

# Navigating Success: The Experiences of Black Teachers Code-switching in Predominately White Schools

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**Navigating Success: The Experiences of Black Teachers Code-  
switching in Predominately White Schools**

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NAVIGATING SUCCESS: THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK TEACHERS CODE-  
SWITCHING IN PREDOMINATELY WHITE SCHOOLS

ABSTRACT

There is a lack of Black educators in the United States. Reasons for this deficit in this particular profession are multi-faceted and have historical significance. However, rather than focus on the gap in the labor market, this study sought to examine the experiences of Black teachers in the field today. Specifically, this qualitative study examined the internal and external challenges that Black teachers face who work in predominately White schools. This study will allow readers to experience the narratives of Black educators who work in these environments. The researcher focused on these experiences through two theoretical frameworks: racial identity and code-switching. The educators selected for the study were purposefully chosen from predominately White school districts. To gather data, the researcher used qualitative study protocols and interviewed each subject using critical incidence techniques in a semi-structured interview environment. All interviews were transcribed and coded to reveal themes that addressed the research questions. The analysis revealed that Black teachers code-switch as a means for survival in these White spaces. The narratives collected also spoke to the racial identity status of Black teachers, and participants provided recommendations as how to address these issues and increase these teachers' sense of belonging within predominately White schools.

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## Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of Frances Jo Allen and Alonzo Allen,

Jim and Bette Love

For inspiring me to write my own story and supporting me in this journey of life.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”

—W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of Black Folks,” 1903, p. 9

This quote from W.E.B. Du Bois comes from his 1903 seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folks*. The double-consciousness of which Du Bois speaks is the difficulty for Blacks to find their identity in a predominately White world that has historically and recently articulated who they are and what they should be. These traditions and long-standing stereotypes have had an impact on how Blacks view themselves and their place in the world. Those who seek admittance into predominately White institutions are faced with challenges in both their own racial identity and how others view them. These experiences are often the tightrope act Black educators walk in working in White schools, changing who they are or wearing a mask to fit in, all in the name of assimilation.

This research sought to give voice and understanding to the perspectives of Black teachers, how they view themselves, their work, their behavior, their language, and their place in the world. The hope is that by examining these narratives, educational leaders will gain a greater awareness of the challenges faced by educators of color and will be inspired to change the educational status quo.

## **Background of Study**

The research in this dissertation centered on the essential question: Do Black teachers code-switch? Understanding these teachers' experiences and the dynamics of Black teachers in predominately White schools was the focus. Such an investigation is important in making meaning of the experiences and identity of Black educators who work in schools in which they are not the majority.

The Black experience in the United States is one that is different from that of many other ethnic minority groups. While other groups have also suffered discrimination at the hands of the majority, no other group had been denied its humanity. Under the Constitution of the United States, Blacks were deemed property that was to be bought, sold, and traded like stock. In 1865 the Civil War had ended, the 13th and 15th Amendments had been enacted, and Reconstruction was underway, Blacks were still under siege by the racist and discriminatory practices in the North and South, effectively relegating Blacks to second-class citizenship. Stolen from their counties and stripped of their native cultures, Blacks struggled post-war to find a place in this new society. Assimilation was a controversial topic within the Black community with great minds such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois leading the narrative on opposite sides of the spectrum.

The battle for equality within society is one not new to the Black experience and is still present as race has again become a polarizing topic of the time. The social construction of race is one that attempts to place people within particular groups. The concept of what it means to be Black is juxtaposed with the varied experiences of each individual and has led to psychological issues when it comes to racial identity within the Black community.

The push for assimilation manifested into what is known as code-switching. Code-switching is changing one's behavior or language (code) to fit a given situation or environment. Due to the disenfranchisement of Blacks in the United States, many Blacks became fluent in this phenomenon, switching between worlds as a means of social mobility as well as survival. Due to the historical background of Black Americans, code-switching is engrained in many Blacks' minds as a known reality or acceptance of their own racial identity.

### **Problem Statement**

This study sought to understand the experiences of Black teachers in predominately White educational institutions. In addition, it focused on whether these teachers altered their behavior according to their surroundings and what that meant in terms of identity. The research examined the historical and systematic oppression of Black Americans and explored whether that is a factor in how educators identify themselves racially and whether that was important in their choice to work in predominately White schools. This study will make a unique and timely contribution to the psychology and educational research literature.

### **Relevance of the Study**

While there is research to support the assertion that teachers of color disproportionately work in schools with higher populations of students of color, there appears to be a gap in the understanding of how those teachers feel in that circumstance. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding about the feelings of Black educators who work in predominately White schools. Looking into whether teachers identify as Black Americans played a role in their choices will add value and understanding to the current research on

racial identity and psychological studies. It will also give more insight into the Black educator psyche and perhaps provide clarity as to why there is a lack of teachers of color in education.

### **Outline of the Study**

The second chapter of this study reviews the current literature associated with code-switching and racial identity. It begins with a definition of code-switching and then continues on to the linguistic frameworks of the phenomenon. The chapter highlights Black English and African American Vernacular English in relation to standard English and how its use has been interpreted over time in both the educational and non-educational realms. A brief historical journey is explored to set the foundation for Black identity in the United States. Finally, code-switching is explored in the areas of media, politics, and education.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for this study. Using purposeful sampling as well as implementing critical incident techniques via semi-structured interviews to develop an interview protocol, data were collected to answer the following questions: Do Black teachers in predominately White schools code-switch? What are the experiences of Black teachers code-switching in predominately White schools? How do Black teachers navigate White spaces while retaining their “Blackness”? What is the racial identity status of Black teachers in predominately White schools and what role does it play in their sense of belonging to that community?

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. This chapter is rich in narrative and addresses each of the research questions posed by the study. Each participant provided perspective on their feelings of being a Black teacher in a predominately White school as well as their belief in the need for code-switching in their given environment. Participants in the study represented all levels in education: elementary, middle, and high school. The narrative

shared even explored the private versus public school dynamic in relation to the research topic. The chapter concludes with how teachers in these spaces cope with the feeling of “otherness” in their school and the support systems they have established in order to navigate these homogenous spaces.

Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses the data collected in the context of the frameworks of code-switching and racial identity, making connections to the previous research in the field as well as making timely recommendations to district and building leaders. The chapter discusses the limitations of the research as well as how this information could be expanded and explored into future research topics. The study concludes with a final reflection on what this study means to the researcher and a hope for the future.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

“Look...I choose peace but, say...Don’t walk up on me wrong....This tea and incense can turn into Colt 45 and Newport’s if NEED be...OK?”

—Erykah Badu

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I explore the phenomenon of code-switching: what it is, how it is expressed, and how it is tied to the experiences of Black teachers in predominately White schools. The linguistic frameworks of code-switching provide a theoretical backdrop for the practice as well as a historical review of the Black experience in the United States. That review is essential to understanding the racial identity of Black Americans and the impact that it potentially has on the behavior of Black professionals. Ultimately through this study, it is the hope that it informs the research question: What are the experiences of Black teachers code-switching in predominately White schools?

#### **What Is Code-switching?**

Code-switching is the practice of speaking and/or communicating in a particular way depending on the surrounding or social context (Boztepe, 2003; Flowers, 2000; Greene & Walker, 2004; Myers-Scotton, 2000). Code-switching is not exclusive to a subset of people and in fact transcends many lines such as race, gender, religion, and ethnicity. Everyone has performed this linguistic phenomenon at some point in their life. A few examples of this would be an athlete communicating in the locker room or sports setting with their teammates contrasted with how that same athlete speaks to their pastor at church on Sunday. The way in which they communicate is different. Code-switching is not about just speaking English, but

rather the tone, vocabulary, and properness that is employed. One would speak to their spiritual leader in a more reverent way than the one used with a close friend or teammate in a more relaxed setting.

Another example would be an individual who works in the corporate or professional setting. They may have to present themselves in a way that reflects their company's mission, vision, and values. These tenets are often sterile, concise, and proper. This may be in stark contrast to what the actual individual values, yet they wear this mask or veil in order to accomplish the goals with which they were tasked or set out to accomplish or quite simply, to put food on the table. Interracial relationships/marriages are another good case study for this. A person of one race may talk, act, or carry themselves differently with their spouse's family than they do with their own. A group of mothers together may act and speak a certain way in order to reinforce the patriarchal societal caste that is placed on them. These actions may only be in the public eye, which often scrutinizes those who do not conform to the stereotype. These behaviors are based on the surroundings and cultural norms which each person encounters.

The context in which code-switching occurs aids in the understanding of this study. It is also important to understand the speaker's and the receiver's perspectives. For this purpose, the lens through which code-switching is viewed is the African American experience. For Blacks, code-switching is a means to navigate the dominant culture in the United States, Whiteness (Waring, 2018). This study is an attempt to understand the experiences of Black educators using code-switching in a setting in which they are often the minority, predominately White educational institutions. There have been many studies, articles, and research on the topic of code-switching (Auer, 1984; Boztepe, 2003; DeBose, 1992; Flowers,

2000; Greene & Walker, 2004; Hill, 2009; Koch, Gross, & Kolts, 2001; Li, 2013; Muysken, 1997; Myers-Scotton, 2000; Shin, n.d.; Waring, 2018; Wheeler, 2008; Wheeler & Swords, 2004; Young, 2009; Young & Young-Rivera, 2013), yet there is nothing on Black educators' code-switching in predominately White schools. This has created a significant gap of understanding in the experiences of these individuals.

### **Code-switching Literature**

This section examines the literature surrounding code-switching. A significant portion of the literature surrounding the area of focus is linguistic in nature, diving deep into the sociolinguistic aspects of the practice. To that end, the social frameworks of code-switching are explored in this dissertation. Other research that tangentially surrounds the topic deals with African American English (AAE), African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Ebonics, or Black English (BE) versus Standard English (SE) (Blake & Cutler, 2003; Chun, 2001; Delpit, 1997, 2002; Ogbu, 1999; Whiteman, 1980).

A body of work also looks into teacher attitudes toward the use of Black English in the classroom as well as controversies surrounding the leveraging of AAVE and AAV in the classroom. Finally, some research and commentary exists on code-switching as it relates to racial identity and its importance for Blacks (Baldwin, 1997; Ogbu, 2004; Shin, n.d.; Young, 2004, 2009), but not within the context of Black teachers in classrooms at White schools. For these educators, code-switching is exhibited differently in social contexts, professional settings, politics, media, and for their overall survival.

### **Code-switching Linguistic Frameworks**

The linguistic community has grappled with the terminology to cover the phenomenon of code-switching. Some researchers refer to it as code-switching, code mixing, borrowing, or

code alternation. While these terms are often lumped together, there are particular distinctions between them. Alternation is used when one language is being replaced by another, often halfway during a sentence (Auer, 1984; Li, 2013). Researcher Myers-Scotton (2000) defined it as the use of two languages in the same clause, and Boztepe (2003) said it is, “the phenomena of alternating between two languages or dialects of the same language within the same conversation” (p. 4).

These switches can be categorized as intra-sentential, switching within a sentence, or inter-sentential, switches between sentences. Researchers correlate code mixing with intra-sentential switches; however, the use of these types of switches are often at the preference of the individual (Boztepe, 2003). These multilingual individuals interact with this practice as a means of assimilation and/or survival. The use of code-switching within the Black community has become a polarizing topic. The use the code-switching or “white voice,” as it is coined by comedian Dave Chappelle, is often viewed as necessary in order to break through the deep-rooted inequities of American society.

The bulk of code-switching research and literature discusses the syntactical and phonological behaviors of the practice. Additional areas concentrate on the relation between its practice and social identity factors such as race, ethnicity, and economic class (Shin, n.d.). Several social theories have emerged as to the reasons why individuals code-switch. These theories are Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton, 2000), Sequential Analysis (Auer, 1984; Li, 2013), Communication Accommodation (Giles, 2016), and Diglossia (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1967).

### **Markedness Model**

Developed by Myers-Scotton (2000), this theory contends that the decision to engage in code-switching is intentional and sends a social message. Users weigh the anticipated benefits and rewards of code-switching and make a rational decision to engage in a language that will ultimately be to their benefit and that marks their rights and obligations. In looking at the given choices within a communicational situation, they evaluate their choices against the norms and forces within their social paradigm.

Actors then use rationality itself as the mechanism to decide if they will act within the model, thus affirming their status, reducing their costs, and increasing their rewards. If there is no language choice and language is unmarked, that is where code-switching is used to find solutions. Opponents of the Markedness model point to the presumption that language choice is rational.

### **Sequential Analysis**

Here, the conversational analysis occurs based on the motivation behind the need to use code-switching and its structure. Linguists such as Auer (1984) and Li (2013) argue that the question of why code-switching occurs comes after the initial examination into how it occurs. With the use of conversational analysis (CA), the focus is heavily on the sequential process of code-switching.

An example of this is whatever language a speaker chooses for a given conversation, impacts the response of the person receiving the message. Additionally, in sequential analysis, the focus is not on the social values/norms that are brought along with the language but rather is on the meaning that code-switching creates.

## **Communication Accommodation**

Developed by Giles (2016), Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) seeks to understand the cognitive reasons for the use of code-switching. During these interactions a person either emphasizes or minimizes their identity with the other person. Overall, in CAT, speakers seek approval in social situations by converging or “accommodating” their communication to that of the person that they are interacting with. This includes language, accent, dialect, and other characteristics. The opposite of that convergence of communication is divergent speech. During these interactions the speaker emphasizes the social distance between themselves and the other person by limited or eliminating any such accommodation.

