

AN ILLUMINATION OF THE ROAD TO RESILIENCE FOR BLACK MILLENNIAL
TEACHERS AS A MEANS OF ADDRESSING THE BLACK TEACHER SHORTAGE

by

Jameka Jones

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience in Virginia public elementary schools. The central question of this study was: "What are the lived experiences that Black millennial teachers ascribe to their resilience in Virginia public school elementary settings?" The theory guiding this study was resilience theory by Masten (2014) which described positive human adaptation through the interplay of individual and contextual risk and protective factors that contributed to resilience. This study followed a qualitative design with a transcendental phenomenological design. A sample with a minimum of 10 participants from Woodrow County Public Schools was confirmed through purposeful sampling through the use of a questionnaire during recruitment. Data collection methods included a journaling protocol, standardized open interviews, and a focus group interview. Data analysis occurred through the Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method for transcendental phenomenology.

Keywords: resilience, Black teacher, millennial teacher, methods, phenomenology, retention, Black teacher shortage

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to every Black educator, fulfilling the dutiful call to educate. You continue to show up and persevere no matter what you encounter. You are seen, your impact is innumerable, and your strength is unmatched.

Acknowledgements

I cannot believe this happened! I am still in awe. All glory and honor go to God, my Father and Comforter, for so clearly calling me to this journey and guiding me throughout it. This journey has not just been academic. It has stretched me spiritually and emotionally in ways I did not know I needed, therefore it will always be a testimony of His sovereignty and goodness towards me.

I also want to thank my family. Whatever I have needed, they have always provided. At times it was fellowship, necessary distractions, and comedic relief. Other times it was space and understanding. They have never ceased to amaze me with how supportive they are with everything I try to take on- my biggest cheerleaders! Other cheerleaders include my church families, friends, colleagues, and dissertation committee. When I first heard my dissertation chair, Dr. Swezey, say, “Congratulations, Dr. Jones” at my dissertation defense, the name had such a familiar ring to it. That is because for the last four years, my supportive circle has spoken it over me regularly. They cheered me on and held me up when I did not see it or believe it myself. This is a shared accomplishment! I could not have done it without you!

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List of Abbreviations

Collaborative Learning Team (CLT)

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Global Positioning System (GPS)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)

Teacher Follow Up Survey (TFS)

United States of America (U.S.)

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service (U.S. Department of Education)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Student demographics of schools in the United States of America (U.S.) are more diverse now than they have ever been, yet classrooms continue to be led by a teaching workforce where 79% of teachers are white (Taie & Goldring, 2020). In 2015-16, 7% of teachers were Black (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020; Taie & Goldring, 2014). In 2012-13, 22% of Black teachers either moved to different schools or left the profession (Goldring et al., 2014). Black teacher attrition has remained problematic for many years (Madkins, 2011), and educators are looking for ways to recruit and retain a racially and ethnically diverse workforce. Additionally, attrition rates are highest among novice teachers (Goldring et al., 2014; Hughes, 2012; Redding & Henry, 2018) who, at the time of this study, meet the birth year criteria to be members of the generational cohort, Generation Y. While 20% of Generation Y, also known as millennials, is projected to enter the teacher workforce (Dilworth, 2018), researchers have asserted the need to determine ways to embrace generational diversity in the workplace or else organizations risk attrition of younger employees (Abrams, 2018; Cugin, 2012; Dilworth, 2018; Maier et al., 2015). Pairing the prevailing Black teacher shortage with trends of millennials in the workplace, there is reason to be concerned. A further complication may be evident as many Black millennials no longer see education as an attractive career option (Dilworth, 2018; Madkins, 2011). The sizable impact of this occurrence warrants exploration to better understand its pervasiveness and long-term effects.

This chapter provides a foundational framework for the study of Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience in Virginia public elementary schools. The background, my personal connection, and the interpretive framework will be explained. The

problem, purpose, and significance of the study will be detailed, followed by an explanation of the research questions and definitions that are pertinent to the study.

Background

At the onset of the 21st century, Olson (2000) contended an estimated two million additional teachers would be necessary to support rising student enrollments. While recruitment efforts have attempted to meet the demand for more teachers, increased teacher attrition has counteracted these efforts, thus creating a national teacher shortage (Bobek, 2002). Numerous education researchers have named trends in teacher retention and attrition as areas for the general public's concern (Bobek, 2002; Holmes et al., 2019; Sun, 2018). The most recent statistics regarding teacher retention, attrition, demographics, and ages come from the 2012-13 Teacher Follow Up Survey which was conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau (Goldring et al., 2014). As of the 2012-13 year, the teacher attrition rate was 16% of teachers (Goldring et al., 2014). Teacher attrition rates encompass teachers who have transferred to a new school and those who have left the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Redding & Henry, 2018). While one-third of teachers leave the profession due to retirement, two-thirds of teachers leave for reasons unrelated to retirement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Additionally, statistics indicate that young and/or novice teachers are most at risk for teacher transfer and attrition (Goldring et al., 2014; Hughes, 2012; Redding & Henry, 2018). At the time of this study, the majority of teachers considered to be novices have birth years that assign them to the millennial generational cohort. This cohort has been determined to have greater job mobility in comparison to other generational cohorts (Brown, 2012; Cugin, 2012;

Maier et al., 2015; Walker, 2009) which has and will impact teacher retention. Perpetual high attrition of teachers has grave effects in the educational system.

Combine teacher attrition with rising student enrollment and difficulty recruiting and retaining millennial teachers, and a long-term teacher shortage can be inferred. About 90% of the annual nationwide demand for teachers is created by teachers who decide to voluntarily or involuntarily leave the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This attrition has an innumerable impact, including high costs for taxpayers and depriving students of experienced, high-quality teachers (Podolsky et al., 2017). This phenomenon indicates an investigation of teacher resilience to determine what factors contribute to some teachers persevering while others choose to transfer or leave the profession. A better understanding of these factors can support researchers and practitioners in increasing teacher retention for all demographics including teachers of racially and generationally diverse populations.

The preceding figures and trends represent the general population of the public teaching workforce however, even more concerning is the lack of entrance and retention of a racially diverse workforce. Numerous researchers have cited major benefits from having a diversified educational workforce (Atkins et al., 2014; Brown, 2005; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Jackson & Kohli, 2016; Madkins, 2011; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Despite confirmed benefits of a racially diversified workforce, teachers of color comprised 21.7% of the teaching workforce in the 2017-18 school year (Taie & Goldring, 2020) and had higher transfer rates within the profession in comparison to white teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Hancock and Scherff (2010, as cited in Farinde et al., 2016) determined being a teacher of color was a predictor of teacher attrition, as well as teacher workload, salary, and school conditions.

While teacher attrition, in general, is concerning, in comparison, statistics for Black teacher attrition are alarming. Current literature has explored Black teacher attrition while no literature can be found pertaining to Black millennial teacher attrition. Recognizing the variety of literature asserting the existence of unmistakable generational diversity, common millennial workplace attributes, and workplace adversity (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Brown, 2018; Cagin, 2012; Dilworth, 2018; McCrindle, 2012; Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Valenti, 2019; Walker, 2009; Zemke et al., 2000), it is necessary to investigate the impact of generational membership on teacher retention and attrition as well. Understanding the current and projected shortage of teachers who are both Black and part of the millennial generation is valuable. This phenomenon necessitates an exploration of factors that support or hinder the formation of Black millennial teacher resilience development. Through this exploration, researchers and practitioners can develop a better understanding of factors contributing to minimal retention and ways to increase teacher retention of this racial-generational demographic in order to maximize the benefits within U.S. public schools.

The following sections provide the historical, social, and theoretical context of the Black teacher shortage, the role of generationally diverse workplaces, and resilience literature. At the time of this study, there is minimal literature focused on Black millennials. The millennial generation is the most studied generational cohort in history (Pew Research Center, 2010), and I have not found any literature specifically focused on Black teachers of the baby boomer or Generation X cohorts. For this reason, a large majority of the historical, societal, and theoretical contexts may focus on either racial or generational demographics separately.

Historical Context

Of the 21.7% of teachers of color in the workforce, 7% are Black, public school teachers (Taie & Goldring, 2020). In comparison to non-Black teacher turnover rates, Black teachers are nearly 50% more likely to leave the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Holmes & Gibson, 2019). The prevailing Black teacher shortage and high attrition rates are not recently developed phenomena. Farinde et al. (2016) noted that after emancipation and until segregation, Black [female] teachers joined and remained in the teaching profession to support the advancement of the Black community. During this time period, it was common for Black children to grow up with mothers who were teachers (Dilworth, 2018), making the profession highly revered and admirable for Black Americans. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was a major contributor of the Black teacher shortage.

As a result of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, schools were integrated as Black students were sent to formerly white schools which led to many Black teachers losing their jobs, finding employment elsewhere. Nearly 39,000 Black teachers in 17 states lost their jobs from 1954 to 1965 (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). This was when the Black teacher began to become less visible in the teacher workforce in comparison to the white teacher. From 1987-88 to 2011-12, growth was seen in the number of Black teachers in the workforce, however, during the same period, the proportion of Black teachers decreased from 8.2% to 6.8% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

At the turn of the new millennium, the Black teacher exodus continued during the recession as school closings in urban districts encountered declining enrollments and fell under sanctions that targeted schools with low test scores under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). During 2000-2012, the decrease in numbers of Black teachers in large cities was proportionally much larger than decreases in other racial populations, ranging from 15%-62% (Carver-Thomas,

2018). In New Orleans, which had the greatest decrease out of seven large cities, over 7,000 teachers were fired after Hurricane Katrina (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Many were replaced by younger, white teachers as district schools were replaced by charter schools (Buras, 2011; Carver-Thomas, 2018).

In addition to these factors that contributed to a Black teacher exodus, Brown (2005) asserted perpetual obstacles have continued to exist for Black teachers' entrance in the workforce. Brown (2005) contested that the presence of test bias in standardized tests required for licensure specifically impact and deter diverse candidates from obtaining licensure. Carver-Thomas (2018) contended teachers of color receive inadequate teacher preparation which results in entering the profession through alternative certification routes. This entry through alternative certification pathways increases the likelihood of attrition by 25% when compared to teachers entering through traditional teacher preparation programs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In her literature review on Black teacher shortage, Madkins (2011) affirmed these obstacles and added increased opportunities in other fields as an additional pervasive contemporary factor of the shortage.

Social Context

Due to the licensure obstacles that often plague teachers of color, Brown (2005) contended a greater emphasis is needed to ensure minority teachers are not at a disadvantage that contributes to the inability to become certified. Failure to do so contributes to ongoing disproportionate rates of teachers of color to students of color (Brown, 2005). Farinde et al. (2016) posited that despite research that shows "highly qualified Black teachers are uniquely positioned to teach Black students because of a cultural understanding of their students' home and community life," (p. 115) there remains a perpetual Black teacher shortage and low

representation of Black teachers in the U.S. educational workforce. Black teachers have been shown to yield lower dropout rates, improved student achievement, increased student desire to attend college, and positive perceptions from students prove the schooling experiences and academic outcomes of students of color (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Black teachers are more likely to feel called to teaching positions in low-income communities of color where openings are difficult to fill (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Dilworth (2018) contended that students of color will become the statistical majority in U.S. public school populations within millennial teachers' lifetime yet a diversified workforce remains to be seen. Despite some successful retention efforts, Black teacher turnover continues to maintain a Black teacher shortage in U.S. public schools (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

As of 2012-13, the highest rate of attrition occurred by teachers less than 30 years and 30-39 years (Goldring et al., 2014). Redding and Henry (2018) found that in recent years 6% of novice teachers left within the school year, not to complete it. Novice teachers, often in the aforementioned age ranges, have contrasting workplace values and attributes in comparison to previous generational cohorts (Abrams, 2018; Cogin, 2012; Maier et al., 2015). Generational shifts in workplace values and career options may lead to difficulty attracting and retaining younger workers (Cogin, 2012) which further exacerbates the retention, persistence, and attrition of younger teachers.

Millennials are more engaged with technology, more interconnected due to social media, more concerned with social justice struggles, used to a multiracial and multicultural society, more likely to switch jobs more frequently, and face significant financial obstacles in adulthood (Dilworth, 2018). Abrams (2018) found that millennials are "high-achieving, tenacious, confident, and progressive teachers" (p. 75) and thrive when offered policy clarity upfront,

maximization of their time, coaching, technology access, technology integration, on-site support, and career advancement. Dilworth (2018) added that Black millennial teachers, however, differ in these areas in comparison to white millennials teachers. In contrast to teachers of color in the Generation X or baby boomer cohorts, millennial minorities have “notably lower levels of union membership and a higher stated interest in transferring to other schools” (Dilworth, 2018, p. 143). Prior to public school integration, being a teacher was one of the few career options in the Black community (Madkins, 2011). While being a teacher is still admirable within the Black community today, many millennials no longer view the career as first choice, citing the innumerable expanded employment options that pay more than teaching (Dilworth, 2018; Madkins, 2011).

Independent of racial or generational demographic, major themes of teacher attrition include lack of administrative support, poor student discipline, weak structures, weak district practices (Holmes et al., 2019), isolated conditions and poor salaries (Report: Teacher Attrition Costs Schools Billions, 2014). For Black teachers, additional reasons for leaving a school or the profession included dissatisfaction with their salary, lack of resources, worries about job security because of accountability measures, and lack of autonomy within their classroom (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Additionally, exploration of the projected impact of the millennial generational cohort’s deterred entrance and/or retention in the educational workforce is necessary. Based on data of racial and generational demographics, as of 2015-16, Black millennial teachers comprised 12%- 40% of the teacher workforce (NCES, 2019), and 44% of the millennial generation identify as people of color (Dilworth, 2018). Failure to recognize the benefits of Black teachers and shifting factors in workplace values of the millennial generation may extend the current lack of diversification of the educational workforce. It is critical that

educational leaders and researchers seek to develop a greater understanding of this racial and generational demographic. This allows a context to be created and sustained that attracts and enables a diverse educational workforce.

Theoretical Context

Despite the problematic and projected historical and social contexts, it is vital to remember that there is a small population of Black millennial teachers who are persevering in public school education. These resilient teachers, often forgotten due to research focused on attrition, are choosing to remain despite factors that cause others in their racial and generational cohort to leave. Bobek (2002) asserted teacher resilience and perseverance as crucial for classroom success and teacher retention. Resilience theory, well-known through the work of theorists such as: (a) Garmezy et al. (1984); (b) Rutter (1979); and (c) Werner (1982), analyzes human adaptational systems when adverse situations are experienced.

First investigated through analysis of at-risk children and teenagers who were able to adapt positively and thrive despite traumatic situations, resilience theorists like Masten (2014) have denied identification of resilience as an innate trait, choosing to call it “ordinary magic” that is the result of protective processes and factors. Masten (2014) contended resilience is “the capacity (potential or manifested) of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development; positive adaptation or development in the context of significant adversity exposure” (p. 308). Having limited investigation in the lives of adults, educational researchers have begun to utilize the resilience framework to analyze the process and factors that support teacher resilience.

Beltman et al. (2011) stated teacher resilience literature was new in 2011 and continues to grow. In a literature review on the topic, Beltman et al. (2011) defined resilience as “the

outcome of a dynamic relationship between individual risk and protective factors” (p. 185). Asserting teacher resilience as the key to longevity, Bobek (2002) defined resilience as “the ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one’s competence in the face of adverse conditions” (p. 202). Bobek (2002) aimed to contribute to the limited literature on resilience in adults through interviewing 12 young adults who experienced adversity yet persevered in college. Gu and Day (2007) asserted teacher resilience as a necessary condition for effectiveness through research of three teachers at different phases in their career while also adding teacher self-efficacy as worthy of investigation in resilience development. Additionally, Doney (2013) conducted longitudinal research of novice secondary science teachers to analyze and detail themes in resilience development. Resilience was identified as something to be fostered in novice teachers to support retention. Shifting from deficit-based language by focusing on teacher attrition, utilizing a resilience lens utilizes asset-based language to shed light on the processes that support positive teacher adaptation in a profession that continues to see pervasive exodus and shortages.

Situation to Self

The topic of this dissertation represents my own personal journey and curiosity as a Black millennial educator. Through my nine years as an educator, I have found myself wavering in commitment to remain in education due to varying contextual factors. I have often looked for educators of the same racial background or from my generation to troubleshoot with and form networks of support. I am always heartened to attend a meeting or professional learning opportunities and see educators who look like me, however, these occurrences have been few and far in between. Finding educators that look like me has been a rarity and has often yielded

discouragement when I have been unable to find relational networks to safely vocalize concerns or be encouraged.

Coming from a family of educators who esteemed education as a viable career, I have always been curious regarding the Black teacher shortage, as well as what causes Black millennial educators like me to choose and persevere in education. This curiosity is at the forefront of my research, and my racial and generational identity largely impacts the lens through which I view the world. Moustakas (1994) affirmed research questions and problems are demonstrative of the qualitative researcher's interests, involvement, and personal commitment to the research. This is an accurate description of my relation to this research. The decisions I have made and continue to make as an educator have been guided by philosophical assumptions and paradigms that led to my decision for this study and will be explained in this section.

Philosophical Assumptions

The first philosophical assumption that led to my choice of research is ontological. As a result of this assumption, I am committed to embracing the idea of multiple realities and report on different perspectives that develop in research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a Black millennial educator who has been both a classroom teacher and school leader, I relate to the teacher resilience research on adverse situations in the workplace. I have had to persevere through difficult situations and develop resilience throughout the past nine years in education. I will remain cognizant that my experiences are contextualized and based on one's perceptions. My reality may be different than my participants' realities. Different viewpoints can exist and be true. What one teacher perceives as a factor of retention, a teacher at another school may perceive as a reason for attrition. These multiple realities must be reported in the findings.

The second philosophical assumption is epistemological. Researchers operating under this assumption work to get close to participants being studied and minimize the distance that is often created between researchers and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Establishing relationships with participants through interviews will allow me to establish rapport and capture textural and structural descriptions of those experiencing the phenomenon.

Paradigm

My guiding paradigm is social constructivism. Social constructivist researchers look for ways to make meaning of the world they live and work within (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Working in the public school system for nine years, experiencing resilience development and also seeing many teachers unable to persevere, I have wanted to better understand the pervasive gap of teachers who look like me who have remained in the field. Constructivism is interpretive and provided me with an understanding of how to co-construct the meaning of my experiences through interactions with others to learn about their experiences. Doing this necessitates generating patterns of meaning by asking broad, open-ended questions that allow co-creation and interaction with those experiencing the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This interpretive framework is common with phenomenological studies. By honoring the multiple realities of participants, individuals' values are also honored. Having the ability to narrate themes using actual interviews of participants to see varying perspectives and insights to describe the experiences of Black millennial teachers will greatly align with the purpose of this study.

Problem Statement

The Black teacher shortage in U.S. public schools has existed for decades and may be exacerbated based on workplace differences and adversity experienced by the Black millennial cohort. The problem of the study is that Black millennial teachers have lived experiences with

the phenomenon of resilience despite having a higher attrition rate compared to other demographics (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dilworth, 2018; Goldring et al., 2014; Redding & Henry, 2018). The chances of recruiting and retaining Black millennial teachers to fill this gap may be greatly increased through understanding the lived experiences that demonstrate resilience by this racial-generational demographic. Recognizing that teacher retention is a by-product of resilience (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Tait, 2008), describing the factors that enable or inhibit the phenomenon of resilience in this high-risk group is imperative to address declining diversification by this demographic and generational cohort in the educational workforce. This problem necessitates that a transcendental phenomenological study is conducted to describe the protective and risk factors that contribute to the resilience of Black millennial teachers in elementary settings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience in Virginia public elementary schools. Resilience is "the capacity (potential or manifested) of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development; positive adaptation or development in the context of significant adversity exposure" (Masten, 2014, p. 308). Black or African American' refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes those identifying as African American, having Sub-Saharan African and/or Afro-Caribbean ancestral origins (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The range of birth years to be considered part of the millennial generational cohort vary, therefore I analyzed the timespan of various researchers and determined the years most consistent in researchers' definitions are 1980-1996 (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Cahil & Sedrak, 2012; Gong et al., 2018; Howe &

Strauss, 2000; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Tulgan, 2009; Valenti, 2019; Walker, 2009; Yeaton, 2008). For data collection purposes of this study, the term *millennial* will be defined as those with birth years 1980-1996. The theory guiding this study is resilience theory by Masten (2014) as it provides a framework that describes the interplay of protective factors that yield positive adaptation in human development during and after experiencing risk.

Significance of the Study

Investigation of Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience in Virginia public elementary schools is a nuanced topic embedded in systemic and historic Black teacher shortages, contemporary factors serving as obstacles for Black teachers, and shifting workplace values among the millennial generational cohort that threaten the educational workforce's ability to attract and retain younger teachers. This study seeks to (a) add data to the research literature as no literature exists regarding Black millennial in-service teachers, (b) allow missing voices of resilient Black millennial teachers to be heard, and (c) aid school leaders, district leaders, policymakers, higher education professionals, human resource staff, and others to gain better insight into factors that support retention of Black millennial teachers.

Empirical Significance

Limited research exists on teacher resilience and Black millennial teacher experiences. In 2011, only 17 of the 50 studies on teacher resilience focused on the American school system (Beltman et al., 2011). Gu and Day (2007) asserted promoting ideals of teacher resilience during the 21st century's change in education has remained an overlooked area. They contended examination of how teachers maintain positive contributions, despite challenges, might have countless benefits.

In addition, an examination into teacher resilience can also have benefits for the diversification of the workforce. Villegas and Irvine (2010) indicated there are gaps in the literature pertaining to a research-based rationale for increasing diversity in education. As a result, they conducted a literature review with the goal of identifying major themes for diversification of the teaching force, validated by empirical research. Additionally, minimal research has analyzed Black millennial teachers and/or the resilience of Black millennial teachers. Brown (2018) conducted research on Black millennial preservice teachers' views and experiences with racism in preservice experiences. This study did not focus on resilience or retention.

Black teachers often cite specific issues as reasons for leaving the profession which Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) determined as an important tool to develop policy interventions for increasing Black teacher retention. These are the voices that fail to be seen and heard in the literature. Brown (2008) contended resiliency research of racial minorities was a notable gap, despite the increase of resilience research over the years. Additionally, the emergence of differences in workplace values and obstacles for millennials is still a newer area of research given that the oldest millennial is 41 years of age, and millennials as a generational cohort have just begun to constitute a large portion of the workforce. This study seeks to provide a voice in the research to Black millennial teachers who have persevered in elementary education settings when many in the same racial and/or generational cohort are now choosing to walk away from the field or choose not to pursue it as a career choice. Brown (2018) noted there is considerably less literature focused specifically on millennials of color despite this generational cohort being the most studied to date (Pew Research Center, 2010). Researchers affirmed that conceptualizing teacher resilience will allow for development and examination of interventions

that enable new teachers to thrive, thus seeing a decline in skyrocketing teacher attrition rates (Beltman et al., 2011), particularly for the vulnerable population that is Black millennial teachers.

Theoretical Significance

Early resilience theorists viewed resilience as a biological trait. This idea has since been debunked, and major theorists such as Garmezy et al. (1984), Rutter (1979), and Werner (1982) have defined resilience as a common phenomenon based on basic human adaptational systems. Early resilience theorists focused evaluation of theoretical concepts on at-risk youth and children. Masten (1994) asserted the theoretical and empirical understanding of resilience development in adults was inadequate due to a lack of empirical research. With this awareness and emerging models of resilience, resilience theory continues to evolve. Application of resilience theory to the teaching profession remains limited, but growing, in American studies (Beltman et al., 2011). This study aims to add additional data to this area of resilience theory in the context of American public schools by using the resilience theory lens to explore resilience development in adults.

Practical Significance

A better understanding of resilience theory and hearing the voice of Black millennial teachers in the literature allows school leaders, district leaders, policymakers, higher education professionals, human resource staff, and more stakeholders to gain better insight into factors that support resilience development retention of Black millennial teachers. Maier et al. (2015) reported generational landscape and changing demographics are key issues for human resource management and workforce sourcing. Cogin (2012) affirmed understanding generational workplace values and adopting more age-oriented decision making will better aid organizations

in attracting qualified applicants and remaining competitive. Knowing the benefits of Black millennial teachers in the educational workforce, the insights provided through a description of the phenomenon will assist educators and educational leaders in understanding the supports and challenges faced by this group of teachers. Teacher resilience has been found to contribute to teacher retention and key, consistent themes are beginning to be seen in the literature (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007). The insight from this study can help others reflect and implement systems, structures, and supports that honor the needs of Black millennial teachers, leading this population to thrive and remain in education.

Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience in Virginia public elementary schools. At the time of the study, a pervasive Black teacher shortage is apparent and expected to continue as a result of difficult entrance into the profession and rapid exit (Brown, 2005; Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017; Madkins, 2011). This shortage is further magnified when this racial demographic is paired with the generational demographic, Generation Y, or millennial. Millennials differ in workplace values and expectations (Abrams, 2018; Cogins, 2012; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Maier et al., 2015) and have greater career opportunities in comparison to previous generations (Dilworth, 2018; Madkins, 2011). Teacher retention has been determined to be a byproduct of resilience development (Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007) which is an asset-based construct that emphasizes how individuals utilize protective factors, or supports, to overcome perceived adversity presented through risk factors, or challenges (Beltman et al., 2011; Benard, 2004; Masten, 2011; Resilience Research Centre, 2014). As a result, the following central research question and three sub-questions guided this study:

Central question- What are the lived experiences that Black millennial teachers ascribe to their resilience in Virginia public school elementary settings?

In 2012-13, 10% of Black teachers left the profession and 12% moved schools or positions within the profession (Goldring et al., 2014). 78% of Black teachers remained in the profession despite high attrition rates compared to other demographics. Bobek (2002) and Gu and Day (2007) asserted the necessity of teacher resilience for classroom success and retention. For resilience to be manifested, an individual must show evidence of recurring positive adaptation through utility of protective factors despite adverse conditions and risks that were evident (Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Masten, 2011; Shean, 2015). This central question allowed the possibility for me to capture how Black millennial teachers have utilized individual and/or contextual protective factors to positively adapt to an environment where same-race and same-generation individuals have exhibited high attrition. This is the phenomenon that is referenced in the remainder of the study. To attend to each component of the central question, three sub-questions will be explored:

Sub-question 1- What do Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual protective factors of resilience in public school elementary settings?

Protective factors are supports utilized to counteract risk. Benard (2004) posited protective factors buffer the effect of adversity. These factors can be classified as individual or contextual. Individual protective factors are personal attributes or personal strengths (Beltman et al., 2011; Benard, 2004) while contextual protective factors are those within one's environment that aid in the navigation of risk factors, or challenges. To determine whether an individual is resilient or not, there must be the utilization of protective factors to overcome adversity (Masten, 2011; Shean, 2015). Bobek (2002) contended resilience is enhanced when a teacher is able to

assess adverse situations, determine options for coping through protective factors, and then arrive at appropriate resolutions. Through each data collection method, participants will be asked to detail what specific supports enable them to navigate challenges within the profession thus manifesting resilience in the workplace.

Sub-question 2- What do Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual risk factors of resilience in public school elementary settings?

Previous resilience research notes risk factors, or challenges, that teachers encounter can be either individual or contextual (Beltman et al., 2011). A teacher's recognition of a risk factor is based on the perception of risk and will vary from person to person (Masten, 2011).

Contextual challenges have been highly researched and can be categorized as (a) pre-service, (b) family, (c) school or classroom context, and (d) professional work context. School climate, culture, and leadership are often the leading cause of teacher attrition or retention (Holmes et al., 2019). Researched individual risk factors have been negative self-beliefs or confidence, difficulty asking for help, and perceived conflict between personal beliefs and practices used (Beltman et al., 2011). Individual risk factors are an underdeveloped area in teacher resilience research (Beltman et al., 2011). Each data collection method asks participants to detail the risks they perceive in the workplace and weigh the impact of the risks on their lived experiences.

Sub-question 3- How does racial or generational identity contribute to protective and or risk factors in the lived experiences of resilient Black millennial teachers?

A large portion of teachers leave the profession within five years of teaching (Goldring et al., 2014; Hughes, 2012; Olson, 2000). While this may have been apparent prior to millennials joining the workforce, recent research asserted millennials as no longer seeing teaching as a lifelong career (Dilworth, 2018; Madkins, 2011). Considering the Black teacher shortage and

shifting workplace value of the millennial generational cohort, this sub-question explores how a teacher's racial and generational identities impact lived experience within education. This idea will be explored through face-to-face long interviews and focus group interviews during the data collection phase.

Definitions

1. *Black or African American*- Refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. The Black racial category includes people who marked the “Black, African Am., or Negro” checkbox. It also includes respondents who reported entries such as African American; Sub-Saharan African entries, such as Kenyan and Nigerian; and Afro-Caribbean entries, such as Haitian and Jamaican (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, para. 3).
2. *Millennial*- any person with a birth year 1980 through 1996 (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Cahil & Sedrak, 2012; Gong et al., 2018; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Tulgan, 2009; Valenti, 2019; Walker, 2009; Yeaton, 2008).
3. *Resilience*- “the capacity (potential or manifested) of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development; positive adaptation or development in the context of significant adversity exposure” (Masten, 2014, p. 308).

Summary

The Black teacher shortage has had a perpetual existence in the U.S. educational workforce for decades. The causes and ramifications of this shortage have been detailed in this chapter from a historical, social, and theoretical lens. Coupling this trend with the generational

workplace differences of millennials and that many no longer see education as an attractive career option (Dilworth, 2018; Madkins, 2011), creates cause for concern when considering the future of the educational workforce.

Numerous researchers have touted resilience theory as a framework that uses asset-based language to understand how persons persist in adverse situations (Beltman et al., 2011; Benard, 2004; Masten, 2011; Resilience Research Centre, 2014). Teacher retention has also been determined to be a byproduct of resilience development (Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007). For these reasons, resilience theory will be utilized as a foundation for this study.

As a Black millennial educator, I have persisted in the K-12 U.S. public school setting despite a variety of contextual and personal risk factors. My personal experience, curiosity about the experiences of other resilient Black millennial educators, and a desire to see Black millennial teachers' voices illuminated in the literature are paramount to this study. The philosophical assumptions and paradigm guiding my experience and this study have been explained. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience in Virginia public elementary schools. Centering the question, "What are the lived experiences that Black millennial teachers ascribe to their resilience in Virginia public school elementary settings?," the intent of the study is to provide a voice for Black millennial teachers in the literature to aid educational leaders in developing workplaces that enable retaining of teachers in this racial and generational demographic. Finally, the three sub-questions and definitions of (a) resilience, (b) Black, and (c) millennial have been detailed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Resilience theory is the conceptual framework for this study which seeks to describe Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience. The following sections explain the theoretical framework of resilience theory, provide additional understanding of teacher resilience, and add on to explanations for the study's significance that were discussed in Chapter One. The subsequent sections explore related literature comparing and contrasting figures and studies on teacher retention, transfer, and attrition by racial/ethnic demographics and generational cohort.

Theoretical Framework

First used to explain how individuals adapt and develop despite experienced adversity, resilience literature was first visible in the late-20th century through classic studies by resilience researchers such as: (a) Garmezy et al. (1984); (b) Rutter (1979); and (c) Werner (1982). Early resilience science literature centered on resilience in children, youth, and adolescents. While a theory was developed to encapsulate human adaptation in adverse situations, several arguments provide the rationale that most overcome adversity despite circumstances (Benard, 2004). Similar findings have been concluded regarding teacher resilience. Statistically, most teachers experience adversity in the workplace yet stay and adapt (Gu & Day, 2007).

Given dismal statistics on Black teacher retention, transfer, and attrition, I challenge the idea that most teachers adapt. I advocate for understanding the resilience development of Black millennial teachers to intervene based on dwindling retention rates seen and projected for this racial-generational demographic. Resilience theory is an asset-based framework of this study that enables research participants to add their voice to the literature by describing their lived

experiences with the phenomenon. I believe the use of the resilience theoretical framework will illuminate specific protective factors that can serve as interventions to retain Black millennial teachers. This section explores resilience literature to provide a theoretical foundation for the study and subsequent sections of the chapter.

Resilience Theory

The concept and exploration of resilience became most notable during the late 20th century as researchers in psychology, psychiatry, and related fields sought ways to explain variations in human development and adaptation (Masten, 2014). Recognizing that risk could be mitigated and recovery was possible despite various global calamities, clinicians and scientists began studies to explore how individuals and families navigated adversity (Masten, 2018). Resilience research has since evolved into studying the processes and systems that account for the variation in individuals who experience adversity (Masten, 2014). Beginning as a framework for exploring negative consequences of adversity (Masten, 2018), resilience research has shifted from a deficit-based focus of risk factors seen in high-risk groups to an asset-based focus on positive adaptation. This included a shift from a focus on mental illness and behavioral problems to mental health and problem prevention (Doney, 2013; Masten, 2014; Shean, 2015). Masten (2014) described resilience research as having occurred in four distinct waves with progressive focuses: (a) descriptive, (b) processes of resilience development, (c) interventions for resilience development, and (d) systems-oriented approaches.

Norman Garmezy, a clinical psychologist often cited as the founder of resilience research, first focused his research on schizophrenia and mental illness (Shean, 2015). He then led a longitudinal study, Project Competence, which investigated positive outcomes in at-risk children. This set a foundation for resilience as a science by establishing definitions and

descriptions of concepts like stress resistance, competence, and resilience (Masten, 2014; Shean, 2015). This enabled subsequent waves where (a) processes that led to resilience were determined, (b) interventions to promote resilience were created while testing theories of resilience development, and (c) systems for resilience development and multidisciplinary approaches were considered (Masten, 2014). Pioneering research and studies cited as having established and broadened the understanding of resilience science include but are not limited to: (a) Garmezy et al. (1984); (b) Rutter (1979); and (c) Werner (1982). Ann Masten, whose resilience research was largely utilized to ground this study, was both a colleague and student of Norman Garmezy. She is a clinical psychologist with a research focus in competence, risk, resilience, and human development. In its early stages of being named and researched, resilience was considered to be a personal trait in individuals, however, Masten's research revealed and characterized resilience as "ordinary magic," citing the existence of resilience as the result of normative processes and basic human adaptation (Masten, 2014).

Resilience is a framework used to capture and narrate systems of functioning that yield positive adaptation in human development after experiencing risk. At the time of the current study, the topic of resilience research extends to a variety of disciplines. Researchers may use different terms to classify aspects of the theoretical concepts, however, to frame this study, the definition of resilience as provided by Masten (2014) was utilized. Masten (2014) contended resilience is "the capacity (potential or manifested) of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development; positive adaptation or development in the context of significant adversity exposure" (p. 308). A previous definition by Masten (2011) used the phrasing "withstand or recover from significant changes" (p. 494) and has since been revised to "adapt successfully" to reflect a new understanding that individuals do

not avoid risk but instead change, or adapt, to navigate the risk (Shean, 2015). The methods and resources through which individuals navigate risk and adapt to overcome adversity are called protective factors.

Through research with the Project Competence longitudinal study, Masten (2011) affirmed an association of adversity exposure and adaptive outcomes result in a classification of individuals as: (a) resilient, (b) competent, (c) maladaptive, and (d) vulnerable. To be considered resilient, individuals must demonstrate existence of positive, or good level, adaptation with moderate to high levels of past or current adverse conditions (Masten, 2011). In accordance with the understanding of the criteria for individuals to be considered resilient, researchers note all humans have access to resilience and the ability to develop it, however, its development is enhanced or hindered by the utility and complexity of protective and risk factors (Beltman et al., 2011; Bernard, 2004; Gu & Day, 2007).

The utility of protective factors to counteract adversity is a fundamental component of resilience theory. The complex construct of resilience necessitates an interrelation of demonstrable risk and protective factors. Risk factors are described as “current or past hazards judged to have the potential to derail normative development” (Masten, 2001, p. 2). Risk factors are commonly classified as individual or contextual. Additionally, risk factors can co-occur and cumulate in situations and over time (Masten, 2001). Protective factors are utilized to navigate and positively adapt to these risk factors. An individual’s use of protective factors predicts whether outcomes in adverse contexts will be desirable and favorable (Masten, 2014). These supports and opportunities safeguard the potential impact of adversity thus allowing resilience to be developed (Benard, 2004). While both risk and protective factors must be present for

resilience to be developed, protective factors have been determined to be better predictors of the degree of resilience demonstrated by individuals (Benard, 2004).

Additional terms used to categorize protective and risk factors include environmental (Bobek, 2013), professional factors (Gu & Day, 2007), social and institutional (Doney, 2013), and challenges or supports (Beltman et al., 2011). For this study, protective and risk factors were generally classified as either individual or contextual. Though researchers may label specific individual protective factors differently, Benard (2004) determined similarities across studies have yielded four areas of classification of personal attributes and strengths: (a) social competence, (b) problem solving, (c) autonomy, and (d) sense of purpose. These categories are consistent with individual protective factors identified in resilience literature (Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Masten, 2011; Tait, 2008). Individual protective factors often transcend context while contextual protective and risk factors are rooted in the specific environment being studied. For this reason, examples were provided in the discussion of teacher resilience development. Protective factors are invaluable in understanding how resilient individuals are developed and thrive in adversity. Such understanding can aid researchers and practitioners in determining interventions that target human adaptive systems and build resilience for at-risk individuals (Masten, 2014).

Teacher Resilience

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (2002) ushered in shifts in the teaching profession such as policy reform, lessened teacher autonomy, and stringent accountability measures. Exacerbating already high teacher attrition rates and a teacher shortage, researchers recognized the need for studying resilience development in teachers as a result of added stressors in education (Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007). Utilizing the

aforementioned conceptual definitions of resilience theory, these stressors are risk factors. Literature centered on exploring teacher retention and attrition is overwhelmingly focused on identifying risks, and resilience researchers recognize individual and contextual protective factors are better predictors of resilience (Benard, 2004). Recognizing that the resilience framework is premised in asset-based conceptualizations (Beltman et al., 2011; Doney, 2013; Masten, 2014; Shean, 2015), findings from resilience studies have an application to teacher retention and attrition (Bobek, 2002). The utility of this theoretical framework to explore teacher resilience enables a focus on individual and contextual factors that contribute to the development of teachers who are resilient in an adverse educational climate. Day (2008) posited a better understanding of these factors is necessary to investigate what enables teachers to remain motivated, committed, and effective in the profession. This is the central premise for applying resilience theory to the teaching context to ground this study.

Based on their review of teacher resilience research which was contended to be a relatively new area of inquiry, Beltman et al. (2011) contended teacher resilience provides a framework to better recognize how teachers are able to persist when facing challenges. Utilizing similarly phrased definitions for resilience theory stated in the previous section, teacher resilience specifically addresses the risk and protective factors within the context of teaching as a profession. Teacher resilience researchers have added: “The social dimension of teacher resilience recognises the interactive impact of personal, professional and situated factors on teachers’ work and lives and contextualises teachers’ endeavour to sustain their professional commitment” (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 1305). Analyzing stressors and protective factors in the lives of novice secondary science teachers, Doney (2013) found the interplay between these factors was primary in the development of resilience and able to counteract the impact of risk. Gu and

Day (2007) asserted the resilience process is *sophisticated* by describing it as a dynamic synergy between a teacher's sense of efficacy, professional and personal identities, and interaction between professional, personal, and contextual scenarios throughout different professional life phases. These conclusions were based on data from a four-year mixed methods research project with 300 teachers in primary and secondary schools (Gu & Day, 2007).

Teacher resilience researchers, like resilience researchers, have different ways of labeling the same concepts, however, the interplay of risk and protective factors in adverse conditions remains central to the framework. Based on a review of teacher resilience studies, Beltman et al. (2011) illuminated the following themes as factors that enhance or inhibit the development of resilience in teachers:

- Individual risk factors- negative self-beliefs, lack of self-confidence, difficulty asking for support, a conflict between beliefs and practices being used;
- Contextual risk factors- pressure from family to leave teaching, lack of infrastructure at home, work-family balance, behavior management for disruptive students, lack of support, lack of time due to extensive workload, the addition of non-teaching duties;
- Individual protective factors- selfless motives, strong intrinsic motivation, being efficacious; and
- Contextual protective factors- strong, supportive, caring leadership, mentor relationships, peer support, and students

Key findings of Bobek's (2002) study of 12 pre-service and in-service teachers' resilience development also indicated having significant relationships that serve as networks of support, having an openness to being challenged, being lifelong learners, having a sense of

ownership, using humor and exploring alternatives when problem-solving, and experiencing success while also being recognized for it was part of the resilience-building process. Previously stated individual protective factors categorized by Benard (2004) are also commonly seen across teacher resilience studies. Additionally, while Doney's (2013) study of novice secondary science teachers confirmed resilient teachers utilize protective factors to problem-solve and have a relational support system, she added a sense of purpose, use of personality, and use of palliative techniques as resources used by resilient teachers. The aforementioned themes of risk and protective factors is not an exhaustive list, however, they encapsulate themes often seen across teacher resilience studies.

Resilience development in teachers is both simple and complex. Resilience is not an innate trait but a system of processes that enable positive adaptation in adverse conditions. Resilient teachers perceive and assess adverse situations, determine options for responding, and utilize appropriate resolutions (Bobek, 2002). How and which protective factors are used to counteract risk can vary. Doney (2013) affirmed factors vary from year to year and person to person, while Gu and Day (2007) contended risk and protective factors were not static therefore, changes in circumstances impacted how teachers maintained their stability. For this reason, resilience can be concluded to be a continually fluctuating process that is contextualized and necessitates flexibility on the part of the individual (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Shean, 2015). As a result, teacher retention has been determined to be a by-product of resilience (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Tait, 2008).

Utilizing resilience theory to ground this study adds to teacher resilience studies. Simultaneously, it specifically illuminates risk and protective factors prominent in the lived experiences of an under-researched racial-demographic, Black millennial teachers. Having the

ability to adjust in the face of adversity was confirmed to be critical for classroom success and retention (Benard, 2004). Using resilience theory as a lens to view and describe the lived experiences of resilient Black millennial teachers who have persevered in adverse conditions is a viable framework for this study.

Applications and Limitations

Resilience theory provides a theoretical framework that directly connects to the context of teacher resilience and allows studies in the educational context to be asset-based and person-focused. For this reason, it is well-aligned with the transcendental phenomenological design of this study. To be considered resilient, individuals must be exposed to and perceive risk factors thus enabling protective factors and processes to overcome adversity (Benard, 2004; Doney, 2013; Masten, 2011). The major aim of phenomenological studies is to describe the self-perceived lived experiences with a phenomenon therefore resilience theory pairs well with the design of this study.

A central precept of this study is Black millennial teachers' description of self-perceived factors of resilience has theoretical, empirical, and practical significance. This study seeks to fill a racial and demographic gap in teacher resilience literature. Utilizing a resilience lens for this study can aid researchers and practitioners in understanding resilience development in this teacher population that is often labeled as high-risk. Systems serving to develop and support protective factors are able to predict 50%-80% of positive outcomes for high-risk populations (Masten, 2011). Literature has focused on Black teachers and millennials as demographics who are high-risk for teacher attrition (Carter et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dilworth, 2018; Goldring et al., 2014; Redding & Henry, 2018) without a focus that illuminates pathways for resilience and retention.

