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Racialization of Urban Black Middle School Students from the Perspective of Middle School Teachers: A Phenomenological Study in Central and Southeast Michigan

Bryan L. Spencer
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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Bryan L. Spencer

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Racialization of Urban Black Middle School Students from the Perspective of Middle
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by

Bryan L. Spencer

MPhil, Walden University, 2023

MHSA, University of Michigan, 2005

BS, University of Michigan, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Developmental Psychology

Walden University

March 2025

Abstract

Prior studies of racialization's impact within the classroom focus on school institutional settings as mirroring societal marginalizations, presenting teachers as negotiating and navigating through presenting inequities to provide an academic experience for the marginalized student. This study recognizes the marginalizing aspects of societal inequities, yet probes into the meaning-making of the middle school teacher and explores understandings and descriptions of their classroom experiences with urban Black adolescents. This interview-based study explored these experiences by employing Crenshaw's structural assignment allusion relative to critical race theory and Vygotsky's socio-historical theory as providing background on racialization's impact and dialogic intersubjectivity in proximal learning. The investigation into teacher meaning-making employed Moustakas's phenomenological design to explore intuitions and intentions, producing codes, categories, and themes through phenomenological reduction. The results of this study indicated the prevalence of a sociological strand that connects society, school administration, classroom, and teacher proclivities, and revealed subthemes of variant Lifeworlds, prevailing Realizations, necessary Interactional Dimensions, and an ongoing Developmental Praxis. Summing that middle school teachers play a mediating and transformative role through negotiating and navigating implicit and explicit influences in their mission to provide a classroom experience that prioritizes positive, inclusive, and safe connections. The implications of this study expand beyond the classroom, as it addresses the importance of interactive dialogue, cultural understanding, and humility in bridging divides and producing meaningful connections.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to the presence and voice of the middle school teacher. As they embrace the responsibilities and developmental challenges within their own sensibilities and manage and embrace classrooms filled with unsure and developing adolescents, they find ways to reach the most vulnerable and contribute to the emergence of their transcendent possibilities. May their presence achieve the acclamation they deserve, and may their voices, filled with wisdom and understanding, resonate through systems and institutions to challenge what divides us and bring an understanding of what meaningful connections can ensure.

Acknowledgments

My first acknowledgment is thanks to God for giving me the strength to accomplish this task. It is said that through many tribulations, we enter the kingdom of God. Through difficulty, we access the kingdom that lies within us, and through these difficulties, we rely on what we have come to learn, to know, and to make a part of our strength collective.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The school environment of the urban Black middle school adolescent can lack the empowered elevation in interactional educational spaces while also providing nonvalidating experiences. Crenshaw's (1995) emphasis on the impact of racialization elucidates the experiences of urban Black middle school students by presenting how the promotion of a socially constructed and assigned racial designation devalues, diminishes identity and elevation, and implants negative stereotypes of public and private regard. Removing these inhibiting factors in the school experiences of these children will require an approach that shifts away from the penchant to avoid conversations. Dialogue and critical analysis of these situations and contexts broaches assessments of meaning-making and developmental learning within the learning environment. This attention is necessary for the elevation of the urban Black middle school student.

A reformed learning environment that benefits the most marginalized is aided by a teaching core that recognizes these students' needs and can function from an advantageous position to influence change. The positioning of the middle school teacher as a mediator and transformer (Gray et al., 2018; Williams, 2018b) aids this development when the teacher reflects on how their meaning-making is influenced by pre-existing schemas of personal and professional import (Howard, 2020; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Narayanan, & Ordynans, 2022). Teacher training has given credence to the value of didactic interchange with students under Vygotsky's concept of proximal learning (Mercer et al., 2019; Patterson, 2018; Sedova et al., 2016). However, expositions into the

background influences of beliefs and values need illumination to reveal the impacts of both personal proclivities and professional teaching traditions.

Engaging middle school teachers involves recognizing the benefits of their work and respecting the depth of commitment to the growth and development of their students. The current sociopolitical environment provides a challenging context from which to conduct their work (Nelson & Johnson, 2023; Williams, 2018b); however, what they accomplish in their positioning in the lives of adolescents is noteworthy. Interaction with the middle school teachers around this topic should embody the respect deserving of their work, and the related exploration should align with curiosity in the performance of this work. The phenomenon of racialization impacts the work of middle school teachers with marginalized adolescents (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Williams, 2018a; Williams, 2018b), and in this study, I explored this impact with awareness, curiosity, and respect for challenges encountered within the classroom experience and the school climate.

This chapter includes a background description of how racialization imposes on the lives and experiences of urban Black middle school children in the school environment. Societal racialization can be reproduced within an insensitive, culturally unaware, or dismissive school environment. Belongingness, acceptability, and validation are sacrificed in a system that encourages stereotype threat, decreases motivation to achieve, and subverts cultural identity. Indeterminant of the prevailing climate, the teacher enters with inset beliefs, values, interpretations, cultural backgrounds, and professional training that may or may not have prepared them for the challenges of engaging and successfully teaching marginalized students. In consideration of the variant

possibilities, this chapter includes allusions to associated reflections, involved intentions, and intuitions within the purposed goals and research questions intended to prompt conversations producing rich and interactive detail.

The chapter continues beyond the goals and questions and includes a presentation of the alignment with a theoretical framework that posits critical race theory (CRT) and sociocultural theory as explaining structural inhibitions imposed by racialization and the possibilities within proximal learning through didactic interchange between teachers and students. The conceptual framework posits a socialization impression throughout, as the social construction of racialization poses boundaries for urban Black students and complications for teachers; however, the social aspects in proximal learning help to build connectedness and inclusivity between the students and teachers. I built on these frameworks in this chapter by exposing the qualitative tradition and phenomenological design to explore the teacher-student dynamic as impacted by racialization. The meaning-making within the relationships is a subject of detailed conversation, emerges in various ways within the study prompts, and was captured in the analysis, representing reflective and reflexive thought, descriptions, and understandings of concepts and transcendental themes.

To add common understanding to this presentation, this first chapter includes definitions of outstanding points of emphasis, followed by assumptions made as a function of this study. Scope and delimitations broaden the study discussion and place boundaries on the study's emphasis. This chapter concludes with limitations, social significance, and what can be possible going forward. This chapter also includes an

overview of various points of emphasis in the development and progression of this study, as the following chapters include further delineation and synthesis. The following chapter includes an investigation of the research literature on this topic and the process of defining the gap within the research.

Background

Racialization impacts the belongingness, identity, sense of safety, and achievement of urban Black students. The social assignment of racialization diminishes the contributions, the narratives, and the individualized life view of marginalized populations (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Mims & Williams, 2020). This positioning denigrates to a demoralized and subservient positioning that negatively impacts hopes and individualized trajectories. These impacts are translated into the school experience of urban Black middle school students when a school climate mimics disparaging biases and assignments seen and experienced in the larger society (Byrd, 2017; Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Griffin et al., 2017). Howard (2020) pointed to stereotype threat as becoming a demeaning outcome in this environment as the student spirals into this dismissive assignment, and this position becomes traumatizing as safety and belongingness are sacrificed for the sanctioning of stereotypes and biases (Kramer & McKenzie, 2022). The reflection and reflexivity of the teacher become a vital intervening force within this dynamic.

The middle school teacher intervenes during this already chaotic developmental time for adolescents (Erikson, 1963) and interposes a mediatorial and transformative presence (Gray et al., 2018) in the educational world of the student. The value that the

individual middle school teacher brings cannot be understated, and the understanding of what they add contributes value to the directionality of all students (Sedova et al., 2018; Wiig et al., 2018), especially for marginalized students under the impact of racialization (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Logan et al., 2018; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Williams, 2018a).

This value represents the gap that requires greater illumination. Ladson-Billings (2009) and Williams (2018a) pointed to the value of sociocultural connection with students, emphasizing Black students who suffer under racialized assignments. Kramer and McKenzie (2022) expanded this understanding of the need for a safe environment with the input of sensitive, thoughtful, and flexible teachers. This experience illustrates value in dialogue between the student and teacher, which is a focus in proximal learning and a point of reference in teacher professional training (Mercer et al., 2019; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Sedova et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). However, the point of a more in-depth illumination looks at the conscious and unconscious meaning-making that contributes to the understanding and dialogue from the teacher toward the student's needs. This intention and intuition include professional training, experience, beliefs, values, and sociocultural background. The phenomenon of racialization provides an impactful point of reference that showcases the inner workings of the experienced teacher in the service of a distinctly marginalized population.

Students at the adolescent developmental stage undergo many changes that are cognitively, emotionally, and biologically based, and the addition of racially motivated marginalization adds another level of challenges. The teachers' meaning-making plays a definitive role in how they respond to marginalized students and what they can bring to

alleviate suffering and promote safety and a positive learning environment. The middle school teacher who recognizes the value of positive sociocultural interchange as a function of their personal and professional demeanor can nurture a safe and inclusive climate for all students (Howard, 2020; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Mercer & Littleton, 2007). The middle school teacher can stand at the crossroads as a mediator, educational translator, and personal confidante for marginalized students of color and an informer for administrative change.

Problem Statement

Black middle-school children from urban environments often face struggles in the classroom. Their presentations often need to be understood, as their behavioral responses, when seen as negative, are interpreted to measure their competence. These misunderstandings can affect the teachers' appraisal and approach and the student's performance (Zaff et al., 2016). Howard (2020) and Mims and Williams (2020) pointed to institutional structures as invalidating factors in the cultural identity of Black students and as barriers to their motivation to achieve. Marchante et al. (2022) employed the stage–environment fit theory to explain how achievement can be affected when an environment is not suited to the students' developmental needs. Marraccini et al. (2022) further presented this dynamic by positing anecdotal evidence in the responses of Black and Latino students to how they feel about discrimination as adversely affecting their experiences within the school system.

Students with sociocultural backgrounds promoting meaning-making and behaviors that do not match the expectations of the dominant group, experience

demeaning and invalidating messaging that inhibits their learning trajectories within the classroom. Kramer and McKenzie (2022) alluded to the trauma that can occur in such situations as an outgroup status is enforced and reinforced, inferring an assigned status and dearth of belongingness (Mims & Williams, 2020; Palese & Schmid Mast, 2022; Williams, 2018b). When considering the developmental period of adolescents, these occurrences can be significantly impactful. These situations also present difficulties for teachers as they navigate the students' meaning-making with their meaning-making (Logan et al., 2018; Narayanan & Ordynans, 2022; Rødnes et al., 2021). Professional teacher training can meet and explain some of these conflicts; however, teachers' sociocultural beliefs and values relative to their societal backgrounds and experiences require exploration and reflection to work through the origins of intuitions and assumptions.

Assumptions made on behaviors or presentations in institutional settings that lack cultural and contextual understanding bear more relevance to social norms as they represent expectations from the dominant group (Crenshaw, 1995; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Mims & Williams, 2020). These judgments are often made from appraisals of a racialized context that lack understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and contexts (Byrd, 2015; Howard, 2020; Mims & Williams, 2020), reinforcing biases that assign deficient and diminished status to those not fitting in based on their racial status (Crenshaw, 1995). This assignment and its impact on marginalized students necessitate exploring and understanding the meaning-making of middle school teachers of urban

Black adolescents and how they approach racialization in the school system and navigate its effects upon these students.

Purpose of the Study

I addressed two purposes in this interview-based study. The first was the exploration of the perspectives of middle school teachers concerning their experiences with the racialization of urban Black middle school adolescents. The second purpose was to explore teacher perspectives concerning the coalescing of student and teacher meaning-making toward addressing racialization and revealing possible solutions. I also explored the mediatorial and translational position of the middle school teacher in support of these students' development and educational trajectory.

Research Questions

The research questions that I asked in this study were:

- How do middle school teachers experience the effects of racialization?
- How do the meaning-making of teachers and urban Black middle school students coalesce and differ around racialization?
- What solutions do middle school teachers offer for mediating the effects of racism on the learning trajectories of urban Black middle school students?

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical basis for this study was Vygotsky's social historical theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and Crenshaw's structural assignment allusion relative to CRT (Crenshaw, 1995). Both theories draw from Horkheimer's critical theory on elevating

social consciousness instead of the unconscious adherence to a repressive hegemonic ideology that diminishes the authentic expression of actual cultural and experiential contexts. This enforced assignment to a diminished expression of individuality uplifts a caste system that relegates populations to a status that instills a hopelessness of elevation and adherence to a predetermined status quo. This predeterminism is a situation that the theories of Vygotsky (1978) and Crenshaw (1995) oppose, as drawing a picture of a structured idealism that ignores the reality of the contributions and narratives of resident populations.

Educating middle school children in an environment that negates the importance of individual expression inhibits learning and development. Vygotsky (1978) met this situation by illustrating an active psychological progression of learning from intersubjective interaction to an internally developed inner speech. This process represents socially mediated cognitive restructuring, with learning possibilities in a supportive, validating, and growth-centered educational environment. The socially impacted school environment of the urban Black middle school adolescent lacks empowered elevation when their educational space does not meet a standard of validation but provides stereotypes and biases that provide nonvalidating experiences. Crenshaw's (1995) constructs representing socially structured determinants, non-recognition of racial and cultural realities, and refusal of counter-narratives serve to lock the urban Black student within a cycle of unvalidated cultural expression and place a ceiling on motivation and achievement in the classroom dynamic.

The theories of Vygotsky (1978) and Crenshaw (1995) include conditions that impact the learning trajectories of urban Black students as they indicate the importance of individual and socio-cultural recognition and support of experiential narratives. Crenshaw's (1995) constructs emphasize the impact of racialization on urban Black middle school students in the promotion of a socially constructed and assigned racial designation that devalues, serves to diminish elevation, and implants negative stereotypes of public and private regard. Vygotsky's construct of proximal learning emphasizes the importance of intersubjective interaction and what it entails for growth opportunities for the student. My critical analysis of these theoretical positions illuminated situational and contextual impacts that influence the learning environment of urban Black middle school students and the teacher's meaning-making as influential in the school lifeworld.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, the phenomenon of note was racialization. Racial discrimination is an active extension of racialization by imposing explicit limitations and marginalization based on a biological assignment with no scientific basis (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Peller, 1995; Williams, 2018b). This lack of an organic basis in racial designations lends to the view of racialization as a socially developed enigma of convenience for hegemonic purposes (Williams, 2018b). The socially mediated nature of racialization was the strand of connection that I used as the basis for the research questions. The research question concerning the merging and divergence of the teacher and student meaning making served as a probing question into the social dynamic that occurs within their interactions, its history, and projections from the teachers' viewpoint.

Convergence and divergence of meaning-making in the classroom is subject to multiple aspects of sociocultural relevance and reveals itself in multimodal ways. The intersubjectivity in proximal learning has its positives in promoting enhanced teacher/student relationships, however, when these bonds are impacted by unresolved negative structural assignments the results are diminishing for stereotyped populations. Kramer and McKenzie (2022) presented a picture of the teacher as a critical influence in the classroom that can mediate the impacts of racialization by laying groundwork for inclusion and connectedness. These results can become active through reflexive approaches as the teacher reflects on their biases and stereotypes, notes their positionality as a potential role model, and advocates for the marginalized student.

However, it is the presence of active extensions of the racializing ideology that impacts not only the marginalized student but also the teacher. Howard (2020) pointed to the need for the teacher to understand the sociocultural dynamics within the classroom and set a standard for inclusiveness and support, thereby disarming the diminishing impact of racialization. This support includes dialogic interaction that validates diverse identities and encourages individual expression (Ritella & Ligorio, 2019; Sedova et al., 2016). These proximal learning approaches can diffuse the impacts of racialization and present an accepting and encouraging environment.

The notion of teachers as positive and influential social actors in the classroom reflects on their role in the classroom and enhancements through their activities in reflection, reflexivity, and exploring the meaning-making that underlie personal and professional proclivities. I included Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach to

explore worldviews that were conscious and unconscious impactors on values, beliefs, and sociocultural understanding. The professional training of teachers provides didactic sequencing in dialogic interaction and communicates the importance of the cocreation of learning as a social aspect in the internalization of learning (Sedova et al., 2016).

However, underlying beliefs need to reflect intent and meaning-making that underlies engagements, understandings, and descriptions of the impact of racialization upon the teacher and within the classroom dynamic.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used qualitative research methodology with a transcendental phenomenological design as elocuted by Moustakas (1994). Meaning-making of the participants as desired outputs represents conscious intent through topical discussions. The topic revolves around the phenomenon of racialization. However, my focus was on its relative impact on the teachers' perspectives and meaning-making relative to engagement with the urban Black student population. Additionally, I used semi-structured interviews to access conscious and unconscious intuition and semiotic influences among the participants (see Moustakas, 1994). The responses became the subject of analysis to produce descriptive themes and concepts. Understanding and describing the development of meaning-making represents participant reflections and are acceptable within the qualitative perspective as being of human construction (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Because the researcher plays a role in this construction of meaning and is considered a biased party within the discussions, bracketing is encouraged to separate

researcher bias from the discussion to represent participant understandings and descriptions better (Dawidowicz, 2020; Moustakas, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The perspectives generated by the middle school teachers' experiences have their roots beyond the classroom, as they include worldviews impacted by training, beliefs, values, self-efficacy, and varied sociocultural influences (see Narayanan & Ordynans, 2022; Patterson, 2018; Sedova et al., 2016; Twiner et al., 2021; Wiig et al., 2018). Ravitch and Carl (2021) pointed to the complexities in individual-determined perspectives and interpretations as subjectively situated within personal contexts. Moustakas (1994) pointed to the intention in conscious interpretation and description of external stimuli as having both an appearance-based impact and an internally modulated interpretation that engages preexisting schema. The meaning-making of the participants as representative of conscious and unconscious reflective renderings are the desired components to describe the transcendental emergent concepts and themes from the phenomenological process, as it engages the appearance of what is and what is surmised in consciousness.

Definitions

Critical Race Theory

CRT arose in the early 1970s as an intellectual and literary response grounded in critical legal studies and radical feminism. CRT is based in an acknowledgement of the prevalence of ingrained patriarchal systems and social dominance perpetuated over people of color to maintain hegemonic and racialized structures (Crenshaw, 1995; Peller, 1995; Williams, 2018b). Tenets of CRT include the permanence of race, interest convergence, social construction of racial designation, elocution of counter-narratives,

and refutation of dominant ideology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Williams, 2018b).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) alluded to a supporting history of critical theory in Europe and civil rights activism throughout the history of the United States as laying a groundwork for the existence and prevalence of CRT.

Derrick Bell is considered to have initiated the intellectual analysis of the intractability of solving racialization, paving the way for many following legal scholars, lawyers, and activists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, civil rights advocate, and a leading interpreter of CRT, emphasized the structural assignment that racialization imposes (1995), which served as a grounding construct for this study. However, Crenshaw and other rights advocates and scholars have expanded from CRT to build other theories that further illuminate the effects of hegemonic dominance and subjective policies and constructions. These applications include intersectionality theory and emphasize CRT in education, voting rights, philosophy, religion, and healthcare.

Critical Theory

Critical theory emanates from schools of philosophy and social theories in Europe that added commentary on systemic hegemonic structures that subordinated populations using ideological, historical, and practical means (Felluga, 2015; Held, 1980).

Horkheimer, an early author in critical theory, pointed to the inductive nature of constructed social structure as emanating from a specific authority and filtering into the actions of multiple social entities in proxy of the governing entity (Held, 1980). This conformist posture embeds the hegemonic structure into society and provides an

ideological and practical target for the deconstructionist critical theory approach that encourages social transformation. An appropriate representation of a critical thinking constructionist ideology that represents better conditions for the mass populist counters the supposed objective claims to an autonomous and objective authority of a ruling class (Felluga, 2015). CRT serves as an expansive use of critical theory that expands the application to the experiences of racialized populations.

Dialogic Interaction

Dialogic interaction resembles intersubjectivity in proximal learning as the teacher or peer discusses the topic with the learner. This approach to learning is represented in professional teacher training as engagement in teacher/student discourse that improves dynamic learning in the negotiation of meaning and is most effective when dialogue preserves sociocultural continuity and supports creative expression (Sedova et al., 2016). Mercer and Littleton (2007) pointed to the importance of conversational linguistics for producing common knowledge and building connections for reasoning and development.

Hegemonic Structures

Hegemonic structures represent a hierarchical caste system that promotes assignments to social roles. These structures tend to disassemble individualized identities and devalue lived experiences to promote a power structure of assignment to predetermined roles and placements in society (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity is a critical element of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Vygotsky (1978) points to psychological development as occurring in two different functional levels that are intrinsically and sequentially connected. There is first a social aspect of connection, which is an external connection for learning, followed by an internalization of the information received. This exchange represents the intersubjectivity of learning, as meaning is constructed through the connection of the two planes (Garcia, 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). History, culture, and experiences are mainstays in the functional activity of intersubjectivity that students bring into the classroom. A teacher's familiarity with diverse students' sociocultural histories and meanings aids in their ability to connect and promote learning.

Meaning-Making

Meaning-making is built by human construction and results from personal backgrounds and experiences. Patterson (2018) points to meaning-making as part of an experienced teacher's modality through experiences and cultural understanding. Worldviews, as expansions of beliefs, values, and experiences, are revealed and explored through reflective processes as roused by existing or promoted phenomena. Narayanan and Ordynans (2022) point to meaning-making processes as a means for educators to build their skills in the classroom, as meaning making is a skill practiced by both teachers and students and is cocreated and negotiated in varying modalities (Twiner et al., 2021).

Proximal Learning

Proximal learning is identified in Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development. This zone is the distance between independent learning and learning coupled with the aid of an adult or an older, more experienced peer. This concept posits that learning proceeds development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Racialization

Racialization has a structure that is first put forth as an ideology, and then an application that cements its intention. Peller (1995) represents this progression of thought by pointing to the application of racial oppression as an outgrowth of the internalization and socialization of prejudice and stereotypes based on skin color. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) point to the insidious nature of racialization by pointing out that the imposition of differences based on race is of a social construction that is only implemented when convenient.

Racial Realism

Racial realism stands in contrast to color-blind ideologies, as it alludes to the permanence of differences under the social construct of race. Bell (1995) identifies racial realism as the advocacy of a position that accepts the reality of racial differences and eschews the illusion of racial equality and color-blind ideologies. Investigation of sociocultural history, experiences of Black Americans, and the prevalence of existing identity subordination echo the existence of racial realism.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity indicates an activity of recognizing personal bias that might influence aspects of data collection and analysis. Ravitch and Carl (2021) pointed to reflexivity as a necessity for furthering validity and rigor in studies, as it subjects researcher biases, positionality, processes, and interpretations under scrutiny. The researcher is considered an involved party in qualitative research, and the process of managing personal values and beliefs that might compromise the study is indicated in a reflexive approach.

Structural Assignment

Structural assignment represents a hierarchal and hegemonic creation that assigns subordinated classes to inferior living states. Crenshaw (1995) points to these assignments as relegating Blacks to a predetermined subordinated status that supports and upholds racist tendencies. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) point to abuses in real estate options, education, and entitlement distributions, as institutional structures used to suppress the elevation of Black people.

Assumptions

In this study, I examined the relationships that middle school teachers have with urban Black students; thereby, an assumption is that the teachers have engaged and dialogic relationships with these students. With such a relationship, obtaining the depth of detail that emerges from a relationship with a demonstrative level of affability would be easier. There is no expectation that a middle school teacher with misgivings would want to participate and reveal angst that negatively reflects their relationship with the students and demonstrates unprofessional behavior.

The behavior and relatedness of the middle school teacher have a definitive effect on the student. This understanding has critical relevance, especially during the conflict of adolescent development and the additional struggle of being an urban Black adolescent in an environment that demonstrates diminished acceptance and hesitancy in identity validation. In this context, an assumption is made that the middle school teacher has some awareness and demonstrable concern for the student's welfare.

This involvement of the middle school teacher should not be limited by sociocultural backgrounds and beliefs but should be elucidated differently based on these same sociocultural backgrounds, beliefs, and values. This assumption of enmeshment should contribute to the rich detail that lived experience can provide. Diversity of ethnic background is an additional dynamic in this study for the same reason, as it adds to the expanse and complexity of shared experience; however, it still should radiate the concern of the middle school teacher for the welfare of their students. The researcher's positionality relative to this concern adds to the amicability of the discussion if respect for the teacher's position is demonstrated proactively and throughout the study's processes.

This assumption of amicability is based not only on reflexivity but also on demeanor and relationships from the beginning of the process. The researcher has enduring relationships with school administrators and retired middle school teachers, and the expectation is that these relationships will transfer to opening doors for garnering participants. However, the maintenance of these relationships will depend on reflexivity and professional respect for what the middle school teacher brings. This is an ongoing

process, as biases are still relevant, especially as diversity in the participant pool increases.

Additionally, the subject matter has sociocultural impact and political overtones; therefore, there is an expectation that discussions can be emotionally impactful. Managing this possibility hinges on demonstrating respect and tolerance and maintaining curiosity in understanding and descriptions. Maintaining a professional demeanor and making room for diverse viewpoints should lead to rigor in detail. The exposition of various frames of reference should produce concepts and themes that add to the research and understanding of the topic.

Scope and Delimitations

This study is qualitative with a phenomenological design, as it engages middle school teachers around their lived experiences with urban Black students within the backdrop of racialization. Racialization as a phenomenon is presented within the rubric of CRT, as this theory provides a viewpoint of how marginalized populations, specifically Black populations, experience racialization. The theory also presents a historical and societal perusal that sets the stage for impact and prevalence assessments that effectively explain institutional exposures and outcomes. Middle school teachers and urban Black adolescent students are set within this rubric; both affected, responding, and with assessments and interpretations based on backgrounds, exposures, beliefs, and values. This study focuses on the experiences, descriptions, and understandings of the middle school teacher as impacted while negotiating and navigating the environment with their urban Black students.