There are four basic principles of CAT. First, communication is not influenced only by the current situation but also the socio-historical context in which the conversation is embedded. An example of this is a person’s interaction with law enforcement. In the current climate surrounding police brutality and militarization, the interaction between a person of color and police could be influenced by this context. Next, communication is not just an exchange of ideas, emotions, and facts but also defines categories of social memberships. These memberships are negotiated during the process of accommodation. The third principle is that speakers have particular expectations of the level of accommodation that will occur. These expectations are influenced by stereotypes and social and situational norms. The amount of accommodation necessary perceived by the speaker influences whether they begin to utilize convergence or divergence strategies. On one hand it exemplifies the speaker’s desire for social inclusion, and on the other, the speaker’s lack of desire or indifference to inclusion.

## **Diglossia**

The formal definition of Diglossia is:

a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) super-posed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation. (Ferguson, 1959, p. 336)

This theory by Fishman (1967) states that in particular situations, one language is better suited than another. This domain-driven approach proposes that participants choose to speak a particular way depending on where and what they are discussing. An example of this is found in bilingual speakers. A person who is fluent in French and English may speak English in their professional setting at work but opt to speak French at home in the presence of family. Within the domain approach, languages are categorized in either superposed high (H) or local/regional dialects low (L) varieties. For example, in the Arabic language, the H is Classical and the L is Egyptian.

Diglossic situations are based on nine characteristics: function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, lexicon, and phonology. In function, the speaker decides whether to use a particular language based on the circumstances in which it will be used. If a person is delivering a sermon or religious ceremony, political speech, poetry, or lecture, they may opt to use language that is of the H variety. Folk literature, captions on cartoons, and conversations between friends and family would be of the L variety. There is often a prestige that is associated with language. In many forms, people will deny the use of L, as it carries a stigma with it. Even fluent speakers of a L language often deny its existence in lieu of the other. H varieties of languages hold a strong literary heritage as well.

Many bodies of literature are written with the H lens due to longer historical use. Acquisition and standardization are linked as L languages are learned at home and are generally the first interactions children acquire. The more formal H is acquired via a traditional formal education. To that end, often in these educational settings, H is standardized by rules and grammatical norms. These are then immortalized in treatises, dictionaries, and other reference materials. Diglossia has stability, as many languages have persisted for over a thousand years. Grammatically, there are extensive differences between the H and the L. In regard to the lexicon, vocabulary in the H and the L are generally largely shared. There are differences and variations within them respectively. Lastly, the relationship between phonology and diglossia vary by the language and situation.

The use of code-switching by Black teachers in predominately White schools falls within these linguistic frameworks. Teachers perhaps do not use one approach exclusively, but rather flow naturally within multiple constructs. The focus of this study is to not speak of the specific linguistic domain in which they reside, but rather how the participants used language in given situations and ultimately made meaning of those experiences . To that end, it is important to present the historical framework in order to provide a foundation for language and this linguistic phenomenon. How Black teachers use code-switching in their daily lives is impacted by their environment as well as the context in which they use it.

### **Social Context**

For many Black Americans, code-switching is a way to navigate their surroundings depending on the area in which they reside and with whom they interact. Sociologist and Pan-Africanist W.E.B. Du Bois spoke about a double consciousness and how Blacks post-reconstruction have developed a mental disorder that has plagued the Black psyche, a racial

schizophrenia (Young, 2009). The need for Blacks to “always look at one’s self through the eyes of others” (Du Bois, 2008, p. 9) created a sense of confusion of identity and self that for many Blacks is still present today. In the early 20th century this double consciousness was at the forefront of Black sociological thought. How could Blacks be recognized as Americans yet be denied some of the basic rights spelled out in the United States Constitution? How can one reconcile the injustices of the past and still move forward in a society that largely views one as a second-class citizen?

While some of these issues have been somewhat addressed (education by the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision of 1954 and voting by the Voting Rights Act of 1964) there is still a sense that in 2019 Blacks are still second-class citizens. One would not have to go far to provide legitimacy and evidence of such a claim. The growing racial wage and educational achievement gaps, school to prison pipeline, political representation, and issues of police brutality are but a few pieces of evidence that substantiate the notion that Blacks in America still struggle for equality.

As many Black middle-class families seek to capture a piece of the American dream, a dream that has been so often deferred (Hughes, 1951), there is a push and pull to retain their Blackness in stereotypical White surroundings such as the suburbs. Because the dominant culture is White, Whiteness has been branded into the many vestiges of global institutions as natural, legitimate, and normative. As a consequence, in these environments, Blacks have resorted to code-switching as a means of inclusion and a way to build social capital in environments that had been historically blocked against them. This cultural adaptation to their surroundings, however, comes at a cost to the Black psyche.

The internal monologue of the Black person to assimilate to the majority while being “Black enough” to their own people is a challenge that many struggle with on a daily basis. The “acting white” or “Oreo” narrative is one that plagues Blacks in not only the suburbs but in mainstream cultural thought. This conversation has led to research into oppositional culture as well as commentary on the use of African American Vernacular English, African American English, Black English, and Ebonics.

### **Black English**

For simplicity in this study, African American Vernacular English, African American English, or Ebonics are condensed into the concept of Black English (BE). Black English is a set of English dialects spoken by African American people in the United States. It is set apart from the nuance, gesture, and tone of standard English. Black English still has the foundations of syntax, semantics, and phonology (Chambers & Bond, 1983), yet the main differences between standard English and Black English are in the realm of variability (Burling, 1973). With this, words, sounds, and contrast play a significant role in the delivery of Black English in regard to punctuation and grammatical changes.

Aside from the linguistic side, many believe that BE is an important part of Black collective identity. Ogbu (2004) defined the collective identity as, “people’s sense of who they are, their “we feeling” or “belonging,” people express their collective identity with emblems or cultural symbols which reflect their attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors, and language or dialect” (p. 3). The collective identity is tied to historical legacy and transcends time. This shared narrative or story paints a vivid experience of what it feels like to be Black in the United States.

Black Americans have a shared history of oppression that defines their collective narrative. Their historical status of involuntary servitude, social subordination, and systematic discrimination by the dominant group have forced many Blacks to adopt this stigmatized group identity of oppression as well as opposition. This oppositional group identity was birthed out of the ashes of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. This provides a succinct timeline for this oppositional identity spanning from pre-emancipation to a contemporary view of Black group identity.

For the better part of 200 years, Black have been an oppressed people. Exploited for their physical labor, slaves were denied not only their native homes and cultures, but also their basic human rights. Due to the fear of revolution, Blacks were also not allowed to assemble, speak their native tongue, or gain an education, thus suffering many forms of discrimination (instrumental, social, and expressive). Blacks were denied by law opportunities that were afforded to Whites. Socially, Blacks were to address Whites in particular ways such as master (massa), mistress, and miss, while Blacks were referred to as boy, mammy, or other derogatory terms (Starke, 1971, p. 6). Blacks were also expected to prostrate themselves in the presence of Whites and not show resistance for fear of a collective punishment. Expressive discrimination came in the form of the belief that Blacks were inherently inferior to Whites. This belief in Whiteness permeated into degrading Black cultural values, religion, speech, behavior, and language as negative, wrong, and improper. As a response to this discrimination, the Black community collectively began to create a rich tapestry woven from the threads of oppression and White supremacy.

Black communities were strategically oppositional by way of religion, music, and language. Forced to speak English by their White masters, Black English developed as a

dialect that differs from standard English in syntax, morphology, and phonology. However, the biggest takeaway from Black English is what Ogbu refers to as “the inversion” (2004, p. 9). This is when “Blacks assigned to words, phrases or statement reverse meanings or changed their functions from what they mean to White people” (p. 9). For example, in standard English the word “bad” always means “bad,” but in Black English, “bad” means “good” (Michael Jackson Bad, 2016).

Within Ogbu’s “acting white” (2004) lens, pre-emancipation Blacks did not “act White” because the expectation was for them not to act White. They were not expected to be educated, articulate, and organized. From the White perspective, subjugation was the only expectation. Blacks were expected to act according to how Whites constructed their norms, behaviors, and speech (Black English). Blacks “acting white” during this time period was seen as a negative and a threat to White power and superiority.

Post-emancipation would see similar struggles for Black equality within the United States. Many Blacks were still denied the economic, physical, and social mobility afforded to White America. They were only allowed to flourish in the Black community. Things like Black codes, political gerrymandering, and Jim Crow laws instituted in the South ensured that White supremacy would reign supreme. Segregation of schools and public places ensured that the races stayed as far away from each other as possible. This exacerbated the belief in the collective identity for Blacks. In response, Blacks continued to look inward and reinforced their oppositional identity.

Blacks championed the belief in rugged individualism but soon felt the sting of the glass ceiling. Leaders within the Black community began to speak to the plight of their people and offered solutions. Booker T. Washington believed in self-reliance. He believed that

through deeds and time, Blacks would earn their place at the table, but there needed to be a practice of patience. W.E.B. Du Bois offered the other side of the coin. He contended that Blacks should receive immediate equality and acceptance by Whites. Of the two strategies, the latter drove the wedge between Whites and Blacks. Marcus Garvey and the Black Separatist movement advocated that Blacks leave the United States altogether and establish a nation of its own.

Movements such as the Harlem Renaissance injected a new life and sense of self into the Black psyche, and the “new negro” was born. Yet, while many celebrated and pushed for this new advocacy of dignity and rights, White America resisted the boycotts, pickets, sit-ins, and calls for social justice. Unlike pre-emancipation, when Blacks were not expected to act and speak like Whites, post-emancipation saw a large shift in those expectations. For Blacks to get ahead in the world, they are expected act and speak like White people. The irony behind this is that despite these actions, they (Blacks) were still not considered on the same social level as Whites.

It was also at this time that Blacks began to become “bilingual” and thus the duality of the Black American began (Black language, behaviors, and culture within the Black community and the use of White language and behavioral norms in the White world). Despite this duality, Blacks in the post-emancipation world resigned themselves to the acceptance that to be successful, they must assimilate into the White world, yet still hold on to their oppositional group identity. Ogbu (2004) stated that this assimilation came in the form of cultural and linguistic assimilation, accommodation, ambivalence, resistance, and encapsulation.

For some Blacks, assimilation was just easier. Here, Blacks would drop their Black English in place of Standard English, bleach their skin, straighten their hair, and attend White churches in an effort to assimilate. Others would decide that they would live in two worlds, keeping each of their lives separate. Some chose the road of ambivalence; they knew no matter how hard they worked, they would not be accepted. Those who resisted believed that if they adopted White norms, they would lose a sense of themselves and their identity. Lastly, those who were isolated in their communities did not have to talk or act White because they had no form of reference.

In the post-civil rights era, Black people have seen significant changes in status. There has been legislation that has aided in the equality and expansion of rights and privileges afforded to Blacks like never before. However, the collective identity of Blacks still remains, and “the function of Black vernacular English has been to strengthen the in-group solidarity of Black American to the exclusion of Whites, and to deceive, confuse and conceal information from White people in general” (Dalby, 1972, p. 172). This notion of always wanting to be “in” is a way for Blacks to maintain a sense of opposition as well as an identity within culture and language.

### **Racial Identity and Salience**

The battle for equality within society is one not new to the African American experience and is still present as race has again become a polarizing topic of the time. The social construction of race is one of characterization and attempts to place people within particular groups. The concept of what it means to be Black is juxtaposed with the varied experiences of each individual and has led to psychological issues about racial identity.

This struggle for identity has had ramifications on the psyche of many, the effects of which are felt in various societal institutions. The realm of education is one such institution that has been significantly affected by the way African Americans see themselves and their place within it. From the doll test conducted by Dr. Kenneth and Mamie Clark (Clark & Clark, 1950) in the 1940s to John Ogbu's work on racelessness in the 1980s (Ogbu, 1987), how African Americans view themselves through the lens of identity has had lasting effects on the social, emotional, and human capital of a people.

This dissonance of race continues to be pervasive in the educational labor market as well. In the 2012–13 school year, 82% of teachers of public school teachers were White despite 51% of students being White. In contrast, 7% of teachers were Black, and Black students made up 16% of the total population (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In addition, teachers of color are also highly employed by schools with low socioeconomic status (SES) in urban communities as well as in schools with higher proportions of students of color (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Seventy years since *Brown v. Board of Education*, the effects of desegregation are still being felt.

### **Racial Identity Frameworks**

Research in racial identity has historically been viewed in two camps: the mainstream approach and the underground approach. The mainstream approach to racial identity originated in the mid-90s (Gaines & Reed, 1994). This approach focused on the holistic view of group identity. One of the leading minds in this camp, Allport, claimed that living in a racist society had negative ramifications on the African American psyche and as a result, Blacks were forced to devalue parts of themselves (Allport, 1979). Much of the early mainstream racial identity research emphasized self-hatred as a large part of the African

American self-concept (Cross, 1971, 1991). Modern mainstream research has evolved beyond those early concepts and moved closer to understanding the process of self-actualization and the structures within a group rather than the unique experiences of each group.

In contrast, the underground approach is focused on the qualitative meaning of being African American, with an emphasis on the unique cultural and historical experiences of African Americans (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). The early proponent of the underground approach was Du Bois. Du Bois differed from Allport in that while he agreed that society played a significant role in the self-concept of Blacks, there were ways African Americans could develop a positive ego despite the stigma of the larger society (Du Bois, 2008). To that extent, what it meant to be Black in relation to being an American created a “double consciousness” for many African Americans. The internal struggle of being Black and American was at odds because of the historical view of Blackness. Du Bois argued that the essential task of the healthy ego for African Americans was the reconciliation of the discrepancy between his or her African self and his or her American self (Du Bois, 2008).