Resilience theory was selected to guide this study as an organizing framework that illuminates the assets of resilient Black millennial teachers as a counternarrative to current deficit-based literature on this racial and generational demographic. Discussion of what personal and contextual protective factors have resulted in positive adaptation in the midst of adversity rather than focus on deficits that have yielded attrition of this demographic is invaluable given the current educational climate. Utilizing the resilience lens fills a gap in the literature as the Black teacher shortage is often approached through deficit models that illuminate risk factors while minimizing protective factors. Masten (2011) affirmed this notion by calling for a reframing of the mission of resilience research to a viewpoint that promoted healthy function and development. This call encouraged resilience research to move away from deficit-focused models toward strength-based or competence-focused models. As researchers and practitioners seek to determine how to recruit and retain a racially and generationally diverse workforce, experiences of those individuals who have experienced the phenomenon framed by resilience theory will provide great significance in the literature. This can lead to an increase in the retention of this racial-generational demographic and a more diversified education workforce. These ideas will be further explored in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Masten (2014) categorized the systematic study of resilience in three models: (a) person-focused, (b) variable-focused, and (c) pathways. This study is aligned with Masten's (2014) description of person-focused models of resilience. Understanding Black millennial teachers' lived experiences that lead to resilience development cannot be fully captured in a statistic since the experiences and use of protective factors will vary from teacher to teacher and are contextualized. Doney (2013) determined no two teachers had the same combined use of

protective factors, and year two of the study unearthed different risk factors that teachers had to navigate.

A resilience lens views the utility of protective factors within the context of risky situations (Shean, 2015), therefore it must be analyzed contextually. For this reason, the utilization of a person-focused model of resilience research aligns with the phenomenological research design. These models and designs support the contextualized exploration of resilience development in Black millennial teachers. Person-focused models of resilience research identify individuals that have life experience that suggests resilience and then examine their lives for clues to protective processes that may justify the manifested resilience (Masten, 2014). This typically consists of biographical or autobiographical accounts of individuals which was the case with this study's research design and data collection methods.

Limitations of the Theory

While I believe resilience theory provides an appropriate theoretical framework for this study, it is necessary to note that limitations include: (a) broad scope of resilience as a theoretical concept, (b) inability to objectively determine if adversity has been experienced, and (c) underdeveloped utility of context and culture for positive human adaptation. Resilience is a multidisciplinary concept with different researchers ascribing to different terminology and measurement of resilience. Masten (2014), a pioneer of resilience research, contended resilience theory was a broad concept that has yielded varying definitions of key concepts. In a literature review of major resilience researchers, Shean (2015) advocated for greater clarity in terminology, definitions, measurement and acknowledgment of the role of context as it pertains to resilience research. Masten (2018) contended lack of cohesion among operational definitions

across resilience researchers has made it difficult to aggregate findings of resilience analyses and move the field of resilience science forward.

Additionally, while resilience development necessitates exposure to adversity, one limitation is that *true* exposure to adversity cannot be objectively determined. Masten (2011) argued that labeling a situation as adverse is contingent on perception. Lastly, the role of a resilient adult teacher's racial and generational demographic will be explored in this study, however, it is critical to note that Masten (2011) indicated resilience studies grounded in a cultural context have been neglected. Additionally, Masten (2014) affirmed much of the literature that utilized resilience framework has not focused on adults, however with the emergence of teacher resilience as a subset of resilience research, more studies have been conducted on adults. Despite the limitations of the theoretical framework, I believe there is substantiated support to ground this study in resilience theory.

Related Literature

To consider the critical need for the perspectives of resilient Black millennial teachers, it is important to first consider the current climate of teacher retention, transfer, and attrition within U.S. public school education. The following section provides statistics that compare and contrast rates by race and ethnicity, age, and/or career phase. Additionally, this section explores empirical studies that provide general themes regarding teachers' perceptions of the workplace environment. Understanding statistics and perceptions of teachers, in general, provides a conceptual foundation for the state of teacher retention, transfer, and attrition in American public schools. While studies primarily focus on teacher retention or attrition, it is important to note when teachers transfer, or move between schools but remain in the profession, the impact on the school they leave has been determined to have the same effect as if they left the profession

altogether (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Djonko-Moore, 2016). For this reason, the following section also presents statistics for teacher transfer to support the understanding and impact of teacher attrition.

General Retention, Transfer, and/or Attrition

Teacher transfer and attrition rates, often referred to as turnover, give context to the need for supporting resilience development. Almost 20 years ago, Olson (2000) indicated an estimated two million new public school teachers would be needed within the decade to balance increasing student enrollments. Rather than seeing an increase in the number of teachers, during this time frame, teacher attrition has remained high and has plateaued. While 6% of teachers left the profession in 1987-88, this rate has increased to 8% as of 2012 and has since plateaued (Goldring et al., 2014). Major effects of teacher attrition include costs to taxpayers and detriments to student learning (Carroll, 2007; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2007; Report: Teacher Attrition Costs Schools Billions, 2014; Sun, 2018). The estimated cost for replacing teachers, particularly in urban districts, is more than \$20,000 per teacher (Carroll, 2007; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). An estimated \$4.9 to \$8.5 billion annual loss is incurred nationally when teachers transfer within or leave the profession (Barnes et al., 2007; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Carroll, 2007; Report: Teacher Attrition Costs Schools Billions, 2014). High rates of attrition also deprive students of experienced, high-quality instructors thus reducing student achievement in the classrooms directly affected (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Report: Teacher Attrition Costs Schools Billions; Sun, 2018). Recognition of the impact of teacher transfer and attrition substantiates claims of the need to study this phenomenon.

While numerous researchers have cited a range in percentage of teacher attrition, most cited 16%-20% as the average for teacher attrition based on analysis of the nationally representative survey data from the 2012 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 2013 Teacher Follow-up Survey (Albright et al., 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Goldring et al., 2014). While these figures represent the education workforce more than five years ago, results from the aforementioned staffing surveys remain regularly cited for this topic due to the comprehensiveness of the survey's analysis. These figures include 8% of teachers who leave the profession and 8% who transfer within the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Of this 8%, while smaller percentages moved for personal life or school factors, Goldring et al. (2014) indicated 30% moved involuntarily. The percentage of teachers who transfer, or move, to schools within the profession is also important to consider because the same instability that is created when teachers leave the profession altogether mirrors the instability caused when a teacher transfers to a new school (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Djonko-Moore, 2016).

Additionally, statistics showing the differences in retention, transfer, and attrition by location, school level, and subject are significant because they allude to a variance of experiences by teachers in the educational workforce. Transfer and attrition rates are higher for teachers in secondary schools, teachers in Title 1 schools, math and science teachers, and alternatively certified teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Goldring et al., 2014; Hughes, 2012; Sun, 2018). Additionally, teachers in schools who primarily serve students of color are more likely to leave the profession sooner (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Djonko-Moore, 2016; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2007). These are valuable statistics because they illustrate how resilience development

through exposure to adversity, and the need for positive adaptation, is not the same for all teachers. This provides a conceptual foundation for the need for this study.

Adverse Workplace Environment That Contributes to Transfer and Attrition

Digging deeper into qualitative explanations of teacher retention, transfer, and attrition rates is integral to providing context. This is necessary for resilience to have the opportunity to be developed when a person has exposure to high adversity (Doney, 2013; Masten, 2011). Of the teachers who leave the profession, two-thirds exit for reasons besides retirement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Glazer, 2018). Reasons for transfer within the profession or exiting altogether include job dissatisfaction with lack of collaboration (Bobek, 2002; Olson, 2000), manageability of workload (Goldring et al., 2014), teacher feelings of helplessness and invisibility due to accountability pressures (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Colombo et al., 2013; Elish-Piper et al., 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Minarechova, 2012) poor student behavior, and low salaries (Allensworth et al., 2009; Report: Teacher Attrition Costs Schools Billions, 2014). Problematic administrative leadership has also been deemed a major contribution of transfer and attrition (Holmes et al., 2019; Hughes, 2012; Report: Teacher Attrition Costs Schools Billions, 2014; Sun, 2018).

Using the criterion of hopefulness to analyze interview responses of 20 middle school teachers in underperforming schools, Colombo et al. (2013) found teachers felt hopeless and unable to meet the accountability pressures set for their students. Similar determinations were found by Olivant (2015) who found the elementary teachers interviewed expressing feelings of hopelessness due to high-stakes conditions that led to decreased teacher autonomy and narrowed curriculum. Furthermore, citing previous research linking the impact of job stress on instructional practice and teacher retention, Mahan et al. (2010) analyzed questionnaires from

secondary school teachers in New Jersey public schools to understand types of stress respondents encountered. Findings included accountability measures connected to high-stakes tests have ongoing, stressful effects on teachers that increase anxiety and impact workers' psychological health (Mahan et al., 2010). The results of these studies elaborate on previously cited themes in the literature that connect adverse working conditions in U.S. public schools to the phenomenon of teacher retention, transfer, and attrition.

Black Teacher Transfer, Retention, and Attrition

Having provided a foundation for teacher retention, transfer, and attrition, it is necessary to provide context for the contrast in statistics and experiences of Black teachers when compared to other racial demographics. The following section carries significance by establishing that a critical Black teacher shortage currently exists, having occurred through historical factors and remaining in existence due to contemporary factors. Additionally, to present a rationale for the significance of the study, literature surrounding minority teacher recruitment and retention is provided. While this study focuses on Black teachers, literature may be presented that focuses on minority teachers as a whole due to limited research on Black millennials as a separate racial-demographic cohort.

The Exodus of Black Teachers Ushered in a Black Teacher Shortage

According to the NCES (2017), diversity dwindles at each state of the teacher pipeline with the least amount of diversity visible for in-service teachers. The national statistics on the U.S. public school workforce that have been used to guide this study are from the Schools and Staffing Survey [SASS], Teacher Follow Up Survey [TFS], and National Teacher and Principal Survey [NTPS]. The SASS and TFS are considered the largest and most comprehensive sources

of national data pertaining to U.S. teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2018). The SASS and TFS expressed longitudinal data from 1987-2011 while the NTPS provided data from 2015-16 and 2017-18.

As of 2017-18, 7% of public school teachers self-identified as Black (Tait & Goldring, 2020). Once more likely to remain in education when compared to white teachers, teachers of color now have higher turnover rates than white teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll et al., 2018). The average turnover rate for Black teachers is 22% which is 50% greater than that of non-Black teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Additionally, Black teachers are more likely to teach in the South, and the turnover rate in that region is 4% higher than the aforementioned average (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Using the most recent comprehensive data on teacher mobility, Table 1 shows that retention, transfer, and attrition of Black public school teachers is higher than that non-Black teachers. While the focus of the arguments in this section is the existence of a Black teacher shortage, it warrants stating that for all racial-ethnic demographics, the percentage of teachers who remained in the educational workforce prevails as higher than the percentage of those who transfer or leave the profession (Goldring et al., 2014).

Table 1

Teacher Retention, Transfer, and Attrition by Race and Ethnicity as of 2012

	Retention	Transfer	Attrition
Black	78.2%	11.7%	10.1%
Non-Black	84.7%	7.8%	7.5%

Note. Table compiled from Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017.

The aforementioned statistics are integral as they are evidence in support of arguments stating a critical Black teacher shortage exists and has persisted. This shortage has been in existence for decades in America through systemic factors and obstacles (Madkins, 2011).

Prior to the federally mandated integration of American public schools in 1954, the proportion of Black teachers teaching Black students was more proportionate (Dingus, 2006). 82,000 Black teachers taught the two million Black students in American public schools (Hawkins, 1994). At the time, teaching was (a) respected as a career choice for Black Americans, (b) more accessible for entrance, and (c) commonly a multi-generational career tradition in Black families (Dilworth, 2018; Dingus, 2006; Madkins, 2011). From 1954 to 1965, close to 39,000 Black teachers lost their jobs across 17 states (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). The *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka Kansas (1954)* decision has been marked as the start of a critical Black teacher shortage as it led to a mass exodus in the profession (Madkins, 2011).

The mass exodus of Black teachers after the integration of American public schools contributed to the minimal diversity seen in the educational workforce today. While numerous research focuses on recruiting Black teachers to education, Griffin and Tackie (2016) affirmed an under emphasis is placed on ways to retain Black teachers further exacerbating the lack of diversification in the educational workforce. For this reason, the analysis of factors that impact whether Black teachers leave or remain in education is imperative. In comparison to other racial and ethnic teacher populations, Black teachers are less likely to leave for personal reasons, family reasons, or to find a more convenient location and are more likely to consider the following when determining their career outlook in education: (a) interrelation of accountability and compensation, (b) administrator or collegial support, (c) classroom autonomy, (d) teaching conditions, (e) availability of resources, and (f) career opportunities (Carter Andrews et al., 2019;

Carver-Thomas, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dilworth, 2018; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Sun, 2018). Additionally, perpetual concerns regarding job security for Black teachers have been made worse by statistics showing involuntary turnover was 20% higher for Black teachers than other demographics in 2012 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Goldring et al., 2014).

Difficult Entrance into the Educational Workforce for Black Teachers

Carter Andrews et al. (2019) argued obstacles for Black teachers remain perpetuated through structural, institutional, and environmental mechanisms that work against efforts to recruit and retain teachers of color. This claim is important in this discussion because it speaks to the need for resilience development in Black teachers to enter and remain in the educational workforce. Unfortunately, it also speaks to the inequities that serve as factors that sustain the Black teacher shortage. While resilience development of pre-service teachers is not the focus of this study, it is important to note numerous literature on the adverse experiences of Black pre-service teachers that impact entrance into the education workforce (Amos, 2010; Brown, 2018; Carter Andrews et al. 2019; Madkins, 2011). Madkins (2011) cited the investigation of the experiences of pre-service teachers from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups who have utilized alternative programs versus traditional programs as a gap in the literature.

In her literature review on the Black teacher shortage, Madkins (2011) defended three major issues contributing to minimal change in the diversification of the educational workforce: (a) inadequate college preparation for Blacks that lessens opportunities to enter the profession, (b) standardized testing for licensure, and (c) increased opportunities in other career fields. The first two themes have been made visible in the literature as alternatively certified teaching and out-of-field teaching. Carver-Thomas (2018) claimed entering the profession through alternative

certification routes was an additional barrier to retention for teachers of color. Teachers who enter education through an alternative pathway are more likely to be teachers of color (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Petchauer, 2018). While alternative routes have aided more Black teachers in entering the teaching profession (Madkins, 2011), teachers who utilize this pathway are 25% more likely to transfer from their schools or leave the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). While alternative certification programs remain problematic for teacher retention in comparison to traditional programs, it is worth noting that the type of certification program is not a factor of teacher self-efficacy (Fox & Peters, 2013). This is necessary to mention due to the connection of teacher self-efficacy and resilience development (Gu & Day, 2007).

In addition to alternative certification, accountability measures requiring teachers to be “highly qualified” minimize a diversified workforce (Brown, 2005; Madkins, 2011). Concerned with the chronic teacher shortage in America and impending projection of diversified student populations, Brown (2005) called for an evaluation of how standardized tests for licensure hindered recruitment and retention of young teachers. Brown (2005) contended greater emphasis and intervention was necessary to ensure minority teachers were not at a disadvantage that contributed to difficult or blocked entrance into the profession.

Alternative certification programs neutralize efforts to diversify the educational workforce. Teachers who utilize these pathways typically have had less coursework and student teaching and being underprepared, as called “out of field teaching” by Olson (2000), further contributes to attrition. In 2012, 28.2% of Black teachers in their first year of teaching had no student teaching experience as compared to 7.9% of all other first-year teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Olson (2000) determined over 25% of teachers entered teaching

without fully meeting licensure requirements, and 30% of in-service teachers were teaching classes they were academically unprepared for.

Methods used for Minority Teacher Recruitment or Retention

Dilworth (2018) posited the residue of institutionalized racism continues to be seen in the systemic policies and practices within the educational system. These policies and practices have created and continue to create obstacles for teachers of color. Much of the methods aimed at recruitment and retention of teachers of color have been policies and intervention programs. Minimal growth has been seen in the increase of the overall number of and proportion of teachers of color due to the inability to keep up with the rapid growth and projections of the minority student population (Villegas et al., 2012).

While the prevalence of alternative certification programs has contributed to increased interest by Black career switchers, declined interest by Black college students is apparent (Madkins, 2011). Attempts to recruit and retain minority teachers have included financial incentives (Villegas et al., 2012), specific pre-service internship opportunities (Bryan & Ford, 2014), apprentice model programs (Madkins, 2011), and targeted teacher preparation programs (Pastermak & Longwell-Grice, 2010). While these methods are being utilized to some degree, Holmes and Gibson (2019) cited six steps to rethink teacher retention. Three of these steps provide context to this study: (a) frame a problem to uncover patterns and devise interpretations, (b) understand that retention initiatives are contextual, and (c) pay attention to both internal and external factors (Holmes & Gibson, 2019). This study did not have a focus on recruitment of teachers of color, however, its themes support the problem and purpose of this study.

Considering the pervasive Black teacher shortage, historical obstacles, and previously used methods for recruitment and retention are crucial to the foundation of this study. For this

reason, conducting a phenomenological study to describe Black millennial teachers' resilience fills a gap and aligns with recommendations for rethinking teacher retention. Resilience theorist Ann Masten (2001) argued interventions targeting self-efficacy and motivation support human adaptive systems and resilience development which has been linked to teacher retention (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Tait, 2008).

Why Black Teachers?

In general, retention, transfer, and attrition rates are concerning for teachers in the U.S. public school system. Teachers of color, however, have higher turnover rates than white teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll et al., 2018). When data is analyzed by racial demographics, clear disparities are visible that warrant further exploration. Black teachers have added and relevant benefits in the educational workforce, yet a demographic disparity of Blacks teachers and students currently exists. The missing perspective of Black teachers in theoretical and empirical studies is also problematic and is explored.

The Demographic Disparity of Black Teachers and Students

Despite the number of Black teachers in the education workforce having grown from 1987 to 2012, the proportion of Black teachers decreased from 8.2% to 6.8% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). As of 2017-18, the percentage of Black teachers is 6.7% (Taie & Goldring, 2020). Simultaneously, the percentage of students of color in the public school population is growing. As of the 2017-18 school year, 52% of the public school student population was composed of students of color, and students of color are projected to represent 56% of the student population by 2029 (NCES, 2020). Additional pertinent figures include: (a) 1% of educators are Black males, (b) Black male students are the most under-represented demographic in gifted education, and (c) the same population is overrepresented in special

education (Bryan & Ford, 2014). Given the demographic disparity between teachers and students, Madkins (2011) stated it is problematic that the teaching workforce does not match our student population, thus reinforcing a need to determine how the recruitment and retention of Black teachers can be increased.

Value in Schools

The value of Black teachers has been affirmed in a variety of studies. Understanding how to support resilience development in Black teachers as a method to increase retention is necessary because of the impact Black teachers have on all educational stakeholders- students, families, community members, and colleagues. While all students benefit from having diverse teachers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016), Black teachers serve as role models for Black students (Madkins, 2011; Villegas et al., 2012; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Considering that Black teachers have similar cultural experiences and linguistic backgrounds to Black students, they provide a sense of community, inclusion (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Jackson & Kohli, 2016; Madkins, 2011; Villegas et al., 2012; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), and opportunity for Black students to see themselves represented and reflected in the professional realm (Madkins, 2011). Black teachers have also been found to have greater expectations for and perceptions of students of color (Dee, 2005; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Jackson & Kohli, 2016), which leads to empowering them with critical knowledge (Griffin & Tackie, 2016).

Additionally, the value of Black teachers in the U.S. educational system can be seen in the pedagogy and instructional delivery of this demographic. Black teachers are more likely to use culturally relevant and social justice pedagogies (Dilworth, 2018; Jackson & Kohli, 2016), although Brown (2018) and Sun (2018) warned against assuming that all Black teachers inherently are equipped to utilize such pedagogies in the classroom. They are also more likely to

express a calling to teach Black students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), have equity and justice-based perspectives (Dilworth, 2018; Jackson & Kohli, 2016) and are led to positions in low-income communities of color (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). As a result, 80% of teachers work in schools where the demographic majority is students of color, and more than 70% of Black teachers teach in Title 1 schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Given that these types of schools are where the majority of Black teachers are employed and are simultaneously the school types known for having higher transfer and attrition rates, understanding factors that support resilience development for Black teachers is crucial to address the Black teacher shortage.

Value in Research

Villegas and Irvine (2010) contended there are gaps in literature pertaining to a research-based rationale for increasing diversity in education. While there are innumerable statistics pertaining to Black teacher retention, transfer, and attrition, there remains a limited body of current scholarship pertaining to the experiences and perspectives of Black pre-service teachers (Brown, 2018) and in-service teachers in American public schools. Brown (2018) argued that it allows a knowledge base for teaching and teacher education to remain void of non-white perspectives and viewpoints. The value of Black teachers' perspectives and experiences in education is critical to addressing the Black teacher shortage.

Added Nuance of Millennial Generational Cohort

Considering teacher attrition rates are highest for those under 30 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), and 22% of teachers leave the profession within their first three years (McCarren, 2000), the added nuance of membership in the Generation Y, or millennial, generation cohort warrants discussion. At the time of this study, the oldest millennial teachers are

41 while the youngest millennial teachers are in their twenties. Statistics indicate that young and/or novice teachers are most at risk for teacher transfer and attrition (Goldring et al., 2014; Hughes, 2012; Redding & Henry, 2018). Through her study on how Black millennial preservice teachers understand their racial identity, Brown (2018) claimed individuals born during a similar time period often hold worldviews linked to the socio-cultural context of that era. There is something to be learned from looking closely at “perspectives, experiences, or knowledge held by people socialized during the same generational timespace” (Brown, 2018, p. 107).

Gaining insight into characteristics of the millennial generation may provide support as educators seek to better support and retain novice teachers. Given an already critical Black teacher shortage, the following section carries significance by pinpointing generational diversity and differences in workplace values, how career opportunities for millennials further exacerbate the discussion of teacher shortage, and how Black millennial teachers differ from other racial and generational cohorts. This is important to consider because it provides context to the value of Black millennial teachers’ self-perceived factors of resilience in the midst of a historical, contemporary, and projected perpetual Black teacher shortage.

Generational Diversity in the Workplace

Today’s workforce includes at least four generational cohorts that span more than 60 years based on age: traditionalists (sometimes referred to as the silent generation), baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y also known as millennials (Cogin, 2012). Generation Z is also entering the workforce (Ohmer et al., 2018). Brown (2012) and Lutz (2017) contended intergenerational conflicts are occurring in the workplace as a result of not understanding the differences between generational cohorts. The causes and effects of intergenerational conflict are worth exploring as they may impact resilience of Black millennial teachers.

Gordon and Steele (2005) indicated employees from different generations can have both positive and negative impacts on company performance, therefore leaders and employees must be aware of differences to support cohesion within an organization and minimize conflict. Generational differences are most visible in the areas of leadership preference, method of communication, workplace environment, and relationship with co-workers (McCrindle, 2012; Ohmer et al., 2018; Zemke et al., 2000). The leadership preferences of each generational cohort are best described as existing on a continuum of stark differences. Millennials prefer authoritative leadership, positioning leaders as role models (Brown, 2012) while Generation X is less likely to have respect for authority (Zemke et al., 2000). Baby Boomers prefer a collegial style of leadership while Generation Z seeks inspirational leaders (McCrindle, 2012; Ohmer et al., 2018; Zemke et al., 2000). Both millennials and Generation Z have been determined to prioritize participative leadership (Maier et al., 2015; McCrindle, 2012; Valenti, 2019; Zemke et al., 2000).

Generational differences are also visible in the area of collaboration and communication. Baby Boomers prefer face-to-face communication while millennials, characterized as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), are tech-savvy (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Hallman, 2017; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013; Smith, 2013) and expect electronic communication as a primary method of communication (Abrams, 2018; Ohmer et al., 2018). Additionally, Baby Boomers and Generation X are more likely to desire autonomous or democratic relationships with co-workers (Zemke et al., 2000) and desire training in their areas of expertise (Brown, 2012) while younger generations desire opportunities to collaborate and gain leadership training for career advancement (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Walker, 2009). These contrasts among generations in the workplace, among

others, lead to intergenerational conflict that can manifest as an adverse climate that impacts Black millennials' resilience development.

Millennial Characteristics in the Workplace

Racial or generational identity can serve as a protective or risk factor in the process of building resilience. Having a more comprehensive understanding of how millennials are similar or different from other generations in the workplace is integral to providing context for this study. Current literature cites further contrasts in millennials' communication, interaction with co-workers and leaders, views on social issues, ways of working, career development, methods of task completion, and general personality descriptions. The following section further expands on these elements.

Technological innovations that ushered in the new millennium have contributed to millennials being digital natives. Digital natives are defined as “youth born after 1980 in developed nations who have had greater exposure to digital media than any previous generation” (Guo et al., 2008, p. 236). The technological innovation that characterizes the millennial generation has resulted in this generation being highly expressive and communicative, uber-connected, and tech-savvy (Brown, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Hallman, 2017; Maier et al., 2015; Pew Research Center, 2019; Roberts, 2019; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013; Smith, 2013; Valenti, 2019; Walker, 2009). The creation and integration of social media in the 21st century have played a major role in how millennials communicate. Millennials seek the same level of interaction in the workplace as that which social media allows (Roberts, 2017). This also plays a role in how millennials desire to be trained on the job as many prefer, enjoy, and expect e-learning opportunities that are multi-modal (Abrams, 2018; McCrindle, 2012).

Technological advances also often provide instant gratification in many opportunities. As this is something millennials are accustomed to, those working with millennials must be aware of their preference for constant feedback on job performance (Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Walker, 2009). For this reason, Abrams (2018) contended educational systems, in particular, must update out-of-date structures that may hinder this generational cohort's strengths. Failure to capitalize on technological innovation and methods of instant communication in the workplace will have an impact on the attraction and retention of millennials in the workplace.

Known for their inclusivity and openness to diversity (Ohmer et al., 2018; Zemke et al., 2000), millennials are known for being more overwhelmingly relationship-oriented in comparison to other generational cohorts (Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Walker, 2009; Zemke et al., 2000). Dilworth (2018) argued Black teachers in previous generations see standard-based reform and accountability measures as threats to their authority and autonomy. Millennials enter education aware of these issues and are less likely to view them as a threat or risk to their perseverance (Dilworth, 2018). While previous generations have and may continue to prefer autonomous and democratic relationships within the workplace (Zemke et al., 2000), millennials value participative experiences and seek atmospheres that prioritize teamwork and collaboration (Brown, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Walker, 2009). Roberts (2017) found that millennials have an expectation that leaders will get to know them and build a relationship with them. Lack of collaboration and communication may cause millennials more angst than other cohorts, thus organizations seeking to attract and retain millennial workers must examine the communicative practices within its culture.

Expectations for the workplace and paths of career progression are also noticeable areas of differences for millennials. Less motivated by titles and statuses (Maier et al., 2015),

millennials have high expectations for the workplace and are highly disappointed when they are not met (Brown, 2012; Roberts, 2019). These high expectations include interactions with leaders and leadership training for career advancement. Millennials are known for being ambitious, determined, and goal-oriented (Brown, 2012; Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Walker, 2009). For many millennials, failure is not recognized as an option. This may be visible in millennials' ambition and willingness to take risks (Brown, 2012; Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Walker, 2009). These characteristics may yield aggression or assertiveness that causes intergenerational conflict in the workplace.

With professional development and career advancement expected, millennials are learners who seek leadership training (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Walker, 2009). They view managers as models, seek to please their bosses, and value opportunities to help make decisions in the workplace (Brown, 2012; Maier et al., 2015; Valenti, 2019). While previous generations have widely disliked the traditional hierarchy in the workplace and have been more skeptical of authority (Zemke et al., 2000), millennials are more likely to look toward leaders for feedback on job performance (Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Walker, 2009). Though some may see the provision of feedback and relational investment as grounds for organizational loyalty, career and job mobility are commonly seen with millennials (Brown, 2012; Cogin, 2012; Maier et al., 2015; Walker, 2009). This often occurs independently of job satisfaction. While there are several speculations for this in the literature, what is most relevant for this study is the tendency this mobility can have on an organization. For this reason, understanding the characteristics of millennials who demonstrate resilience in organizations is valuable as resilience has been linked to retention in the workplace.

In addition to differences seen in career progression and advancement, millennials bring their entire selves to work in ways that may not have been common in previous generations. Though work-life balance is seen as a priority (Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Maier et al., 2015), millennials are less likely to compartmentalize themselves and their views due to the integration of personal values in everything they do (Brown, 2012). This openness can be viewed as unprofessional by other generations that are turned off by political incorrectness (Zemke et al., 2000) which is a concept millennials have been known to repudiate. Known for their passion and expressiveness (Maier et al., 2015), millennials are more likely to be community-focused, speak up about perceived injustice, and demonstrate activism (Dilworth, 2018; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013; Walker, 2009). This will be visible in the workplace.

Having grown up in a time of globalization and demographic diversity, millennials have an expectation of diverse settings more than previous generations (Hallman, 2017; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013; Walker, 2009). This expectation for diversity goes beyond just racial issues, as Pew Research Center (2010) argued millennials may view social class as more significant than race. This is visible in millennials' awareness of inequalities in society, and their comfort with discussing social issues and injustice (Brown, 2012; Devaney, 2015; Hallman, 2017). This passion is also apparent in millennials' willingness to challenge the status quo in society and organization (Maier et al., 2015). These characteristics may be a point of conflict in the workplace as it pertains to intergenerational communication and decision-making. It can be said that though millennials are known for their inclusivity and outrage of social injustice, recent studies conducted may indicate a naiveté towards practical eradication of racial inequities (Brown, 2018; Hallman, 2017; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013). This

naiveté may be problematic in determining strategies to address concerns and develop consensus within the organization.

Finally, regarding millennial characteristics in the workplace, there are noticeable shifts in the areas of task completion and general personality descriptions when compared to previous generations. Millennials are described as creative problem-solvers often seen multitasking which may be a result of comfort with technological software that supports more efficient work productivity (Brown, 2012; Devaney, 2015; Guo et al., 2008; Walker, 2009). Goal-oriented and entrepreneurial (Brown, 2012; Walker, 2009), Walker (2009) affirmed millennials move forward by seeing the big picture, relevance, timeline, goals, and objectives of a task. As risk-takers, millennials have been characterized as confident and self-assured (Maier et al., 2015; Walker, 2009). This includes a tendency towards free agency and independence in thinking (Maier et al., 2015; Roberts, 2017; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013) that may manifest in the workplace as a positive character trait or flaw that yields impulsivity in decision-making. Other flaws seen in the literature are image-driven (Ohmer et al., 2018) and a sense of entitlement as a result of being coddled by their parents (Brown, 2012; Devaney, 2015; Roberts, 2019). While selfishness and ego-centrism are often attributed to millennials, Roberts (2017) refuted this idea in his research and concluded reasonable evidence exists against millennials as self-centered, disrespectful, and unmotivated.

Employees from the same generational cohort often have similar norms that impact their values and attitudes toward leadership and workplace culture (Gursoy et al., 2008). For this reason, understanding the characteristics of millennials in the workplace has a high value for leaders and employees. Meister (2012) indicated that millennials will comprise approximately 50% of the U.S. workforce by 2020 and 75% of the global workforce by 2030. Recognizing that

this generational cohort comprises a large demographic of today's organizations, it is imperative that workplace cultures recognize the differences in characteristics of millennials in comparison to other cohorts within the workplace. When organizations fail to honor and understand generational diversity, adversity is created and exacerbated. This, ultimately, can lead to less attraction and retention of millennials while also affecting the challenges these workers must navigate in the workplace. With a pervasive teacher shortage, the educational workforce cannot afford to negate characteristics of millennials, nor Black millennials, if it seeks to overcome disparities in its current workforce demographic.

Adversity through Intergenerational Conflict in the Workplace

To recruit and retain teachers in the millennial generation, educational leaders must understand how to accommodate, adapt, and change based on the needs of the millennial generation (Abrams, 2018). This includes recognizing and working to minimize adverse conditions that millennials face in the workplace. One major theme in the literature is intergenerational conflict that occurs as a result of not understanding generational differences (Brown, 2012; Cogin, 2012; Lutz, 2017; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018). Dilworth (2018) contended that same-ethnicity colleagues in previous generations do not understand: 1) the ways Black millennials connect with each other and students, 2) their social justice perspectives, nor 3) their use of technology. These are major characteristics of the millennial generation based on literature.

Zemke et al. (2000) determined each generational cohort currently in the workplace has clear differences in their turnoffs. When an organization's culture includes a variety of generational cohorts that do not understand differences, it contributes to conflict. Gavett (2016) determined generational differences to be a point of contention in the workplace due to

challenges with communication. Through a qualitative study of millennials' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of working with non-millennial leaders, Roberts (2017) confirmed this notion. This is integral to providing context for sub-question three of this study: "How does racial or generational identity contribute to protective and or risk factors in the lived experiences of resilient Black millennial teachers?" This section carries significance as it highlights individual and contextual risk factors that may impact if and how millennial teachers develop resilience.

While the youthfulness of millennials is often welcomed into the workplace enthusiastically, the dissonance is often felt when other generational cohorts, often in leadership, typify millennials based on prejudice and stereotypes (Lutz, 2017). In a study of millennial myths and identity, Lutz (2017) concluded there is significant evidence that millennials are minoritized and marginalized in the workplace by other generational cohorts, and obstacles are created that thwart the ability for millennials to thrive in academic and professional contexts. This often occurs when widely known characteristics common to those in the millennial generational cohort are weaponized as prejudicial stereotypes. Lutz (2017) argued stereotypes are used as justification of structures that privilege one group over others, and the agency of the marginalized group is challenged. This can be problematic as millennials have been determined to highly value having agency and independence (Maier et al., 2015; Roberts, 2017; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013).

In addition to the role of stereotypes and marginalization of millennials, the literature regarding millennials' challenges in the workplace consistently illuminates a) ageism, b) lack of support from leadership, and c) the impact on a millennial's career outlook. While there are differences between generations, diversity can be honored and capitalized on to create

organizational cohesion. Instead, researchers have found ageism is often present in organizations as older generations expect and force younger generations to conform to their preferences (Brown, 2012; Lutz, 2017; Roberts, 2017). Lutz (2017) contended ageism centers on the utilization of personal prejudice to create and maintain systems that enable oppression and privilege. This is a major point of contention for millennials as it pertains to organizational loyalty and retention. Roberts (2017) found millennials believed their ages contributed to a culture where respect was lacking, thus minimal opportunities were offered for their career advancement. This is problematic considering millennials seek workplaces where career advancement is prioritized and leadership training is encouraged (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Maier et al., 2015).

Roberts (2017) found that while millennials may expect career advancement to occur earlier than previous generations, there appears to be a discrepancy between organizations encouraging millennials to wait for professional growth and millennials being told they are not ready to advance as a means of creating relational rifts. Contextual factors such as a relational network contribute to overcoming adversity and therefore build resilience (Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013). When relational rifts are created as a result of ageism, it can have an effect on the retention of millennials. Carter Andrews et al. (2019) determined that experiences of toxic environmental conditions impacted teacher retention.

Leaders managing millennials have a large influence on how millennials navigate adversity within the workplace. Recognizing the generational differences within the organization, leaders can mitigate the barriers or challenges that millennials face (Roberts, 2017). As previously stated, millennials value participative leadership and collaboration (Brown, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Valenti, 2019; Walker, 2009). For this

reason, leaders seeking to retain millennials in the workplace must prioritize relating to and involving them in the organization's decision-making. Roberts (2017) found that millennials felt they were often perceived as incapable and under-utilized by non-millennial leaders. While numerous researchers contended millennials are learners (Guo et al., 2008; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Walker, 2009), Roberts (2017) determined the stereotype that millennials are unwilling to listen and learn was apparent in a secondary-school organization. Roberts (2017) refuted this common stereotype in his study.

Managers of millennials must also recognize this cohort's preference of and need for feedback (Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Walker, 2009). In education, there are many roles that remain contingent on a certain amount of years of experience (Abrams, 2018). This may mean that career advancement in education does not come as quickly for millennials as their peers in other professions, therefore, considering their desire for learning and career advancement, millennials need instant gratification through feedback from their managers (Cogin, 2012; Roberts, 2017). Roberts (2017) determined a strict environment where minimal feedback was provided was seen as a challenge by millennial teachers. This challenge will impact the retention of millennial teachers.

Leaders that fail to understand the values of younger generational cohorts sacrifice competitiveness in attracting and retaining qualified applicants (Cogin, 2012). Environments can be toxic and problematic when stereotypes are utilized by the authority who is decision-making (Lutz, 2017). For this reason, it is imperative that leaders recognize their ability to serve as a protective factor that contributes to the resilience development of millennials in the workplace. Using implication from his study, Roberts (2017) recommended leaders create a positive working culture by developing an awareness of millennials' thought processes, expectations, and

intentions. Capitalizing on millennials' views of managers as models that they want to please (Brown, 2012) and their orientation to relationship and community (Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Walker, 2009), non-millennial leaders are encouraged to better understand characteristics of millennials to support them as educators in the teaching profession (Roberts, 2017).

How Black Millennial Teachers Differ From Other Cohorts

Contrasts that create workplace friction are visible when examining characteristics of the varying generational cohorts currently in the workplace. While similarities are apparent for those persons meeting the criteria to be part of the millennial generational cohort, Black millennial teachers have attributes that vary from white millennial teachers or Black teachers who are a part of other generational cohorts. Millennials are the most [racially] diverse generation in the United States to date (Dilworth, 2018). Citing this diversity as the “browning of the millennials,” Dilworth (2018) argued the need for studying and working to recruit and retain Black millennial teachers. This can be done by exploring the differences between Black millennial teachers and white millennial teachers. To pinpoint obstacles that thwart resilience and retention of Black millennial teachers, it is pertinent to illuminate workplace obstacles that are also more nuanced due to both their racial and generational demographics.

While minimal studies of Black millennial teachers exist, there have been studies of other minoritized millennial teachers (Dilworth, 2018; Hallman, 2017; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013). For the sake of this study, it is important to separate the discussion of Black millennial teachers from millennial teachers of color. In his study of 20 Black millennials from a variety of workplaces, Brown (2012) indicated participants did not view themselves as synonymous with other racial or ethnic minority groups (Brown, 2012). He added friction existed in Black

millennials' sentiments towards other minorities, as some participants expressed feeling forced out of certain professions due to the influx of foreign workers (Brown, 2012). For this reason, the focus of this section is how Black millennials differ from white millennials.

In contrast to same-generation colleagues, Black millennials and white millennials often differ most notably in recognition and understanding of racism and social justice. Unlike previous generations, millennials are more racially open than previous generations, recognizing racism's impact on employment and criminal justice (Brown, 2018); however, white millennials are less likely to recognize how racism impacts education (Apollon, 2011). Black millennial teachers are more likely to view racism as a deeply-rooted structural problem (Brown, 2018). Kohli (2018) argued schools maintain racial inequality through racism embedded at structural, macro, and micro levels that create a racially hostile environment that minoritized teachers must navigate. This argument points to adversity that Black millennial teachers may have to navigate and resolve in ways that their same-generation colleagues do not.

Benard (2004) categorized autonomy as a protective factor visible in resilient individuals. Autonomy is how one develops their sense of identity and includes acting independently and having control over one's environment as a result of this sense of self (Benard, 2004). A strong positive ethnic identity is a factor contained within this category, therefore it can be argued that if a Black millennial teacher is in an environment where conflict and hostility exist as a result of their identity, it presents a challenge. This is consistent with recent studies of Black teachers from multiple generations, including millennials that have concluded that this racial demographic feels marginalized (Brown, 2019; Brown, 2012; Jackson, 2015; Kohli, 2018). This pervasive feeling of being "othered" is harmful. Brown (2012) contended a major theme for Black millennials was the desire for organizations to become more familiar with their characteristics as

a racial-generational demographic. This is consistent with a major theme that millennials, regardless of racial identity, seek inclusivity and have an expectation that leaders get to know them for who they are (Hallman, 2017; Ohmer et al., 2018; Maier et al., 2015; Roberts, 2017; Walker, 2009).

In addition to views on racism and its impact on positive ethnic identity, Black millennial teachers are more likely to experience marginalization as a result of their racial identity, often citing racial micro-aggressions within the workplace. Racial micro-aggressions directly or indirectly assault, insult, or invalidate a person or group based on racial identity and can occur behaviorally, visually, or through spoken or unspoken exchanges (Brown, 2019; Kohli, 2018). Brown (2018) explained racial micro-aggressions exist on a continuum of covert and overt behaviors. In a study of the perspectives and reflections of Black teachers, independent of generational cohort, Griffin and Tackie (2016) determined a theme existed of predominantly covert racial micro-aggressions. This included a disrespectful work environment and blocked career advancement by being pigeonholed into certain positions. In a study of 29 K-12 African-American teachers in Southern California, Brown (2019) concluded all participants experienced micro-aggressions while working with non-minorities that damaged relationships with members in their workplaces.

The theme of Black teachers being subjected to racial micro-aggressions as a contextual risk factor is important to state due to its impact on interactions within the workplace and development of positive identity. The existence of racial micro-aggressions creates different experiences for white millennial teachers and Black millennial teachers that impact the development of resilience and the likelihood of retention. White millennials have knowledge of racism and injustice, while Black millennial teachers often cite having to encounter racism and

oppression personally (Brown, 2019; Dilworth, 2018; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Kohli, 2019).

These personal encounters with adversity such as racism and oppression necessitate resilience development in ways that white millennials are not often forced to navigate in order to thrive in the workplace.

Additionally, to understand the generational conflict and obstacles that Black millennial teachers must navigate, it is necessary to also explore how the experiences of Black millennial teachers may differ from Black teachers in other generational cohorts. Current literature on Black teachers has not focused on how generational identity may impact racial identity and experience, nor have studies been conducted comparing workplace experiences of Black millennial teachers to Black teachers in other generational cohorts. This exploration is necessary as it contributes to a greater understanding of how one's racial and generational identity impacts resilience as a teacher. The added difference of being members of the millennial generational cohort sets Black millennial teachers apart from same-ethnicity colleagues that have been more commonly seen in the literature. As this study explores the challenges and supports that impact the resilience development of Black millennial teachers, the role of Black teachers from other generational cohorts becomes important to the discussion because intergenerational conflict can be a cause of adversity in the workplace. As sub-question three is explored, it will be necessary to capture how generational and racial identities impact the resilience of Black millennial teachers.

Having a generationally diverse workplace can support creativity and innovation (Maier et al., 2015). Additionally, millennial teachers have gifts and characteristics that have the capacity to impact the status quo of education (Abrams, 2018; Dilworth, 2018), however, how can this be realized when Black millennial teachers are discouraged from remaining in the educational workforce as a result of adversity, due to their racial or generational identity?

Studying Black millennial teachers through this study is empirically, theoretically, and practically significant. Unless perspectives of Black millennial teachers who are persevering in the educational workforce despite encountering adversity are captured, the educational system in the U.S. stands to miss out on recruiting and retaining gifted, young teachers. Dilworth (2018) complemented this thought through claims that efforts to recruit, groom, and retain millennial teachers of color were “out-of-date and woefully inadequate” (p. ix). Considering the link of retention to resilience (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Tait, 2008), it is valuable to explore how generational and racial identity are contributing to the lived experience of Black millennial teachers.