This study also considers Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, emphasizing the zone of proximal development, where interactive dialogue plays a significant role in learning and development. The teacher occupies a position in the student's life where dialogue influences cognition and interpretation, and the reciprocity within the relationship is effective in multimodal ways. The values and beliefs that the teacher comes with can influence the tone of the engagement. Expert teachers with pristine professional development are still influenced by sociocultural backgrounds and related values and beliefs. Therefore, self-reflection is a necessary tool to enhance self-awareness. Considering the positioning of the teacher in the student's developmental sphere, self-reflection, and reflexivity are vital skills.

Through phenomenological assessment, this study provides the practice of reflection around a substantive topic, engaging the teacher in conscious intentions and related intuitions. These reflections also give way to revelatory understandings of unconscious motivations in pre-existing schemas. Understandings and associated descriptions provide the fodder for meaning-making, which are expressions of the complex mix of personal and professional impact. This study is expected to unfold personal and professional proclivities as the middle school teachers reflect on their lived experiences in the classroom with their urban Black students under the impact of the racialization phenomenon.

The social impact of this study radiates beyond the experiences and influence of the middle school teacher as it reveals the workings of conscious and unconscious internalization of societal messaging relative to the phenomenon of racialization. CRT

points to the structural dynamic of racialization and its inner workings and outward manifestations in society. This processing of societal messaging from the reciprocal interactions of personal and societal dictates can involve elements of social cognitive theory and bioecological theory; however, this pursuit might broaden this study beyond what is necessary. The intersubjective student/teacher relationship within the rubric of the impact of racialization sets the boundaries for this study, although the societal influence is distinctly notable.

Dismantling this monolith must first take deep, detailed, and honest reflection of deep-seated biases that impact values, beliefs, and interpretations. This activity with middle school teachers is vital because of their proximity to the trajectory and elevation of marginalized students; however, society contains many who are marginalized and diminished under the impact of racialization, and their trajectory and elevation are also worthy of attention. This adds to the transferability of the context of the study, as its relevance moves beyond the teacher/student dynamic. The reflection and reflexivity that the conscious and unconscious explorations promote have values that resonate beyond the teacher/student dynamic, mirroring situations of similar contexts.

Thereby, the context and content of this study are subject to thick description to enhance its transferability for related studies. The engagement with the teachers in conversation and interpretation is subject to member checking to validate the content as truly reflective and representative. However, the most crucial component of this study is to keep the participants engaged in the most amicable and supportive manner. This emphasis is to ensure engaged and genuine discussions that reflect the teachers' positive

intent to serve the best interest of their urban Black students and the importance and impact of the reflective process in producing themes and concepts that will reflect transcendent descriptions and understandings.

Limitations

Ravitch and Carl (2021) posit that the researcher and participants are instruments in the study when doing qualitative analysis. This reality is a primary consideration when considering this study's limitations, challenges, and barriers. One issue with current middle school teachers is the context of their experience with the topic, compounded by their social identity, positionality, and the setting. Setting a tone of respect, sensitivity, professionalism, and curiosity throughout first contact, data collection, and analysis helps manage difficulties and navigate barriers. Rubin and Rubin (2012) point to showing respect, doing no harm, and honoring promises as vital during responsive interviewing. Recognizing the partnership of the researcher and participants as critical in maintaining the integrity of the process aids in maintaining transparency, amicability, and continuity.

Transparency will be critical for the middle school administration, the participants (teachers), and the researcher, as the topic arouses broad and specific concerns. With these concerns in mind, access to teacher perspectives amid attributed power dynamics may need to be discussed with the school administration. This situation will be less of a problem for retired teachers. The researcher will also need to practice reflexivity and bracketing in analysis to navigate personal bias, as this study touches on subjective interpretations for the researcher and the participants.

Although safeguards are noted and implemented, the study is bound by what the participants are willing to disclose and discuss. Qualitative methodologies, including the phenomenological design, are of social construction, thereby holding true to the levels and limits of what the participants share bounds what can be analyzed and interpreted correctly and appropriately. Lincoln and Guba (1985) point to “reactivity” in the responses of the participants that are threats to internal validity (pp. 94-97). From the knowledge of being recorded to choosing what role to represent to being influenced by the researcher, either positively or negatively, committing to transparent processes that best serve the appropriateness of the study is warranted.

Significance

The issue of belongingness for urban Black middle students has been researched often, and the effect on their motivation and achievement is well understood. A dearth in belongingness is an outgrowth of racialization as it also impacts the trajectories of these students in terms of their matriculation and development through the education system. However, the classroom teacher is prominent for these students and can intervene as a personal actor and alter the alienation experienced through their understanding of mitigating factors. The meaning-making derived from their experiences provides a perspective on racialization and its impact on these students. The value and voice in the middle school teacher's perspective have lacked appreciation, as they stand as mediators and interpreters, and their professional and personal experiences add to the knowledge and understanding needed to benefit these students negatively impacted by racialization within the educational system.

Educational expectations and institutional structures exhibit misalignment with urban Black middle school students when the students' experiential, cultural, and environmental realities do not match institutionally designed and assigned expectations. These institutional expectations do not recognize or validate the importance of these cultural differences and life experiences when the student does not adapt to the learning environment. Middle school teachers, predominantly due to their interactions with the students, occupy a mediatorial and translational position where they can interpret and translate what students need to feel respected and validated. Middle school structure and educational policies can significantly benefit from the input of middle school teachers.

Summary

Middle school teachers can provide a safe space for adolescents to learn and develop as they navigate the complexities of this stage of their lives and build their learning trajectories. However, when the student comes from a marginalized population, the student and the teacher face additional challenges that impact their sense of meaning-making. This study broaches into this arena of conflict from the middle school teacher's perspective. As the teacher fills their position as a mediator in learning, a translator of institutional proclivities, and a personal confidante for the student, their beliefs, values, sociocultural background, professional training, and understanding are involved in dialogue and other communicative behavior. When engaging with the marginalized student, teacher tendencies and predispositions are impacted on and impact the student. These situations produce meaning-making and reflective opportunities. This study uses this opportunity to engage these middle school teachers concerning their lived

experiences in the classroom with urban Black middle school students against the backdrop of racialization.

This backdrop provides a study background that interprets the conditions that racialization imposes on the lives and experiences of these children as they come to school. The societal impositions that racialization places on the home environments and neighborhoods of these children can be replicated and intensified within an insensitive, culturally unaware, or dismissive school environment. Belongingness, acceptability, and validation are sacrificed in a system that encourages stereotype threat, decreases motivation to achieve, and subverts cultural identity. Into this dilemma, the teacher enters with a mission of building a learning trajectory for all students. The teacher enters with inset beliefs, values, interpretations, cultural backgrounds, and professional training that may or may not have prepared them for the challenges of engaging and successfully teaching marginalized students. This study will engage those associated reflections, involved intentions, and intuitions with purposeful goals and research questions that prompt conversations with rich and interactive detail.

The goals and questions for detailed discussion are aligned within a theoretical framework that posits CRT and sociocultural theory elements as they delve into the structural inhibitions imposed by racialization and the possibilities within proximal learning through didactic interchange between teachers and students. The aligned conceptual framework posits a socialization impression throughout, as the social construction of racialization presents boundaries for the students and complexity for the

teachers; however, the social aspects in proximal learning hold promise for building connectedness and inclusivity, at the very least, between the student and teacher.

This exploration of the teacher-student dynamic impacted by racialization is captured within the qualitative tradition and phenomenological design. The meaning-making within the relationships becomes a subject of detailed conversation, emerges in various ways within the study prompts, and is captured in the analysis, representing reflective and reflexive thought, descriptions, and understandings of concepts and transcendental themes. To add common understanding to this presentation, chapter one includes definitions of salient points of emphasis, followed by assumptions made as a function of conducting this study. Scope and delimitations broaden the study discussion and place boundaries on the study's emphasis. The explanation of what the study entails concludes with limitations that may be present, the social significance this study adds to current research, and what can be possible going forward. The following chapter investigates the research literature on this topic and the process of defining the gap within the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The problem that I addressed in this study is the racialization of Black urban middle-school students. Racialization is a socially constructed means of assigning populations and individuals to a status that benefits hegemonic entities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). A notable function of assignment in racialization is its ability to subject marginalized populations to undesirable living conditions and uninspiring perspectives of their future conditions (Crenshaw, 1995). These assignments translate into impacting student meaning making within the classroom as a function of their perceptions and experiences within the racialization phenomenon. The positioning of middle school teachers as educational mediators and leading translators within classroom interactional relationships places them in a primary role for student meaning-making. The middle school teachers' perspectives, experiences, and sense-making contribute to their understanding of and connection with the racialization phenomenon and play a definitive role in engagements with these students.

I pursued two purposes in this interview-based study. The first was the exploration of the perspectives of middle school teachers concerning their experiences with the racialization of urban Black middle school adolescents. The second purpose was to explore teacher perspectives concerning the coalescing of student and teacher meaning-making toward addressing racialization and revealing possible solutions. I also explored the mediatorial and translational position of the middle school teacher in support of these students' development and educational trajectory. The positioning and voice of

the middle school teacher can provide safety and support for the marginalized student within the classroom environment. Their perspectives may also lead to greater administrative awareness and respect for cultural differences and environmental contexts that impact the development and learning trajectories of urban Black middle school students.

This chapter begins with a description of the importance of identity and belonging for middle school students, followed by the concept of socially constructed racialization. This social construction impacts the classroom experience of the student of color and details the relevance of CRT to this discussion. A description of the literature search follows that includes the middle school teacher's positionality and meaning-making proclivities within the classroom in the face of the impact of racialization upon students of color. I focused mainly on the urban Black middle school students' experiences of racialization in the school environment and the concept of socially constructed racialization as seen by the middle school teacher.

In this chapter, I also discuss teacher training, development, cultural bias, and classroom dynamics. I discuss the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the study, addressing proximal learning and social interaction found in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) and reference to the impact of racialization in CRT (Crenshaw, 1995). Conceptual variables in the racialization phenomenon are then addressed, including the value of social and cultural histories, recognizing diversity within the classroom curriculum and processes, and the importance of safety and belongingness. Within the

dynamics of the classroom experience, the teacher as a mediator in translational learning and an interaction partner is analyzed, including the influence of teacher training.

Establishing Identity and Belonging

Middle school is a time of significant change for adolescents in their developmental trajectory and provides many cognitive and emotional challenges. Identity development and belongingness are a substantial focus during this time as the students look for direction and support among their peers and within the school climate (Erikson, 1963; Gray, 2017; Gray et al., 2018; Green et al., 2016; Marchante et al., 2022; Rawat & Gulati, 2022). “In-group and out-group membership” (Palese & Schmid-Mast, 2020, p. 700) influence this dynamic as a function of social assignment, impacting how students are seen and how they view themselves and producing concomitant behaviors (Marks et al., 2015; Palese & Schmid Mast, 2020). Palese and Schmid-Mast (2020) elucidated this penchant for downward assignment by pointing to social dominance as a function of separating those who belong to the favored group over the unfavored. The authors also pointed to behavior adaptation as a response encouraging alterations to participate and experience belonging. Zaff et al. (2016) commented on the responses of marginalized students to these comparisons in their exposition of marginalization’s academic impact. The authors referred to demeaning assertions of performance and socioemotional competence of students of color through socialized racialization that ignores environmental impacts and strength-based responses. The student adapts by prioritizing meaning-making that demonstrates capacity, understanding, and socioemotional development in safe spaces that support their identity development (Gray, 2017; Griffin

et al., 2017; Mims & Williams, 2020; Stroebel et al., 2008) or conversely by internalizing negative messaging and adhering to stereotype threat, exhibiting the downward messaging in societal expectations (Howard, 2020; Marks et al., 2015).

Social Construction and Emotional Effect

Whether the adaptation is a strength-based transformation of meaning or a negative leaning into implicit bias, the perception of societal bias necessitates a response. Societal constructions provide the rubric for historical and prevailing ideologies that support racialization (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Howard, 2020; Peller, 1995) and that weigh upon the lived experiences and perceptions of marginalized populations (Crenshaw, 1995). These constructions posit difficulties for urban Black middle school students in the classroom, and for their instructors as they mediate and navigate through these constructions and inherent socioemotional challenges. The experience of the tension provides grounding for “meaning transformation” (see Garcia et al., 2021, p. 211- 213), and these meanings have relevance for both the teacher and the student, presenting in multiple types of responses, spoken and unspoken (Twiner et al., 2021).

These multimodal responses indicate various emotional and cognitive reactions with social relevance and impact. These expressions may represent anger, withdrawal, dismissiveness, lack of motivation, or dissent (Dukuzumuremyi & Siklander, 2018; Griffin et al., 2017; Marraccini et al., 2022; Mims & Williams, 2020). Garcia et al. (2021), Kramer and McKenzie (2022), and Marks et al. (2015) pointed to the socioemotional struggle within cognitive challenges that leads to the differentiation of

meanings or alterations as transformed by how experiences are perceived. These transformations of meaning indicate culture, beliefs, and values and show degrees of cognitive and emotional impact (Garcia et al., 2021; Howard, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Mims & Williams, 2020). Construction or reconstruction of meaning under socioemotional disturbance is a product of racialization's effect on those marginalized (Howard, 2020; Marks et al., 2015; Mims & Williams, 2020). These meaning transformations (Garcia et al., 2021) are demonstrated in various social contexts, including schools and classrooms, when encouraged by experiences that bring about emotional and cognitive conflict.

Classroom Impact

The impact of racialization within the classroom creates difficulties for the marginalized student as they seek to learn and develop in what appears to be an adversarial environment. The amelioration of this issue for urban Black middle school students can be enacted by the awareness and understanding actions of the middle school teacher (Howard, 2020; Howe et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Narayanan & Ordynans, 2022). Ladson-Billings (2009), Marraccini et al. (2022), and Marks et al. (2015) pointed to the importance of the middle school teacher's positioning by underscoring the need for a positive learning environment for the marginalized student's developmental and academic growth. Marraccini et al. (2022) continued by alluding to the importance of recognizing discrimination's impact as a segment of teacher training. In the following sections, I will discuss the affective

influence in meaning construction through socioemotional learning. I also discuss teacher meaning-making in a racialized environment.

Adding Critical Race Theory

CRT (Crenshaw, 1995) plays a significant role in presenting the historical experience of Black people in America. It provides an elucidating opportunity for the middle school teacher in the experiences and worldview of the urban Black adolescent. Ladson-Billings (2009), Logan et al. (2018), and Williams (2018b) posited the importance of incorporating the tenets of CRT in teacher training and preservice work. The tenets of CRT that were pertinent to my research were the permanence of racial designation, factors contributing to dominant class benefit, confronting dominant ideologies, and the illumination of counter-narratives that support social justice ideologies (see Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Williams, 2018b). These tenets create an important groundwork for interactive dialogue with Black students, including recognition of their social histories and cultural experiences. This environment of inclusiveness provides a safe climate for urban Black adolescents to engage in the classroom with the teacher and serves as an educative space for non-Black students.

The understanding environment that CRT can provide benefits the Black students and other marginalized students in the classroom, as it encourages the feeling of being in a safe place. Safe spaces indicate the relevance and value of included cultural beliefs as validating and solidifying enculturated identity and belongingness (Marks, 2015; Mims & Williams, 2020). Racialization threatens identity, belongingness, and safety as it invalidates and denigrates the contextualized experiences and worldviews of

marginalized populations, inclusive of urban Black middle school students (Gray et al., 2018; Mims & Williams, 2020). Although this system is a threatening environment for the urban Black student, the worldview of the urban Black student is not the only variant in the classroom environment. The expansive worldviews of all classroom peers and the teacher's viewpoint create a classroom rubric of meaning-making and cultural merging and clashes (Howe et al., 2019; Patterson, 2018). Nevertheless, the teacher stands in the mediatorial position, correlating understandings into a classroom experience. Therefore, the teacher's perspective is necessary for providing interactional, process, administrative, and policy applications that link to safe spaces for students of color (Gray et al., 2018; Narayanan & Ordynans, 2022) and all students in a diverse classroom environment (Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Marraccini et al., 2022; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Wiig et al., 2018).

In this study, I used CRT to reveal nuances in the societal construction of racialization and its impact on the educational system and the classroom experience. The teacher's experiences and understanding of racialization influence the student's perspective in the classroom. Teacher training, structural boundaries, and personal biases affect teacher performance in the classroom and the type and level of support they give or intend to give students (Patterson, 2018; Stroebel et al., 2008; Twiner et al., 2021). When the school climate is unsupportive, as can be the case for urban black adolescents, restorative meaning-making and improved performance can be positively encouraged by teachers' attention and proactive movement to alleviate conflicts in the classroom environment (Gray et al., 2018). However, the experiences and worldviews of the

teachers need elucidation to ascertain nuances in their relationships with students, specifically urban Black students, that impact development and classroom performance.

Literature Search Strategy

The databases that I searched included socioemotional learning, teacher construction of meaning, meaning-making, teacher meaning-making, teacher/educators, African American/Black adolescents, middle school/junior high. The databases used included APA PsycINFO, EBSCO, Thoreau multi-database, ERIC and Education Source, Sage, and African American studies journal searches.

The initial focus on the keyword of *socio-emotional learning* came from the article by Garcia et al. (2021). The study reflected a search for emotional affectivity in the classroom relative to collaborative tasks. A term that stood out in Garcia et al. (2021) was *the transformation of meaning* which was indicative of how students translated their experiences in the collaborative activity as a function of emotional affect and cognitive interpretation. However, that study was populated with college students rather than my focus on middle school students. Nevertheless, the issue of constructed meaning as a function of emotional affectivity stood out.

The initial focus on middle school students shifted to an emphasis on the middle school teacher because of the vulnerability of the adolescents as the focal group. Using the ERIC and EBSCO databases, the pivot to meaning construction from the teacher's perspective was observed in Mabingo (2019), with the keywords *teacher construction of meaning*. This article provided a sociocultural perspective that reflected an added angle of teachers' meaning construction with a backdrop of sociocultural differences. The

article's allusion to constructed meanings in dance was not the focus of the study, but how the teachers interpreted it from a sociocultural perspective was relevant.

Proceeding with ERIC and EBSCO databases and *the construction of meaning* as a keyword, little was found; however, adjusting to the words *meaning-making* produced a more extensive list with an understanding that *meaning-making* is a term with a rich literary history. While adding the keywords *teacher/educator* and including the APA Psych Info database, Thoreau, and the combination of ERIC and Education sources, articles were located to keep building an understanding of the topic. Still, there was a need for *middle school, African American, or Blacks* as a keyword. Relevant articles were found from the database search, but more so from article references; the Sage journal search database was included upon finding relevant articles with a journal reference.

The Journal of African American Studies provided many pertinent articles about the experience of middle school Black students in the school environment. Several articles in the African American Studies journal posited that the experience of racialization had a determinative impact on the belongingness, validation, and identity of Black urban adolescents. However, the reference to middle school teachers' experience and handling of sociocultural differences needed greater elucidation.

Approaching this topic from professional learning, Patterson (2018) reflected on constructing meaning from a teacher's perspective as a phenomenological perspective and emphasizing a didactic approach. The study gave a decidedly cognitive procedural approach concerning teacher professional development. Further searches in professional development illuminated the interactional didactic approach, as posited by Vygotsky

(1978), expanded into contemporary literature. The term meaning-making emerged as a function of teacher-student interaction.

The keywords *teacher meaning-making* gave two references. Twiner et al. (2021) and Kramer and McKenzie (2022) emphasized teacher meaning-making more directly with middle school children bringing their sociocultural environmental effects into the classroom. These two articles further specified the proposed gap concerning urban Black middle school students' experience in meaning-making from the vantage point of their middle school teachers. Additionally, this approach included a historical analysis of the concept of meaning-making with older research tying back to seminal research that includes Vygotsky's social-cultural theory (1978), critical theory as reflected in Vygotsky's interpretation, and CRT as posited by Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1995). As the search expanded, including allusions to CRT, books, and articles were located that referred to Black urban middle school students' experiences in the classroom and teachers' positionality and ability to connect with the students. These books included works by Howard (2020) and Ladson-Billings (2008) and articles by Darling-Hammond and Depaoli (2020) and Williams (2018a; 2018b). Reference to CRT was articulated in the prior references mainly as a function of racialization within the classroom; however, in Bell (1995), Crenshaw (1995), Delgado and Stefancic (2017), and a section in Williams (2018b), there were more direct references to CRT in its theoretical tenets.

Literature Gap

The impact of racialization upon urban Black adolescents has developmental and educational implications as the student strives to negotiate the school and classroom

environment. The connection of racialization to socio-emotional development for adolescents is indicated interactionally by actionable variants of discrimination (i.e., microaggressions, hostile acts) and structural discriminatory acts and policies that distill into communities, schools, and living environments (Marks et al., 2015). These acts produce disparagement of public and private regard that add substantially to the developmental burden experienced by adolescents of color. Garcia et al. (2021) allude to the impact of "tension" and "disquieting thoughts" as a precursor to emotional affectivity and cognitive effect, leading to meaning transformation. The social interactions that house this dynamic are a critical component in the development of the adolescent and are present within peer-to-peer and student-teacher engagements (Dukuzumuremyi & Siklander, 2018; Marks et al., 2015). When racialization impacts the settings and contexts of these exchanges, informed and responsive interchanges are necessary to curtail negative transformations of meanings and concordant behaviors (Kramer & McKenzie, 2015; Marks et al., 2015).

The teacher plays a strategic role in tempering interactive relationships within the classroom. Teacher-moderated sociocultural contextual interchanges in the classroom provide a means for normalized cultural understanding to be within the classroom, both student to student and student to teacher and promoting sociocultural safety (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Mims & Williams, 2020; Ritella & Ligorio, 2019). However, when traditional modes of teaching prevail in which the teacher eschews dialogue for a teacher-initiated and controlled call, response and assessment dynamic, genuine interaction is lost (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Howe et al., 2019). This

approach emphasizes an implicit bias having a dominant sociocultural relevance that does not match students' learning styles that are uncomfortable with dominant contexts (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Mercer & Littleton, 2007). This uneasiness contributes to tension and disquieting thoughts, leading to associative meaning-making and reactive behaviors (Garcia et al., 2021). Teacher-driven interactive dialogue supplants the traditional approach with an approach that is more engaging and sensitive to social and cultural realities (Howe et al., 2019; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Mercer et al., 2019).

Recognizing sociocultural differences in the classroom becomes more necessary for students of color when racialization plays a significant role in their experience. Kramer and McKenzie (2022) point to the importance of the teacher as setting the tone for healthy relationships within the classroom, including sensitivity and reflexivity to the experiences of students of color. Logan et al. (2018) posit a need for white teachers to become familiar with Black culture and history and the tenets of CRT, as connecting with the students and making their experiences relevant within the classroom. In this environment, safety and belongingness become vital attributes in the accepting and inclusive classroom, where the students of color will believe that they fit as individuals beyond a categorical designation (Gray et al., 2018; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The classroom can become a safe place for learning and achievement when acceptance and inclusion are prioritized, and diverse identities are validated. Within this space, the teacher surrenders bias and cultural ignorance to a reflexive modality, allowing for sociocultural understanding and connection (Dukuzumuremyi & Siklander, 2018;

Howard, 2020). Deference to dialogic interaction is present within teacher training as a value in proximal learning and is valuable in promoting engagement with diverse populations (Howe et al., 2019; Ritella & Ligorio, 2019; Sedova et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). This value of dialogic interaction within the classroom is viewed as a means of building sociocultural connection, improving achievement, motivation, and providing a safe and developmentally appropriate space for adolescents (Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Mercer et al., 2019; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Rødnes et al., 2021). However, as CRT alludes, the prevalence of a dominant ideology hinders the full uptake of dialogic interaction in its sociocultural splendor in the classroom (Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Howard, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Williams (2018b) pointed to racism in the school system as resisting adaption to sociocultural acceptance and inclusion and reflecting societal bias. Adherence to hegemonic ideology in the classroom effectively supplants and dismisses the value of didactic interaction to the detriment of the students, especially those experiencing marginalized sociocultural identities.

It is the presence of diverse sociocultural identities in the classroom that enhances the need for understanding and appreciating the inherent differences and including them. CRT details the history of the dismissal and devaluing of these differences, its prevalence in society, and its reach into systems, including the educational system (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Mims & Williams, 2020; Peller, 1995; Williams, 2018b). A notable indicator of racialization's historical and prevailing impact within the educational system is the experiences of Black teachers as former students and practicing teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Williams, 2018a). In their ongoing experiences with the ills of

racialization, the value of Black teachers' input is heightened in the understanding and promoting interactive connectedness with urban Black students (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Williams, 2018a). Howard (2020), Ladson-Billings (2009), and Logan et al. (2018) broaden the perspective of teacher involvement by pointing to the importance of white teachers' exposure to Black history and the tenets of CRT. Ladson-Billings (2009) also adds exposure for preservice instructors. Adding to developmental importance, Kramer and McKenzie (2022) allude to the imprinting of dominant ideology as inappropriate to the culture of Black adolescents and as detrimental to their developmental sphere. These readings posit the detrimental impact of dominant ideology within the classroom, its historical significance, and the need for teachers to have a reflective and reflexive understanding of sociocultural differences to benefit those students adversely impacted by racialization.

