Making Lemonade Out of Lemons: How Millennial Black Women Teachers Navigate K-12 Educational Spaces

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MAKING LEMONADE OUT OF LEMONS: HOW MILLENNIAL BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS NAVIGATE K-12 EDUCATIONAL SPACES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY
JANESE L. NOLAN
CHICAGO, IL
AUGUST 2023
I remember my grandmother’s hands
Made rough like brillo pads
And strong like oak trees
My grandmother’s hands made kitchen pots sings
Claps like thunder silenced rowdy children.
And held space like wrought iron fences
Protective hands
Healing hands
Praying hangs
Raised high in worshipped
Brought low I despair
My grandmother’s hands told stories of generations
They screamed the struggles her mouth wouldn’t utter
held together broken bonds
mended the hems of torn dresses
buried seeds and sin
and sisters and sons

I have my grandmother’s hands
Made rough like brillo pads
and strong like my ancestors.
I hold space like double Dutch ropes
Tap rhythms of revolution on the lunchroom tables
My hands break generational curses
Washed clean of ego or shame
My Midas touch makes the mundane seem magical
I lay hands in fits of laughter
And carve my sister’s faces into mountain sides
Manicured nails trace lifelines through lifetimes
My hands are a birthright
…..
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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that Millennial Black women teachers (MBWTs) are having experiences that are complex and contradictory. Research also suggests that those experiences continue to be underexamined and unexplained. To illuminate the unique socio-political positions of MBWTs, in this study, I examined their socio-political context and navigational tactics while also exploring whether Lemonade Navigational theory could illuminate the contradictory experiences of MBWTs given their generational epistemology.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Although Black students make up 15% of America’s public school student population, Black teachers only account for 6.7% of the American teacher workforce (NCES, 2020). Racial incongruence between teachers and students has been a concern since shortly after the 1954 Brown v. Board ruling. Prior to Brown, most college educated Black people living in America were employed as teachers and racial segregation ensured that most Black students were educated by Black teachers. Despite the Supreme Court ruling being heralded as a victory for students, an estimated 75,000 Black teachers lost their jobs in the aftermath of school integration (Hill-Jackson, 2007). When the whitening of the teaching force became a hot button topic in the 1980’s, local jurisdictions created initiatives to attract and retain more teachers of color. Despite an increase in local and national recruitment efforts, national trends suggest Black teachers continue to account for a consistently shrinking and insufficient portion of the US teaching force (Fitchett et al., 2017). Some have attributed the decline in the Black teaching force to the increase in other job opportunities for college educated Black Americans as a result of the Civil Rights Movement (Hill-Jackson, 2007), while others have contended that integration created systematic barriers to Black teacher success (Milner, 2006). More contemporarily, scholars have attributed racial microaggressions to increased Black teacher attrition (Frank et al., 2019; Hancock, 2020). Researchers believe that having Black teachers is positively associated with the educational outcomes of all students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002), especially Black students (Carrol, 2017). As such, it is important to attract and retain Black teachers.
Problem

Black women teachers (BWT, see Hill-Jackson, 2017) account for 76% of the Black public-school teaching force (NCES, 2018), with a vast majority of them teaching in large urban centers (NCES, 2016). In the last two decades, studies have been conducted on the impact that BWTs have on student outcomes (Carrol, 2017; Milner 2006, Nyachae, 2016), job satisfaction and retention among BWTs (Campoli & Conrad-Popova, 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018; Fitchett et al., 2017), and BWTs motivation for teaching (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Ware, 2006; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2017).

Embedded within the BWT literature is a pair of studies that address millennial aged BWT. Millennial refers to the cohort of individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2022). In the first study, Nyachae (2016) searches for examples of Black Feminism within the Sisters of Promise (SOP) program curriculum, which was designed by three millennial BWTs (MBWTs). The SOP program provided mentoring and academic support to 5-8th grade Black girls at a single school. Nyachae and her MBWT colleagues sought “to empower the girls – academically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically – to embrace sisterhood, so as to move towards becoming future leaders in their communities” (p. 792). Nyachae contends that language within the SOP curriculum sent conflicting messages to students about sisterhood and success due to the coexistence of Black feminist thinking and rhetoric encouraging conformity and individualism. Nyachae suggests that the SOP curriculum implies that Black girls need to confirm to white normative behavior by encouraging participants to be a ‘lady’ who is ‘virtuous’ and has ‘self-control’ (p. 798). She questions if such language could cause outsiders to believe that SOP was a behavior intervention program instead of a group meant to empower Black girls.
Nyachae’s analysis ultimately leads her to ask if it is possible to “embody both individualism and sisterhood” simultaneously (p. 797).

According to Nyachae (2016), school desegregation, colorblind rhetoric, and neoliberalism create a ‘dilemma’ for MBWTs. She notes that MBWTs must both create curriculum to interrupt “the racist and sexist status quo of schooling” and “survive school politics among their majority White women colleagues” who rarely serve as co-conspirators (p. 786). Nyachae goes further to suggest contradictions that appear in the curriculum mirror the contradictions that exist in the lives of the teachers. She notes that Millennials were taught that success was a result of individual hard work because the world had entered a post-racial period. That narrative runs counter to the lived experiences of MBWTs who enter the classroom and see their Black and Brown students systematically pushed out. Nyachae suggests that exposing teachers to Black Feminist thinking in education courses could help reconcile the contradictions presented in MBWTs curriculum. The idea that the MBWT experience was complex, and contradictory is a phenomenon worth noting.

In the second study, Watson (2017) set out to “examine the ideological standpoint” of three early career MBWTs (p. 217). Through a series of semi-structure interviews, Watson identified two contradictions that MBWTs must contend with: (1) the idea that we are living in a “post-racial” era despite the persistence of the criminalization and marginalization of Black people; and (2) many of the educational programs that promote equity often reinforce standards of Whiteness. As such, Watson acknowledges that the experiences teachers have while in schools, and their understandings of themselves in a larger socio-political context, contribute to the overall Black teacher experience.
Watson (2017) offers a view of teachers who are fully aware of the systemic barriers to student success. She notes that MBWTs chose to leverage their own privilege to disrupt and dismantle systematic barriers to student success. In direct response to color-blind, merit-based ideologies that blame students for their lack of success, MBWTs use a race-full ideology to interrogate “the root causes of a racially marginalized groups experiences” while “creating positive definitions of who they are rooted in their own humanity” (p. 223). The desire to disrupt and dismantle systems of oppression while emphasizing the humanity of their students aligns MBWTs with their BWT ancestors. While she observed that MBWTs must contend with contradictions, she too believed that the contradiction could be resolved through intentional shifts in school policy, curriculum, and resource distribution. Watson suggests that teachers who had ‘political clarity’ were those who had reconciled those contradictions. Nyachae (2016) and Watson (2017) illustrate that MBWTs exist at a unique nexus of contradictions and identify the phenomena as being generationally specific. Both authors agree that MBWT experiences are tied to their unique socio-political positioning and that the navigation experience for those teachers is unique.

**Significance and Purpose**

While researchers were enamored with the possibilities of what millennial preservice teachers may bring to the classroom (Brown, 2018; Castro, 2010), very little research has been done on millennial teachers in service. Nyachae (2016) and Watson (2017) each suggest that MBWTs are having a unique set of experiences that continue to be misunderstood and underexamined. Current research into BWTs does not address the specific socio-political position that MBWTs occupy. To better understand the phenomenon affecting MBWTs, more research into the experiences of MBWTs must be conducted. Therefore, the purpose of this study
was to examine the experiences of, and navigational tactics used by, MBWTs. With contradictions being emphasized by the literature, I explored a novel theoretical framework meant to highlight and unpack contradictions MBWTs experience.

**Research Questions**

In order to illuminate the unique experiences of this subset of the U.S. teaching force, I put forth the following research questions:

(1) How do millennial Black women teachers navigate in K-12 contexts?

This first research question responds directly to both Nyachae (2016) and Watson’s (2017) observations about the MBWT experience. To learn more about those experiences, I focused my inquiry on how MBWTs navigate. I operationally define navigation as the means one uses to survive and/or disrupt multiple forms of systemic oppression and erasure, simultaneously. By focusing my inquiry on navigation, I interrogated how MBWTs use their agency to make decisions about how to exist in school space.

(2) What does Lemonade Navigational Theory reveal about the experiences of millennial Black women teachers?

The second question explores a new theoretical approach to studying Black women teachers. Research on MBWTs points to contradiction as being an important point of inquiry (Nyachae, 2016; Watson, 2017) and emphasizes the importance of positive self-determination (Watson, 2017). To address the generational phenomenon in question requires a new theoretical frame.

**Theoretical Approach**

When Beyonce released *Lemonade* in 2016, the world stopped. Not just because Beyonce has that effect on people, but because this album was supposed to address all the rumors about
her marriage and life as a public figure. Notoriously private, Beyonce gave the world a vulnerable look into her personal life, and she accompanied her album with a 65-minute visual film. Both the album and film received critical acclaim. *Lemonade* was famously snubbed at the 59th Grammy Awards in 2017 where Adele took home the trophy for album of the year. In her acceptance speech, Adele made it clear that she thought the award belonged to Beyonce. After thanking her family and her team, Adele said “I can’t accept this award. I’m very humbled and very grateful and gracious, but the artist of my life is Beyoncé. The Lemonade album was so monumental.” While fighting back tears, Adele went on to say, “the way you make my Black friends feel is empowering and you make them stand up for themselves.” On a night where Adele would take home five trophies, she spent almost half of her acceptance speech gushing over Beyonce and Lemonade – giving Beyonce the flowers that so many thought she deserved.

Scholars have written about the influence of Beyonce and *Lemonade* (Edwards et al., 2017; Howell et al., 2019). As a self-proclaimed feminist, Beyonce embodies a feminism that is contradictory. Her music celebrates her strength and independence while revealing that she was willing to fight to keep her family intact, despite her husband’s infidelity. She performs in costumes that leave very little to the imagination, while singing songs about the beauty of motherhood. Her version of feminist expression is celebrated by a generation of feminist who are finding it hard to see themselves in traditional Black Feminism.

Inspired by Beyonce’s sixth studio album, and the summer treat, Lemonade Navigational Theory (LNT) builds on the traditions of CRT and Black feminism to illuminate a generational phenomenon impacting BWTs. LNT seeks to illuminate the contradictory nature of the Black female experience and celebrate the many ways Black women make lemonade out of societal lemons. Because of the unique intersection of marginalization that Black women occupy, Black
women must accumulate and employ navigational capital (Yosso, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991). Navigational capital refers to the skills one uses to navigate institutions that are not made with communities of color in mind (Yosso, 2005). As such, the study of Black women’s behavior must allow for, and focus on how Black women’s agency manifest in their navigational tactics. To illuminate the experiences of Millennial aged women, explicit attention must be paid to generational ways of knowing, the intentional decision to exist within the gray area, and the unequivocal need to infuse joy and pleasure into one’s existence (Morgan, 1999). LNT stretches intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) to include identities that may not be marginalizing but may allow for additional insights into the underexamined experiences of MBWTs. Out of that research, I propose the following frame (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. A Model of Lemonade Navigational Theory

In Figure 1, the nexus of contradiction is the place where marginalization, navigational capital, and generational epistemology intersect. Because understanding this nexus is crucial to
understanding the experiences of MBWTs, I explored whether LNT could help illuminate the contradictory nature of the MBWT experience.

Chapter Summary

Research suggests that Millennial Black women teachers are having experiences that are complex and contradictory. Research also suggests that those experiences continue to be underexamined and unexplained. To illuminate the unique socio-political positions of MBWTs, in this study, I examined their socio-political context and navigational tactics while also exploring whether Lemonade Navigational theory could illuminate the contradictory experiences of MBWTs given their generational epistemology.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

From reconstruction to present, Black women have entered the teaching field for many of the same reasons, despite changing historical context. The most prevalent of those reasons is that Black women see teaching as an exercise in community care and liberatory practice (Hill-Jackson, 2017; Johnson, 2018; Watson, 2017). The history of the Black experience in the United States has been wrought with racial terrorism and disenfranchisement; therefore, many BWTs became activists in various social movements while simultaneously using their classrooms as spaces of racial uplift (Kelly, 2012; Loder-Jackson, 2012).

Most college educated Black people living in America were teachers prior to Brown v. Board (Hill-Jackson, 2007). Jim Crow segregation and general white bigotry made it virtually impossible for educated Blacks to find employment elsewhere. Teaching became the best way for Black people to enter the middle class. Schools that provided education to Black children were staffed by Black educators, many of whom lived in the same communities that they taught in (Hill-Jackson, 2017). The connection between community, school, and church contributed to the honor and respect most teachers benefited from during this time. Prior to Brown, the average BWT had a bachelor’s degree and they gained experience and professional development through the mentorship of elder teachers (Hill-Jackson, 2007). After Brown, many states expanded and changed their state licensure requirements for teachers to include tests that had abysmally low
pass rates for Black teachers (Amrein-Bdeardsley et al., 2013). Racial incongruence between the number of Black students and the number of Black teachers has been an issue ever since.

The publishing of *A Nation at Risk* in 1984 is credited as being the beginning of the neoliberal shift towards accountability in schools (Apple, 2016). Afraid that U.S. schools were trailing their international counterparts, national and statewide policy makers increased the rigor of state licensure requirements, tied teacher evaluation to student achievement on standardized measures, and placed more value on testable skills. *A Nation at Risk* was followed by No Child Left Behind Act (2001), Race to the Top (2009), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015).

With each change in national education policy, teacher performance was highlighted as the most important variable that could be controlled. Over time, teacher turnover rates for Black teachers increased while the number of Black teachers entering the field decreased (Hill-Jackson, 2007).

While modern day BWTs join their ancestors in seeing teaching as a form of political resistance work and community care (Watson, 2017), BWTs who teach today face issues of racism and sexism coupled with accountability and the devaluing of the teaching profession as a whole (Au, 2014; Campbell & Ronfeldt, 2018; Carrol, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). Where the individual expertise of teachers in general is being replaced with best practices, Black women’s success in the classroom is seen as situational and their experience is seen as niche and fringe (Milner, 2006). As part of multiple marginalized communities, BWTs occupy the position of being an “outsider within” those marginalized communities (Collins, 1986; 2000; Evans-Winters, 2019). In a world that traditionally addresses racism and sexism as separate entities, Black women experience racism and sexism simultaneously. As such, BWTs have a unique and nuanced set of political and intellectual experiences and perspectives that are often overlooked or misunderstood. Thus, to understand the decline of the Black teacher force in the United States,
one must first understand the national policy changes that have been made since Brown, and how each policy change contributed to and exacerbated the issue of attracting and retaining Black teachers.