Experiences of Resilient Black Millennial Teachers

While statistics have demonstrated the need for teacher resilience development due to high transfer and attrition rates (Bobek, 2002; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Glazer, 2018; Goldring et al., 2014; Gu & Day, 2007; Holmes et al., 2019; Hughes, 2012; Tait, 2008) qualitative perspectives of resilience remain limited in the literature. There is an even smaller body of empirical studies that examine the perspectives of Black millennial teachers. Considering Black teacher retention, transfer, and attrition, the value of Black teachers, and the added nuance of being a member of the millennial generational cohort, the voices of Black millennial teachers are critically needed additions to the literature. NCES (2017) claimed diversity dwindles at each stage of the teacher pipeline, yet understanding transfer and attrition of Black millennial teachers is further thwarted due to many studies investigating in populations besides Black millennial in-service teachers (Albright et al., 2017; Beltman et al., 2019; Bennett et al., 2013; Brown, 2018; Farinde et al., 2016; Moradian Watson, 2018; Petty et al., 2012;

Zhang & Zeller, 2016). At this current time, I have been unable to find studies pertaining to Black millennial in-service teachers in American public schools.

Summary

An understanding of resilience theory (Masten, 2014) is critical to this study. Researchers have named resilience as a pivotal characteristic for teacher retention (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Tait, 2008). Resilient individuals utilize contextual and protective factors to mitigate adversity that manifests in contextual and protective factors. Specific protective and risk factors have been described in this chapter, as well as applications and limitations of resilience theory.

The exploration of lived experiences of Black millennial teachers through a resilience lens allows researchers and educators to counteract themes in literature that focus on the adverse conditions of the U.S. public school educational workforce due to the theory's asset-based framework. The Black teacher shortage in American public schools is a pervasive problem as exhibited by declining retention rates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Goldring et al., 2014; NCES, 2019). Causes and effects of the Black teacher shortage have been provided in this chapter, as well as the benefits of a racially diversified workforce. Additionally, the added complexity of generational identity has been explored. As generational diversity in the workplace increases and generations entering the educational workforce become more diverse, the need for understanding how to recruit and retain teachers of different racial and generational demographics remains a priority. The characteristics of millennials and other generational cohorts has been detailed in this chapter. Black millennial teachers have both converging and diverging experiences in the U.S. public school workforce that warrant attention and addition to the literature.

While a variety of interventions have been attempted, the lens of resilience has not been applied specifically to Black millennial teachers. There is a limited amount of empirical evidence on Black millennial in-service teachers. While studies on other populations have been supportive, the gap in understanding the resilience of Black millennial in-service teachers points to the need for further study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study utilized a qualitative research methodology to describe self-perceived factors of resilience by Black millennial teachers in Virginia public elementary school settings. Based on the guiding research questions, this method and research design were deemed appropriate considering the goal of the study is to explore Black millennial teachers' perceptions and experiences to construct the meaning of the phenomenon which is resilience in Virginia public elementary school settings. Utilizing transcendental phenomenological methods by Moustakas (1994), I explain the study's qualitative nature, transcendental phenomenological framework, my role as the primary researcher, participation of participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Design

Determination of the type of study, research design, and the approach hinges on the goal of the inquiry. The central question of this study is: "What are the lived experiences that Black millennial teachers ascribe to their resilience in Virginia public school elementary settings?" The following section describes and affirms the appropriateness of the selected study, research design, and approach that guided the study.

Qualitative Study

Specific variables and hypotheses seen in quantitative research are not necessary nor evident based on the central research question of this study. The purpose of the study is most appropriate with a qualitative research design. Moustakas (1994) contended the studying of human experiences is inaccessible through quantitative approaches. Qualitative studies are often contextually-sensitive and necessitate an inquiry approach rather than statistical (Patton, 2015).

An inquiry approach to human experience and the role of the researcher is cited by Patton (2015) as several contrasting emphases between qualitative and quantitative research.

Additionally, the use of interviews as a primary source of data collection (Moustakas, 1994) is a major tenet of qualitative research. Rather than distancing myself from the subject being studied, using data collection methods such as interviews allowed my role to include co-constructing meaning alongside teachers, who served as participants. Desiring to describe the lived experiences of Black millennial teachers and recognizing each experience of the participant is unique and impacted by context, I believe a qualitative methodology is most appropriate for the study. Qualitative research methods provide explanations that are more holistic and detailed, allow for personal experience and engagement, offer more of a conceptual approach, and utilize purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015).

Phenomenological Design

Rather than synthesize findings to support generalizations across varying settings which is a goal of quantitative research (Patton, 2015), the goal of this study was to present an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon- Black millennial teachers' resilience in American public school elementary settings. Originating from a strong philosophical foundation from Edmund Husserl (2012), phenomenology seeks to describe the common meaning ascribed to a lived experience of a concept or phenomenon rather than explain or analyze (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given my goal of exploring the essence of lived experiences and adding the voices of resilient Black millennial teachers to the literature, the research design most appropriate is phenomenological.

Utilizing resilience theory as the theoretical framework for my topic, Masten (2011) contended resilience is developed through experiencing adversity. Such experience is based on

the perception that adverse factors are present (Masten, 2011). Perception as a primary source of knowledge and lived experience is essential to phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). With the understanding that knowledge is based on perception and consciousness, a phenomenological research design honors the various experiences that participants have with a common phenomenon. Participants in this study were Black millennial teachers. In this study, I explored the common meaning of their self-perceived factors of resilience within Virginia elementary public school settings. Moustakas (1994) summarized phenomenological processes as naming the shared experience that is occurring as the phenomenon, collecting data from persons experiencing it, and developing a comprehensive textural and structural description of the essence of the experience for all participants.

Transcendental Phenomenological Approach

Meaning is at the core of transcendental phenomenology, and this approach studies the appearance of things just as they appear in consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Interpretation of the phenomenon is not the focus as it is in hermeneutic phenomenology. A transcendental phenomenological researcher is more concerned with the construction of meaning through the description of the participants' experiences, which is the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) contended major differences from other designs were visible in the launching, data collection, and data analysis of transcendental phenomenology. Major components of this approach include epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and textural-composite structural descriptions. Unlike other qualitative designs, the transcendental phenomenologist uses the epoché process to systematically set aside preconceived notions and prior experiences to best support listening and describing participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Additionally, noema and noesis as central concepts to communicating meaning in transcendental phenomenology validate the appropriateness of the approach for this study. Noema describes what is experienced while noesis describes how it is experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Resilience is developed through the complex construct and outcome of a dynamic relationship between internal and external risk and protective factors (Beltman et al., 2011; Bernard, 2004; Gu & Day, 2007). Considering the impact of both internal and external factors on the lived experiences of my participants, the emphasis of the unity of noema (external perception) and noesis (internal perception) in phenomenological research makes it appropriate.

Finally, as someone who has experienced the phenomenon, having an approach that accounted for setting aside my notions and experiences was pivotal. To ensure the interpretation validity of the research, I desired a research design that provided a remedy for this.

Transcendental phenomenologists bracket their experiences by discussing and directly stating their personal connection to the phenomenon to refocus solely on the participants' experience in the description (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflexivity and epoché will be further discussed in the data analysis section of this chapter.

Research Questions

Central research question: What are the lived experiences that Black millennial teachers ascribe to their resilience development in public school elementary settings?

- Sub-question 1- What do Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual protective factors of resilience in public school elementary settings?
- Sub-question 2- What do Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual risk factors of resilience in public school elementary settings?

- Sub-question 3- How does racial or generational identity contribute to protective and/or risk factors in the lived experiences of resilient Black millennial teachers?

Setting

This study took place in a Virginia public school district, Woodrow County Public Schools (pseudonym). The school division had 59 elementary schools that served 39,187 students. Of these 39,187 students, about 70% were students of color with minority majorities: Hispanic of any race- 35.6% and Black or African American- 19.9%. There were 2,906 instructional personnel whose demographic profile was: 77% White, 11%, Black/African American, and 7% Hispanic. According to a recent division survey of school quality, 94% of personnel expressed satisfaction (Office of Accountability, 2018). Working environment, recruitment, training, recognition, and reward opportunities received the lowest ratings. Data regarding the age distribution of instructional personnel were not available.

This school district was primarily chosen for its organizational structure. The school district utilized site-based management, in comparison to surrounding counties that utilize a centralized organizational structure. Brimley et al. (2016) explained the purpose of site-based management is to give school leadership and staff more control over budget, personnel, and organization at the school level. According to MGT of America Inc. (2007), “PWCS budgeting processes use site-based management as a way to realign the decision making authority by decentralizing the control from central offices to individual school sites. Site-based management provides administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and students more control over decisions relating to budgetary issues, personnel, and curriculum” (para. 3-11). The variance in school organization and management from site to site within the district had the ability to yield a wide variety of experiences by Black millennial teachers employed in the district that may not

have be seen if participants came from a school and/or district organized by the same policies and structures. Pseudonyms were used for the school district and schools.

Participants

According to Moustakas (1994), the criteria deemed essential for participants in transcendental phenomenology is:

- Have experience with the phenomenon
- Interested in better understanding the nature of the phenomenon and its meaning
- Willing to take part in a long interview(s)
- Grant permission to the investigator to record the interview and publish the data in publications

Considering these criteria as a basis for sampling, I added specific criteria based on the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study. The criteria for research participants was:

- Millennial- any person with a birth year 1980 through 1996 (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Cahil & Sedrak, 2012; Gong et al., 2018; Howe and Strauss, 2000; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Tulgan, 2009; Valenti, 2019; Walker, 2009; Yeaton, 2008)
- Black or African American- a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, para. 3)
- Have a minimum of three years of traditional public school teaching experience as a full-time general education classroom teacher
- Currently employed as a classroom teacher in an elementary school in Woodrow County Public Schools in Virginia

Utilization of these criteria supported the use of criterion sampling and snowball sampling. Creswell and Poth (2018) posited phenomenological studies require a more narrowed sampling strategy and purposeful criterion sampling ensures selected participants have lived experiences of the phenomenon. Patton (2015) added, this purposeful sampling strategy ensures cases are worth further investigation in the field. From my contacts, Black millennial teachers in the district were recruited for the sample pool and were asked to complete an electronic questionnaire (see Appendix E) to determine which respondents were *information-rich* to serve as participants.

In the event that I was unable to secure a large enough sample pool, I would have also used snowball sampling. Using this strategy, I would have asked those in the sample pool for additional relevant contacts that fit the criteria and created a chain of recruits (Patton, 2015). This would have continued until the sample pool was large enough for me to screen questionnaire submissions and narrow the pool down to an information-rich sample size of 10-12 participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) cite sample recommendations for groups of individuals in phenomenological studies between 3-15, however, Liberty University requires a minimum of 10 (Liberty University, 2019).

A questionnaire was utilized for enrollment into the sample pool. Completion of the questionnaire enrolled respondents into the sample pool, but not the sample size. To narrow the sample pool to a sample size of 10-12 information-rich participants, I screened responses to determine who met the research criteria. Pseudonyms were used for all teachers. The online questionnaire that was completed by participants was created specifically for this study with both open and closed questioning. Since the questionnaire was created for this study, face and content validity were established and piloting took place.

Establishing Validity and Piloting Procedures for the Questionnaire

Establishing content validity ensures the content is appropriate and relevant to the study's purpose (Gall et al., 2007; Parsian & Dunning, 2009). Sireci (1998) defined content validity as “the ability of a test to represent the domain of tasks it is designed to measure” (p. 104). Each test item must be determined to be content-valid which confirms the credibility of items. This assurance makes certain that inferences made from the results of the assessment are theoretically and empirically grounded (Sireci, 1998).

Elements of test quality that establish content validity are (a) defining the content domain, (b) determining content relevance, (c) determining content relevance, and (d) appropriate test construction procedures (Sireci, 1998). Content validity was determined by detailing the theoretical and conceptual grounding of items to rate their relevance and representativeness of the content (Parsian & Dunning, 2009; Sireci, 1998). I worked with my dissertation committee to secure content validity by communicating how each item on the questionnaire is grounded in research.

In addition to content validity, face validity was also established. Face validity seeks to confirm that the instrument appears to measure what it has been designed to measure (Nevo, 1995). This includes determining if the questionnaire is feasible, readable, has a consistent style, consistent formatting, uses clear wording, and would be understood by the target audience (Parsian & Dunning, 2009). One way face validity can be determined is when someone who is a testee rates test items by employing a relative technique that is suitable for intended use (Nevo, 1995). A relative technique includes asking persons who meet the criteria of the study to rate the validity of the items as it appears to them and expressing their opinions on items by comparing them to others (Nevo, 1995). This was the technique used to pilot the questionnaire once it was

determined to have content validity. The following steps are based on recommendations for piloting procedures by Gall et al. (2007) and Nevo (1995), and it is advised that multiple revisions and re-releasing occur:

1. Submit the questionnaire questions to persons who meet the criteria for the questionnaire but will not be in the sample. This might include family members, friends, and personal contacts who are employed outside of Woodrow County Public Schools.
2. Ask respondents to record what they think the question is asking
3. Provide space for respondents to make criticisms and recommendations
4. Revise the questionnaire based on feedback and repeat steps two through four until face validity has been achieved

Procedures

To begin a research study, the investigator must apply and secure Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. I applied and secured approval from Liberty University's IRB prior to any data collection beginning (see Appendix A). Additionally, prior to recruitment, I applied for site approval to conduct research in Woodrow County Public Schools by requesting site approval to conduct the study (see Appendix B).

To begin sampling procedures and generate a sample pool, I recruited participants in the school district through professional learning networks including personal contacts, email, Twitter, and Facebook groups. A flyer was provided with information about the study, as well as a recruitment letter (see Appendix C). Interested persons received a link to the screening survey and were notified that completion of the survey did not guarantee selection for the final sample. Moustakas (1994) affirmed that participation in a transcendental phenomenology study

necessitates participants having awareness and agreement of their role, as well as how the primary researcher will utilize the data collected from them. For this reason, the recruitment letter clearly communicated the parameters of the study so that those interested had ample information to support informed consent (see Appendix D).

Creswell and Poth (2018) advised consent forms include an explanation of (a) right to voluntarily withdraw at any time, (b) central purpose of the study and its procedures for data collection, (c) how confidentiality will be protected, (d) known risks associated with the study, (e) expected benefits that participants may accumulate, and (f) signatures of both the participant and researcher. Upon submission of informed consent, I sent interested persons a link to the online questionnaire via email. The questionnaire used was generated specifically for this study, therefore, piloting procedures were used to ensure content and face validity. These procedures have been detailed in the participants section. Correspondence for the remainder of the study took place via email, telephone, or video conferencing. To support the recruitment and filling of the study, participants received a \$25 Amazon gift card upon completion of the study.

Upon receipt of informed consent forms and electronic questionnaire submissions, I analyzed question responses to narrow down the sample size to 10-12 participants. Those respondents who were not selected for participation in the study were contacted by email and thanked for their interest. Those selected for the study sample were contacted via email to explain the next steps in the process which included the journaling protocol on Google Forms (see Appendix F), standardized open interviews (see Appendix G), and focus groups (see Appendix H). I explained the requirement of completing the online journaling protocol once within four weeks, and participants had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions. They also received a link to schedule an interview and focus group.

Prior to interviews and focus groups beginning, the researcher piloted questions. Piloting of questions for both data collection methods occurred simultaneously since the majority of focus group questions were identical to the questions for one-on-one interviews. Piloting occurred to ensure questions elicit responses that align with the goal of the study and had clarity. Those persons utilized in piloting may have fit the study's demographic criteria but they were not participants. Piloting procedures that ensure content and face validity were the same as those used for piloting the journaling protocol. These procedures are explained in the data collection section.

Interviews and focus groups took place within the same four-week window of the participants' journaling. Submissions that were received prior to interviews were sometimes utilized for additional probing questions. A single 60 to 90 minute interview was conducted with each participant using a standardized open interview protocol that aligned with the central research question and three subquestions (see Appendix G). One to two focus groups occurred with three to six participants in each group for 50 to 75 minutes. Focus groups included a meditative activity to supported rapport building called "Just Like Me" (see Appendix I), and a standardized interview protocol was used. Probing questions as follow-ups occurred based on participants' answers. Interviews and focus groups took place through video conferencing software, Zoom. All interviews and focus groups were video-recorded and transcribed through transcription software. Follow-up interviews occurred if clarity or additional insight was needed. Audio transcriptions were submitted to participants to verify accuracy.

Throughout the data collection process, I recorded field notes. Patton (2015) contended recording of field notes is vital and not optional. Field notes describe what has been observed through the data collection process. I took descriptive field notes throughout the piloting of data

collection methods and final data collection methods. Field notes include what people say, how the observer feels and reflects, and includes reflection on what was observed (Patton, 2015).

Writing field notes throughout the data collection process supported bracketing in the data analysis phase of the study. These notes were also utilized to serve in the data triangulation process. Descriptions of how data collection was conducted and analyzed is included in the data collection and data analysis sections.

The Researcher's Role

Moustakas (1994) posited the phenomenological researcher has a vested interest in and is passionate about their research inquiry thus the researcher has an active role as a human instrument in the study. Creswell and Poth (2018) contended qualitative researchers have the obligation to be open about their interpretations and stances they bring to their research and writing. As a Black, millennial, public school elementary educator of nine years who is currently working within an elementary public school setting, I have worked with many teachers who toiled with the decision to stay in education or leave. I have also had numerous conversations with Black professionals in my generational cohort about why being an educator was not attractive to them as a career choice. As of 2017-18, Black teachers accounted for 6.7% of the teaching force, while Black students constituted 15% of the student population (NCES, 2020). Considering the benefits of Black teachers in the lives and achievement of Black students and other students of color (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Jackson & Kohli, 2016; Madkins, 2011; Villegas et al., 2012; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), I am often discouraged by the disproportionality between the demographics of the educational workforce and student demographics.

In my leadership role for the last four years, I have worked with numerous millennial and Black millennial teachers who I have seen impacted positively and negatively by protective and

risk factors that support or hinder resilience development. Part of my job description is serving as an encouragement and classroom support for teachers, helping to develop resilience and aid retention. Much of my work necessitates attention to common protective and risk factors that impact teacher resilience, retention, and attrition. Some have allowed the frequency of risk factors to deter them from persevering (Beltman et al., 2011). Others have found protective factors that have supported them in remaining in the profession.

In transcendental phenomenology, the primary researcher's personal experiences are set aside by discussing the personal connection to the phenomenon to refocus solely on the participants' experience in the description (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process of epoché is derived from a Greek term meaning to "suspend judgment" (Moustakas, 1994). As a Black, millennial educator, I am passionate about seeing the educational workforce diversified as I feel the Black millennial voice is often left out of rooms where educational decisions are made. Too commonly, I see a minute amount of young Black, millennial classroom teachers and am concerned about the experiences that might be hindering resilience and retention of educators like me.

Beltman et al. (2011) cited individual challenges as negative self-beliefs and confidence and difficulty asking for help. Contextual challenges are often encountered in pre-service programs, family, school or classroom, and/or professional work (Beltman et al., 2011). In my early years as a teacher, I can recall colleagues dismissing my ideas because of my age and being a novice teacher. These repeated experiences made me feel unsupported, stifled, and judged, however; I also developed close-knit relationships with other colleagues that warded off the shame and isolation that was brought on by others' comments. During my first five years as an elementary school teacher, I often contemplated leaving the profession, finding some of the

challenges not worth enduring. Yet I have remained due to individual and contextual supports such as school setting, students, school leadership, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation. These are common protective factors found in teacher resilience literature (Beltman et al., 2011).

The school district that I selected for this study is the site where I spent the first eight years of my educational career. I resigned in June 2018, on good terms, to work in a neighboring district. I know many of the school leaders and teachers who may have qualified as participants. Despite leaving on good terms, due to adverse situations I encountered in specific schools in the district, there are certain schools and colleagues that I do not believe I would have been adequately able to bracket my experiences from. These experiences and views impact my biases and assumptions regarding this study. As the human instrument of this study, I had to align myself with the goal of transcendental phenomenology which was to describe the lived experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994) rather than allow my own interpretations and experiences with the phenomenon to overshadow my ability to listen and capture the experiences of others.

Considering my passion for the topic and closeness to the site, I addressed my experiences and interpretations by (a) bracketing my experiences to focus on solely describing participants' experiences, (b) excluding participants from entering the sample size if a shared history existed, (c) maintaining empathetic neutrality, and (d) utilizing member checking to ensure I reported participants' descriptions accurately. Creswell and Poth (2018) advised writing reflexive comments about what is being experienced throughout the study's progression. This was done through field notes, previously discussed in the procedures section. Additionally, phenomenological studies necessitate continuous bracketing of experiences. Bracketing is when

the researcher names their experiences with the phenomenon as a method of setting aside their views to approach the research with a “fresh perspective” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78).

While I knew those who piloted questionnaire and interview questions, their aid was purely for content and face validity purposes. I selected participants who I did not have prior working or personal relationships with. Establishing and maintaining empathetic neutrality, the ability to connect and honor someone’s experiences while maintaining objective openness, (Patton, 2015) occurred. Engaging in reflexivity through researcher field notes as a method supported the establishment of trustworthiness. Focusing on solely describing participants’ experiences rather than interpreting them also limited the impact of my experiences as biases (Patton, 2015). Part of my role as the primary researcher included a commitment to collaboration with participants which included their involvement beyond data collection. Using member checking, participants had the opportunity to read the themes that emerged and provided feedback on whether these themes adequately captured their experiences with the phenomenon.

Data Collection

Moustakas (1994) stated that every method developed ought to illuminate the research question. To capture the essence of the studied phenomenon, data was collected from participants through a journaling protocol, standardized open interviews, and a focus group interview. To support bracketing experiences and reflexivity, I, as the primary researcher, also kept dated field notes throughout the collection and analysis of interviews, participant journal entries, and the focus group interview. Prior to individual interviews taking place, procedures for completing and submitting the journaling protocol were explained to participants. Additionally, the focus group meeting was scheduled prior to individual interviews.

Journaling

Journaling is a data collection method that is often used to supplement interviews in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Patton (2015) determined diaries and journals to be types of documentation that specifically support the qualitative inquiry of individuals and families. While experiences provided in interviews and focus groups may cover the entire span of participants' careers, the goal of the journaling protocol was for participants to provide recent, firsthand, detailed experiences of resilience within the timeframe of the study. What the journal submission offered, that the interview and focus groups did not, was real-time description and reflection of perceived adversity in the workplace, as journaling was done within the four-week window of the study. Upon acceptance into the study as a participant, the journaling protocol (see Appendix F) was explained and was available for submission online through a Google form.

Standardized Journaling Protocol Questions

1. Narrate a recent experience when you encountered a challenge in your workplace. Share what was seen, said, heard, felt, etc. by including:
 - a. What happened?
 - b. Why was this a challenge for you?
 - c. How did you address the challenge?
2. If this occurred again, would you change how you addressed it? Why or why not?

Participants submitted one online journal entry regarding a recent adverse encounter experienced during the four-week window of the study. Questions on the journaling protocol were interrelated with questions from the one-on-one long interview and focus group interviews. Explanations of each question on the journaling protocol are provided in the subsequent paragraphs. Based on data from journal submissions, I was prepared to probe further to gain additional data about the participant's experiences.

Recent Experience

Question one is in alignment with both sub-question one and sub-question two which seeks to determine what Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual protective or risk factors in the workplace. Participants were asked to narrate a recent experience when they encountered a challenge by detailing what happened, why it was a challenge, and how they addressed it. This journaling prompt covers a myriad of Patton's (2015) six types of questions:

- Experience and Behavior- Obtains the behaviors, experiences, actions, or activities that would be observed
- Sensory- A type of experience and behavior question that elicits sensory details and stimuli they experienced such as what would be seen, what would be heard
- Feelings- Draw out emotions connected to one's experiences.

Resilience has been described as a process involving the interplay of risk and protective factors (Beltman et al., 2011; Benard, 2004; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Masten, 2011; Shean, 2015). While both the interview and focus group questions asked participants to detail experiences with protective and risk factors separately, this broad journaling prompt encouraged the participant to detail the interdependency of protective factors and risk factors. Doney (2013) posited this as the way to understand how resilience is fostered. Protective factors are often activated as a result of perceived adversity and serve as buffers to risk to develop resilience (Benard, 2004; Doney, 2013; Shean, 2015). Question one allowed the primary researcher to capture and categorize the utility of protective factors used based on Benard's (2004) four categories of individual protective factors: (a) social competence, (b) problem solving, (c) autonomy, and (d) sense of purpose. These categories are consistent with individual protective factors named in the literature (Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Masten, 2011; Tait,

2008). Data from this question of the journaling prompt was paired with responses from interview questions six through nine to detail the participant's adaptation or maladaptation to challenges.

Reflecting on Experience

Question two is directly connected to the central question of the study: What are the lived experiences that Black millennial teachers ascribe to their resilience in Virginia public elementary settings? Collected data supports both sub-question one and sub-question two as participants reflected on their experience. Self-awareness is an indicator of resilience (Benard, 2004). Resilient individuals can step back from the emotion and cognitive restructuring of their experience to see themselves and their experiences differently (Benard, 2004). As an opinion and value question, question two asked participants to consider the previously detailed experience and how it was handled to justify how they addressed it.

Critical thinking and problem-solving are also manifestations of resilience (Benard, 2004; Doney, 2013). As the participant judged their handling of adversity, the primary researcher was able to understand the cognitive and interpretive processes behind the participant's experience and behavior (Patton, 2015). This question is similar to interview question ten and focus group question five where participants are asked to reflect on how their ways of navigating challenges may have changed over the duration of their career. Doney (2013) determined that utilized protective factors should change over time to counteract new challenges that occur, and teachers with the capacity to flexibly handle new demands and use problem solving to alleviate stressors were more likely to overcome adversity. Data from question two enabled the primary researcher to gain insight into how participants interpreted their experiences in order to confirm or revise their use of protective factors in the workplace.

Interviews

Interviews are a primary data collection method used in qualitative research, particularly phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Gall et al. (2007) affirmed questionnaires and interviews as valid data collection methods when researchers need to collect data that may not be directly observable or when direct observation may not be convenient. Considering the goal of phenomenological research is to describe lived experiences, interviews are a primary means that allow participants to detail experiences with the phenomenon. Interviews are advantageous in qualitative research because of their adaptability and opportunities for probing (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). Gall et al. (2007) explained interviews are commonly used in interviews because they allow “open-ended exploration of topics and elicit responses that are couched in the unique words of the respondents” (p. 229). For this study, all three data collection methods were supportive of one another. While the interview was structured with a standardized interview protocol, the responses from the journaling entry were directly addressed and utilized in the interview, when applicable, to allow each participant to expound upon the narration of their lived experience.

At the time of this study, much face-to-face contact had moved online due to safety precautions related to COVID-19. For this reason, the researcher conducted long interviews through video conferencing software, Zoom, for 60 to 75 minutes. Moustakas (1994) describes the interview process as “informal” and “interactive” (p. 114). Researchers are encouraged to begin with a social conversation or meditative activity to support building rapport, relaxation, and trust prior to beginning the interview especially when sensitive topics may be discussed (Gall et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994). For this reason, each interview started with a game called *Mockups* (Gerber, 2016). This simple game served as a simple icebreaker that both the primary

researcher and participant played by selecting three cards: (a) a user, (b) a need, and (c) a constraint. Each player determined a solution to the problem seen in their three cards. While this activity was not collected as data, it was a brief activity that provided insight into the primary researcher and participant's problem-solving which is an attribute of resilience. The interview began after the activity.

Three main formats of interviews are used in qualitative research: (a) informal conversational interview, (b) general interview guide, and (c) standardized open interview (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). This study used a standardized open interview (see Appendix G). This format includes a predetermined question sequence and wording that were used for each participant (Gall et al., 2007) while still permitting a level of flexibility. The open-ended questions invited thoughtful, reflective, and in-depth responses (Patton, 2015). Moustakas (1994) affirmed the use of broad questioning as a way to obtain "rich, vital, substantive descriptions of the participant's experiences of the phenomenon" (p. 116). While questions were developed prior to the interviews, they were "varied, altered, or not used at all when the participant shares the full story of his or her experience..." (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). Additional probing questions were added to the interview, when necessary, based on responses from the participant's journal entries. Follow-up interviews may also occur as a result of the data analysis process.

Employing a standardized open-ended interview forces predetermining word choice, and Patton (2015) added, distinguishing the type of questions the researcher will ask supports greater clarity when asking questions. This aids the participant in responding appropriately as they describe their lived experience. Interview questions can be categorized into six categories: (a) background/demographic, (b) experience and behavior, (c) opinions and values, (d) feelings, (e) knowledge, and (f) sensory (Patton, 2015). While participants may include feelings and sensory

descriptions within responses to questions, the questions are not worded to specifically elicit this information. For interviews in this study, the types of questions that were prioritized were (a) experiences and behavior and (b) opinions and values. Background and demographic questions were collected prior to the interview, through the questionnaire, to maximize time during the interview. Patton (2015) advised against interviews being inundated with background and demographic questions.

Questions began broadly and progressed towards a narrower focus throughout the interview. Participants were asked to share what led them to pursue education as a career. Then they were asked to begin detailing the protective and risk factors that contributed to resilience in the profession. The interview concluded with questions regarding the participant's career outlook for the future. Questions also addressed different time frames: (a) past, (b) present, and (c) future (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) contended past or present questions are more reliable than speculative future-oriented questions. The majority of questions focused on the past and present while future-oriented questions were saved for the end of the interview.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. What led you to education as a career choice?
2. What has caused you to stay?
3. What personal strengths or supports have helped you persist in education?
4. What relationships, if any, have helped you persist in education?
5. What support does your school or school district have in place that helps you persist in education?
6. What about your school culture or environment are you finding most challenging right now?

7. What about being a teacher are you personally finding most challenging right now?
8. [Refer to question 6 AND question 7] Why do you think these challenges impact you more than others that may be present?
9. What are some ways that you navigate and overcome these challenges?
10. Since first becoming a teacher, how have your ways of navigating challenges in the workplace changed?
11. In what ways, if any, do you think being a Black teacher has helped or hindered your experience as a teacher at your school?
12. In what ways, if any, do you think being a millennial teacher has helped or hindered your experience as a teacher at your school?
13. Considering both your racial and generational identity together, how does being a Black millennial teacher help or hinder your experience as a teacher at your school?
14. If you could go back in time and give yourself advice at the start of your educational career, what would you say? Why?
15. What is the likelihood that you will continue as a classroom teacher next year?
16. What do you consider when deciding whether or not to change positions or leave the profession?
17. How long do you see yourself remaining a teacher?
18. What else would you like to share about your experiences?

Career Choice and Adaptation

Questions one and two are opinion and values questions which aimed to help participants communicate what they thought of their experiences, their intentions, and their expectations (Patton, 2015). Question one asked the participant to name the initial desires and values for a

career that led to education as their chosen profession. This question served as an opportunity to start the interview with a general question before exploring the participant's experience with the phenomenon. This question was asked first in the sequence of questions because it is noncontroversial and allowed the participant to speak more descriptively. The primary researcher followed up with probing to elicit greater detail, when needed, (Patton, 2015) and sometimes occurred in conjunction with question two which asks the participant to consider all in-service experiences to explain why they have persisted as a teacher. Asserting the impact of generational shifts and Black millennials' access to a wider range of careers in comparison to previous generational and demographic cohorts (Dilworth, 2018; Madkins, 2011; Ramirez, 2010), questions one and two allowed the participant to explain their motivations for teaching as a career choice and how these motivations may have remained or shifted as an in-service teacher.

Beltman et al. (2011) postulated the frequency of experiences had a more enduring impact on teacher commitment and efficacy than the intensity. To answer these two questions, the participant were forced to weigh initial intentions for being a teacher with supports and challenges in their experience. This resulted in a response that synthesizes what most encapsulates the participant's experience as a teacher. Workplace values influence job loyalty and retention (Maier et al., 2015), and teacher retention is a by-product of resilience (Tait, 2008). These questions were designed to capture how these aspects impact resilience for Black millennial teachers. Responses to these two questions served as baseline data that were used to probe further in additional question sections as the participant described how resilience had been manifested in their experience.

Individual and Contextual Protective Factors

Questions four through six directly connect to sub-question one of this study: What do Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual protective factors of resilience in public school elementary settings? Protective factors are greater predictors of resilience than risk (Benard, 2004). For this reason, this is a central section of the interview. Questions three through five elicited responses that describe the participant's experiences and behaviors, as well as opinions and values.

Protective factors that enable an individual to overcome adversity are commonly categorized in research as individually supported or contextually supported (Beltman et al., 2011; Doney, 2013). Benard (2004) classified individual protective factors into the following four categories: (a) social competence, (b) problem solving, (c) autonomy, and (d) sense of purpose. These categories are consistent with individual protective factors named in the literature (Benard, 2004; Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Masten, 2011; Tait, 2008). Question three asked the participant to share personal strengths that supported persistence as a teacher. As the participant detailed their experiences, responses allowed the primary researcher to determine if and which common categories of resilience were visible in their experiences. If participants did not automatically address any of these common categories, I was prepared to probe further with follow up questions that named specific categories of resilience such as, "How has problem solving supported you in persisting?", "How has social competence such as responsiveness, communication, empathy, compassion, etc. supported you in persisting?"

Question four asked the participant to provide any noteworthy relationships that have served as supports for resilience, and question five aimed to extract contextualized protective factors provided within the corporate in the school culture or school district. A familial or relational support system is one of the most common protective factors for resilience (Bobek,

2002; Tait, 2008). Gu and Day (2007) affirmed the people we work with and the nature of the settings we work in are dimensions that impact resilience. If participants had already discussed supportive relationships in previous responses, I focused more on probing on question four.

Masten (2014) asserted proactive interventions can be enacted to reduce risk exposure.

Interventions should target and support development in areas such as self-efficacy, motivation, self-regulation, or problem-solving (Doney, 2013; Masten, 2011). Data collected from question five allowed the primary research to capture how contextual supports are viable for intervening and building resilience.

Individual and Contextual Risk Factors

Questions six through ten directly connect to sub-question two of this study: What do Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual risk factors of resilience in public school elementary settings? Resilience is predicated on the basis that an individual has perceived risk and adversity (Masten, 2011). These interview questions connect directly to the journal protocol and focus group questions one through three. The questions in this section were worded to elicit experience and behavior as well as opinions and values based on the participant's experiences. The intent of these questions was for the participant to (a) name specific contextual or personal risks, (b) explain what causes these factors to be risks for them, and (c) to describe what they do or have done to persist despite the risks: activities that would be observable if the primary researcher had been present at the time described (Patton, 2015).

To be considered resilient, individuals must be exposed to risk factors or stressors thus enabling protective factors and processes to overcome perceived adversity. Risk factors or stressors are classified as ongoing or episodic (Mahan et al., 2010). The presence of risk factors alone does not lead to maladaptation which occurs when individuals perceive high levels of

adversity and exhibit low levels of adaptation (Masten, 2011). It is the frequency of risks that have the most impact on whether an individual demonstrates resilience in the midst of adversity (Shean, 2015). The aim of this section of questions was for participants to describe, in detail, what risk factors have been present, to what degree have they been present, and what processes have been utilized to yield positive adaptation.

Numerous risk factors are present for teachers (Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Mahan et al., 2010; Rooney, 2015; Tait, 2008), however, cumulative, frequent risks are more impactful on an individual's resilience than the individual, infrequent risks (Shean, 2015). Question eight asked the participant to consider all risk factors experienced and determine which impacts them the most. Resilience looks at the utility of protective factors within the context of risky situations (Shean, 2015). Assessment of a factor as risk is based on one's perception. Question eight provides insight into how participants categorize risk factors and how the same risk factors may be viewed differently across participants. This question allowed the primary researcher to inquire why certain risk factors are more challenging than others and detail how the participant weighs risk factors. Question nine then allowed them to explain what protective factors are used to counteract the named risk factors. Resilient persons utilize individual or contextual protective factors to adjust to and minimize the impact of risk factors (Bobek, 2002), thus the continual analysis of protective factors, despite the presence of a variety of risks, offers greater predictions of resilience than the identification of risk factors (Benard, 2004).

This section is intentionally sequenced in the middle of the interview. During the previous section, the participant reflected and shared experiences or behaviors that have been supportive during their career. Patton (2015) advised opinions, values, and feelings are more accurate and grounded once experiences have been "relived." Questions six through ten asked

the participant to begin sharing experiences and behaviors that have demonstrated risk in the workplace while also providing opinions as to why they perceive these experiences as risks.

Finally, question ten asked the participant to provide more reflective data from the duration of their career to narrate how their strategies of navigating risks have changed over time. In a study conducted by Doney (2013), after interviews with four secondary teachers, the researcher determined resilience was contextual and changed over time for each participant. This confirmed research conducted by Gu and Day (2007) that resilience may be demonstrated in a certain context or professional phase, yet no longer be displayed when time or location changes. The intent of this question was to describe how the participant's demonstration of resilience may have changed over time.

Racial and Generational Identity as a Protective or Risk Factor

Questions 11 through 13 are opinions and values questions. Major themes in the research addressed in Chapter Two include generational differences (Brown, 2012; Cogan, 2012; Lutz, 2017; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Maier et al., 2015) and racial friction in the workplace (Bower-Phipps et al., 2013; Brown, 2018; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Kohli, 2009). The questions were designed for the participant to describe if and how their racial and/or generational identity impact risk factors within the workplace. Questions 10 and 11 directly connect to sub-question three of this study: "How does racial or generational identity contribute to protective and or risk factors in the lived experiences of resilient Black millennial teachers?"

Benard (2004) affirmed positive identity as an indication of the individual protective factor of autonomy. While positive self-identity contributes to resilience development, for Black teachers, racial identity is often met with the navigation of contextual risk factors such as racial isolation (Bower-Phipps et al., 2013; Griffin & Tackie, 2016) and racial microaggressions

(Brown, 2018). For millennial teachers, it is common to encounter generational stereotypes and intergenerational conflict (Brown, 2012; Lutz, 2017; Maier et al., 2015). This section asked the participant to consider how their racial and generational identity has impacted their experiences in developing resilience. Previously cited literature affirmed racial and/or intergenerational conflicts as areas Black teachers and millennial teachers must maneuver to develop resilience and persist in education. Responses from these questions allowed the primary researcher to capture how the participant's identity has served as support or challenge to persisting.

Themes of Resilience Development for Black Millennial Teachers

Question 14 directly connects to the central question of the study. This question encouraged the participant to reflect on the past and present experiences and synthesize their experience by naming what they have learned through their experiences. This was integral to making themes of each participant's lived experience visible. Confirmation of resilience implies that individuals have withstood or recovered from significant adverse challenges (Masten, 2011). By providing what they have learned as a result of risk and protective factors during their career, the researcher was able to capture a holistic view of the participant's textural-structural description of experience with the phenomenon. This was the only question in this section of the interview to allow for probing based on themes shared by the participant.

Job Satisfaction and Future Career Outlook

Questions 15 through 17 asked the participant to reflect on the past and present experiences to forecast their future career outlook. Patton (2015) advised asking future-oriented questions after participants have had the opportunity to consider the present and past. Exploring present and past experiences was covered through questions in previous sections. A review of the literature affirmed that teacher resilience is linked to retention (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007;

Tait, 2008). Additionally, moving schools while remaining in education has also been viewed as having a similar impact as career attrition (Goldring et al., 2014) which is the opposite of resilience and retention. Exploring future commitment to the field of education provides insight into the participant's development of resilience as a predictor of career retention.

Question 15 sought information on the participant's career outlook for the near future while question 16 asked for a more distant projection. Patton (2015) cautioned against future-oriented questions as they are less reliable and speculative. Question thirteen was most relevant to understanding how the participant's resilience development could support retention, however; question fourteen allowed the primary researcher to gain insight into how one's experiences may impact long term goals. Additionally, several researchers state millennial teachers have a greater likelihood of pursuing job mobility (Abrams, 2018; Cogin, 2012), and novice teachers are likely to leave within the first three to five years of teaching (Bobek, 2002; Moradian Watson, 2018). It should not be assumed that demonstrating resilience and remaining in a position for the upcoming year means the participant will persist in the career forever. Comparing and contrasting responses from questions thirteen and fourteen allowed the primary researcher to capture the potential impact of different workplace values for Black millennial teachers with demonstrated resilience development.

Focus Groups

For this study, all three data collection methods are interconnected. Administration of focus groups was the culmination of the three methods. Focus group interviews bring together a purposeful, homogenous sampling of individuals well-informed about a focused topic (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). There are twelve varieties of group interviews, and I utilized a convergence-focused group which brings together individuals with similar backgrounds and

experiences to identify patterns and commonalities in their experiences (Patton, 2015). While a recommended minimum group size varies among researchers, Gall et al. (2007) and Patton (2015) agreed the maximum size is 10 people. Considering Liberty University (2019) requires a minimum of 10 individuals for phenomenological studies, and while I aimed to have all research participants also join the focus groups, I aimed to conduct one or two focus groups with three-six participants.

Focus groups are beneficial methods of data collection due to their ability to:

1. Make data collection a social experience that enables a greater depth of making meaning such as snowballing and sparks of ideas and memories (Patton, 2015)
2. Help individuals share more deeply than one-on-one interviews (Gall et al., 2007)
3. Increase validity and enhance the quality of data that emerges (Patton, 2015).

As a form of interviewing, focus groups also provide opportunities for probing (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). Unlike a one-on-one interview where the researcher serves a direct role, in a focus group, the researcher shifts to a more indirect role as a moderator of group conversation (Gall et al., 2007). Patton (2015) expressed considerable skills are needed to facilitate and conduct a group interview, and Williams and Katz (2001) agreed moderators must be comfortable managing groups. In my professional role as an Instructional Coach, I facilitate small group meetings regularly and have received numerous hours of professional development centered on group facilitation. For this reason, I believe I was well-equipped to moderate the focus groups. Additionally, during focus groups, moderators must also focus on establishing a comfortable and nonthreatening environment and take note of silences or topics participants avoided (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Since video conferencing was utilized, the role

of the moderator also included noting the nonverbal cues of individuals in response to the discussion.

The researcher moderated the focus group through video conferencing software, Zoom, for 90 minutes to two hours. Patton (2015) recommended this duration of time for the moderation of focus groups. Moustakas (1994) recommended interviews begin with a brief, meditative activity to support rapport building. I utilized this recommendation to begin focus group interviews as well.

At the start of the session, I facilitated a group strategy for activating called “Just Like Me!” from the text, *Groups at Work: Strategies and Structures for Professional Learning* (Lipton & Wellman, 2011). The authors stated the intent of this strategy is to develop group cohesion by helping investigate common experiences and characteristics of the group members (Lipton & Wellman, 2011). As the moderator, I named an interest, characteristic, or experience by sharing my screen and projecting it on a slide. Any group member who identified with what was on the slide raised a self-created sign that said, “Just Like Me,” for all members to see the commonalities. Explanation of the activity, engaging in the activity, and debriefing (see Appendix I) took approximately 15 minutes. The focus group began after this activity.

As previously stated, the three main formats of interview formats used in qualitative research are (a) informal conversational interview, (b) general interview guide, and (c) standardized open interview (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). These formats also apply to focus groups. Focus group questions were organized using a standardized open interview format (see Appendix H). This format included a predetermined question sequence and wording that was used for each participant (Gall et al., 2007) while still permitting a level of flexibility. Williams and Katz (2001) affirmed the role of a moderator as one who can listen, probe, direct, and

redirect during the focus group. For this reason, the standardized open-ended questions were used to initiate discussion and as conversation occurs, I probed and asked follow-up questions as needed. The same six categories for interview questions that have been stated were utilized to craft focus group questions: (a) background/demographic, (b) experience and behavior, (c) opinions and values, (d) feelings, (e) knowledge, and (f) sensory (Patton, 2015). All questions were open-ended and provided participants multiple opportunities to offer descriptions of their experiences.