### **Nigrescence**

Cross’s (1991) model of Nigrescence is the most widely used conceptual framework when examining African American racial identity from the underground lens. The five stages of this model signify possible stages that African Americans may go through when seeking to identify or find meaning in their self. These stages are *pre-encounter*, *encounter*, *immersion*, *internalization*, and *internalization-commitment*. The first stage, *pre-encounter*, is when individuals seek to assimilate and be accepted by Whites. These individuals directly or indirectly distance themselves from other people of their own race and may allow others to think that race has not been or will not be a relevant factor in their future life. Stage two,

*encounter*, is precipitated by an event that forces the individual to acknowledge the impact racism has on their life. Faced with the reality that that one cannot be truly White, the person focuses on their personal identity.

The third stage is *immersion/emersion*. Here, the person surrounds themselves with visible symbols of their own racial identity and actively avoids Whiteness. For example, individuals seek out Black culture and obsess over it. The *internalization* phase sees individuals becoming less defensive and open about their race. They are willing to establish meaningful relationships with other races and see positive and negative elements of being Black or White. The fifth and last stage is *internalization-commitment*. At this stage, the individual has found ways to put their own personal sense of race into a plan of action, often culminating in ways to improve their own race (Cross, 1991). Because of the intrapersonal nature of this framework, it is difficult to predict where each individual—in this case Black educators—mentally reside. The uniqueness of each situation gives reason to explore this study via qualitative methods.

### **Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity**

The next conceptual framework that may help frame the mindset of African American teachers is the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI). Developed by Sellers (Sellers et al., 1998), the MMRI represents “an amalgamation of a number of existing theories on group identity that is sensitive to the historical and cultural experiences that make racial identity a unique form of group identity for African Americans” (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 23). This hybrid brings together the mainstream and underground models and synthesizes them into an operational framework. MMRI sets its foundation within four dimensions: racial salience, racial centrality, racial regard, and racial ideology.

*Racial salience* refers to the extent to which a person's race is a relevant part of their self-concept at a particular moment or situation. This term is also drawn from literature of symbolic interactionists such as Stryker. Stryker's work on identity salience drew on the importance of a person's identity and how and when he or she will access it. "Theoretically, salience determines the consistency or variability in identification across situations" (Thompson, 1999, p. 749). *Racial centrality* refers to the limit to which an individual defines themselves with regard to race. In other words, a person may have multiple identities, and these are ranked within a hierarchy. The identity that is higher is the one which the person considers to be most essential to their core. *Racial regard* is how that person effectively judges or evaluates their own race. Within this is both private and public regard. Private regard is what the individual's personal feelings are toward their race, while public regard refers to the degree to which a person feels their race is being judged positively or negatively. The last dimension is *racial ideology*. This dimension refers to how an individual believes members of their own race should act.

### **Racial Salience**

There are few studies that explore the salience of race (Steck, Heckert, & Heckert, 2003; Thompson, 1999). One such study examined the identity among White and Black students in colleges and universities. Using the Twenty Statements Test (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954), Steck and colleagues sought to examine self-attitudes by studying students at both predominately White universities (PWUs) and Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs). The study of over 700 participants were asked racially salient identification questions to see if they were affected by the setting in which they were the racial minority or

majority. Results showed that racial salience was lower for White students at PWUs than for Black students.

Surprisingly, salience among White students at HBCUs was lower than that of Blacks. This indicates what Steck et al. (2003) refers to as the transparency phenomenon. Here, Whites are far less likely to view themselves in racial terms than people of color. In a sense, this fulfills the notion of White privilege because Whites have the ability to navigate their racial identity in multiple settings, while Blacks may not have such luxury. Lastly, the study found that Blacks had higher salience at PWUs than at HBCUs, highlighting the importance of context when it comes to salience.

Racial salience is also a factor within the labor market. Historically, discrimination has played a role in the lack of minorities within particular fields. This lack of diversity led policy makers to institute initiatives such as affirmative action and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Most of the focus on discrimination has been from an “inter-racial” lens. The inter-racial view is focused on the treatment of people of color in relation to Whites in particular situations. New research in the field of sociology is now looking into an “intra-racial” lens. This differs from inter-racial in that intra-racial discrimination occurs within organizations that say that they value diversity; however, the advancement, hiring, and promotion of people of color is based on how racially palatable they are. This creates an environment that disincentives candidates to be racially salient and further stifles that person’s sense of self (Thornhill, 2015). Code-switching is a tool many Black educators employ to be racially palatable in predominantly White schools.

## **Professional Settings**

Within the contemporary professional setting, code-switching may vary. In the corporate world, Blacks may present themselves as more professional by speaking in Standard English. This is satirized by many comedians as “white voice” (Kevin Hart, Dave Chappelle, Martin Lawrence, Keegan-Michael Key, Jordan Peele, Marlon Wayans, Shawn Wayans) as well as in the media. The most current example is Boots Riley’s 2018 dark comedy, *Sorry to Bother You* (Bongiovi & Riley, 2018). This film brings to light the reality of linguistic assimilation and code-switching as a way to be successful. For many Blacks, speaking or talking White in their profession opens doors for them and their families. It also makes White people feel less intimidated, thus making it more likely for Blacks to attain a particular position (Steele, 2011).

## **Politics and Media**

Former President Barack Obama is the best case study for the use of code-switching in a visible prominent political position. The first Black President of the United States of America was proficient at what some may call code-switching or code meshing (Young, 2016; Young, 2004, 2009; Young & Young-Rivera, 2013). The vivid example of President Obama’s use of this was in 2013 at the USA Men’s Basketball game when he was to deliver the motivational speech for the players. As he entered, he formally shook the hand of the White assistant coach. President Obama then moved on to now Brooklyn Nets star player Kevin Durant and embraced him with a very different type of handshake. This subtle event demonstrates that code-switching goes beyond spoken language; it involves body language as well. It also provides evidence that even the most powerful person in the free world navigates his surroundings in an intentional way.

President Obama's ability to navigate both White and Black worlds is often satirized by comedians. The most notable is Kee and Peele in the "meet and greet" sketch. Both comedians are bi-racial, and within that lies additional dimensions of code-switching and race norming. In the movie *Sorry to Bother You*, code-switching takes a front seat in the narrative. The main character, Cassius Green, is a young Black man still living in the garage of his uncle's almost-foreclosed-on home. To make ends meet, he lies on his application to get a job in a call center. He soon finds out that he cannot sell anything using his Black voice and is taught how to use his "White voice." From there, the sky is the limit for Green, and he excels in the company and furthers the narrative for the rest of the film. This depiction of code-switching on the big screen reinforces the threat of assimilation and the pandering that many Blacks have to do to make it in White spaces. As a consequence, Blacks have to compromise who they are to fit into the dominant culture.

### **Survival**

The most contemporarily cogent use for code-switching is survival. The word survival serves a multitude of functions. First, it is a survival tool in terms of economic survival. In a 2015 CNN/Kaiser Family Foundation poll, 69% of Blacks said past and present discrimination is a major reason for the problems facing people of their racial or ethnic group. Also, 26% of Blacks felt they had been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity at their place of work within the last 30 days (DiJulio, Norton, Jackson, & Brodie, 2015). Also, the threat of implicit bias in the workplace is present as many Blacks have to deal with microaggressions in the workplace. Black educators in White schools are not immune to this plight, often serving as the token representative of their race to the masses (Kanter, 2008).

Another way in which code-switching serves as a medium for survival is physical safety. In a post-Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice world, police brutality and the treatment of unarmed Black men at the hands of White officers has become a polarizing subject. Many groups such as those involved in the Black Lives Matter movement have risen to scrutinize the current status quo. In a study by Banks, Eberhardt, and Ross (2006), when researchers

exposed police officers to a group of Black faces or a group of White faces and asked, “Who looks criminal?” they found that police officers not only viewed more Black faces than White faces as criminal, but also viewed those Black faces rated as the most stereotypically Black (e.g., those faces with wide noses, thick lips, or dark skin) as the most criminal of all. (p. 1172)

Code-switching in a sense is a way of self-protection for many Blacks. Presenting themselves as less threatening with code-switching could be the difference between a routine traffic stop and ending up on the evening news as the next martyr for the movement.

### **Code-switching in Education**

Code-switching in education strictly from the perspective of educating students of color who utilize AAVE or BE in the classroom has been studied at length (Auer, 1984; Boztepe, 2003; DeBose, 1992; Flowers, 2000; Greene & Walker, 2004; Hill, 2009; Koch et al., 2001; Li, 2013; Muysken, 1997; Myers-Scotton, 2000; Shin, n.d.; Wheeler, 2008; Wheeler & Swords, 2004; Young, 2009; Young & Young-Rivera, 2013). It is a controversial topic in many communities across the United States and became national news in the 1996 Oakland School Board case on Ebonics. A California school district attempted to classify BE—or in this case Ebonics (Ebony and Phonics)—as recognized language. This would effectively make all Black students bilingual students. This decision was met with harsh criticism from both the Black and White communities. Proponents of the Oakland decision championed the

notion that Black English was being recognized as a formal language with the intent to help Black student academic outcomes and close the achievement gap in the school district.

The dissent came from many places as well. Many believed that the use of Ebonics was disgraceful. “African Americans in all walks of life were incensed. How dare anyone suggest that that ignorant-sounding trash was ‘our language,’ that we couldn’t learn to speak properly?” (Delpit, 2002, p. 110). Many in the Black community were offended that years of trying to fit in and be accepted into the dominant culture (White culture) was being thrown out by adopting a dialect many viewed as ignorant and uneducated. Other researchers such as Ogbu believed that the entire focus was off. Instead, his focus was “not only the degree of differences per se that counts. What seems to count is the cultural meanings of those dialect differences” (1999, p. 148). Ebonics became a meme and punch line for many inside and outside of the Black community. As the years passed, frustration also grew in teachers’ attitudes toward AAE and teaching in the classroom (Blake & Cutler, 2003).

Teachers, the majority of whom were White, did not know how to address teaching students of color standard English, as this presented a conundrum in ethical behavior. A majority of educators want to respect and affirm students’ home dialects, yet still have students become competent in standard English. There have been several approaches to address language differences in the classroom. First is the elimination of Black English in favor of standard English; second is the correctionist approach, in which teachers correct every mistake by students. Both approaches are exhausting and do not honor the student as an individual.

Contemporary research and curriculum pushes have been led by Dr. Holly Craig, who coined the term, “toggle talk.” This curricular approach claims to honor and affirm the

individual student's dialect while also promoting standard English. This is done by increasing students' metalinguistic awareness—i.e., ability to think and talk about language—and analytical thinking skills (Toggle Talk, 2016). This balance, through the use of this program, has led to positive literacy outcomes.

Code-switching in the realm of education is tied to the sense of belonging felt by the educators of color and ultimately to their sense of self. Racial identity takes a front seat in the way Black teachers feel about themselves in their unique environments. The Nigrescence model provides a framework for the stages Black teachers may be in or encounter when in predominately White schools. These stages influence how Black teachers interact with the world around them, from conversations with students in the classroom and fellow colleagues to those with parents at parent-teacher conferences. With that said, Black teachers' experiences may influence not only their personal narrative but also the learning climate, culture, and student achievement in the classroom and in the building.

Black teachers in predominately White schools often carry the burden of being the de facto spokesperson of their race. As a consequence, this tokenistic clout is placed on the educator of color, and thus the pressure of comporting themselves in the manner that is racially palatable to the majority, is a reality. However, having Black teachers in schools matters. There are many within the educational community that will point to the myriad of benefits to having people of color in the workforce and the effect that it may have on the achievement of students of color. One possible benefit is that minority teachers play the part of role model, not only for minority students but for all students (Ainsworth, 2010; Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003; Zirkel, 2002). Second, minority teachers help bridge the communication and cultural gap between schools and the minority community.

Parents and students recognize and identify themselves within the school, thereby increasing participation. Also, because of their familiarity with the minority culture, minority teachers have an important monitoring function; they recognize earlier when minority students are having problems and when intervention is necessary (Beady & Hansell, 1981). Minority teachers can also inform other colleagues of cultural norms. Black teachers' familiarity with their culture can allow them to leverage their "Blackness" to make connections with students of color who struggle academically or socially and at the same time code-switch back into the environment.

The salience of race for the Black educator in predominately White schools also becomes an interesting prospect. Most educators pursued teaching for altruistic belief in the greater good of society; thus one could perhaps make the argument that the effect of race has no place in the realm of educating *all* students. However, given the multidimensional model for racial identity, it is hard to not include the influence of group identity and how salience may not only affect the teacher themselves but the students around them. This salience becomes critical in the many aspects of the educator's professional and personal life.

Code-switching is a way for Blacks to safely navigate White spaces. Black teachers have to navigate White schools differently from their White peers because of stereotype threat (Steele, 1997, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Code-switching serves as the agent to disarm discrimination and to earn a seat at the proverbial table of success. Black teachers do not share the same history experiences or group identity as their White counterparts and thus perhaps have a different outlook on their role within the school building. How Black teachers present themselves to the community as a whole has ramifications for the prospects of that teacher's career as well as potentially those of the teachers who may follow them in the future. Black

teachers have educational networks, and these teachers may discuss which districts allow them to be themselves or if they have to code-switch constantly. This influences the labor pool for Black teachers who want to work in predominately White schools or in education as a whole.

The current and historic majority, White students, will no longer be the majority by the year 2024. In fact, White students will represent only 46% of public school students. This is a drop from the 51% reported in 2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Hispanic students are expected to represent 29% of students by 2024, Pacific Islanders 6%, and Black students 15%. These are compared to their respective 2012 numbers of 24%, 5%, and 16%. All of these student categories increased, as opposed to Black students, who are projected to decrease by one percentage point.