**The Black Teacher Shortage**

The number of Black teachers has fallen consistently since the 1960’s, levelling off to Black teacher’s making up roughly 7% of the K-12 teaching force in the United States today (NCES, 2020). Scholars have charged Brown V. Board with being one of the largest contributing factors to the decline in the Black teaching force (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Ethridge, 1979; Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014; Milner & Howard, 2004). They identify integration as a watershed moment that would change the profession for decades to come. W.E.B. Du Bois (1973) most notably said that Black “teachers will become rare and, in many cases, disappear” with the onset of integration (p. 151). While his assertion seemed extreme at a time when many saw the Supreme Court's ruling as a win for the Civil Rights Movement, he undoubtedly predicted what the next several decades looked like for Black teachers and students alike.

**Brown V. Board and Desegregation**

Despite Brown’s objective of desegregating schools, more than “40 years after Brown, most U.S students go through 12 years of schooling without ever having met a minority teacher, and approximately 70% of all minority students continue to attend predominantly or exclusively minority schools” (Hudson & Holmes, 1994, p. 389). Although student population homogeneity is most closely tied to the continued and pervasive housing segregation that persists in the United States, Hudson and Holmes attribute much of the shrinkage in the African American teaching force to the way that Brown was implemented by White school officials throughout the south. Because Brown implied that White educational institutions were intrinsically better, Black
students were bused to nearby White schools and expected to receive a better quality of education from the White teachers who were there.

Brown failed to offer any guidance to schools about how to make structural changes to meet the needs of new Black students (Milner & Howard, 2004). The ruling also failed to account for the job security needs of Black educators who had only taught in segregated schools (Lash & Ratcliff, 2014). In the first ten years after Brown, 38,000 teachers and administrators lost their positions (Ethridge, 1979; Hudson & Holmes, 1994). Those that secured employment at White schools were demoted or relegated to positions outside of their expertise, with many former principals being placed back in the classroom (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). Black teachers in White schools found themselves “with two different missions: a mission for the White students and a mission for Black students” (Milner & Howard, 2004, p. 293).

Black teachers who were allowed to move to formerly all-White schools were met with discrimination and demotion. Fairer skinned Black teachers were given preference because they were viewed as less threatening, while teachers of darker complexion were seen as inherently less intelligent and were either laid off or left at the previous school (Milner & Howard, 2004). Many former Black principals were placed in roles that made them responsible for the discipline of Black male students who were viewed as unruly (Milner & Howard, 2004). This change in roles shifted the relationship between Black educators and Black students from one of admiration to one of fear. The demotion of teachers and administrators stunted the career advancement of many Black educators at the time.

The degradation of Black teachers did not begin and end at the process of transferring Black teachers to the new White schools. Black teachers were verbally assaulted by White parents and undermined by White colleagues and administrators. White parents regularly came
into schools to confront Black teachers who gave White students grades that parents felt they did not deserve. Black teachers lost their voice in educational spaces and lost their ability to advocate for their students as well as themselves (Milner & Howard, 2004).

Racism impacted how White teachers educated Black students. According to Dempsey and Noblit (1996), many White teachers were not familiar with – nor did they respect – the customs, values, and cultural understandings of their Black students. They go on to explain that in the absence of Black teachers, Black children were labeled as uneducable and placed into lower tracked classes (Dempsey & Noblit, 1996). Milner and Howard (2004) put it best when they say, “one can only imagine the quality of instruction that Black students received from White teachers, some of whom were opposed to the very notion of desegregation and teaching Black students from the very outset of the Brown decision” (p. 291). Black students no longer saw themselves as potential leaders in the school setting, nor did they feel that they belonged in the educational spaces they inhabited. Students received implicit messages about their place in the world and “the views they form in school about justice and fairness also influence their future citizenship” (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986, p. 79).

Brown helped usher in an era of racial desegregation in public places and in public discourse. The United States political context changed drastically in the 20 years following Brown. The increase in professional options and the decrease in teacher workforce stability contributed to the decrease in the number of teachers entering the Black teaching force (Dempsey & Noblit, 1996; Hill-Jackson, 2017; Loder-Jackson, 2012). One of the biggest impacts of this change is what Milner and Howard (2004) refer to as dis-centering. Because Black teachers and Black schools were once the center of community pride and inspiration, the
destabilization of schools in Black areas caused a change in the values of Black communities, which had a negative impact on the community as a whole (Milner & Howard, 2004).

**A Nation at Risk, NCLB, and Standardization**

A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, was published in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report called for reforms to address the shortcomings of the US education system (A Nation at Risk, 1983). The report spawned both local and national pushes for education reform aimed at making US students more competitive on the international level. Like its national education policy reform predecessors, A Nation at Risk had unintended consequences on United States teaching force diversity. By explicitly tying America's economic future to educational outcomes, A Nation at Risk put a spotlight on education - increasing the demand on schools and, by default, teachers (Mehta, 2015; Grady et al., 2008; Jones, 2009). Early reforms increased the rigor of state teacher licensing test and introduced the idea of standardization on a national level. The remainder of the 1980’s and the 1990’s saw an increase in accountability language and a decline in the number of Black teachers.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a direct policy response to A Nation at Risk in that the conventional wisdom behind NCLB was that the US needed to overhaul its education system to better compete with other world superpowers (Jones, 2009). Whether intended by the policy writers or not, NCLB ushered in an era that caused two major shifts in how schools operated. The first is that schools began to make ground level decisions based on data from nationally approved standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT (Au, 2014). The second was to increase the demand on teachers by requiring them to undergo more rigorous training and evaluation processes (Campbell & Ronfeldt, 2018; Grady et al., 2008). Researchers believe that the increased reliance on teacher certification exams discouraged many Black
college students from choosing education as a major or as a viable career option (Dempsey & Noblit, 1996; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Gist, 2018; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Hudson-Vassell et al., 2018). Black teacher candidates have traditionally had a lower pass rate on these exams when compared to their white counterparts (Campbell & Ronfeldt, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). Research on standardized testing in relation to Black students underscores the notion that standardized exams of any sort tend to disproportionately disadvantaged individuals of color (Au, 2014; King, 1993).

**Whiteness**

Understanding the experiences millennial Black women teachers have in K12 schools requires an understanding of the current educational context through the lens of Whiteness. First brought into the academic lexicon by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1920, Whiteness is an unseen force that allows people perceived as white to amass benefits and advantages they did not earn (DiAngelo, 2018; Du Bois, 2003; Giroux, 1997; Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2002; Matias, 2016). Operating often with impunity, Cancelmo and Mueller (2019) argue that

> whiteness embodies both a material reality – connected to the disproportionate economic and political power wielded by those racialized this way, as well as a symbolic reality – shaped by the cultural meanings attached to whiteness as a form of inflated value, morality, aesthetics, and civilization. (p. 1)

Whiteness is not a singular structure or process replicated in multiple spaces. It is a multifaceted, interconnected web of structures, beliefs, and outcomes that work together to protect white supremacy. Because race is a social construct, one does not need to be white to participate, they just need to be racialized as white to benefit (Omi & Winant, 2014). As such, many mixed-race Black people would “pass” as white to benefit from the privileges of white society (Larsen, 1929).
Schools and access to education have been tied to privilege since America’s colonial infancy. While private education sought to reify the status of elite families by providing their offspring with an education befitting their social status, public education was used to create good, subordinate U.S. citizens (Watkins, 2001). Many early US education reformers had backgrounds in eugenics, setting the stage for an educational system built on inequality and bigotry (Watkins, 2001). In many slave states, it was illegal to teach Black people to read and write until the late 1800’s and racial discrimination in education was legal in the US until the 1950’s. As such, racism, sexism, and white supremacy are the bedrock of the US educational system (Gillborn, 2005).

First coined by Cheryl Harris, Whiteness as Property explains the legal and social processes used to determine who or what has value and to whom valuable things belong (Harris, 1993; Haney-López, 1996). Whiteness as property protects the property interests of whites and ensures that resource allocation benefits whites through legal means. This process, in turn, reinforces white supremacy and white privilege. Harris (1993) contends that resource allocation is essential to whiteness’s hold on US schools through her analysis of Brown v. Board of Education I and II (1954, 1955). Harris explains that Brown I “dismantled an old form of whiteness as property while simultaneously permitting its reemergence in a more subtle form” (p. 1753). The 1954 ruling erased legally mandated segregation within educational spaces but did not address the material inequalities between Black and white students that were created through racial subordination (Harris, 1993; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Milner & Howard 2004). Brown II left the responsibility of desegregation to the states to decide, citing the importance of considering regional needs in the process. The supreme court’s position essentially allowed the same individuals who upheld segregation to “manage, postpone, and if necessary, thwart change”
in the aftermath of the civil rights movement (Harris, 1993, p. 1754). What has emerged is a patchwork educational system that remains very racially segregated and continues to prioritize the material property rights of white supremacy (Leonardo, 2004). Any act to decenter whiteness or redistribute power is deemed dangerous and justifies white violence as a reasonable response (Picower, 2009; Stein, 2019; Matias & Newlove, 2017).

Whiteness, then, impacts every aspect of the educational context. The ability of white supremacist officials to shape the educational landscape after Brown created a white supremacist context for all schools, regardless of region, racial make-up, or school type (Harris, 1993; Salisbury, 2021). White supremacy is present in the curriculum presented to students (Baszile, 2006; Gonzalez et al., 2001), the expectations placed on student behavior (Emdin, 2016), the assessment tools used to measure student success (Au, 2014), the tools used to evaluate teacher effectiveness (Campbell & Ronfeldt, 2018; Cochran-Smith & Reagan, 2022; Urrieta, 2010) and the rhetoric used to discuss and distribute educational opportunities (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Phillippo & Nolan, 2022). Though Whiteness is not the sole factor impacting MBWTs experiences, Whiteness does shape the context that all MBWTs must contend with regardless of their physical school locations and provides an understanding of the phenomenon in question.

**Contemporary BWT Literature**

The literature published in the last 20 years about BWTs at the K-12 level addresses the experiences Black women have in schools from an intersectional perspective – highlighting how 21st century accountability measures and whiteness exacerbate many race/gender-based issues in schools. The focus on accountability and student outcomes in education research runs concurrent to the post-Brown shift towards national standardization. Contemporary BWT literature provides insight into the experiences BWTs are having at the K12 level, generation notwithstanding.
Views of Black Women Teachers

Brown et al. (2018) addresses the ways that BWTs are viewed in a series of metaphors. When describing Black teachers as silver bullets they acknowledge that teachers of color are misunderstood as a charmed cohort that with little effort and minimal resources can remedy the persistent PK-12 academic achievement gap between underperforming students of color and their white peers” while simultaneously paying the “invisible tax of serving as cultural translators, disciplinarians and mentors.” (p. 288)

The invisible tax is a term used to delineate the responsibilities that a successful person of minoritized decent has to their community, without question or consent. The notion that BWTs can make miracles happen despite working in difficult circumstances furthers the belief that they are superwomen who contain magical powers (Goins, 2012).

In addition to seeing BWTs as superhuman, the literature discusses BWTs as Othermothers (Dixson & Dingus, 2008). Dixson and Dingus offer the following definition of othermothers: “those who assist blood mothers in the responsibilities of childcare” and provide “multiple role models for children.” Othermothering is covered in the literature around BWT as warm demanders (Ware, 2006), experts in culturally relevant teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 2009), and those who teach from an ethic of care (Brown et al., 2018; Roseboro & Ross, 2009; Collins, 2000). Research on BWTs at the college level show that the emotional labor of Black women faculty has direct linkages to higher rates of illness and death (Horsford & Tillman, 2012).

Despite much of the literature being focused on the positive attributes of BWTs, Richard Milner (2012) offers a look at the negative perceptions of BWTs. Many of the attributes seen as positive and necessary for Black children can simultaneously be viewed as negative, depending on the observer. When discussing what the warm demander approach looks like in action, Milner
offers that an outsider might view a Black teacher’s tone as inappropriate due to cultural differences in communication. Carrol (2017) also suggests that BWTs who have high expectations for their students can be seen as “boring, and too hard” or as someone “who shows no respect to her students” (p. 126). Some of the negative perceptions of BWTs come from students (Carrol, 2017), outside observations made by colleagues (Milner, 2012), and from being compared to their white female counterparts (Watson, 2016). BWTs find themselves contorting to fit the expectations placed on them, regardless of how unrealistic or unfair they may be (Milner, 2012; Nyachae, 2016; Watson, 2017). Much of what is described by researchers ties into the tropes of Black females that are persistent in American society. While BWTs are expected to take on roles as caregivers, mothers, and disciplinarians, their knowledge is devalued, and their experience is negated because it does not fit neatly into best practice models (Milner & Howard 2004). The ability to successfully balance contradictory and confounding job expectations impacts how long BWT chooses to stay in the profession.

**Black Women Teachers Leaving the Profession**

One of the largest bodies of research on BWTs is on teacher attrition and retention. Farinde-Wu et al. (2017) devote three chapters in their book *Black Female Teachers: Diversifying the United States Teacher Workforce* to this very issue. In the studies that focused on quantitative analysis of big data sets, researchers found that working conditions and pay were high on the list of reasons BWTs voluntarily left schools (Campoli & Conrad-Popova, 2017, Fitchett et al., 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Each of these studies suggested that the social, pedagogical, and professional working conditions that BWTs faced impacted feelings of self-efficacy and support.
Michele Foster (1997) offers the narratives of 14 BWTs as context for the types of conditions these educators face. Novice teacher Ashallah Williams highlights the notion that most new teachers do not expect to have longevity in teaching. She writes,

as much as I enjoy teaching, I don't think I will retire from the profession. Unlike people from previous generations, people from mine do not expect to work at the same career for their entire working lives. For me teaching is one of the first of many careers” (p. 188)

Although Ashallah does not explain why, other teachers recount the endless amounts of paperwork and the constant battles with administration as being frustrations they find on the job (Foster, 1997).

Watson (2017) similarly uses the voices of BWTs to demonstrate the working conditions that they face. Teachers in her two-year study expressed frustration with social contexts, such as poverty and police brutality, that followed them into the classroom as well as the ways that schools systematically disenfranchised students of color. One teacher says “I just feel like on so many levels the system is just set up for our students, for minority students to fail… I don’t know what to do with that” (p. 229). In addition to feeling despair when trying to combat the systemic injustices that students face, Lewis (2016) acknowledges that as a BWT, she was criticized for classroom practices that were aimed at creating a safe learning experience for her students. She recounts in her chapter *The Thrill is Gone*, that school districts began “telling their teachers and students how to speak to one another” and “not to think but to listen to the city’s direction” (pp. 202 & 203). She had no autonomy in determining what was in the best interest of her students and her evaluations became increasingly tied to measures she had no control over. What Lewis highlights is the impact that accountability-based education models have on students and teachers alike. Many of the systemic changes that have happened in schools have disproportionally impacted the experiences of minority students and teachers.
Black Women Teachers and Students

Although my study does not seek to investigate student-teacher relationships among BWTs, it is important to note that recent scholarship has revealed that BWTs have positive impact on student success and student self-efficacy. Gershenson et al. (2018) assert that Black students who had at least one Black teacher during the first four years of their schooling career were more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in a four-year university than their peers who had no Black teachers during that same period. Much of the research notes that Black teachers have a shared sense of community with their students, and that the relationship between Black teachers and Black students provide students with higher levels of support and motivation (Beaupreuf-Lafontant, 2002; Brown et al., 2018; Gist, 2018).