Questions were sequenced to support the respondent in (a) identifying individual and contextual risk factors in their workplace, (b) sharing which have had the most impact on them and why, and (c) detailing protective factors that have helped them navigate the challenges. This sequence aligns with research that defines how resilience is developed (Beltman et al., 2011; Benard, 2004; Masten, 2011; Resilience Research Centre, 2014).

Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

1. What about your school culture or environment are you finding most challenging right now?
2. What about being a teacher is challenging you personally right now?
3. What are some ways that you navigate and/or overcome the challenges from question 1 or 2?
4. In what ways, if any, do you think being a Black teacher, millennial teacher, or both has hindered your experience as a teacher at your school?
5. In what ways, if any, do you think being a Black teacher, millennial teacher, or both has helped your experience as a teacher at your school?
6. Based on your experiences during your career, what advice would you give to Black

millennial teachers to help them persist in elementary education settings? Why?

7. What else do you want to share about your experience or ask each other?

Questions for the one-on-one interviews and focus groups are closely related, and several are identical. This was done to support the deeper sharing of the participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon. Since discussion in focus groups allow group members to spark and trigger memories and make more sense of behavior (Patton, 2015), I asked similar questions to see how participants may provide greater narration of their lived experiences with the phenomenon once with others with similar backgrounds.

Individual and Contextual Risk Factors

Questions one and two directly connect to research sub-question two: What do Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual risk factors of resilience in public school elementary settings? These questions are identical to interview questions six and seven. Both questions elicit responses that detail behaviors, experiences, actions, or activities that would be observable if the researcher was present as they were occurring (Patton, 2015). Resilient individuals must perceive adversity exists in their workplace as this perception activates the utility of protective factors in resilient individuals to combat risk factors (Doney, 2013; Masten, 2011; Tait, 2008).

Question one asks participants to share what contextual risks they find most challenging in the present time, while question two asks participants to share what individual risks are challenging them. While participants may have experienced or chosen to share experiences from the past, these questions are present-oriented, as Patton (2015) asserted present-oriented questions are more reliable and easier than past-oriented questions. As participants share, Patton

(2015) added that answers to present-oriented questions can be used as a baseline for probing and eliciting experiences from the past.

The intent of these questions was to collectively generate a list of present experiences to illuminate similarities or differences between participants' current risks in the workplace. By hearing each other's contextual and personal challenges, participants are able to compare and contrast the experiences others are having with the phenomenon, with their own experiences. These questions are valuable to the focus group as they helped identify themes for each type of risk factor that Black millennial teachers experience.

Individual and Contextual Protective Factors

Question three directly connects to research sub-question one: What do Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual protective factors of resilience in public school elementary settings? Question ten and eleven were designed to elicit the respondents' experiences and behaviors as they consider what protective factors have been utilized to navigate challenges in the workplace and how they have changed over time. While a follow-up question was not added to the interview protocol, based on participants' responses, I probed to elicit participants' opinions and values regarding why the protective factors they utilized contributed to overcoming challenges. Patton (2015) advised opinions and values questions are more grounded after experience and behavior questions where the respondent has relived their experience.

After establishing that individual and/or contextual risk factors that are currently being experienced, the respondent explained protective factors that have been enacted to respond to the challenges. While challenges must be present for resilience to be developed, Benard (2004) contended protective factors provide greater insight into one's resilience. Similar to the intent of questions one and two, the intent of question three was to collectively generate a list of strategies

for dealing with their challenges in the workplace, whether contextual or personal. These strategies demonstrated how participants have developed resilience to combat adversity in the workplace.

Racial and Generational Identity as a Protective or Risk Factor

During this section of the one-on-one interviews, participants were asked to share how (a) being a Black teacher has helped or hindered their experience, (b) being a millennial teacher has helped or hindered their experience, and (c) how these two demographics have helped or hindered their experience. For the focus group, only one question was asked to center conversations on the impact of being a Black millennial teacher as opposed to discussing each identity separately. Major themes in the research addressed in Chapter Two include generational differences (Brown, 2012; Cogin, 2012; Lutz, 2017; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Maier et al., 2015) and racial friction in the workplace (Bower-Phipps et al., 2013; Brown, 2018; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Kohli, 2009). This section of the focus group interview was designed for participants to describe if and how their racial and/or generational identity acts as/or influences risk or protective factors within the workplace.

Question four is identical to interview question 13 and directly addressed research sub-question three: “How does racial or generational identity contribute to protective and or risk factors in the lived experiences of resilient Black millennial teachers?” Focus group question four drew out experiences and behaviors by asking participants to reconsider their risk or protective factors previously shared and reflect on how their racial or generational identity may have shaped those experiences or behaviors. Responses included opinions and values or feelings. I listened and probed participants based on what was shared.

Themes of Resilience Development for Black Millennial Teachers

Question five extracted opinions and values based on experiences and behaviors over time. This question connects to sub-question one of this study. Focus group question five asked participants to reflect on the entirety of their careers. With a similar purpose as interview question 10, focus group question five asked participants to provide two tips they would give their younger selves at the start of their career as a result of what they learned through their experiences. Numerous researchers have contended resilience as contextual and changing over time (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Shean, 2015). In her study of four novice secondary teachers, Doney (2013) found risk factors encountered and protective factors used to combat the risks changed from year one to year two for the study's participants.

To answer focus group question five, participants reflected on how the use of protective factors to navigate risk factors has changed since first becoming a teacher. Benard (2004) asserted problem-solving skills and autonomy as two of four personal resilient strengths. Both strengths must be engaged as participants reflected in order to answer this question. By phrasing what has been learned as advice to their younger selves, it allowed larger, overarching themes pertaining to the resilience development of Black millennial teachers to become more visible.

Closing

Question six allowed participants to share anything else about their experiences that may not have been asked or captured in the group dialogue. Additionally, since focus groups offer a space for individuals of similar backgrounds and experiences to express feelings, perceptions, and beliefs in a non-threatening environment (Gall et al., 2007), the final question offered a chance for participants to ask each other questions about the similarities or differences of their experiences.

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) postulated a transcendental phenomenological perspective differs from other methods in how the study is launched and methods for data collection and analysis. For this reason, transcendental phenomenology is known for being a much more structured approach. Moustakas (1994) developed modifications of two methods of analysis of data: van Kaam (1959, 1966) method and Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method. The primary difference is that the Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method begins with the primary researcher obtaining a full description of their own experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher goes through the same steps of analysis for their experience as they will with their participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) cited this method as the “most practical, useful approach” (p. 201). The following section explains the data analysis procedures and processes for this study.

Epoché

The goal of phenomenological research is to describe the phenomena from the lens of those participants who have experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). For this reason, bracketing the primary researcher’s experience is imperative. This process enabled them to look at the phenomenon freshly without the interference of their biases, judgments, or presuppositions from their own experience. My choice in this research design was largely influenced by having a structure that supported the description of a phenomenon rather than interpretation, and epoché supports the preparation of data analysis.

Epoché is considered the first task of preparing to examine a phenomenon and is ongoing during data collection and analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Derived from the Greek language, epoché means to “suspend judgment” and enables the primary researcher to minimize the impact of their

experience and judgment of participants so that their experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon are revealed (Moustakas, 1994). This process allows the creation of a naiveté that permits the primary researcher to be unhindered, open, and receptive in listening to the experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994). This takes place prior to coding to minimize interference during the coding and development of themes. By bracketing the primary researcher's experiences, the goal is not to ignore one's biases, but to make sure they are made known and that any unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and study become conscious. Though this is the ultimate goal, it is worth noting that entirely setting aside the primary researcher's experiences cannot be done and seldom is perfectly achieved (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological Reduction

Phenomenological researchers collect large amounts of data, and it is imperative that the amount of data is reduced in the analysis phase to determine what is most relevant to the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) stated the goal of phenomenological reduction is to get to the "source of the meaning and existence of the experience," and this occurs by "reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combining the statements into themes" (p. 34). Creswell and Poth (2018) explained this as a simultaneous process of bracketing (withdrawal) and reduction (constituting the meaning). Confining data to the structures of the research questions supports reduction to reveal the phenomenon. Horizontalization, clustering variant and invariant meaning, and thematic development play large roles in phenomenological reduction.

Before horizontalization began, I used Otter.ai to transcribe all interviews. Transcriptions were submitted to participants to confirm or revise. Each participant's journal entries were

analyzed with their interview transcriptions and the focus group transcriptions. Once epoché was achieved to the best of the researcher's ability, horizontalization began (Moustakas, 1994).

Horizontalization is the idea that each piece of data collected has equal value and can yield innumerable possibilities of discovery (Moustakas, 1994). To begin paring down the data to reveal the phenomenon, the primary researcher "delimits the horizons" by beginning to cluster invariant meaning units into themes to develop a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements that are most significant (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). By reading and re-reading, the primary researcher considers the relevancy of the data to the research question to ensure alignment, while also illuminating what is significant or unique to the experienced phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing and re-bracketing continue during this stage to ensure an open mind is maintained by the primary researcher through the examination of participants' comments and statements of the phenomenon. Memoing, which is recording short phrases or ideas that occur to the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018), is supportive during this process.

A spreadsheet was utilized during this process to visually determine which codes were most prominent, thus allowing themes to emerge versus data points that were outliers. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended a final code list of 25 to 30 categories of information that are combined into five or six themes. The collected data then shifts from narrow to broad. Themes consist of several codes combined to form a common idea (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Clustered themes are utilized to develop textural, structural, and composite descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2018) contrasted textural and structural descriptions by defining textural as what participants experienced, while structural describes how the phenomenon was experienced through conditions, situations, or context. The primary researcher

used themes to compile textural descriptions that described what each participant experienced. These individual textural descriptions were compiled into a comprehensive composite textural description (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative Variation

Imaginative variation occurs after phenomenological reduction has occurred and textural descriptions have been developed. Using the textural descriptions, how the phenomenon is experienced is viewed and challenged from various perspectives to support the illumination of structural themes for each and all participants (Moustakas, 1994). Using free fantasy variation, the primary researcher explores the structural qualities that contribute to the textural qualities of the lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Universal structures investigated may include time, space, intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, and intentional structures (Moustakas, 1994). A list of structural qualities are clustered and developed into structural themes (Moustakas, 1994). From these themes, individual structural descriptions are composed that are then organized into a composite structural description. The composite structural description is integrated with the composite textural description to synthesize the meaning and essence of the experienced phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Criteria must be in place to establish that qualitative research meets expectations of rigor. Patton (2015) contended the credibility of one's findings and interpretations is contingent on the researcher's ability to prove the trustworthiness of the study. Trustworthiness is addressed through credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Each component of trustworthiness will be explored in this section. Creswell and Poth (2018) asserted at least two well-accepted validation strategies should be utilized in any given qualitative study. These

validation strategies are classified as representations of (a) researcher's lens, (b) participant's lens, and (c) the reader's or reviewer's lens (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation of data sources, member checking, reflexivity, expert audit review, and providing a thick description are explained as strategies for ensuring the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility

Credibility is the means through which the researcher verifies that the study's findings are accurate (Lincoln & Guba, 2008). Through strategies that demonstrate credibility, the researcher ensures that how the study's participants view their lives matches with how the researcher represented these views (Patton, 2015). Credibility was met through the triangulation of data sources and member checking. Triangulation of data sources established credibility through the researcher's lens, and member checking established credibility through the participant's lens.

Recognizing that any single source of data has strengths and limitations, triangulation is the process through which multiple types of data are analyzed to determine consistencies or inconsistencies in patterns and themes (Patton, 2015). The three data collection methods of this study asked participants to respond to similarly worded questions centered around the central and sub-questions of this study. Patton (2015) provided several ways that triangulation of data sources can be conducted, and of those methods, I (a) compared what people said in public in the focus group with what was shared in private through one-on-one interviews and journaling, (b) checked the consistency of what participants said about the same thing in each context, and (c) checked interviews against evidence in journaling submissions. This process strengthened the consistency of the themes in the data by ensuring that participants remained consistent in sharing their lived experiences with the phenomenon.

Additionally, the researcher employed member checking by sharing preliminary findings and gathering feedback on if the interpretations accurately captured participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order for the researcher to accurately capture the essence of the phenomenon, feedback must be provided by those experiencing it. If participants do not relate to or see the interpretations as accurate, the credibility of findings is brought into question (Patton, 2015). Once preliminary analyses with descriptions and themes were compiled, I provided participants rough drafts to be examined. Participants had the opportunity to (a) verify their experiences were accurately captured, (b) suggest alternative language, (c) indicate sections that could be problematic if published as is, and (d) provide further insights and interpretations of their lived experiences (Glesne, 1999; Stake, 1995). Participants provided feedback on the rough draft of the analyses by completing a structured Google Form.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability ensures the investigator utilizes a process that is well-documented, logical, and traceable (Patton, 2015). Assurance that the study meets the criteria to be dependable assures that the findings could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 2008). For this study, the researcher used the maintenance of an audit trail and expert audit review to make sure the study was dependable. Auditing validation strategies utilize a reader or reviewer's lens. Additionally, utilization of a standardized open-ended interview for the long interviews and focus group interviews supports consistency across each interview supports dependability, as well as the use of the Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method as a structured data analysis process appropriate for phenomenological studies.

Through an audit trail, the researcher documents the materials and procedures used in each phase of the study (Gall et al., 2007). An audit trail was kept through the data collection and

analysis phase of the study and is provided as an appendix of the study. The audit trail was submitted as part of the expert audit review. The researcher discussed the research processes and findings with neutral colleagues who understand qualitative research, particularly phenomenology. This aided in research honesty about the data and supported more reflexive, deeper thinking. Experts question the researcher's methods, meanings, and interpretations to assess and strengthen the quality of analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) contended this is the role of the doctoral committee. Both members of my doctoral committee have expertise in phenomenological studies to serve as expert auditors for this study.

Strategies that guarantee confirmability allow the researcher to demonstrate how neutrality has been maintained in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 2008). As the researcher provides and describes the lived experiences of participants, confirmability establishes that the data and interpretations can be linked to the respondents and not the researcher's bias, imagination, or personal interest (Lincoln & Guba, 2008; Patton, 2015). For this study, the researcher engaged in reflexivity which is a strategy representing a researcher's lens.

Reflexivity is embedded within transcendental phenomenology as the epoché process is used to systematically set aside preconceived notions (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher continuously engages in reflexivity throughout the study to produce interpretations that are the most integral (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). This is important as it aids the researcher in remaining more objective. Engaging in reflexivity allows the researcher to: (a) directly state their experience with the phenomenon; (b) express their biases, values, and experiences; and (c) report how their experience has shaped their perspectives and approaches to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). This was done in this chapter in the section, The Researcher's Role. This was also done through the use of the Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method

which begins with the primary researcher obtaining a full description of their own experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Transferability

Strategies that contribute to a study's transferability aid the assurance of application in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 2008). Criteria for transferability can be met by providing readers with enough information so that they can decide how similar the context being studied and the context that findings might be transferred to (Patton, 2015). For this study, transferability was achieved through the provision of a thick description. This strategy represents a reader or reviewer's lens.

A thick description provides extensive clarity of research processes, context, and how the final product was produced. Thick descriptions detail the participants and settings being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To provide a thick description, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended reviewing the raw data shortly after it has been collected to add further descriptions. A richly detailed report is then created that provides as much context, meaning, and intention of experiences (Gall et al., 2007). This is part of the Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method which includes creating textural-structural descriptions for each participant, in addition to a comprehensive composite textural description of the phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting any type of research and study, it is imperative that researchers consider ethics. There are five main ethical considerations in this study that are recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). First, participants were notified of the general purpose and use of the study. They had opportunities to ask the researcher questions prior to interviews taking place. Teachers may have felt vulnerable by sharing such personal experiences, especially if they were

negative, for fear of backlash from those they were discussing in a negative light. Allowing questions to be asked created a supportive environment.

In addition, confidentiality was provided by using pseudonyms for participants, schools, districts, and leaders. While the use of online tools for data collection supports efficiency, measures must be taken to ensure confidentiality. Settings were changed on the Google Form so that email addresses were not collected and attached to journal responses. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended a digital file naming system for protecting, managing, and organizing data. During enrollment, participants chose pseudonyms. These pseudonyms were used for data submissions and for storing data. All data was stored digitally on a password-protected Google Drive account. Data was also added to an external hard drive through the data collection process. Gall et al. (2007) advised reducing the number of individuals who can access the data; therefore I was the only person with access to it. Upon completion of the study, files on the researcher's Google Drive were deleted. Digital data on the external hard drive was stored in the home of the researcher for a period of three years. After three years, the data will be destroyed.

The school district utilized is not the researcher's current district of employment, thus minimizing power issues that could be potentially raised (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Nonetheless, considering the researcher's biases, peer examination and member checking was conducted to provide feedback on the alignment of the findings, interpretations, and conclusions, making sure they were in accordance with the data findings. It is imperative that the researcher is not the only person constructing reality. It should be co-constructed. Also, to avoid siding with participants and only disclosing certain results that may match the researcher's position or experiences, the researcher reported multiple perspectives and reported contrary findings if they arose (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

This qualitative study and phenomenological research design allowed the researcher to utilize research methods to describe the essence of teacher resilience in American public, elementary schools from the perspective of Black millennial teachers. Utilizing Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological framework, the study was designed to illuminate a co-constructed description of the lived experience of the phenomenon. The research design selected for the study guided the methodological framework. The setting and participants have been explained. The research design necessitates criterion sampling in order to ensure data collected is from *information-rich* cases. Procedures have been detailed and include (a) when IRB approval was obtained, (b) methods used to recruit a sample, (c) ethical enrollment of participants, (d) piloting of data collection tools, (e) administration of data collection, and (f) how epoiché occurred throughout the process.

Bracketing of experiences is critical to qualitative research. I explored my role and personal experiences with the phenomenon. In transcendental phenomenology, the primary researcher's personal experiences are named in detail and set aside to maintain focus on the participants' experience in the description (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The three data collection methods have been explained: (a) the journaling protocol, (b) one-on-one long interviews, and (c) focus group interviews. Questions used for each method are grounded in the literature pertaining to the topic of the study. All questions from these methods are interrelated to support the triangulation of data sources. Triangulation is one method that was used to establish trustworthiness. Other methods utilized include (a) member checking, (b) audit trail, (c) expert audit review, (d) reflexivity, and (e) thick description. Ethical considerations that were used to guide the process have also been provided.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience in Virginia public elementary schools. In this chapter, I provided descriptions of the participants' stories. Using pseudonyms, the participants are referred to as Alexandra, Jackie, Jaime, Janae, Monica, Nelson, Nicole, Pauletta, Rose, and Yvette. I presented my study's results by narrating the development of six central themes that encapsulate the lived experience of Black millennial teachers in Woodrow County (pseudonym) with resilience. Using the Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method for data analysis, themes were produced using meaning units, codes, and categories from interviews, focus groups, and journal entries. A coding frequency chart is provided (see Appendix M). This chapter concluded with answers to the study's central research question through narration of each sub-question.

Participants

The participants for the study included 10 Black millennial teachers from Woodrow County Public Schools (pseudonym). To be selected, informed consent was provided through a Google form acknowledging that they were born between 1980-1996, self-identified as Black, had a minimum of three consecutive years of traditional public school teaching experience as a general education classroom teacher, and were currently employed as a classroom teacher in an elementary school in Woodrow County Public Schools in Virginia (see Appendix D).

Participants were secured through criterion sampling. The school division provided a list of schools that I was able to work with. I then contacted each school principal to secure lists of teachers who met the research criteria so that I could contact them individually. Those interested

were asked to complete a screening survey to determine eligibility. Once enrolled, participants scheduled times for their interview and focus group based on their schedules. During the time that focus groups were scheduled, only seven participants were enrolled. As enrollment stalled, I submitted an application to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board to widen the birth year criteria for participants from 1984-1994 to 1980-1996. This expanded criteria was still included in the birth year span for millennials (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Cahil & Sedrak, 2012; Gong et al., 2018; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Tulgan, 2009; Valenti, 2019; Walker, 2009; Yeaton, 2008). Once the modification was made, I used snowball sampling to secure the remaining participants and bring the sample to 10. 10 participants completed the one-on-one interview, nine completed journal entries and seven participated in focus groups. Since the three participants enrolled after the IRB modification and once the two focus groups had occurred, their experiences are not reflected in focus groups data.

Pseudonyms have been used, and various identifying information has been changed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. In descriptions and subsequent sections of this chapter, the participants will be referred to as Alexandra, Jackie, Jaime, Janae, Monica, Nelson, Nicole, Pauletta, Rose, and Yvette. Participants engaged in the interviews, focus group, and journal entries during the middle of the 2020-21 school year. This was during the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, therefore data was gathered through synchronous and asynchronous virtual forums. Table 2 shows the number of years each participant had taught at the time of the study, whether they have transferred schools during their career, and their career plans for the following year.

Table 2

Participant Overview at the Time of the Study

Participant	Years of Teaching	Has Transferred Schools	Career Plans for the Following Year
Alexandra	3	Yes	Classroom teacher
Jackie	11	No	Classroom teacher
Jaime	10	Yes	Classroom teacher but pursuing other positions in education
Janae	8	Yes	Pursuing other positions in education
Monica	12	Yes	Classroom teacher
Nelson	11	No	Classroom teacher
Nicole	15	Yes	Classroom teacher
Pauletta	14	Yes	Classroom teacher but pursuing other positions in education
Rose	12	Yes	Classroom teacher
Yvette	7	No	Classroom teacher

Alexandra

At the time of the study, Alexandra was a 3rd grade elementary teacher in her third year of teaching at a Title 1 school. She participated in all three data collection activities. Alexandra attributed her success to support from others and her desire to be stable support for others. Being relationship-oriented and proactive often yielded numerous leadership opportunities despite still being very new to the profession. While her problem-solving skills were clearly narrated during the study, what anchored her most was the desire to see all her colleagues thrive. She shared:

I try to be flexible and just try to be, and try to like help out my team whenever they feel overwhelmed because usually if everyone is feeling overwhelmed, then I feel overwhelmed. So if I can help everyone else calm down, then in turn my stress level goes down.

This noble desire, however, served as an Achilles heel as she was constantly conflicted by her personalization of others' struggles to the point of emotional distress. When sharing challenges of the current school culture during a focus group interview, she communicated the tension:

I just hate when people feel, when I know that there's tension and I know that everyone's not happy. I always want to make everybody happy. And I kind of talked to Jameka about this like, I need to stop doing that so much but I feel like everyone should feel heard.

Making everyone's happiness her personal duty often left her with tension in interpersonal relationships, resentment from lack of reciprocity, and a compounded workload that led to even more stress than already existed.

Additionally, Alexandra viewed her racial-generational identities as positives, particularly with students. Despite a preference for working with millennial teachers, Alexandra remained cautious of white millennial teachers. However, as she has considered the microaggressions she has heard through conversations, she often wonders how genuinely committed teachers might be to Black and brown students. Despite the tension between protective and risk factors, Alexandra remains committed to the education profession and with guidance from the mentors in her life, plans to seek additional educational positions beyond the classroom once she gains more experience.

Jackie

Teaching for more than 10 years, Jackie is a fifth grade teacher who prides herself in being a laid back, self-assured, collaborative team player and relatable to students. She explained:

I think that I'm able to make really great connections with the kids. And I don't know if that has to do with our demographic. I just, I've always been able to connect really well

with kids, just like on their level. I'm not going around, like, you know, speaking their jargon or talking like them or anything like that. I just, for whatever reason, kids like to, you know, they feel comfortable around me. And I think that's, that's one of my strengths.

Love for students and her passion help overcome challenges such as virtual learning, technology frustrations, overwhelming workload, unsupportive school district supports, and uncollaborative teammates. Her sense of purpose is what grounds her despite adversity faced. While she is committed to the profession and her particular school location, she expressed frustration with the added emotional labor that comes with being a Black teacher. Examples include, frustration from unfair class placements, having to adjust herself to conform to out-of-date expectations of professionalism, and assumptions made about her. At the time of the study, navigating the constant changes of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic were dominant across the two data collection activities she participated in. Humorously expressing her dissatisfaction with the school year, she said:

Making all these lessons, I hate it. I hate it. I feel like the county didn't really do a really good job of providing us stuff for this. I mean, I know like it's everyone's first pandemic, I get it. [laughs]. But like, you know, I mean, it doesn't make any sense.

Despite her aggravation, Jackie's ability to skillfully navigate challenges and "go with the flow" was a trend in her responses.

Jaime

Jaime is an energetic, proactive teacher who has taught over 10 years in multiple schools and multiple grade levels throughout Woodrow County Public Schools. Throughout both her interview and focus group responses, it was clear that Jaime approaches adversity head on to ensure she is always in control and performing at her best. Unfortunately, this approach has been

both a gift and curse throughout her experiences as she expressed difficulty with persevering when criticized by others. Adding on to what another participant shared during a focus group, she stated:

Yeah, I think I probably tell myself, kind of similar...Don't take so much to heart. I, I think, when I started, I used to take a lot to heart and be offended by a lot of things that people would say, and then eventually I'm like, "I don't care what they say, like I'm doing what I need to in my classroom. My kids are learning. My kids are happy. My parents are happy. My admin is happy. I don't really... you know?"

Just as much as she communicated her love for students and close connections with them, she also had instances with challenging students and difficult experiences with their families that ultimately may lead to exiting her position or the profession altogether. Heavily insulated by both professional colleagues and a supportive family, Jaime often expressed the dissonance she experiences from a love and simultaneous disdain for her educational environment at this point of her career.

In addition to the dissonance between her protective and risk factors, she communicated her discouragement from seeing Black students without advocates at her school and annoyance with class placements and behavior management. While she considers her racial-generational identities to be advantages, she provided numerous experiences with microaggressions, overt racism, and differing opportunities than her same age white peers. At the time of the interview and focus groups, Jaime was exploring endorsements in other educational positions due to frustrations that had only been exacerbated by virtual learning and the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of her interview, I asked if there was anything else she wanted to share. She concluded

with: “I know it seemed negative but overall, I really do love teaching, and the idea that I don't want to do it anymore breaks my heart.”

Janae

Still fairly new to Virginia public schools, Janae, a first grade teacher, specifically looked for a school district with a diverse student demographic. A major theme visible in her responses across all three data collection activities was advocacy and equity for all. Janae was deeply concerned with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual learning on all students and subsequently found the virtual learning experience to be emotionally challenging. She expressed frustrations here:

The biggest thing for me is I feel like there is a disconnect sometimes in what we expect of students, and what we know that students need, right? So, I think we understand that everyone is, you know, going through this pandemic right now and kids will have different needs, throughout the pandemic. And throughout like, even accessing zoom and accessing assignments. And so, for me it's been rough. I've been having a lot of conversations, even with my team about what the expectation should be for students and completing their work and grading, that has been another hot topic.

Though she communicated having strong relationships with students and families and being relationship-oriented towards interactions with colleagues, she felt a void in genuine relationships with colleagues beyond “work talk.” Other challenges included overwhelming workload, subpar school district supports, and finances as a teacher. Despite these challenges, Janae remained committed to the profession and was searching to advance her career as an administrator to make a greater impact on others by creating equitable learning environments, as explained here:

I feel like, how you mentioned that principals and administrators need to be educational leaders right and instructional leaders in the building. And I feel like I can continue to make change in my classroom and build relationships with my students and their families and change those groups of kids as they come through every year. Or I can try to make a bigger change with more kids at a time.

Janae is passionate about her role as an educator and believes educators should have an intrinsic motivation that communicates their commitment to the field.

A strong desire and expectation for career advancement is a main characteristic of millennials in the workplace (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Walker, 2009) to which Jaime agrees. She explained her enjoyment of school-based professional development and shared her own experiences as a leader of the school equity team. She shared that being a millennial contributes to greater relatability with students, thus sees it as an asset. While she also spoke of Blackness as an asset, specifically the benefits of Black leaders, she narrated her struggles with lack of diversity and equity, differing opportunities than her white colleagues, and frustration with having to navigate the workplace differently as a Black professional. She pondered these issues in this interview excerpt:

I think it's a little harder, because I'm at a school where there aren't a lot of Black teachers. And even though we have a school full of Black and brown children, you know, and so we're having, we're constantly having to have those conversations. And I am.... Sometimes I feel like I'm questioning... I trust my colleagues, but sometimes I question would students be treated the same way, like would this student be treated the same way, if they weren't Black, you know, and so it's just me constantly having the conversation with myself.

Monica

Though others may view her as reserved and timid, Monica is a discerning, thoughtful, and hardworking fourth grade teacher who loves seeing students grow in their knowledge and skills as a result of her teaching. She shared:

I'm just knowing that I'm impacting lives and just realizing that even if you have a class of 20 students and you have like, eight students who, you know, they continue to succeed because of whatever you're doing. That just gives me that drive to just push me further.

With a love for both teaching and traveling, Monica sought to teach in the U.S. after growing up and starting her career in Jamaica. In her four years of teaching in Virginia, Monica has navigated cultural differences, mental health, the strain of team interdependence, rejection from students' families, and insecurity as a result of standardized accountability measures. While she has encountered racism personally and seen it from afar in her work environment, she contends a love for her Blackness and sees it as an asset. When asked how her racial identity has impacted her as a teacher, she nonchalantly professed, "I don't know if it has impacted me much. I like being Black so maybe that's why it [racism] doesn't bother me." Despite many challenges, Monica attributed her ability to overcome them through her own autonomy and positive identity, intrinsic motivation, relationships with students, school district professional learning, faith, and firm boundaries. These factors were visible in both data collection activities (journal entry and interview) she participated in.

Nelson

Often using humor to convey deep truths and dark challenges, Nelson narrated an experience saturated with internal and external obstacles. As a Black, millennial, male teacher for 10 years in a white female-dominated work environment, Nelson often feels pressure to

fulfill many roles because of the rarity of his racial-gender demographic in education. When discussing the intersectionality of these demographics, he spoke of the added weight he has had to carry:

And so being one of the few Black people, or, you know, millennial especially as a Black male, having conversations where everyone expects you to know the answer, or you have to be the Black face for everyone.

Through Nelson's responses across all three data collection activities, he narrated a journey of feeling constant internalized pressure. Feeling responsible for closing every gap in every student's life and since shifting to acceptance as part of a student's learning journey has been notable for him. He detailed this journey in this interview excerpt:

I think I've started to view things back to how I did when I started, so that the joy and excitement of teaching and recognizing a student as a whole person is what I always aim to do. But you get filtered in through this, this culture of, you know black and white. Numbers are very black and white. And then, that whole, let's talk about the, you know, data is important, let's talk about the data and stuff like that and when we get into the data we see numbers and we see sections and we see a lot of different things and I started to... and it's not intended to be that way but I started to internalize this as my success and failure as a teacher, or even as a person because I think as a teacher, you become so intertwined with your career that your career kind of becomes who you are. And so, when things aren't going necessarily well you view that as a direct reflection of yourself, and you've missed the progress.

Releasing his savior complex has yielded a greater sense of purpose, usage of mental health supports, settling into his relational network, and capitalizing on the impact both his racial and generational identity has on his teaching.

Nicole

In her 15th year of teaching, Nicole uses her intrinsic motivation to propel herself forward as she navigates challenges: “Yeah, I want to be... I want to achieve. I try. I try my best. I will not be like, “Ugh”, if I don't get an A, but I'm still gonna work hard for it.” Desiring to be competent and remain perceived as such, through her strong sense of purpose combined with ambition, Nicole has often used her personal strengths to rise to the occasion. Through her interview and journal responses, a recurring tension between squelching interpersonal conflict and being a team player is seen. She affirmed:

My flexibility and my, my, whole aim to compromise and make things work is one of the things that has kept me in this, on this team doing this job so long.

A similar navigation of conflict was also seen in responses regarding the impact of her racial demographic. Though aware of the impact of being a Black professional and feeling that she had to prove herself professionally because of it, Nicole was very intentional to not involve herself in “Black issues” solely because she was Black. She contended:

I've overheard [racism] situations which really don't concern me, if they do, if it doesn't concern me I'm not going in that direction, but personally for me I've not, apart from that one incident and it was just like overhearing of it.

Nicole often turned a blind eye to drama she knew was occurring in the workplace to remain focused on her own personal goals which were centered around her students' success.

Pauletta

From the onset of early childhood, Pauletta determined she was destined to be an educator and now has educational pursuits she hopes will extend beyond her fourth grade classroom. She explained:

I always try to look at everything with the positives. Yeah, so you know because you kind of control what type of day you have. It is going to be a good day or a bad day. So, now, in reality, yes we all have bad days but it's how you make it, you know, right you do to turn that day around so that way. So, for the most part I don't, I don't let others try to get to me or, you know, make it so that it changes my day or emotions, if that makes sense.

Sense of purpose and her optimism are illuminated in her responses in all three data collection activities. Pauletta personified the saying, “when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.”

Though she expressed a history of tension between being collaborative and self-sufficient, she spoke highly of her interdependence with school colleagues. Affirming the need for a strong school community, she shared:

I think that it's just super important like as a school community that you stay connected, and you have those relationships with each other so that way you know none of that goes away and everybody's able to still work together and build and have that bond with each other.

Her biggest challenges included family engagement during virtual learning, student behaviors, an intensified teacher workload, and the effects of school leaders on the work environment.

Asserting the benefits of Black teachers as role models for Black and brown students, Pauletta viewed her Blackness as a bright light that has not been dimmed from covert or overt racism.

Similar sentiments of seeing her generational identity as “a plus” were seen as Pauletta expressed:

I thought that being a millennial has had a plus, especially because of right now with all of the virtual that's going on, and we're of that age where it's kind of like we're the techie people anyway so we know more about technology more so than any of the others, so I think that that's been a plus for us.

Rose

Having taught for more than 10 years, Rose's career has consisted of several different school locations that have had an impact on her. Rose prides herself in being assertive, determined, caring, and protective of others. The theme most prominent in Rose's experience is that of a clear tension between interdependence with colleagues and personal professional autonomy. As someone with clear boundaries between work and school, Rose shared this about working from home: "I don't think that I have a problem being at home [laughs], and not having to be around as many people. I actually think that this is probably the, the happiest I've been as a teacher in a long time." While her love for working with students was prominent in her experiences, working in a school climate that she perceived punished more reserved, introverted, and internal processing teachers has led to exhaustion. This perpetual battle was narrated across all three data collection activities. Though she narrates her growth in identity development and how it has led to becoming more unashamed in the manifestation of who she is as a professional, the toxicity and micro-aggressiveness of her work environment may ultimately be "the straw that breaks the camel's back."

My goal is to get out of the classroom. Hmm. The classroom has been very... and it's, it has nothing to do with the classroom itself and the students, but obviously with the experiences I've had with, you know, administrators and things like that, like I just don't

know that the classroom... I feel like I've utilized... I've done all I can to help in that setting.

Yvette

Composed, self-controlled, and self-improving are the words that quickly come to my mind in describing Yvette's experiences that were narrated in all three data collection activities. While other participants may have described external factors that impacted their resilience, most of Yvette's were internal. She is intrinsically motivated, competing against herself to be better, maintains a small, trusted social circle, and practices self-discipline through clear boundaries between work and school. Obstacles that most threatened her resilience were personal: loss of control, lowered self-efficacy, insecurity as a result of interpersonal experiences, and a bent towards autonomy. In a focus group, when participants were discussing the strain of work with others, she shared:

Yeah, and that's how I live my life anyway like, if I want something done like I try to do it myself because I know I'm gonna do it the way, not the way I want to do it but when I know how to do certain things at all, it's easier for me to get it done than have someone else and, you know, try to. I mean I'll help them through it but like it's just easier for me to do. And then if they want, like to learn like the next time you're like, "Hey, yeah we'll show you. But this time, let me just do it so it'll get done and then I'll show you later" if that's coping, I don't know.

With her racial demographic having a greater conscious impact than her generational demographic, she often described her sentiments as a result of perceived microaggressions but was hesitant to assert that she experienced racism. Nonetheless, she narrated an awareness of how being a Black teacher served as both an advantage and disadvantage in her career

experiences. “There's not really that many Black kids in our school, but I feel like they kind of bunch them into my room lately, which I like... I mean, I personally like it because I want to be like that representation.” Being a strong representation for Black and brown students as an advocate for equity was notable in her responses.

Results

The following section details the results of the study. Adhering to steps outlined in Chapter Three, theme development occurred in alignment with a transcendental phenomenological research design. Steps taken and obstacles that arose and were overcome are narrated. Narration of the six major themes have been provided with an emphasis on the participants' voices in descriptions of their experiences. Finally, the central research question is addressed through detailed answers of each sub-question.

Theme Development

This section includes an explanation of how the six major themes were developed. The Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method for transcendental phenomenology was utilized (Moustakas, 1994). Processes that enabled themes to emerge include epoché, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Discussion of coding, categories, and themes are provided. Coding frequency charts for each theme are provided (see Appendix M), and measures of trustworthiness are identified in an audit trail (See Appendix J).

Epoché

Use of the epoché process was integral to theme development. During each part of the data collection and analysis, I bracketed my own thoughts, experiences, and biases to be most present with the data and elevate participants' experiences rather than my own. Engaging in reflexivity through bracketing is essential to the epoché process which Moustakas (1994) affirmed is

ongoing. Being a Black millennial educator, having worked with some of my participants, and/or having heard about some of the participants through my work in Woodrow County, bracketing was essential to ensure the perspectives of participants were elevated. As I began the epoché process before data collection, I used self-reflection through journaling to name my own experiences, question my ideas and views, and identify my own conclusions I had about my research questions. This allowed me to make my biases most conscious and set them aside. This awareness of my predispositions, biases and pre-judgments assisted me in remaining reflective and transparent during the collection and analysis process.

As I facilitated interviews and focus groups, I used standardized interview protocols with pre-determined questions. At times, I adjusted the flow of questions as a result of the participant's direction rather than my own preconceived flow. Though I still ensured the same questions were used for each participant, allowing participants to guide the flow of questioning resulted in data collection that was more authentic and elicited deeper responses. Deeper responses helped to discourage me from reading too much into responses. Despite the epoché process, as a novice researcher, I still brought biases and preconceived notions about the data to interviews. When I found myself internally disagreeing with a response because it may have diverged from my own experiences or conclusions I subconsciously had already drawn, I took time to ask questions and engage in the tension with the participant. This often stopped me from making assumptions that clouded my interpretation of the participant because I simply asked the questions that were forming internally as I listened; therefore participants were able to directly address the issue.

Since I played both the role of facilitator and participant during these interactions, I often shared my own experiences during interactions with participants to process my experiences but

also to engage with the participant to see how our experiences were similar or different. Additionally, after each interview and focus group, I recorded field notes and engaged in journaling to set aside my own experiences and elevate the participant's. Before analyzing the data, I provided the participants with the transcripts to read and comment for accuracy.

To support minimization of biases, while analyzing the data, I used frequent breaks when I sensed I was reading too much into the data and potentially imposing my own views or negative experiences that differed from mine. I took time to ponder why I may have reacted to certain participants' responses which helped me process experiences that may have hindered my ability to be open to other truths. Having worked with some of the characters in participants' stories, I had to admit that my unfavorable experiences did not necessarily equate to them having negative experiences with the same person. Patton (2015) contended reflexivity necessitates "deep introspection, political consciousness, cultural awareness, and ownership of one's perspective" (p. 70). I relied on journaling to process my own memories that may have been triggered, set my ideas aside, and have fresh eyes as I analyzed the data. I ensured that for every code, category, and theme, I had quotes from data sources for justification. As a result of the epoché process, I was more conscious of the repeated instances I may have attempted to elevate my own pre-judgements or superimpose them on the participants' experiences. I allowed myself to grapple with the idea that every Black millennial teacher did not feel exactly the same as me, no matter how similar our experiences or school environments were. While there were many common experiences amongst myself and participants, I was able to see more of the individuality and variance in this demographic that broadened my thoughts on resilience development of Black millennial teachers. As I compiled themes and answered my research

questions, I repeatedly reflected on whether or not I was maintaining participants' voices rather than imposing my own, so that participants' experiences were center stage.

Phenomenological Reduction

Horizontalization assumes that every piece of data has equal value; therefore, to begin the process of phenomenological reduction, I coded every statement in all data sources submitted by participants. This included 15 hours of recorded and coded interview data, nine journal entries, and over three hours of focus group interview data. As I prepared for first cycle coding, I reviewed the types of codes recommended by Saldana (2016). I considered which might better support me in capturing the meaning of participants' responses based on my methodological framework and research questions. Saldana (2016) advised consideration of the research questions to align coding choices. I used a variety of code types during first cycle coding. These included descriptive, emotion, values, InVivo, process, simultaneous, and concept.

I transferred each participant's data into separate Google Docs. Using the comment feature, I began to code each meaning unit. I then manually transferred every code into a Google Sheet to provide more flexibility as I maneuvered through the coding process. A tab was created for each participant, and every code was entered alongside the data source type, section of the data source, quote, and corresponding sub question. I then began paring down the data through delimiting the horizons through multiple rounds of coding and recoding. Recoding seemed like a perpetual process. Saldana (2016) indicated that this is likely as more precise words and phrases are often illuminated by recoding. Multiple rounds of recoding allowed me to more easily view the relation of meaning units and the start of categories amongst them. I hid any quotes that did not seem relevant as I asked myself the sub-questions of my central research question. This was

done for each participant before beginning the next round. At the conclusion of this round, I had identified 110-150 invariant meaning units per participant across the data they submitted.

Numerous times I reread all quotes in the participant's tab and began second cycle coding by clustering the codes into patterns that I was beginning to see. Pattern coding takes codes from first cycle methods which are often small summaries and begins to recode them to identify themes that are emerging (Patton, 2016). I extracted the codes from all participants' responses, placing them into one cumulative tab so I could begin pattern coding to categorize them and determine themes. Through pattern coding, I determined 66 categories and six themes. At this time, I continued delimiting the horizons. I went back through the meaning units I extracted and paired the codes from the first cycle with the categories from second cycle coding. I hid any quotes that did not fit into these six categories. As I went through and labeled participants' quotes in categories, I realized the categories did not seem specific enough, thus I was having difficulty tagging many quotes to the categories. The categories did not strongly capture the specificity of the codes. In my field notes, I indicated, "I am really second guessing myself with these themes. So many codes can fall into two different codes. It's not as Black and white as I need it to be." At this point, I decided to take some time away from my process, record field notes to process my thoughts, and try again.

Five days later, I returned to try again. I removed the six categories that I previously determined. Instead, I went back to re-examine each participants' quotes and identify categories for their data alone. After doing this for each participant, I identified 36 categories that I then collapsed into 10 themes across my three sub-questions. Though this was significantly more than I previously identified, I felt that these categories more accurately captured what participants were experiencing as they narrated their relationship with the phenomenon of resilience.

Individual participant interviews produced the most invariant meaning units. Overall, 229 codes were assigned to the 752 meaning units that were most relevant to the central research question and sub-questions. The areas that generated the most codes were related to personality and skills, collegial interdependence, threats to efficacy, and relational networks.

Now satisfied with the codes and categories, I began collapsing the categories into 10 themes that were visible across the texture of all participants' experiences with the phenomenon. These themes were later condensed to six themes as a result of imaginative variation. Reasoning will be provided in the subsequent section. Tables were created to visually represent coded, categorized, and themed data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2016) (see Appendix M). At this time, I began compiling individual textural descriptions for each participant that captured what was experienced, externally and internally. All descriptions were developed from the meaning units of all three data collection instruments. From there, I synthesized these descriptions to create a comprehensive composite textural description of *what* is experienced by Black millennial teachers in Virginia elementary settings as they develop resilience. While I did not include my own experiences in the final synthesis of participants' textural description, using the Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method required that I obtained a full description of my own experience of the phenomenon. Each step of the horizontalization process that has been described was first done with my own data and then set aside while I analyzed participants' data.