The teacher workforce in the United States is not representative of the growing diverse student population. Given the future projections of student diversity, a general assumption is that the diversity of the workforce would change as well. However, in the 2011–12 school year, 82% of public-school teachers were White despite only 51% of students being White. 7% of teachers were Black, and 8% were Hispanic. This is in contrast to the 16% of Black students and 24% of Hispanic student (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Another piece of information of note is that teachers in K-12 programs are less likely to be Black or Hispanic than those who teach early childhood (i.e., Pre-K, Head Start) (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). Despite the disparity between the racial diversity of teachers and that of the students they teach, diversity has increased gradually over time, just not at the rate of student demographic change. Teachers of color also are highly employed by schools with low SES in

urban communities as well as in schools with higher proportions of students of color.  
(Ingersoll & May, 2011)

### **Summary**

Overall, the Black experience within the United States is one that examines the sociological and psychological well-being of the human condition. Code-switching fits into that narrative as displayed in the historic background of Blacks in the America as well as its more contemporary setting. From the bellows of slave ships during the Atlantic Slave Trade, to President Barack Obama in the White House, Blacks have leveraged this linguistic piece as a tool in the most difficult situations and as a means to survival. In professional environments, social settings, and media, Blacks have assimilated into mainstream culture. This assimilation does not come without a cost. The conversation surrounding racial identity and salience in these situations is appropriate and timely. Black educators, especially those in predominately White schools, grapple with these feelings on a daily basis.

The research in this chapter lays the framework to explore the experiences that Black educators encounter when using code-switching in their profession. This study examines how that manifests in the classroom and in interactions with students, parents, and co-workers. It also addresses how these same educators feel about the salience of their race and if the use of code-switching aids or impedes these beliefs or feelings.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

“Trust the process,”

—Philadelphia 76ers

As stated in Chapter 2, the landscape of public education in the United States is changing. The demographic make-up of students enrolled in school is changing and shifting to one that is more diverse. However, one area that has not changed with the times is the teachers who educate these students. Regardless of environment, White teachers dominate the workforce (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The shift to predominately Black teachers happens only when 90% or more students in the school are minority. In schools that are predominately White (80/20 split or higher), minority teachers represent only four percent in elementary and secondary schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

The experiences of Black teachers in predominately White schools are different than those of their White colleagues and perhaps different from those of Black teachers who work in schools that are predominately minority. Working in these environments comes with challenges that are unique to Black teachers. Issues of discrimination, microaggressions, tokenism, stereotype threat, and the focus of this study, code-switching, are a reality. All of these issues influence the racial identity of Black educators.

Research into code-switching for Black educators is extremely limited but there are some studies that explore code-switching in relation to Black racial identity and salience. From these, one can try to extrapolate some themes and experiences that may translate to the

Black educator. However, to avoid these implications and inferences, this study seeks to create a literary foundation to understand the experiences of code-switching of Black educators in predominately White schools. Understanding the experiences code-switching of Black teachers in these environments will allow a better understanding of the racial psyche of the Black educator and perhaps provide information about how to recruit and retain teachers of color in these environments. This information would be helpful to human resource departments, district and building administrators, and building leadership teams that want to address issues of implicit bias and culturally responsive pedagogies (Delpit, 1997; Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2014).

Understanding the experiences of Black teachers code-switching in these spaces is also validating for teachers who may feel marginalized or are repressing their Blackness in their environment. This study aims to give them voice on issues that are unique to their situation.

### **Research Questions**

In this study I address the essential research question: Do Black teachers in predominately White schools code-switch? In addition, what are the experiences of Black teachers code-switching in predominately White schools? Given these two broad questions, the following sub-questions are instrumental in understanding code-switching of Black teachers in predominately White schools:

- How do Black teachers navigate White spaces while retaining their “Blackness”?
- What is the racial identity status of Black teachers in predominately White schools and what role does it play in their sense of belonging to that community?

To explore these questions, my research is grounded in the literature of Black racial identity using the Nigrescence model, the Multidimensional Model for Racial Identity, and collective identity.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of Black teachers who code-switch in predominately White schools. These experiences extend to the multifaceted interactions of verbal and non-verbal communication with fellow colleagues, students, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders. The decision to select a qualitative approach to the research study was strategic and purposeful. According to Creswell and Poth (2017) research decisions begin with philosophical assumptions that the inquirer has to accept. In addition, “researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project” (p. 15). As the researcher, I understand that my personal experience and worldview influenced the decision to use qualitative research methods. Additionally, the qualitative research is used to study the meaning that individuals and groups “ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). There are some who view code-switching as a problem while others view it as a means or survival. This study delves into those stories and bring light to how individuals interpret the use of language in particular settings.

Reviewing these philosophical assumptions, Creswell and Poth (2017) stated that by utilizing a qualitative approach, inquirers take a stance in either ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetoric, or methodology. The assumption that is made in this study was an ontological one. In ontology, researchers “embrace different realities, as do also the individuals being studied” (p. 18) The intent is to explore multiple perspectives and realities. Making meaning of Black teachers’ experiences with code-switching in predominately White

schools falls exclusively in the domain of ontology. This study sought to understand the multiple realities of teachers in these environments.

The assumption that their narrative experiences are unique, demonstrates the need to pursue this particular research method. To that end, after framing a study in a particular assumption, further inquiry will be shaped by a particular paradigm or worldview. Creswell and Poth (2017) defined them as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p. 19). The four general worldviews that often inform all qualitative work are post-positivism, constructivism, advocacy, and pragmatism. This study examined the workplace interactions of teachers of color through the social constructivism worldview. Additionally, the aim of this worldview is to “develop subjective meaning of their experiences” (p. 20).”

The constructivist approach makes meaning through social and historical lenses as well. Black teachers navigate their race in predominately White schools through a historical and social lens. The language and behavior they display is influenced by societal norms and expectations placed on them. Speaking with Black teachers through open-ended questions allowed themes to form and provided context for their beliefs. Finally, this worldview is particularly important because constructivism allows researchers to “position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (p. 21).

This study involves Black teachers in predominantly White schools. As the researcher, I was once a Black teacher in a predominately White school and am now a Black administrator in a predominately White school. I recognized that my personal narrative would shape how the data were interpreted and that my experiences and background would influence how I interpreted the meanings others have about the world. According to Creswell and Poth

(2017), the social constructivism worldview best addresses phenomenological studies as well as the grounded theory perspective.

### **Grounded Theory**

Given that this study employed qualitative research through the social constructivist worldview, it was appropriate to use the grounded theory. While phenomenology focuses on the meaning of the experience, grounded theory seeks to focus beyond the descriptive and moves to a more analytical process (Creswell & Poth). Grounded theory “generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants” (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 63)

There are two general approaches to grounded theory. The first (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) is a more systematic approach to the work; the other (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007) is a more contemporary constructivist approach. The traditional model involves a systematic approach in which researchers develop a theory that goes through a process and action. There is a saturation of interview data (20–30 interviews) where researchers begin to open code the data into categories, particularly surrounding a “core phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 64). From there, data are categorized into casual conditions, strategies, intervening conditions, and consequences. Categories are then examined to determine how they relate to the core phenomenon. The last step in the traditional model of grounded theory research is selective coding, which consists of researchers developing propositions based on the categories developed and creating a narrative that describes the interrelationships between the categories in the model.

The second approach to grounded theory is entrenched in the philosophy of constructivists Charmaz and Belgrave (2007). Unlike Strauss and Corbin, who emphasized a

linear process of a core category, Charmaz and Belgrave approached research through multiple realities and diverse lenses, views, and paradigms. This second approach is more interpretive and flexible and is not as rigid. This approach “places more emphasis on the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals than on the methods of research” (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 65). Charmaz and Belgrave espouse a process in which rich data collection, coding (both line-by-line and focused), memoing, and theoretical sampling are used (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). This approach to grounded theory does not lessen the role of the researcher in the process of the study. In Charmaz and Belgrave’s approach, “the researcher makes decisions about the categories through the process, brings questions to the data, and advances personal values, experiences, and priorities” (Creswell & Poth, p. 66).

Due to the nature of my study, I predominately used the Charmaz and Belgrave (2007) approach to grounded theory. Studying Black teachers code-switching in predominately White schools demands a more fluid process that calls upon the multiple worldviews of the participants. Because some of the literature attributed to this study rests in Du Bois’s double consciousness, it is only fitting that the grounded theory approach was used because of the potential for differing historical, political, and social perspectives as well as my own personal experience.

### **Setting**

This study addressed Black teachers in predominately White schools. For this study, predominately White schools was defined as schools with a White population greater than 80% of the population of the building. This ratio of 80-20 was selected because Black teachers in these environments would more likely use code-switching in their daily

interactions with others. Teachers were selected from public and private school institutions in the Midwestern region of the United States.

### **Study Participants**

This study sought to interview seven Black teachers who worked in or had previously worked in predominately White schools. That was an important distinction in that current employment in a predominately White school was not a prerequisite for this study; the prerequisite was having the experience of being a Black teacher in that environment regardless of the timeframe. This study was exclusive to teachers and not administrators.

The researcher utilized local teachers from around the area. The researcher also called upon his personal resources and social networks to create a palette of educators who covered a wide breadth of knowledge and diverse experiences. The teachers covered the gamut of K-12 education and included extra- and co-curricular activities as well as athletics.

### **Selection of Participants**

The participants for this study were selected purposefully. The sample that was used was intentional in ensuring that the data collected would answer the questions the researcher sought to answer. Marshall (1996) stated that random sampling is inappropriate for qualitative studies such as this one. First, while random sampling provides the best chance for generalizability, it is not the most effective way to develop a deep understanding of the issue, in this case code-switching of Black teachers in predominately White schools. Also, in a qualitative study some informants may provide a richer depth of knowledge than others, thus increasing the sense of understanding and meaning of a particular concept. Random sampling would not get to the root of what this study was trying to reveal because “choosing someone

at random to answer a qualitative question would be analogous to asking a passerby how to repair a broken down car” (p. 523)

According to Marshall (1996), there are three broad approaches to selecting a sample in a qualitative study. The first approach is the convenience sample, which is about what is the best available to the researcher. This may be the most fiscally responsible avenue; however, it may result in poor quality data and may hurt the credibility of the study. The next is the judgment sample. In this approach, samples are intentional, guided by the researcher, and are selected in a way that would best answer the researcher’s question. The researcher selects candidates based on particular characteristics that would give the study more flavor and have them stratified in sections such as gender, age, attitudes, and beliefs. Here the participants would also be informants about others who could add to the study and also add dissenting opinions to the mainline narrative.

The last approach is theoretical sampling, which is driven by theory. Emergent data provides insight, which gives rise to theories. All three of the approaches have overlapping characteristics, depending on the type of question that is being asked. The process is fluid in qualitative work, and the answers are not always black and white. Multiple variables such as self-efficacy, time of day, and the interviewer may impact the data collected.

The approach to this study was in the judgment sampling camp. The study participants or key informants were the repositories of the knowledge this study sought to explore. These Black teachers have the experiences in predominately White schools. Through purposeful interviewing, themes emerged through their oral storytelling. If new theories were to emerge, then additional samples would be obtained to add to the richness of the data.

## **Positionality**

For the positionality of my study, it is important to recognize that I am Black myself and I may have had similar experiences as an educator that many of the participants may have experienced as well. Because of my race, this has positioned me in a place of privilege when it comes to this particular data collection and helps avoid unforeseen dangers when conducting qualitative work on race and culture (Milner, 2007). For some, I believe that this study will be cathartic or in some ways therapeutic. Speaking with someone about shared experiences allows for people to have a sense of belonging and combats the feeling of isolation and loneliness.

## **Interview Protocol**

The study utilized focused interviews or semi-structured interviews as well as critical incidence techniques. These techniques allowed adequate time and space for the data to be gathered as well as the flexibility to allow the conversation to go where it needed to. The objective was to understand the point of view and behavior of the person. The use of open-ended questions allowed other opportunities for rich themes and narrative to develop. It was important to build rapport with the interviewees, because they were more likely to open up and contribute additional information (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016).

In addition, the questioning was adapted to the individual person, and a question that was phrased a particular way for one respondent may not have been worded the same for another or even entirely eliminated. Because I as the researcher had been a Black teacher in a predominately White school, this gave me more credibility to the respondents. It also afforded me the opportunity to ascertain the many nuances of the experiences of being Black in a predominately White setting. In this particular case, I believed that the race of the person

conducting the interview yielded different results than if the person was of a different racial and ethnic background. Specifically, a Black researcher would be able to develop a stronger rapport with Black respondents because they perhaps have shared experiences (Galletta, 2013).

The extension to that is the researcher may interpret or understand the data in a different way than would a person who did not share the same race or background. The strength in utilizing semi-structured interviews resides in building positive rapport with respondents, increased validity, suppression of prejudice, and clarity of complex issues and questions. Because the semi-structured interviews are less rigid, rapport and common ground is formed more easily. Because the structure of the interview flows as the respondent recalls information or experiences, meaning and understanding of the particular issue may be revealed. The respondent is the expert in the conversation, and the interviewer is but a facilitator of the conversation. This lends to the validity of the protocol, as the person can give detail and depth to the content. Furthermore, through this technique, interviewers may discover additional insight and perspective.

Semi-structured interviews have some pre-determined questions which allow for a general structure; however, interviews change and evolve based on the responses that are given. In that sense, the interviewee might suppress or alter their response according to what they suspect is the “right” answer to the question. In contrast, this interviewing method does have its challenges. First, its effectiveness depends on the skill of the interviewer. A more experienced person will be able to adapt to the respondent and explore more deeply into the heart of the topic. Reliability is also another challenge. Because each interview is unique, it is difficult to replicate, and the results vary.