Scholars have noted that BWTs serve as role models for their Black and brown students (Milner, 2006). Role modeling provides students with a broader view of what they may achieve through education. BWTs are disseminators of knowledge relevant to the world view of their students and are uniquely positioned to teach their students how to survive and thrive as a Black person in America (Carrol, 2007; Foster, 1997).

Role modeling goes beyond the simple existence of BWTs in the classroom, but also includes the work that BWTs do in terms of curriculum creation and academic supports. Studies of BWTs at the collegiate level highlight that Black women faculty serve as advisors of Black student organizations and provide research opportunities for Black doctoral students (Atwater et al., 2013; Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Goins, 2012). A study of social justice education in college science curriculum highlighted the impact of social justice curriculum on the development of pre-service and school leadership educators. While some of the students found the social justice angle to be irrelevant to science education, others were inspired to write curriculum that better
reflected the historical contributions of Black scientists to the field (Atwater et al., 2013; Horsford & Tillman, 2012). The course in question was taught by a Black faculty member.

While research suggests that MBWTs are having experiences that are akin to all BWT, those same studies suggest that MBWTs are also having divergent experiences. Understanding those experiences requires an understanding of Millennials as a generational cohort.

**Millennials**

Born between 1980 and 1996, millennials are arguably one of the most researched generations (Dimock, 2022). While generational boundaries are typically determined by birth rates, millennials are largely defined by shared cultural experiences (Dimock, 2022; Outtz & Coleman, 2018). Millennials came of age in the 21st century – or after the new millennium, earning them their cohort's name. Notorious multitaskers, millennials are a generation marked by contradictory experiences and rhetoric. Millennials were the first generation to use computers in schools and they experienced major world events in 24 news cycles (Abrams, 2018; Outtz & Coleman, 2018). Access to the internet and the rise of social media factor heavily into how millennials engage with their peers (Hansen, 2018). While they remember a time before the internet, millennials also appreciate the social options afforded to them via the internet. Travel is high on the list of millennial pastimes. They see themselves as members of a global community, which makes them more culturally aware and politically active (Hansen, 2018).

As a generational cohort, millennials are diverse and highly educated (Abrams, 2018; Dimock, 2022; Outtz & Coleman, 2018). The nationwide push toward global competitiveness resulted in a push for college and careers over trades (Hansen, 2018). Because they were educated in what has been characterized as a post-racial America” millennials are more likely to be concerned about issues of social justice. They see their job as an extension of the social justice
identity, and they switch jobs frequently (Outtz & Coleman, 2018). Millennial wealth accumulation has trailed previous generations due to increased cost of living and depressed wages (Dimock, 2022). Many millennials are saddled with school debt, making home ownership a tricky landscape. As such, millennials are more likely to rent, be unmarried, and live in large urban cities (Dimock, 2022).

Media coverage of millennials has been less than favorable with some reports calling millennials selfish and lazy (Abrams, 2018). Despite the consistent disrespect, millennials are seen as agents of change in almost every industry (Dillworth, 2018). Two economic recessions during their formative years impacted millennial employment, with many millennials struggling to find employment in their given field after college (Fry, 2020). Industry gatekeeping has prevented many millennials from receiving promotions leading many to consider entrepreneurship (Hansen, 2018). Mental health is also important to millennials with one in three having participated in some form of therapy in their lifetime (Gary, 2022). Millennials’ relationship with education is an example of their contradictory material reality.

**Millennials in Education**

Millennials entered schools that were equipped with technology that changed as they grew. Just as quickly as millennials learned to use one form of technology, a new one would arrive. Large tech companies invested heavily in placing technology in schools to ensure that millennials would be capable of competing in a global market. In 2000, Intel created a multiyear program to place computers and internet in schools throughout the US (Wyatt, 2000). Programs like this were not uncommon during the 00’s. As such, millennials education is very much tied to their access to, and use of, technology (Brown, 2018). Neoliberal education policies enacted during the 1990’s and 2000’s emphasized competition, individual excellence, and accountability
Younger millennials endured standardized testing on a near annual basis as standardized testing became a normal part of schooling (Au, 2014). Increased school choice options meant that some millennials were educated at charter schools – many of which had corporate sponsorship (Fabricant & Fine, 2012). Not surprisingly, many millennial college graduates hold degrees in computer sciences, media, and business fields (Hansen, 2018).

Millennials that chose education as their career were studied as pre-service teachers. Brown (2018) found that Black millennial preservice teachers were concerned about race and that there were some generational differences in how Black millennial preservice teachers talked about race. Howe and Van Wig (2016) found that experiential learning was important for millennial preservice teachers because they desired educational experiences that honored their individual values while allowing for collective knowledge production and teamwork. Howe and Van Wig also note that millennial preservice teachers preferred learning models that deconstructed the traditional teacher/student power dynamic. Researchers were both excited and concerned about the kinds of teachers’ millennials would be. Millennials were predicted to be change agents in K12 school (Dilworth, 2018), but some scholars had concern about their lack of respect for historical norms (Anthony, 2018; Barker, 2015). Even though millennials are more racially diverse (Outtz & Coleman, 2018), the U.S teaching force is overwhelming white and education programs are still heavily predicated on standards of whiteness (Brown, 2018). As such, millennial preservice teachers showed social justice pedagogies that were riddled with meritocracy language (Castro, 2010). The contradictory nature of lived experiences for millennials shows up in the pedagogies of millennial educators (Nyachae, 2016).

There is an emerging body of work that elucidates the experiences of millennial Teachers of Color (TOC). Researchers agree that issues around agency and advocacy are high importance
to millennial TOC because racism is a material reality for them (Outtz & Coleman, 2018; Herrera & Morales, 2018). While white millennial teachers may be concerned about racism, millennial TOC must live with racism. As such, millennial TOC deals with anger, apprehension, and battle fatigue all while being champions of change (Ishmael et al., 2018). White supremacist ideologies plague millennial TOC, forcing them to grapple with unrealistic expectations from students, parent, and peers. The findings align with the larger research around TOC and BWTs (Castagno, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Kohli, 2018; Leonardo, 2004).

**Theoretical Framework**

**CRT, Black Feminism, and Lemonade Navigational Theory**

Theory, at its best, is used to explain social phenomena (Collins, 2000). At its worst, theory is used to erase and disenfranchise people (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Morgan, 1999). As previously discussed, the phenomenon in question sits outside of CRT and Black Feminism. However, both frames influence LNT and my overall approach to the study.

CRT is a transdisciplinary approach that works toward liberation for marginalized people (Crenshaw, 1991; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Omi & Winant, 2014). CRT has roots in Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which sought to illumine and eradicate white privilege as codified in law (Harris, 1993). Within the field of education, CRT seeks social justice by challenging the “ways race and racism impact education structures, practices, and discourses” (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). When studying and theorizing in education spaces, CRT should illuminate the interconnected nature of marginalization and challenge dominant ideology (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Leonardo, 2004; Yosso, 2005). At the center of CRT is the importance of experiential knowledge, therefore CRT provides models for collecting and retelling the stories of people of color authentically.
Black feminism contends that Black women live at the intersection of race, gender, and economic discrimination (Collins, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2019; hooks, 1984). In order to bring that point of intersection into focus, Black feminism provides epistemic, paradigmatic, and methodological understandings that give light to the uniqueness of the Black female experience. As a critical social theory, Black feminism “encompasses bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing U.S. Black Women as a group” (Collins, 2000, p. 12). Black Feminism offers a framework to deconstruct and critique the Black female experience both here in the United States and abroad.

Where LNT differs from the traditions of CRT and Black feminism is that it does not seek to interrogate marginalization or oppression, LNT assumes they exist. While there is value in research that elucidates how marginalization functions, doing so has limitations with regard to the phenomenon in question. Rather than interrogate marginalization’s impact on MBWTs, Lemonade Navigational Theory assumes that marginalization is a material construct all Black women must contend with. The way that MBWTs content with their material reality is the point of inquiry. Shifting the way marginalization is conceptualized is important toward honoring the race-full ideological standpoint that MBWTs have (Watson, 2017). As such, Hip-hop feminist provides tools to understand a feminist form of expression that accounts for contradiction and generational epistemological standpoints.

**Hip-Hop Feminism**

Hip-Hop Feminism is a “generationally specific articulation of feminist consciousness, epistemology, and politics” (Durham et al., 2010, p. 722). The term was first introduced by Joan Morgan (1999) in *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down*. Morgan felt torn between the teachings of traditional Black feminism and her love for
hip-hop music. She articulated a desire for a feminism that allowed her to embrace the contradictory nature of the modern Black female experience while still being allowed to call herself feminist.

Morgan (1999) was introduced to Black Feminism in college by various liberal-minded professors. Morgan found that the work of Black feminist thinkers helped to clarify the relationship between racism and sexism and gave her “language to express the unique oppression that comes with being colored and a woman” (p. 37). Morgan also felt that Black feminism fell short of articulating her own lived experiences as a modern Black woman. For example, Morgan got her first job as a writer because she “captured the sexual attention of a man” (p. 56) who later hired her. Morgan’s comfort with, and willingness to use her body for professional gain went against the teachings of feminist thinkers such as Alice Walker, Paula Giddings, and bell hooks. Morgan believed that traditional Black Feminism failed to capture “the powerful richness and delicious complexities inherent in being Black girls now – sistas of the post-Civil Rights, post-feminist, post-soul, hip-hop generation” (p. 57). She coined the term Hip-Hop Feminism (HHF) to describe a form of feminist expression that was “brave enough to fuck with the grays” (p. 59) and allowed Black women to be defined as something beyond victims of racism and sexism.

Morgan (1999) – a lover of hip-hop music – saw the relationship between hip-hop music and Feminism provided fertile ground for the discussion of the value of embracing complexity and contradiction. While hip-hop music is full of sexist language and tropes that are demeaning and derogatory to Black women, hip-hop culture extends beyond the music. Hip-hop culture is an eclectic artistic space used to provide social commentary through art with an emphasis on joy and escapism. Dance, graffiti art, DJing, fashion, and music all work together to create a collective of distinct individuals who use their creative talents to comment on the status of the
world (Peoples, 2008). What some see as an impossible marriage between hip-hop and feminism, Morgan saw as the space of modern feminist articulation. She said “we need a feminism that possesses the same fundamental understanding held by any true student of hip hop. Truth can’t be found in the voice of any one rapper but in the juxtaposition of the many” (p. 62). She suggests that understanding agency for modern Black women requires a lens that can see the magic in the “intersection where those contrary voices meet” (p. 62).

Hip-hop culture values community and individuality in a way that is antithetical to the teachings of traditional Black feminism. This is what makes Morgan’s framework for HHF so powerful – she combined the best aspect of hip-hop culture and Black feminism to identify a feminist expression that “simply refuses to give sexism or racism that much power” (Morgan, 1999, p. 60). Hip-hop feminist scholars articulate what is like for Black women and girls to live – fully- in the intersectional space identified by Crenshaw (1989). HHF scholars work toward articulating the modern Black female experiences with an emphasis on joy and personal responsibility (Peoples, 2008; Lindsey, 2015; Morgan, 1999). Following in the footsteps of Morgan, Hip-Hop feminist scholars have continued to critique the influence that academic research has had on the evolution of traditional Black Feminism (Peoples, 2008; Lindsey, 2015; Durham et al., 2010).

Because of its subversive nature, HHF provides tools for studying intragroup difference. HHF scholars agree that Black women exist at the intersection of racism and sexism; however, they suggest that women who are born after the civil right movement have a different experience, worthy of new exploratory tools and language. Therefore, HHF scholars focus their inquiry on the lives of Black girls and Black women who are of the hip-hop generation. The work of HHF scholars further supports the existence of generationally specific phenomenon.
Seeing the Phenomenon

This study requires a frame that can ‘see’ the generational phenomenon in question while also interrogating contradictions as they exist. Because this study focuses on Black women, my frame must consider intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992; Omi & Winant, 2014), and the larger white supremacist context in which Black women operate (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Morgan, 1999). LNT seeks to illuminate the unexamined experiences of a subset of the Black teaching force while expanding the way researchers interrogate Black women to account for intergroup difference. For Black women of the millennial generation, contradiction is an important location of feminist agency (Morgan, 1999). As such, LNT is a framework that combines marginalization, navigational capital, and generational epistemology to illuminate the nexus of contradiction that MBWTs occupy.

Lemonade Navigational Theory (LNT)

Lemonade Navigational Theory (LNT) is comprised of three components that overlap to create a nexus of contradiction. Below, I explain each component.

Marginalization

Marginalization is the socio-political process of depriving people of resources, mobility, and power (Brown et al., 2003; Crenshaw, 1989: Harris 1993). As the byproduct of systemic oppression and discrimination, marginalization occurs when someone’s humanity encounters a dehumanizing ideology. For example, racism is a dehumanizing ideology because Black people were reduced to 3/5 of a human being. Racism, sexism, and erasure are dehumanizing ideologies that produce marginalization for Black women within society (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Morgan, 1999). Black women experience marginalization at a nexus requiring them to carry and contend with multiple forms of oppression concurrently (Crenshaw, 1989). This intersectional
existence also requires Black women to contend with contradictions in spaces where their marginalized identities cannot be decoupled (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, a Black woman who is assaulted by her Black male partner may struggle with reporting the crime to the police. Reporting the crime means putting another Black man in jail, not reporting the crime means less protection from future assault. Reporting that assault is not just complicated by her woman-ness, it complicated further by her Blackness (Crenshaw, 1989). Her inability to decouple her Blackness from her woman-ness is what creates the contradiction. In schools, BWTs interact with colonialism and white supremacy – dehumanizing ideologies that produce marginalization in school contexts (hooks, 1994; Ewing, 2018). This includes witnessing their students be dehumanized and being dehumanized themselves (Lewis, 2016).

Although Black women are societally marginalized, Black women have also outpaced other racial groups in educational attainment (Blalock & Sharpe, 2012) and entrepreneurship (Umoh, 2020). It is possible that one can be marginalized, feel the impact of marginalization, and still make socio-political progress. Rather than studying HOW marginalization appears, or focusing on the negative impacts of marginalization, LNT looks at how someone views and interacts with marginalization. If we know racism and sexism and bigotry are systemic, then there is value at looking at how individuals understand and interact with that system. Rather than discuss Black women solely as victims of marginalization, LNT says that marginalization is societal construct that Black women acknowledge, consider, and interact with. How Black women do so is important to understand.

Navigational Capital

Written in direct response to Pierre Bourdieu, Yosso (2005) challenges the assumption that students of color lack the capital they need for social mobility. Instead, Yosso suggests that
students of color possess Community Cultural Wealth, or forms of capital that are acquired through communal means. She outlines six forms of capital: apparitional, navigational, social, linguistic, familiar, and resistant. Though all six forms of capital are interconnected, LNT utilizes Yosso’s navigational capital as a frame for understanding BWTs navigation. Navigational capital classifies the skills people of color use to navigate institutions that were not made with communities of color in mind. Among other spaces, Yosso explicitly names schools as being institutions where people of color must employ and acquire navigational capital because they are spaces of marginalization and emancipation simultaneously.