Imaginative Variation

After compiling a composite textural description that narrated what was experienced by participants, I condensed the most significant participant statements into 10 themes. I used the process of imaginative variation to determine *how* those textural qualities were experienced and

aimed to condense the number of themes to better capture participants' experiences with the phenomenon. Structural descriptions detail the circumstances and conditions that determined how the participants engaged with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Use of imaginative variation enabled an unearthing of the essence of the phenomenon.

Using a spreadsheet tab that included the meaning units most relevant to the textural qualities from participants, I re-engaged with the meaning units, codes, categories, and themes. Clustering the units by theme, I reread them, engaging in free fantasy variation by asking, “*How* are participants experiencing this theme? What *structures* the experience of this theme?” As I engaged in this process, I was able to vary frames of reference and consider different perspectives from the various participants. Epoché continued during this time to help me set my preconceived notions aside and continue to have a fresh look at the data. With time having passed between phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation, I was beginning to notice the structures of participants' experiences more clearly. Having looked at the data over and over, I found myself moving ahead with conclusions and having to remind myself to go back to justify there was evidence to support the conclusions. Here are two excerpts from my field notes as I engaged in this process:

I'm realizing that some of the themes I thought fit neatly into a box do not. For example, I thought participants spoke about how work-life balance was very difficult for them, however, looking back at everyone's responses that I coded as work-life balance, its showing as more of a protective factor. People are affirming the boundaries they've put in place. Participants expressed work-life boundaries as both a protective and risk factor. COVID-19 made participants view work-life balance as impossible. Additionally, I see that work-life boundaries can be physical and/or emotional/relational.

Later I recorded this note to myself:

Need to ensure that the data evidence supports the paragraphs for SQ3. Be careful with conclusions that “participants felt” if every participant did not say it.

As I continued the process of free fantasy variation, I considered how resilience is a system and began to see the structure of the phenomenon metaphorically. I considered universal structures and through the perspectives of participants, I noticed the salience of universal structures such as intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. These noticings narrowed my initial 10 themes to six. The following themes were collapsed into my current themes: work environment, students and behavior, generational impact, and school district supports. As I re-engaged with my data, I determined that these four themes were textures of the experience with the phenomenon and not notable enough to be included as major themes. While searching for themes that indicated the structural description of the phenomenon, I determined that these four themes better fit as sub-themes.

Six structural themes emerged that best captured participants’ experiences, and I used these themes to compile individual structural descriptions. These individual structural descriptions were then integrated to compile a composite structural description that encapsulated the experiences of all participants. This composite structural description was combined with the composite textural description to form a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The textural-structural description is a comprehensive representation of the experience with the phenomenon as represented by the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). As a whole, Black millennial teachers experience the phenomenon of resilience as a metaphorical long-distance trip in a luxury car. The following section narrates the themes that emerged from collected data sources and provides the essence of

being a resilient Black millennial teacher in Virginia public elementary schools. Member checking was employed, and feedback from participants have been included in the narration of themes and answers to research questions. Measures of trustworthiness are identified in an audit trail (see Appendix J).

Narration of Six Major Themes

The development of resilience is an intimate relationship between factors that support an individual and the obstacles, both expected and unexpected, that appear on the way. The essence of being and remaining a resilient Black millennial teacher is a never-ending process. Maintaining an intrinsic motivation to persist is driven by a fixed sense of purpose and progressive competency with a strong relational network which requires consistent evaluation and realignment as resilience is both fragile and fluid. For this reason, the essence of being resilient as a Black millennial teacher in Virginia elementary public schools can be narrated through the metaphor of taking a long-distance trip in a luxury car which is temporarily inconvenienced by car troubles. All participants in my study, ultimately, arrived at the destination of being resilient as a result of being equipped with individual and contextual supports, however, the journey was riddled with both expected and unexpected obstacles that threatened safe, timely arrival. Six core themes characterize the development of resiliency as Black millennial teachers. These themes emerged through the analysis using the Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method. Epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation were used to enable an emergence of themes that illuminate the phenomenon of resilience as a Black millennial teacher. Subsequently, they are narrated through the aforementioned metaphor in hopes of encapsulating the essence of being a resilient Black millennial teacher.

Theme 1: Sense of Purpose as a Global Positioning System (GPS)

On their road of developing resilience, a sense of purpose functioned as a GPS, offering a clear destination to move toward and providing redirection during the times when they sensed themselves heading off track. This theme emerged from the interviews and focus groups. Categories that fell under this theme included advocacy, career advancement or position change, impact of school community, and purpose and calling. Pauletta always knew she would be a teacher:

I've always had the desire of being a teacher and it never changed and ever since I was little and then once I got to college, you know, I knew exactly what I wanted to do, and I haven't changed my mind, ever since." Like Pauletta, some participants were convinced they were destined to be teachers from early ages while others stumbled into the profession.

Either way, participants in my study, without exception, were deeply rooted in their "why" as an educator. Pauletta later affirmed this message when reflecting on what advice she would give her younger self after what she has navigated in her career: "Just know that it's, it's worth it because at the end, you are making a difference, and you have a huge impact in children's lives."

Participants often expressed a sense of obligation to students' success. For Yvette, having a hand in student success has been a strong motivator: "Yeah, that's one of the things I love most about teaching is literally at the end of the year, seeing what those kids have turned into it's, it's the best part, I think." For Jaime, the sense of purpose that came from seeing students succeed was enough to recoup the loss from all other difficulties:

Um, I don't know there's this gratifying moment when you see, when you work for those kids that are just they just struggle, either at home or at school, and you just see that

either light bulb moment or that moment where they're just so happy that it just, it compensates everything else that teaching doesn't give like for that one moment it's worth it.

Similarly, Nicole said:

I'm intrinsically motivated and I think of, "Why did you come into this thing called teaching?" And then, kids are the kids are really, really my focus. At the end of the day, it's all about them for me. No matter what the day is like, it's just, I try to make my focus the children.

Sense of purpose functions as a mechanism that invites teachers to be grounded as they journey through adversity in their career, therefore when obstacles occurred, remembrance of their purpose enabled a reset to get back on course or gave the ability to power through. As she experienced personal difficulties after the death of a close family member, Monica used her purpose to push herself forward: "Some days, I am not myself, I tried to be though. I try to, once it's class time. I try to just, you know, put the very best forward and try to remember my purpose in the classroom, but sometimes I just can't help myself." Through participants' responses, it was clear that sense of purpose did not negate the adversity they faced; it co-existed alongside obstacles. Being resilient develops as a result of being rooted in purpose in the midst of obstacles around you, thus it is a tool teachers used to navigate and override roadblocks they encountered. Similar sentiments were seen in responses of participants, as some described the reason they struggled as losing their purpose along the way.

Additionally, though participants expressed an obligation to adequately serve each and every one of their students, the added layer of their racial identity deepened their sense of purpose. At the time of the study, 9 out of 10 participants taught at Title 1 schools where the

student demographic was majorly comprised of Black and Brown students. For Rose, teaching in a Title 1 school was the only option:

I knew I wanted to Title One, I knew I wanted to be in a particular area. Because when I grew up, I knew what that area was all about. And so that's kind of the reason that I chose the school that I ended up choosing.

Most participants expressed that they felt better equipped to work in Title 1 schools than areas of the county with higher populations of white middle-class students. I shared a theme with Jackie that I was beginning to see through other participants. I told her that many participants felt “called” to Title 1 schools, and I asked her to give her thoughts on that observation. She paused and replied: “I agree with that. I agree with that. I don't think that my skill set would best fit that type of demographic.” Participants explained an awareness of the impact they could have on Black and brown students. When I asked Nelson to tell me about how being Black impacted him as a teacher, his words had a heaviness to them:

Yeah, that has had a significant impact. In fact, I think. I think that's part of the pressure that I've always had that, you know, we can place on ourselves. You know when the world tells you that you're something a little bit less than, and you start to internalize that, you know, everyone's like, there are no good Black fathers, there are no Black man you know especially as a man. It's not there. It's like, “Man, if I could be that consistent presence for these little Black boys and girls who are looking, looking to see what they could become...” And actually, loving on them is important that that's, you know, there's that pressure to be, you know, not blow it, you know.

For Nelson and other participants, this awareness sat on the surface of how they traversed through the role of teacher. During a time of notable racial tension in the United States, Alexandra viewed herself as a place of safety for Black students:

I think that, I think that a lot of times right now might be a really good time to be Black teacher, because now kids are seeing stuff going on, and they're like, at least they know they can come back and they know that they have a Black teacher to come to.

The opportunity to be role models for students and change the perspectives that students or colleagues had about Black people was often clear in responses. During a focus group interview, when asked how being Black impacts them as teachers, Jaime and Pauletta both detailed differing facets that their racial identity played. For Jaime:

I think starting as a Black woman anyway, we had to overcome a lot that maybe necessarily growing up, we didn't realize, but as we became older and, for me at least as I got into education and started teaching. I started noticing that, you know, "okay. I am treated differently because I am a Black female, I am treated differently because I'm a Black student." And then when I got into education itself. I noticed that I was treated differently as a Black teacher, as opposed to some of my colleagues that might have been white teachers or other ethnicities. And I think just overcoming things in life, made us more realistic for me, it helps me implant it on my students like I let them know "Look, this might be hard, life is not easy." So, I'm not going to dumb down my teaching to make them feel better about themselves. That's not how they're going to learn. I let them know it's gonna be hard, you're gonna learn it, the more, the more you try, the better you'll get it. You know life isn't always easy, but when you try and you persevere, you

will get through it. So, I think helps me instill it in them more because I've had to go through it more.

Pauletta added:

And I think it's also helpful for students to see African American teachers in the classroom because we don't see many of us, you know, of our race teaching, and for them to look at us and say, "Oh, she looks like me, I can do that when I grow up. I want to be a teacher just like Mrs. Pauletta." You know and just let them know that there's options out there for you and yes, you can do this just like anybody else, because they don't see us in those certain roles, often.

Participants took pride in this role, and if they considered leaving a school because of problems, some often considered the impact on Black and brown students should they leave. Nelson confidently declared: "I wanted to always support students who look like me and this is why I've never gone to a more predominantly white school. I felt like, where I am is where I'm needed." For participants, sense of purpose is seen as multifaceted and complex. While they often felt confident in their ability to help all students grow and succeed, more tension was seen through the impact of their racial identity and sense of purpose. Navigating the known inequities and disparities for Black and brown students and taking on the task of helping to stand in the gap for this demographic added a weight that was often visible for anything connected to their racial identity. This often yielded an added layer of advocacy that was interconnected with sense of purpose.

If sense of purpose is the cause, advocacy is the effect. Actions of advocacy were visible for all students, specific populations of students, and teachers. Fighting for equity and equality

was a noticeable theme across Janae's responses. When asked what has driven her resilience and retention, she affirmed fighting for students has kept her in the field:

For me it's really seeing the bigger picture and understanding that the system of education that we're in, is not benefiting all of our students and trying to find a way to make sure that every kid is getting a fair shot at, you know, whatever their life goal may be at the end of the day, whether that's going to college or starting a business or whatever they want to do but they need to have some skills, you know, especially in lower grades.

In Jaime's interview, she detailed several situations where she found herself advocating for students who may or may not have been in her own class. At times, she advocated for students with special needs and their families. Other times, she stepped in to ensure Black and brown students had advocates when disciplinary measures were unjust. Her sense of advocacy compels her to remain at her school location: "I think I've stayed at that school because of students like Kyreik, you know, and they're not all like that but the justice that they have at that school. It's just kind of sad." Feeling obligated to advocate for teachers was seen by several participants and will be detailed more in other themes.

While sense of purpose anchored and drove all participants on their resilience journey, it does not necessarily indicate retention as a teacher. At the conclusion of every interview, I asked participants how much longer they believed they would remain as a classroom teacher. For many, they immediately expressed that they would continue as a classroom teacher for the following year. When I asked for their job outlook for five or ten years, responses changed. Several teachers, who loved teaching and felt called to it, were not thrilled at the thought of staying in the classroom much longer. They did not necessarily feel they would be fulfilled or satisfied if they stayed past their time. Janae demonstrated this. When I asked, "So what is the

likelihood that you will be a classroom teacher next year?" She instantly said, "Slim." As we continued our conversation, she then pondered what was next for her here:

Ooooh [somewhat groans]. If I don't get an admin job, how long would I stay in the classroom? [thinks] Probably another two or three years. I would give it a go. You know, I would try persistently for another two years, two or three years. And then I may have to find, like another way to get to my goal, you know?

Continuing to consider the idea of staying in the classroom, she soon added:

No, I don't know if I could do that. I mean, I love the kids, right? Yeah, it's really I could stay forever, right, like I could retire as a teacher, like, like my mom, like my grandma.

But I don't know how satisfied I would be. I don't know.

Similarly, Pauletta expressed she would be content in the classroom because of her love of teaching, but I noticed she was grappling with this idea as she was looking to progress beyond the classroom:

I feel like, you know how you go through all these years, and it's just, I kinda, I want some type of I want growth, I always look for opportunities to grow and to pursue things because you don't want to become bored and I feel like I'm now at a stage where it's just like, "Okay, this is, I'm, I've been doing this for x amount of years, I need to grow a little bit more" so I don't, I don't kind of want to become that person that's just like, "Oh yeah I've been teaching for 80 years," because I feel like there's other opportunities and leadership roles out there for me. Um, and just having other, what's the word I'm looking for... just other experiences and opportunities too, because like I said if you just, if you know it's time. It's time to move forward.

Several were looking for positions that were in education but demand less. This will be further discussed in accordance with other themes. Ultimately, while a sense of purpose enables participants to reach their destination of resilience, it may not necessarily indicate they will remain classroom teachers, though most participants were looking to remain in the field.

Theme 2: Self-Efficacy as Fuel in the Gas Tank

While having a clear destination and the ability to redirect or reroute is essential to taking a long-distance trip, cars are unable to move towards the destination without fuel. Likewise, becoming a resilient teacher does not occur solely through having a sense of purpose even though this is a major component. Participants illuminated specific skill sets and personality traits that are best encapsulated as the substance that yielded high self-efficacy and a sense of professional competence. This theme emerged from the interviews, focus groups, and journals. Categories that fell under the theme included behavior management & student discipline, career advancement or position change, conflict with families, impact of school community, lessons learned through challenges, personality and/or skills, school district supports and PD, students' families as supports, technology, threats to efficacy, unfair class placements, and work-life boundaries or workload. Being relationship-oriented was seen, to some degree, with all participants. All teachers expressed an ease with building relationships with students, and it was often the most immediate attribute to be named as a strength. Jackie firmly stated:

I think that I'm able to make really great connections with the kids. And I don't know if that has to do with our demographic. I just, I've always been able to connect really well with kids, just like on their level. I'm not going around, like, you know, speaking their jargon or talking like them or anything like that. I just, for whatever reason, kids like to, you know, they feel comfortable around me. And I think that's, that's one of my strengths.

Pauletta narrated her process for establishing relationships at the start of the year:

And I find that our morning meetings have been so successful because I've been able to find out so much about each individual child from that I'm able to like cuz I know you're probably familiar with the morning meeting because we have the greeting component and then the sharing, and I've had them just be like cuz they'll be like, "oh can I share something." I'm like, "Sure, go for it," you know, and they actually have shared so much with me to the point where, like now all the kids are like, "Oh can I share tomorrow. Can I share this day?" and from that I've been able to take that and run with it when I'm doing my, my, when I'm doing my lessons I kind of incorporate that in this as well.

Being relationship-oriented was also demonstrated in participants' narration of interpersonal interactions. Comfort in communication and conflict, being assertive, and being emotionally intelligent were conveyed. Janae often expressed a strong belief in the power of assertive communication:

Um, you know they say that you can be emotionally smart, or you can say anything you want to someone as long as you're saying it out of love, whether it's a critique, whether it is a, you know, something that could potentially be negative but as long as you're coming from a good place, it won't come off wrong, you know? So, I feel like that has helped me a lot, especially this year.

She further explained this idea in a focus group interview where she added how it supports having tough conversations with administrators:

I can say whatever I need to say to my now assistant principal who's white because she, she now knows that even if she disagrees with me that I'm coming from a place where I am looking out for the best interest of my students, you know, and so you kind of have to

become an advocate and not... be okay with pushing back because admin doesn't always know best.

Similarly, Nelson feels “very confident calling out a leader.” Other areas narrated as strengths include problem-solving, being innovative, being optimistic, using technology, setting boundaries for communication with family, and becoming patient. Jaime linked her generational identity with the ability to be more of an instructional innovator:

I think, I think being a millennial I'm able to think outside of the box more, whereas a lot of teachers that are pre-millennials, they are very. Excuse me. They're a lot more traditional, and not necessarily stuck in their ways but it's like, it worked before so it should work now, you know, whereas millennials we had to figure out ways to do things like we had to figure out ways to create Facebook accounts when we weren't in college like we had to, you know, so I think I'm having a problem solve.

Alexandra detailed her growth in becoming more proactive:

I think I'm definitely more more proactive than I was before. Like my first year I would kind of like take a step back and kind of just watch things happen and then fix them after I think now I'm more of a, I can see that this is going to be a problem. Later on, or I can see this being stressful. So I'm going to go ahead and do this now, so that later on we will all be good.

Pauletta's responses always had an air of optimism to them:

I always try to look at everything with the positives. Yeah, so you know because you kind of control what type of day you have. It is going to be a good day or a bad day. So, now, in reality, yes we all have bad days but it's how you make it, you know, right you do to

turn that day around so that way. So, for the most part I don't I don't let others try to get to me or, you know, make it so that it changes my day or emotions, if that makes sense.

The feeling and state of being efficacious co-existed with statements of strong self-determination and aversion to failure. Nicole, in particular, consistently aspired to achieve at high levels.

“Because I personally think achievement or being great at what you do is optimal. You should always strive to be great at anything that you set out to do. So, I don't like failure or low achievement.” She later added: “Yeah, I want to be... I want to achieve. I try. I try my best. I will not be like, “Ugh”, if I don't get an A, but I'm still gonna work hard for it.” Standing her ground when it pertained to decisions impacting her students was non-negotiable for Rose.

You know a lot of people might think that being, you know, confident in your ability may not be a strength but I just know you know when it's. You don't want to say it in the wrong way but I just know that when I feel good about something, I feel good about a lesson, I feel good about the way that I'm doing something... I'm very confident that my students are going to be successful with, with the things that I teach. So, I think just my, you know the confidence, the strong will, even though sometimes it gets me in trouble [laughs]. I'm not gonna back down when it comes to my kids, you know. That's non-negotiable for me. So, it might make me seem like something that I'm not or something different but I'm not backing down, when I feel like something is, unless you can, unless you can prove it to me that something else works better or that I need to be doing something different but just telling me that isn't going to cut it for me.

These personality traits and skills often resulted in comfort with their handling of the instructional curriculum. When asked to name the personal strengths that help her persist in education, this was the first strength Jaime identified:

I think, knowing what it is that the kids are expected to know my curriculum and different ways to teach it because not all kids learn the same. So, coming up with different ways to teach it I think is something that I've really developed over the years and gotten good at.

Pauletta communicated that this same strength, for her, was the result of teaching the same grade level for several years.

Um, and then actually like being in the education field for now this is like my 14th year being able to become familiar with the curriculum so now I feel like I can eat, breathe and sleep in and I know it off the top of my head because of the fact that I also you know kind of stayed with the same grade level.

Though these skills and traits were expressed, I noticed that teachers were not always conscious of them. At times, there was a reluctance to identify strengths, and I sometimes had to help participants identify how what they were narrating was a strength or gift. Interview question three asked: What personal strengths or supports have helped you persist in education? Participants often had fewer strengths to list here. As the interview progressed and/or when I asked participants to confirm or deny common specific attributes of millennials, they more clearly named the strengths that enabled their resilience. Participants often thought their attributes were just simple things that every teacher did with ease. In my field notes after Jackie's interview, I wrote:

Resourcefulness and problem-solving are trends for her. She thinks that her resourcefulness is something every teacher does, but I don't necessarily think that's true, in my experience.

Success in their work with students was seen as a given; an innate ability that catapulted them towards resilience and success. This makes sense since participants were firmly planted in the idea that seeing students grow was why they felt called to educate. While participants had skills and traits that facilitated their professional competence, participants were not as conscious of their usage of protective factors to mitigate risk as they journeyed toward resilience.

Just as a filled gas tank enables a car to actively and consistently move towards the intended destination, lack of fuel hinders performance and movement. Such is the case when self-efficacy begins to wane. When unexpected obstacles got in their way, efficacy would deter until a protective factor was utilized to (re)gain efficacy. Obstacles where this often occurred included class placements, student behavior, conflict with families, collegial interdependency, and virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of collegial interdependency and virtual learning will be explored in subsequent themes.

Many participants expressed concern with how students were dispersed and placed in classes in their grade level. Teachers expressed inequities in placements and explained that they often received more underperforming students than other teachers. This concern was expressed across all of Monica's responses, as she deemed it difficult to feel efficacious with student growth when the majority of her students were below grade level and her colleagues had all high performing students.

I think I have a problem with how students are placed, because it kind of puts pressure on some teachers, like I do understand that the gifted teacher can only pull from a certain number of rooms, and the teachers who are doing the inclusion are the ESOL, so they can only be in so many rooms, but I still think like my class, I have like eight students with IEPs. I have majority ESOL who are still learning English. So, even if, let's say I have a

student who started at a DRA level 6 in August. Now she's reading at level 12, but still my data is showing that she's still below grade level. There is no part in the data to say that this child made a drastic improvement because all they're looking at is that I have X amount of students still reading below grade level.

In her journal entry, she shared why a recent change in class placement was a point of contention:

This was a challenge for me because I then realized that some teachers think they are exempt from teaching students who are low, have a disability, or have health issues. She thought it was OK for the child to be in my class, but not hers. She also thought because I was younger I was better able to deal with some students.

Later she explained how she has learned to find success through other measures:

Sometimes just looking on my own data and analyzing it myself to say, "Alright, even though this student did not pass this test, sometimes they weren't able to add or they were not able to write a sentence and now they're writing three sentences. They were not able to multiply but now they're doing multiplication and division..." just looking on my data and analyzing it for myself. Realizing that even though they're not passing the test, they have improved.

Recognizing that teachers' efficacy can stem from their confidence to support students' growth, unfair class placements and other contextual risk factors have the potential to threaten their efficacy. It can be hard for teachers to see the possibility of student success when they begin the year feeling like the odds are stacked against them. The absence or lessening of efficacy had more internal impact than external, thus it may have eventually led to a spiraling cascade of doubt, frustration, or hopelessness. Waning self-efficacy and internalization as failure has been

the arc of Nelson's story as a teacher. Nelson now has supports in place and reflected on the journey here:

I think I've started to view things back to how I did when I started, so that the joy and excitement of teaching and recognizing a student as a whole person is what I always aim to do. But you get filtered in through this, this culture of, you know black and white. Numbers are very black and white. And then, that whole, let's talk about the, you know, data is important, let's talk about the data and stuff like that and when we get into the data we see numbers and we see sections and we see a lot of different things and I started to... and it's not intended to be that way but I started to internalize this as my success and failure as a teacher, or even as a person because I think as a teacher, you become so intertwined with your career that your career kind of becomes who you are. And so, when things aren't going necessarily well you view that as a direct reflection of yourself, and you've missed the progress.

A lack of consciousness surrounding what specific factors enabled their efficacy may have slowed their process to overcome hardships that arose. Oftentimes, it took experiencing adversity to realize how important a specific skill or trait was to their survival. After a focus group with Pauletta, Jaime, and Yvette, I noticed that the protective factors they learned pertained to internal supports, such as mindset and emotional regulation to thrive. I noticed that "teachers are aware that their own personal protective factors have been the areas of growth they have had/needed to thrive and help them mature." For some participants, they needed to experience adversity to force them to learn to use their voice to assert their needs. For others, it was setting more realistic goals to prevent pressure and frustration. Jaime shared that if she could go back in time to when she started her career, she would tell herself to:

Be more realistic. I went into the teacher world, you know... I had this plan. “Okay, this is how this unit’s gonna go. They’re going to learn this! It’s going to be great!...This this that and the third” and I had to learn that I had to take it day by day, literally. You can have the best laid plans, and something is gonna go wrong just because that’s the way it is. So, I’ve learned to become more realistic.

Once identified, participants were better able to put boundaries in place to help safeguard against risks. Jackie shared how she has had to learn to better manage work-life boundaries. At the start of the career, she felt consumed by the job. She shared the protective factor now in place:

I think that they’ve [navigating challenges in the workplace] just gotten better. I’ve learned over the years what’s important and what you know, like how to grade at school versus grading at home and waiting for stacks of papers to go like I was getting... we grade things in class, we’ll switch papers right then and there.

Similarly, Rose’s realization of a need for work-life balance was shared as a support she has had to put in place:

One thing that I want to make, if I could go back, I would totally make sure that I made time for myself. And, and, and I wanted so badly to just be good at teaching and be a good teacher that I forgot that there were other things that were important in life.

[laughs]. You know, other relationships and things that eventually I would want or need or try for, that now in your mid-30s, it’s kind of like, Oh my gosh, you know, it’s just tough going out there and putting yourself out there and now I wanted, I would go back and say, “You are more than a teacher.” There you go. [laughs]. You can do more than this, this isn’t, this is your job not your life.

The existence of high efficacy is not permanent and is subject to change. While efficacy certainly enables teachers to move toward the destination of resilience, the ebbs and flows of efficacy must be responded to in order to sustain resiliency. Continuing to drive a car necessitates a cyclical process of filling up the gas tank, using it on the journey, and refilling the tank to continue the momentum. This was the case with efficacy as seen in participants' responses. Efficacy that yields resilience requires the cyclical process of having supports in place to mitigate risk, experiencing a decrease in efficacy when risk occurs, and then adding in supports to build the efficacy back up to regain momentum.

Theme 3: Relational Networks as the Car Dashboard

Now equipped with both a destination and fuel to get to it, one must be mindful of *how* they navigate the path to the destination. On the car dashboard, measurements and devices are easily retrievable and viewable for safest navigation on the road. This dashboard enables the driver to self-assess how they are maneuvering on the journey and course-correct when needed. Metaphorically, this is the role played by teachers' relational networks. This theme emerged from the interviews and focus groups. Categories that fell under this theme included family and friends as support, mentors as support, and colleagues as supports. Jaime's reliance on her teammates for stability and sanity was visible across many of her responses. "It's good to have that sounding board throughout the day so at the end of the day I'm not necessarily exploding... I think just using my team and bouncing off them as much as possible, helping keep the sanity." When Jaime was at a new school, away from her current team, and experiencing turbulence, she "called my previous team often as support and family just for that sounding board and sanity." Participants' relational networks kept them insulated from the impact of individual and contextual risk factors, thus relationships served as another method of building and maintaining

efficacy. Several participants expressed a disconnect between their teacher preparation program and the actuality of being an in-service teacher. Assigned mentors through the school district or informal mentors that formed organically during participants' first year often played big roles in their journeys. This was the case for Jackie as detailed here:

You know, when I first got to the school, I had a, you know, I had a mentor who wasn't in my grade level, but she was great. Like, she came in and checked on me. She taught second grade, so I was like, I don't know how she's gonna help me because she can't like, she can help me in talking to her but like she just more or less was tenured like, she's amazing, you know, like great to talk to you, but she can't help me in the sense of in the classroom. But I had a really great coworker, who was, I consider her like my other mentor, because if it wasn't for her, I would have like, drowned my first year. You know, like, she really, I mean, I think it's really important. Like, when you start off as a new teacher, you have to have someone that you can count on, you know, like, you have to have a really great teammate. Even if it's not the whole team, you gotta have at least one person you can go to, you know, to help you figure you know, figure out the ways because it's nothing like, student teaching is nothing like real teaching. It's like nothing at all.

Participants' relationships with family, mentors, and/or supportive colleagues functioned as reassurance of their purpose or reinforcement of their competence. If participants "veered off course" by questioning their abilities, their relational networks stepped in to provide words of wisdom, encouragement, or career guidance. In addition to a small group of colleagues at her school, Rose found strength and support through conversing with her parents:

You know my mom is a really good support. She's kind of, you know, I have parents. My dad is the hard head like me and my mom is like the caring nurse who loves everyone and I think, you know, I get both sides of that. You know, I'm hard headed like my dad.

We're not gonna give up, and we're not the best people person people, you know... but then my mom on the other side is like the caring part or the one who is "It's going to be okay" you know she always tells me the grass is always greener, "you can do this stick it out. Just do your best," you know, she's the one with the loving, supportive messages [laughs]. And I think I can go to her anytime and be like, "Mom, I had a bad day, this didn't work out" and she's like "You're still a good person. Don't worry about it. It's fine." So, yeah, that's always nice to have them too.

When school or district leaders served as mentors for participants, it often created more of an attachment to the profession and/or school district. Alexandra repeatedly mentioned the role her mentor plays.

Like a lot of times like I'll text her, I'll call her and be like, "I'm done." But she's like, you know she's like really good at kind of talking you down. Like also talking to her too, I know that there are other opportunities.

Later she named this mentor as a reason she feels supported to stay in the school district:

I have Maggie. So like, I don't think I would move to a different county. I think I would stay here, because I know I have Maggie as a support, I would really say Maggie would be the reason why I would stay.

Janae attributed the support of a previous school leader as a reason she remained in education during a trying year:

So, it took a lot of conversations with my close friend principal, assistant principal, like “Should I even stay? Like what's the point if it's going to be like this, if my opinion isn't... if what I want, isn't a concern if they're not being considerate of what my needs are then what is the point of me even being here at this point?” So, I feel like she has definitely played a large role in me staying in education.

Though Pauletta has transferred to different schools, her first principal remains a mentor and also provides career guidance:

Um, I have to say that the first school that I was at which was Seattle Grace Elementary the principal there, she was phenomenal and so she's been like a mentor for me especially because I'm now, you know, I got my master's in Educational Leadership and so I have always looked up to her and so she's been like a mentor throughout the whole process and still now ‘til this day so we keep in contact.

Similarly, Monica’s former principal was the one who encouraged her to advance in her career:

I started teaching at that same school because my principal then saw something in me that I guess I wasn't seeing. So, she encouraged me to go to college so I did that, and after doing my, my diploma, she pushed just the same and I did my first degree.

For others, relationships provided advice that motivated them to take action, were supports to help navigate obstacles, or affirmed their professional competence. Talking with teammates about the day allowed Jaime to compare instructional experiences to course-correct in her own practices if necessary. She explained:

I do call my team a lot. And I'll just start reading I'm like, “I have no idea why this this this this happened today.” And then, one of them will go, “Yeah, same here we got to figure out something.” “Okay, what are we going to do?” So, having a sounding board

even if I'm told I'm crazy I'm like, "Oh, that is crazy, but we can do this." So having that sounding board has helped too.

In a school with a transient teacher population, Yvette found a collegial friendship provided stability despite the instability around her:

I mean, So, in school, I do have, um, the one teacher that's been here and she was my mentor, and she was team lead a couple years ago so she's really the only one left on my team who was there since I started. So, I mean having her has been really nice because we you know we text each other, we vent, we can relate to each other because we've been on the same team, we can like, we know what we've done over the year so it's really easy for us to plan together, usually in planning it's really just me and her talking, half the time because we kind of know each other. So, like having someone at work, who, you know, you kind of build a relationship with definitely makes a huge difference, because, you know, over the years with people coming and going, having someone there like consistently is is really great.

For Monica, relationships with school leaders who provided her feedback on her performance helped to affirm her when she may have been unsure about her instruction:

Well, colleagues, people like you who always come, you know and be like, "Monica, you can do this" or "I enjoyed that lesson" or just to give you feedback to say, you know, "Why don't you try this way?" so you realize that you have people who will give you constructive criticism because they realize that you have potential. So, if they lead you in the right direction or the right path, then you can be even greater. Yeah, people within the circle, that within my circle, that continue to motivate me, or they continue to see things in me that I sometimes don't even see in myself.

While it is possible to arrive at an intended destination without a properly functioning dashboard, it would not be advised. This is the case with teachers as relational networks provided notable support and guidance to participants on their resilience journeys. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some participants experienced a strain from the necessary social distancing that limited the in-person contact they had come to rely on, as will be explained in a later theme. Just as a malfunctioning dashboard can limit a driver's ability to accurately understand the fullness of the car's functioning, the lack of ability to be connected to others complicated the journey of resilience during the time of virtual learning, social distancing, and working from home.

Theme 4: Collegial Interdependency as Typical, Expected Traffic on the Journey

If you are lucky, you may experience a long-distance trip without traffic, however, if you are like me, living in a densely populated area in Virginia, there seems to be a 90% chance of traffic at any given moment. Luckily, there are levels of traffic. Certain roadways may be more congested than others, and the congestion is well-known. When you enter your destination into the GPS, the app provides you with a variety of route options, and if congestion is in your pathway, suggestions are provided if you wish to avoid the traffic. Additionally, the GPS will adjust your estimated time of arrival to factor in the traffic so that you are aware of its potential impact on your journey. This characterizes teachers' experiences with collegial interdependency. This theme emerged from the interviews, focus groups, and journals. Categories that fell under the theme "collegial interdependency" included collaboration with school community, collegial conflict, interdependence and autonomy, personality and/or skills, relationships with school or district leaders, and work-life boundaries or toll of the workload.

Working on *collaborative learning teams (CLT)* as part of the professional learning community (PLC) model means having a shared responsibility for grade level student

achievement which necessitates constant collaboration with teammates for decision-making. At the time of the study, all participants worked in schools that used CLTs within the PLC model, though Nelson was the only participant to identify it as a structure that the school provided to support resilience. He expressed the tension that was often common across responses. “I mean of course like, collaborative learning teams are meant to be a support in that way. I think sometimes it's a point of frustration. But that is meant to be a support in order to kind of help teachers.” In the previous theme, I explained that collegial relationships were described as supportive by participants. When participants expressed this, often they conveyed colleagues provided moral support and/or they appreciated having relationships with people who understood what they were experiencing. Janae conveyed the necessity of relationships with colleagues that was often echoed by others:

That relationship piece is huge for me, and I would say the same for a lot of my colleagues, you know, I don't feel like I could work with someone that I did not get along with. I don't think I would stay. And the same with my, my team, you know, even my colleagues, I don't know if I would stay on a team, where... it's okay to not be friends right, like we can work together or not be friends. But I don't know if I could work with you every day, and not get along with you. You know, I'm not sure I would enjoy an environment like that.

Tensions with colleagues were more apparent when there was shared responsibility with the work where interdependence was an expectation. Jackie detailed the role of a PLC and the distinction between what the team needed to agree on as she expressed frustration about a non-collaborative teammate here:

Because of the type of person I am. You know, because of me being like a sharer, you know. I don't understand why it's a, because it feels like you're just focused on your own kids, you know? Like, if we're, I don't wanna say force, but if we're supposed to sit down, because that's the whole thing. We're a PLC, and we're supposed to be like working together, talking about the kids together. These are our kids. Like, if this is an "our kids" situation, then anything that you do with your own class, like if you're not doing, you know, sharing to help all the kids, then it feels like you're, you know, you're not sharing. It's one thing if you're doing like, something with your own kids, like, I don't care if you're planning a party with your kids, because that's not education related. That's like you doing your own thing, spending your money, you know, however you want to do it. But when it comes, I'm talking about things that are going to help benefit all the kid, like in terms of teaching, lessons, things to help the kids understand something better. Like, because then if we're going to sit down and look at these PLC forms where we have to fill out like "Okay, what did we do that works? What did we do that didn't work? You know, like, what books are we reading for this unit?" If we're doing all that, we're doing it as a team. And you're doing something like that, you know, you did some kind of like lesson, but you didn't include it on the PLC, but then like later on, like, you're like, "Oh, yeah, I did do this." How does that help the rest of the kids? Like it helps your 25 but not our 50?

Rose was unfamiliar with the CLT structure in previous teaching experiences, thus it caught her by surprise.

I think that was kind of like a culture shock or just a shock in general to me, that I would have to sit there and tell people my ideas. And like [laughs] listen to theirs and then we'd have to come to some consensus on what we wanted to do. That was really hard.

Working so closely commonly yielded disagreements or conflict, however, participants' narration of conflicts indicated that they felt they were under control with strategies to mitigate interpersonal challenges that arose. Like navigating expected traffic, some teachers knew how to take different routes to bypass conflict. This may have been compromising with colleagues, supporting colleagues to be better leaders, creating structures to fill in leadership gaps, or avoiding conflict by becoming self-reliant to survive. Narrating interpersonal conflict in her journal entry, Janae shared her strategy for dealing with a selfish team lead:

Throughout this process I continued to try to mentor the teammate and talk to her about the issues that were happening with the team. Some days it seemed like the conversations were being heard and small changes were being made, but then other times it was clear that the conversations weren't enough."

Rose chose compromise despite how draining the CLT structure was for her.

So even though you know I could easily go in my classroom and close my door and do the things that I want to do we want to make sure that everybody's doing what's best for their kids whether that looks one way or the other way. What is our end goal, you know, reminding people of the end goal. And you can help to get there.

Though she desired collaboration with her colleagues, Jaime was met with resistance when she shared ideas:

That was the year I learned, not really learned, but I had to become self-sufficient because ideas like you said, new people on new team. Things weren't necessarily as

trusted coming from me. Even though I had scores to back everything I was saying. It wasn't received well at all so I kind of became an island. And within myself and my classroom was my sanity. So, unfortunately, that year for me, I didn't have a team that was open to sharing ideas unless it was their idea and their way because they've done it like this for years.

Pauletta asked, "And would you say that that was probably the reason why you were there just for that one year?" Jaime firmly replied, "Most definitely."

Some participants had personality traits that manifested in mediating conflict on their team or within the school to support peace with colleagues. Coming from a previous school where she experienced much distress as a result of working with grade level colleagues, Alexandra now strives to "make sure they [her teammates] are talking and like making sure that they're sharing and making sure that they're heard because I knew what it was like to be on that other side." Nicole attributed her willingness to be collaborative as a strength. "So, my flexibility and my, my, whole aim to compromise and make things work is one of the things that has kept me in this, on this team doing this job so long." In contrast, others chose to grit their teeth and sit through it until conflict passed. This may have manifested in withdrawing physically, vocally, or mentally. During her interview, collegial conflict was a major point of contention for Monica. After expressing that she does not speak much in CLT meetings because silence is easier on a team with such big personalities, I asked how she navigates that challenge. She simply replied, "I just do it my way when I get in my classroom." Intrigued, I asked, "Is that helpful?" She then shared:

It has been helpful. It has been helpful. Yes. And then, after doing it my way and then like we meet and then they'll see the math lesson they planned didn't go well, sometimes

I'll chip in and I'll say, "Alright, this is what I tried with my class." So even though I sent that activity and it wasn't used, I say to them "Alright this is what I used."

Though not as potent in participants' responses, some teachers expressed challenges they had with other colleagues, not just those on their grade level teams. These issues were often rooted in toxic school cultures and conflict with school leaders, not necessarily the CLT structure and PLC framework.

Ultimately, to become resilient and maintain resilience as a Black millennial teacher in Virginia public elementary settings, one must partner with and ride alongside others on the journey. When participants failed to successfully navigate collegial interdependency, it often resulted in feelings of resentment and frustration that made them cautious of trusting others. Virtual learning resulted in less collaboration for some, and it brought relief for Rose. "Because I don't think that I have a problem being at home [laughs], and not having to be around as many people. I actually think that this is probably the, the happiest I've been as a teacher in a long time." In a few cases, ramifications of collegial conflict have yielded actual or potential removal from the school location. As shared previously, lack of collaboration was the reason Jaime left a previous school. Repeatedly being tasked with leading new teachers on his team, Nelson shared how this might impact his retention at his school:

I think it's had a, it's exposed me to a lot of different teaching styles, methods, ideas, relationships, but it's always leaving me stranded as the one who has to carry the team in that sense. And I don't know if I was always prepared for that. But in a lot of cases it made me want to leave. It made me want to quit, I get I get, you know it's hard to start over and build those relationships and then start over the next year and build those relationships and then people start to know and understand the curriculum more and then

once you finally feel like you're, you're getting some headway and you could find a successful team, start over again. So that's draining- extremely draining.

When considering participants' responses on what most threatened their resiliency, collegial interdependence was expressed as a point of contention for many participants, but it seldom was identified as the main reason participants might leave the profession. While it may be a factor in whether or not participants arrive at the destination of resiliency, participants often learned to cope enough to navigate the road bumps they experienced through interdependence with colleagues.

Theme 5: Virtual Learning during COVID-19 as Unexpected Traffic that Complicated the Journey

While expected traffic on a journey is more tolerable and navigable, nothing throws off one's plans as much as unexpected traffic along the way- the type that even the best GPS app is unable to detect. Unexpected traffic is not factored into the journey and throws off the driver. It typically pushes back the estimated time of arrival, and for some, it might even cancel continuation of the journey. This encapsulates the impact of virtual learning during COVID-19 for participants. This theme emerged primarily from the interviews and focus groups with one category seen in journal entries. Categories that fell under this theme included conflict with families, impact of school community, threats to efficacy, and work-life boundaries or toll of the workload. During first cycle coding, I began categorizing meaning units as either indicators of self-efficacy or threats to self-efficacy. As I dove into the data more, I noticed that many meaning units fell into both categories. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, participants may have identified something as a support, and then once the pandemic ushered in virtual learning, the same support may have become a risk or vice versa. This led to the separation of meaning units

that were connected to the virtual learning experience to see how the major shift of virtual learning in a pandemic had a catastrophic impact on teachers' resilience journeys. This field note during data analysis shows the emergence of the theme:

When the pandemic hit, I was very nervous that all of my data would be geared towards teachers' struggle with the pandemic, and I felt like my results would be skewed from the pandemic. I may have subconsciously tried to minimize the impact of the pandemic on teachers, selfishly. What I'm seeing is that the changes that came with the pandemic often re-created challenges that teachers had overcome. While you may be able to infer that any time teachers' stability is threatened it will yield the same impact, the only data that I have to clearly show this is how they have narrated the effect of virtual learning on their stability.

Subsequently I recorded:

I thought I recall students and families being a point of contention for teachers, however, it ended up being that that was most seen during COVID, not before COVID. One participant had experienced conflicts with students and families, but this was not salient in the data.

Navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent virtual learning awakened risk factors that participants thought had been tamed or lied dormant. The constant barrage of structural changes throughout the year left participants scrambling for security that was difficult to find. These changes were frustrating for Janae, as she described her experience of attending optional staff meetings repeatedly and not walking away with answers:

But it was a lot of while we were there, if we did decide to show up, it was a lot of like, I guess brainstorming to figure things out, but I also feel like that's a central office thing.

And why don't they have the answers. And for me it's been, you guys have been planning this or knowing that school was starting this way since June or July, really, and probably earlier than that like I should have been thinking this through. Since we went out in March, and no one still has the answers. It's mind blowing. And to always do things so last minute I don't think they have the best interest of our students in mind from a central office standpoint, like they just don't care.