In addition, sample sizes are often small, further hindering reliability. Generalizability also would be a challenge in using semi-structured interviews because respondents would be answering different types of questions or expanding upon additional questions asked by the interviewer as the conversation flowed organically. Lastly, much like validity was a strength, it is also a weakness. The researcher does not know if the information they are receiving from the respondent is accurate. Also, the interviews may be an opportunity for respondents to have a “second chance.” If a question is asked more than once or in different way, respondents might give a different answer than the one they originally gave, believing that the interviewer wants a different answer.

This study was grounded in understanding the experiences of Black teachers using code-switching. To that end, as the interviewer it was important to hear these teachers speak their truth about the various experiences they have encountered. Probing through this technique allowed the conversation to evolve through the multiple dimensions and lenses of race, language, culture, and identity.

Critical Incidence technique brings a particular approach to collecting direct observations of human interaction and behavior (Flanagan, 1954). The focus of the semi-structured interviews was based on critical incidences. Montalvo (1999) stated the aim is to “discover the key event in a client’s life that shaped his or her ethnic identity. It attempts to unravel the client’s ethnic experience and formation of identity in a way that is relatively straightforward” (p. 39). The critical incidence technique also helps identify the client’s level of awareness of their racial identity. The focus on particular events in their lives when they realized they were different or being treated as different also works with the model of Nigrescence (Cross, 1971, 1991)

The critical incidence model allows exploration into complex scenarios or experiences in which the client had incidents of significance. Asking clients in-depth followup questions allows them to go back to that experience. Articulating what was seen, heard, who was there, and other elements helps flesh out how they felt in that time and aids in their self-concept Montalvo (1999). Another factor in utilizing this model was assessing if the interviewee's feelings over the incident have changed and if so, what event made that impact.

Generally speaking, if an interviewee's critical incidences are positive, it strengthens their group identification and self-esteem. These experiences are often collective and emphasize the interdependence of relationships: "Positive events that occur in adult life often include rediscovery and reaffirmation of ethnic identity and cultural pride" (Montalvo, 1999, p. 25) Negative experiences exemplify the otherness of the individual. This includes the stigmatization by markers such as socioeconomic status, phenotype, and language use.

For the purpose of this study, critical incidences of Black teachers in predominately White schools may or may not affirm that ethnic/racial consciousness "results from coping with issues of development and survival that occur in the wake of intercultural, intergroup encounters and from the ambivalent struggle with the demands of acculturation and assimilation" (Montalvo, 1999, p. 26).

Following are the questions I utilized during the interview process that harnessed the semi-structured protocol as well as the critical incidence elements.

### **Interview Questions**

1. How many years have you been at this school? How many as a teacher?
2. Growing up, would you say you were upper, middle, or lower class?
3. Why did you get into education?

4. Give me an example about a time where you acted different depending on your surrounding. How did this make you feel? Why did you feel it necessary to do so?
5. Do you find yourself doing these behaviors more or less given your environment?
6. Is the ability to alter your behavior an advantage or disadvantage given your situation? Tell me more.
7. Provide for me a situation where your language affected how others perceived you. Do you feel that this particular situation takes away your “Blackness”?
8. Have you ever had a situation where you should have acted a particular way given the situation but didn’t? Please provide examples. What would have changed? Do you believe that the outcome would be different?
9. Do you think your behavior would be the same if you were in a predominately Black school?
10. Is there ever a time that you interact differently with your colleagues than you would with others in your personal circle? If so, why?

Issues to address in the conversation:

- Black professionals in today’s society
- Blackness in predominately White environment
- Interactions with students, parents, and fellow teachers
- Being yourself at work
- Treated differently than White peers
- Additional pressures placed on you as a Black teacher
- Mentors through career

- Supports and coping mechanisms

### **Data Analysis**

After conducting the interviews, the data will be analyzed with open coding technique. This strategy is utilized primarily with grounded theory research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, Charmaz & Belgrave 2007). After transcribing the interviews, they will be initially viewed from a data-driven lens (Gibbs, 2018). This open coding allows for there to not be preconceptions about categories and allows for the codes to generate organically. Codes will then be marked line-by-line for particular analytical categories such as specific acts, behaviors, events, activities, experiences, relationships, consequences, and meanings.

From there, these codes are taken and are scrutinized for similarities and differences as well as those that occur numerous times. This will create a natural hierarchy that will be used to determine significance. From there, those key words, phrases, and concepts will form emergent themes that will be further analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of the study and research questions (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

### **Pilot Study**

I conducted three pilot interviews to test the interview protocol. The three selected participants all met the criteria set by this study. All three were Black teachers who currently worked in predominately White schools. Pilot interviews are a key part of qualitative work. According to Seidman (2006), piloting “can alert them [researchers] to elements of their own interview techniques that support the objectives of the study and to those that detract from those objectives” (p. 39). Each of the interviews were over an hour in length and were digitally recorded and transcribed. Each of the participants were happy to be part of the process and were asked if they had any feedback regarding the questions and the process.

I reviewed when particular questions were asked during the conversation because of the disjointed feeling of going from a brief background straight into them feeling like the “other.” The participants gave good insight into their truth, but it often felt like it was already covered ground when trying to dig more deeply into specific experiences of code-switching. While there were light anecdotal experiences noted, the stories appeared to be not as profound as I had originally imagined. This is my own undoing, as I perhaps envisioned mass revelation and epiphany at the notion of being questioned about their marginalized experiences. In the three participants, I found a calm acceptance of their experiences, and this allowed the conversation to flow without much difficulty.

One question that was asked of all participants brought almost every interview to a halt. “Is professionalism synonymous with Whiteness?” This is not necessarily a difficult question in theory, but it was one that had the three interviewees stuck for a moment. Instead of dwelling on this, I allowed them to think about the question and answer it later in the interview. This gave me reassurance that the right questions were being asked and would produce rich information for the study.

### **Summary of Methods**

In summary, the goal of this qualitative study was to explore the meaning behind what it means to be a Black teacher in a predominately White school. The focus is whether those experiences alter the behavior of such teachers in the realms of language, racial identity, professionalism, and overall self-efficacy. This study was rooted in grounded theory. The research was conducted in the Midwest where multiple schools in bordering states were used. Eight to ten participants were intentionally identified for their characteristics; they would provide key insights into the questions the study sought to answer. Data were collected using

semi-structured interviews as well as utilizing some critical incidence techniques. Open coding was used to establish themes and analyze the data.

As a former Black teacher in a predominately White school now serving as a Black administrator in a predominately White school, I understand that I am close to this research. The constructivist worldview seeks to understand qualitative data that is rooted in the researcher's own experiences. It is important to acknowledge bias and privilege not only as a potential limit but also as an opportunity to leverage deeper meaning and understanding.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

“Say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud.”

—James Brown

This qualitative study was conducted to explore and make meaning of the experiences of Black teachers code-switching in predominately White schools. To illuminate these experiences, the following research questions were addressed: Do Black teachers in predominately White schools code-switch? What are the experiences of Black teachers code-switching in predominately White schools? How do Black teachers navigate White spaces while retaining their “Blackness”? What is the racial identity status of Black teachers in predominately White schools, and what role does it play in their sense of belonging to that community?

Through this chapter, I first provide an overview or context in which the participants live and operate. Next, I provide a brief review of the theoretical frameworks used to analyze the qualitative data collected. Lastly, the themes that emerged from the data that address and are pertinent to the research questions are discussed.

#### **Participant Profiles**

The seven teachers who participated in this study were chosen from two Midwestern school districts, as well as one private school and one independent school. The teachers in this study had an average of over 10 years of experience in the field of education. All levels of education were represented in this sample of participants as well as types of schools, both public and private. All of the participants identified themselves as Black. Two of the participants recently left predominately White schools due to circumstances that related to the

research questions of this study. The experiences of these teachers is not intended to be indicative of all Black teachers in these environments but rather a perspective from teachers with this particular educational situation or lens.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Data*

Name	Gender	Age	Total years teaching	Years at current school	Level	District
Barbra Stevens	Female	32	10	10	High	Hill Top
Duane Davis	Male	49	18	2	High	Hill Top
Tre Turner	Male	50	27	20	High	Hill Top
Caleia Corbin	Female	53	25	23	Elementary	Pine Bluff
Tanisha Johnson	Female	38	15	1	Elementary	Cable Springs
Aldoria Patterson	Female	28	7	1	Middle	Cedar Creek
Natalie Underwood	Female	29	9	1	High	Hill Top

*Note.* Pseudonyms are used for the participants' names and the names of their school districts.

**Code-Switching, Black Racial Identity, and Collective Identity as Frameworks**

The findings of this study were analyzed through the lenses of two frameworks selected to support this study: Code-Switching and Black Racial Identity. Code-switching is

the phenomenon in which a person switches their language, behavior, and body language to adapt to the social context the person is currently in. For this study that is Black teachers in predominately White Schools (Boztepe, 2003; Flowers, 2000; Greene & Walker, 2004; Myers-Scotton, 2000). Racial Identity framework, specifically for Blacks, attempts to make meaning of the processes Blacks go through when trying to identify themselves and their place in the world. The nigrescence and Multidimensional Model for Racial Identity are such processes within the psychology of racial identity (Cross, 1971, 1991; Sellers et al., 1998; Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Thompson, 1999). Collective identity also describes what people's sense of who they are, that "we feeling" or sense of belonging. For Blacks, this collective identity has changed through history (Ogbu, 2004).

### **Emergent Themes**

Each of the participants in the study were able to provide thoughtful data unique to their experiences in those environments. These narratives were compared and contrasted with each other, noting significant instances that were in line with the chosen frameworks as well as with the study's research questions. A number of codes were created and through these, five major themes emerged: (1) Playing the Game, (2) Opportunities, (3) Racial Identity Journey, (4) Importance of a Strong Support System.

#### **Playing the Game**

All of the participants in the study gave their honest account about their experiences being a Black teacher in a predominately White school. In recounting their experiences, every teacher spoke about how they used code-switching in many different capacities and for particular reasons. Duane Davis used the phrase "playing the game" as a phrase of code-

switching. The reasons for playing the game, stemmed from survival in White spaces and professionalism.

It's a game that I just play, whether it's unconsciously or consciously, whether I want to or whether I don't...you know...yeah...but the more I talk about it, why do I play the game? (D. Davis, Interview, December 19, 2019)

### **Survival in White Spaces**

Many of the participants spoke about their experiences code-switching and its use as a means of survival. This survival extended from economic and emotional to physical survival. All teachers described how they leveraged code-switching in their predominately White spaces to survive. For example, Natalie Underwood stated there are two ways to look at code-switching. She stated,

The ability to communicate with someone in a way that they can understand is always valuable...There's two ways to look at code-switching. There's the way to look at code-switching as something that I have to do to survive, and it forces me out of whatever identity I come from. "Other people are making me do this, I'm a minority in my majority culture" and then there's this other way of code-switching that I think most people who ever learned to code-switch to survive transition to as they start to embrace their identity. And that other side is "okay, I actually don't have to code-switch but I'm going to do it because I've learned how to communicate with you, and I need to get something done." I think most people transition to that direction only if you're able to embrace your identity and being comfortable in your identity. Because a part of my identity is what I had to do to survive at some point. (N. Underwood, Interview, February 23, 2020)

Mrs. Underwood also understood the value of code-switching to reach her goals:

I am very aware of barriers that my people face. I'm very aware that I'm going to have to operate in White spaces, hopefully not for the rest of my life, but I'm going to have to operate there because the way that the United States is structured is what like when it comes to power, you have to know how to navigate White spaces. And so, I'm at the point where I'm like, I'm navigating these spaces out of necessity so that I can learn things so that I can give access to my community. (N. Underwood, Interview, February 23, 2020)

Tre Turner expressed a similar sentiment in that he felt the need to code-switch because if he did not, he would not have a job in the predominately White school district. This lament was seen throughout the participants' vast experiences as part of their sense of self. All of the teachers sought code-switching as a means to an end. Tre states,

I would always say I have to put on my work face, you know, as opposed to my normal face. In a perfect world, it would be nice if you didn't have to code-switch and in 2019 as being a Black African American male, in the profession that I'm in and in the environment that I'm in, I think the only way I survive is by code-switching. I think if I didn't know how to code-switch, I really believe that I wouldn't have a job. I truly believe that. (T. Turner, Interview, December 19, 2019)

Barbara Stevens spoke about this fear in the form of stereotypes. Many of the participants in the study were cognizant about the negative stereotypes that were associated with Blacks, and many were determined not to succumb to that narrative. Code-switching was a way to fight that narrative. The Black female teachers in particular were concerned about the "Angry Black Woman" trope, often associated with assertive women of color. Barbara Stevens stated,

I was worried about coming off too strong when I met some of the people...I definitely had this sense of I don't want to be "that Black girl." I don't want to be the one who was loud and angry. And so I, I think I had softened myself a lot probably my first couple of years because I already knew how much I stood out and I didn't want to continue to stand out or bring extra attention that I didn't need or negative attention, I guess. So yeah, I definitely think that I changed the way I acted or carried myself. (B. Stevens, Interview, December 19, 2019)

In education, one of the most foundational tenets is strong student-teacher relationships. Often teachers foster this by making themselves more relatable to their students or taking an interest in the students' personal interests. Teacher Aldoria Patterson was one such educator who was invested in making sure all of her kids felt valued. However, she worried about how she

would be viewed if she stayed more in line with contemporary music and slang in her classroom. She wrote,