As the value of dialogic interaction is a substantiated vehicle for student achievement and success in the classroom, the impact of the racialization phenomenon takes center stage. The teacher enters this arena as an interrupter in discriminatory practices and moderator of meaning-making (Gray, 2018; Howard, 2020; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Marks et al., 2015; Marraccini et al., 2022); yet the question remains as to how prepared is the teacher to enter this space. Narayanan and Ordynans (2022) point to reflection as an essential facet of the meaning-making process for the classroom teacher. This reflection includes looking into cultural bias and values as factors in the teacher's worldview and the professional training regimen (Howard, 2020; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Patterson, 2018). Therefore, the teacher's worldview needs

illumination, both from experience and in elucidating conscious and unconscious renderings. The literature details teaching training, methodologies, interactional challenges, and the challenges experienced by Black adolescents in a racialized system. However, a gap remains in broad-based teacher elucidation of these challenges and how they understand, navigate, and engage with students to remedy the situation.

This study focuses on the teacher's worldview as working or having worked in the classroom environment and the meaning-making that emerges or having emerged from the experience. Teacher training provides a context for instruction routines; however, the experience in the classroom touches on more than just the pedagogical challenge. Howard (2020), Kramer and McKenzie (2022), and Patterson (2018) point to the importance and relevance of teachers' cultural backgrounds and values as contributing to navigating the sociocultural dynamic within the classroom. Navigating and mediating the sociocultural environment is complex and has inherent difficulties (Wiig et al., 2018), providing a basis for questioned self-efficacy for the teacher (Narayanan & Ordynans, 2022; Rødnes et al., 2021). In this environment of classroom multimodal interactions and clashing meaning-making (Twiner et al., 2021) around the racialization phenomenon (Howard, 2021; Williams, 2018b), the teacher's worldview becomes the subject of study and analysis. This study explores the perspectives of middle school teachers in the classroom experience of the racialization of urban Black students. In elucidating the phenomenological viewpoint of the middle school teacher relative to racialization, this study intends to fill and expound on the teacher's perspective of their biases, values, understandings, experiences, hopes, and aspirations. These elements provide a general

descriptor of the experience of the middle school teacher with urban Black students under the shadow of racialization.

Theoretical Foundation

The theories that ground this study include Vygotsky's (1978) social and historical theory and Crenshaw's (Crenshaw, 1995) elocution of CRT. Both theories relate to Horkheimer's critical theory (Held, 1980) concerning revelations on elevating social consciousness instead of the unconscious adherence to a repressive ideology that diminishes the authentic expression of actual cultural and experiential contexts. Vygotsky (1978) illustrates an active psychological progression of learning from interactive engagement to a developed inner speech representative of a socially mediated cognitive restructuring. This process, when appropriately executed in an interactive dialogic environment, provides learning possibilities that are supportive, validating, and growth centered. When employed with invalidating intent, such as when racialization plays a significant role, the urban Black middle school adolescent will lack empowerment in this space and their identity development is negatively impacted. Crenshaw's emphasis on the devaluing of nondominant cultural constructs is highlighted in the impact of racialization on urban Black middle school students. The racialization process promotes socially constructed and assigned racial designations that devalue and implant negative stereotypes of public and private regard.

These invalidations serve an opposite function of Vygotsky's positives in the proximal learning dynamic that represents the teacher in an encouraging and supportive role. Howe et al. (2019) and Twiner et al. (2021) allude to the importance of teacher

sociocultural awareness when engaged with diverse students in the classroom environment. This awareness supports enhanced dialogue as these interactions validate and encourage beyond the formal and institutionalized classroom environment, which lacks continuous dialogue and enhanced learning opportunities. The progressive interaction strategies exemplify the proximal learning environment posited by Vygotsky (1978) while also expounding on the premise of critical theory, as Horkheimer and the Frankfurt school (Held, 1980) alluded in relevance to sociocultural ideology beyond the dominance of hegemonic designations.

Sociocultural ideology sets the stage for analysis into the impact that racialization has upon marginalized populations. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory's relevance to CRT is in its support of the ideology of psychological complexity and human development in expressing individual consciousness (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky posited this expression as evidenced by behavior as a function of social and cultural impact upon cognitive functioning. This pathway not only described mental functioning but also represented a scientific pathway toward that functioning. (Vygotsky, 1978). This merging produces a development in individual consciousness that can be described and followed along its developmental sphere. This understanding dismisses approaches to human functioning that neglect individual development and support predetermined superiority. This opposition to predetermined superiority and commitment to the process of human development and conscious expression are undercurrents in the socially supportive aspects of critical theory and CRT.

Critical theory questions the status quo that hegemonic determinations put in place, and CRT expands this analysis into the context of racialization. CRT follows a course with its rudiments from critical legal studies that question and analyze decisional processes based on varied determinations concerning precedence and argumentation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). These decisional processes indicate patriarchal and hegemonic leaning with racial underpinnings through societal construction assignments (Crenshaw, 1995). Crenshaw (1995) points to the coercive impact of assignment through its historical precedence, permanency, and power to lock marginalized populations into lived experiences and worldviews that underscore and support the assignment. Public and private regard are informed through such tenets as inset structures, reinterpretation of history for dominant benefit, and the refusal to acknowledge counter-narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Williams, 2018b).

Progressive movements throughout the history of the United States provided underpinnings for CRT. In movements opposing enslavement, the progression of the civil rights movement in the mid-20th century forward, the feminist stance against social roles, and oppositional positions supporting ideologies providing counter-narratives to prevailing hegemonic doctrines (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Vygotsky (1978) and Crenshaw (1995) constructed their theoretical positions by understanding the sociocultural impact on the lived experiences of affected populations. These understandings are demonstrated in the classroom environment in the diversity of lived experiences brought into the classroom environment by the students and the teacher.

These variable sociocultural realities represent the need for teachers to comprehend, elucidate, and negotiate the classroom contexts.

Teachers working in a diverse collective face a formidable task, requiring a process that will support their efforts toward inclusion. Amid this classroom dynamic, interactive dialogue is a needful vehicle to navigate this challenge (Dukuzumuremyi & Siklander, 2018; Edwards & Mercer, 1987) and contribute to a scaffolded learning environment that enhances academic trajectories (Mercer et al., 2019; Wiig et al., 2018). The sociocultural understanding that emanates from beneficial communication adds substance, contributing to an inclusive classroom experience of increased belongingness, safety, and validation for diverse student populations (Gray et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2017; Sedova et al., 2016; Wiig et al., 2018). The teacher, being adequately resourced, is a vehicle of change (Mercer et al., 2019; Patterson, 2018), as their unique positioning in the lives of the students creates a meaning-making dynamic that is impactful on the understanding of the students and returns understanding to the teachers in reciprocal learning, and has additional relevance for adjusting administrative policies for positive impact in the classroom (Griffin et al., 2017; Howe et al., 2019; Mercer et 2019). The theoretical underpinnings of Vygotsky and Crenshaw reflect these critical reviews of the classroom environment and what is possible through communicative and sociocultural dialogue. The selected theories by Vygotsky (1978) and Crenshaw (1995) have critical theory as a basis and point to the need for recognizing and validating sociocultural differences to certify and advance trajectorial learning for diverse classrooms, with the study's emphasis on urban Black middle school students. The study phenomenon places

racialization as a sociocultural designation that marginalizes, devaluates, and inhibits positive trajectory as a function of hegemonic assignment. This study explores the effect of racialization on this population of students from the experience, viewpoint, and worldview of middle school teachers.

This study also searches the external and internal dialogue of middle school teachers as a function of their professional learning, their sociocultural engagement with urban Black middle school students in their classrooms, the meaning-making that comes from these engagements, the worldviews that encompass these experiences, and the possibilities for social change through their experiences and understandings. As prevailing research details and reviews dialogic interactions, this study's intent adds to the research by exploring the perspectives of middle school teachers as influencers in the classroom, interpreters within the school institutional environment, personal confidants with this population of students, and how their viewpoints are essential to enhancing the educational environment for all students.

Conceptual Framework

The phenomenon under exploration in this study is racialization. Racial discrimination is an active extension of racialization by imposing explicit limitations and marginalization based on a biological assignment with no scientific basis (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Peller, 1995; Williams, 2018b). This lack of an organic basis in racial designations lends to the view of racialization as a socially developed enigma of convenience for hegemonic purposes (Williams, 2018b). The assignment of such a designation, when used to sublimate, marginalize, degrade, and eventually control

populations, is a convenient tool for maintaining class-based assignments and structures of power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Williams, 2018b). In this study, this structure provides difficulties for urban Black middle school students in pursuing trajectories that belie such an assignment (Griffin et al., 2017).

A tenet of CRT points to structural determinism as a facet that locks the marginalized student into a limited trajectory. Williams (2018b), Delgado and Stefancic (2017), and Peller (1995) define *structural determinism* as inset structures that are instructive and dictatorial of structural norms and processes. When coupled with the socially racialized imprints and impacts that belie and invalidate color-blind ideologies (Bell, 1995), the need for intentional socio-culturally informed and reformed approaches to inequities is implicated. These approaches enhance the educational processes employed from Vygotsky's proximal learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) as the dialogic interaction becomes more value-laden for the marginalized student and the subsequent internalized messaging becomes more socio-culturally validating and identity-supporting.

These types of messaging have positive implicit value, supporting social and cultural values and aiding explicit learning processes. Williams (2018b) alludes to race permanence and counter-narratives as aspects of CRT that impact the identity development of impacted populations. In coordination with the definitions playing out within the classroom environment, the illusion of color-blind over the realism of racial permanence invalidates sociocultural differences and negates the richness of inclusion (Howard, 2020). Additionally, the inclusion of counter-narratives of diverse representation serves as a variant from dominant narratives, adding richness to the

understanding of the broad-based human experience. The adolescent need for identity development and the marginalized student's need for belongingness and inclusivity are enhanced when these aspects are given recognition in the classroom environment.

The diversity of expression brought by the variety in student's cultural beliefs and norms adds to learning in the classroom; however, resistance to these differences marginalizes and encourages diminished cultural learning opportunities for other students. Mims and Williams (2020) employed a multiple-worlds framework to posit how racialization, through socialized norms, distills into active stereotypes and discrimination in the school environment that threatens the identity of marginalized students. This imposition in a middle school environment is deleterious as it adds further struggle for marginalized students, in addition to the adolescent development and crises transition experienced by all adolescents, regardless of socio-cultural identity (Erikson, 1963; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022). The institutional environment of the school itself can also serve to denigrate cultural variations when emphasizing cultural understanding nonstandard to the diverse adolescent (Byrd, 2015; Gray et al., 2018; Marraccini et al., 2022; Mercer & Littleton, 2007), thereby the urban Black adolescent faces the threat of invalidation of their presence and support of their socio-cultural identity (Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Howard, 2020; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022).

In the face of socio-cultural invalidation that filters into the school environment, the teacher can be a validating entity for the marginalized student. The classroom teacher has a positioning in the school life of the adolescent to nurture and merge enlightened meaning-making that filters denigrating, racialized messaging into validating interchange

and discourse with an awareness of its socio-cultural importance (Dukuzumuremyi & Siklander, 2018; Logan et al., 2018; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Wiig et al., 2018).

Dialogic interaction stands as a vital cog in the socio-emotional development of the child in the classroom environment (Garcia et al., 2021; Ritella & Ligorio, 2019), yet when coupled with thoughtful and reflexive teacher understanding and enlightened meaning-making, a deleterious racialized situation can take a positive turn towards more equity affirming dialogue and outcomes. However, there are a variety of concepts and concerns that inhabit this complex landscape (Howard, 2020; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Patterson, 2018) that the teacher must learn to navigate and moderate.

Key Variables and Concepts

This study builds on the need to elucidate the middle school teacher's value and voice in supporting the educational trajectory of urban Black middle school students impacted by assigned racial stigmatizations. Assigning such a defining stain invalidates the positives in sociocultural identity, compromises a sense of belongingness in the larger society and inhibits educational trajectory (Byrd, 2015; Gray, 2017). The classroom and school climate feel like an unsafe place when experiencing demeaning characterizations in racial assignments (Byrd, 2015; 2017; Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Gray et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2017; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Marraccini et al., 2022). The value the middle school teacher brings to this situation is their positioning as an interaction partner with the student, the classroom instructional mediator, and a representative of the administrative educational structure (Griffin et al., 2017). With this positioning, the perspectives of the middle school teacher significantly influence what

happens in the classroom. The worldview these instructors bring into the classroom has been impacted by their professional training, culture, values, beliefs, and sense-making. How these influences are interpreted and navigated by the instructor within the classroom impacts the meaning-making of the marginalized student and influences how the student navigates racialization's impact within this context and setting (Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Howard, 2020).

Belongingness plays a significant role in how students perceive and navigate the school environment. Gray et al. (2018) alluded to the dynamic of the mediatorial impact of the teacher as an opportunity to enhance belongingness and identity validation for these students. Griffin et al. (2017), Mims and Williams (2020), and Marraccini et al. (2022) added to the discussion of belongingness by referencing the experiences of Black adolescent students in school environments that are not validating their sociocultural backgrounds. These students would benefit from historical recognition of their cultural value and personal validation that their presence is appreciated. Ladson-Billings (2009) directly pointed to the nonrecognition of Black culture in the school system as a function of systemic racism that alienates the child. Integrating and validating diverse experiences into classroom instructional pedagogy is recognized as necessary for engaging students in contextualized learning (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Rødnes et al., 2021; Twiner et al., 2021; Wiig et al., 2018) and as creating a means of supportive dialogic interaction and enhanced internalized messaging (Mercer et al., 2019; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Ritella & Ligorio, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978). These positive external experiences of acceptance contribute to the internal sense of belonging.

Belongingness as a function of dialogic interaction does play a significant role in acceptance yet also extends into validation of identity. Mercer and Littleton (2007) posited the value of a shared understanding of cultural histories in the pursuit of dialogues with enhanced communication. The teacher can bridge misunderstandings and create context in the classroom by understanding the social and cultural histories that students bring into the classroom. Mims and Williams (2020) pointed to the dysfunctional and nonvalidating environment that is produced for students when not recognized and accepted as to their social and cultural identity. Ritella and Ligorio (2019) referred to teachers using “etic” and “emic” approaches to broach better educative processes. Wiig et al. (2018) and Rødnes et al. (2021) promoted a contextual approach that is receptive of diverse cultural expressions. These external expressions and applications of support have significant value for internal validation of social and cultural expression.

Internalized messaging plays a vital role in how the student segues into meaning-making, and classroom discussions and interactions can influence racialization's impact. Williams (2018b) alludes to the middle school teacher mediating racialization's impact by understanding CRT tenets. These beliefs illuminate experiences throughout Black history and its sociocultural impact on the lives and understanding of contextualized entities, which includes urban Black middle school students. Teacher awareness of the tenets of CRT creates a window of understanding and opportunity to engage the urban Black student around sociocultural impact and meaning making (Howard, 2020; Logan et al., 2018; Williams, 2018a). This understanding also finds illumination through the narratives

and worldviews of Black middle school teachers, who have firsthand experience of the impact of racialization as students and as teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Logan et al., 2018; Williams, 2018a).

Tenets of CRT present guideposts into understanding the functionality of racialization in the lives of the marginalized. Tenets related to this study include the permanence of racial designation, the manipulation of factors toward dominant class benefit, confronting of dominant ideologies, illuminating counternarratives, and the support of social justice ideology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Howard, 2020; Williams, 2018b). Crenshaw (1995) alluded that dominant ideology maintains a hierarchical status that administers cultural inferiority as locking marginalized populations in a subordinated status even when progress appears to be present. This can be seen when overt actions such as *white only* designations are removed, and acts of discrimination are deemed illegal, yet microaggressions remain and equality emerges as illusionary, and serving as functionaries of inset racialization. It is the allowance of counternarratives and the understanding of social and cultural histories and lived experiences that allow true dialogic interaction to occur (Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Dukuzumuremyi & Siklander, 2018; Edwards & Mercer, 1987, Howe et al., 2019). Broaching and analyzing these tenets provides clarity in understanding the impact of threatening classroom climates. Enhanced teacher professional training pedagogy that includes CRT perspectives and is supported with preservice instruction from the sociocultural narratives and counternarratives of Black peer instructors, aid in supporting productive classroom dialogic interaction (Williams, 2018a; 2018b).

This type of communication builds connection and a means to traverse sociocultural hindrances. Whereas racialization, in its prevalence within the structure of society (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Peller, 1995), serves as a barrier to dialogic interaction in the classroom (Byrd, 2015; Dukuzumuremyi & Siklander, 2018; Gray et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, this race-based obstruction can be lessened when the impact of its presence is recognized, and the experiences and viewpoints of those most negatively impacted are validated (Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Howard, 2020; Marraccini et al., 2022; Mims & Williams, 2020). The unique positioning of the classroom teacher sets them within the exchange of cultural and social meaning-making between diverse classroom peers (Dukuzumuremyi & Siklander, 2018; Marraccini et al., 2022; Rødnes et al., 2021; Wiig et al., 2018), including the classroom exchange interspersed with the instructor's prevailing worldviews and sociocultural influences (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Narayanan & Ordynans, 2022; Patterson, 2018; Twiner et al., 2021). These converging and contrasting elements create a need for managing these interchanges to provide the most promising environment for positive dialogic exchanges and developmental opportunities (Howe et al., 2019; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Rødnes et al., 2021). The possibilities for learning enhancement through managing and navigating these sociocultural highways are elucidated within understanding the contribution of CRT and proximal learning dynamics.

Vygotsky's presentation of proximal learning provides a base of understanding of dialogic interaction as first externally received and then internalized as messaging from

which to build comprehension. Mercer and Littleton (2007) broaden this thought into socio-cultural value in diverse classrooms, recognizing how social and cultural histories form communication. The teacher may take advantage of these contributing factors with expanded context within the classroom environment. Personal interactive dialogue is also enhanced by understanding the unique proclivities in socio-cultural communications. In this vein, Logan et al. (2018) posit that white teachers could benefit from an understanding of Black history and CRT relative to the experiences of their Black students. Social and cultural understanding enhance the value of proximal learning as they build the connections necessary for internalized learning.

The input of Black teachers can aid routes toward building substantial connections with Black students. Williams (2018b) posits the benefit gained from preservice teachers listening and gleaning from the experiences of Black teachers that carry personal understanding and experiences with racialization. Shared cultural histories are illuminated within the dynamic of dialogic interaction and positively contribute to the internalization of messaging between teacher and student (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Howard, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Wiig et al., 2018). Within this dynamic, meaning-making is exchanged in multi-modal expressions in the classroom environment. These expressions can invoke positive responses that affect the classroom environment for temporal and long-term impact (Twiner et al., 2021).

The impact of dialogue and its communicative properties cannot be understated, and its usage paired with expressions of support aid teacher/student engagements within the classroom. Advantaging external dialogue for the positive enhancement of

internalized dialogue is a strategy found in professional teacher training (Howe et al., 2019; Mercer & Littleton, 2007). However, pedagogic training based on implicit ground rules that mirror a dominant cultural interpretation pervades, as determinations of right and wrong answers create a dominant socio-cultural context of what are acceptable responses (Dukuzumuremyi & Siklander, 2018; Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Mims & Williams, 2020). This prevalence encourages the need for phenomenological exploration to elucidate dialogic interactive pathways.

Values, culture, and beliefs impact the worldview of teachers, and the support of a reflective process aids in bringing these factors to the forefront. Wiig et al. (2018) allude to the background of teachers as critical in the provision of validating or invalidating contexts. This background includes training and personal proclivities as the teacher uses their expertise to develop the student's expertise through co-creative strategies (Sedova et al., 2016). Patterson (2018) posits the importance of what the teacher brings in personal experience as determining what enters the classroom approach and instruction. Multiple students bring varied social and cultural histories into the classroom, and these differences are more pronounced with greater diversity. When the teacher is challenged with diversity, a proper contextualized environment is compromised; however, when the teacher comprehends and can navigate the classroom environment and contextualize to the student's needs, a positive enhanced trajectory is present for all students (Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Dukuzumuremyi & Siklander, 2018; Howe et al., 2019).

The environment of support that is present when the students' needs are prioritized creates a positive climate for all. This contextualized environment enhances

communication and improves the meaning-making dynamic for teachers and students (Narayanan & Ordynans, 2022; Patterson, 2018; Twiner et al., 2021). This collusion in understanding substantially impacts socioemotional comprehension and reduces potential traumatic effects in the classroom that negatively impact temporal and extended learning (García et al., 2021; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Williams, 2018b). Researchers have posited pathways that may usher in a positive learning climate for all students that can circumvent the perils that inhibiting factors such as racialization encourage. However, when racialization in society is such an explicit and implicit reality, navigating the impacts can be problematic for the teacher (Bell, 1995; Peller, 1995; Williams, 2018b).

Recognizing the impact that racialization has on teacher functionality in the classroom should bring curative remedies to this malady. Teacher professional training can provide information, including a synopsis of racialization through CRT (Logan et al., 2018; Sedova et al., 2016; Williams, 2018b). However, only the teacher's voice can provide the summation of teacher meaning-making through culture, values, and beliefs. These compilations are illuminated within the experiential lens of the classroom dynamic. The descriptive form of phenomenological methodology explores these experience-driven perspectives.

The teacher occupies a position with a significant impact on the students in their classrooms, and their perspectives can provide context for administrators and policymakers who intend to make substantive changes. Teachers as interactive partners with the students, presenters of the academic structure, and representatives of the larger school structure represent access to opportunistic change. It is hoped that this study will

bring the voice of the middle school teacher to the forefront, contributing to understanding and roadmaps to smooth the educational trajectory for urban Black middle school students.

Summary and Conclusions

Racialization's impact upon society distills into marginalized students' experience within the classroom, where the teacher is an interactional partner, a mediator and navigator within the educational process, and a representative of the school structure. This positioning relegates the teacher as a principal translator through the process of proximal learning and the dynamics of dialogic interaction. As the tenets of CRT provide the backdrop of the racialized student's experiences and historical and sociocultural contexts, the standard of care that positive and collaborative dialogic interaction provides creates an avenue that posits remedies in the classroom environment.

The societal illness that racialization indicates and distills into the school and classroom environment is elucidated in tenets of CRT; the permanence of race, the preponderance of hegemonic ideology, and counter-narratives, with specific emphasis in this study, on structural determinism. In its permanence, racial realism recognizes the stability of racial differences as an existing reality. These variations contribute to diversity, which can be additive to community dialogue and add richness in expression. This richness is compromised when oppressive and repressive hegemonic ideology builds structures slanted to maintain dominant interests. These approaches silence and ignore the voices of the oppressed to maintain positions of dominance. When these impacts spill

over into the school system and the classroom, the effect on the most marginalized students is limiting and deleterious to their achievement.

Although this challenge is present, the middle school teacher is positioned as an influencer through proximal learning dynamics in interactional dialogue. This dialogue is personal, adaptable, social, and culturally sensitive when at its best. Nevertheless, the teachers' culture, beliefs, and values impact their worldviews and influence the tenor of their dialogue and interaction. Additionally, approaches and impacts from dominance-centered pedagogy persist in teacher training and teaching methodologies. Professional teaching research and curriculum does include dialogic interaction as a necessary pedagogy, but the teacher's worldview impacts its level of implementation in the classroom. The teacher's worldview colludes with the student's worldview in the classroom. It produces an interchange of multimodal communications of meaning best navigated by beneficial dialogic interactions. The positioning of the teacher puts them in a place where their voice has a directional impact on the tone of the classroom and should have more impact on how administrative decisional processes are traversed.

The impact of teacher pedagogy, adaptive processes, and worldviews have been indicated as necessary in the educative process and in the dialogic interactions that enhance learning. However, when racialization becomes an impactful phenomenon, the needful discussions are more important for urban Black middle school students. The impact of the racialization phenomenon can accompany curriculum and pedagogy that is insensitive and intractable to sociocultural differences. The teacher is positioned as an interpreter and navigator through the educational milieu and the underlying messages it

communicates. The teacher's worldview, meaning-making, and sociocultural understanding are challenged when navigating the presence and impact of this phenomenon, and their description of their experiences provides a necessary vantage point of the collective classroom experience.

Current and past literature presents diverse experiences of racialization in school and classroom environments as faced and navigated within the rubric of experiences, negotiating of teacher training, backgrounds, and beliefs. These teacher-individualized understandings and familiarities provide the basis for implicit and explicit biases, whether unconsciously or consciously communicated by teachers to the children under their tutelage. For urban Black middle school students, when biases are negatively implied, it can be debilitating to their achievement as their sociocultural reactions and responses are labeled under the assignments of racialization.

These assignments are empowered when counter-narratives are dismissed but are disassembled when beneficial dialogic interaction is pursued with marginalized children, and teachers employ enhanced socio-cultural sensitivity, awareness, and humility. The processes within teacher individualized experiences and meaning-making strategies within these adaptations require coalescence into a collective voice that reveals the middle school teachers' understanding of the basis of their worldviews, understanding their Black urban students' worldviews, and the context of the impact of racialization within their school-based settings. This study aims to explore a descriptive representation of a collective and thematic worldview of middle school teachers around racialization and its impact on urban Black middle school students within their classrooms and school

environment. This descriptive analysis will take the form of descriptive phenomenological methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

I pursued two purposes in this interview-based study. The first was the exploration of the perspectives of middle school teachers concerning their experiences with the racialization of urban Black middle school adolescents. The second purpose was to explore teacher perspectives concerning the coalescing of student and teacher meaning-making toward addressing racialization and revealing possible solutions. I also explored the mediatorial and translational position of the middle school teacher in support of students' development and educational trajectories.

These goals required a methodology that I could use to explore the participants' worldviews and a structure for describing patterns or themes present within the collective worldviews of the participants. The reality of the complexities in mining multiple perspectives while respecting this endeavor's recursive and interpretive nature required a qualitative approach that contained these elements. Additionally, the task required a methodology of assessing the consciousness of meaning-making components and the intuition behind lived experiences.