Navigational capital in the context of LNT refers to all tactics used to survive and dismantle systemic oppression. Because schools were not made with Black people in mind, any and all behavior exhibited by Black women in school spaces has the potential to be navigational capital. The manifestation of “individual agency within institutional constraints” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80) is essential to understanding navigational capital in action. Navigational capital accumulation happens within communities of color, but those tools are often employed outside of communities of color – where people of color operate as the minority. Navigational capital use, then, requires the individual to make choices about how to navigate within a space given the knowledge they bring from outside that space. Choice, or agency, are key points of consideration when examining navigational capital use.

**Generational Epistemology**

Because the phenomenon in question is generational in nature, interrogation requires a frame that allows for generational interrogation. In reference to the millennial generation, Nyachae (2016) and Watson (2017) both locate ways of thinking that were tied to generational understandings or generational knowledge. Watson, specifically, focuses on the epistemological
standpoint of MBWTs as being one that is race full. The location of a generational phenomenon and the identification of a generational standpoint requires a lens into generational epistemology.

As a theory of knowledge, epistemology illuminates what one believes, why they believe it, and affects the way an individual assesses knowledge claims (Collins, 2000). For marginalized people, and specifically Black women, epistemology is a contested space because white supremacy impacts whose knowledge is seen as valuable in relation to societal power structures. The dominance of white epistemological knowledge creates conflicts when information is presented that negates white supremacy (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). As such Black women’s epistemological standpoint is one where they must be aware of other epistemologies (due to marginalization) and clear about their own epistemology in order to navigate the world successfully (Collins, 2000; Watson, 2016; Morgan, 1999).

Epistemological processes have always existed in communities of color to produce and validate knowledge for and by themselves. Collins (2000) offers five considerations when giving space to the knowledge possessed by Black women.

(1) Lived experience as criterion of meaning – gives value to the knowledge that Black women have simply from existing in a space.

(2) “The use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims” allows claims to be validated through dialogue between members of the same community using the interconnectedness of lived experience as a basis for determining validity.

(3) “the ethics of caring” gives value to expressiveness, emotionality, and empathy in ways that only people who share a lived reality can do with authenticity.
(4) “the ethics of personal accountability” requires knowledge creators to be accountable for the impact of their claims – both negative and positive – and to take a firm clear stand on any topic; and

(5) seeing Black women as agents of knowledge – asks members of the Black community to elevate the voices of Black women and give validity to their understandings of their own circumstances. (Collins, 2000, pp. 279-288)

As such, understanding the communal nature of knowledge production is essential to generational epistemology frame.

Generational epistemology, then, is defined as the ways of knowing tied to one’s generation. Generational epistemology is impacted by the shared socio-cultural experiences one has that influence individual knowledge production and assessment (Morgan, 1999). Generational epistemology includes the impact of art, technology, media, migration patterns, etc. on how knowledge is produced and assessed throughout someone’s lifetime. HHF scholarship suggests that knowledge production is collective and influenced by societal power structures. Generation epistemology in the context of LNT attends to collective means of determining validity exemplified through how one articulates lived experience both as an individual, and as a member of a group. Because knowledge production happens in community with one’s socio-political context, evaluation of epistemological understandings must be rooted in the temporal reality of the individual or group in question.

**Nexus of Contradiction**

Because marginalization is a material reality for all Black women, marginalization impacts the type of navigational capital each woman possesses. A Black woman’s experiences with, and understandings of, marginalization impact the kinds of navigational capital she
accumulates and employs throughout her lifetime. Take into consideration the ways a wealthy Black woman’s navigational capital may differ from that of a Black woman who lives paycheck to paycheck. While each woman will undoubtedly experience marginalization, marginalization will manifest differently. The personal networks at each woman’s disposal will also differ because of the ways that marginalization impacts her material reality. The unique – and intersectional – way that marginalization appears in a woman’s life impacts the navigational capital she will need, as well as where and how she employs it.

Consideration of each woman’s generational epistemology further nuances her experiences. While marginalization is a material construct for all Black women, marginalization is rooted in the temporal reality each Black woman lives in. The way marginalization is discussed and enacted throughout her lifetime; impacts the way a Black woman interacts with marginalization. Understanding the temporal reality that a Black woman occupies, and the epistemological understandings she has a result, is essential to understanding her marginalized reality, and her navigation of it. Consider the tools available to a wealthy Black women born in the 1920’s versus the navigational tools of a wealthy Black women born in the 1980’s. Differences in technology alone impacts each woman’s temporal experience with marginalization and the network of navigational resources at her disposal. Epistemological beliefs rooted in the language and resources available during a Black woman’s lifetime will also impact how she passes navigational capital to others and what she sees as navigationally necessary.

The nexus of contradiction is where marginalization, navigational capital, and generational epistemology meet. Understanding how each construct functions individually helps elucidate the experiences of Black women as a collective. Each point of overlap grants a more
nuanced view of Black women, allowing for places of intergroup difference to be exposed. In relation to MBWTs, the inclusion of generational epistemology that allows this particular group of Black women to be seen, and to have their experiences elucidated. While there is a shared reality that all Black women have, it is the nuances within that shared reality that LNT seeks to illuminate.

**Chapter Summary**

BWTs exist at a nexus of contradiction because their existence has always been complex and contradictory. As such, BWTs have traditionally carried unique socio-political baggage. BWTs who taught before Brown faced a socio-political climate where racism was codified into law. The Brown ruling shifted the educational landscape, making overt racism illegal in schools. As a result, BWTs who were educated and taught after Brown have contended with more covert racism and white supremacy disguised as meritocracy. The impacts of the ‘regressive era’ that followed Brown is evidenced in the contradictory norms, beliefs, and expectations MBWTs contended with. The literature suggests that understanding the experiences of MBWTs requires a theoretical lens that focuses on the generational nature of lived contradictions, the importance of agency and collaboration, and allows for positive self-determination.

With roots in CRT and Black feminism, Lemonade Navigational Theory seeks to illuminate the unique experiences of millennial Black women teachers. Rather than interrogating marginalization, LNT assumes that marginalization exists. Treating marginalization as material reality Black women must contend with allows for Black women’s’ behavior to be seen as more than survival tactics. Those tactics, as seen through the lens of navigational capital, allow for the interrogation of Black women’s behavior as an expression of the individual and collective identity. The consideration of generational epistemology opens the door for a view of one’s
existence as being temporally bound, not just in experiences, but in epistemological understanding.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

For this study, I conducted individual interviews with each participant as well as a 2-hour, semi-structured focus group using Sister Circle Methodology (SCM). The phenomenon in question is communal in nature in that it impacts a generational cohort (Millennials). Because my participants are Black women, SCM allows for a more culturally responsive research method that authentically honors the collective nature of meaning making among Black women. My methodological approach will rely on the scholarly work of Black women scholars in honor of the collective work of telling Black women’s stories in academia (hooks, 2000).

Sister Circle Methodology

Sister Circles are a cultural practice of “support groups that build upon existing friendships, fictive kin networks, and the sense of community found among Black Women” (Neal-Barnett et al, 2011, p. 267). Sister circles have existed in multiple formats – formal and informal – for centuries. Some examples include women’s groups at churches, Black Greek letter organizations on college campuses, and they can even be groups of good friends who just want to support each other (Collier, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010). Regardless of the format, the overall objective of sister circles is to provide Black women with a safe space to share knowledge, give support to one another, and offer encouragement (Collier, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010)
Rooted in the idea of “mentoring as research methodology,” Sista Circle Methodology (SCM) is “a qualitative research methodology and support group for examining the lived experiences of Black women” (Johnson, 2015, p. 43). Borrowing from the traditions of Sister Circles used throughout the diaspora, SCM was created to help study Black women teachers while also providing mentoring and support. While like focus groups in some ways, SCM offers a dialogic approach to the study of Black women rooted in Black Feminist Epistemology. There are three distinguishing features of SCM (Collier, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010)

- **Communication Dynamics**: communication among, and between Black women is more than verbal. In addition to paying attention to the multiple meaning of words, SCM requires extra emphasis be placed on cultural ways of communicating including facial expressions, body language, sounds, and finishing one another’s sentences.

- **Centrality of Empowerment**: because lived experience is knowledge, SCM encourages Black women to share wisdom and experiences with one another. In doing so, participants empower one another, and themselves. SCM provides a mandate that the focus group setting be used to empower participants. Emphasis on encouraging language and sharing for the purpose of healing.

- **Researcher as participant**: by eliminating the traditional power dynamic between researcher and participant, SCM ensures reciprocity in the research experience by requiring that the researcher shares their own personal experiences with participants as well. Anyone in the group can shift or steer the discussion. Researcher as participant also requires the researcher to share in the community building process with participants and opens the door for participants to influence the research process.
Sister Circles that employ Sista Circle Methodology (SCM) work best when participants have some level of comfort, comradery, or familiarity with each other. As such, SCM informed the recruitment for this study.

**Epistemological Considerations**

As stated in Chapter Two, Patricia Hill-Collins provides researchers with five epistemological considerations when researching Black women. At the center of her consideration is the understanding that meaning making – amongst Black women – is both individual and communal in nature. Concepts such as ‘truth’ and ‘fact’ require individuals to bring their expertise to the table to be judged by their peers. The processes of bringing and evaluating knowledge are embedded within unspoken communal understandings (Collins, 2000).

**Researcher Positionality**

Cynthia Dillard (2012) asks Black women researchers to (re)member a spiritual and cultural practice that she deems “necessary to truly appreciate the complex and contested spaces and places of Black women’s lives in our fullness” (p. 3). (Re)membering requires self-examination and reflexivity but within the context of one’s communal existence. It is looking at yourself in the mirror and seeing your foremothers flanking your reflection in the mirror. It is knowing who you are, who’s you are, and who’s you have always been. It is a tradition of reclaiming what was stolen and reconstituting truth. In the spirit of (re)membering, I start my methodology section with a reflection on what brought me to this study, these questions, and my theoretical approach.

Like the participants in my study, I am a millennial Black woman teacher. I began my teaching career in 2011 and exited the classroom in 2017 to begin my doctoral studies. Reflecting on my time in K-12 teaching, I always felt like something was missing from the
academic narratives of BWT’s. While I could resonate with the stories of Black teachers reflected in the works of Linda Darling-Hammond and Gloria Ladson-Billings, I didn’t see my own experience reflected in the research.

Having been a teacher myself allowed me to connect with participants and understand their experiences. With each MBWT that I spoke to, I felt an instant bond of sisterhood. It was almost as if we were being drawn together by some invisible force. That spark of kinship continued through to the women who ultimately participated in the Sister Circle focus group. My participants were eager to share with me, but they were just as eager to hear about my experiences. With each moment of genuine connection, I earned my participants’ trust and faith in me. They were willing to share with me because they knew that I could – and did – understand. There was a kind of healing that occurred during our time together. In our own ways, each of us walked away feeling a bit more whole.

**Participant Recruitment**

As a researcher who holds insider knowledge and status as a MBWT, I used snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to intentionally recruit and select my participants. Snowball sampling allowed me to utilize my professional networks to aid in recruitment. Snowball sampling also allowed me to attend to existing fictive-kin relationships, which is important for effective implementation of SCM. Recruitment focused exclusively on MBWTs who currently live in or near Chicago to allow for meetings to occur in person. Upon receiving IRB approval, I shared a link to my participant recruitment form (see Appendix A) with former colleagues. I also posted a link to my recruitment form on my personal Facebook page. The participant recruitment form included a summary of the purpose of the study and information regarding what
participation entailed. When participants signed up to volunteer, they were asked to share their weekly availability.

Recruitment lasted six days. During that time, I answered questions from potential participants about the study. Individuals who expressed interest in the study were encouraged to share the participant recruitment link with other potential volunteers. After six days of recruitment, 18 MBWTs volunteered. Upon reviewing the initial list of volunteers, I narrowed my list to eight women who had the most open availability. Six of the eight women I contacted signed consent forms and officially joined the study. The other two were unavailable due to family holiday travel plans during the research period. My final focus group size met the norms for research focus group size (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Millennial Black Women Teachers**

Each participant took part in a 30 minute, in-person, interview (see Appendix B) with the researcher prior to the Sista Circle focus group. During these individual interviews, each participant shared information about their background, their teaching experience, and their motivations for participating in this research study. As can be seen in Table 1, all participants were millennial-aged, Black women ranging in age from 32-42 years old. All but one participant earned their teaching credentials at public Illinois universities. One participant completed an alternative certification program called Teach New Orleans. On average, participants had 8.7 years of teaching experience with nine being the shortest and thirteen being the longest. Two participants are current classroom teachers and four participants have moved on to other careers.
Table 1. Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of Teaching Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 6 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 8 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 – 10 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 12 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 or more years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Level of Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters +</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Schools Taught In</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 2 schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 4 schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 6 schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 or more schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Licensure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Certification</td>
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<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level of Teaching Expertise</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Pk-2nd</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary K-8th</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School 6th -8th</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School 9th – 12th</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participants were educated at predominantly white institutions (PWI’s) for their undergraduate and graduate degrees. One participant completed her undergraduate degree at a PWI in the south, all other participants received their undergraduate degrees at public universities in the state of Illinois. Of their graduate degrees, participants participated in a mixture of in person and online learning programs. The COVID-19 pandemic affected many participants’ graduate student experiences with four participants earning a master’s degree during lockdown or immediately after schools reopened to in-person instruction. One participant attended a junior college before transferring to a local four-year university.
Of the four participants that are no longer classroom teachers, each exited the classroom 1-3 years prior to their participation in the study (see Table 2). Upon exiting classroom teaching, participants chose careers related to education.

Table 2. Participants Who Left Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years Since Leaving Classroom Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 1 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 3 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career After Leaving Classroom Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Writer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Case Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two participants are currently classroom teachers with no plan to leave teaching. Carmen, who is entering her 10th year of teaching at the same school where she began her career, refers to herself as a “lifer” and intends to teach until retirement age. Ty is currently entering her 8th year as a teacher, and she started the current school year at a new school. After spending seven years teaching at a school with a majority Latino student population, Ty moved to a school near her home that had a larger Black student population. Although she has only been at her new school for a semester, she is being recruited by her principal to serve as department chair next school year. She sees herself staying at her current school for the foreseeable future.

Combined, participants’ teaching experience spanned 19 different schools in rural, suburban, and large city settings. Their collective teaching experience also included public and charter school settings in a variety of income areas. The details that participants shared about the school settings they taught throughout their career are shown in Table 3. Most participants spent their career teaching in schools that had majority Black student populations and majority white
teaching staff. Majority was denoted by a 60% or more threshold. Diverse school settings were those where three or more individual racial groups comprised at least 20% of the population each.