When I walked in the building it would just be a whole different Aldoria; like the slang and the terminology that I use, I wouldn't necessarily use it because kids wouldn't get it or like teachers wouldn't get it. I feel like I couldn't be myself in the building because the Aldoria that I am is like always joking. I love to listen to what's the latest things. Like I kind of keep up with what's going on in the world when it comes to our high school students. So, what I could not do was come in there and use the same terminology because in their mind it was like, "Oh, she's just ghetto."  
(A. Patterson, Interview, January 20, 2019)

Duane Davis spoke candidly about how code-switching was a means of survival for him. His behavior changed at predominately White schools because he felt that there was a fear of what would happen if he did not change. Many of the participants spoke of an uneasiness of being the "other" in White spaces. As the United States has yet to reconcile its original sin, slavery, many Blacks still have the images of racial injustices ingrained in their minds of a time not so long past. The images of pogroms perpetrated in Black communities in the Jim Crow era are ever present in the collective memory of Black Americans. Mr. Davis said,

Sometimes I have fear that I'll be judged different, differently than my White counterpart...I'm afraid that they wouldn't understand. I guess that's where I keep coming back to, you know, there's a fear of their ignorance and where that ignorance can go. (D. Davis, Interview, December 19, 2019)

Mrs. Stevens also recounted her upbringing and how fear played a significant role in how she carries herself in predominately White spaces:

Both grandparents on both sides of my family have parents who were slaves and my family talks about it a lot and a lot of my dad's cousins still live in the area where the plantation was where their ancestors lived, and they talk so much about it. It's in the middle of nowhere, Louisiana. And they talk about like this type of White person and how you have to be careful around this type of White person. I'm going to use the term self-preservation as far as just avoiding issues....I feel like the Black people that I spent time with growing up, all of their parents were similar to my parents and that,

“you know we’re not segregated anymore,” but there’s still this divide and you have to be careful about who you speak to and what you say and you kind of have to toe the line a little bit. (B. Stevens, interview, December 19, 2019)

While “playing the game” may afford Black teachers to successfully navigate these White spaces, the process of constant code-switching can be exhausting and can come at a cost. Teacher Aldoria Patterson recently resigned her job at a predominately White school and now works in a school that is predominately Black. She said this about her exodus:

I realized that the code-switch for me is too much for me...I had a bunch of mental breakdowns last year and so that was like my pushing point. I said, “I can’t do this anymore.” My happiness is more important, and I know where my happiness is. I truly feel like leaving allowed me to just breathe. The stress level and the anxiety that I had no longer existed...I feel like code-switching is a lot of work and it becomes a full-time job if you don’t get some self-control with it. And I felt like I was allowing it to become a full time job for me...to live one way when I came out of school because I went to go see all of my friends and then I would come to work and didn’t have any friends but two people. I wasn’t able to be myself all the time and that’s what kind of took a toll on my mental health (A. Patterson, Interview, January 20, 2020)

Mrs. Underwood supported that notion of the mental health struggles in these spaces as well:

I will say that I did feel like I was going through PTSD on a daily basis. All of the things that I struggled with when I was in high school as a Black woman...a Black girl in a White space, I was now having to endure as a Black woman in a White space. I would say the heaviness was not any mask that I felt like I needed to put on. I felt like it was the experiences and the treatment that I had while I was at Hill Top, that made it very difficult for me to leave the same way. Like there was like emotional, like weight, when I left that building from when I came in. (N. Underwood, Interview, February 23, 2020)

## **Professionalism**

One of the most important aspects of the use of code-switching for Black teachers in predominately White schools was the perception of professionalism. For many of the teachers, it was important for them to feel professional in their atmosphere. Barbra Stevens said, “For me, it’s really important to maintain my professionalism.” And while one could argue that the feeling of being professional is not exclusive to race, Black professionals felt an

added pressure to ensure they were at the top of their game for fear of ostracism or ridicule.

Many teachers felt the word professionalism was synonymous with the concept of Whiteness.

Natalie Underwood provided her thoughts on the matter:

I've had to tell supervisors not to use the word professional with me because it's a trigger word...I think education defines unprofessional as anything that is outside of middle class, White cultural norms. That's 100% how I'd define it. Middle-Class, White cultural norms, like all of those parts because I think there are things that if you're not from the middle class or you are from a low-income environment and you're White, you might do things that are considered unprofessional. (N. Underwood, Interview, February 23, 2020)

Barbra Stevens expanded on this:

The idea of professionalism comes from White people being the majority, right? Right or wrong, that's the standard that we have and that comes from the White majority. (B. Stevens, Interview, December 19, 2019)

This feeling is exacerbated because they were often the only person of color teaching in the building and they felt they represented Blacks as a whole. This token representation is another burden that Black teachers in these spaces have to bear. Tre Turner explained his feelings on being the token representative in his building:

When I first started teaching, I had students that would move to Crestfield from the surrounding little areas that had never been in contact or never talked to a Black person before ever in their life and they were 14, 15, 16 years old. So, my professionalism and how I carried myself was going to be the first interaction that they ever had with a Black man or a Black period. So, I had to think, "Okay, how are they going to perceive me and think this is how all Blacks are," you know, some of those things...I would definitely say there was two different Tre's. You know, I wasn't as comfortable, but I learned how to navigate in my environment. I felt like I needed to be a certain way so that they won't say, "Oh, this is how Blacks are, this is how," you know, a negative image on Blacks or African Americans because we're already seeing certain things on TV and in the media, there's a certain perception. You hear it, even at my job, you would hear it. I had teachers that would say, "You know what? You're pretty cool" trying to give me a compliment but in essence, it was kind of a slap in the face because they were like, "I just didn't realize that Blacks were like you." and, "You are different and not what I expected." (T. Turner, Interview, December 19, 2019)

Interactions with parents in predominately White schools was of particular note for several Black teachers. They felt discredited when they entered the building. These teachers felt they needed to prove themselves above and beyond their White cohorts in order to be taken seriously in those spaces. Caleia Corbin spoke about an experience in which a parent was asking very detailed questions about her schooling all the way down to the focus for her Master's thesis. Tanisha Johnson added to these experiences about interactions with parents:

I feel like for any like major event, like back to school night or parent teacher conferences or other things, I felt like I had to do something different with my parents. I feel like we had usually that involved like me going to get my hair done, straightened. Making sure my nails were tight, making sure like my outfit was good. I felt like I had to be at my best...I feel like I had to put my best foot forward all the time. (T. Johnson, Interview, January 22, 2020)

There is perhaps nuance with both Mrs. Corbin's and Ms. Johnson's experiences as both teachers are in private and independent schools. One could argue that the private versus public setting moderated their experiences. On the other hand, Natalie Underwood spoke about her experiences in which she felt that parents were using microaggressions to obtain insight into her intentions with their students in class.

In my first interactions with parents, there was already skepticism before I opened my mouth. Skepticism on like "Is she going to be an impediment on my child getting an A." Skepticism on, "Is she qualified to teach this class," skepticism on, "what type of like propaganda is she going to try and teach my child." (N. Underwood, Interview, February 23, 2020)

Interestingly, the concept of professionalism was just as contentious in predominately Black schools. Aldoria Patterson previously worked in a predominately Black school before going to a predominately White school.

There's a divide, what we deem as professional at one school district was not deemed as professional at another. So just dress attire was something that I noticed was a big thing when it came to a Black environment versus a predominantly White environment and how we classify business and business casual...I feel like it's a slave

mentality. That's just how we look at people. If a Black person has on a suit and tie, they must be important. Like why can't they just wear jeans and a hoodie? I don't understand what the difference, they still hold the same degrees. They still hold the same leadership skills, but why can't they come in like that? Whereas in the White environment, I was able to see assistant principals come in with a button up and no tie and just be okay or they would wear jeans and a polo shirt, and it would be okay. Whether it was tucked in or not tucked in, it didn't matter. So I am like, "Wow, we're kind of getting to the slave mentality of making our kids of color think that just because I have a suit on and slacks that I am at a leadership phase in my life." And it's almost like you have to bow down to me like instead of I am your teacher and you should still respect me because I am your instructor. (A. Patterson, Interview, January 20, 2020)

Caleia Corbin spoke about how society has been brainwashed into thinking what professionalism is and is not, what it looks like and what it does not. These distinctions have deep roots in the DNA of American society. Mrs. Corbin offered these thoughts:

I was looking at Jay Z, he's a billionaire, right? And I was looking at his hair and I was thinking, "huh, that's what a billionaire looks like now." That's because I didn't have Mansa Musa in front of me all the time, who was a billionaire 400 times over. That's what the press has put out there to us...we've been brainwashed to think what professionalism looks like...imperialism is what professionalism is. (C. Corbin, Interview, January 13, 2020)

## **Opportunities**

Many of the participants recounted several of the positive opportunities that were afforded to them by being in their particular environment. Some of the opportunities ranged from being a safe space for students of color to advocacy and education for students and colleagues who have questions regarding race and culture.

**Safe space.** One of the positive outcomes of a Black teacher working in a predominately White school is the fact that they can become a safe space for students to go. This was particularly true for students of color. These teachers would be a refuge for things that were going on in the building that presented challenges for students of color. Some of our teachers, being in a similar situation but in an adult capacity, could relate and commiserate

with students, thus increasing the bond and relationships in the building. Mrs. Underwood gave insight into her role within her school:

It was an opportunity to be like a mentor for my students of color...I advised the Latino Student Association, Black Student Union, Freshmen Executive...I understand what this environment is like, I'm not a majority here, but at the same time I think my students are going to gain value for me bringing my whole self, my authentic self...and that ended up being my asset when it came to building relationships with students. (N. Underwood, Interview, February 23, 2020)

Tanisha Johnson reaffirmed her “why” of education by saying despite the challenges and obstacles that arise in these environments, she remains steadfast and unwavering in her goals and that it is always the kids. Mrs. Johnson stated:

I had become a voice, and not only have I become a voice, I've also become a safe space for a lot of students. So, it has like increased my Black pride because I have become an advocate. The need for being an advocate for my race is so obvious in a predominantly White school...It is not my priority to make parents happy. It is my priority to make sure students and children get served to the best of my ability. Now in the meantime I can filter and make sure parents hear it in a way that's not harmful or it's not offensive. But I think the priorities are different and a lot of people have the priority of we don't want to ruffle any feathers. (T. Johnson, Interview, January 22, 2020)

**Advocacy.** Participants in the study stated that although they maybe the “other” in the building, it was an opportunity to evangelize the Black experience and culture. These opportunities came mostly in the form of teachable moments. Duane Davis spoke about being a “beacon of perspective” for his fellow non-Black colleagues. His hope was that if he can educate them, it would be reflected in their educational practices and teachers would be more mindful in the classroom. Mr. Davis said:

I think that is one of my roles here is to help or support or make people understand that there's life outside of their bubble they live in. (D. Davis, interview, December 19, 2019)

Ms. Patterson and Mrs. Corbin offered insight into how they leveraged who they were to advocate and educate others when it came to the controversial issue of Black hair. Ms.

Patterson recounted a conversation with a coworker:

I had to explain to her, you just don't touch Black people's hair...you can't do that to another Black student. It's just our culture. (A. Patterson, Interview, January 20, 2020)

Ms. Patterson continued her narrative about Black hair by providing another experience with a coworker on the subject:

I respected Lori because she did not fear asking questions. I remember an incident happened where her son touched the little girl's hair at school and the little girl punched him in the face...he's four and she was just like, "How do I explain to him why he cannot do this?" So we would have those conversations exposing her kids so that they understand it as well. She would ask questions like, "Okay, well how often do you wash your hair?" She wouldn't even say, "I don't want to offend you or anything" because that's what normally starts the conversation when what you're going to say is probably going to offend somebody. I'm like, once, "So how many products do you use?" It would just be an ongoing conversation with her, but she would want to know like if I say this in a class, during an instruction, is this going to offend any of the students of color if I talk about this topic. She was very open to want to know how I learn about your culture, but also how can I make sure that I don't overstep any boundaries with anything because of the complexion of my skin and where I was raised. I appreciated her and I wish people would view and have the lens like her because that's what makes us a melting pot. (A. Patterson, Interview, January 20, 2019)

While Ms. Patterson addressed her coworker, Mrs. Corbin added her experience with her class about appropriateness and leveraged it into a teachable moment. She explained,

I wore my hair relaxed forever and I remember coming back from break, one of the spring breaks, we have two weeks spring breaks here and I had gotten my hair braided here in town and the children came and climbed in my lap. They wanted to touch my hair and I had to teach them it's not appropriate for you to touch my hair unless you ask me. Then they said, "What island did you go to Mrs. Corbin to get your hair braided?" and I am like, "What do you mean?" "Well I went to Antigua and that's how I got my one braid." I said, "Oh, you think I went, do you know you can get your hair braided right here in the city?"...the person who did it came to my house. (C. Corbin, Interview, January 13, 2020)

Mrs. Corbin spoke about a conversation that she had when speaking to her principal about a potential promotion to another grade.

He said the idea that our kids could learn about the Civil War and social studies from an African American female who graduated from an HBCU..."Yeah, I would love that." (C. Corbin, Interview, January 13, 2020)

This advancement in her building allowed Mrs. Corbin to continue to provide a high-quality education that her school's reputation was known for and provide her students with the opportunity to learn social sciences through a diverse lens. The power of advocacy was ever present in the conversations and at the forefront of her "why."