In this study, I emphasized meaning-making on the part of middle school teachers relative to their effectual experience of racialization on Black urban middle school adolescents in their classrooms. Dawidowicz (2020) and Moustakas (1994) referred to Husserl's philosophy of *epoché* and its freedom from suppositions and emphasis on intuitiveness and the essence of the phenomenon explored. This epistemological approach precedes empirical analysis (Moustakas, 1994) and encourages responses based

on the conscious or possibly unconscious positionality in response to the phenomenon. In the case of this study, the discovery and description of the effect of racialization on urban Black middle school students was the experience or phenomenon under review.

The questions that I answered using this methodology were:

- How do middle school teachers experience the effects of racialization?
- How do the meaning-making of teachers and urban Black middle school students coalesce and differ around racialization?
- What solutions do middle school teachers offer for mediating the effects of racism on the learning trajectories of urban Black middle school students?

In this chapter, I explore methodological areas of concern and provide a view of the process and content this study contains. Patton (2015) alluded to the holistic nature of qualitative research and its search to synthesize findings from the study into a descriptive, connected whole. The presentation of this process provided the components that contributed to synthesizing the study's concerns as a connected whole.

In this chapter, I will discuss my role as the researcher and biases, relationships, power dynamics, and ethical conflicts. This discussion is followed by descriptions of processes involving the participants that include the population of focus, participant criterion, sampling strategy, recruitment and contact strategies, indication of saturation, instrument protocols, and data collection appropriateness and adequacy. These assessments contributed to study transferability.

Additional points that I address in this chapter are assessments concerning the context and setting of the study. This includes the location of data collection, who was the collector of the data, frequency, and duration of data collection, how data was recorded, followed up and how debriefing was pursued. These are followed by explanations of how research questions were related and how themes were coded. Within these processes, context and setting played definitive roles, as the location of the study and interactive dynamics added layers of meaning to responses. Ravitch and Carl (2021) pointed to the tendency toward complexity in qualitative research, and how the realities of impact in context and setting influence participants' responses. I address the trustworthiness issues that I addressed through strategies that added assurances for the participants and the overall study regarding credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I improved trustworthiness with ethical procedures such as human subject considerations of informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). These assessments also included ethical considerations in power relationships, recruitment, and data protection.

Research Design and Rationale

In this study, I focused on the viewpoint of the middle school teacher with the phenomenon of racialization impacting urban Black adolescents within the classroom environment and the school climate. The perspectives generated by the middle school teachers' experiences had roots beyond the classroom, as they included worldviews impacted by training, beliefs, values, self-efficacy, and varied sociocultural influences

(see Narayanan & Ordynans, 2022; Patterson, 2018; Sedova et al., 2016; Twiner et al., 2021; Wiig et al., 2018). Ravitch and Carl (2021) pointed to the complexities in individual-determined perspectives and interpretations as subjectively situated within personal contexts. Through the methodology and design of this study, I intended to take advantage of that tendency by engagement with middle school teachers around their worldviews within the impact of the racialization phenomenon. Qualitative methodology was a suitable process to investigate the varied perspectives and meaning-making, and the phenomenological design was an appropriate means of exploration and discovery around the phenomenon, which in this case was racialization.

Worldviews, as products of meaning-making, became the avenue of discussion, description, and interpretation recursively, as the engagements proceeded into in-depth discussions and analysis. Dawidowicz (2020) and Moustakas (1994) pointed to Husserl's philosophy of epoché as an absence of suppositions, a measure of exposition through an expression of consciousness. This expression of meaning-making is the essence of a qualitative design (Patton, 2015) and, more specifically, a phenomenological approach when assessed from the lived experience of a phenomenon.

The phenomenon within this study was racialization, and the middle school teachers were engaged around their worldviews relative to this phenomenon and its impact on the urban Black students within their classrooms. I employed a descriptive or transcendental phenomenological design to break down meanings and constituent impacts of the phenomenon into descriptive themes. These themes provided an essence of the teachers' experiences, leading to a descriptive understanding.

The teachers' expressions of conscious and unconscious intuitions provided descriptive understandings that illuminated routes toward meaning making around the phenomenon and thereby fulfilled the goals of this study. This approach is the essence of the qualitative methodology as it involves constructed meaning on the part of the participants. This construction was iterative as it involved repetitive discussions, producing rich descriptions, and arriving at the essence of participants' communicative intent. The exploration of meaning-making differs from the positivist approach in that there is no sought-after objective truth, but an unfolding of contextual truths as understood by the participants. This approach fitted the goals of this study, as I used the qualitative methodology to produce descriptive understandings on the part of the participants, deviating from quantitative approaches that do not represent constructed meaning from iterative dialogue.

The dialogue that precedes the constructed meaning-making requires a focal point or topic from which to launch the exploration and build descriptive understanding. The participants' worldviews, in this case, middle school teachers, were vast, highly contextual, and subjective. Therefore, a design was needed to galvanize the discussion around a reference point that had both apparent impacts and was worthy of intentional, conscious analysis. Moustakas (1994) pointed to the intention in conscious interpretation and description of external stimuli as having both an appearance-based impact and an internally modulated interpretation that engages pre-existing schema. With this understanding I pursued conversation into appearance-related and interpretive dialogue built from worldviews, values, and beliefs. I used the phenomenological design to engage

in the appearance of what was and what was surmised in consciousness. The phenomenon of racialization served as the focus of attention relative to the urban Black adolescents in the classroom. The middle school teacher's assessment of the impact of this phenomenon became the focus of exploration and descriptive understanding.

Research Questions

There were two research questions for this study and one supplemental question in this study.

- How do middle school teachers experience the effects of racialization?
- How do the meaning-making of teachers and urban Black middle school students coalesce and differ around racialization?
- What solutions do middle school teachers offer for mediating the effects of racism on the learning trajectories of urban Black middle school students?

These questions were intended to describe the impact of racialization on the sensibilities and worldviews of middle school teachers and how they negotiated these impacts and perspectives relative to marginalized students in the classroom context. These students experienced meaning-making as impacted by their sociocultural experience of racialization. The teacher also brought a background into the classroom that included concepts and contexts that racialization had impacted. The positionality, dialogic interaction, and mediatorial activity of the teacher in the classroom communicated an essence that impacted the student around the phenomenon. The exploration that proceeded from this study was intended to encourage reflection on the

teachers' worldviews as influencing her demeanor and its perceived impact in the classroom. The descriptions and understandings that emerged were further intended to answer the supplemental question on solutions that impacted positive developmental trajectory for the urban Black student.

Research Tradition

I used a qualitative research methodology for this study. Patton (2015) and Ravitch and Carl (2021) pointed to the meaning-making aspect of qualitative research from the human perspective. In qualitative research, the researcher is included as a biased party and resident within situated contexts. This requires researchers to separate their beliefs and values to avoid bias in the study. However, the beliefs and values of the participants are necessary factors within the study, contributing to the context. Qualitative research sets itself apart from quantitative research in recognizing human construction as contributory to outcomes and representing significant meaning. The positivist aspect of quantitative research, which emphasizes definitive measurement and objective realism as the measure of proper outcomes, does not prioritize the impact of human contribution. This human contribution was central to the elements within the present study.

Rudiments in this study mirrored components of the transcendental phenomenological approach as articulated by Moustakas (1994). This design's factors focus on *intentionality*, *intuition*, *intersubjectivity*, and *semiotics*, all contained within the consciousness of the participants (see Moustakas, 1994, p. 28-38). The participants in this study, the middle school teachers, had experiences within the classroom that required reflection relative to the phenomenon of interest. This phenomenon, racialization,

invoked a response worthy of exploration, as its impact upon the middle school teacher impacted the marginalized students under their tutelage, whether positive or negative. The phenomenological design entailed and promoted the necessary reflection that probed meaning-making and answered the research questions.

Role of Researcher

I played a definitive role in the study as an impactful presence in the context, the dynamics of the setting, the structure of the process, and the tone of the engagements with the participants. Ravitch and Carl (2021) pointed to the primary role the researcher plays in qualitative studies, alluding to "social identity" and "positionality" as central to the researcher's approach (p.10). This study, in its cultural ramifications and socio-political tone, required that I remain aware of biases and tonal approaches toward participants in presenting questions. I practiced reflexivity to recognize and address any apparent biases that might compromise the flow of the interactions.

These reflexive practices engaged sensibilities and broached proactive approaches that not only engaged researcher bias but put at ease participants who could have felt unsure of their reflections being heard and respected. Crawford and Knight Lynn (2020) pointed to the need to notice body language and vocal tone and how they impact interviewees. A solution that the authors put forward is to reduce notetaking, letting the recorder retain the bulk of responses, as the interviewer focuses on maintaining continuity of comfort and attention. This approach is also practical when empathy is required on the researcher's part, as recognition is enhanced when attention is primary.

The sensitive nature of this topic had the potential to invoke strong feelings which necessitated a sensitive and engaged posture; therefore, maintaining an attentive and responsive position was necessary. Establishing an informed positionality from the beginning of contact with the participants helped to negotiate possible power dynamics. The presentation of the role of the researcher as the interviewer and communicating the position of deferring to the knowledge and input of the interviewees helped to lay the groundwork for the interactive relationship. This approach to positioning (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) is also vital in gender-presenting dichotomies where the interviewer is a different gender than the interviewee. In this study, I needed to be able to negotiate the context of female interviewees. This situation can adversely affect the tone of the engagement if the power dynamics appear slanted toward the interviewer (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This threat was mitigated when given attention within the initial engagements, both recruitment and introduction and with demonstrated attentiveness and respect during the sessions. Any conflicts that might be present from prior work relationships were also addressed initially in the provision of the grounds for the interviewing relationship and process.

Addressing power dynamics and conflicts of interest aim to provide a comfortable atmosphere for the participants. The qualitative methodology is predicated on retrieving information that is not coerced and represents the situated contexts of the participants. An intimidating and unsupportive environment can compromise the needed information, as the participant(s) might feel unsafe. This understanding necessitated a reflexive

positioning from the researcher and a continual recognition of maintaining a demeanor that encouraged participation and diminished discomfort.

Participant Criteria

Middle school teachers of urban Black children were the target population of this study. For the study sample, teachers were required to be certified, having undergone teacher training, be at least 18 years old, and have a status beyond preservice designation. Having at least three years of experience would be necessary to have mediated the COVID-19 destabilization in the classroom. This experience interpreted understanding before and after the imposed restrictions within their lived classroom experience.

The teachers' lived experience with this population of students within the context of racialization had significant ramifications within the classroom for both the students and the teacher. The teacher held authority and mediatorial control within the classroom and thereby became a filter or conduit for the classroom impact of racialization. This positionality qualified the middle school teacher as an information source for reflective worldviews from personal and professional experiences from racialization's impact within the classroom, school climate, and personal values and beliefs. As these effects have multiple dynamics, several considerations were pursued when positing criteria for participation.

The sampling strategy for this study required sensitivity and consideration for the plight of the middle school teacher amid the sociopolitical struggle that embodied this topic. This consideration called for a recruiting pool including current and retired teachers within a 12-year window after retirement. This 12-year window presupposed

significant relevance to current detail and the prevailing phenomenon. Snowball sampling was employed as teachers and past teachers emboldened to address this issue knew of others of the same persuasion. Ravitch and Carl (2021) alluded to the need for informed consent from an organizational entity when the researcher is viewed as an outsider relative to the organizational structure. The particulars of the consent must be transparent and embedded, stating goals, expectations, description of the study, protections for privacy and confidentiality, and participant risks and benefits. This requirement was unnecessary in this study because there was not an organizational entity as a intermediary; however, these same points for consent were extended to all the individual participants.

The participants for this study were middle school teachers of urban Black adolescents within a public school system or retired teachers matching the same criteria, having retired within the last 12 years. Current teachers must have had at least three years of experience with urban Black students in their classrooms. These criteria were placed for a variety of reasons. One of these reasons is the reflective opportunities that were recently encouraged through the experience of COVID-19. Narayanan and Ordynans (2022) allude to the destabilization of COVID-19 and its impact on teachers regarding personal self-efficacy and the involved meaning-making accompanying such a challenge. This window of opportunity for reflective thought and mediating sociocultural differences has been relevant within the last three years. Expanding the 12-year window for retired teachers broaches their experiences before COVID-19, what they have observed and reflected on afterward, and multiple years of experience with various iterations of student populations.

Another reason for these criteria is what Ladson-Billings (2009) termed “wisdom of practice” (p. 179). Ladson-Billings (2009) asserted that wisdom is imputed beyond just knowledge, and seasoning aids in building this wisdom. Williams (2018b) added to this discussion by providing a scenario of the teacher establishing an identity through negotiating context and social relationships that include sociocultural backgrounds and belief systems. Additionally, within the context of negotiating relationships through educating adolescents, time must be allowed for teachers to gain experience navigating the many complexities of adolescent development. The learning experiences of varied tenures ensure the exploration of the viewpoints and worldviews of recent educators and longer-term educators. Years of experience are expected to translate to reflective content or experience-laden substance for reflection on the phenomenon, as multiple experiences can lead to in-depth descriptive discussion. This depth provides sufficient descriptions for developing common themes across participants (Dawidowicz, 2020; Moustakas, 1994). Achieving such depth of discussion precludes a need for many participants, which can add excess and needless analysis (Dawidowicz, 2020).

Determining the appropriate number of participants is a supposition that assesses data saturation. Crawford (2020) pointed to two criteria that are determinant in the saturation assessment. These criteria, the lack of new information and unexplained phenomena, satisfy the assignment of saturation, although these determinations may present a challenge to justify. However, thick descriptions that detail sufficient descriptions of the participants, the setting, and in-depth data collection are expected to justify estimating the number of participants and the appropriateness of data content to

answer the research questions. For phenomenological studies, Creswell and Poth (2018) posited 5 to 25 participants, and Dawidowicz (2020) identified 8 to 12 participants. Williams (2018b) study of Black middle school teachers' life histories consisted of four teachers, and Ladson-Billings (2009) study of successful teachers of Black adolescent students totaled eight teachers. Therefore, the plan for 5-10 participants seemed appropriate.

Although care was taken to maintain good relationships with initial contacts and to initiate good and transparent rapport with prospective participants, the possibility remained that the appropriate number of participants may still need to be attained. This could be due to the topic, discomfort with sharing, aversion to research and researchers, unwillingness to sacrifice time, or other personal concerns. Whatever the reason, there needed to be an alternative plan to involve other middle school teachers. This alternate plan must stay within the alignment and tone of the study to maintain similar engagement with all the participants.

Maintaining this approach would entail returning to initial school system contacts to broach other methods, including expanding contacts to other community representatives with attachments to school system representatives. I have been a long-term community resident with varied contacts within the community sphere; therefore, expanding contacts was a viable alternative. Maintaining lines of contact leads to nurturing trust, which is necessary for garnering genuine responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Building and maintaining relationships also add strength to member checking of data, enhancing detail in content, and verifying the dependability of the instrument.

Data Collection Instrument

The instrument for this study was the semi-structured interview. A vital facet of this engagement was the relationship of the researcher and the participants in what Rubin and Rubin (2012) termed as a "conversational partnership" (p.7). This partnership entails mutual respect and ease of discussion, allowing for an exchange that answers the research questions with sufficient, thoughtful, and revealing responses. Rubin and Rubin (2012) pointed out an imbalance in the conversation, as the researcher asks prepared questions, soliciting participant responses. However, even though there is a purposeful structure to the conversation, a friendly relationship is sought in the engagement. Affable relationships are essential for gathering information that pulls from the experience, knowledge, and understanding of the participants. A genuine atmosphere of positive connection is an output that adds depth and authenticity to the interview.

The semi-structured interview design is responsive interviewing that flexes and adjusts to the participants with added questions and probes beyond the initial interview questions. Rubin and Rubin (2012) alluded that interactions can broach emotional responses based on personal convictions and backgrounds. Therefore, the researcher must always manage personal bias to support the continuity and geniality of the relationship and conversation. Additionally, the reciprocity of the relationship must consistently be recognized as a priority because both parties are making significant contributions of themselves in time and energy, and this reality commands respect.

The tools brought to these interviews supported the participants' convenience in recognizing their time and comfort. The primary tool was the ZOOM computer

application with the recording option. In an occurrence where the interviewee might desire an in-person engagement, an electronic recorder would be employed; however, in this study, none of the participants requested an in-person interview. Note-taking was used sparingly, as attention to interviewee responses was primary in maintaining response-ability and sensitivity. Supplementary information and validation of data credibility were pursued through member checks from participants. Crawford (2020) alluded to the importance of member checks in that participants continue to be involved to ensure data reflects a correct representation.

This discussion was constructed from research questions posed to explore the constructed realities of middle school teachers. These responses were expected to reveal multiple constructed realities, also containing diverse reasonings behind the realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The convenience these questions brought as study tools was their utility in engaging with the participants' worldviews. The study's goals could only be met with engaged and forthright participation. Therefore, the questions were presented as to be convenient for the sensitivities and sensibilities of the participants.

The main questions for this study engaged the participants by moving from broad questions concerning experiences in the classroom and the development of connection with the students. The following questions distilled connectedness into its classroom value and how connectedness looked with urban Black middle school students. The closing questions specifically looked at the experience of the urban Black middle school student from the teacher's perspective. Rubin and Rubin (2012) detailed the importance of starting questions with a broad and relatable perspective and specifying the study's

focal points as the questions progress. These questions should lead to discussion and engaging conversation rather than lead the participants to narrow answers. Additional questions follow as probes and prompts as a function of the discussion for more detailed and in-depth conversation (Dawidowicz, 2020; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The following questions were the main questions that were asked during each interview:

- Q1. What challenges and successes have you experienced as a middle school teacher?
- Q2. How have your training and experiences helped you nurture and maintain connections with your students?
- Q3. How would you describe the value of connectedness to belonging and learning?
- Q4. How would you describe the process of culturally connecting with urban Black middle schoolers?
- Q5. How would you describe the sensitivity of the school environment to validating the identity of the urban Black middle schooler?
- Q6. How do you envision a role that enhances the school experience of the urban Black middle schooler?

The following are examples of probing questions to produce more detail:

- P1. Can you describe an experience that stands out as an example of the power of connection between student and teacher.
- P2. How do you see the norms of adolescent development as impacting levels of connection?

- P3. How have administrative and institutional figures supported continuing education for building connections between students and teachers?
- P4. Can you describe how you have experienced the value of student connectedness and academic achievement on a personal level?
- P5. How would you describe the impact of social stigma (racialization) on the Black student?
- P6. How do you see your personal experiences and background as impacting your level of connection with Black students?
- P7. How have these experiences impacted your perspectives on racialization?

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Analysis

Conscientiousness and sensitivity remained necessary in recruitment, participation details, and data collection concerning the participants in the study. The interviewing process was a conversation, and what preceded the interaction and what occurred during it played a significant role in the quality of the conversation. Rubin and Rubin (2012) alluded to the need for respect and trust from the invitation to participate and throughout the interview conversation. The recruitment of participants indicated this recognition, as potential participants were invited based on their knowledge and experience of the topical phenomenon. The questions developed for the conversation assumed participant knowledge and understanding. The prompts and probes realized as a function of conversational dynamics were also based on respect for what the participant brought to the discussion.

The participants in this study were, or had been, middle school teachers, and their knowledge of their craft, experiential interaction with Black urban students, and their proclivities and worldviews would be the focus. The phenomenological topic of racialization provided a layer of needed descriptive understanding that required referencing within recruitment materials. The information conveyed in the invitation communicated respect for the input the teachers provided, trust in their professional assessments, and their intuitiveness in processing the impact of the racialization phenomenon. The letter also communicated the positionality of the researcher and the connection to the topic. This approach respected all participants' roles and the need to establish a conversational partnership (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Study's Relationship Origin

This conversational partnership found origination from prior relationships with administrators and teachers within the metropolitan area. I have worked in the community with primary schools and had established connections that paved the way for enhanced relationships with a broader pool of possible participants. The quality of these prior relationships provided the means for snowball sampling, as trust and respect have been established and preceded the recruitment. The tone of these prior relationships found replication within the recruitment letter and following contact with responding participants identified from the primary contacts. Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasized the importance of building and maintaining connections for rich conversational partnerships. Starting from a position that communicates professional and personal respect helps launch partnerships where greater conversational detail is required.

Participation

The recruitment items consisted of a letter with a personal introduction and a detailed description of the study, possible outcomes, notice of consent, time commitment, setting, and contact information. This letter carried a tone that communicated respect and curiosity as it represented the initial attempt to engage prospective participants in a conversational partnership. The nurturing and maintenance of this partnership were my responsibility, as the researcher, and the tenor of respect and curiosity were evident from the study design and radiated within the invitation and through data collection and analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed to the nature of naturalistic studies to unfold information as the study progresses. Therefore, the relationship must contain appropriate respect and flexibility to allow detailed information to emerge. The letter should initiate an affable partnership's transparency, respect, and curiosity.

The letter was emailed to a list of prospectives compiled through snowball sampling (See Appendix for a copy of the recruitment letter). However, the initial contacts that precipitated the snowball sampling were contacted by phone and email to schedule a meeting to discuss the study and how to approach prospective participants better. These initial contacts were from prior relationships with former middle school teachers and administrators. Middle school teachers serving as initial contacts were asked to participate in the interviews and acquire prospective participants.

The initial contacts, middle school teachers, were asked to review the letter and decide whether to participate in an interview. Additionally, the middle school teachers were asked to share the letter's content with other middle school teachers within their

circle of influence. Subsequently, if requested, the letter was to be conveyed to prospective participants by me, as the researcher. All those deciding to participate would respond for the conveyance of a consent form, with the return of it, whether by email or in person, being a requirement to participate.

A consent form would be conveyed, preferably by email, to those accepting the invitation. This consent form provided:

- the opportunity to understand what the research entails,
- the risks and benefits to them,
- assurances of confidentiality, and
- the freedom to withdraw at any point if desired.

Informed consent is generally a signed document indicating an understanding of what is involved while participating. However, as Rubin and Rubin (2012) pointed out, signing this document can be seen as a compromise of confidentiality. If this is a problem with participants, a coded signature can be applied if a signature waiver is unacceptable. For this study, a coded signature was unnecessary. The consent form was retained in a password protected computer, as informed consent must be received before the participant may participate.

After receiving the consent form and addressing questions and concerns, an interview was scheduled for each participant. Respecting the participants' time constraints is a means of demonstrating respect and sensitivity to the participant's needs. This awareness demonstrates alignment with the role of the researcher as managing an affable relationship with each participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Scheduling required flexibility

within a specified time frame that respected the needs of each participant but also aided the researcher in maximizing involvement and engagement as data collection moved to analysis and interpretation. Since the interviews were conducted separately, scheduling was established within the researcher/participant relationship, with member checking as a part of the conversations that emphasized interpretations and thematic coding. The participant was asked to play a significant role in clarifying content as scheduling allowed.

Participation was guided by an interview protocol that included the interview questions and prompts to pursue greater detail. Prompts proved unnecessary as the discussions proceeded with rich detail. Rubin and Rubin (2012) referred to the rich detail that may emerge from engaged and genial relationships that can develop within the conversational partnership. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Moustakas (1994) alluded to the function of the phenomenological approach as producing detailed discussion that reveals intentional consciousness about the phenomenon of focus. These discussions also touched upon unconscious renderings that revealed pre-existing schemas for all the participants, including myself.

Existing biases play a significant role in conversations and must be managed to maintain amicable relationships and beneficial discussions. Rubin and Rubin (2012) alluded to the conversational dynamic of the interviewer's personality and the interviewee's needs. In this situation, effectual emotions, shifts in the conversation, and biases, play a determinative role and require the interviewer to demonstrate openness to change to further the goals of the interview. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to "reactivity"

in naturalistic inquiry and how it plays a role in the participants' responses (p.95). The interviewer must be aware of reactionary responses and the need to manage their input to maintain the desired flow of information.

Engaged participation was expected to provide the needed information within the interview process. Therefore, the need to maintain positive connections with the participants was significant. This sensitivity to nurturing and maintaining attentive partnership should be present from the initial contact and follow into the scheduling and conduct within the interviews. Ravitch and Carl (2021) underlined the importance of keeping good relationships by prioritizing the needs of the participants in scheduling the interviews. This study prioritized using ZOOM technology, whereas scheduling could be more easily worked around the participants' time constraints.

The researcher should prioritize maintaining a good environment to enhance the conversational partnership. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited managing good responses in the interview process to maintain internal validity. Dawidowicz (2020) pointed to the need to bracket the interviewer's opinions from the participants' actual responses to maintain engagement with the flow of information. This attention to reflexivity maintains the continuity of the conversation and maintains the connection needed to promote a beneficial interview. As the conversation becomes amicable, respectful, and partnered, the collection of appropriate information becomes more probable, and the interaction beneficial for all involved.

Data Analysis

The data for this study was pursued along phenomenological lines and in a qualitative approach. Thereby, the voice of the participants was the vital data source that was pursued. Dawidowicz (2020) alluded to the importance of the participant's viewpoint as the centering point in the phenomenological methodology and that analysis is initiated within the data collection process. Probing questions aid in providing rich detail to represent the participants' perspectives more definitively. The data should be gathered in its entirety and analyzed to best represent the participants' accounts and understandings.

Descriptions and understandings that emanate from appropriate representations produce themes that are generalized depictions. These themes are sought outputs from phenomenological approaches, as they provide what Moustakas (1994) referred to as "phenomenological reduction" (p. 90). Saldaña (2016) expanded on the idea of coding by pointing out that coding also "distills, condenses, and summarizes" data (p. 4). Themes can be captured within coding processes that organize patterns within the data. This study used multiple coding to capture descriptions and understandings to arrive at conceptual themes.