Table 3. Teaching Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Demographics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large City</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Charter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Public</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Selective</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Demographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority Black</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority Latino</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Staff Demographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority Black</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority Latino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each time a participant indicated that they left a school, they were asked the reason for their exit. Seventeen total school shifts were reported by participants throughout their career.

Table 4 shows the reasons participants indicated that they left the school.

Table 4. Reasons Participants Left a Teaching Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position Cut</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fired/Asked to Leave</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Exit</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Study Setting**

Participants engaged in individual interviews and a focus group as a part of this study. Pre-focus group individual interviews lasted 25-30 minutes and were held in person at locations chosen by participants. A total of six interviews were conducted; four interviews occurred at participants’ homes and two interviews occurred in the researcher’s home. All interviews were audio recorded. The focus group lasted 144 minutes and was held in person at a participant’s home. The focus group was audio and video recorded to aid in matching responses to the correct participant during transcription. The post focus group interviews were conducted over the phone and were audio recorded.

**Data Collection**

Data collection occurred in three phases. During phase 1, I conducted individual interviews with each participant (see Appendix B) prior to the focus group. We discussed the informed consent. Informed consent forms (see Appendix C) were sent to participants 72 hours prior to their scheduled interview, and they were asked to review the informed consent form prior to their individual interview with me. I answered all questions participants had about the study. Participants then signed the consent form. After the forms were signed, the remaining time was used to collect data about each participant’s educational background and teaching career. Participants walked me through their careers one school at a time. They shared information about the courses they taught, the length of time they spent employed at a particular school, any extracurricular activities they were involved with, and any leadership roles they had in their schools. It took two weeks to complete phase 1 interviews.

During phase 2 of data collection, I conducted a focus group utilizing SCM. The focus group was scheduled for a Sunday afternoon and one of the participants agreed to host the group
in her home. Prior to the focus group, Vanessa organized her living room furniture (two love seats and two chairs) into a horseshoe shape so that all participants could clearly see each other’s faces. I sat at the opening of the horseshoe. The focus group was video- and audio-recorded. A camera was placed on the opposite side of the room. An audio-recording device was placed on the floor in the middle of the group. Videorecording was used to ensure I could match participants with the statements made during the focus group.

At the onset of the focus group, I shared a list of guiding questions with participants (see Appendix D). The guiding questions served as an anchor for the conversation; however, once the group got underway, several members of the group asked questions that influenced the direction of the conversation to include topics beyond those I had considered as researcher. Participants discussed the specifics of their teaching experiences. Topics included relationships with student and colleagues, politics, and racism.

Phase 3 of data collection consisted of individual interviews with each participant after the focus group. Post-focus group interviews lasted 20-25 minutes each and occurred over the phone. All interviews were audio-recorded. These interviews occurred two to three weeks after the Sister Circle focus group. Because participants expressed a desire to have the questions in advance, participants were texted a copy of the questions ahead of the interview. The protocol included five questions: two questions that asked all participants to reflect on their participation in the focus group and three questions that were individualized for each participant based on the information they shared during phase 1 and phase 2 of data collection (see Appendix E).

**Data Analysis**

Pre-focus group interviews were coded as demographic data and reported in the participant section on millennial Black women teachers above.
I conducted a round of open coding immediately after the conclusion of the focus group. This round of preliminary coding served two purposes: the first purpose was to create an initial list of topics discussed during the focus group to help with further coding and analysis of the data and the second purpose was to identify follow-up questions to ask participants during their post-focus group debrief interviews. To identify initial topics discussed by participants, I listened to the focus group audio and created a list of words, phrases, and subjects that come up repeatedly during the focus group. To identify follow up questions for participants, I listened to the audio recording from the Sister Circle and cross-referenced participant responses with the guiding questions participants were given. I identified four questions from the guiding questions list that had not been answered by all participants. Those four questions were used to guide the language of the follow-up questions posed to participants during their focus group interviews.

Once all phases of data collection were completed, transcripts were created for all individual interviews and the focus groups. I conducted a second round of open coding using the transcripts from the focus group and the individual post-focus group debrief interviews with each participant. Data from those transcripts was combined and coded using the initial codes list created during open coding with additional codes being created as new patterns emerged. Once my code list had been refined and finalized, I used axial coding to identify connections among codes and create categories. Finally, I used selective coding to identify connections across categories and to create themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

My study simultaneously interrogated the efficacy of LNT in illuminating the nuanced experiences of BWT. I will therefore engage in a secondary grounded analysis (Oktay, 2012) of the themes present in Lemonade Navigational theory. Participant responses were coded for
marginalization, navigational capital, and generational epistemology. This secondary analysis happened without input from participants.

Validity

Validity for narrative inquiry requires the researcher to study the trustworthiness of their subject (Bailey, 1996). Because the narratives of people of color have historically been dismissed (Bell, 1992), I will treat teachers as experts of their own experiences rather than perpetuate harm and violence in evaluating their trustworthiness. Therefore, during the data analysis process, I engaged in member checking to ensure the trustworthiness of my analysis and interpretation of the results. Member checking addresses the co-constructed nature of knowledge by providing participants with the opportunity to engage with, and add to, interpreted data after participating in a research study (Caretta, 2016). Member checking allowed for me to assess the validity of my data while honoring the communal nature of knowledge production for Black women.

After completing all phases of the data collection and data analysis process, I reached out to participants and asked them to “check my work.” Five weeks after our study had concluded, I shared the final list of themes with participants via text message (see Appendix F). In addition to receiving a list of themes, participants were asked if I had accurately summarized our time together and if they felt anything was missing. All six participants responded via text message, indicating that they felt the themes list was accurate and comprehensive of the discussion they had together.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

K-12 Landscape for Participants

Data was coded to answer the following research questions: (a) How do MBWTs navigate in k-12 contexts? and (b) What does LNT reveal about the MBWTs experience? Themes were derived primarily from the information participants shared during the sister circle focus group and their individual post-focus group debrief meetings with the researcher. To understand how participants navigated in their k-12 career contexts, I first had to understand what experiences participants had to navigate. The following four themes reflect experiences participants had to navigate in their k-12 contexts.

Theme 1: Bullying

Bullying emerged as the most salient theme throughout data analysis. Five out of the six participants described bullying as a normal aspect of their relationship with their white female colleagues. Each of the five participants shared personal experience with bullying and one participant witnessed another Black teacher’s being bullied.

Ty, a current high school ELA teacher, described being repeatedly bullied by her department chair and another white female colleague during her first year of teaching. First, she described being asked to meet with her department chair about her teaching evaluations.

Ty: I had been observed a few times and they all went well. So, I call her [Ty’s department chair] like, is the principal saying something to you? What's happening? She said, no, but we need to just talk about evaluations and do all these things because you know that because you're Black, you have to work three times harder. You have to work harder as a Black teacher.
Later, Ty described not feeling safe to express herself around her colleagues. In another interaction with her department chair, Ty discussed being chastised for making a routine comment about grading. The interactions with her department chair led Ty to feel singled out.

**Ty:** I think I said a comment out loud once, like, oh I can't stand grading. And then the department chair came back to me like, grading is a very important part of teaching. I don't know, I just felt very bullied and like she wanted me to be her friend or be on her team. It was just so political in the department. It was just so many politics and so many cliques that it was like, once I didn't team up and be on her side, she just really tried to make my first year a living hell.

Lily also discussed being bullied during her fourth year of teaching. She was one of two new hires to the first-grade team at an elementary school in a wealthy suburb. Her colleague, a first-year teacher, required support with lesson planning, so her grade level lead began hosting team meetings after school. Staying after school often made Lily late picking up her son from daycare. She attended the after-school meetings for a few weeks, but she eventually began leaving work immediately after dismissing her students for the day. Once Lily stopped participating in the after-school meetings, her grade level lead began to treat her differently.

**Lily:** “When I stopped planning, then she had to help him plan. And then she started being so mean to me. I started being ostracized. I started getting all the smart comments.” Lily described two additional incidents where her grade level lead bullied her in front of her colleagues. In each instance, her colleagues watched but didn’t intervene on her behalf.

Vanessa similarly discussed being yelled at by a colleague who was being investigated for writing a racist poem about a student. Although there were multiple teachers involved in the initial reporting of the poem, Vanessa was singled out and “snapped on” in front of several of her peers. Vanessa reported that she believed that her colleague singled her out because she was the
only non-white teacher involved in the incident. She also reported feeling like her colleague was trying to intimidate her.

In addition to sharing stories of her own bullying, Samantha talked at length about watching her Black colleagues be bullied by her white colleagues.

**Samantha:** They [white teachers] would complain about the Black teachers, saying she [a fellow Black teacher] don't know how to teach, blah, blah. And I'm like, I have been in that white man's class if we're going to talk about not knowing how to teach. But that's just what they [white teachers] were so used to, and they felt so confident in trying to check the Black teachers and going to the administration on our [Black] teachers, and you have the department head, the other teachers, the students all coming to you [admin] painting a picture of a bad teacher.

When discussing one particular example of a Black female colleague being bullied, she said the following.

**Samantha:** She was fighting for her life in there. The [English] department was after her. So, then the kids are after her because for some reason, our Black kids thought white was right. The white teachers would get away with anything because they [white teachers] would come and complain. They fucking with her. I know it. And she’s not doing anything wrong, you know what I'm saying? But just existing in that space. And it was the fucking white teachers. It wasn't the admin. It was her colleagues that was going after her.

Participant’s responses indicated that bullying created a culture of mistrust between themselves and their White female colleagues. This was made evident in that participants referred to White women most frequently as “they” or “them,” which appeared to be universally understood by all participants as a reference to white women colleagues. Lily spoke about how “White women” at her schools have gotten away with the kind of behavior she knows that she would be fired for. Ty and Lily both describe incidents of bullying that included more than one teacher ganging up on them. Ty describes a “double team” between her department chair and another teacher in the English department at her first school. Lily described an effort to get her fired during her second year of teaching by the instructional coach and another teacher on her
grade level team. Lily described the behavior as “nitpicking.” In both Ty and Lily’s examples, all of the teachers involved were White women.

The distrust between participants and their White women colleagues was not unilateral. Two participants who shared examples of bullying also shared examples of positive working relationships with their white colleagues. Lily spoke fondly of her grade-level team at the last school she taught at before leaving teaching. Because there wasn’t a lot of turnover, she had time to bond with her colleagues over the course of several school years. She refers to many of her former colleagues as friends. Samantha also spoke of the camaraderie she enjoyed with her department at the last school she taught at. Although she was very adamant that “most of the Black teachers at our school get messed with”, she recognized that she enjoyed support from many of the teachers who participated in the bullying of other Black teachers.

Theme 2: Isolation

Participants make routine and constant reference to the fact that Black teachers were rare. Participants spoke frequently about being the “only” or “one of a few” Black teachers in any given school. Three of the six participants shared moments of isolation that corresponded with high-profile moments of racial injustice.

**Vanessa:** The moment that I realized I don’t think I’m able to do what I think I’m able to do was around the time of Ferguson, when they were starting kind of like, lighting stuff on fire and such and such, I was having a hard time [being the only Black teacher in the building].

**Carmen:** …that was the most annoyed, frustrating that I think I had ever experienced in my teaching career, dealing with other white teachers is when he [George Floyd] died, when the Black Lives Matter movement and was in full force during the pandemic… they didn’t get it.

**Lily:** My district wanted to have this Black Lives Matter week I’m like, okay. Elementary age is kind of hard to get into some of those topics and explain. You have to be sensitive to certain things at certain ages. But am I reading it [the email sent by her school district]
and I was like, this ain’t got nothing to do with Black Lives Matter. This is what you would do for Black History Month, right? Talking about equality and that kind of stuff. Nothing to do with what Black Lives Matter means. I just feel like everyone is like yes, yes, yes. And I was the only Black person.

Two participants described isolation in terms of their struggle to find consistent mentorship and support. Below are excerpts from participants.

Ty: “…there was no support. There was no, like, let me help. The only other Black teacher in my school was the music teacher…”

Stella: “I'm the only African American teacher in my school. We have a Ghanaian, gentleman. Experiences are very different.”

While participants all experienced isolation throughout their career, Samantha reported having experiences teaching at three different schools with the majority Black teaching force. When talking about her time at each of those schools, Samantha speaks fondly of the support she received from other Black women teachers. In one particular comment, Samantha says the following about the influence that having Black women as mentors had on her career.

Samantha: There's so much pride in the way that my educational experiences started as a teacher. And it was because of Black women. I'm always ready to talk about that. Black women made me who I am. Black women allowed me to be nurtured and grow and pushed and affirmed me.

When Samantha shared this aspect of her teaching experience, other participants responded with phrases like “I love that for you” and “I wish.” I read those responses as an indication that Samantha’s experience was rare from the perspective of participants.
Theme 3: Assumed Responsibilities

This theme covers the bevy of additional responsibilities that participants took on outside of their job descriptions, often without extra compensation. Some responsibilities were placed on participants by administrators or other colleagues. Other responsibilities were taken on willfully by participants. Half of the participants discussed feeling obligated to take on extra responsibilities for the sake of their Black students.

In the following exchange, Ty and Carmen shared that they felt pressured to take on extra responsibilities because they were the only Black teachers in their schools.

Ty: Even thinking back to interviews, like, would you feel comfortable sponsoring our African American club? And then once I got there - so I taught at a predominantly Hispanic school with a very small Black population, and that Black population is split between African and Black. So, my presence in the building, like, once I got there, all of the 5% of Black kids there, they just instantly gravitated toward me. Then I felt a responsibility to be there for them, because there's no other content teachers who are Black, and I think they saw that and just continued to put stuff on me…

Carmen: I can definitely relate to that because I started in the classroom at 23, and then I was the only Black person…still am. There hasn't been any other Black people as content teachers or ELL or special ed in my building in the past ten years that I've been there. Black history came- oh, Carmen is in our building. Let's see if she'll do something. What I do? Start a hip hop step club. Was it free? Yes. Was there a stipend? No. I did that for, like three years.

Samantha added to the discussion by sharing that she spent her own money on students. She believed that her white colleagues saw her generosity as an invitation for additional responsibilities.

Samantha: I took kids home with me. I would pay for so much as a teacher. I had this group of boys. They were actually in gangs. And I would take them to Navy Pier every Sunday and get everybody dinner and then take them to the children's museum. I've paid for haircuts and field trips. I had kids spend the night at my house and stay at my house for two weeks who I’m still in touch with. I think they [white women] saw that and just continued to put stuff on me. It was hard for me to say no to things. So, I would be the go to person for a lot of stuff.
Ty, Carmen, and Samantha all describe difficulty saying no to extra tasks that they saw as beneficial to Black students because there were not many Black teachers in the building where they taught. Carmen also shared similar attitudes of obligation when explaining why she joined her district’s Student Behavior Team (SBT).

**Carmen:** I’m the only Black teacher in my building and we've got quite a few Black kids. And the trend is, why is it that there's so much discipline for Black kids when they're only 6-8% of the population? And it's doubled or tripled a white kid when they're more of a percentage in our district? And so, we're having those conversations. We're presenting that information to our staff. We're coming up with questions, putting them in small groups, talking about microaggressions in the workplace, like with students, but also with staff. So, I just got on that this year, this fall.