I don't want a child under my tutelage to grow up a child of color, well actually any child and feel like they don't have a history in this country, a history that they can be proud of. (C. Corbin, Interview, January 13, 2020)

### **Racial Identity Journey**

Every one of the participants spoke candidly about their racial identity or Blackness and how it pertained to them working in a predominately White school. Each teacher spoke their truth about what it meant to be Black and the journey they have been on in their personal and professional lives.

**Blackness.** When asked about being Black, there was a great sense of pride from everyone. Not one of the study participants wavered in their love of self, and all identified as Black or African American. This spoke to the journey or evolution that many of them traveled to get to that point, because that had not always been the case. Several of the teachers grew up in predominately White schools themselves so they dealt with the same struggles as an adult as they did as an adolescent. Aldoria Patterson gave her testimony on her pride and where she fell on the racial spectrum as well as how she felt after leaving her position in a predominately White school.

I have now, now grown to love the Black skin that I live in...I would just say I'm kind of right in the middle and I enjoy being there (referring to the racial spectrum). I don't think I want to shift to the left or to the right any more than where I'm currently located. Because I don't want to get so empowered into being everything Black. And, and I forget, like to love other people...it just feels so rewarding. Like I can just be myself and I also like having the opportunity to teach kids about loving themselves. It's not about having the weave. Some days you're going to come out and you got to wear your natural curls and embrace them and love them. I enjoy teaching and talking to kids that need that empowerment and need that push to say you are pretty with all of the different complexions skin that you do have. (A. Patterson, Interview, January 20, 2020)

This is Natalie Underwood's take on her identity and also what it means to be Black,

I am far away from self-hate...colorism is real and permeates internationally. So, what is Black changes by country. In the Dominican Republic, I'm Black pretty much everywhere. My husband, who's a little bit lighter, might not be considered Black in the Dominican Republic. There's this level of colorism on what is Black and then there's this level of experience. There are some people in the United States who are extremely light and so by color they wouldn't be considered Black and honestly the only people who know they're Black are Black people, White people don't even know they're Black. But if they choose to have the experience and say, "I'm going to associate with Black people, I'm going to associate with things that are a part of Black culture," then they might be Black. Then there's this last part and that is what the society you're in says you are. (N. Underwood, Interview, February 23, 2020)

Participants Tre Turner, Tanisha Johnson, and Duane Davis were vocal as well, saying that being Black means to strive, endure, and overcome many obstacles that are placed in the path. Echoing shades of James Brown, many stated, "I'm Black and I'm proud."

Racial identity can also be something that is a struggle for some in these spaces.

Barbra Stevens gave compelling testimony about how she felt about her Blackness:

Being Black isn't monolithic. There's no one way to be Black. And I think that a lot of us think so because that's what society wants us to think. Black people do this, Black people say this, Black people act this way, Black people talk this way...I am Black because of the color of my skin. I am Black because the courses in my hair, I am Black because all my ancestors were American slaves...I've struggled with the identity thing for a very long time, and I think part of it is because I think if you look at Barbra on paper I just fall into all of the stereotypes, just my home life and my family life, all in negative stereotypes...my whole life it was, "we only support Black businesses and

Black people do this and Black people don't do that." That's what was coming from mom and grandma and auntie and everybody. So, when I wanted to branch out, it felt like a betrayal, like I was betraying my Blackness. If I wanted to listen to this type of music or if I wanted to hang out with these types of people or if I wanted to wear my hair this type of way, or if I wanted to shave my legs, because that's the thing Black girls don't do...that was really hard for me but now I feel like I've come out on the other side and I'm able to say, "no, I don't have to fit into your Black box" pun intended. I can be who I want to be and I'm not betraying my Blackness or leaving it behind because there is no one way to be Black. (B. Stevens, Interview, December 19, 2019)

Several of the study participants spoke about how their racial identity was challenged due to the environment in which they worked. These accusations of "acting White" was a narrative that was common when speaking to Black teachers. This phrase was not exclusive to just Whites addressing them but also from fellow Blacks who saw them as "sellouts." Tre Turner stated in working in predominately White schools, you had to "toe the line between being Black enough for the Black families but not too Black for the White families." This was particularly difficult to hear because Black teachers who worked in predominately White schools saw themselves as advocates for Black students, not impediments. Barbra Stevens spoke about how code-switching hurt her perceived racial identity by others;

There are a lot of people here who think, "Well, Barbra is not Black enough or she can't connect with our Black students because of the way she speaks and the way she carries herself." So, then I think, "Well, do I let that other side of me out?" I don't know, is that then being fake if I do that also, or putting on a mask on top of my mask? (B. Stevens, Interview, December 19, 2019)

Tanisha Johnson also wrestled with her identity while working in a predominately White school, mainly because she felt that her conviction to work in predominately White schools was misguided because of the needs elsewhere in the Black community:

For a long time, I felt like as a Black person, I was a sellout because I worked in a predominantly White area or predominantly White school because everyone would say, we need you other places. We need you working in the hood, we need you working with more Black kids. I tried that. I did that for a long time, and I was burnt

out. I was exhausted. I gave my all and I felt like I was successful. But I almost left the field of education and I'm sure there's a middle ground...no matter where your path takes you as a Black educator, it's important to just stay firm in who you are...Black teachers who teach in predominantly White areas are not sellouts. They have a really, really important role. (T. Johnson, Interview, January 22, 2020)

Caleia Corbin spoke fondly about her youth and how as a young Black girl, she hungered for knowledge about people who looked like her. She would pore over books on Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington, and Frederick Douglass. Although in her home environment she was around Black culture, her schooling environment was a mirror of what she teaches in now—a predominately White school. It was not until her experience in a Historically Black College that she had a racial awakening and the possibilities she held as a Black woman. This was consistent with Aldoria Patterson and Tanisha Johnson, both of whom attended HBCUs. Ms. Patterson said this about her experience:

When I decided I was going to an HBCU, I think all eyes opened up for me...I've seen Black people living in nice houses and they have nice jobs. I'm meeting kids whose parents are sitting on the Senate seats and mayors of the city, I'm like, "I'm sorry you said that you're Black and that's what your parents do?" It was like, "Wow, like this is a whole different breed." (A. Patterson, Interview, January 20, 2020)

### **Importance of Strong Support Systems**

All of the participants in the study spoke about the value of a strong support system. These structures were vital to the success and endurance of Black teachers in predominately White schools. Teachers found support in the following areas: family, friends, and colleagues.

**Family.** The close-knit relationships of family was one resource that the participants in the study used to support them through the trials and tribulations of working in a predominately White school. Parents, spouses, and various other individuals were a source of strength that teachers called upon as a means of support, inspiration, and sometimes just a

listening ear. Aldoria Patterson spoke about her own mother's diverse experiences that helped keep her grounded:

My mom is probably the person I go to and have those conversations because she works in so many different capacities with the Head Start program in DC that she experiences everything...my conversations with her are, "Mom, how do I handle this situation? If, if you were a parent of a kid up today what would you tell your kid to do to handle a situation? What would you expect the teacher to do to handle the situation?" I like to get it from different angles because of her experiences with everybody. (A. Patterson, Interview, January 20, 2019)

**Friends and colleagues.** Many of the participants spoke about the support they received from their work colleagues and friends. Several of the teachers in the study who went to predominately White colleges highlighted that while they were in those spaces, many of the Black students bonded together and formed support groups. These connections are still sources of strength for these teachers. Duane Davis talked about his support over his long career:

My wife is also a Black professional. We have a network of other Black professionals that we try to get with every so often, and that helps. (D. Davis, Interview, December 19, 2020)

Fellow Black teachers working in predominately White schools were also a support structure. Having another person who looked like them and shared some of the same challenges allowed them to commiserate over the experiences. Caleia Corbin spoke about how she and another Black teacher in her building would have special codes or phrases that they would say to each other from Black movies. This was a way for them to retain some of their Blackness in the predominately White space. Natalie Underwood spoke about how her similar upbringing with another Black teacher in her building was uplifting to her:

Sometimes she [co-worker] came to my room bawling and I came into her room bawling and that kind of situation, so yeah, she was definitely a support but just also just similar...we had similar backgrounds. She had city interactions. I had my city

interactions, and we had similar ideas of what we believed and what students of color were capable of. I just don't think that was shared by all teachers of color in this school on one side or by any other teachers. We just had similar philosophies of education. (N. Underwood, Interview, February 23, 2020)

Lastly, several teachers spoke about the support they received from their administrators. This was a great boon for teachers because they felt support at the top level of the building leadership. Caleia Corbin talked about how her administration supported her going to additional professional development to support her needs in providing a comprehensive look at history from the lens of a Black female. Tre Turner spoke about how he felt empowered in his building because he had the support of his supervisor. Tre explained,

I have a supervisor or someone in leadership that I could go to that's going to support me. I think that makes a difference also. I think if you're feeling like you're going to be out on that island and know you're not ever going to get any of that support and you're just constantly going to be knocked down, then I think that's a little tougher thing to deal with. But I'm at a place where I feel that my supervisor is here in the building is going to support me. (T. Turner, Interview, December 19, 2020)

### **Summary**

An analysis of the qualitative interview data collected in this study indicates that all of the participants code-switch to a certain extent in their school settings. The reasons they use this linguistic phenomenon range from survival and acceptance in the workplace to career mobility within their educational organization. The data also reveal that the Black teachers were making a conscious choice to utilize code-switching as a way to be viewed as a professional in their educational environment by themselves and by others around them.

The information revealed the opportunities presented to Black teachers in these spaces and the ability for them to provide safe spaces for students of color as well as advocates for Black culture for students and fellow colleagues. Lastly, the teachers in the study spoke about

the support structures they had developed and how they were necessary for them to be successful in predominately White schools.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“An identity would seem to be arrived at by the way in which the person faces and uses his experience.”

—James Baldwin

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of Black teachers' code-switching in predominately White schools. To understand and make meaning of their experiences, teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. The focus of the interviews was to provide a rich narrative of Black teachers' experiences in schools where they were the minority and explore how their behavior altered due to their environment. It also explored how teachers survived and thrived in these spaces.

The seven teachers interviewed for this study all identified themselves as Black Americans and were all currently in the field of education and employed full time at their respective locations. In an effort to provide the most dynamic and diverse experience within the confines of the study, the teachers represented all three levels of the traditional American educational experience: elementary, middle, and high schools. In addition, two teachers were in private and independent schools and not public. The average teaching experience of the teachers in the study was 16 years and the average time at their current school was 8 years. One caveat of note is that two teachers in this study have recently left predominately White schools due to some of the issues discussed in Chapter 4.

Judgment sampling was utilized when selecting the participants for the study. This was the most appropriate way to sample because this approach is purposeful in selecting the people who participate in the study. According to Marshall (1996), this sampling helps

researchers select candidates who will fulfill the goals of the study. Another benefit of the judgment sample is that the participants would recommend others who could add nuance to the study and to the main narrative.

In the interviews, many stories and memories were collected. The utilization of critical incidence technique elicited valuable perspective from these teachers of color in predominately White schools. In the end, four themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews:

1. Playing the Game: a euphemism for code-switching, or in this case, capitulation of identity in the workplace
2. Opportunities afforded to Black teachers working in predominately White schools
3. Acknowledgement of the Racial Identity Journey
4. The Importance of a Strong Support System

The themes that emerged addressed the research questions posed in this qualitative study.

### **Key Findings**

The first key finding and essential takeaway from this study is that it appears Black teachers in predominately White schools code-switch for two reasons. The first is to avoid conflict because they anticipate being stereotyped. Because of this anticipation, it manifests itself into the need to code-switch as a way to counter their perception of how the world will view them. This fear handicaps Black educators into feeling that they must wear a mask in order to assimilate for acceptance. This assertion is supported by Claude Steele's work (1997, 2011) with stereotype threat. While this work is majorly associated with academic performance of students, I argue that this phenomenon influences Black teachers behavior and emotions in predominately White schools.

The second reason is what author Arlie Russell Hochschild (2012) called managing their hearts. In these environments, Black teachers are subject to significant emotional labor. Having to consistently manage one's feelings as a way to ensure it is appropriate for a given setting is a burden. Code-switching is thus a way for Black teachers in predominately White schools to manage their hearts. For some Black teachers they endure and take up the cross and for others, this cross is too much to bear.

### **Research Question One**

Do Black teachers in predominately White schools code-switch?

The simple answer is, yes, Black teachers in predominately White schools do indeed code-switch. All the teachers in the study code-switched in some form or fashion. For many it was almost second nature. When the question was asked, it was more of a surprise if Black teachers in predominately White schools did *not* code-switch. For the participants, code-switching was a means to an end, a way of survival, and a way to gain a "seat at the table."

### **Research Question Two**

What are the experiences of Black teachers code-switching in predominately White schools?

A wealth of data was gathered that spoke about the experiences of Black teachers' code-switching in predominately White schools. All of the teachers saw code-switching as a necessity in their current positions and often referred to it as "a game" they play. Like a switch, it is something that they could turn off and on given their environment. To some of the participants in the study, this ability was a sign of intelligence and savvy to be able to recognize the areas in which code-switching would be beneficial and when it would not be. This idea coincides with several of the linguistic frameworks on code-switching. The

markedness model by Myers-Scotton (2000) suggests that members of a group weigh the decision to code-switch based on the anticipated benefits and rewards and make a rational decision to partake in the act.

The data additionally stated that many Black teachers who work in predominately White schools do not feel comfortable being themselves for fear of not having a job because they will not be viewed as professional. This notion reinforces Myers-Scotton's model in that the Black teachers in this study were rationally choosing to engage in the practice of code-switching as they, Black teachers, see the rewards and benefits to code-switching—employment. However, it is important to note that this rationalization was not universal, as one teacher in the study refused to continue the practice of code-switching and as a consequence left the school voluntarily in resistance to conformity for self-preservation.