Themes emerge from the descriptive or transcendental approach, as Moustakas (1994) referenced. This methodology has a two-fold slant as it looks at what is apparent in a phenomenon and how the object appears in the consciousness. The object influences an initial response that has its dynamic. However, there is also a response in the consciousness that involves an intentional act of processing through meaning. The pre-reflective schema or perception acted on by the object and the consciousness-based

meaning are locked in a relationship as iterations of the phenomenon impact the worldview of the one experiencing the phenomenon. The activities in intentionality that reduce the experience of the phenomenon into parts of meaning are the focus of this study. Themes emerge from interpretations of shared meanings from experience-based descriptions and understandings from those being interviewed about the phenomenon's impact.

The coding methods employed in this study were intended to capture the essence of meanings emerging from the research questions. Lived experiences and meaning-making of middle school teachers around the phenomenon of racialization were the triggers from which the meanings and interpretations of meaning were extricated. Moustakas (1994) pointed out that “intentional experiences” incorporate exposures that are experienced and interpreted through activities of “thought, perception, memory, judgment, and feeling” and that these intentional contributions contain themes to be extricated (p. 57). The resulting interpretations provide the generalizable concepts that emerge from the process of the transcendental or descriptive phenomenological approach, as referenced by Moustakas (1994).

Data segmentation to illuminate themes is an essential process in the phenomenological methodology as descriptions and understandings emerge and are textualized. However, a danger emerges when the process loses the context of the conversations, and the nuance of the *-emic* is lost in the pursuit of generalizing themes. Keeping within the confines of context in relation to the research questions aids in building focused and context-laden responses that facilitate the recognition of saturation.

When no new information emerges within the separate interviews, and all the questions' constructive elements are answered (Crawford, 2020), additional analysis becomes non-value added, and the -emic within the data remains contextualized. The process then moves to interpreting the data with attention to rich detail to capture the essence of what emerges during the inquiry. Careful use of the appropriate coding and re-coding processes is warranted to maintain the participants' perspectives.

Trustworthiness

Attention to trustworthiness throughout the study helped to ensure a credible study. Ravitch and Carl (2021) posited that adhering to approaches that contribute to trustworthiness is beyond technical adherence to procedural tasks, also giving attention to managing relationships with participants. The participants are the source of relevant data through their experiences and perspectives; therefore, the proper handling of their personal and information-sharing proclivities is vital. Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed to the “reactivity” of the participants as playing a determinant role and effective in terms of internal validity (pp. 94-95). Therefore, maintaining an affable, sensitive, and flexible conversational partnership is necessary to maintain credible and rich interchange.

The viability and vitality of what participants contribute are demonstrated in the importance of member checking. Crawford (2020) pointed to member checking as much more than a checking-in process in which the participants only review the transcripts and data. The member-checking process ensures that what was collected, understood, and interpreted by the researcher was a correct representation of the participants. Ravitch and Carl (2021) presented a detailed perspective of member checking that represents a

processed and systematic attitude in the involvement of participants. “Participant validation strategies,” as presented by Ravitch and Carl (2021), intuit a more precise terminology that puts the participants in a position that challenges interpretations not only at the close of the study but throughout its progression (p. 176). This attention to this level of detail aligns with the approach of a conversational partnership, as the participant is included as a well-recognized partner in the actual process.

The burden of responsibility to ensure the necessary interchange that fulfills the study’s design falls upon the researcher as the caretaker of the study’s entire process. Ravitch and Carl (2021) pointed to “transformational validity” as an immersive process that subjects the researcher to a reflexive demeanor leaning toward a better understanding and interpretation of participants’ contributions. As the researcher gives attention to personal adjustments within the process, biases and misunderstandings become more apparent and can be bracketed within the discussions with participants. This orientation aids in developing and nurturing partnerships, paving the way for rich detail within the discussions.

Substantial detail goes a long way towards establishing the credibility of the data as it adds completeness in answers to the research questions and works with transferability, dependability, and confirmability to add a trustworthy structure in the technical approach to constructing a study. Creswell and Poth (2018) used the term *validation*, even with its quantitative history, to mirror the qualitative trustworthiness and serve as a process for assuring accuracy. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability work within the validating process to certify the

authenticity of the study. Establishing credibility entails processes that add believability to the data while answering the research questions. Ravitch and Carl (2021) identified credibility as dealing with complexities and hard-to-answer themes that become apparent.

The actionable approaches toward establishing credibility reveal the functionality of the study design and mechanisms and the viability of the data. The phenomenological approach in its revealing of participant conscious and unconscious intentionality requires approaches to credibility that appropriately represent the participants' descriptions and meanings. Tools for this purpose can be thick descriptions, member checking, triangulation, persistent observation, reflexivity, and peer debriefing (Crawford, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018). All are mechanisms that were used in this study to establish credibility.

Adding to credibility are mechanisms for ensuring transferability. Ravitch and Carl (2021) pointed out that transferability does not imply that results can be carried over to other settings. However, it ensures that context-related procedures appropriately representing participants' shared content are transferable to similarly conducted studies. The emergent nature of studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that require adaptations for the complexities of contexts and settings takes transferability away from a search for objective truth. A significant description and explanation of the mediating contextual variables gives the correct representation of transferability. Tools to represent transferability are reflexivity in presenting researcher roles and biases, thick descriptions, and significant participant variation (Crawford, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). All these tools were used in this study.

As information is obtained from the study population, the scrutiny involved in collecting, analyzing, and reporting data is representative of dependability. Ravitch and Carl (2021) pointed to the viability of research design in answering “core constructs and concepts” as a necessary argument in the proof of dependability (p. 171). The approaches also include an assessment of alignment, including the relevance in collecting and analyzing data concerning the research questions. Ravich and Carl (2021) alluded to triangulation and audits as mechanisms for establishing dependability. Both tools were used in this study.

The last element in this study for proving trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability has a basis in objectivity; however, a different angle is pursued because the emphasis in qualitative research is subjectivity. Ravitch and Carl (2021) posited objectivity as unattainable due to bias. Therefore, a subjective approach that broaches a certain neutrality and minimizes or demonstrates estrangement from unmentioned bias is a necessary vehicle. This goal is accomplished by recognizing and acknowledging biases that may be present throughout the study through structured reflexive intent. Methods employed to accomplish confirmability are triangulation, reflexivity, and external audits (Crawford, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). These methods were helpful in this study for confirmation strategies.

Trustworthiness is critiqued by how it measures up through the collective lenses of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed to the criticism of the naturalistic approach as its admitted subjective nature conflicts with the supposed objectivity of the quantitative approach. Whether the

quantitative approach is objective is a matter for another conversation; however, the resident bias with possible subjective interpretations is subjected to examinations under the four lenses that reduce inaccuracies and promote authenticity. The work of these focused examinations provides the grounding for replicative studies that further the understanding through related topical subject matters.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are explicitly connected to issues of trustworthiness as qualitative research aims to accurately represent the participants' contributions through the sensitive handling of both human and technical aspects. Asymmetries between the researcher and participants can lead to disrespectful interactions that compromise aspects of the study; however, sensitive, and empathetic attention by the researcher can reduce negative impacts (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This attention on the researcher's part supports the entrance of the multiplicity of situated truths and viewpoints that saturate the conversations around the research questions. This awareness supports a connected alignment from the design through data collection, analysis, and reporting. This connection of the technical structure to the sensitivity of nurturing and maintaining the conversational partnership cannot be understated, as they provide an ethical lens from which to conduct the study.

Other technical aspects relating to ethics are Institutional Review Board (IRB) considerations involving participation related to human subject concerns. The review will assess the ethical concerns of the study's structure and if it presents any concerns in recruitment, informed consent, data collection, and other agreements that impact privacy

and confidentiality (i.e., anonymity, waivers) or bring any risks or harm to the participants. Harms in this study were minimal due to transparency throughout the processes of recruitment, data collection, and reflexivity requirements. Additionally, participants were given coded identification to segment variable responses without using personal and private identifiers.

Maintaining an ethical lens throughout the study is a responsibility the researcher must take with honesty and sincerity. Protecting the privacy concerns of the participants and ensuring confidentiality are ongoing processes that enhance trust and help to nurture the conversational partnership (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The discussions that proceed from these relationships can provide rich and detailed descriptions and understandings; therefore, building, honoring, and respecting the people, the contexts, the settings, and what provides for affable and rich discussions is of the utmost importance.

Summary

This study explored the meaning-making of middle school teachers of urban Black adolescents through a qualitative design and using a phenomenological methodology. The phenomenon of racialization was the object that was subject to reduction into its constituencies of impact upon the middle school teacher while in reflection of their interactions with urban Black students within the classroom. Two primary purposes were pursued in this interview-based study. The first was the exploration of the perspectives of middle school teachers concerning their experiences with the racialization of urban Black middle school students. The second purpose was to explore teacher perspectives concerning the coalescing of student and teacher meaning-

making toward addressing racialization and revealing possible solutions. A supplementary goal of this study was to explore the mediatorial and translational position of the middle school teacher in support of students' development and educational trajectories. These goals required a methodology that would explore the participants' worldviews and provide a structure for describing patterns or themes present within the collective worldviews of the participants.

In the process of this approach the research questions broached to answer these goals were:

- How do middle school teachers experience the effects of racialization?
- How do the meaning-making of teachers and urban Black middle school students coalesce and differ around racialization?
- What solutions do middle school teachers offer for mediating the effects of racialization on the learning trajectories of urban Black middle school students?

The phenomenological approach explores the intentional consciousness of the teachers through the interview process. The outcomes intend to reveal themes that give descriptions and understandings of the worldviews of the teachers relative to racialization of urban Black middle school students.

The qualitative design, coupled with the phenomenological methodology, required alignment throughout the study to maintain the amicability of a conversational partnership and the integrity of technical appropriateness. The researcher's role requires nurturing and maintaining affable connections through managing biases, relationships,

power dynamics, and ethical concerns. Technical determinations in this role include the population of focus, participant criterion, sampling strategy, recruitment, contact strategies, indication of saturation, instrument protocols, and data collection appropriateness and adequacy.

These human and technical aspects of the study align with the qualitative approach that prioritizes context, setting, and the beliefs and values of the participants. However, the researchers' beliefs and values require bracketing to be separate from the representations of the participants. It is the consciousness of the participants that is the focus of the study, finding their expositions within the transcendental phenomenological perspective with a focus on intentionalities, intuitions, intersubjectivities, and semiotics as elocuted by Moustakas (1994, pp. 28-38). The role of the researcher preserves this structure by maintaining a position of reflexivity that recognizes the participants' reactivities to the subject matter and stays true to qualitative and phenomenological traditions.

Engaging the participants further entails adherence to protocols and criteria that conserve a "wisdom of practice" (Ladson-Billings, 2009) that looks not only at experience but also at the knowledge level attained from recent experience with the phenomenon. Adherence to appropriate criteria required having professionally trained and certified teachers older than 18 with at least three years of experience and retired teachers who have stepped away for no longer than 12 years. This window encompassed the experiences of the COVID-19 lessons in conjunction with the racialization phenomenon as it reflected on the reflections of middle school teachers within this

dynamic. The experiences of this period brought an expectation for thick descriptions and revelations of personal proclivities about the phenomenon, along with beliefs, values, and self-efficacies.

The setting for these engagements were interviews over the ZOOM platform, allowing for visual contact and recording capabilities. In-person interviews were also possible if requested by participants but were not requested in this study. All engagements were conducted with respect and amicable procedures to ensure participant comfort, as participation was voluntary and under a conversational partnership. This interaction included an invitation letter and an informed consent agreement that entailed risks, benefits, and all pertinent information for participation. Informed consent allowed the participant to understand the particulars of the study and their rights, including confidentiality and privacy assurances and the option to abstain from participation at any point. The invitation letter preceded the consent form and set the stage for engagement and the conversational partnership by setting a respectful and curious tone ahead of the data collection from the ZOOM platform. Interview scheduling was also respectful, communicating sensitivity to participants' scheduling considerations.

Setting the stage for respectful interaction is vital for this phenomenological approach, as detailed information is gleaned from the conscious expression of personal concern and revelations from the unconscious as a product of reflection. Pre-existing professional relationships with potential participants would provide a trusting framework if the relationship had been cordial, respectful, and amicable. This study drew from relationships such as these and proceeded with real possibilities for snowball sampling

under initial contacts' pre-existing relationships. This study was intended to adhere to an alignment that represented nurtured and maintained relationships with the study participants, including through data analysis and interpretation.

Member checking played a significant role in analysis, as participant involvement was pursued throughout the clarification of representations, understandings, descriptions, and interpretations. Careful and appropriate coding and recoding were active pursuits, as they aided in providing proper representations. These representations were the bedrock of the study and found assurance for accurate depiction through ethical and trustworthy practices as portrayed within study protocols.

These protocols for assuring trustworthiness represented credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility alludes to the believability of the study and is assured through member checking, triangulation, peer debriefing, reflexivity, and persistent observation. Transferability refers to the context-related procedures as being transferable as appropriate representations of participants' content and is assured through researcher reflexivity, thick description, and participant variation as possible. Dependability is demonstrated in research design and procedures and is checked by triangulation and audits. Confirmability minimizes and demonstrates estrangement from unmentioned bias and is verified through triangulation, reflexivity, and external audits.

Managing researcher bias and role impact through reflexivity is a tone that resonates throughout processes, ensuring trustworthiness. This oversight includes the review of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as assessors of ethical considerations of

human subjects' relevance. Ethical oversight within the study, including technical and human concerns, remained as my responsibility, as the researcher, throughout the study. A multiplicity of situated truths and perspectives would saturate the conversations, and an authentic representation of the content was necessary throughout collection, analysis, and reporting. Maintaining alignment that demonstrates respect and honoring the participants' contributions must be evident throughout the study as delivering accurate and representative content.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Racialization impacts the belongingness, identity, sense of safety, and achievement of urban Black students. The social assignment of racialization diminishes the contributions, the narratives, and the individualized life view of marginalized populations (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Mims & Williams, 2020). These impacts are translated into the school experience of urban Black middle school students when a school climate mimics disparaging biases and assignments seen and experienced in the larger society (Byrd, 2017; Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Griffin et al., 2017). The middle school teacher intervenes during this already chaotic developmental time for adolescents (Erikson, 1963) and interposes a mediatorial and transformative presence (Gray et al., 2018) in the educational world of the student.

Ladson-Billings (2009) and Williams (2018a) point to the value of sociocultural connection with students, emphasizing Black students who suffer under racialized assignments. Kramer and McKenzie (2022) point to the need for a safe environment with the input of sensitive, thoughtful, and flexible teachers. This situation illuminates the value of dialogue between the student and teacher, which is a focus on proximal learning and a point of reference in teacher professional training (Mercer et al., 2019; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Sedova et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Nevertheless, there remains a need for a more in-depth illumination that investigates the conscious and unconscious meaning-making that contributes to the understanding and dialogue from the teacher toward the urban Black middle school students' needs.

I pursued two primary purposes in this interview-based study. The first was the exploration of the perspectives of middle school teachers concerning their experiences with the racialization of urban Black middle school adolescents. The second purpose was to explore teacher perspectives concerning the coalescing of student and teacher meaning-making toward addressing racialization and revealing possible solutions. I also had a supplementary goal of exploring the mediatorial and translational position of the middle school teacher in support of these students' development and educational trajectory.

These purposes were explored through the following research questions:

- How do middle school teachers experience the effects of racialization?
- How do the meaning-making of teachers and urban Black middle school students coalesce and differ around racialization?
- What solutions do middle school teachers offer for mediating the effects of racialization on the learning trajectories of urban Black middle school students?

Students with sociocultural backgrounds promoting meaning-making and behaviors that do not match the expectations of the dominant group experience demeaning and invalidating messaging that inhibits their learning trajectories within the classroom. This assignment and its impact on marginalized students necessitate exploring and understanding the meaning-making of middle school teachers of urban Black adolescents and how they approach racialization in the school system and navigate its effects upon these students.

In this chapter, I provide a description of the recruitment, demographics, setting, informed consent, and data collection activities. These procedures provided a foundation for ensuring a safe and affable environment for the sharing of pertinent information and managing emotional effects that the questioning might promote. The demographics provided a diversity of experience and sociocultural background, coupled with the grounding and understanding gained from a variety of experiences as a seasoned middle school teacher. Conversations with these teachers contributed to substantial data collection which led to analysis and the process of phenomenological reduction. Additionally, the application of bracketing provided boundaries where the voice of the participants would be elucidated over biases that I might contribute. Data analysis also produced representations and structures that illuminated relationships within the data and the collusion of understandings that provided and illuminated themes of transcending value.

The portion of the chapter representing data analysis is followed by a review of trustworthiness issues as pursued within this study, in which I demonstrate and explain issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These descriptions include procedures in auditing, member checking, peer review, alignment, and other methods to ensure trustworthiness. The results are presented as responses to research questions, and I show how aligned processes were contributory. These approaches included various coding approaches, using the conceptual framework to build a top-down approach, and using data to employ a corollary bottom-up approach. Structural analysis is also presented to indicate how the research questions were integrated and addressed

within the data in a manner that not only meshed with the themes from the conceptual framework but were also thoroughly addressed by the participants. This chapter concludes with a summary and an intro into Chapter 5.

Setting

I conducted this study separately from the school setting to ensure confidentiality and privacy. I presumed that the information pursued was not of a nature that would bring substantial harm to the participants. However, sharing personal information, especially with possible emotive content, deserves the safety and support of a confidential and empathetic environment. For these reasons, participants were offered interviews via Zoom, with the offer of an in-person interview if desired. I also pursued discussions with middle school teachers not associated with the study to preemptively accustom myself to the sensitivities and concerns of teachers. These activities resulted in a modulated tonality within the interview structure. Additionally, communicative approaches were attenuated to keep attention focused, produce enhanced awareness of emotive cues, and support a communicative and conversational environment over the aura of a structured interview dynamic.

I constructed the invitation letter to promote this communicative and conversational atmosphere along with the details of what the study entailed and its requirements. Even with this attention to details, teachers were slow in responding to the study invitation for reasons that may have included the timing of the request (end of school term), avoidance of racialization topic, and reticence in responding to studies in general. I thus assumed that snowball sampling would yield better recruitment results;

however, this approach seemed only marginally effective. Recruitment was actively pursued over a 3-month period with two amendments to the consent form (per teacher advice) with IRB approval. These activities produced eight inquiries. These contacts included e-mail messaging and phone calls for further discussion. From these discussions five respondents followed through and assented, responded affirmatively to the consent form, and were scheduled for interviews. As mentioned earlier, the snowball referral process was marginally effective; however, it was supplemented with community contact referral to round out the recruitment process and produce these five participants.

All five participants chose the Zoom application as it provided convenience for their scheduling, comfort, travel concerns, and ease of confidentiality. Overall, comfort was an essential element in this study, as an affable conversational environment was the sought-after medium to provide the most beneficial tone for data collection. This setting did provide the appropriate environment, as all the interviews proved affable and conversational, with little hindrance for in-depth and rich conversations.

Demographics

The demographics (see Table 1) and how they presented throughout the study indicated benefit in ethnic and gender diversity and multi-year experience base. Gender and ethnicity were not focal points in this study but were noted as presenting factors along with years of teaching experience. However, their presence proved a beneficial reference in the context of the teachers' classroom experiences and dialogues with the students. In addition, teaching certification in Michigan qualified these teachers to teach students from seventh to 12th grade. Thereby, the schools in which they taught could

assign them to teaching positions from middle school through high school, which added experiential perspectives to this study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Ethnicity	Gender	Years Teaching	Teaching Middle School	Current Status
JB	White	Male	32	7	University Professor. Retired 8 years from primary school
KF	Black	Male	19	5	Currently teaching primary school
MAK	White	Female	18	2	University Program Facilitator. Retired 5 years from primary school
MG	White	Female	24	4	Retired 7 years from primary school
RH	Black	Female	25	variable	Retired for 2 years from primary school

As referenced earlier, intentionally recruiting with ethnic and gender specifications were not requirements for this study, as the initial focus was on the professional import of middle school teachers under the specter of racialization while teaching urban Black adolescent students. However, how these teachers modulated and

integrated these realities into their professional import added depth. Additionally, the majority of these teachers being retired was not a hindrance, as the wisdom garnered from the number of years teaching added perspective. The perspective of a current teacher within the mix did not indicate a substantial difference from the experiences of the other teachers. Also, having two teachers that moved to the University environment added the perspective of seeing student educational continuity and provided overall reflective value to the study. My attempt to steer the study away from societal discussions on racialization and remove distracting content was unnecessary, as the teachers' experience and maturity attenuated deviations from the interview questions. Overall, this diverse grouping was not intended but added value.

Data Collection

The study protocol required five to 10 participants. Because of recruitment difficulties, recruitment efforts were adjusted after receiving IRB approval. The retirement window was expanded from 5 years to 7 and finally to 12 years. Additionally, through IRB approval, the study location was expanded from the metropolitan area to a region that included much of central and southern lower Michigan. These changes proved helpful, as they included teachers with a wealth of knowledge, experience, and understanding, and one who was a long-time teacher in the metropolitan area but had continued and elevated their teaching career in another locale in southern Michigan.

Recruitment proved difficult for an apparent variety of reasons. A teacher served as the point of contact, and through snowball sampling, she conveyed the invitation to current and former teachers in her circle. Later, as participants were added, a request was

made of them to contact others in the attempt to increase the number of participants. Additionally, support was sought from community members within my network. Still, there was a dearth of responses as two teachers had consented and then changed their minds; others, maybe because the request was initiated during summer vacation, were reticent in responding (understandable), and others may have been hesitant due to the topic and the current political climate. This last possibility was noted when discussing the topic among teachers in a community meeting.

However, five participants were found, informed consent was pursued through e-mail, and discussion was broached with participants before data collection to explain the study, what the timing, climate, and tone would be, and obtain their preference for in-person or through the Zoom application. Zoom technology offers more accessibility, and giving participants options enhances congeniality and nurtures affable relationships, leading to better and richer conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All the participants expressed anticipation for the interview and opted for the Zoom option. Obtaining the informed consent was seamless as, per request, they all responded to the e-mail with "I consent."

After obtaining the consent, I set dates for the interview, which was to be done by Zoom technology, both audio and video, recorded and transcribed through a purchased license for Zoom Workplace. The level of confidentiality and privacy on the researcher's end was accomplished by isolated home and office locations, and the participant determined their level of assured confidentiality and privacy from home and office locations. Scheduling was seamless, as all conflicts were negotiated, and dates and times

were set and followed. All the interviews were scheduled for 1 hour for 1 day, with the option of reconnection for a 20 – 30-minute member checking discussion if a participant consented after viewing the transcript. This member-checking option would be forgone only at the request of the participant.

The participant was engaged and welcomed on the day and time of the interview. After a brief introduction to the study, the participant was asked if there were any questions and advised that the interview was being recorded and that they had the right to have the recording stopped and to exit the interview at any time. Recording started as the participant assented to their readiness for the interview. A phone recorder was used as a backup in case of technological issues with the Zoom recording. The recording and the “cloud” function for transcription were then engaged. After the interview was completed, both recordings were stopped. The participant was asked if there were anything else they would like to say, thanked for their participation, and invited to initiate contact for further questions or clarifications. Reference was made to the thank you gift (gift card) to be sent to the address asked for and given during the last portion of the recording.

Data collection, in terms of the actual process, was followed as presented in the previous chapter without change. Interviews were limited to 1 hour. The affability necessary for a conversational partnership was present throughout, leading to rich and detailed discussion. The participants indicated no hindrance in expressing intentional and intuitive discussion regarding experiencing the phenomenon. Emotive affect was present for all the participants, as effect was indicated, both consciously and unconsciously. The participants demonstrated reactivity to elements of the conversations that lighted upon

touchpoints from experiential memories as impacted by what and how the children presented. The depth of their emotive presentations was surprising in their completeness, as they encompassed an understanding of elements of the lived experiences of the children as adolescents and urban Black students. The participants' responses also demonstrated cultural humility, sensitivity, and the desire for connection and learning.

Data Analysis

Beginning the data analysis process required understanding the phenomenological reduction approach, maintaining continuity in the participants' voice from data collection through analysis, and how the alignment with theoretical and conceptual frameworks would be represented. Dawidowicz (2020) refers to the participants' voice as a centering factor in the phenomenological methodology. The goals, research questions, and associated interview questions provided a framework from which to build a descriptive and understandable structure; however, the participant's contributions fill out how the study is presented and perceived. Therefore, the participants' expressed and textualized lived experiences and meaning-making required articulation to build thematic relevance.

Building this conceptualized approach required an initial "top-down" process emanating from theoretical and conceptual frameworks and then filling this structure with a "bottom-up" handling of data as provided by the participants. It was decided to abandon the planned NVivo application to handle the data using a more "hands-on" approach using Excel spreadsheets. Spreadsheets were used to list and segment phrases that coincided with pre-determined codes emanating from the conceptual framework and

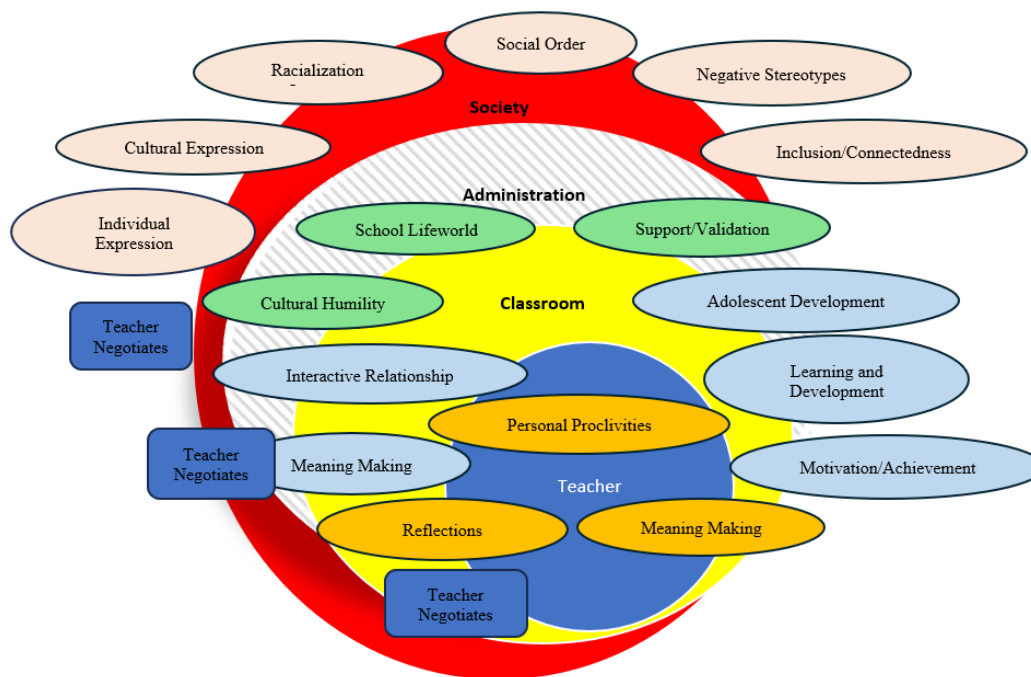
broached through the interview questions. Separate spreadsheets were created for each participant with pre-determined initial coding.