In addition to feeling obligated to take on extra responsibilities for the sake of Black children, Stella shared that she felt obligated to explain things to her white colleagues. Stella said, “My biggest challenge with my white coworkers has been the explaining things. I literally had my friend make me a T-shirt that said, don't touch my hair. I wore to our first institute day.”

Carmen and Stella both shared examples of moments when they were asked to speak to a student who used the N-word. Carmen said, “I had to do it a lot my first couple of years because a lot of white kids were using it because they heard it in music” and Stella shared that she was once asked to explain “the cultural significance” of the N-word to a student who was in her colleague’s class. Both Carmen and Stella taught in schools that were more diverse than the rest of the participants.

Overall, all participants expressed feelings as if they were expected to do more than their White colleagues. Vanessa best sums up participants overall attitude about the additional responsibilities they take on in their daily lives as teachers when she said, “who was going to do it if not us?”
Theme 4: Contradictions

Finally, five of the six participants contributed responses to the theme of contradictions. Responses indicated the contradictions participants associate with their teaching. Below are excerpts from each participant.

**Vanessa:** I think that going through an education program, it was a very utopian experience. There were a lot of conversations about what it means to be a teacher. And I think a lot of it had to do with always presenting a perfectly positive emotion. Like, on the hard days, it was, okay, yes, it's difficult, but we're still in it. We're in it for the income, not the outcome. There were a lot of those things that kind of said, keep going, keep going, keep going. And I think once I was actually in the classroom and starting to see that it wasn't that simple, it was a bursting of a bubble.

**Lily:** We have all the things that are good, best practice and what you should do for kids and what they need. And then on top of that, oh, you need to do all these assessments. Oh, yeah, we know your kids can't read, so you have to do all these assessments one to one. No, we're not going to give you a sub. You actually have to get these done in this time frame regardless. And so curricular expectations and them constantly changing the curriculum and not being able to get good at something before it changes again. So, yeah, just a lot of things that kind of trickle down. The people, at the district office are the ones that are making the decisions, but they're not the ones who have to put them into practice. They're not always practical. And when you're in the classroom, you know what works and doesn't work, but you don't have the power to make the decisions because the district does. And they're so far removed from the classroom that they don't know what works and doesn't work because they haven't been in a classroom in a very long time. So that becomes a lot when you know what you should be doing, but then you have these expectations of what you have to do. You just kind of do what you have to do because you don't want to lose your job.

**Ty:** I love the classroom. I love being in the classroom, and, like that's what I wanted to do. But I quickly found out that the administrative part of being a teacher, it just overwhelmed me. And there was not support because I felt like I was looked at as well, you're young. I started- started teaching at 22. You're young. You don't have any kids. You're at this school, and we need you to do everything. And I was just like, oh my God, this is not what I expected. I, like, literally have no life. Like, I don't want to be here all the time, and you all want me here all the time.

**Samantha:** I don't really get a lot of shit from white people, not directly. You know what I'm saying, I don't know what they're saying about me when I'm not around, but they don't tend to fuck with me. But being at that school and watching my colleagues, my younger colleagues get fucked with all the time was really hard, you know what I'm saying?
Participants talked at length about the contradictory experience of teaching with the majority white colleagues shortly after President Trump’s election given that he won the majority of college educated men and women. Participants questioned if they could trust their white colleagues with students of color given that particular statistic. Samantha said “Even though you not gone say it out loud. 53% of y’all are the reason we sitting here today” of her White female colleagues.

Participants also discussed moments of enforcing policies that didn’t benefit students. Lily discussed having to move on to the next lesson despite knowing that her kids were behind. Her charter school required teachers to be uniform in their instruction. She said,

if [admin] walks into any of the first-grade classrooms, we should all be doing the exact same lesson. And if we weren't, it was a problem. So, if the other two classrooms, if their kids got it and mine didn't... I hope they learned in second grade, you know, like, I hope you get it next year. Like, this is not what teaching is supposed to be.

While contradictions plague k-12 educational space due to the influence of neoliberal educational policies and privatization (Apple, 2016; Ewing, 2018; Nyachae, 2016; Stovall, 2016) participants saw their experiences as being influenced by discrimination. Participants describe feeling burdened to fix a system that they didn’t break while simultaneously navigating for their own survival within that same system.

Navigational Tools

Once I was able to understand what participants were navigating, how they were navigating became clearer. Participant employed a variety of navigational tools and strategies throughout their careers. The following themes emerged from the data and can be used to understand how participants in this study navigated the contexts they described.
Theme 1: Creating Support Networks

Although all participants reported feeling isolated, they also reported having robust professional support networks that they create for themselves. Participants’ support networks include Black teachers and administrators inside and outside of the school setting. As can be seen in Table 5, most participants reported having support network of Black teachers outside of their school.

Table 5. Participant Professional Support Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Network</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Teachers (inside home school)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Teachers (outside home school)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Communities for Educators</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black administrators (inside home school)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black administrators (outside home school)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Support Staff (inside home school)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to reporting professional support networks that extend beyond their current school, participants also identified family and personal friends as being important to their personal support network.

Theme 2: Engaging in Continued Personal and Professional Development

Professional development emerged as a key aspect of participants’ navigational practice. In the absence of professional support and mentorship, participants chose to enroll in advanced degree programs. Table 6 shows the variety of advanced degrees that participants hold. All participants have at least one master’s degree. Two participants hold more than one master’s
degree. Several participants also hold master’s degrees that come with more than one endorsement.

Table 6. Participant Advance Degree Topic Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Area</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPED</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Leadership</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Psychology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Samantha and Lily both talked about their degree attainment as being important to improving their practice. Samantha shared that she enrolled in a master’s program focused on math because she wanted to be a better math teacher.

**Samantha:** It was very important to be knowledgeable. I have issues with special education programs and teachers because the programs don't teach content knowledge. It teaches, like, behavioral accommodations and modifications and such, but not real strong content. So that was very important for me as a math teacher. Not to be a special education math teacher, but to be a good math teacher who presents solid content to these kids.

Lily shared a similar anecdote when explaining why she obtained a masters in reading. She said, “I got a Master's in reading so I could be more confident in my ability to give reading instruction to my students. I just wanted to be more confident and learn more.” Degrees were discussed in relation to their ability to help the participants improve their practice.
Theme 3: Creating Safe School Environments for Students

Half of participants spoke directly to the importance of creating safe spaces specifically for Black students. When discussing her relationship with students, Ty described their classroom as spaces for “Black students to be Black.” Her comment elicited the following responses from other participants about safety for Black students.

**Carmen:** The problem is there's nobody advocating for these Black kids. And so that's what I wanted to do and have a say in that, especially if I was going to be in gen ed. I can see it firsthand because now I have Black kids. Before, I didn't have a lot of Black kids for four or five years. So it's nice being back in that setting. But also, like, I can see the kids that are, okay. This is a kid that's being written up. He's in my class, but he's never a problem. Why? And so I can talk to my assistant principal…

**Samantha:** …there's a level of safety that's important to me to have in my classroom for my kids. I'll defend them to the death, and I care about who they are outside of the classroom, too…

**Stella:** I try to always validate who my students are as people. So we write this way. So we're doing formal writing. This is what goes through. This is what it sounds like. Because your audience is going to view you a certain way based on your writing. But when we're having a conversation, we can talk however we gone talk.

Discussion of safety was broached by these participants during the focus group and during their individual debrief meetings with the researcher. The fact that participants repeatedly referenced safety was significant. Safe space for students also doubled as safe spaces for participants.

Theme 4: Experiencing Love and Joy

During the individual post-focus group debrief meetings, I asked participants “what charges your teacher battery.” All participants provided responses. Excerpts from those responses are below.

**Ty:** I love the classroom. I love being in the classroom, and, like that's what I wanted to do.

**Samantha:** I love the kids. Before I had my own kids, it was like raising kids. Just the amount of love and respect that was shown, I was given knowing that those kids cared
about me just as much as I cared about them. Work didn't feel like work when I was in the classroom, if I'm being honest. I wasn't burning out in the classroom. I thought I was going to retire in the classroom.

**Lily:** …seeing [students] go from struggling to read to being a fluent reader by the end of the year really makes me feel good, like, okay, I did that. That was me. They know how to read now.

**Vanessa:** I think a lot of the joy came in the moment when I was able to infuse my own interest and infuse myself into some of the lessons and the engagements. But a lot of that did end up coming out as pop culture. But I think just also the way in which I was able to relate to students, I feel that my tone and my use of not always having to use academic language, not always having to use the most proper English, allowed students to also feel like they could talk to me in addition to being their teacher. So those were points of joy, those were points that charged me, was the moment when I could be more myself, but still have it relate to what students wanted or needed, be it for an assignment or just passing the time.

**Carmen:** … being away from school and doing anything that has nothing to do with school and not talking about school, with non-school people, non-educators. I think that because I get so into work mode and we bring our work home from the school and into our house, and it's all over our counters and our tables, and that's all we look at or how we think about, and sometimes we spend the whole week in grading. And so anything outside of school is charging for me.

**Stella:** I often was able to make connections with students that I did not have, and so that is something that I absolutely just loved. So just forming those relationships is something that charged me. And as I kind of grew in confidence in my abilities as a teacher, that's something that charged me, too, because I was like, I found my voice. I was like, okay, girl, look at you, given your opinion, and people out here listening to you, and you really do kind of know what you're doing. So that's something I enjoy. That's because I saw the growth within myself as a professional, and I trusted that. I trusted that growth.

In addition to these comments, Ty and Vanessa both expressed concerns that they may have been too negative in the focus group and wanted to speak explicitly to their love of teaching. Vanessa said

I wish I had spoken more to the joy in being a Black female millennial teacher. Like the ways in which I am able to connect with students and elevate different things with and for students because of my position. I think I wish I had spoken more to that.
She goes on to share that she derives great joy from being able to connect with students because, “there are also things that we [MBWTs] are able to do that other teachers are not able to do as opposed to the expectations given to us versus other teachers.” Ty shared that she also had concerns that she has spoken too harshly about her experiences as a teacher.

**Ty:** I just kind of wanted to make it clear that I enjoy teaching. I just hope that I didn't come across as, like, I hate kids or I hate teaching and teaching sucks. It has its good days and its good moments, and I enjoy the profession. It's a great profession. I don't want to come off like a basher of education and the profession and that people should leave it.

When asked to elaborate on what she enjoyed about teaching, she continued to describe building genuine connections with students as being central to her joy.

**Ty:** I definitely feel like impact is made, like, that I am helping young people learn. I definitely feel like I guide them, and not just from an educational standpoint, but once they feel comfortable with you and they come to get life advice and relationship advice and career advice and, just, guidance. I really enjoy that aspect of working with young people. School is fun. I think being around young people keeps you young. I enjoy that kids are funny. I have some of my best laughs at work daily. I enjoy my content. It's just very emotionally draining. And I think when discussing that aspect of it, it can come across as, like, I hate teaching because it is so emotionally draining, but that's not necessarily the case.

**Theme 5: Leaving the Profession**

Four of the six participants chose to leave the classroom and pursue other careers. These participants also accounted for 16 of the 17 school shifts reported by participants. I asked each participant what led them to leave classroom teaching, below are excerpts from their responses.

**Vanessa:** …. burnout that I didn't realize was burnout and being sought out for this current position. So I hadn't planned to leave the classroom, though I needed to, but I hadn't planned to leave the classroom until this job was offered to me, and then I went through with it.

**Lily:** I got the degree [a masters in school leadership] because I wanted to work more with student behavior outside of the classroom. I wasn't necessarily in a rush to leave the classroom. I wanted to get it and then when the opportunity presented itself, I wanted to be prepared and have the stuff that I needed to go ahead and do it. So that's what pushed me. And then during the pandemic, when we were at home and stuff, two schools in my
school district posted a Student Support Specialist role, which was what I wanted. And so I graduated in May. The positions were posted in May, and I applied to both schools, and I got it at one of them.

**Stella:** … my student teaching experience was a yearlong, not just for 16 weeks. And in that year, I realized that I really liked the discipline aspect of education, and so even before I finished undergrad, I knew I did not want to retire as a teacher. For a long time, that had been my goal. I wanted to be a dean.

**Samantha:** So that [leaving the classroom] was being at home with the kids, kind of getting my bearings with being a parent, but also realizing that I didn't fully enjoy it [classroom teaching]. And I wanted to find enjoyment. I was still in that phase of my life where enjoyment has to equal purpose.

Participants responses indicate a variety of reasons participants gave for leaving the profession. Two participants left the classroom as a part of natural career advancement. Two participants exited teaching because they lost passion for the job. Vanessa was the only participant to use the term “burn out.”

**Results on Lemonade Navigational Theory**

To answer my second research question, data was also coded for the three components of Lemonade Navigational Theory (LNT) – marginalization, generational epistemology, and navigational capital. Responses were coded as *marginalization* if participants indicated that they interacted with marginalization in any way. Responses were coded as *generational epistemology* if the response demonstrated a way of knowing that was tied to participants temporal reality. Responses were coded as *navigational capital* if they were examples of tools participants used to navigate within their k-12 career contexts. Thirty-three responses were coded for generational epistemology, 58 responses were coded for navigational capital, and 38 responses were coded for marginalization.
The nexus of contradiction represented the place where all three aspects of LNT converge. Nineteen excerpts were coded for all three aspects of LNT, with all participants contributing at least two responses each.

**Theme 1: Agency**

One theme emerged from the data – agency. All participants exhibited agency, and it was often most often indicated in acts of defiance or in moments that participants chose to say no. Agency also included moments where participants advocated for themselves. Below are three examples of individual agency exhibited by participants.

**Ty:** Having kids is when I stopped taking work home is when I had to create boundaries for my life. Because before that, just be like, oh, I'll do it at home. Like, oh, I'll do it at home, I'll do it at home. And I think having kids is what really separated my teacher self from my personal self. Having kids was my separation.

**Vanessa:** …something that I had to go to a therapist about was recognizing that in order to prioritize myself, I needed to kind of pull back from how much I prioritized my job. It was difficult because the idea of you need to put yourself before your job is different than saying you need to put Vanessa before my teacher self because my teacher self always came first. And I feel like I was raised in the perspective and taught through a program where that's how it's supposed to be. And even to the point where I was always very confused about all of these teachers who had full on families because it was like, but how though?

**Lily:** I sent her [Lily’s grade level leader] and email. I typed it all out. I wanted to get all my thoughts. I was like, I went from the beginning, you did this and then this, and then this happened. And you said during this stuff. And went through chronologically. I wanted it all put out there. I sent it to her and another teammate who was this chick who was trying to team up with her. And I came to her the next day, they were avoiding the, like, the Black play. They were running in the other direction.

In addition to individual responses that demonstrated agency, participants discussed the importance of creating boundaries between themselves and their white colleagues. When discussing being asked to serve as cultural expert for their white women colleagues, participants how the following exchange.
Stella: I’m not going to continue to be that person. I’m not here to educate you on stuff that you can be educated via TikTok or watching a documentary.