Black teachers' code-switching also validated Fishman's (1967) work on diglossic language. Diglossia is that theory that in particular situations, one language may be better suited than others. In this instance, Black teachers believed that the language that was better suited for their workplace was standard English.

The use of Black English or African American Vernacular English was not present in the conversations with the participants. In fact, there was only one mention or utterance of that linguistic terminology. This is perhaps attributed to the lack of knowledge in this particular area or that many of the participants did not attribute their comfortable language with those particular terms. For Black teachers, when speaking with others in the workplace, specifically White parents, there was a feeling of being discredited and a sense that one would have to provide justification of their right to be there in the predominately White school. As a result, Black teachers felt they had to appear more professional by speaking in a particular

way and suppressing their vernacular or utilize strategies like “up-speak” or what contemporary Black comedians such as Dave Chappelle and Kee and Peele call “White voice.”

Several of the study participants spoke about the importance of having “a seat at the table” and harkened back to the historical struggle for Blacks to have legitimacy in traditional White spaces. The need to fight deep-rooted racial stereotypes was at the forefront of Black teachers’ minds when carrying themselves in predominately White schools. Code-switching was a way of fighting these long-standing beliefs in Black professionals’ aptitude for leadership in the workspace. Much of the data gathered on code-switching also reinforced the work of Steele (1997, 2011) and Steele and Aronson (1995) about stereotype threat. Black teachers felt that by code-switching, they would be racially palatable and thus debunk many stereotypes attributed to African Americans and open opportunities for advancement within the school organization or provide a sense of belonging.

### **Research Question Three**

How do Black teachers navigate White spaces while retaining their “Blackness”?

Aside from the obvious strategy of code-switching, teachers in the study found that advocating and being almost an ambassador allowed Black teachers to retain their Blackness in predominately White schools. On the other side, this role could be looked at as tokenism. Early theory on tokenism was brought to the forefront by Kanter (2008). In her original 1977 work, she illuminated the plight of being a token in a given environment. Originally based on women in the workforce, there are many parallels to the situation of minorities in predominately White schools. As the token in the workplace, teachers are not viewed as individuals but rather as the spokesperson for the race. They carry the banner and the burden

of an entire people on their shoulders. Because of this, there is high visibility for teachers of color and thus additional pressures are placed on them. Moreover, because there are often few teachers in these spaces, teachers often assimilate to their token role because it is easier than fighting stereotypes.

Many of the participants despised the word or the thought of being perceived as a token despite the fact that it was their known reality. Each teacher had a purpose-driven goal about why they were in that environment, and they were all steadfast in their ability to remain who they were in the face of differing environments. Many of the teachers leveraged their Blackness into their environment by sharing their knowledge of Black culture with their students and coworkers. Issues such as colorism, the use of the n word, and Black hair, are but a few issues that teachers in the study were able to broach in their school because they were the resident expert.

The belief in addressing issues to fight ignorance and racism is consistent with the work of Kelly (2007). Kelly's study specifically highlighted the belief in Civil Rights ideology by its participants as a sense of duty and as a way to defeat racism. A number of teachers were also involved in getting student groups started in their respective schools such as Black Student Union and the expansion of more comprehensive perspectives within various curricula from the Black American lens.

#### **Research Question Four**

What is the racial identity status of Black teachers in predominately White schools and what role does it play in their sense of belonging to that community?

All of the teachers in the study had a great sense of Black pride and strong racial identity. I believe that each teacher had a unique journey to their own truth about who they

were, but particularly what that truth meant in this space where they were the overwhelming minority. All of the teachers provided a rich narrative about their upbringing, and this seemed to be the nexus to how they viewed themselves. Much like Cross's (1971, 1991) work in nigrescence, each of the participants moved through the phases of the model. None of the teachers fell into the self-hate or the pre-encounter stage. One teacher said growing up she did not like that her hair could not be like some of her White friends' and she did not understand why she was different than her contemporaries.

Another teacher spoke about her experience in the encounter phase of this model. Growing up, this teacher lived in a predominately White area and she talked about a time when she and her mother went to a store. After she saw her mother speaking to another Black woman, she said to her mother, "Do we even talk to Black people?" Her mother was mortified and from then on made it a priority to surround her with Black everything. "We had Black Jesus, Black Santa Claus, Black everything." While this was an innocent comment by a child, it spoke to the mother's instinctual need to surround her child with her culture.

Given the data, it is safe to say that all of the teachers reside in the fourth and fifth stages of the nigrescence model. The internalization and commitment phases are appropriate given how each teacher views themselves. All of the teachers are able to develop positive relationships outside of their own race; in fact, one is even in an interracial marriage. This brings an entirely different twist to identity. Some of the teachers embody the commitment stage of this model because they are looking beyond themselves and seeking to improve the Black race as a whole within their school environment. Because the teachers in this study are comfortable and confident in their own skin, they are able to code-switch consciously within

these spaces as a way to navigate success without compromising how they feel about their sense of self.

Recent movements in media and politics also empowered the teachers in the study to embrace more of their Blackness and identity. The election of President Barack Obama, the movie *Black Panther* (Feige & Coogler, 2018), Black Lives Matter, and the natural hair movement are just a few events in recent memory that have inspired participants in the study to lean into their identity and promote self-love to students of color in their predominately White schools.

However, while all the teachers in the study had strong senses of self and identity, some still had to come face to face with the “oreo” or “acting White” narrative. These comments came from both White and Black people. Several of the teachers were deemed sellouts because they were “not doing enough for the cause” or were not giving the Black students in their class a free pass. There was a perception that the Black teacher should go above and beyond to protect the Black students and when they were held accountable, some families saw this as an act of racial betrayal. One teacher in the study did question the intentions of a fellow Black teacher in the building, saying, “He had become a comfortable person to put on a committee so that they can say that they have diversity...he can become detached from like the plight of students of color.” This data supports Ogbu’s (1987, 1999, 2004) work on racelessness and the notion that teachers have to be Black enough to be accepted by their own race but not too Black to assimilate into their predominately White surroundings; hence code-switching.

Three of teachers who worked in predominately White schools went to HBCUs. and the others went to schools and were a part of organizations that promoted Black student

success and safe places. This was another way their identity was awakened and reinforced. This sense of community was developed during their collegiate years and many of teachers still have these same relationships in their adult lives. This camaraderie and professional networks allow teachers to support each other in the daily challenges in these unique spaces. This sense of belonging also reinforced Ogbu's thoughts on collective identity (2004).

Ultimately, the teachers' sense of belonging was not very strong in their workspaces because they had to code-switch. Although teachers acknowledged that they know themselves, they could not be themselves in that space 100% of the time. Feeling the need to capitulate oneself in order to assimilate is troubling and is not encouraging for others wanting to enter into these spaces for the first time.

### **Limitations of the Research**

One of the limitations of this study is that it is a small sample and thus makes the assumption that all Black teachers in predominately White schools have the same experiences. This does not account for other factors that may influence the school environment such as the socioeconomics of the area as well as if the institution is private or public (however, the study did have two teachers in private and independent schools).

Another limitation was the focus of the study. This study primarily focused on code-switching in the workplace and how that influenced Black teachers in predominately White schools. This did not take into consideration other factors that would make teachers feel like "the other." Issues on gender and sexual orientation were not addressed, and that, coupled with being a racial minority, would be yet another dimension to unpack and for teachers to navigate.

## **Implications for Practice**

After analysis of the data presented in this study, the following are recommendations for school district officials, building administration, teachers, and community stakeholders. These recommendations are made with the belief these will ease the burden of being a Black teacher in a predominately White school and the baggage that comes with it.

### **School District Officials**

As discussed in Chapter 2, by 2024 the majority of students in schools in the United States will be students of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). To that end, the urgency to narrow the achievement gap between White students and students of color is ever present. Research such as the work of Thomas S. Dee (2004a, 2004b, 2005) suggests ethnic matching in the classroom as one strategy to close the elusive gap. District leaders, particularly human resource directors, are in quandary as to how to recruit quality teachers and also retain them in these spaces.

School districts, particularly ones in regions that are traditionally and historically not predisposed to educational professionals of color, must audit their recruiting strategies to ensure that they are doing everything they can to bridge the gap between prospective candidates and the district. To do that, the district needs to truly evaluate the vision of the district. One would hope that a progressive district would want to meet the needs of all of its patrons and as such, would put a priority on diversity for the well-being and benefit of all students.

Human resource departments need to create a comprehensive plan to try to find teachers of color that would fit the needs of their district. It is also important for districts to go outside of their particular recruiting radius to see what is out there. The lack of diversity in

districts can be sometimes attributed to the strategies that are utilized to bring candidates to the city in which the district resides. It would be prudent to use other Black teachers within the district to advocate and recruit for the district, especially if the relationship with that particular teacher was one that would encourage being a spokesperson. While this role again maybe viewed as tokenistic, it is a small step in the right direction of changing the demographic and culture of a district. Having teachers of color in the district help with recruiting efforts also gives those teachers a leadership role and displays transparency in giving a position of importance to that teacher. Those Black teachers can also speak their truth about being Black in predominately White schools and hopefully they will convince candidates to come and make positive change within the district.

District leadership also needs to look at the process by which they retain their teachers of color. They need to ensure that they have solid anti-discriminatory policies in place that are treated with respect and enforced if need be. This requires a show of strong support by the district and displays equality throughout the district. Also, providing mentorship programs for new teachers is critical. Even if they are not new to the educational profession, having an on-boarding process that addresses a myriad of issues including a sense of belonging is important. The district should also invest its resources into providing district-wide professional development on racial sensitivity and inclusiveness. These trainings should encompass issues such as implicit bias and microaggressions. Having these trainings in place reinforces the district's commitment to a stress-free work environment and continuous improvement.

## **Building Administration**

One of the areas highlighted in the data collected was how building leadership acted toward teachers. There was a clear distinction in the level of support the teacher felt within the building. Change in the climate of buildings is significantly made at the building level, and the leadership displayed here is key to the culture of the building. Building leadership would do well to model the appreciation of various groups by way of the daily operation and programming offered at the school. An example would be ensuring that schools highlight events such as Black History Month and other nationally recognized holidays.

Building administrators should also be available to those teachers of color as a mediator for issues that include race with other teachers, parents, or students. It is vital that teachers of color feel they have the support of their leadership in the building. Lastly, building administrators would do well to ensure that they are not tokenizing their teachers of color. This means principals are not going to Black teachers for every issue in regard to race. This is a hard balance for administrators as they seek to be informed properly by teachers in that racial group but not marginalize them by making them feel they have to be the solution to every issue regarding race.

## **Teachers, Students, and Parents**

The recommendation for these groups of people would be to resist the temptation to fit teachers into stereotypes created by the media or historical tropes. It would be important for the majority culture to reach out to these teachers and let them know they are valued in the community. One of the findings in the data was that many Black teachers felt they had to prove something as a way to feel they belonged in predominately White schools. They felt

there were different expectations for them than for their White peers. That being said, having the same expectations for teachers of color and White teachers is key. This is done by students, teachers, and parent groups treating everyone with dignity and respect. Groups such as the PTA can bring new teachers to the district appreciation gifts and student organizations such as AVID, StuCo, and Executive Council can host drives or campaigns to help diverse organizations and institutions.

### **Implications for Future Research**

There are several suggestions on future research to extend the look at Black teachers' code-switching in predominately White schools. The first is to expand the study. Having a larger pool of data would be helpful in looking at multiple dimensions of this topic. Some of those areas include gender, sexual orientation, interracial marriage, multi-racial teachers, political affiliation, and religion. These are all topics that would modify or moderate the responses given as to whether Black teachers code-switch in these settings. Extending the study to include Black administrators would be interesting as well due to their position of leadership and power in predominately White schools.

Another interesting area to explore would be the intra-racial pressure or Black-on-Black pressure. This was spoken about briefly by some of the teachers in the study. These teachers were critical of other Black teachers because they felt that they were not Black enough or had forgotten what made them Black. Exploring these topic of racelessness by Black teachers in predominately White schools would also expand on the work of Fordham and Ogbu (1986).

Future research with Black teachers in predominately Black schools would be a proper contrast to this study to see the effects on racial identity as well as the potential impacts of this

on student academic achievement in comparison to student achievement in predominately White schools.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to seek understanding about whether Black educators change who they are in White educational spaces—to find meaning as to why they feel the need to alter or mask their true nature in the name of assimilation. Black teachers in predominately White schools do code-switch for a myriad of reasons. These reasons range from the basic human need for survival to increasing personal social and political capital. Black teachers in this study tended to have a strong sense of their racial identity despite their surroundings. This sense of self was fostered in their youth but challenged when they went to spaces in which they were isolated.

Ultimately, all of the teachers wished they did not have to code-switch and saw it as a vehicle to get them to where they wanted to be. I found the result not necessarily illuminating, but like Icarus, perhaps I am too close to the sun. Personally, this study was cathartic for me. As the researcher and a Black educator working in a predominately White school, I have been in this position for my entire educational career. I have dealt with the struggles of identity and a sense of belonging in these spaces the same as many of the participants on the study. The results collected were in line with many of my personal thoughts and experiences as I now transition into another phase of my career, administration. My hope for myself and others that come after me is that they can be themselves and live out their own truth regardless of their environment as I continue to try and live mine.

As the United States continues to evolve and change into the spirit of a true melting pot, some of the old vestiges of power need to be addressed in order to make space for others.

These others are not a threat to the old institutions, but rather spice that enhances the overall flavor of the offering, adding value and enriching the experiences for all.

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