Initial Coding

As mentioned earlier, a top-down approach was employed to build a structure, as codes were constructed from themes within the conceptual framework. A sociological framework was intuited from theoretical and conceptual frameworks that included four spheres of influence: society, school administration, the classroom, and the teacher. The phenomenon of study, racialization, is embedded within the social structure of society, yet its effect filters into the other spheres. At the same time, the school administration can become a proxy or a sieve, the classroom, a landing spot for proximal learning in an intersubjective environment, and the teacher, the mediating and transformative figure in the learning environment. The teacher was the focus of this study as she negotiated all the spheres and reflects, meaning makes, intuits, and mediates in the classroom and in the mind and heart of the student. The pre-determined codes are intended to reflect relevant elements within the spheres of influence (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Mapping (Initial Coding)



Note: Society = Critical/Critical Race Theory (Racialization Phenomenon); Administration = Sieve (proxy/support); Classroom = Intersubjective/Intra-subjective (Proximal learning); Teacher = Phenomenological Content.

Although racialization is the phenomenon of interest that permeates all spheres, racialization is an element of study within Society (as depicted in *Figure 1*) in its overall concept, notwithstanding the effects emanating from its expression. This abstraction was important as the analysis proceeded, as teachers would indicate little difference between the adolescent student and the adolescent Black student; "But it doesn't even matter. Kids are kids. They still have issues that need to be addressed", "biochemically and mentally,

all kinds of things are happening," "every kid has a problem." However, still acknowledging the impacts of racialization that might appear as poverty, shame, and marginalization along cultural differences;" I need to go out and learn that culture and find people who are willing to take the time to share it with me and make sure I understand things," "students that may come to you who don't have food at home and you are their only source of breakfast," "things that affect children in the urban area and in the city area that people don't necessarily ... take an account", "had no role models to show them what an education could give them," "if you don't like kids - don't be in the classroom. And if you don't like black kids - get the hell out - because they know."

The initial codes are broad and cover a range of reflections communicated by the participants as they talked about their experiences within the classroom (see Table 2). For example, under the sphere of the *Teacher* and the code of *Meaning Making*, a participant stated, "Parents send you the best kids they have" and "get to work with the people that are in front of me," and under the sphere of *Society* and the code of *Negative Stereotypes* a participant stated, "culture does not support people of color in recovery." Under the *Classroom* sphere and the *Interactive Relationships* code, a participant stated, "I could pull the student out in the hallway and give him a 3rd degree ... but they know it's all out of love", and under the *Classroom* sphere, and the *Learning and Development* code, a participant stated, "the stuff that I was doing was constructive to an education."

Table 2*Initial Codes*

Code	Sphere	Sample Quote
Cultural Expression	Society	<i>I'm only allowed to see what I'm allowed to see and ... be in that realm as much as they will let me be in that realm.</i>
Individual Expression	Society	<i>Kids dealing with depression.</i>
Inclusion/Connectedness	Society	<i>I could take them out and show them what an education could give them.</i>
Negative Stereotypes	Society	<i>Preconceived notions.</i>
Racialization	Society	<i>Culture does not support people of color in recovery.</i>
Social Order	Society	<i>My experience or exposure to black people was very minimal.</i>
Adolescent Expression	Classroom	<i>Every kid has a problem.</i>
Cultural Humility	Administration/Classroom	<i>You can't just expect your students to make adjustments for you. It's got to be the other way around.</i>
Interactive Relationship	Classroom	<i>Praising them, you know, for the things that they do, you know, turning their weaknesses into strength.</i>
Learning and Development	Classroom	<i>I need to figure out where you are right now and how to bring you up. What's my strategy that I'm going to use to make you better.</i>
Meaning Making	Classroom	<i>I had to have the kids know that I was there. I knew they could be successful, and hopefully they absorb that.</i>
Motivation/Achievement	Classroom	<i>If you can get that through to a junior high kid ... you have a beast of a brain for the rest of their life.</i>
School Lifeworld	Administration/Classroom	<i>If you get a bad administrator. You end up spending at least 25% of your time trying to figure out how to outfox the administrator.</i>
Support/Validation	Administration/Classroom	<i>She just needed somebody to understand and respect her creativity.</i>
Meaning Making	Teacher	<i>I'm teaching them to learn... not what to think.</i>
Personal Proclivities	Teacher	<i>My dad always said don't be a phony.</i>
Reflections	Teacher	<i>All they want you to do is be honest, and they want you to acknowledge things.</i>

For each interview question for each participant, impactful phrases were placed alongside existing codes found within the spheres. Care was taken not to force phrases into codes, as phrases were found to fit under specific codes because of the alignment of the conceptual framework with the interview questions. It was important to make the interview questions broad enough yet contain enough context to promote a rich and detailed conversation that remained within the context of the question. Table 3 provides an example of the structure within the spreadsheet that includes the question, topic (sphere), code, and associated phrase:

Table 3

Question 1: What Successes and Challenges Have You Experienced as a Teacher of Middle School Students?

Topic	Code	Word/Phrase
CRT	Social Order (Structure)	<i>My experience or exposure to black people was very minimal.</i>
I/I	Cultural Humility	<i>Sometimes I would be the only white person in the room - and that was – it was challenging in that -the kids were fine.</i>

Note. CRT – Critical Race Theory [Society], I/I – Inter, Intra subjectivity [Classroom]

All six interview questions (*see Figure 4*) were structured within this same rubric for all participants with an associated list of relevant phrases. Secondary coding followed which reduced coding by merging similar codes.

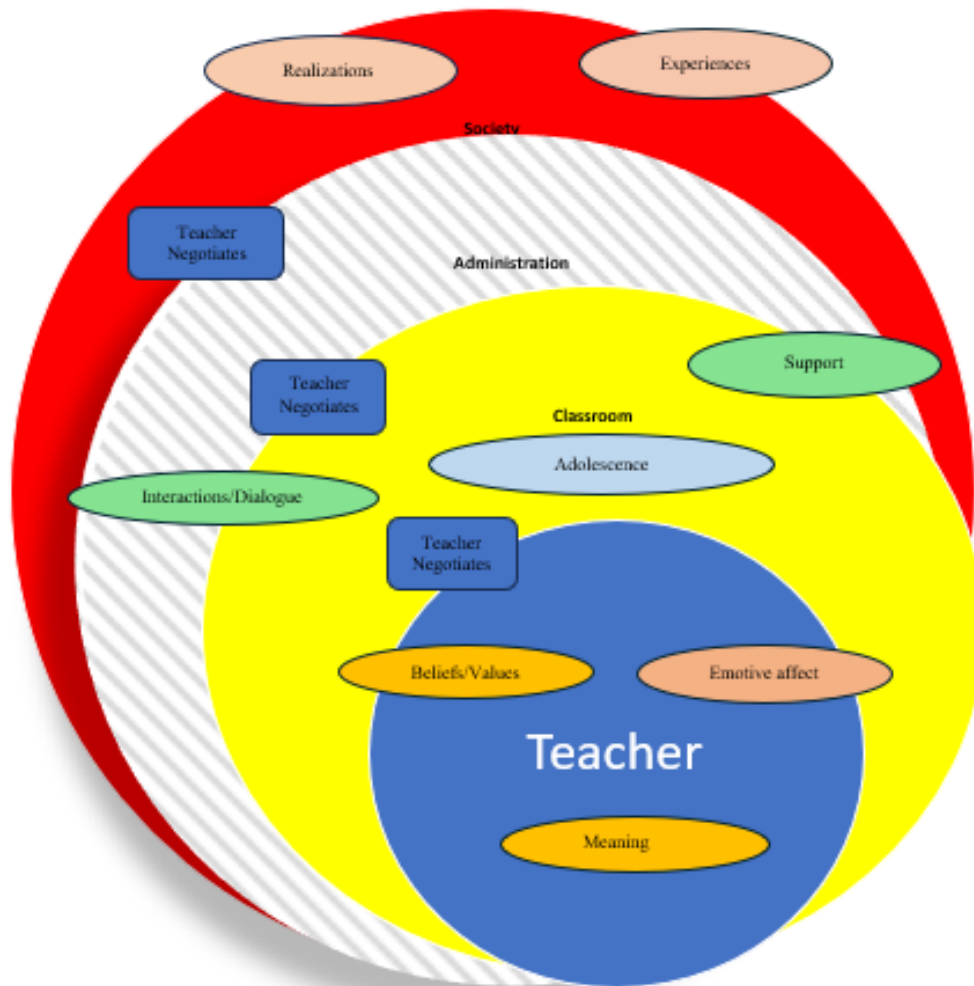
Secondary Coding

The phenomenological reduction approach is evident in this process as the initial codes are synthesized to reduce to the most representative meanings. The coding

approaches used to arrive at this product were pattern coding and focused coding. Saldaña (2021) defined *pattern coding* as assigning meaning within a determined structure. In this study, the organization of the initial coding within this secondary coding process looks at similarities between elements. It establishes a secondary code that reduces these elements into one representative code that could serve as a category. An example of this process is demonstrated by taking the initial codes: Racialization Impacts, Stereotypes, and Inclusion/Exclusion and grouping them under a secondary code that identifies them as Experiences of Racialization within society. This process produced several categories (Figure 2) that significantly reduced the elements identified in the initial coding. These reductions are represented within conceptual mapping, and also a reference table (see Table 4).

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework Mapping (Secondary Coding)



Note: Society = Critical/Critical Race Theory (Racialization Phenomenon); Administration = Sieve (proxy/support); Classroom = Intersubjective/Intra-subjective (Proximal learning); Teacher = Phenomenological Content.

Table 4*Secondary Codes*

Secondary Code/ Categories	Sphere	Merged Codes
Adolescence	Classroom	Adolescent Development
Beliefs/Values	Teacher	Personal Proclivities, Reflections, Meaning Making
Emotive Effect	Teacher	Inclusive of Beliefs/Values
Experiences	Society	Racialization Impacts, Negative Stereotypes, Inclusion/Connectedness
Interactions/Dialogue	Administration/Classroom	School Lifeworld, Interactive Relationship, Cultural Humility, Meaning Making, Learning and Development
Realizations	Society	Racialization, Social Order, Cultural Expression, Individual Expression
Meaning Making	Teacher	Beliefs/Values, Reflections, Personal Proclivities
Support	Administration/Classroom	Support/Validation, Motivation/Achievement, Learning and Development

A succeeding coding approach is focused coding. Focused coding is a more defined coding method, as it encourages further reduction of patterns into the conceptual rubric of the framework. This reduction broaches the creation of themes, as it directly connects to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that define the study. Concept coding also enters into the development and alignment of thematic structure as it helps in providing a big-picture look that elucidates concepts. From the broader perspective, the conceptual framework presents a sociological strand throughout the study's spheres (*see Figure 3*). From the societal aspects where racialization has been impactful upon the lives of the marginalized and through the administrative structure of the school system, the

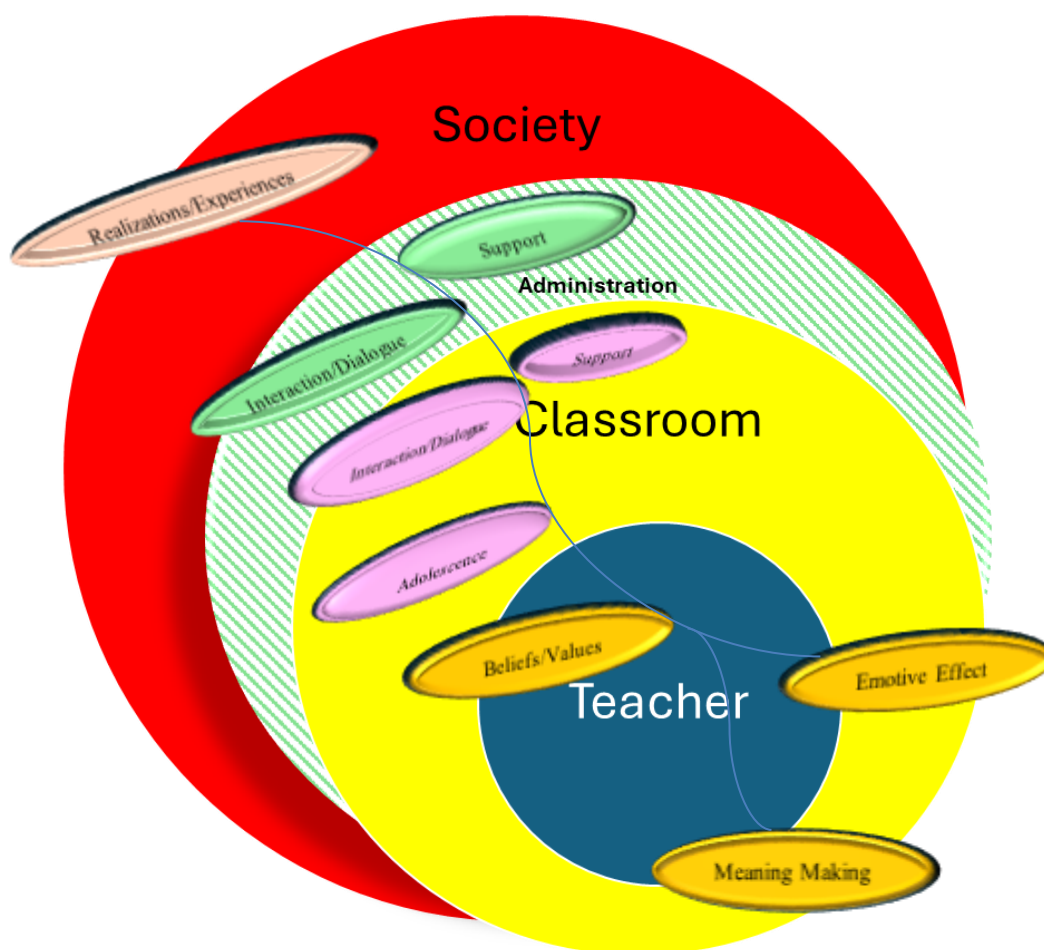
classroom dynamics, and the demeanor of the classroom teacher, the sociological relevancy is noted in the application of focused coding, and the overall look from concept coding.

A final coding procedure was affective coding, regarding beliefs/values and emotion coding. The isolating of the middle school teacher's contribution to this sociological structure brings into play their beliefs and values. These can be formed from sociocultural backgrounds, teacher training, familial structure, and direct experiences, and are directly attached to reflections through phenomenological assessment. Emotions naturally flow from the impacts of lived experience, and noting these outflows provides a significant understanding of the expression of conscious intent and unconscious effect. Beliefs, values, and emotions are indicated in various responses from the participants. Examples of the influence of beliefs and values are, "You can't just expect your students to make adjustments for you. It's got to be the other way around," "I need to research my environment so that my teaching is authentic to those people in front of me," "teaching is my call," and "My dad always said don't be a phony." Examples of emotive impact are "It's scary sometimes to talk about ... I don't know something", "I don't believe in the stuff that I'm teaching, if I don't have passion for what I'm doing, who the heck is going to buy from me?," "if you don't like kids - don't be in the classroom. And if you don't like black kids - get the hell out - because they know," and "Oh my God - these kids are being so cheated." Affective coding through beliefs/values and emotions gives a strong and relevant picture of impacts on and within the middle school teacher.

The realizations of the middle school teacher, as indicated in their reflections, are impacted by their beliefs/values and emotive content and are tied through a sociological strand that extends throughout all spheres of influence (Figure 3). Meaning-making also emerges within this strand, as the teacher negotiates not only their feelings, beliefs, and values but also the same elements within the classroom, school administration, and the influences of the larger society. They serve in a mediatorial, translational, and interpretive role for their diverse classrooms while negotiating within the social and socializing strand of impact that runs throughout associated experiences within the classroom and without.

Figure 3

Sociocultural Strand – Conceptual Framework Mapping



Theme Development

Secondary coding produced categories that consolidated initial coding into relevant patterned representations. Further coding methods focused on bigger-picture themes that were evident within the conceptual framework but were also elucidated from the bottom-up coding approach. These focused and concept coding methodologies reduced categories to sub-themes reflective of the larger sociological strand evident within conceptual and theoretical frameworks (Table 5). The theoretical constructs in CRT references the sociological impacts of Life-worlds. Socio-cultural theoretical constructs of inter-subjective/intra-subjective relationships and proximal learning are Realizations of actualities and are realized within Interactional Dimensions and the Developmental Praxis in teacher development. These understandings contribute to the subthemes from the theoretical and conceptual frameworks (top-down) and collaborate from the bottom-up analysis through initial coding methodology.

Table 5

Subthemes

<u>Subtheme</u>	<u>Sociological Strand</u> <u>Merged Spheres</u>	<u>Merged Categories</u>
Life-worlds	Society, Administration, Classroom, Teacher	Experiences, Beliefs, Values
Realizations	Classroom, Teacher	Emotive Effect, Adolescent Tendencies
Interactional Dimensions	Administration, Classroom, Teacher	Support, Dialogues
Developmental Praxis	Teacher	Learning, Meaning Making

Specifically, the overall theme and sub-themes find a relationship within the research questions. The first research question asks about the experience of middle school

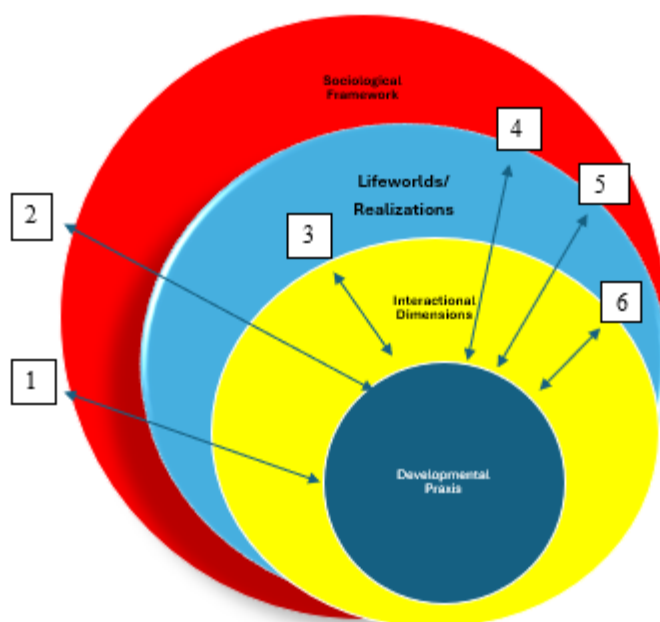
teachers with racialization. Subthemes in Life-worlds and Realizations combine to explore the belief and value systems of the teacher as they negotiate those systems within society, school administration, and the classroom, through their experiences and the emotive effect within those negotiations. Adolescent tendencies also provide a significant backdrop as the teacher negotiates the presentations of normal adolescent development with the impacts of racialization upon the lives and sensibilities of urban Black students. The second research question touches on the sensibilities of both the teacher and the student in the exploration of coalescence and differences in meaning-making.

This second research question employs Interactional Dimensions principally, as dialogic interactions reveal similarities and differences in meaning-making. Outputs and long-term outcomes within interactional dynamics also reveal how meanings were navigated and assigned within the specter of the racialization phenomenon. A teacher said, "What I've given is the idea that there can be people ... white people ... who really do care," and "I think they've given me always a deeper understanding of a culture I didn't grow up in." From a teacher's perspective, these statements give a picture of what a merging of ideologies might entail. These understandings also touch on the Development Praxis that can be initiated within interactive relationships with these students. The teachers also gave evidence of long-term and continuous awareness and contact with the progress of lives lived and, unfortunately, experiencing the pains of lives lost.

The third research question looks into the teacher's perceived role in mediating the upward trajectory of these students, which is represented by a collusion of all the subthemes. The teacher pulls from experiences, beliefs, values, professional acumen,

student relationships, lessons learned, and the navigation of administrative realities to support the academic development of the urban Black student. Ladson-Billings (2009) pointed out a dynamic of practice that experienced teachers developed, terming it a "wisdom of practice (p.179)." The experiences of these teachers directly illuminate this understanding, as they pull from sociocultural backgrounds, training, and development to provide a means for aiding in the academic development and upward trajectory of the urban Black student.

The interview questions were also aligned to elucidate the overall theme and the subthemes as they provided context for discussions. These questions are represented as inset within the structural representation (Figure 4).

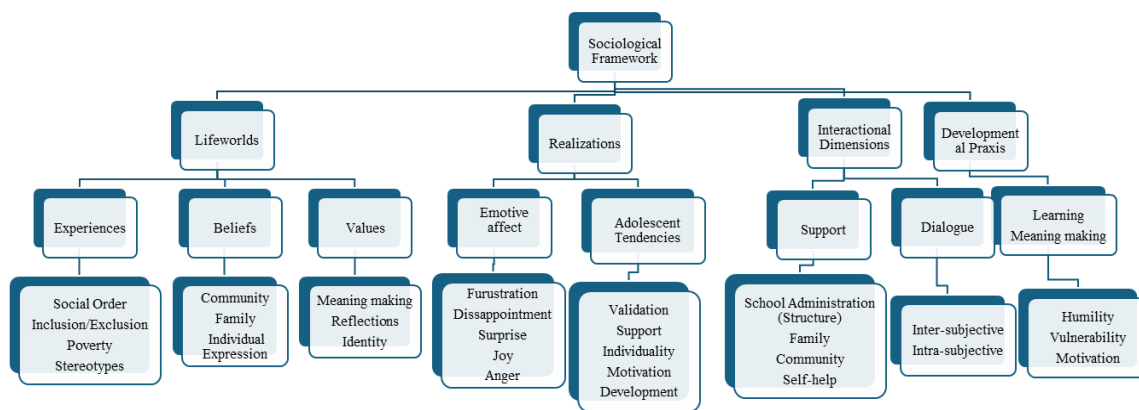
Figure 4*Interview Questions Representative Fit**Note.*

1. What successes and challenges have you experienced as a teacher of middle school students?
2. How have your training and experiences helped you nurture and maintain connections with your students?
3. How would you describe the value of connectedness to belonging and then to learning?
4. How would you describe the process of culturally connecting with urban Black middle schoolers?
5. How would you describe the sensitivity of the school environment to validating the identity of the urban Black middle schooler?
6. How do you envision your role (did you see your role [retirees]) in enhancing the school experience of the urban Black middle schooler?

Correspondingly, the overall theme and subthemes were represented within a structured illustration that details development from initial and secondary coding (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Thematic Development



Discrepancies

Due to the sociological strand that runs throughout the experiences of the middle school teacher in the classroom, disconfirming variables can be present. A teacher mentioned the possibility of having a dearth of connection with some urban Black students, yet they still perform at exemplary levels. This teacher posited an inclusive example of high-performing urban Black college students performing well despite unsupportive environments. Other teachers brought up the realities of some urban Black

students underperforming and even grasping onto behaviors or environments that may have cost them their lives. These were real situations that permeated the lived experiences of these teachers and are worthy of studies that differentiate these experiences in the context of the sociocultural impacts of these students along the same strand. However, the positive impacts are undeniable, and the research into the value of proximal learning and understanding the value of critical race theoretical impacts are not lessened in any capacity. The nature of qualitative studies is an emphasis on the experiences and interpretations of participants, and this study took the preponderance of the data presented by the participants, and represented their viewpoints based on these experiences.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness has four elements and a myriad of approaches that ensure the authenticity of a study. One of these elements is credibility. Actionable procedures toward establishing credibility reveal the viability of the study design and mechanisms and the believability of the data. The phenomenological approach, in its revealing of conscious and unconscious intentions and intuitions, requires ensuring that the meanings and descriptions of the participants are respected and represented. Two procedures that serve these purposes are member checking and thick descriptions.

Member checking keeps the participants involved in validating the interpretations of what was said, and that it represents what the participants were intending to communicate. In this study, the participants were comfortable with what they said after reviewing the transcripts. After the interview, Two of the participants decided they did not

need to see the transcripts, expressing comfort with what they had shared. This comfort was communicated from discussion directly after the interview, which also serves as a member-checking procedure.

The other participants asked to see the transcripts, although expressing comfort with what they had shared. Responses indicated comfort with what was shared and also led to further amiable and open conversation. This geniality was vital in this study, as it maintained the conversational partnership established from the invitation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed to the "reactivity" of the participants as playing a determinant role and effective in terms of internal validity (pp. 94-95). Amiably maintaining that conversational partnership contributes to confirming the credibility of the responses as the openness in sharing intentions and intuition is positively accentuated.