Researcher: Yes. Google works.

Stella: Like, if I can understand things about you all and the way that you do things…

Samantha: …we’re required to.

Stella: Yes.

Vanessa: Yes.

Stella: … then I don’t understand why you [white female teachers] can’t…

Samantha: We [Black female teachers] can’t survive if we don’t.

Researcher: But that’s it though. Our survival is tied to understanding a world we can’t occupy.

Stella: Yeah.

Participants continued to banter back and forth for several minutes about the things they refused to do. Samantha shared that she believed it was the responsibility of white teachers to educate other white teachers. She also indicated that she had stopped attending any professional development activity on diversity because “white folks need space to sort they own stuff out.” Carmen shared that she has started to say no to requests to step into difficult conversations with students she doesn’t teach. Despite reporting doing so early in their careers, Carmen became frustrated with the frequency of request during the George Floyd protests, and she started encouraging her colleagues to educate themselves on the topic. All of these were seen as examples of professional boundary setting for participants.

Closing the focus group, I asked participants what advice they would give their first-year teacher self. Five of the six responses provided by participants were coded for all three aspects of LNT. Below are the responses from participants.
Samantha: Find an experienced Black woman to mentor you, whether in your building or not in your building.

Lily: …know when to walk away. I think it's important. It's okay to leave a school. It's okay to leave a position. It's okay to do that and not have that guilt of, like, I have to stay, I'm so dedicated. It's okay to walk away.

Carmen: I think control what you can control, and anything out of that is out of your control. Do what you can do and be okay with that.

Vanessa: This job makes a difference, but don't forget that it is a job.

Ty: I think to be yourself. You don't have to try to fit it to be something for these people. Just be yourself. It's okay.

In response to this question, Stella said “give yourself time to develop, time to grow. Give yourself time.” Stella’s response was not coded for all three aspects of LNT. I include it as an example of a participant response to the question that does not demonstrate LNT.

Chapter Summary

The results of this study indicate that participants must navigate bullying, isolation, assumed responsibilities and contradictions in their daily lives as educators. To navigate these experiences, results indicate that participants are creating support networks inside and outside of their school setting, engaging in continued professional development through degree attainment, creating safe spaces for students, intentional experiencing and expressing love and joy, and some participants chose to leave the profession. When applying the LNT framework, it is evident that participants are using agency to navigate these experiences. For these MBWTs, agency comes in the form of creating professional boundaries between themselves and their colleagues and advocating for themselves using both active and passive means. Participants also utilize self-care and self-preservation as tools of agency.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the navigational tactics employed by millennial Black Women Teachers (BWTs) in hopes of understanding the generational phenomenon impacting them. In this study, I also explored whether LNT would be helpful in understanding the experiences and navigational tactics of MBWTs. As such, this study asked two questions: (a) how are MBWTs navigating the experiences they are having in K-12 schools and (b), what does Lemonade Navigational Theory reveal about the MBWT experiences.

Data revealed that participants in this study navigated bullying, isolation, contradictions, and the burden of additional responsibilities throughout their K-12 teaching careers. In response participants utilized agency to make choices about how to navigate their contexts.

Question 1: How are MBWTs navigating their k12 school context?

Data analysis suggests that participants are navigating hostile territory with few allies. While each participant described having a robust support system that included sources inside and outside of the school environment, they also described feeling isolated, targeted, and unsupported in K-12 school settings. Participants describe working in environments where they come to expect their white female colleagues to bully them and other Black teachers. Each participant addressed the bullying in different ways. Participants were willing to have direct conversations, but they were also willing to choose silence. Both options were acceptable forms of self-advocacy for participants in this study. Participants were adamant that the bullying they
experience is due to racism. Participants describe uncomfortable working conditions due to the consistency of the bullying.

Participants also describe their school administrators as being out of the loop, easily manipulated, and generally unhelpful. For example, Lily described being bullied by her department lead. That same colleague had a reputation for yelling at members of the admin team. With each additional story of bullying, harassment, and targeting, participants described their school administrators as culpable in the abuse they experienced. The perpetrators of bullying were rarely punished, reprimanded, or confronted for their behavior by the administration. Vanessa described watching her white colleague “get a slap on the wrist” for writing a racist poem about a student. When that same teacher yelled at Vanessa in front of her peers, Vanessa chose silence because she knew the administration would not back her up if she complained. Participants described school admin as being unable or unwilling to address bullying or harassment directly. Participants descriptions suggest that white school administrators may struggle to effectively discipline white teachers for racist or unprofessional behavior.

Participants understood that they lacked mentorship due to the shortage of Black teachers. In the absence of mentorship as support, participants created informal, lateral support networks. As participants accumulated professional certifications, they increased their support network by adding new individuals they met along the way. Participants described support networks of friends who teach in other school settings, friends who don’t teach at all, and key allies within their building. In response to the isolation and bullying they experienced professionally, participants created boundaries between themselves and their white colleagues. Participants described making choices to limit their interactions with their white colleagues. By
creating clear professional boundaries, participants were able to meet professional obligations while minimizing opportunities for bullying.

Participants demonstrated sophisticated understanding of their socio-political positioning and they used their knowledge to make calculated decisions about how to spend the limited political capital they had. As participants’ understanding of their socio-political positioning evolved, participants became more selective about the additional responsibilities they chose to take on. Participants were aware of their limited sphere of influence, so they made conscious decisions about how to operate from within the constraints of their sociopolitical positioning.

Participants’ love and passion for teaching was implicit and obvious to me as a researcher and a fellow MBWT. In addition to the intentional engagement on the topic from Vanessa and Ty, all participants spoke about their desire to make sure the Black students were loved, supported, and free to express themselves authentically in school. Participants emphasized approaches that also allowed them to prioritize their own personal wellbeing. Participants were adamant in their belief that teaching should not be as all-consuming as it is. Instead of challenging professional standards directly via protest, participants chose subversion. Participants were clear about the battlefield in front of them. They were intentional and strategic about choosing their battles.

**Question 2: What does LNT reveal about the MBWT experience?**

Use of LNT as the theoretical framework for this study allowed to me see the agency being employed by participants in moments of contradiction. Where participants lacked true autonomy, or the ability to self-govern, participants made choices that demonstrated agency.

Participants used their limited social capital to blunt or nullify the impacts of whiteness on Black and brown children. Participants provided analysis of their socio-political position that
demonstrated their awareness of whiteness, and their deep understanding of how whiteness impacts school settings. This is exemplified in Carmen’s description of what led her to join her districts student behavioral team (SBT). She spoke about the suspension data trends in her district and compared that to anecdotal data of what she noticed in her own building. She joined the team to make sure someone was “looking out” for Black students given the suspension data trends in her district. Carmen’s matter-of-fact approach suggested that the discrepancies in discipline code enforcement were not new information for her. She, and the other participants, thought deeply about the interconnected nature of the forces working against them as teachers, and against their students. Participants were aware of their limited sphere of influence, so they worked within it until they could figure out the next step. Participants provided resistance from within the constraints of their sociopolitical positioning by creating, maintaining, and protecting spaces of freedom for students. They operated adeptly within the constraints placed upon them while acquiring the knowledge and credentialing necessary for mobility within the system.

I also think LNT revealed that self-preservation was a key aspect of how participants navigated. Participants didn’t always respond to similar situations the same way. Lily, for example, taught at three different schools in her nine-year career. When discussing her time at her second school, Lily described moving her students to the next lesson despite knowing that her students had not reached mastery. When discussing her time at her third school, Lily described intentionally lagging a few lessons behind her grade level colleagues because she liked to do more hands-on learning activities with her students. In each setting, Lily utilized her agency despite having differing levels of autonomy. At Dawson elementary, Lily chose survival. While she could have protested, participant’s descriptions of administrators suggest that doing so would be a waste of time. By choosing to comply, Lily was able to keep her job long enough to finish her first
master’s degree in reading literacy instruction. Lily had to knowingly participate in professional practices that she knew were harmful to students learning to survive. Contradictions in participant responses appeared to be tied to survival.

Data showed that, in some instances, participants made conscious decisions to prioritize their personal lives and personal wellbeing over their professional responsibilities. This is evident Ty’s advice to her younger self and Vanessa’s admission that she sought therapy to learn how to put herself first. Participants demonstrated individualistic ways of thinking about how to respond to collective and systemic oppression. Carmen derived joy from things that were not related to education on purpose. Participants also create professional boundaries by choosing how to use their limited ability to say ‘no’. Ty refused to grade at home and Samantha refused to participate in learning moments for her white colleagues. In response to feeling obligated to take on additional responsibilities, saying no allowed participants to implement and reinforce boundaries between themselves and the profession they love. Setting boundaries was another important aspect of participant navigation within their k-12 career context because it allowed them to care for themselves without guilt.

**Discussion and Implications**

Upon examination of the findings, I argue that MBWTs exist, uniquely, at the intersection of contradicting identities. The contradictions present in the pedagogy and practice of participants in this study reflect the contradictions present in their socio-political positioning.

Kimberli Crenshaw (1989) discusses contradiction as a component of Black women’s intersectional identity. Speaking of Sojourner Truth’s *Aint I A Woman* speech, Crenshaw says that Truth illuminated the “contradiction between the ideological myths of womanhood and the reality of the Black woman’s experience” (p. 153). She goes on to say that Truth highlighted the
contradictory nature of the Black women experience to demonstrate the inequity that existed in the women’s’ suffrage movement of her day. According to the Crenshaw’s reading of Truth, the Black female existence is an embodied contradiction to the dominant narrative of womanhood. Crenshaw also speaks of contradiction in relation to how Black women experience discrimination. She says, “Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional” (p. 149). Crenshaw suggests that the intersectional nature of the Black woman experience leads to multidirectional exclusion. Multidirectional exclusion contributes to creating a contradictory socio-political landscape for Black women to navigate.

Moreover, contradiction is featured heavily in the literature on millennials. Millennials deal with contradictions as a generational cohort. As covered in Chapter Two, contradictions were covered in the literature on millennials (Dimock, 2022; Fry, 2020; Outtz & Coleman, 2018) and millennial TOC (Herrera & Morales, 2018; Ishmael et al., 2018). The literature suggests that because millennials were promised a world that never materialized, they operate in a landscape where contradiction is expected and normalized.

Nyachae (2016) and Watson (2017), whose studies provide the foundation for my own, both offer insight into the contradictions experienced by MBWTs. My findings were similar to theirs in a few ways. Nyachae (2016) suggested that the contradictions that appeared in the SOP curriculum were a mirror of the contradictions that existed in the lives of the MBWTs who created the curriculum. Participants in my study displayed contradictory decision making similar that what Nyachae described. Nyachae suggested that contradictions presented in MBWTs pedagogy and practice could be solved with more strategic exposure to Black Feminist approaches to education. Findings from my study suggest that the contradictions presented in
MBWTs’ pedagogy and practice may be intentional. Survival and self-care were of high importance for participants in my study. As such, participants often made choices that appear contradictory in nature but actually revealed nuanced agency.

Participants in my study demonstrated the race-full ideological approach that Watson (2017) found in her MBWT participants. Watson’s participants used their race-full ideology to help them “to see the contradictions in democratic aims of education and how they are enacted in practice” (p. 254). Similarly, participants in my study demonstrated a clear understanding of the root causes of their marginalizing experiences, and the mitigating factors that influence their marginalized experience. In response, participants in my study created spaces of positive self-determination for themselves and students. This is evidenced in the extracurricular activities that participants chose to sponsor as teachers. Watson encourages teachers to use their knowledge to challenge inequality “at the macro and micro levels” to “build coalitions” and demand meaningful structural changes (p. 234). Participants in my study did build relationships with other educators, but they often used those relationships for personal support and development – not to make collective pushes for systemic changes.

My findings provide evidence of a generational phenomenon impacting MBWTs. My findings also suggest that MBWTs have a generationally specific standpoint that influences their decision making. I believe the phenomenon impacting MBWTs is currently being documented in academic literature on whiteness, hip-hop feminism, and millennial Teachers of Color. Participants in this study clearly shared a communal understanding about the world despite having unique and different lived experiences.

I also argue that using LNT as the theoretical lens for this study allowed me to focus my inquiry on how MBWTs were navigating their material realities. As such, I was able to see
agency within contradiction. Critical Race scholars (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1991; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Omi & Winant 2014; Yosso, 2005) have produced literature that explores that material realities of Black people who live in America. They point to racism as a permanent fixture of American society. They also lay out examples of what the material realities of marginalized groups look like in America. Black feminist scholars (Collins, 2000; Davis, 2016; Evans-Winters, 2019; hooks, 1984)) do the same for the Black female experience. Researchers describe what is like for Black women to live at the intersection of their marginalized identities. Building on the knowledge provided by those scholars was integral to the foundation of the theory.

Hip-hop feminism provided theoretic support that allowed me to see contradictions as a location of feminist agency. LNT attends to generational ways of knowing, the intentional decision to exist within the gray area, and the unequivocal need to infuse joy and pleasure into one’s existence. As such, I believe LNT is a hip-hop feminist approach to the study of Black women.

**Implications for Research**

Based on the findings from this study I believe there needs to be continued research in three areas.

There need to be continued investigation the social, political, and community factors that impact the lives of Black women across educational spaces. I think there needs to be collective effort to draw connections between the research being done on Black women in higher education, k-12 spaces, and Black women school administrators. Millennial BWT in this study rely on their ability to find overlaps in things that appear to be distinct or contradictory. Research
must also do the same in its approaches to investigating the lived experiences of Black women. 

Embracing and engaging in hip hop feminist thinking would be a nice start.

There also needs to be continued investigation into how Black women teachers navigate the shifting and contrasting realities of the state, their institution, community, and family. While my study does start this work, there is so much more to do. I believe that research into BWT needs to embrace research methodologies that center Black women. They also need to ask questions that center the Black female experience. Nyachae (2016) and Watson (2017) both provide inquiry into how these teachers work with and for students. I believe we need to inquire into how these teachers work – period.

Finally, I think there needs to be continued research into intragroup differences. Heterogeneity is played out. Modern life requires us to accept that multiple things can be true simultaneously. Because researchers often participants in creating the tools used to sustain social movements, we have to accept that painting any communities with a broad brush – especially marginalized communities – does a disservice to the communities we claim to want to advocate for. Studying intragroup differences within BWT allowed me to see the way my participants utilized their agency. I think continued inquiry into intragroup differences in other research areas could yield a more nuanced picture of what agency looks liked.

**Implications for Practice**

The connection between workplace culture and Black teacher experience is an emergent area of research. Like Frank et al. (2019) and Hancock (2020), findings from my study suggest a need for better training for school leaders on how to address issues of workplace climate and culture around racism and difference-based-bullying. Participants in my study describe school leaders as being easily influenced and manipulated by staff bullies. They also describe
disciplinary lapses on the part of admin members as being a normal aspect of their experience. I think principals and school leaders would benefit from participation in DEI training exclusively aimed at addressing workplace climate and culture.