Like navigating unexpected traffic in a location that is unfamiliar to you, participants who were skilled and efficacious before the pandemic, were no longer equipped to overcome the chaos and challenges they typically experienced in their schools. For Yvette, the inability to be flexible was hard because “sometimes things change at the last minute like you're saying and like you have to be flexible. It's hard to be flexible when you are working in this environment.” At the time of the study, the majority of participants were fully teaching virtually. Some had prepared to return to school to teach concurrently but these plans were halted suddenly, so they may have been left in limbo. The inability to keep up with the changes brought feelings of helplessness, frustration, or exhaustion. As I questioned participants to dig deeper into how they were experiencing the changes, some narrated a disconnect with their sense of purpose. Student interactions and work effort differed, so the purpose that often anchored teachers pre-pandemic did not have the same hold on them. Yvette articulated this tension here:

It's challenging for me because at the end the day, I'm really frustrated because I'm trying to reach the kids through this computer, but because of different factors that I think are related to that or maybe just because of their family life, I don't know, it's just really frustrating at the end of the day for some of my kids. I feel like I can't reach them as if they were in this school with me.

Rose expressed having to adjust her teaching style:

I'm a very strict teacher. When it comes to, I need, I need you to work hard and I need you to, to show me what you've got and do the best, you know like, give me your best. And I think for me having to kind of back off of that and really just.... It's almost like, I don't know what to expect.

Being unable to hold students as accountable for learning as they would have liked was a trend in responses, as described by Pauletta:

I felt like when the kids were in the building, like there's no reason why they're not going to be able to get their work done like you're right there in the classroom so they're not just going to sit at their desk and do absolutely nothing because that. I mean because they see everybody else, everybody's gonna be looking at them they know that this is what I should be doing and there's no there, that there, somebody is going to be holding you accountable, but I feel like with the virtual world, if your parents aren't holding you accountable because you're, and there's nothing the teacher can do because she's not physically there with you so they're just kind of like I could do whatever I want to do.

Similarly, Jaime detailed the tension she experienced between how she prefers to run her classroom when in person versus the virtual classroom:

Because in the classroom. It was mine. That was our safe place that was, you know, it was our house, if you would, like our class would become a family, and, in turn, like when I was with my team our grade level be a family but our class was a family. I had control in there, you know, "you don't want to do it that's fine. You're not going to do this fun thing that all of us are about to do." But now that we're virtual I don't necessarily have that freedom as much anymore. Where as in the classroom okay I can see that you're

sitting at your desk and you're working on what you should be because you didn't finish it. Well now, okay, I'm trying to do a fun activity with your class. I have to share my screen, but you didn't finish your work and you need me to help you. So, you know, so now it's like, "okay, go to the breakout room." "Okay, hold on guys, the ones that we're trying to have fun you guys keep talking to each other." So, it's a little more micromanaging, and I don't like micromanage, you know, like it's just tiny things that will fall into place in the classroom has just changed drastically, virtually.

Professional competence previously gave way to strong self-efficacy, however, loss of control during virtual learning threatened this competence. Not knowing what students were doing hindered a sense of efficacy for Nelson:

Most challenging for me right now is knowing what exactly my students are doing in terms of maybe mistakes, and thinking, or something like that, like, or just that accountability like, it's the computer, like I don't know what you're doing, kid. You could be looking directly at me and be on, you know, another website doing whatever it is. That's the most challenging part right now. So, you know, we could do multiplication and I don't know that you're just punching buttons in the calculator and coming up with the right answer or if you have the wrong one, it's kind of hard for me to tell exactly why because I can't always see students work.

Reflecting on the focus group interview with Pauletta, Jaime, and Yvette, I wrote the following in my field notes:

Lessened self-efficacy was the root of some personal challenges. In the virtual setting, teachers feel they have less control and students/families are held less accountable. This limits the teachers' feeling of success because they don't have good gauges of their

success as they would in a classroom where they have high control over students' progress. Teachers are questioning their success and efficacy given the constraints. This aligns with the research that says millennials have high expectations in the workplace and have difficulty when those needs aren't met (Brown, 2012; Roberts, 2019).

In addition to seeing dips in teachers' self-efficacy and professional competence as a result of virtual learning during the pandemic, work-life boundaries shifted. Work-life boundaries that participants may have learned to put in place were less apparent as a result of virtual learning. "I feel like right now in my life all I am is a teacher," contended Rose. Janae expressed similar sentiments:

Ummm balancing everything. Um, teaching right now is, it doesn't seem like it should be that much like, "Oh you're at home. You're on zoom. It shouldn't be that hard," but I have never planned so much in my life. And it takes so long to get everything done because I'm trying to plan a lesson that's engaging behind a screen.

Prior to the pandemic, Yvette considered herself to have tight boundaries between work and home. This shifted during the time of virtual learning.

Well, I've been doing worse now that we've been at home actually with the boundaries, but I think from the beginning, maybe, well maybe not my first year... My first year I had a lot of hours, but I think I've always had the separation of like school and home like, school stays at school.

Some participants critiqued the school district for providing minimal support. With humor, Jackie expressed her disdain. "Making all these lessons, I hate it. I hate it. I feel like the county didn't really do a really good job of providing us stuff for this. I mean, I know like it's

everyone's first pandemic, I get it. [laughs]. But like, you know, I mean, it doesn't make any sense." When I asked her to share more of why this was most challenging, she said:

Because it's all technology. And we didn't do that before. Like, my school did not have... we were not one to one... so it's difficult because we don't, we didn't have things already made... I'm not buying anything. I'm making everything from scratch. So it's very frustrating. Yeah, it's a lot of work. And I don't think people understand that.

Jaime was overwhelmed by the amount of resources teachers were provided and did not find this approach helpful, but she worked with her team to sort through them all.

You can divide and conquer in this virtual world, and the county has again so many overwhelming resources that it's like, "Okay we got to divide and conquer who's going to try this out who's gonna try this out. Let's figure out which one we want to use" especially if your schools like mine and they're not necessarily mandating you use a specific one they're saying, "Here. What works best for you?" I'm like, "Ah, there's a lot there."

At the time of the study, participants were four-six months into virtual learning, and they were beginning to identify new strategies to help cope. These were often strategies that were not shared in pre-pandemic experiences. In a field note after a focus group interview, I recorded these observations: "For personal protective factors, teachers mentioned, "Prayer often... deep breathing and releasing.... Self-control... adjusting expectations, giving grace, and setting more realistic goals... reflecting and re-clarifying expectations with families." Many participants came to similar conclusions like Rose. "I think that for me too, kind of like letting go of what teaching has been for me for 11 years especially you know we're not in the classroom anymore and things

are changing.” For some, letting go of the control they were used to having helped them better manage reality and expectations.

Contextual risks that were most identified included conflict with families and isolation from colleagues. Prior to the pandemic, several participants identified good relationships that they had with families, or they did not mention these relationships as challenging. During the pandemic, tensions with families rose. This was a primary challenge for Alexandra: “Right now it's probably like dealing with like the parents and the adults, like the kids aren't even the worst part, it's like the parents.” Participants shared frustrations with parents who allowed their children to have lackadaisical attendance, questioned teachers on the instruction, failed to respond to their communication, or did not hold children accountable to working on assignments. At the time of the study, Pauletta was trying to determine how to handle the amount of missing work in her gradebook:

I would say with my students as they are like I have maybe five or six of them that just don't turn in any work whatsoever. And I contact the parents and when I contact the parents let them know these are the, your child has not turned in anything for the second quarter, and these are the missing assignments and when they still don't do it. Like I know with the first quarter though it was those same exact students, and you go all out your way you make the phone calls you tell them what's missing, and then at the very end of the quarter like, I want to say the day before, whatever, then that's when they want to turn everything in at the last minute and I'm just like, “Are you kidding me?”

Families now had full access to observing lessons which Alexandra did not prefer. “I just always feel like I'm being watched. Just the fact that the parents are there I feel like it's just additional stress on us, even though sometimes it's like they're babysitters or it could be their siblings in the

background.” Janae explained tension regarding what to teach because of families having full access to her lessons. She shared a story of when she was interrupted by a student during a phonics lesson:

“Miss Janae, you know, I really want to learn about Black history, and I want to know why white people took Black people's land, like mid-morning meeting kind of thing. And so you know my initial reaction is, let's get to it you know let's talk about it. But then my other reaction is I'm also in the middle of someone's living room, you know, and you're ready for this conversation, and I'm ready for this conversation, but I don't know if everybody's parents are ready for this conversation. And so then I had to you know I mean I told her the complete honesty about it I just had to be a little bit more tactful about, you know, what I was saying in front of parents like they're always, everybody's always watching, you know. So, I feel like that's been a lot harder for me, this year like I would never say anything crazy to a kid anyway. It's just I feel like parents are not as ready for conversations as our students are, you know, so finding that balance has also been hard for me.”

Similarly, collegial connection also flip-flopped as a protective or risk factor. Some participants who previously felt comfortable through their connection with colleagues now felt the impact of social distancing. After Pauletta expressed the isolation being challenging for her, Yvette agreed, explaining:

Yeah, I think so because, like I value the relationship I have in my school like especially with the teachers that I'm closest with and not having that like being able to go in their room in the morning or like, you know, eat lunch together, it makes a difference because it's kind of like for morale... I think for me anyway, because it, you know, that's my

person that I go to that I can like, you know, relate to throughout the day and make the day easier so not having those people around is like... I bothered my husband all the time now and he's like, "Okay, I'm working" I'm like, "Oh I don't have anything else."

For others who may have felt overwhelmed by the connection to colleagues or parts of school culture before the pandemic, they began to feel refreshed working from home. Nelson said virtual learning allowed him to find "joy in it [teaching] again. I started like, I don't have to deal with a lot of the crap inside of school. So that's probably really helpful." Efficacy, which in one circumstance, was a protective factor, easily shifts into a risk factor as typically seen during teachers' virtual learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. This demonstrates the fragility and contextualization of resilience. Unexpected adversity has the potential to drastically impact and shift how resilient individuals navigate obstacles. At the time of the study, one participant identified burnout, as a result of virtual learning, was leading her to look for a different position in education besides classroom teaching.

Theme 6: Blackness as the (Dis)advantages That Come from Embarking on a Long-Distance Trip in a Luxury Car

My understanding of luxury cars is purely from hearing other people discuss them, however, what I have gained is the tension of such luxury and its functionality. While owning a luxury car may come with pride, joy, and notoriety, the quality and rarity of parts complicates access to maintenance. Imagine taking the car on a trip, enjoying its luxurious amenities that *make the trip more enjoyable*, only to have it break down on the road. You search for a nearby car repair shop, but the mechanics are uncertified to work on the specific make and model of your car. While the car alone may not stop you from getting to your destination, in comparison with a driver who has a more common car that mechanics are more equipped to service quickly,

the journey may take longer, with more obstacles to overcome because it is rarer compared to other cars on the road. This is the contrast for a Black millennial teacher. Being a Black teacher in a predominantly white career field comes with added weight that complicates their journey. This theme emerged from the interviews, focus groups, and journals. Categories that fell under this theme included added roles for Black teachers, advocacy, benefits of Black educators, behavior management & discipline, benefits of Black educators, differing opportunities & expectations compared to white teachers, fighting against stereotypes in interpersonal interactions, purpose & calling, racism, and unfair class placements.

Participant's racial identity was viewed and communicated as an asset particularly when used in service to others. Jaime speaks of the impact on her relationship with students:

I have noticed that a lot of students of minorities that I've had, have seem to taken better to things that I said, as opposed to see the ones that I saw have interactions with their previous teachers. So, I think me being a woman of color has helped a lot of them see "okay, I can do something. She looks like me or she looks like my mom, or I can be her when I grew up," you know, and they actually listen a little more.

As discussed in theme one, participants were firm in their sense of purpose, and this sense of purpose was often deepened because of their Blackness. Participants often communicated a sense of duty to Black and brown students, serving as representation, advocates for equity, and/or counteracting poor educational experiences students may have had previously. Being a role model for students was important to Pauletta:

And I think it's also helpful for students to see African American teachers in the classroom because we don't see many of us, you know, of our race teaching, and for them to look at us and say, "Oh, she looks like me, I can do that when I grow up. I want to be a

teacher just like Mrs. Pauletta.” You know and just let them know that there's options out there for you and yes, you can do this just like anybody else, because they don't see us in those certain roles, often.

Janae used her giftings to advocate for cultural accuracy in instructional materials and equity for students:

And I feel like there were so many more opportunities that I wasn't presented as a child, as a student, and I feel like for our kids especially our Black and brown kids, there are so many things that they should be more exposed to so that they can be more successful in the world. We shouldn't just be pushing kids to go to college or the military. You know what I mean? That isn't the best for all of them. Maybe we should be pushing kids to open up a business. Maybe we should be teaching kids to get a trade, or you know finding ways for them to be successful, that aren't just these very narrow paths and very small boxes that we try to shove kids into, and the system that we have, that's what it is. We stick a label on it, and they keep moving. And I don't think that is the best approach to education, it's hard to learn when you are forced to be in this very narrow box.

Some participants expressed Black families were gracious towards them because they were excited their children would have a Black teacher or because families felt more comfortable with their children having a Black teacher. This, however, did come with pressure for some teachers. Nelson described this pressure:

You know, in a predominantly minority school, and, you know, vast majority of the teachers are not, you know, it's that pressure that, you know, there's challenges with that and the fact that there are some parents who like really, really, really, really want you as their child's teacher because of your Blackness which that feels that feels like a lot of

pressure, and I get it, I truly get it. But it's like you don't even know if I'm good or not.

You just like that I can relate to your kid in certain ways.

Though not pervasive in the majority of participants' experiences, Monica shared that she does not feel Black families are always pleased that she is their child's teacher.

Yeah, my first year I had a Black parent, pointing out that she did not want a Black teacher for her child. That to me was rude, disrespectful. I think she said her child does better with Caucasian teachers, and the child went to another class. And then it was quite a flip, so she realized that it wasn't a problem with me, it was a problem with the child.

Another instance where blackness was viewed as advantageous included working with Black leaders. When participants had Black leaders (principals or school district leaders), this often led to a sense of safety. When I interviewed Janae, she expressed great satisfaction at her current location because of the safety she felt with her principal. She elaborated more here:

I have more of a relationship with my Black administrator than I do with my white administrator and it's interesting because, I mean, I know you, you typically go to your assistant principal for certain things or you go to your principal for certain things, but for me it's always been, it doesn't matter if my assistant principal is Black or if my principal is what I always went to the Black ones for whatever it was just because I had already built a relationship with them. And I didn't notice that until we had the discussion about it. So even when I was in Georgia my assistant principal was Black, and my principal was white, but I always had a more solid relationship with you know whoever the Black person was. So, I think that that definitely plays a part in it.

Some participants, like Janae, specifically searched for Black leaders when seeking a school location. Others were closely connected to Black leaders and expressed grief when those leaders

left their schools suddenly. Rose had recently experienced a Black leader suddenly transferring to a new school. Her description of her feelings show both the safety of a Black leader for Black teachers and the sadness that comes when the leader moves on.

I believe it was about a year and a half ago we actually had a Black assistant principal, and I definitely sat in on her interview process and I definitely felt more comfortable going to her and speaking to her. I felt a lot more heard like, you know, like we said before. She accepted another position as a principal at a different school. And so now it's kind of back to the beginning, back to the way it was before. Having two white administrators and it kind of already feels like things are just going back to that kind of not so positive place. I know the stress for them is difficult too but at the same time it's just like. Now what do we do, that's what my team keeps saying because we have this really powerful advocate and now she's not there so. I think about how, you know, Black students have connections with Black teachers, but I also feel the same way about Black teachers having connections with Black administrators, I mean, for me it was kind of painful when our administrator left and I was just like, "Why do I have such, you know this big attachment, and then this other person can just up and go," you know, and she just left, and was okay with it and that I think that kind of bothered me even though I've had to work through my own feelings but it definitely bothered me that she could just go. But we were still stuck, you know.

Just as teachers often felt empowered by the closeness and support of a Black leader, Alexandra often was compelled to support and advocate for new Black colleagues, particularly if they were struggling.

So sometimes I just step up because I feel like if that's not there, then the other two are going to be lost and they're already on thin ice, and they're both women of color, like I'm not gonna let them be those teachers that people talk about and say that they don't know what they're doing. And I don't want her saying that about them either. So I need to make sure that they are getting their stuff together so that she's not going back and telling people that they don't know what they're doing. And they're young Black women so like again that plays into that whole like I feel like I need to help them.

Black colleagues often provided support and safety too. Janae explained this here:

I think it's interesting because every year since I've been here my team has shifted. And we've gotten like new teachers on the team. But the Black teachers that started, the brand new ones always gravitated toward me or my other Black colleague, whereas the newer white teachers always gravitated toward you know one of the other white teachers on the team or one of the other white teachers in the building. So I feel like it is, you know, a need for us to be there to support them like Alexandra was saying, but I also feel like you kind of gravitate towards people who look like you, for one reason or another.

Participants did not see their racial identity as a deficit yet and still, they were conscious that with it came an added weight in America that manifested in specific challenges in the workplace. As Black teachers, they described the common challenges that were tacked onto their plates. In addition to just trying to do their job well, they simultaneously maneuvered through different forms of racism and took on unspoken roles from a variety of school stakeholders. Whether stated or not, teachers felt they were expected to be the Black spokesperson, behavior enforcer, or academic miracle worker for students of color. Jackie was often frustrated by this expectation:

Don't expect me to make the connection just because like, I don't know what that's I'm saying, like, I don't understand why they think like, if you have a behavior issue with the child, that's African American or of color, that the that the Black teacher should be the one to handle it. Like, well I don't have that expectation of my white teachers.

“Being one of the few Black people,” Nelson experienced “having conversations where everyone expects you to know the answer, or you have to be the Black face for everyone.”

Racism was narrated as embedded into systems in the schools and interpersonal interactions. Racism, in some form, was common in the majority of participants’ experiences. For some, it was overt. For others, it was covert and subtle. Jaime spoke of having to rely on her white teammates as allies to help her voice be heard.

It's not prominent unless you've worked at a title one school and you know what to look for. Like, my two co-workers Abby and Bonnie, they have seen it. Like the way people, they will address Bonnie and Abby certain ways and they'll look at me, because I say something they'll go and kind of snub. Bonnie will say the exact same thing I just said they'll say, “oh my gosh that's such a great idea” I'm like, Bonnie says, “She just said it”, you know, so it's little things like that.

She provided another example of microaggressions here:

I've also experienced adults who, not necessarily think less of me but don't, don't think I'm as capable as I am and are completely shocked when I provide something of substance, you know, so, sometimes it's one of those slaps in the face when you get a comment, like, “Oh wow, that's a really good you know,” small comments like that it's just like, “Yeah, thanks.”

Though participants may have had direct experiences with racism, others heard of situations around them but they themselves were not directly involved. Nicole stated, “I’ve seen many, many situations where a person is... I’ve not experienced any real situation, but I’ve seen where persons, because of their skin color were talked down to.” One participant stated that they had not experienced or heard of any racism in their experience.

Class placements have already been identified as unfair in a previous theme, and participants often identified the construction of their classes as having racial impact. Nicole plainly stated, “Yeah, the white kids are normally in the white teacher’s class.” Yvette noticed more Black students were placed in her classroom. “There’s not really that many Black kids in our school, but I feel like they kind of bunch them into my room lately, which I like... I mean, I personally like it because I want to be like that representation.” Though this was not the case for all, half of participants expressed concern that they seemed to be expected to teach more students of color, more students with behavior concerns, and/or teach more students with academic difficulties than their white counterparts. Jaime explained the differences in the class makeup white teachers were given versus Black teachers:

And now for white millennial teachers, um, I don’t believe that many of them realize that at least the ones that I worked with and encountered. I don’t believe that they realize how entitled they actually were like things would be given to them. Almost perfect classes would be given to them, like, “Oh my gosh, she got 100%.” “Yeah, she didn’t have anybody that went below reading level 34, like she should have 100%” you know, small things like that. Just, uh, yeah, just making sure that they’re comfortable and not stressed or overwhelmed and I hear that a lot but I’ve never. I’ve never heard any of my principals, or administrators say to make sure that a Black teacher makes sure that they don’t feel

overwhelmed. I've never heard that even if they're new. It's always, "You don't want to overwhelm them [white teachers]. Don't give them too many low kids." "Okay. What do you mean there's 40 kids in the whole grade level, there's four classes, everybody's gonna get 10? I don't understand, you know, "Don't give them that many." Come on, this is not real teaching, if you want them to be a teacher.

While all participants arrived at the final destination of resilience, their journey involved detours that elongated the trip when compared to their non-Black collegial counterparts. This theme of having different expectations and opportunities compared to white teachers was salient in participants' responses. Yvette articulated what many participants said, "I think the difference between me and my colleagues is that they are given more sooner," Participants knew that they were just as, or even more, qualified as other teachers yet felt penalized because of implicit biases held by those in the workplace. Several participants identified cultural differences in behavior management and respect, but they felt their methods for behavior management were wrongfully identified as "mean" or "strict" instead of firm. Jackie wondered why students come to her with an expectation that she will be mean.

Oh, I heard you were mean but you're not mean." I'm like "Okay, great." So, I think it's like, it must be like I don't know if it's because like the older Black generation was known as being mean, so they automatically think that you're going to be mean, I don't know."

Comments were often made about Jaime's behavior management:

I almost get offended like the way people say, "oh yeah Jaime runs a tight ship in her room." Okay. Yes, I do, however my kids end up having fun. You walk into my classroom, and it's gonna be chill. It's gonna be quiet. You're gonna see kids learning. You're gonna see kids talking to each other, but it's not gonna be loud. You walk into

another one of my colleagues' rooms, we're doing the same things but you walk into her room and it's just kind of like, loud.

Yvette was concerned that leadership opportunities often did not come as easily as they did for similar-age white peers.

I feel like my white counterparts in my school have been given more of the benefit of the doubt with different things. Like if the same situation happened with, you know, me or another, or another Black teacher, or like a white teacher, it wasn't received the same way. I've had kids in my class who make their growth. My data has always been good. Like my teaching has been, you know, if you look at the data it has been good. Um, but I don't know. I think I didn't get the opportunity to be, like team leader, to be on different committees, just because... I don't know. I just feel impacted in some way, I think, I think it is like you know how we have implicit bias or things like that.

White teachers were described as being more likely to be heard. Several participants stated that white (millennial) teachers had an entitlement that they did not. After Janae expressed that white teachers have more freedom than her, I asked her to elaborate. She added, "More freedom to do what they think is okay, in their classroom without fear of being reprimanded."

Recognizing these factors, participants often described the consciousness they had to have when maneuvering interpersonally. Having to code-switch, monitor their tones, avoid confirming negative stereotypes about Black people, and more were described. Jackie named this unspoken expectation here. "I think that there's a certain expectation that people hold or that people think we have or what or that we act a certain way, so you do have to, you know, act accordingly, I guess so to speak, around certain people." Alexandra's Black colleagues would ask her to communicate concerns to teammates out of fear of how they might be received.

Alexandra narrated the extra methods she had to employ to make sure what she said was received:

I have my teammates will come to me and be like, “Alright, I need you to say this, or can you do this?” and then “I don't really like our idea so I need you to do this” so then I’ll like, say it in a funny way” or like, just like charm my way through it, so we have to do that. Like if I want it to be my real self I would have been like, “No, we're not gonna do this.” and like, why are we so afraid to say no to some of these people, especially like white woman? Like, “No, my idea can be better” or “her idea can be better. Why do we have to like sugarcoat it for them, they don't do that for us, do they? No.

In a field note after a focus group, I reflected on the narration of the impact of participants’ racial identity:

Just as I noticed in interviews, teachers are more conscious of the impact of being Black than they are of being a millennial teacher. While teachers often see being a Black teacher HELPS in relationships with students and families, more tension is seen interpersonally with colleagues. It reminds me of the saying Black people often hear, “Work twice as hard just to be half as good.” Teachers mentioned having to constantly self-police their tone, and devise ways to communicate their thoughts in a way that’ll be received. Yvette and Jaime expressed that they are having to question if they are reading into everything.

Several participants referenced the stereotype of being an “angry Black woman” or perceived as “aggressive”. In Rose’s journal, she said:

I have been viewed as a scary, intimidating, black woman for as long as I have been teaching (12 years) and it is a daily struggle to make people understand that the passion I

have is for my job and my students and not just me being “mean”. I have been told numerous times that I am unprofessional but when a teacher of another background grows a backbone and speaks up, they are viewed as a strong teacher who does what is necessary for their students.

They worked hard to avoid being seen in this light. Adding comedic relief was a strategy employed to make statements be better received:

I've had similar experiences, it's almost like. If you are too much of who you are as a Black woman or who too much of who I am as a Black woman, I'm almost not taken seriously. And so, I would have to make light of situations, or like a throw a joke. Oh, you know what I mean just to make it more digestible. And then even like some ideas with my team, everyone's about my age, within like maybe four or five years. And so, we're all we know what we've grown up as, even if you're not technically a millennial like they're still in our, in my age range. And, um, it's still times where I have to throw something out there and then like backup and guide them to make it seem like it was their idea, because they won't take my idea seriously,

Whether they realized it or not, navigating the workplace as a Black teacher took extra work.

Nelson encapsulated this idea here:

I don't know this this could just be a Black paranoia thing but you know as a Black teacher as opposed to a white millennial you already have one strike against you kind of thing for a lot of people. So, that goes back to that. “Got to work a little bit harder, you gotta be above approach...” you might not be given as much of a leash as someone else would be.

Directly experiencing racism was not a part of every participants' experience, and some were hesitant to identify something as racist. Nonetheless, second-guessing their treatment and having to be on guard is still a common by-product of racism that is an added weight that Black teachers carry. This was something that participants were conscious of and handled. Despite the added risk factors that result from their racial identity, participants never communicated that the added weight of Blackness was a threat to their retention as a teacher. Participants' racial identity often grounded them, giving them a greater sense of purpose and emboldening them to persevere, specifically due to their visibility amongst the Black and brown student demographic they taught. Holding true to the metaphor of taking a luxury car on a long-distance journey that breaks down on the side of the road, getting to the final destination may necessitate additional supports and strategies to overcome challenges brought on by its rarity. Such is the case for Black millennial teachers. Their racial identity often brought unique challenges in the workplace, but it never disallowed them from reaching resilience. Janae put it this way:

I think that, I don't know if it's really hindered me at all like I can't say for sure like whether it's hindered me. I think that obviously you know in the workplace being black definitely doesn't make it any easier [laughs], but I feel lucky in that I've been able to do that for my kids.

Participants knew the difficulties they had to traverse compared to other colleagues, yet they chose to persist anyway.

Resilience is a process that manifests through both conscious and unconscious actions to persevere. Essential components of the experience of resilience for a Black millennial teacher include textural and structural characteristics of sense of purpose, self-efficacy, relational networks, collegial interdependence, navigation of unexpected obstacles, and managing the

added weight of their racial identity. The salience of each component varies from teacher to teacher, however, all participants in my study ultimately have persisted through the utility of multiple protective factors that were able to overpower adversity that they experienced. Nicole summed it up this way, “But I tell you this experience, being here. I've grown a lot. I've been pruned, rooted up, trimmed. Everything.”

Research Question Responses

The central research question of this study is “What are the lived experiences that Black millennial teachers ascribe to their resilience in Virginia public school elementary settings?” Answering this central question necessitates exploring the components of building resilience: protective factors and risk factors. The following section seeks to answer the central question of this study by answering each sub-question. Considering a goal of this study was to add the voices of resilient Black millennial teachers to the literature, direct quotes are used to allow participants to tell their stories.

SQ1: Individual and Contextual Protective Factors

When describing the factors that were protective, participants narrated both individual and contextual supports. Individually, participants detailed a sense of purpose and professional competence. Contextual supports included relational networks (family, mentors, and supportive colleagues) and relationships with students and families. Collectively, these protective factors were integral aspects of the resilience development of participants.

Sense of Purpose

Woven through the responses of participants is the idea of being called and purposed to education which serves as a compass throughout their journey in education. Some participants always knew they would be teachers while others became educators after making switches to

their majors in college. Despite their path to education, purpose served as a mechanism that grounded them and counteracted challenges faced. As a compass, purpose and passion is used by participants to reflect and consider when they might need to seek a change in school location, job position, or exiting the profession. Pauletta communicates the idea of purpose as a compass here:

Obviously, you know we don't do it for the money because clearly teachers don't get paid enough so you actually have to have that passion within you and I really think that you know God gives everybody a talent, so I feel like that is definitely built inside of me because I love what I do and I feel like being a teacher you have to love what you do and you have to have that passion and desire to work with children and you have to have that patience to because it's a hard job and I don't think that everyone realizes how tough it can be and if you don't have that passion for it, then you're not going to last long in the teaching field.

Monica further illustrates this idea as she narrates her thought process when submitting her letter of intent each year:

I'm intrinsically motivated and I think of, "Why did you come into this thing called teaching?" And then, kids are the... kids are really, really my focus. At the end of the day, it's all about them for me. No matter what the day is like, it's just, I try to make my focus the children.

For other participants, being dispassionate about their job as a teacher is reason enough to consider leaving their job or the profession. As Janae considered the question, "So, if you were to not get an admin job, which I believe you will, how long would you see yourself remaining a classroom teacher?" she replies regretfully, "Yeah, it's really, I could stay forever, right? Like I

could retire as a teacher, like, like my mom, like my grandma. But I don't know how satisfied I would be. I don't know.”

Sense of purpose was also demonstrated through participants' feeling of personal responsibility as advocates for others, both teammates and students. Alexandra's responses were often salient with themes of feeling responsible for the well-being of other colleagues:

And with the two new teachers I'm trying to like make sure they are talking and like making sure that they're sharing and making sure that they're heard because I knew what it was like to be on that other side.

This personal attentiveness to colleagues was demonstrated through participants' professional commitments that contributed to the success of others by serving as team leaders, committee leads, curriculum writers, mentors to new teachers, and trainers of new initiatives. For others, the duty to advocate may have been geared towards specific student populations such as Jaime. She described her role as a dutiful teacher for students with special needs:

I've worked with a lot of special education students and sometimes they don't get the services that they're supposed to be getting. They don't get the resources and the help that they're supposed to be getting so I have to be that advocate for them and teach them and their parents how to advocate for themselves.

In contrast, Nelson communicated his personal responsibility to support all students as “....an intrinsic motivation to be able to provide a sense of stability for people for students for children who may otherwise not have it.”

Participants lean on their awareness of purpose as an anchor that contributes to resetting themselves when challenged. Participants often spoke of the joy they experienced when seeing students grow as a result of their impact. Monica described it here:

For me personally, it's just at the end of the day when you know that light bulb moment that a child will have on you be like, "Okay, they got something from me today." So just basically passing on knowledge, and realizing that you're impacting them, impacting lives.

When asked what advice she might give her younger self knowing what she knows now, Pauletta responded: "So just know that it's, it's worth it because at the end, you are making a difference, and you have a huge impact in children's lives." At a time when all participants were teaching virtually, there was a noticeable grief as they considered how much, or the lack of, growth students would be able to have during pandemic learning in comparison to the joy and efficacy they experienced in typical school years.

High Self-Efficacy and Professional Competence

Though the number of years in participants' teaching career ranged from three to fifteen, there was a noticeable self-assuredness and professional competence exuded by participants. High self-efficacy was visible through a sense of ownership and responsibility of their craftsmanship. Participants are armed with internal and external methods of support that contribute to resilience. Feeling efficacious in their careers was pronounced in responses. Alexandra communicated her proactivity and resourcefulness by narrating how she was already thinking how to prepare herself and her team to return to in-person concurrent learning in the upcoming month.

I'm just seeing how people like react to stressful situations, again, from past experiences I know how things work so it's like, like I knew that we were gonna have a return to learn soon, like because we're gonna go back and look on the 12th, and I need to do our presentation. I knew we had to do our schedules, so I went ahead and I texted my

kindergarten and first grade friend. I said, “Hey, send me your presentation. Send me your schedules, give me any tips you have.” One of them was like “You need to do observations. Come to see us because that helped us when we saw kindergarten.” So, then I said, “Okay guys, I think we should go do observations.” Everyone's like “Oh yeah that's a great idea.” So, then I already scheduled, I already emailed Mrs. Johnson for approval and I told them this is what we're doing.

This level of proactivity is something Alexandra has grown to feel more comfortable in.

I think I'm definitely more proactive than I was before. Like my first year I would kind of like take a step back and kind of just watch things happen and then fix them after. I think now I'm more of a, I can see that this is going to be a problem later on, or I can see this being stressful, so I'm going to go ahead and do this now, so that later on we will all be good.

Jackie also described her gift of resourcefulness:

I think that I'm good at the organization, but I've learned over the years like, you have to hold on to things [laughs] and learn that you can, like filing. That is something that my team comes to me for. Because of people, well one particular person, I've been working with her for like, nine years, like we've been working together for a while. And she knows, like, I always have everything. I keep everything. I'm not necessarily like in a hoarding set type situation. But I have all of my stuff. Like, I have everything from fourth grade still, everything that I have for fifth, like I'm very, I want to say organized in that sense. I know I can put my hands on something. So, I think it's helpful and beneficial, especially like, even though I'm teaching fifth, we can still use fourth grade stuff.

Jaime expressed how she wields what some may consider a personality disadvantage, as an advantage.

It might sound bad but I'm kind of like the voice of doom, I try to think of anything that could possibly go wrong before it happens, and try to manage before I present it or before I teach it, or before we get to it that way when we do get there I'm like, okay, it's not as bad as I thought it'd be, you know, I'm so trying to think of every bad thing that could happen. But outside of teaching I've always kind of been more cautious and like "this could be bad."

Teachers often identified the ability to know what practices were needed to support students, and they felt comfortable implementing them based on their personal reflections. Yvette regularly reflected on her own practices to make refinements and support continuous improvement:

I don't do it formally but to kind of reflect on what was not good that day or what, like, happened and then sometimes I'll write it down but try to, you know, it might take me a while, usually I might do it the next day, but to try to figure out what I need to change or what else I need to do because that helps me when I write things down and just get it out. And then either go back to it later or think, like, like, think about other things and then come back to it later and try to like figure it out, if that makes sense.

Despite being a teacher teaching virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic where rules and regulations were constantly shifting, participants consistently narrated learning of new expectations and devoting time beyond their contract to master the new skill. Right before her interview, Nicole was teaching herself how to use a gaming platform she was unfamiliar with:

Like Kahoot is something I've always been hearing about, and all interested in it is what then with all that I'm learning, today I placed on my to do list so a friend is going to teach

me about Kahoot. And we went on Zoom, and I learned Kahoot but guess what? I write down all the steps that she taught me to go and practice it again. So, I made time to learn stuff, and to prepare myself so I can do my best at it.”

In addition to being proactive, flexible, and resourceful to overcome challenges including virtual learning, some participants illustrated how determination and self-assuredness impacted their success as teachers. Jaime conveys this here: “And then I don't like to fail, so I will teach these kids like that's my goal, like, I will teach you this year. You will learn.” Monica communicates a similar sentiment of doing whatever it takes:

People are out there always saying that, “I'll try everything just to make sure that my children get whatever they need to get.” So, I'm willing to try different methods... make a fool of myself when somebody else is in the room. Just do whatever it takes to make them learn or want to learn.

Rose describes her experience of self-determination in this interview excerpt:

You know a lot of people might think that being, you know, confident in your ability may not be a strength but I just know you know when it's... you don't want to say it in the wrong way, but I just know that when I feel good about something, I feel good about a lesson, I feel good about the way that I'm doing something. I'm very confident that my students are going to be successful with, with the things that I teach. So, I think just my, you know the confidence, the strong will even though sometimes it gets me in trouble [laughs]. I'm not gonna back down when it comes to my kids, you know. That's non-negotiable for me. So, it might make me seem like something that I'm not or something different but I'm not backing down, when I feel like something is, unless you can, unless

you can prove it to me that something else works better or that I need to be doing something different but just telling me that isn't going to cut it for me.

Finally, participants' professional competence and efficacy was often strengthened as a result of past challenges. For many participants, they have had to learn how to loosen their grip on control. For some, this came after their first few years of teaching or first year at a new school. Jaime describes a lesson learned here:

At the start it was kind of, "Okay. This is what I plan to do it's going to be perfect. It's going to be great" and then it would all shatter. And then I try to clean it all up at once. Whereas the next year is like, "okay, baby steps, let's try this." It didn't work, I could tweak it some and then move on. Now, it's, it's definitely all baby steps you know you can't have this whole grand three week lesson plan and expect it to go perfectly because after that first day you might be like, "Okay, we've got to go back to second grade math because we forgot it." You know, so I've learned to take it more so day by day, and tweak as I go, as opposed to trying to present a whole scheme and fix it after I've started everything.

Expressing a similar sentiment of having to learn by letting go, Pauletta describes accepting a job as an upper elementary teacher and suddenly being changed to primary teacher with little advance warning. Despite frustration at first, she now views her experience as an advantage as she pursues career advancement. Reframing negatives into positives was repeatedly seen in Pauletta's responses:

I was able to see what the students learn in the primary grades and take that information back with me for when I was teaching fourth grade again. It also helped me to get that extra exposure to different grade levels which will be helpful for me considering I want

to become an administrator and I need that background knowledge with different grade levels.

Here is an excerpt from Nelson as he communicates how he has learned to relinquish the need to know everything before taking action:

I think the thing that's helped me the most is learning to be flexible, because I was made team lead of my team. And my second year of teaching, like I didn't know what I was doing. So, I was always just having to come up with stuff on my own, especially with the constant leadership changes and people were looking for me to have answers that I didn't have. And so now I'm just like, "We'll figure it out." And I don't... we just do it [take action], and then ask for forgiveness later.

Additionally, for several participants, learning through challenges meant instituting physical boundaries to mitigate risks because, as Nelson puts it, "if I don't take care of myself then I'm never going to fully be able to take care of these children the way they need to be taken care of, academically, emotionally, or whatever it may be." Learning to have boundaries between work and the rest of their life often was developed over time, as Jackie recalls:

I lived in Charlotte County. I actually moved and am closer now. You know, it was taking me 45 minutes to get home. So, I wasn't getting home to like, well after seven. You know, I had a dog. And so like time management, I've learned how to better manage myself. And how to grade papers, because I remember I was having stacks on stacks. And having family and friends come over and help me grade. But, you know, past couple years, I've learned "Nope, we're gonna grade this in class" or whatever we got to do, you know.

For others, social and emotional boundaries were in place in connection to their own personality inclinations. Participants who described themselves as more reserved or introverted were more likely to have clear boundaries. Alexandra explains:

I don't bring my work home. I don't grade at home over the last few years. And then, you know, I might go to school early or I might stay late but I'm not gonna bring it home because that's like two separate things. And I think that's really helped me because like you said, if you have it around you all the time, you can't relax. You can't decompress. So, I think over the years, just naturally I've just separated the two.

She later adds:

I think that's just part of my personality because I feel like I just, I just do that naturally a lot because I'm like "I don't want to do this after I go home." Like I never, I never had like the "I gotta work, I gotta work, I gotta do this, I gotta do that" kind of feeling. I have like, "This is my job. You know, and I love it" and it's, I mean, it's a job that I mean more than the eight hour day obviously but I think I've always, I've always just naturally had that as part of my personality and not just in that area but in general.

After I expressed frustration with what I have perceived to be an expectation to integrate your social life with your professional life as a teacher, Rose added:

But I definitely agree with the whole you know sorority analogy. I think a lot of teachers think that, you know, we're in this profession to find you know our bridesmaids and our and our, you know, this and that, but I'm just here to get my money, and help my kids, and that's all I need to do.

Finally, Monica, who “can be in the parking lot right now crying and then by the time I get to my class, you'll never know I was in there crying” relayed her experience with emotional boundaries that help her stay focused.

Relational Networks

Every participant named a network of relationships as a support. For many, family members and mentors regularly provided words of encouragement, nudges to overcome obstacles, and outlets to process frustrations. Family members, often mothers, provided words of wisdom and reassurance of purpose when participants were in distress. In a focus group, Alexandra shared an experience during her first year of teaching when a competitive work environment yielded self-doubt and insecurity as it pertained to her own self-efficacy. It was her mother who affirmed her in having a stronger presence and speaking up:

And then slowly I started like adding more and more because I was talking to my parents and they're like, “You know you were hired there for a reason. Don't think because other people are talking that you can't like... You have value. What you have to say matters.”

So then I started speaking up more and more and then that's kind of like how it started happening where it was transitioning into like “Okay now, everyone is a part of this.

Everyone's voices should be heard.”

Rose leans on her mother in similar ways.

My mom, on the other side, is like the caring part or the one who is “It's going to be okay” you know she always tells me the grass is always greener, “you can do this stick it out. Just do your best,” you know, she's the one with the loving, supportive messages [laughs]. And I think I can go to her anytime and be like, “Mom, I had a bad day, this

didn't work out" and she's like "You're still a good person. Don't worry about it. It's fine." So, yeah, that's always nice to have them too.

For other participants, particularly those aspiring to advance their career, previous employers were seen as credible role models who provided the same support of words of wisdom and reassurance. Janae strongly attributes her retention in the profession to a mentor:

And it really took a lot of conversation with her throughout all of the changes whether she was there at my school or at a different school, to really keep me in it, because for a while, it felt like I didn't even know if I was supposed to be there anymore, you know.

Some participants explained the impact of mentors' guidance on their career advancement.

Monica worked with a principal who ultimately encouraged her to go to college to be a teacher.

She shares:

I started teaching at that same school because my principal then saw something in me that I guess I wasn't seeing. So, she encouraged me to go to college so I did that, and after doing my, my diploma, she pushed just the same and I did my first degree.

Similarly, Pauletta's first principal remains a support to this day.

Um, I have to say that the first school that I was at which was Seattle Grace Elementary the principal there, she was phenomenal and so she's been like a mentor for me especially because I'm now, you know, I got my master's in Educational Leadership and so I have always looked up to her and so she's been like a mentor throughout the whole process and still now till this day so we keep in contact.

Mentoring relationships that formed organically and over time were more prominent in participants' experiences than when school-based mentors were assigned. Jackie and Janae both briefly mentioned assigned mentors provided some moral support.

Other participants conveyed heavy reliance on their grade level colleagues to empathize and motivate them when they faced obstacles. Nelson describes the different roles colleagues played for him when asked about the relationships that have helped him persist in education:

Um, Lorelei was a big, big one. She was a person I could just... If I was about to lose it, I could just go and go into the room, just close the door and just talk to her about, you know, struggles that I had had. Obviously, I mean I'm not pandering but you obviously were a big deal, or a big deal for me and trying to navigate those hurdles. I got a lot of really good wisdom from you. And I would think kind of like the support of some of the people around me that I taught with...Derek was good for me. Derek was the hothead so I didn't have to be sometimes, like that took some of the pressure off me. He would say some of the things that I was thinking and then I'm like, "Man I'm glad you said it because I did not want to sound like that."

When she encountered unexpected rejection and isolation after starting at a new school, Jaime said, "Um, I called my previous team often as support and family and support just for that sounding board and sanity." For Monica, colleagues provided reassurance in the wake of disappointment during her first year teaching in the United States.

And the first year I was like, "Oh my gosh, is this what is expected of me to have all these things in my classroom?" And then another teacher who said to me, "No, you don't have to. You know what you have been doing back home. You don't have to do that."

Here, Yvette describes how having a supportive colleague buffers her small social circle:

I mean, so, in school, I do have, um, the one teacher that's been here and she was my mentor, and she was team lead a couple years ago so she's really the only one left on my team who was there since I started. So, I mean having her has been really nice because

we, you know, we text each other, we vent, we can relate to each other because we've been on the same team. We can like, we know what we've done over the year so it's really easy for us to plan together, usually in planning it's really just me and her talking, half the time because we kind of know each other. So, like having someone at work, who, you know, you kind of build a relationship with definitely makes a huge difference, because, you know, over the years with people coming and going, having someone there like consistently is really great,. But outside of school, I mean, I have like two friends because I'm an introvert again, two close friends. I don't have a lot of close friends.