Other important variables in credibility are reflexivity, thick descriptions, and persistent observation. Reflexivity points to the researcher giving attention to managing bias. This can be done by bracketing researcher contributions to the dialogue to differentiate contributions from the participants and the researcher. Attention was given to bracketing during the interviews as it allowed the participants to give their comments unhindered. Persistent observation was also valuable in that cues were given through intonation and affective behavior, as reflections brought up issues that were touchpoints for the participants. These were exemplified in statements such as, "Oh my God - these kids are being so cheated," "It's hard to read whether you were effective or not," and "She hugged me, and we started talking, and we were in tears, laughing." Thick descriptions were also important, as descriptions of the amiable context of the conversations, the

chosen settings, and the participants' demographics provided a picture of how the conversations proceeded and why the data provided such rich detail. These procedures come together to produce a triangulation that enhanced the credibility of the data.

The transferability of the study had little to do with replicating results but with recreating the context. Ravitch and Carl (2021) pointed out that transferability does not imply that results can be carried over to other settings but ensures that context-related procedures appropriately representing participants' shared content are transferable to similarly conducted studies. In this study, appropriateness was demonstrated in reflexivity in my role and biases as the researcher and in thick descriptions.

Dependability is a measure of alignment with theoretical constructs, framework, collection, and analysis. The development of the goals, research questions, and interview questions followed an alignment that resonated with the core constructs within the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The initial coding for the study was constructed from a top-down approach, drawing from the conceptual framework. The interview questions directed toward the participants drew responses within the constructs' context. Additionally, journaling was used to maintain reflexivity through the analysis and to provide an auditing trail throughout the process, from recruitment through analysis. These processes provided significant context for alignment, means of triangulation, and ensuring dependability.

Confirmability has objectivity as its basis; however, the researcher's subjectivity is a part of the process in qualitative research. Therefore, filtering bias is necessary to attain a certain level of confirmability within the study. This phenomenological study

emphasized the participants' lived experiences, and their voice was the most sought-after product. Maintaining this emphasis required bracketing within the interview to filter out my voice. Journaling also proved valuable within the pre-collection process and analysis. Journaling provided a vehicle for broaching self-awareness and transparency, as these helped enhance critical reflection on how I was interpreting data. Auditing the epistemological process also provided a means for checking relativity and alignment along theoretical lines and how constructs were used. It was important not to force data to fit but to see how they naturally aligned with the research and the goals and how the gap in knowledge was illuminated within the study. These methods broached a triangulation that checked the confirmability of the research process.

Results

Two primary purposes were pursued in this interview-based study. The first was the exploration of the perspectives of middle school teachers concerning their experiences with the racialization of urban Black middle school adolescents. The second purpose was to explore teacher perspectives concerning the coalescing of student and teacher meaning-making toward addressing racialization and revealing possible solutions. A supplementary goal of this study was to explore the mediatorial and translational position of the middle school teacher in support of these students' development and educational trajectory. These purposes were tied to research questions posed to address knowledge gaps around the phenomenon of racialization of urban Black middle school students.

These research questions were: How do middle school teachers experience the effects of racialization? How do the meaning-making of teachers and urban Black middle school students coalesce and differ around racialization? Supplemental question: What solutions do middle school teachers offer for mediating the effects of racialization on the learning trajectories of urban Black middle school students? These questions were addressed within interview questions, designed to explore the experiences and associated meaning-making of middle school teachers within the classroom.

Effectual Racialization in the Classroom

The first research question focused on how teachers experienced the effects of the racialization of urban Black students within the classroom. What emerged in addressing this question presented a rubric of impact that began with the societal picture of the structural assignment that racialization brings with its repercussions, including poverty, shame, stereotypes, and exclusionary approaches that suppress identity and culture. Concerning structural assignment, a study participant noted differences in student academic trajectory in his transference from a well-supported predominantly white school system, noting that he "realized was these kids were going to do well with or without me." Another teacher directly referred to perceptions of urban Black students in stating "who other people felt like were insignificant, which happened to be in an urban area," and "have emotional needs or physical needs in an urban setting." Impacts of poverty were also noted; "things that affect children in the urban area and in the city area that people don't necessarily ... take an account," "students that may come to you who don't have food at home, and you are their only source of breakfast," and "problems at home

who are coming to school and torn up clothes and embarrassed." These answers were given as a result of the interview question: *What successes and challenges have you experienced as a teacher of middle school students?*

Other challenges pointed directly to racial differences; "being white, I know that I don't have an intimate view of their black ... environment at home," "I have a boundary being white. I have a boundary, and it's not just because I'm a teacher. It's because I need to respect that I'm white," and "sometimes I would be the only white person in the room - and that was - it was challenging in that - the kids were fine." Additionally, a Black male teacher noted his differing perspective from his racial identity; "being a black man, trying to relate to black kids in general, not just black males, but black kids in general, I think that that there are some avenues that I can take, that maybe the white lady might not be able to take." However, this inroad could lead to challenges when dealing with apathy from just an adolescent attitude, or they "had no role models to show them what an education could give them." These challenges prevailed; however, inroads were available when building connections was prioritized.

Connection and Learning

Building connections points to an approach in proximal learning that prioritizes intersubjectivity and the intra-subjective learning that is an outcome. Darling-Hammond and Depaoli (2020) pointed to a standard of care that prioritizes connection as a climate setter in the classroom in alluding to a classroom approach complete with dialogue, acceptance, and sociocultural understanding as promoting a safe and connected environment where learning can flourish (see Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Howe et al.,

2019; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022; Mercer & Littleton, 2007). The teachers echoed this sentiment, "I think that it is important that you establish connection," "That you want to connect with the kids, because if the kids are connecting with you, then they will. They will learn from you," and "Relationship is everything." For these teachers, these connections bred success within the classroom.

The successes that these teachers talked of mirrored the level of connections that they established with the students, as these relationships appeared to traverse chasms and prioritize connection. The racial divide was recognized; however, interacting with the adolescent mindset was a priority in the classroom; "One teacher said to me, you have to remember 7th graders are closer to like 3rd grade than they are 10th grade. I was like - God, you're right", "I was thinking like they were just young high schoolers, and that is not the case - but you know it's hormones, no matter what color you are," you have to "understand the junior high mind," "biochemically and mentally, all kinds of things are happening," "this whole sexuality thing? What are these hormones? What is this hyperactivity? - I can assure them - it's going to be okay". The security found in it being okay proved a significant determinant of success. Statements such as "kids knew that I cared," "the successes I had was just having a ton of fun with the students," "when they see me and they're not running away from me. And they're saying, Yeah, mom, that's my teacher," and after years "I still have communication" indicates significant success in being and having been a middle school teacher of urban Black adolescents.

Racial Pragmatism—Meaning Coalescence—Negotiation

Teaching within the settings and contexts of urban Black adolescents encourages nuanced perspectives that were prompted within the set of research questions. In regard to the research question of experience with the phenomenon of racialization, the teacher participants candidly addressed their experiences with racialization as a function of the realities of the racial divide and bridging through understanding and connection. In terms of the coalescence of meaning-making the teacher participants talked of the interactional dynamics with the students and how their meaning-making was impacted from cultural, developmental and socioeconomic standpoints. Developmental understanding became omnidirectional and inclusive of bi-directional acceptance, learning, and dialogue based. They also talked of the academic struggles faced when the impacts of racialization created barriers and how they traversed these difficulties to motivate toward academic achievement. In negotiating these successes and challenges, the teachers navigated through a thematic sociological strand that permeates sub-themes, including their experiences, life-world engagement, significant interactional dimensions, and teacher personal and professional development.

Negotiation

Teacher development, in terms of preparation, can also be accomplished through training, both preservice and after being a certified teacher, with the added impact of related experiences. The following interview question dealt with this scenario: *How have your training and experiences helped you nurture and maintain connections with your students?* This question delved into how well teacher training prepared these teachers for

dealing with this student demographic and other significant experiences, assuming that connection was a prime goal in precipitating learning. What transpired was a treatise on a dearth of support from preservice teaching and training but a wealth of support from interactive relationships in the community, among colleagues, and from dialogues with the students.

The participant teachers collectively communicated that in terms of formal preparation, there was "nothing formally" and "No, I was not prepared." However, one teacher had an interesting perspective, stating that "Being called" to teach helped the learning curve, producing a predisposition toward helpful elements. Another stated that her master's program was more helpful than the bachelor's program for providing a better foundation. However, some stated that the aid of colleagues and in-service seminars directly addressing the topic were helpful; "I think the camaraderie in the trainings with the teachers were super helpful," "Whatever trainings I got at the school just reinforced that good relationship with those teachers," "Racial Pds [*Professional Development*] that we end up having to where one of them was just like a conversation between different ethnicities - some black folks, some white folks, some Latina folks, and we were all talking about some stereotypes and some issues that we had," and "So some of the training did help me." When on the same page, the interactive dynamics among the teachers seemed to augment relevant training; "But talking about those things in a - like in sort of a safe space was really helpful, and it helped us become a bit closer."

This interactive teacher dynamic also resonated with building knowledgeable connections within the community and with the parents. A teacher had a community

member take him to someone in the community, and what this teacher garnered proved invaluable; "He took me to see a guy in the neighborhood - he educated me on issues of race in ways that no class would." This teacher also stated the value of moving from comfort zones to better understandings; "If you're going to be a white person in a school of color, you have got to do those kinds of things." This attitude extended into navigating beyond offense in training, classrooms, and with the parents; "I had to realize - that you know what - Yes, I love them. Yes, I can teach them. And yes, there's a whole lot of stuff I do not know or understand, and never will," "Had to work through getting offended - getting them to trust me (I have this white face) - white people ... that I can't take that personally." Having this approach with parents can have beneficial outcomes; "Got invited into a lot of homes," and "Whole lot easier for me to work with them as opposed to working against them."

Sociological Strand/Subthemes

Interactional Dimensions had proven to be a significant subtheme, as it bore relevance among the teachers, administrators, and students within the classroom and was impactful within the sociological strand that ran throughout. Another interview question broached this interactive dynamic when working with the school structure and administrators in support of the urban Black student. This question, *How would you describe the sensitivity of the school environment to validating the identity of the urban Black middle schooler*, prompted responses to barriers and issues that school structures and administrators may have provided. The teachers provided responses that provided a view of the variability in administrators; "It always depended on the administrator - some

were really good, and some paid attention to the kids," "Some were more concerned about their data and how they looked ... and those became to me very dangerous educators," "Principal, I got along with wonderfully, and they knew they could come into my classroom at any time." This variability indicated the flexibility the teachers needed in negotiating their environment and the developmental learning that precipitated. This flexibility extended into the classroom with their adolescent students; "You can't just expect your students to make adjustments for you. It's got to be the other way around."

This attitude was reflected in how the teachers prioritized connection to improve educational outcomes. Dukuzumuremyi and Siklander (2018) pointed to the value of social connectedness in the classroom as promulgated by the teacher in prioritizing inclusivity within the classroom. This environment has been found to enhance academic outcomes (see Byrd, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Gray, 2017; Gray et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2017). The interview question that broached this topic (*How would you describe the value of connectedness to belonging and then to learning?*) encouraged responses from teachers that reflected this understanding. "She just needed somebody to understand and respect her creativity," "I've taken the time to understand the world they live in," "... meet a kid where they are, and they're gonna come to you," and "They knew I wanted them to do their best," are all statements that underscore the value that these teachers placed on connection and belongingness, and the enhanced learning climate following. These occurrences tied into the exploration of the trajectorial support given by the teachers to this student demographic. The subthemes of Interactional Dimensions and

Developmental Praxis are clearly representative of the sociological strand that runs throughout.

Leading to these developmental opportunities within the interactive dynamic are the subthemes of Realizations and Life-worlds. The realities of working with adolescents and their developmental challenges, the impacts of racialization upon students of color, and the concordant beliefs and values from teachers' sociocultural backgrounds induced emotive effects that colored responses, understandings, and descriptions. Content from descriptions and understandings communicated this variability of effect. Working with adolescents, the teachers expressed, "Biochemically and mentally, all kinds of things are happening" as they are "trying to figure out their place in the world." "They're middle schoolers, and they're just goofballs," however, boundaries would need to be set as the teacher exclaimed, "Push as far as you can. And my job is to say, that's it - that's the end, 'being a warm demander.'" Traversing this experience over to working with urban Black students, the teachers recognized the cultural differences but emphasized a similar adolescent experience; "But it doesn't even matter. Kids are kids. They still have issues that need to be addressed," and "they need to know that you care ... (that's all they really need to know)." Supporting these comments are underlying beliefs and values and contributing emotive effect; "If you're genuine with your kids, they'll be genuine with you," "I'm teaching them to learn... not what to think," My dad always said don't be a phony," and "if you don't like kids - don't be in the classroom. And if you don't like black kids - get the hell out - because they know."

This last statement leads to the interview question: *How would you describe the process of culturally connecting with urban Black middle schoolers?* Color-blind ideology does a disservice to identity and cultural relativity (Howard, 2020); however, the recognition of cultural differences leads to enriching dialogues. Kramer and McKenzie (2022) pointed to the teacher's thought-filled and reflexive dialogue as providing safety in the classroom, reducing trauma, and providing a positive environment. The teachers in this study recognized their power through connection and learning, as represented through their relationships with their students. Although the teachers prioritized the similarities in adolescent behavior, regardless of color, they also noted cultural differences in connecting with urban Black adolescents. From "I think because I grew up in a Wally and the Beaver kind of ... you know ... environment where I never had to worry about anything" to "Oh my God - these kids are being so cheated," the teachers recognized sociocultural differences and their impact. However, they recognized that what they had brought to the classroom engendered connection and belonging. A teacher stated, "I think that if you have an effective teacher who is compassionate, who knows their content and is like you said, enthusiastic about teaching, I think that they could teach a population that is willing to learn." Another said, "I think they've given me always a deeper understanding of a culture I didn't grow up in." These statements evidence an attainment of bi-directionality in culturally connecting.

The experience of the bi-directionality of genuine connection resonated with the research goal of exploring the coalescence in meaning-making between the urban Black student and the teacher. Culturally connecting included and moved beyond the sub-

themes of Interactional Dimensions and Developmental Praxis and into the sub-themes representing Life-worlds and Realizations, as the experience of culturally connecting pulled on all elements of sociocultural backgrounds, traditions, values, and beliefs and posed new reflexive connections. In this manner, the classroom can become a test tube for a subcultural experience where inclusiveness, belonging, and progress are modeled. A teacher echoed this sentiment, stating, "I think they've given me always a deeper understanding of a culture I didn't grow up in" and "What I've given is the idea that there can be people ... white people ... who really do care - who really do have their best interest at heart."

The Teacher as a Disruptor

The essence of lasting impact gives rise to the final interview question: *How do you envision your role (did you see your role [retirees]) in enhancing the school experience of the urban Black middle schooler?* This question revisited the research goal that examined the coalescence of student/teacher meaning-making and solutions concerning racialization and teacher contribution to elevating the trajectories of urban Black students. Darling-Hammond and Depaoli (2020) and Kramer and McKenzie (2022) pointed to teachers as disruptors of the continuation of traumatizing attitudes and biases within their classrooms. These teachers can model appropriate stances toward adolescents of color and set in motion activities and understandings that promote acceptance, inclusiveness, and positivity. However, as the teachers in this study posited, it begins with the teacher, "I think they've given me always a deeper understanding of a culture I didn't grow up in - so that I can have a respect for people who are different from

me, and that transfers over too," "Just takes patience, and it takes studying your student," I do feel like I'm a salesperson - I don't believe in the stuff that I'm teaching, if I don't have passion for what I'm doing, who the heck is going to buy from me?" It is apparent that not only is understanding the content of the task important, but also an awareness and understanding of the content and context of the student, as well as self-awareness of the content and contextual landing points of the teacher.

Even within the immensity of the teacher/student/task rubric, the humanity of the teacher comes through in their fears and anxieties, "It's scary sometimes to talk about ... I don't know something," "Maybe there's some things that you don't want to talk about, or you don't feel comfortable talking about," "I definitely disagreed with some of the choices that the parents made for the child for them to skip school," I think every teacher ... you want to be remembered fondly. You want to be remembered that you made a difference in their life," "And you know, I mean, teachers go to work to do the best they can, and they want to help kids."

The Interactional Dimensions and Developmental Praxis come to life in these situations. Not only with the students, but also with administrators, other teachers, parents, and the community. "But I think the relationships I formed with the colleagues was super influential," "We just felt like we were all in it together, and it was all for the kids," "... it's just not me and the student, it's me and the student and the other students, it's me and the student and their parents," "It's me, the parent and the school environment, including the fellow teacher." "Principal, I got along with wonderfully and they knew they could come into my classroom at any time," "Kids were very comfortable going to

administrators and talking and sharing." In community relations, a teacher stated, "I was blessed to have people who took the time for me." What resonated in these relationships was a community strand of interaction and support. This sociological strand and its connected elements represented the overall theme of this study.

Summary

Teachers relativized experiences as emanating from the core of their background, training, beliefs, and values, and these were reflected in their expressions through intentions and intuitions. This meaning-making represented the phenomenological expression through their lived experiences, as iterated by Moustakas (1994). Within this study, teachers' expressions indicated an understanding of the impact of racialization upon their urban Black students, if not with emphasis on the ideology of racialization, yet comprehending its impact on the children as they entered the classroom. The children indeed came with the minds, activities, and concerns of adolescents; however, the additional impacts of racialization encouraged a need to understand this influence on these students in the classroom.

Managing the classroom environment became necessary as the teacher focused on bringing the best learning environment into the classroom experience. Negotiating this task invariably involved managing sociocultural diversity and provided a challenge for meaning-making on the part of the teacher as she manages not only the classroom but also her own proclivities and sensibilities (Narayanan & Ordynans, 2022; Patterson, 2018). The teachers' experiences within this environment called for a certain level of self-awareness, which preceded the learning and development praxis the teacher experienced

in learning to teach and interact in the presence of sociocultural differences. The teachers in this study traversed those challenges as they negotiated sociocultural differences and indicated an understanding of the world that they would have to negotiate within the classroom with urban Black students.

Negotiating teaching protocols within a classroom that included these students brought experiences with the effects of racialization. The first research question explored the middle school teachers' experiences with the effects of racialization. These effects brought urban Black students to class with a myriad of issues that might include housing struggles, food lack, sleep interruptions, and mental and emotional trauma by virtue of unstable and unsafe situations. These effects needed to be negotiated by teachers to be effective in the classroom.

The teachers in this study emphasized understanding and connection in navigating through the struggles that racialization brings. Whether the biases through racial and cultural differences or the negative impacts of social order and assignments making living conditions unequal and lacking in equity, teachers can bring a sense of normalcy to the classroom environment. Practical help, such as food pantries, clothing resources, and school washing machines through school administration, can be supportive. However, what the middle school teacher provides within the classroom provides significant value in reducing trauma, enhancing belongingness and inclusivity, and providing a safe environment for learning (Byrd, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Griffin et al., 2017; Kramer & McKenzie, 2022).

Entering this space requires some level of sociocultural awareness to connect and build a dialogue that provides a base for proximal learning. Vygotsky (1978) broached an intersubjective relationship in proximal learning that required building a relationship with the student. This teacher/student relationship leads to reciprocal meaning-making, which, at its best, bridges differences and provides intra-subjective learning for the student and a developmental praxis for the teacher. The learning opportunities the teacher provides coalesce with the developmental opportunities the students give back, providing experiences for both parties. The teacher experiences the impacts of racialization through their relationships with the students, what they see in the students that enter the classroom, and what they learn about them as they interact as teachers and develop as learners of what may have been previously foreign to them.

The second research question asked how the meaning-making of teachers and urban Black middle school students coalesce and differ around racialization. A coalescence of understanding is met through dialogue as asymmetries are traversed and negotiated. Edwards and Mercer (1987) stated that traditional school verbiage, being asymmetrical and only directed at the student, presented a problem when differential sociocultural contexts were not considered. These situations provide an entrance into semiotic differences that provide barriers to language, culture, and understanding. These multiple frameworks that embody diverse environments call for a sociocultural sensitivity to the voices and understandings within the room.

The teachers in this study approached barriers with a cultural humility that paved the way for positive dialogue, interaction, and understanding. Their expression of care

began with an understanding of adolescent developmental challenges and an acknowledgment of the difficulties faced by students impacted by racialization. The need for belongingness arising from identity validation is important for the urban Black student (Gray et al., 2018; Mims & Williams, 2022) and adolescents in general (Erikson, 1950;1963). Teachers expressed the importance of understanding how adolescents think and process information due to biological and cognitive changes and trying to understand how they fit in this world. These experiences opened opportunities for dialogic interaction, even as the middle schoolers could be "goofy," "apathetic," and "annoying," yet "endearing" and "fun." The students needed to know they are cared for and listened to.

This caring demeanor comes to be a rallying point for the coalescing of meaning and the navigation of semiotic differences. Vygotsky's concept of intersubjectivity in proximal learning (1978) provided a path for individual expression to emerge and learning to be cognitively codified, intra-subjectively, within the student's consciousness. However, this learning is best transferred in environments that eschew the social assignment and refuting of personal narratives that are constructs as elocuted within CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Peller, 1995; Williams, 2018b). As one of the teachers exclaimed, "Relationship is everything," and this is where coalescence occurs.

The differences that racialization illuminates are recognized within our society but do not have to be a pivot point where separation is pursued and codified. As Bell (1995) pointed out, racial realism is actual as there are differences, yet they are to be recognized and not used as a point of departure. Coalescence in meaning-making is found in and

through relationships as differences are culturally and experientially modulated. As found by these teachers, these differences did not have to be a point of separation but an opportunity to dialogue and find common ground from which to build relationships. The commonality is located when shifting from maintaining a positional asymmetry found in the traditional teaching mode into a dialogic relationship where proximal learning makes learning a reciprocal undertaking, as the urban Black student and the teacher occupy a space where both can coexist and flourish.

The supplemental research question examined the middle school teacher's position in mediating racialization's effects on urban Black students' learning trajectories. The reality is that learning trajectories within the structure of the prevailing school systems are compromised for urban Black students. The teacher's recognition of these inequities helps negotiate and navigate these difficulties in favor of these students' trajectories. One of the teachers stated, "When we started putting the emphasis on standardized testing. I tried to explain to principals constantly, I don't have standardized kids." What the teachers notice in the classroom dramatically impacts what appears on measurables in student performance. Teachers recognize elements that impact student learning and hinder their academic trajectories. Teachers understand that there are "things that affect children in the urban area and in the city area that people don't necessarily ... take an account", also stating that some schools "...had to provide the physical and the mental, and the social needs that these students need before we could really push the academics." They recognize that students who are behind get left behind, and students from urban areas seemed as insignificant.

Darling-Hammond and Depaoli (2020) and Kramer and McKenzie (2022) posited the importance of safe and validating spaces for children to support academic achievement. Kramer and McKenzie (2022) additionally pointed to the self-awareness teachers need in the classroom to recognize their personal biases and proclivities that may hinder student development and achievement. The teachers in this study recognized the importance of the classroom teacher in the student's learning trajectory. They saw the disadvantages the urban Black student faced, including societal struggles and school system failures; however, they also saw the role the middle school teacher could play as a positive player in the academic trajectory of the urban Black student. Whether supportive of cultural differences and identity validation, supporting individual and creative expression, giving recognition, empathy, and practical support for negative socioeconomic impacts, or being a listening ear and caring voice for the disadvantaged and marginalized student, the middle school teacher could play a pivotal role in the academic trajectory of the urban Black student. These teachers were humanized in their fears, insecurities, doubts, sensitivities, and concerns but were identified as teachers in their professionalism, flexibility, and care. The following chapter will reiterate the goals of the study and summarize key points, present an interpretation of the findings, assess limitations, provide recommendations for future research and societal implications for this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Emphasizing sociocultural sensitivity and understanding is necessary for building connections and enhancing academic trajectories for urban Black adolescent students. This mission is compromised when social assignments that demean cultural relativity and identity validation hinder the intersubjective and cognitive developmental value in proximal learning. Kramer and McKenzie (2022) pointed to the need for a safe environment with the input of sensitive, thoughtful, and flexible teachers in reducing trauma, enhancing inclusivity, and promoting a positive learning climate. A more inclusive and culturally aware climate has long been a value that enhances learning in a diverse classroom (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Gray et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2017; Williams, 2018a). The placement of the middle school teacher within this dynamic impacts an adolescent's already chaotic developmental stage (Erikson, 1963) and adds further gravity to a population that has additionally been saddled with negative race-based social assignments (Howard, 2020). The middle school teacher interposes a mediatorial, translational, and transformative presence (Gray et al., 2018) in the educational world of the student. These classroom authorities negotiate and navigate the lifeworlds and associated dialogues within the classroom, develop and reconstitute elements of their meaning-making proclivities, and look to define success with a marginalized demographic within their sphere of influence.

In this phenomenological study, I explored these realities as middle school teachers within a central and southern region of Michigan provided perspectives of their

lived experiences and dialogic relationships within classrooms populated with urban Black adolescents. I pursued two primary purposes in this interview-based study. The first was the exploration of the perspectives of middle school teachers concerning their experiences with the racialization of urban Black middle school adolescents. The second purpose was to explore teacher perspectives concerning the coalescing of student and teacher meaning-making toward addressing racialization and revealing possible solutions. A supplementary goal was to explore the mediatorial and translational position of the middle school teacher in support of these students' development and educational trajectory.

The key findings in this study traversed a pathway that moved from racialization's imposition and relegation of social and structural assignment to teachers' personal and professional proclivities in the midst while pursuing connection with their students. These findings delved into the viability and developmental possibilities of sensitive, humble, and true connections, and finally, the disruption of racialized assignments through the possibilities in intersubjective and intra-subjective proximal learning. CRT's contribution provided a basis for understanding the roots of societal biases that cloud the possibilities of connection and understanding. The intersubjective and intra-subjective constructs of proximal learning provided a rubric within the classroom that moves beyond academic pedantic as significant dialogues reduced barriers and provided an educational climate of bi-directional connection and learning.