I believe investing in DEI work on workplace culture and climate could have positive impacts on the Black teacher pipeline. While there continue to programs aimed at increasing the number of Black teachers entering the teacher pipeline, it does no good if those teachers are dropped into hostile environments with little support. Making changes to the environments that future Black teachers go into may encourage more of them to stay in the classroom longer.

**Limitations**

There were a few limitations to this study. Because this group was small and included participants from a single city, the data is not generalizable. The teacher/non teacher split suggests that a large chunk of MBWT’s are no longer classroom teachers. It also was a challenge for the participants who work in admin roles to not talk about their experiences as millennial Black women administrators. Scheduling in person interviews with participants also became an unexpected challenge. I think that COVID changed the way that humans interact globally. As such, I believe my study would have benefited from conducting the individual interviews online.

Time also was a limitation for the focus group. Several participants expressed wishing we had more time for our focus group while others said they wished would have had multiple sessions together to get into other topics.
APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT INTAKE FORM
The following information was turned into an online form for participants to complete.

**Page 1**

Hey!!! My name is Janese Nolan, and I am a PhD candidate at Loyola University Chicago. I was a middle and high school ELA teacher for 6 years before leaving the classroom to pursue my PhD. My study seeks to understand how Millennial Black Women Teachers (BWT) navigate their experiences as K12 teachers. Topics will include race, gender, generation, and the impact of societal pressures. Participants will engage in a 30 minute individual interview where I will learn a little about you, a 2-hour focus group with 5-7 other millennial black women teachers where we will talk about our experiences together, and a 30-minute individual interview after the focus group where we will debrief.

**Criteria for participation includes:**

- Must self-identify as a Black woman
- Millennial (born between 1/1/1980 and 12/31/1996)
- Currently reside in the Chicago-land area.
- Have at least 3 consecutive years of classroom teaching experience as a full-time K-12 classroom teacher within the United States prior to the start of the 2022-2023 school year. Former and current teachers are welcome.

If you meet the criteria and you are interested in participating, please fill out the following form. Filling out this form will take roughly 3 minutes and will help me learn a little bit about you. I will select participants based on the information you provide and will contact folks to confirm participation. If you have any questions, please email me at jnolan7@luc.edu, or add your questions to the end of the intake form. If you know anyone who may be interested, please share this form with them using this link.

Thank you so much for being willing to participate.

-Janese

1. First Name _____________________________
2. Last Name ______________________________
3. Date of Birth _________________________
4. Email _________________________________
5. Cell Phone Number (pls include area code) ___________________
6. Are you currently a classroom teacher? YES NO
7. Final selection for participants will consider existing relationships among participants. Please list the name of any other woman you know who has, or intends to, volunteer for this study. If you don’t know anyone, type N/A_____________________________________
8. In a typical week, when would you be free to participate in a 2-hour long focus group. Provide as much detail as you like. __________________________________________________________

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9. I will be reaching out via text message to set up intake meetings with participants. Is it ok if I text you? YES NO

10. Do you have any questions or concerns for me? ________________________________
APPENDIX B

PRE-FOCUS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Hello. Thank you for meeting with me today. Our time together has 3 objectives. The first is to go over and have you sign a consent form for your participation in this study. I sent you the consent form via email for you to review ahead of time, have you had a chance to read it?

Before I have you sign the form, I want to go over a few sections that explain your participation in more detail. (Read through purpose, procedure, method, and confidentiality sections)

Do you have any questions? IF yes, answer questions. If no, move forward.

Please sign both copies of the form. I’ll keep one and the other is for you to take home.

Let me confirm the information on your intake form.

For the duration of the study, we will refer to each other by pseudonyms. This name will replace your legal name and will also help to protect your privacy. Take a few minutes to think of a pseudonym for yourself. It can be a name that has some special meaning to you, or it can just be any old random name. it’s totally up to you. All I ask is that it is a name that will be easy for people to use during informal conversation in place of your actual name. Nothing too wild.

- Record participants chosen pseudonym. Try to steer them away from extreme or over the top choices if they come up. Ultimately, honor their choice.

I want to learn a little bit about your education and your teaching experiences. (Begin asking questions below.

1. Tell me about your education. What degrees do you hold, where did you earn them, and when did you graduate? If you are currently enrolled in a graduate program or participating in some additional certification programs, please include that here.

2. Tell me about your teaching experience. Please include current schoolyear THINK RESUME. DO NOT include school specific information such as school name. DO include how long you were at each school (if there were multiple), grade levels and subjects taught, if the school was public, private etc., and what city or town each school was in.

3. Did you earn any awards or receive any special accolades during your career? List those here. If you were ever in any leadership role (dept chair, etc.) please include that information here.

4. Tell me about the teams or clubs you sponsor or coach. Please include how long you have sponsored or coached and list any awards or successes achieved.

5. Are you currently a classroom teacher? YES NO

6. If no, tell me a little about why you left teaching and what you are doing now

Do you have any additional questions for me?

Thank you for sharing with me. I’ll be in touch soon to schedule the focus group meeting.
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Making Lemonade out of Lemons: How Millennial Black Women Teachers Navigate K-12 Educational Spaces

Researcher(s): Janese L. Nolan

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Markeda Newell

Introduction
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Janese Nolan, (a doctoral student in Loyola University Chicago’s Cultural Educational Policy Studies Program) for a dissertation. Janese is working under the supervision of Dr. Markeda Newell, professor in School Psychology and Interim Dean for the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. You have volunteered to participate in this study because you identify as a millennial Black woman teacher (BWT) and you are interested in sharing your experiences working in K-12 schools. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose of Study
The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of, and navigational tactics used by, Millennial BWTs.

Participant Selection
Participants were selected based on selection criteria. Special consideration was given to ensure that each participant had one personal or professional connection with another participant in the study if possible.

Criteria for participation includes:
- Must self-identify as a Black woman
- Millennial (born between 1/1/1980 an 12/31/1996)
- Have at least 3 consecutive years of classroom teaching experience as a full-time K-12 classroom teacher within the United States.

Procedure
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to

- Complete an intake form and share demographic related information with researchers. This includes race and gender markers, age, and professional background.
- Participate in a 10 – 15 minute phone screening to verify eligibility and allow for participants to ask questions.
- Participate in a videotaped 2-hour group talk (sista circle) focusing on sharing how you navigate(d) as a millennial BWT. The Sista circle will occur at a time and location that is convenient for all participants. Participants will be asked to share their own experiences,
engage with the stories of other participants, and assist the researcher in some initial data analysis coding (please see methodology.)

- If there is a need, participants may be asked to participate in a follow up interview with the researcher. This will only happen if additional information is needed to accurately convey participant ideas. The length, time, and date of these follow up interview are at the discretion of the participant. These interviews will be audio or video recorded.

Methodology
I use Sister Circle Methodology (SCM) as the model for how our focus groups will be run. Sister Circles “are support groups that build upon existing friendships, fictive kin networks, and the sense of community found among Black Women” (Neal-Barnett et al, 2011, pg 267). Using SCM means that there is a shared sense of ownership over our focus group research space. Although I am a researcher, SCM dictates that power be shared amongst all participants. Participants will be asked to aid in creating and maintaining a safe ad nurturing environment for one another. Participants will also be asked to co-construct a list of themes or thematic ideas that emerge during our discussion with the researcher. This will occur during the 2-hour sister circle session.

Confidentiality & Voluntary Participation
Given the nature of this interactive study confidentiality is not guaranteed, however your privacy will be protected, and information shared within group emergent strategy meetings will be within a closed space and only open to participants of the study. Participants will not have access to the recordings of individual interviews. Personal identifiers will not be included should any themes or notes from the individual interviews be shared in this closed space. Throughout this study, participants will be invited to share aspects of their professional experience. You have the right to abstain from participating in any portion of the study should you become uncomfortable. I cannot guarantee that other participants will not know who else is participating. Participants will be asked to waive confidentiality. Because of the voluntary nature of this study, participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

Risks & Benefits
There is a potential risk that the individual interviews and discussion may evoke emotional responses. The benefit of this study is that participants get to share and heal in community with other millennial BWT.

Health and Safety Considerations
This study will be conducted in person if doing so is in according with safety and health guidance provided by Loyola University and the Centers for Disease Control. This study will be conducted virtually if healthy and safety protocols require.

Contact Information
Please contact me at Jnolan7@luc.edu if you have any questions and/or would like more information about the study.
Statement of Consent
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. Please sign both copies and keep one for your records.

Participant’s and Researcher’s signature

Participant’s Signature  
Date

Researcher’s Signature  
Date
APPENDIX D

SISTER CIRCLE GUIDING QUESTIONS
Welcome: Thank you all for coming. The purpose of our time together is to share our experiences as millennial Black women educators. Some of us are still classroom teachers while others have transitioned to other opportunities. For this study, I want you to focus on your time as a classroom teacher. Tailor your responses to what you were thinking, feeling, experiencing, and doing during that time. Some of us may share some personal information during our time together. I ask that we all respect one others right to privacy by NOT sharing anything we discuss today with others outside of our space here today.

Before we dive into the questions, I thinks it’s important to know who is in the room We all kind of familiar with one another in some ways, but I think it might help just to put it out there. So why don’t we go around the circle and tell us your name, tell us how many years of teaching experience you have total – including this year, if you are teaching still and if you aren’t, what are you currently doing professionally.

Ok let’s dig in

Guiding Questions
1. When did and why did you decide to become a teacher?
2. What did you think it would be like to be a teacher? What is it actually like?
   o PUSH: Focus on the places where expectation didn’t meet reality. Where did you get your messaging from? What happens when you find out the truth?
3. Describe your “teacher identity. Who are you as a teacher? How did you decide? What influences how you “show up” as a teacher.
   o PUSH: Who inspired you? Who discouraged you?
4. What are the factors that impact your daily life as a teacher? What charges your “teacher battery” and what drains it?
   o PUSH: Think about social media, politics, community issues, changes in policy, parents, school boards, resources, student expectation, societal pressures, massive global change, personal mental health
5. What makes you a GOOD teacher? What makes you a bad teacher? Who decides? What happens once you are labeled good or bad?
6. How do you decide what to teach to students? What influences how you present material to students?
   o PUSH: Media, pop culture, external pressures, time constraints, resource availability, student engagement.
7. What does community mean to you? What communities are you a part of? How do you participate in your community? How do you bring your community with you to the classroom?
   o PUSH; School, race, gender, sexuality, neighborhood
8. What does collaboration look like in your role as a teacher?
9. What support systems do you have that helped you navigate teaching? How did you go about developing those support systems?
   o PUSH: Mentorship, programs and institutional supports, social media, conferences.
10. How do you build relationships with students. How do you know when you have a good or bad relationship? How do you go about fixing or repairing relationships with students?)

11. What is your relationship like with your colleagues? With admin? With Parents? With leadership in general? Why do you think relationships are this way?

**Sister Circle Guiding Questions (participant copy)**

Welcome: Thank you all for coming. The purpose of our time together is to share our experiences as millennial Black women educators. Some of us are still classroom teachers while others have transitioned to other opportunities. For this study, I want you to focus on your time as a classroom teacher. Tailor your responses to what you were thinking, feeling, experiencing, and doing during that time. Some of us may share some personal information during our time together. I ask that we all respect one another’s right to privacy by NOT sharing anything we discuss today with others outside of our space here today.

**Group Sharing Prompt**

1. What’s your name
2. How many years of teaching experience do you have
3. Are you still in the classroom? If not, what are you doing professionally.

**Guiding Questions**

1. When did and why did you decide to become a teacher?
2. What did you think it would be like to be a teacher? What is it actually like?
3. Describe your “teacher identity. Who are you as a teacher? How did you decide? What influences how you “show up” as a teacher.
4. What are the factors that impact your daily life as a teacher? What charges your “teacher battery” and what drains it?
5. What makes you a GOOD teacher? What makes you a bad teacher? Who decides? What happens once you are labeled good or bad?
6. How do you decide what to teach to students? What influences how you present material to students?
7. What does community mean to you? What communities are you a part of? How do you participate in your community? How do you bring your community with you to the classroom?
8. What does collaboration look like in your role as a teacher?
9. What support systems do you have that helped you navigate teaching? How did you go about developing those support systems?
10. How do you build relationships with students. How do you know when you have a good or bad relationship? How do you go about fixing or repairing relationships with students?)

What is your relationship like with your colleagues? With admin? With Parents? With leadership in general? Why do you think relationships are this way?
APPENDIX E

POST FOCUS GROUP INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Questions for all participants.

1. Tell me about your experience in the focus group. What did you take with you? What did you give to your sisters? What was missing?
2. Was there anything you wish you would have said during our group time that you want to share now?
3. Who are you as a teacher, who are you as a woman? What do these identities share. What is different about each one.
4. What charged your teacher battery? What drained it?

Individualized questions – asked ONLY to Ty, Stella, and Lily
5. What influenced HOW you presented material to your student? Think about factors from inside and outside of the school setting.
6. What did community, collaboration, and support look like for you?
APPENDIX F

MEMBER CHECKING MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANTS
Hello _________

I have finally analyzed the data from our sister circle focus group and I am so excited to share with you. Below, you will find a slide that briefly summarizes my findings from our time together. Although we talked about a lot, I only need to report out the findings that address my research questions. I have two questions for you. 1. Do you think this accurately summarizes our time together? If not, is there anything you think I should add or subtract? Thank you!

Findings – Shared With Participants

**What are Millennial BWT Navigating**
- **Isolation** – being one of the few Black teachers in almost every space.
- **Bullying** – when (white) folks in power do too much
- **Contradictions** – expectations that go against student interest.
- **The Black Tax** – the extra labor we do because we are black.

**How are Millennial BWT Navigating**
- Informal, lateral support networks
- Continued professional and personal development (i.e. getting another degree)
- Shade, laughter, and intentional joy
- Creating safe spaces for themselves and students to be fully Black
- Self Care
- Knowing when to walk away and being unafraid of doing so.
REFERENCE LIST


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VITA

Janese L. Nolan was born and raised on the south side of Chicago. She attended Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and gained her BA from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC). After completing her undergraduate degree, she went on to teach middle and high school ELA. She earned her MEd in Instructional Leadership from the University of Illinois Chicago. (UIC)

While at Loyola, Janese was a founding member and inaugural president of Loyola’s Black Graduate Student Alliance. She served on several university advisory boards during her tenure as BGSA President. Janese is a Diversifying Faculty of Illinois Fellow and a Golden Apple Scholar. She also coached a youth poetry team during her graduate studies.

Currently, Janese is an Assistant Professor of Pk-12 School Leadership at Illinois State University in Bloomington-Normal Illinois.
The dissertation submitted by Janese L. Nolan has been read and approved by the following committee:

Markeda Newell, Ph.D., Director
Associate Professor, School Psychology and Interim Dean, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Kate Phillippo, Ph.D.
Professor, School of Social Work and School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

David Stovall, Ph.D.
Professor, Black Studies
University of Illinois at Chicago

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature that appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

________________________________________  ______________________________
Date                                         Director’s Signature