She later returns to this notion to describe the benefits of a supportive colleague here:

When you relate to someone, that way when you like, talk to someone who understands what you're going through. You kind of need that, as like a person to, you know, to get that off your chest or to share something and laugh about it later, so that you can go into the classroom with that positive... just get that, for me anyway, like get the negativity out I guess, with someone who understands and then go back classroom and, you know, fun times with your honest, very honest children.

Students and Families

The impact of relationships with students and families was seen as both a protective factor and risk factor; therefore, responses will be included as answers to both sub-questions. As Jackie stated, “Being able to make really great connections with the kids” was often the first item participants listed as a personal strength. Feedback from students and families can be viewed as part of high self-efficacy and professional competence. For Janae, being “able to build relationships with my students really well and their family, like that would probably be my number one strength.” Just as participants’ relational networks counteracted the tension they

often felt due to the adversity faced, their relationships with students was often expressed as a boost to their efficacy as a teacher. Rose described the power of student relationships to overcompensate for deficits she may have in other relationships:

I'm maybe not good at the, you know, personal relationships in terms of the other people but with my students it's just, it's different and that's what keeps me there, just knowing that they've been successful and they're leaving as better people than when they came in. That's my whole goal, you know, even if you're not successful in, in terms of SOLs or assessments. If you, if I know that you are a better person than you were when you walked in here, then I'm successful, you're successful, we're successful.

She later attributes her resilience to her strength in building relationships with students and families.

And then we have so many students that had siblings, where it's like, "Oh, my siblings coming up in a couple years," and I'm like "Well I'd love to be able to stay and watch them and continue our like family relationship." So, I kind of stick around just for that, you know or you know we get we build a good relationship with our fourth graders because they're walking down the hall they walk past us all the time. We always check in with them and then you meet these kids and you're like, "Okay, I can do this for one more year so that I can make an impact on those ones" you know.

Strong relationships with students, for Nelson, endured even through the challenge that was virtual learning:

And I think just the structure of this year even with the difficulties. Like, you know, we're supposed to be doing our groups, you know you have your live whole group lessons. And then you go through small groups. So many groups throughout the day, it's ridiculous.

But like, they [students] keep trying to come back. And that's a choice. Like in school, you have a captive audience but with virtual learning, you're not always sure. And even when they don't necessarily always get it, they're coming back saying "I want to do this work with you." That makes it feel like I'm reaching them. Like, what we're doing is working and it'll continue to work. They have the choice to do it or not. And they keep coming back so I can't be ruining them too bad.

The strength of relationships with students yielded a return in relationships with students' families. Janae explains her process, "I'm able to build relationships with my students and their family, so that even when I have a suggestion or I have a concern, parents aren't immediately closed off to what I'm saying." She later adds how this process has continued to be supportive during virtual learning:

Especially during this pandemic... I've had parents like try to bring me food, and it wasn't like I've done anything that should be out of the norm. Like, I went to their house to bring them their learning bags, or I did things that I, I feel like should be the norm that maybe aren't always the norm, you know.

School District Supports

Few participants identified the school district as offering support that contributed to their persistence. Pauletta, however, gave kudos to Woodrow County for its professional development and mentoring program:

I feel like Woodrow County, they have a lot of professional development opportunities for teachers. So just, I know when I first started teaching, I know you're probably familiar with the reading program that the training that they have in spot is phenomenal because of the fact like they go over like with new teachers, you know how to do guided reading,

how to do strategy groups, and Kathleen and she's the one that teaches that class and I feel like that was the best class ever and that kind of molded me into why being a great reading teacher I feel like I'm better at teaching reading than I am with math and is about one particular professional development class that I've taken through Woodrow County.

She later added:

Woodrow County also does a great job with their mentorship program, and having, you know, the first year teachers be partnered with a veteran teacher and not just putting them with a teacher but also providing them with the veteran teachers with the training to go over how this is actually how you coach, a mentor you know, anyone that you're mentoring, because I know not all counties have that.

Nicole also mentioned the structure provided from curriculum documents was supportive because without it “then probably it would just leave things all over the place so, um, I appreciate the structure of what they have provided.” Generally, participants felt more supportive by school-based professional learning as opposed to district-wide professional learning. Janae explained why here:

My building level administrators and like our reading specialists and our math specialists, do a really good job of whatever the program is or whatever, new thing we have to implement, they do a really good job of presenting the professional development in a way that allows us to engage with it, and make sure that we're doing right for our kids. But as, like, district level stuff, I'm not a fan of but building level stuff is a lot better.

Nelson identified the CLT structure as both protective and a risk. Though he was the only one to name it as a school or school district support when asked, teachers did identify working with their grade level teammates as a support.

Workload and Work-Life Balance

Workload and work-life balance was seen as both a protective factor and risk factor; therefore, responses will be included as answers to both sub-questions. Nicole chuckles as she states her position on boundaries: “I also draw that line between school and work. So, you don't drown me at work after five o'clock [laughs].” For Yvette, boundaries were part of her personality.

I think that's just part of my personality because I feel like I just, I just do that naturally a lot because I'm like “I don't want to do this after I go home.” Like I never, I never had like the “I gotta work, I gotta work, I gotta do this, I gotta do that” kind of feeling. I have like, “This is my job. You know, and I love it” and it's, I mean, it's a job that I mean more than the eight hour day obviously but I think I've always, I've always just naturally had that as part of my personality and not just in that area but in general.

Over the years, other participants described learning to set boundaries in these areas as a result of challenges. Nelson learned the need to set boundaries after the birth of his child. His response indicates how workload and work-life balance can be both a risk and protective factor.

There were days that I would go three or four days without seeing my child because I'd be at work at 6:30, get at home at night and she's like an infant needing, you know, support. When I got home, she was asleep. And I think now, her being older and me developing better as a father and also being able to hear her tell me what she needs and what she wants. And so she'll get home and she's like, “Hey, I need you to come play with me!” Well, I gotta get off the computer now because I can't tell her no. So, I don't think I can be a good teacher if I can't be a good father, so that helped me put things into perspective.

SQ2: Individual and Contextual Risk Factors

Through narration of the individual and contextual risk factors, participants focused much of their attention on the contextual, or environmental, factors that caused the most adversity, although some individual factors were described. This is in alignment with current literature (Beltman et al., 2011). The adverse factors that most compile the themes below are lowered self-efficacy, workload and work-life balance, students and families, and interpersonal relationships. Many of these themes were apparent before the COVID-19 pandemic, and as you will read in responses, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these risk factors. Additionally, several participants described a savior complex, finances, accountability measures and students' growth, mental health, school leadership changes, and unpreparedness for the role as risks to their resilience and perseverance.

Decreased Self-Efficacy

Several participants articulated a tension between their self-efficacy and students' success. Decreased self-efficacy was narrated through negative self-beliefs, feelings of disappointment or discouragement, and/or lack of self-confidence based on adversity being experienced. Lowered self-efficacy was often described as part of a participant's early years as a teacher such as Yvette who shared, "I don't think I really felt confident until my fourth year teaching honestly." Oftentimes, a lessened self-efficacy was in connection to school wide accountability measures such as Virginia's Standards of Learning tests. Monica describes the rude awakening she experienced in her early years teaching in U.S. schools:

It wasn't until coming here, I think, I don't want to call it defeat or anything but back home, my students are always and it's just always because I taught fourth grade for most of my years. And it was always. It's an exam grade. And my students are always passing

the exam. So, I think when I got here and we did the SOLs, the very first year and I didn't know anything much about it and I think that year too was just chaos in the, in the school building and everything. I think after realizing that more than half my class, which was ESOL, that I knew nothing about, really they failed the reading test and like I said, it's always said, "Oh, this amount, this percentage of your class failed." I think that was like a rude awakening for me to see, "Oh, you're not the teacher you were back home where you had like majority of your students succeeding. You come here now and this is what you're seeing." So, um, sometimes I question myself. I hate SOLs period. I hate it, hate it, hate it because of what it does to students too.

For Nelson, lack of student success as he would have hoped has resulted in a perpetual journey of "trying not to internalize everything that feels like failure." Sense of purpose, for Nelson, shifted from a protective factor to a risk factor when it manifested in savior complex. He continues here:

But you get filtered in through this, this culture of- We know you know Black and white numbers are very Black and white. And then, that whole, let's talk about the, you know, data is important, let's talk about the data and stuff like that and when we get into the data we see numbers and we see sections and we see a lot of different things and I started to... and it's not intended to be that way but I started to internalize this as my success and failure as a teacher, or even as a person because I think as a teacher, you become so intertwined with your career that your career kind of becomes who you are. And so, when things aren't going necessarily well you view that as a direct reflection of yourself, and you've, we missed the progress. I was missing the process for a while, so I can have a kid

who was like reading at a DRA 12 and they finish at a, you know, 28 and you're like, "Man, still in the red. I didn't do enough."

Alexandra echoes similar sentiments of being drained as her sense of purpose to advocate and support colleagues toppled into a savior complex. In a focus group she shared:

I just hate when people feel when I know that there's tension and I know that everyone's not happy. I always want to make everybody happy. And I kind of talked to Jameka about this like, I need to stop doing that so much but I feel like everyone should feel heard.

Her journal entry added on:

Recently, I've realized that a lot of my workplace challenges come from me trying to help others. They usually don't even concern me, but people often come to me for advice, to vent, with concerns, help, etc. As a result, it adds more to my already full plate.

For some participants, self-efficacy was lowered through internal struggles and for others, being perceived as different or "going against the grain" led to self-doubt by comparing themselves to others. When reflecting on what she might tell her younger self based on what she knows, now that she is more established in her career, Monica advises:

Be okay when others don't think like you think. Be okay when others don't teach like you teach. Be okay when your classroom don't look like other people's classroom or sound like other people's classroom. Just be okay with yourself. Take your time.

Workload and Work-Life Balance

Adherence to strong work-life boundaries is often a description of the millennial workforce (Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Maier et al., 2015), however, the majority of participants agree with Nelson's description: "That whole balance thing, just seems like this unicorn that it's hard to catch." Janae echoes this sentiment:

As a teacher, work life balance has been harder for me than maybe my millennial counterparts. Um, and I don't know, maybe it's not because I'm a teacher. Maybe it's just because it's me, but I feel like I'm not good with work life balance at all.

Work-life boundaries are often considered to be physical such as having strict times to cut off when you are working to allow you time for activities beyond school. In reflecting on their careers, some participants, like Nicole, expressed grief regarding the stubborn patterns she has developed due to the amount of overtime given to their career.

I think it has become a part of me to work, work, work, work, work, work, work and don't stop work. After school I'm still working on weekends, so probably if I established a routine, a pattern, I mean it would not be so, into me to just keep working after hours out of. Probably developed to know that, hey schoolwork time is schoolwork time and I just wish I would not take homework and do stuff, but it's now a part of me.

For participants, the lack of work-life boundaries often had physical impacts, but emotional and social effects were also narrated. Referring to the impact of being so invested in student relationships and their well-being, Nelson expresses the tension, “The downside to that part is that it takes an extreme and emotional toll.” He adds on during a focus group conversation about boundaries: “I felt so obligated to my kids that I had developed years of unhealthy patterns. I was that teacher, emailing you resources, you know, 11:00, 2:00, 3:00 in the morning, and stuff.”

Continuing this tone, Rose expressed regret over her lack of boundaries early on in her career:

If I could go back, I would totally make sure that I made time for myself. And, and, and I wanted so badly to just be good at teaching and be a good teacher that I forgot that there were other things that were important in life. [laughs]. You know, other relationships and things that eventually I would want or need or try for, that now in your mid-30s, it's kind

of like, “Oh my gosh,” you know, it's just tough going out there and putting yourself out there and now I wanted, I would go back and say, “You are more than a teacher.” There you go. [laughs]. You can do more than this, this isn't, this is your job not your life.

Students and Families

Relationships with students and families were evident as both a protective and risk factor. While participants felt that relationships with students was a personal strength, participants communicated poor or unfair classroom placements often made it difficult to feel efficacious and supported. Both Monica's interview and journal responses expressed frustration with how class placements are structured.

I think I have a problem with how students are placed, because it kind of puts pressure on some teachers, like I do understand that the gifted teacher can only pull from a certain number of rooms, and the teachers who are doing the inclusion are the ESOL, so they can only be in so many rooms, but I still think like my class, I have like eight students with IEPs. I have majority ESOL who are still learning English. So, even if, let's say I have a student who started at a DRA level 6 in August. Now she's reading at level 12, but still my data is showing that she's still below grade level. There is no part in the data to say that this child made a drastic improvement because all they're looking at is that I have X amount of students still reading below grade level.

Frustrations continue in her journal response:

A child was recently transferred from my class to another teacher's room due to class count and COVID stipulations. The child has a medical history with seizures and is working way below grade level, and so, this teacher was not happy with the switch. She clearly stated that she would rather a child who was working on grade level and who had

no medical concerns. She went on to say I was younger than her and would be more alert if anything went 'wrong' at school. Listening to her vent the situation to another teacher via phone made me feel violated because her conversation seemed as though she was blaming me for the switch, when in fact, it was the administration's decision.

Class placements were often coupled with unexpected student behavior that challenged teachers to the brink and left them feeling helpless. Jaime narrated challenges with students and class placements during her first year of teaching:

Upon graduating college, I was given a job as a kindergarten teacher. The year had already started so it was slightly rough because I got, it doesn't happen but teachers tend to give the students that they don't necessarily, necessarily want, or the parents that they don't necessarily want to deal with. So, I had a plethora of kids that weren't supposed to be together and kids whose parents were a little overwhelming, but it ended up being a really good year until later in the year.

She later adds on:

That first year of teaching... When I finally thought I had my little kindergarten, I finally got them walking in a line. I got them raising their hand when they wanted to say something in the classroom and then I had this little boy Jackson come. He loved me, Mom said he did, but I had bruises. He just, he turned my life upside down and literally turned my teaching upside down.

Similarly, Yvette detailed an experience with a challenging student:

I had a student and he was identified with an emotional disability, and he had come from other districts, another school district and he was supposed to be in a self-contained classroom but he had to go to the general ed classroom to go through the process to be

put in a self-contained classroom and that was maybe my fourth year. I had never experienced a student like this, he, he, he was a runner, so he would run out of the classroom, all the time. And he was probably, um, he was he was I mean he was a big boy so he probably weighed about the same as me so I remember one day I tried to like, lock the door, and he literally ran right over me and he ran out the hall and like it was just crazy and that wasn't the first time. That was probably the last time out of like a dozen times.

Pauletta articulated a point of contention as she shared frustration with managing behavior due to unclear expectations within the school:

If you have a certain way of managing behavior and then you are told, "You can't do that," then I kind of think that that will kind of be very difficult if you know a certain way of how to manage your class but then you're being told, "Nope it's only this way. There's no other way to do it." And that's not the way that works for you. That can be a challenge.

Later in her interview, she cycles back to her concerns with supporting student misbehavior, attributing challenges to school leadership:

And I think it all has to go back to what type of leader you have in your building and how they manage and discipline the students in the building if you do have behavioral students, um, because I know like I've seen, I've had the experience to see different administrators and how they operate and how they handle those certain types of situations, and depending on how they choose to handle it can be very challenging, because when you send a kid to the office and you just give them a lollipop or you say sit down and you play this game on the iPad real quick then that doesn't help me any, you

know what I'm just gonna come back and do it all over again or they might even act up more because of the fact that they want to go back and get another lollipop or whatever the case may be. So that definitely is a challenge for sure.

Identification of concerns with student behavior and interactions with families were risks, however for most participants frustrations seemed to be sporadic more than pervasive concerns across their career. At the same time, Pauletta and Jaime both identified student behavior and changing family engagement before the pandemic as potential reason for attrition years down the line. Reflecting on her experiences that she narrated in her interview, Jaime regretfully said, “I know it seemed negative but overall, I really do love teaching, and the idea that I don't want to do it anymore breaks my heart, but it's becoming a different generation.” When I asked Pauletta if she could see herself remaining a classroom teacher for 10 more years, she communicated how student behavior plays a role in that decision: “Um, 10 more years I would have to get down and have a long conversation with God. Because, dear God, like I said the behavior issues get crazier and crazier by the year.”

Interpersonal Relationships

All schools that the participants worked in utilized a professional learning community model where grade level teams meet regularly as *collaborative learning teams* to plan lessons, discuss assessments, reflect on instruction, etc. Participants described constant tensions between wanting to collaborate and be more autonomous. The expectation of such high collaboration came as a surprise to Rose in comparison to her preservice teaching experiences and expectations.

I think that was kind of like a culture shock or just a shock in general to me, that I would have to sit there and tell people my ideas. And like [laughs] listen to theirs and then we'd have to come to some consensus on what we wanted to do. That was really hard.

This tension seemed to be constant throughout every participant's experience and across school locations in their career. For Jaime, it was the determining factor in transferring out of a school after one year, as communicated in this exchange with Pauletta during the focus group:

I was at a school for a total of one year. And there were four of us on a team. I was the only African American, I was the only one a four in the entire school. It was not a fun year. Um, I called my previous team often as support and family and support just for that sounding board and sanity. That was the year I learned, not really learned, but I had to become self-sufficient because ideas like you said, new people on new team. Things weren't necessarily as trusted coming from me. Even though I had scores to back everything I was saying. It wasn't received well at all so I kind of became an island. And within myself and my classroom was my sanity. So, unfortunately, that year for me, I didn't have a team that was open to sharing ideas unless it was their idea and their way because they've done it like this for years. So, um,

Pauletta then asked: "And would you say that that was probably the reason why you were there just for that one year?" Jaime replied, "Most definitely. I actually ended up getting yelled at with the finger my face that year too."

Most participants desired to collaborate in ways that demonstrated shared responsibility and led to cohesion. This was a constant tug o' war for many, as they often described experiences with selfish teammates. In Nicole's journal response, she shared one instance:

A request was made for a member of my team to take car riders to the front of the building at dismissal. There were three team members present and one said she is unable to do that task. The other teacher said nothing, so I volunteered. When it was dismissal time I was told I had to take out bus riders. Another teacher was taking out bus riders but there was no one to take out the car riders. She decided she was only taking out her bus riders. It now became chaotic. The buses were about to leave and I still had bus riders and car riders heading towards the bus loop. This was a challenge because of poor communication and non-cooperative teammates.

Very few things upset Jackie, but refusal to collaborate seemed to be at the top of her list:

I've had teammates that have not been so willing to share things, you know, I try not to let that affect who I am as a person, like, just in me, in general, I am that type of person, like you need something, I'm there for you, you know, I have it no questions asked. Don't ask me. Don't, I'm not worried about when I'm gonna get it back because I know that... So, I work the same way in the classroom in terms of sharing, but it's hard when you have a teammate that is not the same... doesn't have the same thought process. It does kind of make you, it kind of deters you from wanting to do the same or like, "Well, why am I sharing my stuff, but they're not gonna share their stuff right now?" But then I try to remember, "Victoria, you're not like that. That's not you. So, you just keep doing you. And maybe one day they'll catch on." So that is frustrating... when you deal with people like that.

Similarly, other participants expressed disdain when shared responsibility and cohesion were absent. Alexandra, who spoke of the emotional toll from feeling responsible to help anyone who struggled, shared, "The problem is people don't speak up. They wait until the night before

something is due, or text me for help about a lesson the morning before they are supposed to do it.” Although some had preferences to work alone, they often surrendered this tendency for the sake of solid collaboration. Rose makes conscious decisions to participate despite the toll that constant collaboration has on her:

So even though you know I could easily go in my classroom and close my door and do the things that I want to do, we want to make sure that everybody's doing what's best for their kids whether that looks one way or the other way. What is our end goal, you know, reminding people of the end goal. And you can help to get there.

Pauletta, who had nothing but positive things to say regarding her current team, admits the interdependence is still something she has to work on: “Yeah, I'm bad about that sometimes like if you want to get it done and you want it done right sometimes that's the best way to do. It's just getting it done yourself.” For some, personality differences and variances in instructional practice were points of conflict, especially for Monica:

My team is draining me right now... And when I say draining, I mean, they, I think, of the five, I'm probably the slowest with everything so they're like go, go, go, go, go. So, they plan like they'll try to plan, like, five, six weeks ahead. And to me that is just chaos in my mind, because I was trained that after teaching this week's lesson you need to do an evaluation and if it didn't go well, you probably need to revisit next week. But if you're planning six or seven weeks ahead, you're telling yourself already that these lessons are going to go well, and you can just move on. So, currently, I don't think I'm putting out my best in this year.

Monica later adds:

I just do it my way when I get in my classroom. And then, after doing it my way and then like we meet and then they'll see the math lesson didn't go well, sometimes I'll chip in and I'll say, "Alright, this is what I tried with my class." So, even though I sent that activity, and it wasn't used, I say to them, "Alright this is what I used." And I'll tell them, and they will be like, "Oh, okay."

Relationship with collaboration remains fragile throughout their career experiences. Conflict and lack of cooperation were points of contention for many, like Yvette. In her journal entry, she details a chain of events after her team was asked to take on a responsibility that resulted in reluctant volunteering to complete:

I asked if I could say something, and I shared with the team that I felt we should spread out team obligations equally and I asked the teammate that was NOT part of any committees etc. if she would feel comfortable writing them. She said no and I said ok and was prepared to end the conversation there. Asking that team mate to take on this responsibility upset a few of the teachers. We had about a thirty-minute conversation with me trying to explain how we all have ways we are helping, there was only one first year teacher so every other teacher on the team should be able to help and have enough experience etc.

The conversation ended up turning into more of an argument and during the course of this conversation one of the teachers ended up cursing at me saying I did not give her "the f***ing time of day" because I did not make eye contact with her when she had come in to ask me something earlier that week. (I was working on my computer, and I often work and listen at the same time, also she was asking me to share a responsibility that she did not want to do...) I brought this to the attention of our team administrator,

who was the administrative intern at the time, and this behavior was excused by saying “we all drop the f-bomb sometimes”.

At the end of the conversation, even though I still do not feel that I did anything rude I apologized to everyone. In hindsight I don’t think I should have done this because I feel I only asked someone to be a part of a team by taking on a responsibility for the team. Although I did not want to make it uncomfortable to work together, I said what I said, and I meant it.

This was a challenge for me because I refuse to take on more when others are not doing what they are perfectly capable of doing. I shared in our focus group that I like to do things myself because it easier but not when I know that others can do it, but just don’t want to and expect someone else to step up.

At the sign of conflict, participants often removed themselves to be self-reliant in order to survive, pretended to collaborate, or were aware of the disconnect and/or cautious to get too comfortable in team interactions. Janae summarizes her need for strong collegial relationships and the detriment of being without them here:

That relationship piece is huge for me, and I would say the same for a lot of my colleagues, you know, I don't feel like I could work with someone that I did not get along with. I don't think I would stay. And the same with my, my team, you know, even my colleagues, I don't know if I would stay on a team, where... it's okay to not be friends right, like we can work together or not be friends. But I don't know if I could work with you every day, and not get along with you. You know, I’m not sure I would enjoy an environment like that.

For Nelson, whose teaching experience has been laced with regular transience, the possibility of lack of reciprocity on a team threatens his retention as a teacher at his school location:

In terms of leaving a school. It would be, you know, if my team constantly changes. Like as much as I say like I've learned and I've developed with that it'd be nice to just be in a position where you can learn from you know other people who have something to give to you kind of thing, instead of people who are just looking to take from you, or, or expect certain things, you know.

Beyond interactions with grade level colleagues, some participants did indicate frustrations with relationships within the greater school community. Participants identified cliques and factions in the school that impacted formation of relationships. High transience in leadership and teachers, for some, made it difficult to form lasting, dependable relationships. Other participants identified *toxic positivity* as common in the school climate which made it harder for them to connect with others. Rose shared:

Don't tell me that you had the best day ever because then that makes me feel like crap because I'm not having the best day ever like, this was difficult for me, for all of us. How do you have a smile on your face when most of us are over here in the corner crying, you know? It's hard.

Exacerbated Challenges from COVID-19 Virtual Learning

Navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent virtual learning awakened risk factors that participants thought had been tamed or dormant. Protective factors such as professional competence and successfully managing a teacher's workload suddenly were thrust back into being a risk factor. The workload became compounded as teachers were expected to do their normal job duties while navigating virtual learning with limited skills, resources, and

policies to help them thrive. Participants, such as Jackie, felt they had overcome struggles in these areas yet found themselves feeling much like a first year teacher.

I feel like I'm doing just as much work because you know, like, I feel like a first year teacher. Like after we get off, I have more work to do. I was up all yesterday doing work. And I think it makes it bad to say, I won't say bad, but I realized why I have so much is because there's only three of us this year. And usually you know, it's like at least four of us to divide the work out. And like we're all we're making everything from scratch. So, there's only three of us. Yeah, it's an all-day event. Lesson planning all day long. So, we're making like PowerPoints. And then sometimes turning them into Nearpod. It's an all-day affair, like, literally my Sundays, because I, you know, I can't do anything during the week, because I'm like, I'm already tired once I get off of class with them, so my Sundays are literally like, 12 hour days, like, I start at 11:00, you know, 10:30 or 11:00. And I go until 11:00 or 12:00 in the evening. So, I think that this is like the worst I, this I say, it's worse than first, you know, first year teaching.

Janae jokes about her constant computer use, “Um, but since like school started, I feel like I'm always at my computer, like all my mom says I carry it around like my pocketbook at this point.”

Jaime explains the shift from her pre-pandemic workload, to the workload during virtual learning: “Grading papers used to be my break from planning [on the computer], but now creating work, lesson planning, grading papers, emailing I'm just like, I hate laptops.” An underlying theme in some responses was others' lack of awareness and/or appreciation of the amount of added work they were now doing. When asked why the workload was most challenging, given everything else going on, Jackie responded:

Because it's all technology. And we didn't do that before. Like, my school did not have... we were not one to one... so it's difficult because we don't. We didn't have things already made... I'm not buying anything. I'm making everything from scratch. So, it's very frustrating. Yeah, it's a lot of work. And I don't think people understand that.

Similarly, Janae expressed:

It doesn't seem like it should be that much like, “Oh you're at home. You're on Zoom. It shouldn't be that hard,” but I have never planned so much in my life. And it takes so long to get everything done because I'm trying to plan a lesson that's engaging behind a screen.

For Jaime, the impact of the workload required for virtual learning may be what leads her to a career change.

Yeah, I love teaching, but I don't think I can mentally handle it much longer. I think the whole virtual aspect. I was burnt out this year, much quicker than any other year and it's my team and I we know, we know we're, we're working 10 times harder than many people in our school, but we also do it because we know the kids need it, it's not... we're not just working just to work.

As constant changes were being made and implemented within the school, the school culture was impacted. To Rose, the school environment became filled with “toxic positivity” that disabled teachers from being able to acknowledge and honor the difficulties they were facing.

I just think it puts a lot on teachers and it makes you feel bad when you don't feel that good. You know, when you're not showing up every single meeting with a smile on your face and waving, you know, have your Disney hat on and, like, it makes you feel less than, because you're not as chipper as the rest of the group. Don't tell me that you had the best day ever because then that makes me feel like crap because I'm not having the best

day ever like, this was difficult for me, for all of us. How do you have a smile on your face when most of us are over here in the corner crying, you know? It's hard.

For others, communication and cohesion were harder to maintain virtually. Pauletta shared:

I would say that right now because we're in that virtual world, it's harder to have that school culture, because we're not actually physically there with one another. And so, because we're not there, each day to see each other it's, it seems like everybody's doing their own thing, and you're kinda, you kind of gotta, you know, reach out to people and find that time to stay connected or otherwise it's just like everybody is just like in their own world. It just doesn't feel like, I don't know, it just feels like we're not there together. It's different.

Jaime noticed that communication at school became even more problematic during virtual learning. “The struggle with communication has always kind of been there but once we went virtual in the spring, it became drastic. And it's like, we haven't been able to pick back up from it.” Janae, often advocating for equitable environments, shared her concerns with her school culture:

The biggest thing for me is I feel like there is a disconnect sometimes in what we expect of students, and what we know that students need, right? So, I think we understand that everyone is, you know, going through this pandemic right now and kids will have different needs, throughout the pandemic. And throughout like, even accessing Zoom and accessing assignments. And so, for me it's been rough. I've been having a lot of conversations, even with my team about what the expectation should be for students and completing their work and grading, that has been another like hot topic.

An increased flexibility in parameters for student learning coupled with participants' loss of control led to tensions with student and family relationships. "I just always feel like I'm being watched. Just the fact that the parents are there I feel like it's just additional stress on us," shared Alexandra. She later adds the impact of virtual learning on her teaching duties:

But now I feel like I'm being a parent too because sometimes you have siblings in the background and you got to tell them. "Okay, go tell your brother to go to another room," like I just feel like we're taking on a whole nother role. "Sit up. Okay, can you put on... Okay. Go get your notebook if you don't have a notebook. All right, I'm gonna text your mom and tell her you don't have a notebook." It's just like, this is all stuff we would not have to deal with if we were in person. Like, they don't understand all the extra work we have to do for them. Like, it's so much more like, we are literally parents and teachers right now.

Participants were often frustrated with lack of effort put forth by students and family's unwillingness to create an environment where students could learn best. Pauletta and Jaime exchanged frustrations during the focus group interview:

Pauletta: I would say with my students as they are like I have maybe five or six of them that just don't turn in any work whatsoever. And I contact the parents and when I contact the parents let them know these are the, your child has not turned in anything for the second quarter, and these are the missing assignments and when they still don't do it. Like I know with the first quarter though it was those same exact students, and you go all out your way you make the phone calls you tell them what's missing, and then at the very end of the quarter like, I want to say the day before, whatever, then that's when they want to turn everything in at the last minute and I'm just like, "Are you kidding me?"

Jaime: And it's up to you to go back through every assignment to find the one that was turned in late, because it doesn't pop up at the top, and parents are like, "Well they turned that in. Why didn't you change the grade?" They turned it in three hours ago! Are you kidding me?

Pauletta: And then you have that with it it's like, "No I'm not going to stop and do it as soon as now as your child turns it in," and then that's when you want to see it in ParentVue right away. No, that's not gonna happen. And it's not like you get a notification saying, well, like for some of the things like we do some things that aren't on Canvas where it's like you can't see it right away that they did it and so that's that's just been so frustrating for me and so I'm trying to not relive that, again, and for second quarter I'm like, "Listen, this needs to get done," but here we are again. Second quarter is about to be over and they haven't turned anything in, and I can see it about to come again and I'm like, "you know what, I don't know how I'm gonna solve this issue," because I was being nice and just like constantly on them calling, calling and telling them, "Hey, you need..." but I don't know, I might stop the phone call.

Jaime: I think the second quarter I know for the rest of the quarter I'm not doing it. When we come back, "Look, I've already told you all several times. You have until January 8 to give me everything from second quarter so I have time to grade it and go through everything."

Pauletta: That's how I'm feeling right now because I looked at it during you know the break and I'm like, "There is still nothing there even before the break happened." I let them know so that way, hopefully maybe they will say, "Oh, they have all this time off."

I know they're not supposed to do any work during the break but if my child hadn't turned anything in, I would make sure of it that they're doing something. [laughs]

Jaime: Agreed. Agreed.

Pauletta: It's very frustrating.

When asked for her thoughts and experience regarding what Pauletta and Jaime shared, Yvette added:

Um, it's the same thing really. Everything you just said. Literally I have parents that I call all the time, I have kids that haven't turned anything in, but I think that I don't know thing with little kids in kindergarten, especially having never done school before, is that they can't read. They don't know their letters, like, and the kids that I'm trying to reach most don't show up, or parents don't answer the calls or they say, "Yeah, yeah" and then, like, nothing happens, nothing's turned in. So, I think, I agree with everything you guys just said. I think, a personal struggle for me is not having control over the situation because like at least if they came in the school. I would be able to make sure they get what they mean like, I, you know, I would make sure they're working on their letters, make sure they're doing this, you know, but you can't control your kids through the screen like they lay down I can tell them 100,000 times to sit up while I'm teaching but if mom's right next to you and she's talking to you during the lesson throughout the lesson and you don't know what a square is like, what can I do about that? I think that that's like my biggest, biggest struggle for this whole thing is just not being, having more like control over the situation and being able to really get to the kids that I really get to like really, really, really bad.

Several participants spoke of managing communication with families and ultimately having to set boundaries with them, oftentimes still receiving pushback. When asked what's challenging her most, Alexandra replied: "Right now it's probably like dealing with like the parents and the adults, like the kids aren't even the worst part, it's like the parents." During a focus group interview, Janae shared:

I will say Nelson, you are absolutely right with classdojo and I mean I have dojo. And this year I feel like parents really expect an immediate response. And I want to give that to them because I know that they, a lot of them just like Alexandra said, they are working very odd hours and so I feel like my parents really want to support their kids, especially my ESOL students you know because their parents, they have no idea what we're doing throughout the day. And so classdojo just give them, you know, a little bit of an insight because they can translate my messages to them or whatever, but it is very hard figuring out when to send out messages and so at the beginning of the year, I would respond immediately. But now I've kind of stopped doing that so much, even if I do see the message. I won't respond to it right away. I'll wait until a more appropriate hour like I have parents messaging me at 11 o'clock at night, like we are homegirls, you know, and I do want that relationship, but I also know that there has to be a line in the sand, you know.

Alexandra expressed a recent struggle with parent communication:

I got a message this morning from a parent. "No disrespect but why is there a math test tomorrow?" And I'm like, first of all, and, "She's like why am I just now finding out that there's a math test tomorrow." I'm like I've been posting it all week. I did a review session this morning. I'm doing a review session tomorrow morning. I told them multiple times, I

emailed you guys. I sent out a study guide, like, don't come at me crazy. Like your child knew, so she needs to be telling you that they need to be responsible. And I posted it everywhere.

Finally, efficacy was lessened as the loss of control during the historic school year often left participants with proverbial whiplash from constant changes. Rose articulated mourning the past was required, "I think that for me too, kind of like letting go of what teaching has been for me for 11 years, especially you know, we're not in the classroom anymore and things are changing." Some participants, like Nelson, felt ill-equipped to do their job to the best of their ability.

Most challenging, right, for me right now, is knowing what exactly my students are doing in terms of maybe mistakes, and thinking, or something like that, like, or just that accountability like, it's the computer, like I don't know what you're doing, kid. You could be looking directly at me and be on, you know, another website doing whatever it is. That's the most challenging part right now. So, you know, we could do multiplication and I don't know that you're just punching buttons in the calculator and coming up with the right answer or if you have the wrong one, it's kind of hard for me to tell exactly why because I can't always see students work.

For others, virtual learning was attached to a loss of control that left them questioning their professional competence. Jaime articulated this tension:

Because in the classroom. It was mine. That was our safe place that was, you know, it was our house, if you would, like our class would become a family, and, in turn, like when I was with my team our grade level be a family, but our class was a family. I had control in there, you know, "You don't want to do it that's fine. You're not going to do this fun thing that all of us are about to do." But now that we're virtual I don't necessarily

have that freedom as much anymore. Where as in the classroom, okay, I can see that you're sitting at your desk and you're working on what you should be because you didn't finish it. Well now, okay, I'm trying to do a fun activity with your class. I have to share my screen, but you didn't finish your work and you need me to help you. So, you know, so now it's like, "Okay, go to the breakout room." "Okay, hold on guys, the ones that we're trying to have fun you guys keep talking to each other." So, it's a little more micromanaging, and I don't like micromanage, you know, like it's just tiny things that will fall into place in the classroom has just changed drastically, virtually.

Pauletta, Yvette, and Jaime further discussed the impact of this tension on their efficacy

Yvette: This sounds bad but that's [having and feeling in control], that's how I teach. By having certain situations, going the way I want them to go and having this kid here and this kid, they're doing this. Like, that's how I teach. I control what's happening so if I can't control it, I can't do my job.

Jaime: Yeah.

Pauletta: Yeah, when you know that the students are capable of doing much better than what they are actually putting forth the effort of doing it, that's, that's, that hurts. And especially because you're going above and beyond to help this child and try to do whatever it is to make sure that they get the resources and provide them with whatever it needs, what, what they need and they're just not taking that and moving forward.

Jaime: Yeah, agreed. It's, it's knowing your qualities and capabilities as a teacher, and knowing that you cannot give it to them. That's eating me inside like it's, I think that's my biggest thing. I know in the classroom, "Okay we're going to make this happen whether you want to or not, you know, you are going to learn. Sorry, that's not a choice. You're

going to learn and have fun, or you're just going to learn and not have any fun,” you know. You're going to learn though, that's not a choice. Whereas now it's just like, um, “I hope you're gonna learn. Are we gonna learn today? Hey, Mom, you can go. I've got them. Thank you,” you know, so relinquishing that control is just hardest when you know what you're capable of producing.

Yvette: And then having like the same. I mean, we have a high expectations for ourselves but having like in my PGP 100% of my students are going to be reading on grade level at the end of the year when I don't have 100% of my students in class. And like any given day at any given time, or they're counted as present, but they came to five minutes of one single class. So, that's kind of also...

Jaime: That is driving me crazy too. Or they leave early every single day before your reading block. Wait, what? Okay.

Yvette: Yeah, it's like, you can't do your job to the best of your ability, but you still have these, you know, expectations that you're supposed to, you want to achieve but, if we're going to be honest, like... *shrugs*

The virtual learning experience brought contextual risk factors such as workload, student and family interactions, and school culture, in tandem with participants' loss of control and frustrations, which yielded lowered self-efficacy. These factors combined to illuminate an exhaustion that participants experienced physically, mentally, and/or emotionally.

SQ3: Racial-generational identity as a protective or risk factor

As it pertains to participants' racial-generational demographic, their racial identity served as both a protective and risk factor while their generational identity served primarily as a support to their resilience. While participants often expressed their Blackness as an asset and explained

the benefits of Black teachers in education, their racial identity was an added weight in their experiences as educators. Participants detailed the personal toll of navigating the workplace as a Black professional, differing opportunities in comparison to their white peers, different forms of racism, and inequitable class placement practices. When participants discussed the impact of their generational identity on their lived experience, two themes were most potent: being millennial is an asset and technology use.

Benefits of Black Educators

Participants' racial identity was viewed as a benefit, and at times, an advantage. Participants expressed being Black as particularly beneficial around students as they felt it allowed them to be positive influences for all students, especially Black and brown students. Janae affirmed this idea:

I think it's definitely helped my experience with my students, because my students are able to see a Black face, you know? And research has shown that Black students who have Black teachers before third grade fare far better than, you know, if they don't have a Black teacher until later in life, right? So, I've been able to give them that.

This added to previously discussed protective factors that found participants to have a sense of purpose that grounded them as a support when mitigating risk factors in their career. For Pauletta, her visibility in the classroom as a Black teacher was something she remains conscious of:

And I think it's also helpful for students to see African American teachers in the classroom because we don't see many of us, you know, of our race teaching, and for them to look at us and say, "Oh, she looks like me, I can do that when I grow up. I want to be a teacher just like Mrs. Pauletta." You know and just let them know that there's options out

there for you and yes, you can do this just like anybody else, because they don't see us in those certain roles, often.

Participants often felt part of their calling as an educator was connected to their proximity to Black and brown students. 90% of participants worked in Title 1 schools where Black and brown students were more populous. "I wanted to always support students who look like me and this is why I've never gone to a more predominantly white school. I felt like, where I am is where I'm needed," Nelson affirmed. When asked if she feels "called" to Title 1 schools after I saw it as a theme amongst participants, Jackie paused then firmly responded, "I agree with that. I agree with that. I don't think that my skill set would best fit that type [middle class, more affluent, and predominantly white] of demographic." While participants often advocated for all students, some participants specifically felt responsible for the success of students of color. Yvette explains how her racial identity and her own experiences further gives her a sense of purpose:

Growing up, we always hear, or we, I mean it's true but that there are disadvantaged, or what's it called [thinking] marginalized races... So like, I give support to all my students, obviously, you know, whatever color they are but I just feel, I feel more needs to be given to just my students of color just because... and in this case I do not know a lot of their home lives and their home lives in a general way, of course, everyone's different, has been different than my, usually than my Caucasian students and there's individual cases but I don't know, I mean, I'll say personally I just, I just feel like they... that I want to give them like more than my Caucasian students. I mean I still of course give them like what I all I can, but I just, you know, I just, I think they just need a little bit more that encouragement to just counteract any... Try to counteract the, the negativity that they'd see every day about people that look like them.

Additionally, the benefit of Black educators was seen in participants' articulation of the support they found with Black school leaders. Six of 10 participants expressed safety at their school in connection to Black leadership. Janae, who specifically sought out Black leadership when choosing a new school location, explained the dynamics she has with her Black principal.

I have more of a relationship with my Black administrator than I do with my white administrator and it's interesting because, I mean, I know you, you typically go to your assistant principal for certain things or you go to your principal for certain things, but for me it's always been, it doesn't matter if my assistant principal is Black or if my principal is what, I always went to the Black ones for whatever it was just because I had already built a relationship with them. And I didn't notice that until we had the discussion about it. So even when I was in Georgia my assistant principal was Black, and my principal was white, but I always had a more solid relationship with you know whoever the Black person was. So, I think that that definitely plays a part in it.

Rose communicated the grief and loss she recently experienced after a Black administrator suddenly transferred to a new school.

I believe it was about a year and a half ago we actually had a Black assistant principal, and I definitely, I sat in on her interview process and I definitely felt more comfortable going to her and speaking to her. I felt a lot more heard like, you know, like we said before. She accepted another position as a principal at a different school. And so now it's kind of back to the beginning, back to the way it was before. Having two white administrators and it kind of already feels like things are just going back to that kind of not so positive place. I know the stress for them is, is difficult to but at the same time it's just like. Now what do we do, that's what my team keeps saying because we have this

really powerful advocate and now she's not there so. I think about how, you know, Black students have connections with Black teachers, but I also feel the same way about Black teachers having connections with Black administrators. I mean, for me it was kind of painful when our administrator left and I was just like, "Why do I have such, you know this big attachment, and then this other person can just up and go," you know, and she just left, and was okay with it and that I think that kind of bothered me even though I've had to work through my own feelings but it definitely bothered me that she could just go. But we were still stuck, you know.

Racism and its Different Forms

Despite the strong sense of purpose and love of Blackness that was often interwoven in participants' responses, racism whether intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural, or systemic was just as potent in their experiences. Nelson explained:

I think one of the hardest things for some people to do is to change. And part of that is that your worldview has become part of who you are for so long that when you're being requested to change, it's like a personal attack. And so, for a lot of older white teachers that can be difficult. And so, it could be met with aggression, it can be met with a lot of pushback. And I've seen that for sure. And especially if they believe that they have always been right or caring, or they believed a certain way because nobody Black has ever told them otherwise.

For some, experiences with racism were overt. Monica shared several instances where families, both Black and white, said they did not want their child to have a Black teacher.

Yeah, my first year I had a Black parent, pointing out that she did not want a Black teacher for her child. That to me was rude, disrespectful. I think she said her child does

better with Caucasian teachers, and the child went to another class. And then it was quite a flip so she realized that it wasn't a problem with me, it was a problem with the child.