In the school environment, urban Black adolescent students face difficult challenges when the proclivities of their cultural identity and environment are not

validated. These students experience socioeconomic shortfalls and environmental hindrances that hinder their motivation, performance, and achievement in the classroom (see Byrd, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Depaoli, 2020; Howard, 2020; Ladson-Billings, G., 2009; Mims & Williams, 2020). Sociocultural divides also create semiotic challenges where language and cultural barriers require an ability to surmount these challenges with sensitive and humble interest and care. Middle school teachers' ability to navigate the sociocultural and socioeconomic differences realities, realize the global challenges in adolescent development, and mediate their personal proclivities positions them to disrupt demeaning narratives and support the academic trajectory of urban Black adolescent students.

Engagement within sociocultural contexts can be an enlightening experience when bi-directional learning and development is a sought-after outcome. The positioning of the teacher and the asymmetries in power and age-related perspective require mediatorial adjustment on behalf of the teacher to provide the translational bridge to support higher student trajectories for diverse populations. This reality underscores the value of proximal learning engagements that enlist higher levels of teacher offerings, that reaches out to the student and promotes inclusion and validation. This positive intersubjective climate produces intra-subjectivity in cognitive learning that has bi-directional benefit for teacher and student. In this manner, the coalescence of meaning-making bridges barriers to produce positive outcomes for both the teacher and student, improves the academic trajectory for socially marginalized and non-included students and co-creates a positive and engaging sub-cultural climate.

This chapter includes an interpretation of the findings developed around the study's sub-themes and their connection to the larger theme. I will address the limitations of this study as impacting its breadth and trustworthiness. Recommendations for further research follow as taken from points related to the study's limitations, related studies, and points of emphasis as found within the study. The chapter continues with an examination of specific and broad implications that reflect social change value within the school environment and expansion to the greater society. These implications also include messaging for researchers to further the benefit of contextual studies. Finally, I conclude the chapter with an overview of the goals of the study and lessons learned in the progressive usage of the phenomenological methodology.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this study, I used the CRT constructs of racial realism and social assignment as they underscored sociocultural and socioeconomic inequities, and proximal learning dictates appearing as intersubjective and intra-subjective constructs. The dialogic relationships and subsequent connections that emerged when these constructs were holistically aligned produced a sociological strand that moved from the experiences and realizations of societal effect and through the structures of the school environment, school administration, the classroom, and the activities and beliefs of the teacher within the classroom. This sociological strand represented the conceptual framework as the overall theme of the study, with sub-themes demonstrated in Lifeworlds, Realizations, Interactional Dimensions, and Developmental Praxis.

Lifeworlds

The lifeworlds of the participants and their students were a notable influence as lifeworlds depict and relativize how the participant teachers and their urban Black students experienced their separate worlds. Bentz et al. (2021) defined *lifeworlds* as a merging of experiences and multiple realities into a relatable composite inhabiting understanding and existence. Experiences, beliefs, and values include explicit and implicit understandings imputed by sociocultural, socioeconomic, familial, and personal backgrounds influencing how phenomena impact intuitions and intentions within subconscious and conscious expressions. In this study, the merging of the lifeworld of the urban Black adolescent student and the middle school teacher met within the classroom and produced detraction and coalescence as determined by levels of relationship and connection. When accompanied by substantive dialogue, inclusivity, and safety, these semiotic clashes produced positive outcomes that demonstrated benefit for both the student and the teacher.

Teachers within this study referenced their backgrounds, socioculturally, socioeconomically, and familial, as providing experiences and understandings that preceded their engagements with students. These impacts defined initial engagements with these students. The residuals left evidence of empathetic bridges that facilitated understanding and chasms that needed infilling to usher in beneficial dialogue and connection. Teacher training, especially at the bachelor level, proved inadequate in preparing these teachers for engagement with urban Black students. However, engagement with other teachers in preservice and as colleagues proved beneficial when

engagement priorities were aligned. These situations represented the clashing of lifeworlds as providing opportunities for coalescence and separation, depending on the sensitivities, intentions, and incessantness pursued.

The follow-through pursued by the teachers in this study indicated a cultural sensitivity and humility that bridged differences and brought connection. Although adjustment and adaptation did not come easily, as the multi-parted aspects of semiotic separation attest and present, these teachers' professional import and commitment represented devotion to the craft, the engagement of relevant temperament and familial lessons, and submission to the learning aspects that on-the-job training required. Statements such as "I think they've given me always a deeper understanding of a culture I didn't grow up in," "You just gotta be smart enough to hear those clues when they give them to you," and "I don't believe in the stuff that I'm teaching, if I don't have passion for what I'm doing, who the heck is going to buy from me," represented a devotion to a higher form of teaching, and a submission of self to this higher calling.

These teachers' statements represented the responses from questioning that probed adaptations necessary when cultural differences provided challenges. Differing lifeworlds do not have to foster separation but can be an opportunity to develop a better version of self and devotion to a higher form of the professional craft. These teachers demonstrated an ability to adjust and adapt to provide the most beneficial learning environment for the students under their charge. They demonstrated a higher level of teaching by maintaining the mentality and focus necessary when these changes pushed them toward new directions. These changes proved necessary as circumstances revealed the need for

greater cultural sensitivity and devotion to learn better teaching strategies. These situations encouraged alternate means of navigating and negotiating presenting lifeworlds as realizations illuminated the need.

Realizations

Lived experiences provide the opportunity to view life from the vantage point of others who occupy your lived space and give realizations that might not have otherwise been seen. The essence of the experience of phenomena provides what Moustakas (as a reflection of Husserl) presented as the *noema* and the *noesis* in the experience (1994). Realizations in the noema represent the initial impact of a phenomenological experience upon the thoughts and perceptions of an individual. In contrast, the noesis experience provides subjective and intentional meaning-making as related to the phenomenological experience. The realizations within this study included perceived understandings from societal and personal aspects. The emotive affect was realized and observed through personal impact and import. These realizations were added to the presenting realities of adolescent development. When the phenomenon was racialization, a bevy of impact came through the subjective reality and the objective, as realizations were experienced implicitly and explicitly.

The teachers in this study recognized the socioeconomic impact of racialization on the urban Black adolescents in their classrooms and the concomitant socialized structure that presented as poverty, hunger, and dysfunction within the home environment. The emotive impact on the teachers was present on two levels, showing noema and noesis within the experience. "From single-parent homes, being part of the

lower class, or dealing with some poverty issues, or maybe abusive homes," "sometimes I would be the only White person in the room - and that was - it was challenging in that - the kids were fine," and "being white, I know that I don't have an intimate view of their black ... environment at home," are statements that were in recognition of realities of initial impact. However, statements such as "even though kids are all the same - their experiences aren't all the same - and it took me a while to figure that out," "Oh my God - these kids are being so cheated," and "And I thought, What do you say to a child? What do you say to a kid? "You're not worth having new books," the meaning-making in the noesis experience became evident.

The noema and noesis in these realizations were enlightening, as the practical that represents itself upon the senses, and the more in-depth personal and intuitive meaning-making, that assigns deeper conscious and unconscious renderings, were made apparent. The teachers collectively assigned the noema renderings when asked about challenges faced when engaging with urban Black students in their classrooms. The noesis in the reflections appeared to have a demonstrable emotive effect as a more resounding impact was indicated. The differences in these realizations were also indicated as noesis reflections were encased with greater interactions in dialogue and activities.

Interactional Dimensions

Classroom teacher and student interactions and related dialogue are a function of teacher proclivities, student perceptions and the classroom experience; however, the depth and character of these engagements play a significant role in the psyche of the urban Black adolescent as subjected to societal assignment in marginalization. As a

translator and mediator in the classroom, the middle school teacher plays a chief role in how external messaging is interpreted and applied in the classroom. Most assuredly, the teacher negotiates and navigates the school administration, school environment, parental involvement, classroom diversity, and relationships with her students to provide the most beneficial learning environment. However, the teacher's mediatorial, translational, and transformative skills are most apparent within the classroom and with the students.

In relationships with students, proximal learning is seen and recognized as providing the basis for transformation. As one teacher stated, "[It] just takes patience, and it takes studying your student." The connections that are inevitable within the work of proximal learning provide the basis for intersubjective learning to take place. Proclivities, such as patience and sensitive caring, are necessary to determine what is needed for the student to progress. Progressive dialogue and activities promote a level of cognitive learning that the student internalizes, leading to a transformative experience. These positives are actualized in an environment of validation and identity-supporting activity through genuine dialogue, positive connection, and caring. Teachers in this study echoed this sentiment by stating that "If you're genuine with your kids, they'll be genuine with you," and "I wasn't always real honest with kids, and it took me - took me a while to realize that's what they wanted." They wanted and needed this genuine dialogue and connection to benefit and progress.

From the teacher's perspective, interactions with the students were not just based on the students but were influenced by the teacher's sociocultural and familial backgrounds, training and development within the school structure, teacher-to-teacher

interactions, and community and parental interactions. Therefore, the teacher had to navigate and negotiate a broad base of interactional dimensions to bring a substantive product into the classroom. Whether it was the school administration, parental involvement or non-involvement, collegial support or disinterest, or personal sensitivities, the teacher had to negotiate the realities of these experiences in bringing their version of teaching expertise into the classroom. A teacher referred to the presentation of her offerings in the classroom as a sales proposition, illuminating her expertise, passion, and product belief in the classroom interchange. Another teacher underlined adjustments needed to win the "hearts and minds" of the students, providing a springboard for transformation. Additionally, emphasis was made on the importance of parental involvement, administrative support, and teacher-to-teacher interactions. These understandings underscored the importance of navigating interactional dimensions to provide a route that facilitates and encourages buy-in from all interactional partners whenever possible.

Developmental Praxis

Personal development is an element of learning that enhances professional progress. The teachers in this study emphasized the importance of learning and growing within the experiences within the classroom environment. Whether negotiating the level and practice of parental involvement, the support or nonsupport of school administration entities, or the engagement with the diversity of student presentations within the classroom, the teachers were challenged with learning to negotiate these realities. In traversing these challenges, the teachers learned how to receive support from various

entities, drawing from their past lessons learned and emergent support in training, community, collegial, and even student support. These supports all contributed to refined meaning-making that included enhanced dialogue, humility, vulnerability, and motivation that came from a desire to connect and improve teaching regimens and enhance benefits for diverse student populations. From the phenomenon of this study, this learning practice included learning how to navigate racial differences that were present as a function of racial realism and the impartations and impacts of structural social assignments. Collectively, the teachers recognized but did not emphasize the ideology of racialization but referenced its impacts upon the urban Black students and what they had to learn in negotiating the realities of the experiences of these students. Whether being supported by community agents, their research into negotiating these barriers, their empathetic lessons from family learning, developmental training, help from colleagues who understood the ground, or dialogues with the students themselves, these teachers took on the developmental praxis needed to achieve personal and professional benefit. These practices produced bilateral benefits, as students and teachers benefitted from this learning ground.

Developmental Praxis from the standpoint of teacher development was instrumental in the improvement of dialogue and enhanced connection between the students and the teachers. The teachers' statements concerning sociocultural backgrounds, identity associations, and personal values indicated some collusions and separations that would require levels of negotiation and navigation. Black teachers shared in skin color but not necessarily in socioeconomics and environmental influences. In contrast, white

teachers were obviously disparate in regard to skin color but also indicated differences in socioeconomics, sociocultural expression, and environmental influences. Racialization, in its assignments, broaches separation, not just in skin color, but in social connections, economics, neighborhoods, gender expression, and in other ways and means of promoting separation and sustaining adversity. Maintaining an emphasis on developmental opportunities that accentuated positive intersubjective relationships bridged differences, enhanced connections, and promoted proximal learning.

These interpretations from the sociological strand throughout this study illuminated the sub-thematic constructs of Lifeworlds, Realizations, Interactional Dimensions, and Developmental Praxis. These constructs worked together to align the particulars from initial coding into generalized contextual descriptions and understandings based on the lived classroom experiences of the middle school teachers in this study. These descriptions and understandings were presented as reflections from the intuitions and intentionality presented as referenced through the Moustakas process in the phenomenological mode. This approach not only elocuted the conscious interpretations from the noema perceptions of the teachers to the phenomenon of racialization but also the noesis perspectives that came from enlightened thought and emotive acceptance of meaning-making through unconscious experience and intuitive insight.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study were indicated within the power dynamics of school administration, what the teachers were willing to disclose relative to this topic, and the teachers' reactivity relative to the study's progression. Meeting these limitations required

transparency throughout the process and delimitations that kept the integrity of the discussions within the classroom sphere. It was assumed that the reactivity of the topic relative to the current political climate might influence the content of responses, and the willingness to disclose personal proclivities. Exacerbation of this concern was fueled by the possibilities of administrative stances as influenced by societal sound bites.

The element of school administration was taken out of the picture as most participants were retired teachers. The one teacher who was currently employed as a primary school teacher had no reservations about sharing his perspectives. This perspective was aided by this teacher's positive relationship with school administration. As for all the participants, an added support for free expression and a relaxed environment was that this study was conducted in the summer months and by Zoom application. The teachers conducted interviews from a personally chosen location outside of the classroom location if preferred. This option aided the study's discursive elements and teacher reactivities as study management was advantaged in an affable environment and deferential tonality. Bracketing on my part as the researcher was prioritized to maintain the teachers' individual and collective voice throughout the study. The delimitating aspect of nuancing the questioning and probes to keep the discussion within the classroom rubric (although the societal influence was unavoidable) was managed well by the participants, as their classroom-related rhetoric was more than applicable to the purposes and intent of the study.

Additional limitations to this study were expanded around larger societal structural impacts on the school environment. These points of emphasis were referenced

within the studies by Howard (2020) and Mims and Williams (2020), including constructs in CRT that relate to structural racism relative to the multiple worlds experience of urban Black adolescents, the diminishing of identity validation in the curriculum, and uneven application of disciplinary action. Differentiations and inequities in school cultural offerings, as demonstrated in mixed schools and "de facto" segregated schools (Prosser, 1934) were also left unaddressed as an intent of delimitation, and maintaining an emphasis on teacher expression of happenings and lived experiences within the classroom. There were salient references to these realities, primarily by Black teachers, but not in such relevance that would merit significant reference to the goals of this study. These limitations provided no hindrance to the breadth and impact of this particular study, but they are worthy of merit as study topics in related contexts and emphasis. Therein, the trustworthiness and authenticity of this study's merits maintained alignment with the purposes.

The smaller number of participants is another limitation that this study presented. Studies in the phenomenological approach merit smaller numbers of participants because of the lived experiences within a defined context around a phenomenon (Dawidowicz, 2020). In addition, saturation was found within the responses as a repeated theme emerged and was continually represented in sub-themes as elocuted and merged within the conceptual framework (top-down approach) and initial coding processes (bottom-up approach). However, possible expansion in the discussion of topics about perspective school-related impacts of racialization (i.e., discrimination, identity suppression, disproportionate discipline) remain as topics of elocution within similar contexts. These

possibilities speak to the transference benefits of this study, as thick descriptions of the setting and participants lend usefully to further studies.

Recommendations

Racialization as a phenomenon has a societal position as an ideology and as a functional tool in the subjugation of marginalized populations. This study recognizes the ideology as a phenomenon that introduces and enforces differences between peoples, but also the teacher participants' recognition of its impacts upon the lives and livelihood of urban Black adolescents as they enter and attempt to function within the classroom. This places the middle school teacher as a translational and transformative entity in the school lives of these students, and a mediator in the climatic and climactic impacts on their socioemotional development.

From an historical perspective, identity and cultural validation in the comparison of mixed and "de facto" segregated schools probe into the sociocultural impacts of racialization, tying back into the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision and questions posed by stage environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Marchante et al., 2022). The study by Prosser (1934) predated the Supreme Court decision and was referenced in terms of the psychological impact on Black adolescents. From this perspective, the psychologies and socioemotional development of the urban Black adolescent is prioritized, whether within the integrated school environment or a school primarily attended by this demographic. Thereby, the translational, mediatorial, and transformative skills of the middle school teacher stand out, as their presence in the lives of the students is highly influential.

Therefore, the voice of the middle school teacher is recommended as a policy consultant when considering the well-being of the urban Black adolescent in the classroom. Appropriate training is indicated in mediating and negotiating their proclivities concerning their engagement with this student population; however, conducted with the respect due to their professional and relational positioning with the student population. Teachers within this study refer to their demeanor in the classroom as a “calling,” and not as just an occupier of this position, and the value of this demeanor should be considered in the elocution of policies concerning the well-being of these students within the classroom.

Various studies look into the negative experiences of urban Black students within school environments serving as proxies of societal marginalization and assignments (i.e., Gray et al. 2018; Howard, 2020; Mims & Williams, 2020); however, the voices of students in their experiences with middle school teachers need greater illumination. Additionally, broad-based studies that look into environmental and societal impacts in racialized school environments are plentiful, and the realities of these experiences are well-noted. However, the nuances of the interpersonal relationships of student/teacher dyads that have provided beneficial outcomes need broader illumination.

Therefore, it is beneficial for middle school teachers to continually review the quality of their engagements with urban Black adolescents as not only a practice in professional development but also in personal development as an enhancer of community connection and a detractor from the conveyance of social disconnects and devaluations. School administrators and education advocates should also be aware of social constructs

that build disconnects rather than enhance the benefits of diverse, informed, and connected educational environments. Narratives that do not elevate the voices of all involved parties hinder interconnected and interpersonal dialogues and cognitive growth and development. Solutions are better seen when the frank honesty of situational experiences and impacts are illuminated along with validated solution-based beneficial pathways.

Implications

A construct of CRT is the devaluation of the personal and communal narratives of the disaffected. Pursuing remedies for this malady has value for broad-based illumination of the experiences and conditions of these populations. The experiences of urban Black adolescent students within school systems that do not understand, respect, or include identity and cultural differences make for difficulties that mimic societal separations. However, the work of sensitive, understanding, and informed teachers provides mediatorial, translational, and transformative possibilities. In too many cases, the voices of these teachers are muted as their value is diminished, and their narratives are suppressed or deferred for systemic prerogatives. This study recognizes the difficulties that racialization brings within the classroom environment but also illuminates, through the teacher's voice, the possibilities that real connections can bring. These possibilities recognize the value in learning through acceptance of differences and following the path of humility that leads to better understanding and demonstrative professionalism.

An inclusive connection that recognizes the contribution of all relevant parties provides pathways for interactive growth and development. The constructs in proximal

learning lay a groundwork for not only the teacher/student dyad but also the parent/teacher, teacher/teacher, and administrator/teacher dyads. Emergent intersubjective learning provides a cognitive base for developmental learning for all involved.

Intersubjectivity begins as the basis of proximal learning. The most learned of the dyad provides information and accessibility. Whether it is the teacher, the parent, the student, or the administrator, the most informed of the dyad provides the information from which to lay a groundwork for dialogue, leading to intersubjective engagement and cognitive learning for all engaged parties, as a pretext for connective development and personal growth. Pairing this approach with the acceptance of the impactful realities that structural social assignment brings ushers in an understanding of the difficulties that the maintenance of these biased structures brings to all.

Additionally, this approach represents integrated usage of Bronfenbrenner's systems theory (2005) as it provides an understanding of the context of racialization's impact when spread throughout human systems. However, it also indicates the benefit of bringing integrated and connected solutions. School systems can participate in providing a systemic intercessory and proactive subcultural approach. Demonstrating the value of systemic approaches that prioritize humility, connection, and inclusivity, adding valuable learning opportunities and professionalism to the school environment, and representing this process to connected entities.

The study process also provided opportunities for me as the researcher to become a part of this learning and developmental climate. The meaning-making shared by the participant teachers gave viewpoints that were otherwise not known to me or understood

as coming from these teachers' experience and professional demeanor. Their classroom experiences provided enlightenment and encouraged humility in maintaining a respectful and affable tonality and posture for learning. This demeanor reflects positively on Moustaka's encouragement towards the suspension of judgment to receive the participant's voice. Learning is continually bilateral when the connection is prioritized, and the residue from the relationship provides fodder for future engagements and learning opportunities.

Future studies may illuminate these beneficial pathways, even if they provide details of negative or unsupportive realities that would inform progressive directions. This study's emphasis on meaning-making of middle school teachers touted connections as tantamount to their successes in the classroom. However, these teachers also referenced losses, including educational shortfalls and premature deaths, as functions of their experiences and heartaches. Connection and relationships become of greater focus when adversity and shortfalls are brought into focus. Studies that delve into the particulars of these losses would be beneficial in the details they might provide, but they might also be painful. The affability and attention to tonality that were standards in this study would be indispensable in studies that touch upon these negative experiences and remembrances.

Studies that touch on the collective and collateral impact of racialization's residue within the school environment should involve the voices of all the players and their voices. These prospective participants include the students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and community policymakers. Meaning-making through lived

experiences would still provide rich detail as it touches on the conscious intent and intuitive thought and reveals unconscious meanderings looking for a place to land and express. These expressions within the context of nurturing and preserving a positive sociological strand borrow from the subthemes of this study (Lifeworlds, Realizations, Interactional Dimensions, Developmental Praxis) and provide the groundwork for providing beneficial outcomes within the school environment of urban Black adolescents and translating throughout the student body.

Maintaining affability and respectful tonality is important in engagements that are revealing and reactive. Focus groups of peers (i.e., teacher/teacher, parent/parent, administrator/administrator) might be the next step beyond the personal interview, followed by mixed group interactions (i.e., parent/teacher, parent/administrator). Political power plays and active racial bias tend to muddy the waters of real connective context and exploration. However, where true and honest intent can be found, exploration of commonalities and beneficial intent should be explored.

Conclusion

This study pursued two primary purposes. The first was to explore the perspectives of middle school teachers relative to their experiences with the racialization of urban Black middle school adolescents. The second purpose was to explore teacher perspectives concerning the coalescing of student and teacher meaning-making toward addressing racialization and revealing possible solutions. A supplementary goal of this study was to explore the mediatorial and translational position of the middle school teacher in support of these students' development and educational trajectory.

The exploration of teacher perspectives around the racialization phenomenon yielded a realization of the impacts of racialization upon this student population, the integrated issues of adolescent development, and the personalization and professionalism needed for integrating connections and enhanced relationships to produce beneficial outcomes. Connection as a validating need in adolescent development and bridging racial divides played a pivotal role in the teachers' perspectives. This duality was noted in the teachers' collective view of connection in the developmental stage of adolescence as preceding racial designations and also included connection as pertinent when working amid the impacts of racialization. The coalescing of meaning-making between these teachers and their urban Black student population became a treatise in semiotic contrasts mediated through relationship, connection, and understanding, producing bilateral learning and development. This proximal learning dynamic emphasized relationship-based solution finding and placed the teacher as a translational and transformative figure.

The phenomenological approach pursued in this study provided a structure for hearing the voices of the participants, adding value to their lived experiences and validity to their meaning-making. A construct of CRT is the muting of the subject's personal narratives, and this suppression rings throughout society. Those marginalized are subjectively placed within a social assignment that disallows their most relevant contributions. Parents, teachers, students, and administrators are put into these role plays and are expected to toe the line and withhold the dictates that uphold the subjective structure. However, when we learn from each other proximally, and those with the most

pertinent insight are encouraged to share what they have experienced and learned, society is better served, as all play a part in the great social experiment. Cognitive development is enhanced, as Piaget (1969) alluded, where assimilation and accommodation become the modes of enhanced learning, and as intra-subjective continuity increases our understanding of each other.

The participant teachers in this study found value throughout the sociological strand, as they took the best learning from their backgrounds and applied it within their sphere of influence. They learned to listen, to be sensitive, and humbly receive the direction and purpose that would enhance their productivity with this marginalized student population, even amid the impacts of racialization. Perfection in execution was not the goal but the enhancement of personal understanding and meaning-making to develop, nurture, and enhance the connections and relationships needed to produce the most beneficial outcomes for those under their charge. The most progressive approaches, as extended from these participants' reflections and behaviors, included hearing and validating the voices and experiences of varied marginalized populations. This approach broaches behavioral learning as a tool for building connections and understandings, leading to better and more productive experiences within the larger societal strand.

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Appendix: Sample Letter

Hello, prospective participant,

I hope this letter finds you well.

My name is _____, and I am in the Walden Ph.D. program in developmental psychology. My dissertation focuses on the racialization of Black urban middle school students from the perspective of the middle school teacher. I am seeking middle school teachers of urban Black students with at least 3 years of experience teaching and middle school teachers of urban Black students who have retired within the past 12 years. The dialogues with students informed by the training, experience, and understanding of middle school teachers illuminate students' experiences within the classroom. The sought value in this study is what the middle school teacher brings in the development of their viewpoints on the experiences of the urban Black student under the impact of racialization.

My background as a mentor and project coordinator for elementary, middle school, and high school students has contributed to my zeal for the actual capacity of these students to be realized and celebrated. The positioning and connection of middle school teachers are significant during this most active developmental period for these students, and your contribution to this study is of considerable value. The sharing of your descriptions and understandings might contribute towards elevating administrative focus to the voice of the middle school teacher in addressing the impact of racialization in the classroom and pivoting approaches in educating these children and recognizing their true capabilities.

The interview process will include completing an Informed Consent statement (I'll e-mail this to you), allowing me to interact with you around a list of interview questions. Scheduling will follow, in accordance with your scheduling possibilities. This conversation will be conducted as an interview using ZOOM as the medium. However, a face-to-face or phone interview is available upon request. The interview should take at most 60 minutes of your time. I look forward to discussing racialization's impact on urban Black students from your professional and personal perspectives.

Thank You