Continuing the explanation of her experience with parents, she shared:

This year too I had one parent to me, he made a frown and he realized that was his child's teacher when we were in the parking lot. When I was asking who was the child second grade teacher, I realized it was one of the Jamaicans. She was saying the same thing, that they had a problem with her. And apparently, they dished it out on Facebook and somebody said it to her. So, then I realized that I really was not in my head. He really gave me a look when he realized his child was having a Black teacher, but this was a white person. So, some white parents do I think would rather white teachers teach in there, and especially in a place like Virginia.

Some participants shared stories of colleagues making fun of students who had “more ethnic” names. Others, like Jaime, shared a theme they saw with disparities in how behavior was handled for Blacks students versus white students.

One little boy would bite, pee on, gave a teacher a concussion, nothing ever happened.

Another sped student in his class, a little Black girl destroyed the classroom one day... no students were in there. She got suspended for three days. He literally gave a teacher a concussion. I'm sorry, he PEED on another teacher, nothing happens. Like it was just little things like that you would see.

Class placements and behavior management were noticeable as a form of structural racism.

Nicole stated, so matter-of-factly, “Yeah, the white kids are normally in the white teachers class.” Yvette processed her realization that students of color were often solely placed in her room:

Last year, I had a little boy. He was really, really sweet but he's African American... he was very, very, very difficult, and they gave him to me. And then this year I have, like, all the little Black boys in my class. By coincidence, I guess. And then the year before that, I don't think that because there's not that many. Honestly, it's like 60-70% Latino in our school. And then there's white, Asian, and Black. There's not really that many Black kids in our school, but I feel like they kind of bunch them into my room lately, which I like... I mean, I personally like it because I want to be like, that representation.

Other experiences with racism were microaggressive. Jaime explained the subtlety here:

It's not prominent unless you've worked at a Title 1 school, and you know what to look for. Like, my two co-workers Abby and Bonnie, they have seen it like the way people, they will address Bonnie and Abby certain ways and they'll look at me, because I say something they'll go and kind of snub. Bonnie will say the exact same thing I just said, they'll say, "Oh my gosh, that's such a great idea." I'm like, Bonnie says, "She just said it", you know, so it's little things like that.

Similarly, Monica identified the subtlety as a "vibe":

Sometimes I do get a vibe. If a Black person should come in the room like I remember when another teacher was going to join the team and I heard, the only thing I heard was, "Oh another Jamaican," you know, and I'm like "Okay then." But sometimes they'll see some things in a way, like they'll do it as a joke. So, they'll do it in a slick way.

Vague, covert racism led to some participants questioning whether or not they were experiencing racism, which added to the weight they already felt Blackness often brought. Yvette narrated this idea here:

I'm always thinking like "Is it me? like am I like reading too much into this?" but then I don't think so, like, because it happens, a little thing that happened like, over, over time, or stories that I hear from other Black teachers that don't stay, not in my school, but in particular. I mean those that don't stay around, very long, but it's just like, I don't know and I don't think they're [white teachers] doing on purpose, but I don't know.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the one participant who stated that they did not experience any racism in the workplace worked in a school, when compared with other participants, had the highest population of Black teachers. This participant also worked in a school where the principal or assistant principal has been Black during the entire time they have worked there.

Cautious Interpersonal Maneuvering

Participants' lived experiences professionally and personally seemed to yield a cautiousness when navigating the workplace. Jackie stated it simply,

I think that there's a certain expectation that people hold or that people think we have, or what, or that we act a certain way, so you do have to, you know, act accordingly, I guess so to speak, around certain people.

A hyper-vigilance of their interactions was evident and seldom yielded the ability to rest or "just be." Nelson describes this tension here:

I don't know this this could just be a Black paranoia thing but you know as a Black teacher as opposed to a white millennial you already have one strike against you kind of thing for a lot of people. So, that's it goes back to that, "Got to work a little bit harder, you got to be above approach..." you might not be given as much of a leash as someone else would be.

Navigation of the workplace entailed constantly managing their tones, language, and actions to avoid affirming negative stereotypes that they felt are often expected of Black people. For many participants, they often narrated a conscious awareness to not be perceived as the stereotypical “angry Black woman.” Combatting the label of “aggressive” was notable in Rose’s responses. In her journal entry, she stated: “I have been viewed as a scary, intimidating, black woman for as long as I have been teaching.” She expands this statement in a focus group discussion:

So, in all of my fields, I'm the only Black person. That goes for specialists, that goes for any resource person that comes into our meetings, any administrator now. And so that tone police thing, that making people not see you as the angry Black woman has definitely been something that I've struggled with. I've been called aggressive, intimidating, all of those things. And then it kind of you know sometimes makes you want to shut your mouth because you're just really just tired of hearing people say those things about you and your ideas and then you go in your classroom and you teach the way you want to teach.

This awareness of perception often yielded a lack of fully expressing their personality and taking up space. “Sometimes I think that it's difficult to be completely open in the work place because you don't want people to look at you differently or treat you different because you're being blunt,” shared Janae. She expounds upon this idea in a focus group discussion:

It's almost like. If you are too much of who you are as a Black woman or who too much of who I am as a Black woman, I'm almost not taken seriously. And so, I would have to make light of situations, or like throw a joke. Oh, you know what I mean, just to make it more digestible. And then even like some ideas with my team, everyone's about my age, within like maybe four or five years. And so, we're all we know what we've grown up as,

even if you're not technically a millennial like they're still in our, in my age range. And, um, it's still times where I have to throw something out there and then like backup and guide them to make it seem like it was their idea, because they won't take my idea seriously.

Participants often narrated navigation of *respectability politics* where they often felt accountable for maintaining a specific image that destroyed widely-held notions about Black people. For Yvette, this navigation was set in motion from her own personal upbringing:

I think part of it was you know how I was raised. You know my mom always kind of instilled in me that, you know, as a person of color, you have to be on it, you have to be, you know, super... Um, I don't know what's the word... you have to be? You just have to be up to another, another standard I guess because of the way people might look at you so I think that's kind of just... I've internalized that.

She later shares:

I've seen what they consider to be like confrontational or whatever, which I don't think is confrontational but okay. Um, but I think this just helped me learn a little bit how to navigate a little bit differently and how to just approach certain situations and just people in general, I think.

Different Opportunities and Expectations Compared to White Teachers

Even with a conscious steering of interactions in the workplace, participants still communicated a sense of fragility when it came to opportunities for leadership and advancement.

Yvette, specifically, expressed feelings of being slighted:

I feel like my white counterparts in my school, are, have been given more of the benefit of the doubt with, with different things. Like if the same situation happened with, you

know, me or another, or another Black teacher, or like a white teacher, it wasn't received the same way. I've had kids in my class they make their growth, my data has always been good. Like my teaching has been, you know, by, if you look at the data has been good. Um, but I don't know I think I didn't get the opportunity to be, like team leader, to be on different committees, just because... I don't know. I just feel impacted in some way, I think, I think it is like you know how we have implicit bias or things like that.

Participants expressed the realization that they had different opportunities in comparison to white teachers. Jackie shared her experiences with preferential treatment:

So, I feel like they [white millennials] don't deal with stuff, you know? Like, they would rather just kind of be like, "Oh, there's a problem. Oh, no, I'm not," you know. It almost seems like they're allowed to, they're allowed to push them [students with behavior concerns] out whereas we're, like, expected to deal with it. You know, like, "You know what to do. You should deal with it. Like, you're great. Like, you can handle behavior." Like, "No, like, if we're all great teachers, and we all you got to figure out how to deal with it." Like, I had a little white boy in my classroom two years ago, or the year of Corona? And he was terrible! But I couldn't send him out anywhere like, you know. And when I said something like, "Oh, he's got to go to the office or whatever." It was like, "Oh, he's got to go back down to your room." I'm like, "Why? He's acting out. Like, it's not fair. Everyone else gets to send people out, but I got to deal with him. Like he gets to throw chairs and act crazy?"

Yvette contended, "I think the difference between me and my colleagues is that they are given more, sooner." Jaime also has noticed preferential treatment:

And now for white millennial teachers, um, I don't believe that many of them realize that at least the ones that I worked with and encountered. I don't believe that they realize how entitled they actually were like things would be given to them. Almost perfect classes would be given to them, like, "Oh my gosh, she got 100%." "Yeah, she didn't have anybody that went below 34, like she should have 100%." You know, small things like that. Just, uh, yeah, just making sure that they're comfortable and not stressed or overwhelmed and I hear that a lot but I've never. I've never heard any of my principals, or administrators say to make sure that a Black teacher makes sure that they don't feel overwhelmed. I've never heard that even if they're new. It's always, "You don't want to overwhelm them [white teachers]. Don't give them too many low kids." "Okay. What do you mean there's 40 kids in the whole grade level, there's four classes, everybody's gonna get 10? I don't understand, you know, "don't give them that many." Come on, this is not real teaching, if you want them to be a teacher.

They often felt penalized or disadvantaged, not because of specific actions they did, but because of implicit bias that permeated the workplace. For Monica, she communicated the restraint she practices in her speech:

I know that, while I think I have to be mindful of what I say, I know that they're free to say whatever. So, they'll say anything and expect you to take it as a joke, but as soon as you say something, then they'll take it to another level. So, I have to be mindful of what I say.

Added Roles for Black Teachers

As a Black teacher, participants experience a variety of forms of racism that they persistently worked to navigate, and on top of this, they often had unspoken added roles due to

their racial identity. As advocates for other Black people in the environment, participants often communicated that they bore the weight of being the “Black spokesperson.” Nelson demonstrated this idea, “Being one of the few Black people, or, you know, millennial especially as a Black male, having conversations where everyone expects you to know the answer, or you have to be the Black face for everyone.” For many, the weight of being an advocate to ensure fairness for Black students kept them returning to school locations even if they wanted to leave. Jaime shared “I think I've stayed at that school because of students like Kyreik, you know, and they're not all like that but the justice that they have at that school. It's just kind of sad.” Janae often felt responsible for ensuring instructional materials were culturally affirming and anti-racist:

This past summer, and one of the lessons was absolutely insane. I was teaching second grade summer school, and the lesson was about a slave who was brought here, and you are having the kids, add up to see how much money she should have been paid per day. And it was from some like museum here. And so, the summer school principal that I was working with, she uploaded the lesson. And I'm assuming that maybe she didn't look it over. And so, but it was also with third grade lesson too, like they just readjusted the numbers or whatever to make it fit third grade. And so, we, one of my colleagues, we both like send each other the message as soon as we saw it. And then, you know, I brought it to her attention, and then you know she wouldn't even have the conversation she was just like, “Oh yeah I remember the lesson,” but it's more so, “Why did you post the lesson? Why did you think this was okay?” Where did it come from because someone's still using this hot trash. Right. And so, what are we going to do to make sure that another Black child isn't exposed to this foolishness. Like, you can't just start the

conversation with slavery, with Black kids in just, “Oh yeah there were slaves,” like they have no context for what this really means and why there were slaves and, and now we're talking about someone being used for money, and adding up how much they were, what their value should have been, it's mind blowing to me. And it's mind blowing that at a district level this is still happening, and no one is checking in your domain and we can check it in our classroom, and I can do my part to check it in my building, but what else are we doing as a whole to fix this madness?

Knowing the rarity of having a Black teacher, participants often encountered families who wanted them to teach their children solely because of their racial identity. Nelson narrates this pressure:

Um, but, you know, in a predominantly minority school, and, you know, vast majority of the teachers are not, you know, it's that pressure that, you know, there's challenges with that and the fact that there are some parents who like really, really, really, really want you as their child's teacher because of your Blackness which that feels, that feels like a lot of pressure, and I get it, I truly get it. But it's like you don't even know if I'm good or not.

You just like that I can relate to your kid in certain ways.

For this reason, participants felt a sense of duty to be a positive representation. Yvette communicates this idea and the toll it plays on her in these two excerpts:

I want to be like that representation. I want to be like, a part of their lives. I want them, you know, to see someone, or have a teacher that, you know, has really high expectations for them and doesn't, you know, think because of whatever color you are that you don't, you're not able to do the same things.

Later, as she reflects on what advice she might give herself at the start of her career, she says:

I think I would tell myself that I, I mean I would encourage myself that I have a responsibility like as a Black young teacher to be the, you know better, like I said, but I think I would give myself the advice that “Don't let that, you know, kind of feeling, that responsibility hinder.... Don't let that, like,” oh, what am I trying to say? “Like, don't let that discourage me, like that responsibility that I feel, like discouraged me when I may not feel like I'm meeting that expectation for myself,” if that makes sense.

Other implications of the added roles and weight participants felt due to their racial identity included the weight of “behavior enforcer” and felt responsible for countering the impact of harmful practices of non-Black teachers at their school. Jackie expresses her frustration:

I think that we're expected to handle all the behavior issue children because we're Black. But like, I don't like that we're expected to handle all the behavior kids. I don't like that, that bothers me. Because I feel like every year, it was like, “Oh, put them in Jackie's class.” “Like, why?” You know, but then it was like, I also noticed that they would give all the Hispanics to one of my, my one co-worker, like all the low Hispanic kids, because why? Cuz she speaks Spanish? That's not like, what if you didn't have her? Like, these kids would be divided, you know, like, so, but I just think that in terms of us, yeah, I get, you know, “the bad Black children,” the behavior kids or whatever they want to call it.

Describing harmful practices, he has seen from a non-Black teacher, Nelson communicates frustration:

That concept of, you know, we've been put down but we're not fragile, we're not, we're not gonna break and I think some people who are trying to be anti-racist, at times, kind of cripple us like we're like this fragile little porcelain doll... Like, come on man. We're people. Stop. She believes that she is helping a lot of our Black boys specifically by

coddling them. “They could not have done anything wrong. Don't correct this child he's so hurt” and stuff like that. He cannot be corrected? Oh, absolutely not. You're creating monsters. So, when people would correct a few of the students she would jump in to save them.

Being a Millennial as an Asset

Though their racial identity had more of a conscious impact on their experience as a resilient educator, participants generally identified their generational demographic as an asset that supported their resilience. Most participants intertwined being a millennial with being youthful which contributed to greater relatability amongst students. Janae explains:

I think that I'm able to relate to my students pretty well. I think that I understand a lot more about them in their music, in their culture, in their home life than older teachers would. Um, I mean there's obviously still nuances that I, as I'm aging, right? They're getting younger. So, things like now every now and then I'll have to ask my daughter like, “So, what, what, what does that really mean?” you know? I think that because I'm still on the younger side of things. My kids feel comfortable talking to me, you know, and they feel comfortable asking questions and joking around with me in a different way that they would if I was older than like way older.

Being a millennial was often described as an advantage that yielded greater success when compared to co-workers in older generational cohorts. Alexandra views her generational demographic as a benefit:

I think it's helped me a lot, actually, especially being young with being able to just like deal with the changing times. I think the older you are I think it's harder for you to change just because you're so used to certain things, but I just think the way that I'm thinking the

way that I was like, taught in college and everything, like I'm kind of just flexible. I'm going with the flow of things.

Similarly, Monica explains how being a millennial supports her in connections with students:

Um, helped, because um, the world is ever changing so I think the fact that I am open and young. [laughs]. I'm not so young anymore. I think the classroom now has a place for people like me, versus like retired teachers coming in but because these students need somebody who is vibrant, someone they can relate to. And what better, better person than a millennial teacher, or educator, yeah? Cuz we can, I can relate to some things that they're experiencing, because we probably experienced them not too long ago.

Participants communicated an ease pertaining to innovative instruction and/or adapting to changes in education due to their youthfulness and generational characteristics. Jaime explains the instructional contrast between generations:

I think, I think being a millennial I'm able to think outside of the box more, whereas a lot of teachers that are pre-millennials, they are very. Excuse me. They're a lot more traditional, and not necessarily stuck in their ways, but it's like, it worked before so it should work now, you know, whereas millennials we had to figure out ways to do things like we had to figure out ways to create Facebook accounts when we weren't in college like we had to, you know, so I think I'm having to problem solve.

Nelson described his role as a generational mediator and its implications for his instruction:

For the millennial that the social aspect is huge because, one, you know, in the workplace, things aren't just... you know the status quo is people don't just sit for that. And you see that with the children talking about a lot of it, so you have to kind of be an intermediary there. And the adults, a lot of the times will talk a lot about it and so you

have that friction with the people who are a little bit older, and who do love the status quo, such as Miss Susan. And then you have some people who you know are against it and especially with events within the past year or so, that's caused a lot of friction and opinion. Things that you have to kind of deal with.

Technology Use

As digital natives, participants often described comfort and use of technology as the first and main benefit when considering their experience as a millennial teacher. Pauletta found her comfort with technology to be particularly supportive during virtual learning:

I thought that being a millennial has had a plus, especially because of right now with all of the virtual that's going on, and we're of that age where it's kind of like we're the techie people anyway so we know more about technology more so than any of the others, so I think that that's been a plus for us.

At the same time, participants articulated a tension in their usage of technology, like Yvette.

Honestly though at the same time I kind of am like adverse to technology. I know my kids are in the computer, all the time when they get home or on their phone all the time. So like I use it to help my teaching, I use it for them, but I also try to encourage them to do non-technology stuff during the day. I try to limit it during the day because I've had so much technology like, you know, growing up and just like on the phone all the time, video game, blah blah blah, I just because it's even more now, I just kind of am kind of backing away from that honestly if that makes sense. I can't wait because I know I feel like especially now it's just, I thought, I kind of don't like technology, I mean besides like the modern advanced, of course. But like having the device all the time, I actually really don't like that.

Few participants were consciously aware of the characteristics that differentiate millennials from other generations, however, they often narrated these characteristics throughout the interview and the tension of not having these characteristics in place. These included high levels of communication, being relationship-oriented, highly collaborative and easily frustrated without it, desiring participative leadership, seeking constant feedback on job performance, being social justice oriented, and less motivated by title and statuses.

Summary

This study was implemented in Woodrow County public elementary schools in Virginia. 10 participants took part by describing their experiences of resilience in their careers through three data collection instruments. A description of each participant who participated was provided. Interviews, focus groups, and journals were used to collect data for this study. The data was analyzed using the Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method for transcendental phenomenology. Trustworthiness methods are identified through an audit trail (see Appendix J). The analyzed data led to six major themes which have been narrated through the metaphor of taking a long-distance trip in a luxury car which is temporarily inconvenienced by car troubles. Coding frequency charts have been provided (see Appendix M). The central research question was addressed through answers to the sub-questions. Direct quotations from the participants were used to support the discussion of themes and sub-questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this study is to describe Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience in Virginia public elementary schools. The following chapter will provide interpretations and ideas based on the findings of the study. The central research question will be answered through a summary of findings from the three sub-questions. Reconnecting with Chapter Two, I analyzed my findings in light of related theoretical and empirical literature. Based on these discussions, empirical, theoretical, and practical implications and recommendations are provided. Finally, delimitations, limitations, and recommendations for future research are identified.

Summary of Findings

This section summarizes the findings found in Chapter Four. The summaries are organized into three subsections based on the three sub-questions that cumulatively answer the research question, "What are the lived experiences that Black millennial teachers ascribe to their resilience in Virginia public school elementary settings?" Each subsection briefly provides what was revealed in the reports of participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon.

Sub-Question One: Individual and Contextual Protective Factors

When asked to narrate the individual and contextual protective factors that have been essential to building resilience, participants identified a strong sense of purpose, professional competence and self-efficacy, relational networks, and/or the impact of students and families. Sense of purpose was often apparent as an intrinsic motivation that existed at the start of their career, while other factors developed over time throughout their career. Professional competence and self-efficacy were visible through participants' personalities, skills, or boundaries learned

during their career. Relational networks consisted of family, supportive colleagues, and mentors. Mentors may have been provided through school mentoring programs or mentorships developed organically. Participants often identified students' success and relationship building with students as being connected with a sense of purpose and self-efficacy. The aforementioned protective factors were potent in participants' experiences across data sources. When experiencing adversity, utility of these protective factors enabled participants to overpower obstacles and persist. Additionally, some protective factors became risk factors during the COVID-19 pandemic and vice versa.

Sub-Question Two: Individual and Contextual Risk Factors

As participants described the adversity they faced during their career, risk factors that were identified can be categorized as the following: lessened self-efficacy, workload and work-life balance, students and families, collegial interdependency, and virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Work-life boundaries were seen as either physical, emotional, or social. Minimized self-efficacy was most notable during times of rapid changes, in connection to data or student performance, comparison to others, or not meeting teachers' self-imposed expectations. Challenging student behaviors and class placements were identified as challenges. Interactions with families became a risk factor during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of virtual learning. Though supportive colleagues were seen as a protective factor, interdependency with grade level teammates, when shared responsibility was necessary, was a point of contention. Several risk factors were most notable during the COVID-19 pandemic and were not challenges before it. Additionally, some risk factors that were more apparent before the COVID-19 pandemic were not risks during virtual learning. This indicates fragility and contextualization of risk factors.

Sub-Question Three: Racial-Generational Demographic as Protective or Risk

Participants' racial identity had more of a conscious impact on their lived experiences while their generational identity had more of an unconscious impact. Participants described their racial identity as both a protective and risk factor. Being a Black teacher was an asset when used in the service of others such as being role models and advocates to students of color, creating safe spaces for Black colleagues, and advantageous from the perspective of families who desired that their children had Black teachers. It is important to note that participants did not name Blackness as a risk. Nonetheless, it was visible as a risk due to interpersonal, systemic, and structural racism faced by teachers and the cautious interpersonal maneuvering they had to do because of it. Generational identity as a millennial was identified as an asset. Though participants were mostly unaware of specific characteristics that set millennials apart from other generations, they often narrated preferences and skills that are common to millennials in the literature.

Discussion

Comparisons and contrasts are visible based on the findings of my study and previous studies pertaining to resilience theory, teacher resilience theory, teacher retention, the Black teacher shortage, and characteristics of millennials. While no two participants had the exact experiences, the confirmation of resilience as a dynamic, contextual, and fragile system was present in responses in the interviews, focus groups, and journal entries that participants provided. Additionally, findings in my study confirm previous empirical findings while diverging from and/or adding new findings.

Theoretical Literature

The discussion of theoretical literature compares the theoretical framework to the study's findings. The theoretical framework for the study utilized two theories to inform the discussion on the lived experiences of Black millennial teachers as it pertains to resilience. A classical

person-focused model of resilience was utilized (Masten, 2014), as well as teacher resilience theory using several studies (Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007) and a literature review (Beltman et al., 2011). The following discussion considers how my study affirms, diverges, or extends from previous research, as well as sheds new light on this theoretical framework.

Resilience is defined as “the capacity (potential or manifested) of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development; positive adaptation or development in the context of significant adversity exposure” (Masten, 2014, p. 308). The confirmation of resilience as a dynamic system was present in the interviews, focus groups, and journal entries that the participants contributed to the study. While all the participants shared their lived experiences, which varied from person to person, the system that was illuminated through the interactions of protective and risk factors had similar themes amongst participants which aligned with the resilience framework. Masten (2014) postulated that resilience is an ordinary, common phenomenon “arising from ordinary human adaptive processes” (Masten, 2001, p. 235).

Protective factors used by participants were common to many resilience studies (Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Masten, 2001). These factors included participants’ sense of purpose, self-efficacy, professional competence, and relational networks enabled them to adapt successfully to individual and contextual disturbances. Masten (2001) cited a small set of global factors that are most commonly associated with resilience. These factors include connections to competent and caring adults in the family and community, cognitive and self-regulation skills, positive views of self, and motivation to be effective in the environment (as cited in Masten, 2001). The experiences of participants in this study confirm this

research. The utility of protective factors, such as the aforementioned factors, to counteract adversity is paramount to resilience theory. Resilience theory postulated individuals do not avoid risk but navigate it (Shean, 2015). This was visible throughout participants' responses in the study. They used protective factors to overcome risks such as lessened self-efficacy, collegial conflict, students and families, workload and work-life balance, and virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants did not avoid risks, instead they described experiences of facing challenges head-on. To be considered resilient, individuals must illustrate the existence of positive adaptation with moderate to high levels of past or current adverse conditions (Masten, 2011). At the time of the study, all participants had plans to remain in education for the current year, thus indicating positive adaptation. All participants narrated moderate to high levels of adverse conditions, both prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and through it. Nonetheless, protective factors have been determined to be better predictors of resilience (Benard, 2004). Despite the risk factors experienced, participants often came back to their protective factors to help steer clear of risks.

Similarly, major themes that emerged in my study align with themes found in teacher resilience theory. Gu and Day (2007) determined the resilience process is *sophisticated* by describing it as a dynamic synergy between a teacher's sense of efficacy, professional and personal identities, and the interplay of professional, personal, and contextual scenarios during different professional life phases. My study confirms this research. Additionally, resilience has been concluded to be a continually fluctuating process and "*unstable construct*" that is contextualized and necessitates pliability by the individual (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Shean, 2015). This idea was often described by participants in the study. As a result, teacher retention has been determined to be a by-product of resilience (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007;

Tait, 2008). Gu and Day (2007) claimed that though most teachers experience adversity in the workplace, they stay and adapt. At the time of the study, all participants had plans to remain in education for the near future, despite the adversity they had experienced. Participants may have contemplated changing schools or pursuing other roles in education but were planning to remain in education.

Although Masten (2014) identified resilience studies with adults as a gap in the literature, I find it interesting that the common protective factors cited by Masten (2001) remain potent in my research with adults. Resilience research studies are more common with youth and adolescent demographics, focusing on positive adaptation for high-risk populations in the midst of adverse developmental situations. My sample of adults utilized protective factors that align to those cited by Masten (2001): connection to other adults, skills to regulate risk, positive sense of self, and motivation to be effective in the environment. Nonetheless my findings diverge from that of Masten (2001, 2014) due to use of adults as participants. Additionally, Masten (2011) indicated resilience studies grounded in a cultural context have been neglected. This differs from my study due to the added lens of analyzing resilience in conjunction with participants' racial-generational demographic as a factor.

The findings of Bobek (2002) for 12 pre-service and in-service teachers' resilience development were cited as a novel study in the literature review of teacher resilience studies by Beltman et al. (2011). My study supports the key findings of Bobek (2002) where relational networks, sense of ownership, and methods for problem-solving are concerned. At the same time, Bobek (2002) reported several key findings that did not emerge in my own work. Bobek (2002) identified an openness to being challenged, being lifelong learners, using humor when problem-solving, and experiencing success while also being recognized for it as part of the

resilience-building process. Additionally, Bobek (2002) identified mentoring programs as integral, poor administrative support as the primary reason for teachers leaving, and students' parents as protective factors.

Participants often demonstrated an ability to learn new skills to overcome adversity, however I cannot confirm that they consciously have a lifelong love of learning that they initiated with or without adversity. I found that participants detailed experiences where they rose to the occasion when challenged, but again it fails to be seen if that is a factor that they intentionally seek out. Two participants either described frustrations when school leaders did not celebrate their hard work or communicated a preference to receive affirmation as feedback from school leaders. I suspect that several of Bobek's (2002) factors may have emerged in my own work if I had incorporated them into the standardized interview protocols so that participants could confirm these factors as they responded to questions.

Bobek (2002) used a sample primarily of young, new teachers in the early years teachers phase, whereas my sample consisted primarily of teachers in the middle professional life phase (Gu & Day, 2007). This may account for some of the variance since our samples were in differing stages of their careers. The role of school-sanctioned mentorship programs was not as notable in my findings, however, mentors in their relational networks were salient. One participant described their assigned mentor's support as invaluable. Two participants identified their assigned mentor as helpful for moral support but not necessarily supportive for navigating the workplace structures. Five participants expressed the support of a mentoring relationship that formed organically and/or the mentor was a school or district leader. Additionally, poor administrative support was not a major point of contention for participants. One participant identified frustration from lack of affirmation from the school principal for the hard work they

were doing, and another identified a tumultuous relationship with their principal but did not correlate that to the reason they were considering leaving their school. Another participant identified high transience among school leadership which yielded a lack of reliance on administrators for support. Overall, most participants felt supported by their school leaders or administrative support was minor compared to other struggles, thus not mentioned. An additional consideration is that of the participants who identified feeling supported by their leaders, all had Black leaders that they spoke highly of and identified as safe and supportive. The final contrast that emerged was that of using humor when problem-solving. This did not emerge in participants' responses. Though they often used humor in sharing their stories, no indication was provided that the use of humor was a strategy to navigate risk.

Gu and Day (2007) identified teacher resilience as a necessary condition for effectiveness. Their sample and methodology differed from mine in that their study was a longitudinal study which explored resilience across different professional life phases. Despite these differences, our findings converge at the areas of the role of self-efficacy, emotional regulation, sense of purpose, professional competence, the instability of resilience, and professional and personal factors that challenge values, beliefs, and practices. Additionally, my findings confirm years 8-15 as the time when teachers consider the next direction of their professional life, and the role of changing expectations about schools as an impact on teacher's resilience (Gu & Day, 2007). Participants in this phase spoke of transferring schools.

My findings add to Gu and Day's (2007) findings that sense of purpose was a protective factor. For two participants, a sense of purpose was also a risk factor that developed into a savior complex that took an emotional toll on them and led to resentment or burn out. This was particularly evident as participants considered their ability to impact Black and brown students or

colleagues. Some participants expressed an “If not me, then who?” mentality that kept them stuck in unproductive patterns while others recognized the patterns and sought help to mitigate them. Additionally, the composition of the student population was not an environmental risk for participants in my study. On the contrary, the majority of participants described feeling “called” to their schools and/or student demographic. They were often conscious and aware of the decision they were making when selecting their school locations and had no desire to work in school locations with differing student populations. Finally, external policy contexts, heavy workload and work-life tensions had notable impact on effectiveness and efficacy during teachers’ middle and later professional life phases (Beltman et al., 2011; Gu & Day, 2007). Unlike these studies, my findings report workload and work-life tensions were identified by participants as both protective and a risk. Some participants identified that they had difficulty managing these areas in the early year phase of their career, not the middle or later professional phases. Most participants identified boundaries they had in place to manage workload and/or work-life tensions, however, all participants identified the re-emergence of workload and work-life tensions as risks during virtual learning in the COVID-19 pandemic. It is my belief that as teachers and schools return to normalcy, workload and work-life tensions will also return to a support rather than risk. This idea affirms findings that the construct of resilience is both fragile and contextualized (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007)

Investigating how resilience is developed in novice secondary science teachers, like the findings of my study, Doney (2013) affirmed: (a) the necessity of adversity to build resilience, (b) the contextualization of resilience, (c) participants’ ability to revise protective factors to address changing stressors, and (d) the synergy of individual skills and relational networks to overcome stress. Participants’ ability to identify their challenges to apply strategies to overcome

was paramount in both studies. Doney (2013) postulated that navigating challenges empowered individuals to develop a repertoire of coping mechanisms which was visible in the narration of my participants' responses.

Like Bobek (2002), Doney (2013) affirmed the use of humor to navigate challenges. I find it interesting that numerous researchers identified humor as supportive yet this was not visible in my study at all. Another divergence is that of palliative techniques used by participants to support resilience. Doney (2013) cited the utility of palliative techniques such as extracurricular hobbies, meditation, and relaxation techniques by participants. Three participants identified prayer in their experiences, however, it was not described as an ongoing technique that was proactive. Two participants identified prayer in a focus group interview, but the context appeared to be out of sarcasm rather than a repetitive, conscious support to overcome risk. One participant identified therapy as a support to mitigate risk and unpack personal trauma that was bleeding over into their professional experiences. I did not ask specific questions to dig more when participants identified these techniques, thus I cannot affirm Doney's (2013) contention that resilient individuals use palliative techniques to proactively release stress. Finally, Doney (2013) recommended the focus on interventions for teachers at the novice level. Though several participants alluded to difficulty during their early years as teachers, experiences did not indicate that specific external interventions would have altered their development of resilience. Despite challenges early on in their careers, all participants overcame them and developed resilience without notable specific external interventions. Based on the findings of my study, I would assert that interventions may be more or just as useful at the middle year phase of teacher careers as this is a time where fewer interventions are provided despite it being a phase when teachers begin questioning what they might do for the rest of their career. It appears that this may indicate

attrition as potential for teachers in this professional phase just as it is potential for novice teachers.

In the same way that similarities can be seen in previously mentioned studies, my findings align with several key findings reported in the teacher resilience literature review by Beltman et al. (2011). Analysis of 50 case studies on teacher resilience identified the following themes as factors that enhance or inhibit the development of resilience in teachers:

- Individual risk factors- negative self-beliefs, lack of self-confidence, difficulty asking for support, a conflict between beliefs and practices being used;
- Contextual risk factors- pressure from family to leave teaching, lack of infrastructure at home, work-family balance, behavior management for disruptive students, lack of support, lack of time due to extensive workload, the addition of non-teaching duties;
- Individual protective factors- selfless motives, strong intrinsic motivation, being efficacious; and
- Contextual protective factors- strong, supportive, caring leadership, mentor relationships, peer support, and students.

My findings align with the individual and protective factors identified by Beltman et al. (2011), and individual risk factors such as negative self-beliefs and lack of self-confidence were visible as pervasive throughout career phases in participants' experience. Contrastingly, work-family balance, behavior management for disruptive students, lack of support, and lack of time due to extensive workload were temporal risks and/or often arose for smaller portions of the sample as opposed to the majority of participants. Beltman et al. (2011) found the following individual risk factors were present for teachers: difficulty asking for support and a conflict between beliefs and

practices being used. These two risk factors were not salient in the responses of participants in my study. Participants often felt supported, able to address concerns with colleagues, and/or became self-sufficient if they were having difficulty. While two participants expressed frustration between their values and school wide practices, this did not apply to the majority. Participants often identified the ability to know what practices were needed to support students, and they felt comfortable implementing them based on their instincts. Contextual risk factors identified by Beltman et al. (2011) included pressure from family to leave teaching, lack of infrastructure at home, and the addition of non-teaching duties. These factors were not visible in participants' responses in my study. Lack of time due to extensive workload is a common risk factor identified by Beltman et al. (2011). Though it was seen, it was present in the context of virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most participants spoke of having a better grasp on the workload prior to the pandemic, though they had trouble with it in the past. Other divergences include behavior management as the most frequent challenge, and peer support and leadership as protective factors (Beltman et al., 2011). One participant mentioned behavior management as a struggle, while two participants provided anecdotes of a challenging student they had to learn to support. I would not consider this a pervasive risk or frequent challenge in participants' lived experiences since participants discussed these experiences in connection with the support they used to navigate the difficulty. Finally, unlike findings from Beltman et al. (2011) results from my study indicate peer support and leadership co-exist as both risk and protective factors.

An overall pattern emerges when my study is compared to previous, similar research. My research supports the overall findings of previous studies, which found that the presence of individual skills, self-efficacy, and relational networks are common characteristics of resilient

teachers (Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007). On the other hand, differences can be seen between my study and those previously mentioned specifically in the areas of professional learning as protective, several factors as protective and risks, focus on middle or later professional phase teachers, mentoring, management of workload and work-life balance, use of humor, and palliative techniques. For this reason, my study makes several contributions to the field and sheds new light on the topic of resilience. Resilience theory was selected to guide this study as an organizing framework that illuminates the assets of resilient Black millennial teachers as a counternarrative to current deficit-based literature on this racial and generational demographic. Masten (2011) called for resilience research to shift from deficit-focused models toward strength-based or competency-focused models. The findings of my study add to the field by affirming that Black millennial teachers do develop resilience using a variety of protective factors despite being an at-risk population. Resilience is developed by this population in similar and contrasting ways to samples previously studied. My findings fill a gap in the literature regarding the impact of racial and generational identities on resilience development. For Black millennial teachers, racial identity is both a protective factor and risk factor, while they affirm their generational identity to be a protective factor. My study adds to data by including specific ways that race serves as protective and a risk. Additionally, Masten (2011) argued that *true* exposure to adversity cannot be objectively determined. While this may be true, all participants in my study were experiencing the ramifications of ever-changing circumstances as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on schooling. One might argue that this, undeniably, was true adversity, and it had a prominent effect on all participants that forced the utility of risk and protective factors to overcome. Lastly, Beltman et al. (2011) identified the study of resilience theory in the context of American public schools as weak, as

only 17 of 50 studies used samples from the United States. My findings contribute to the field by adding American schools as the context for a teacher resilience study.

Empirical

Initially exploring the current literature centered around the resilience and retention of Black millennial teachers, I posited that this racial-generational demographic would drastically differ from other racial and generational demographics, thus my study would illuminate these vast differences. My hope was that revelation of differences for this racial-generational demographic would yield better insight for recruitment and retention efforts as a means for addressing the perpetual Black teacher shortage. After completion of the study, I have identified where current literature aligns and diverges from my findings. Additionally, I will elevate new findings that I have determined as key when considering the resilience and retention of this racial-generational demographic in the field of education.

General Retention, Transfer, and/or Attrition

Considering transfer in the profession as having the same impact as attrition, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) determined 8% of teachers transfer and 8% leave the profession. The majority of those that transfer do so involuntarily (Goldring et al., 2014). My findings do not support these statistics. 50% of my sample had transferred schools within their career, and all who did so, did so voluntarily. At the time of the study, 0% were looking to leave the profession. Additional statistics indicate that transfer and attrition rates are higher for teachers in Title 1 schools and for teachers serving students of color. I find this interesting as the majority of my participants indicated specifically choosing Title 1 schools with high populations of students of color. They often described feeling “called” to these schools and did not find their skill set to be supportive to the demographics in non-Title 1 schools. Six of 10 participants had

transferred from Title 1 schools during their career, but transferred from a Title 1 school to another Title 1 school. At the time of the study, 90% of participants worked in Title 1 schools while 10% worked in non-Title 1 schools. The one participant who was currently working in a non-Title 1 school had spent the majority of their career in a Title 1 school. Their current school had a student demographic that was 70% students of color. Finally, although my findings do not support that teachers in schools who primarily serve students of color are more likely to leave the profession sooner (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Djonko-Moore, 2016; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2007). At the time of the study, all participants had plans to continue working in the education field next year. The majority of participants were firm that they did not desire to leave Title 1 schools. They may have spoken of transferring schools or changing positions in the field but not specifically leaving Title 1.

Statistics for teacher retention are dismal for all populations, particularly Black teachers. My entire sample consisted of Black teachers, therefore I am unable to compare and contrast the differences in attrition rates with a sample of non-Black teachers. According to the NCES (2017), the least amount of diversity visible is in the area of in-service teachers. Within Woodrow County public schools, 11% of elementary teachers are Black, however this rate varies anywhere from 4.5% to 30% in the school where participants taught. The average turnover rate for Black teachers in the United States is 22% which is 50% greater than that of non-Black teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), making Black teachers the cohort with the highest attrition rates. Though 0% of participants were planning to leave the profession at the time of the study, the majority had transferred from other schools voluntarily during their career, and 20% of participants were currently looking to leave the classroom and transfer to leadership roles. While attrition rates are highest for Black teachers and involuntary turnover was 20%

higher for Black teachers than other demographics in 2012 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Goldring et al., 2014), my findings do not support this. 0% of participants had plans to leave the profession at the time of the study, and any transfers in participants' careers were voluntary. The vast majority of participants communicated a commitment to the profession for years to come.

Though participants expressed a commitment to the field of education, it is imperative to consider what work conditions plagued them throughout their career as a means of identifying contextual factors that may lead to attrition. Reasons for transfer within the profession or exiting altogether include job dissatisfaction with lack of collaboration (Bobek, 2002; Olson, 2000). My findings confirm and extend this idea. Collaboration was both protective and a risk, meaning that collaboration was supportive for participants, however, constant collaboration was also a challenge as participants often encountered collegial conflict or personal strain from lessened autonomy, personal time, and/or having to usher in new teammates. Of those with a history of transfer, two left due to job dissatisfaction connected to collaboration and work environment. For one participant, the amount of collaboration versus time for personal planning may lead to attrition. Other reasons for transfer include manageability of workload (Goldring et al., 2014), teacher feelings of helplessness and invisibility due to accountability pressures (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Colombo et al., 2013; Elish-Piper et al., 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Minarechova, 2012) poor student behavior, and low salaries (Allensworth et al., 2009; Report: Teacher Attrition Costs Schools Billions, 2014). My findings diverge from previous studies that indicate these areas as reasons for leaving as minimal participants cited these reasons as cause for attrition. 80% of participants taught students in grade levels with multiple annual high-stakes tests. Accountability pressures were not present in my findings. Mahan et al. (2010) identified

accountability measures connected to high-stakes tests have ongoing, stressful effects on teachers that increase anxiety and impact workers' psychological health. Three participants indicated a disdain for high-stakes tests, but they did not attribute this as a reason to leave the profession. Their disdain was not in connection to feelings of hopelessness nor invisibility. Finances were identified as problematic by three participants but only a consideration. Finances did not present as weighty in decisions to stay or leave except for one participant. Similarly, only one participant identified the workload as a reason to transfer to a different position within education.

In contrast to other demographics, previous studies have identified Black teachers are more likely to contemplate the following as they determine their career outlook: (a) interrelation of accountability and compensation, (b) administrator or collegial support, (c) classroom autonomy, (d) teaching conditions, (e) availability of resources, and (f) career opportunities (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dilworth, 2018; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Sun, 2018). My findings were in alignment with the majority of these career considerations. When I asked participants what they consider as they submit their letter of intent to Human Resources for the following school year, they included career opportunities, collegial support and amount of collaboration, finances, and administrator support. As previously stated, accountability measures fail to be seen as threats to participants' attrition. This measures up with findings by Dilworth (2018) who posited that millennials do not view standards-based reform and accountability measures as threats to their authority and autonomy due to being aware of the role these measures play before they even enter education.

As I compare my study to previous literature on causes of Black teacher retention, transfer, and attrition, I notice that several of my findings have not been discussed in previous literature. In my study, students and families played a role in the experiences of teachers as both

protective and risk. Behavior management and discipline have been cited as a frequent risk for teachers (Beltman et al., 2011), however, this was not as salient in my findings. Several participants identified experiences with challenging students as something they had to learn to navigate and were able to overcome. It was often one specific student identified across the entirety of their career as opposed to challenging students recurrently in their career.

Additionally, student behavior and changing family engagement before the pandemic were points of frustration for two teachers who both alluded to it as a reason for attrition years down the line. These participants felt like they could handle these areas now, but they were beginning to see trends in the handling of behavior and coddling of students by school leaders and families that made them question if they could continue to work as teachers. The final area where I saw findings not present in previous literature was that of school leaders and retention. Problematic leadership has been identified as a reason for attrition (Holmes et al., 2019; Hughes, 2012; Report: Teacher Attrition Costs Schools Billions, 2014; Segan, 2000; Sun, 2018). Of the participants in my study who had previously transferred schools, school leadership was not identified as the reason for transfer. In addition, my findings indicate that participants were strongly influenced to remain at their school because of their school leaders, particularly Black leaders. Of the four participants with Black principals, three identified their leaders as reasons for satisfaction and continuation at the school. One participant expressed feelings of dissatisfaction and grief after the loss of a school leader who transferred. This may imply that the role of school leadership, particularly Black leaders, may have a vital role on retention for Black teachers.

Methods to retain Black and millennial teachers are underemphasized, out-of-date, and inadequate (Dilworth, 2018; Griffin & Tackie, 2016). My findings support this idea as there was no indication that anything had been done to recruit teachers to the workforce in Woodrow

County. Several participants grew up in the area which caused them to seek employment in the district while two participants identified searching specifically for Black leaders to work for on their own. Though a majority of participants identified school or district supports that they found helpful, few were specifically focused on retention, and most were professional learning opportunities. What I did find interesting, however, was the role of mentorship as a recruitment or retention method. Though the school district has a formal mentoring program in place for all novice teachers, few participants identified the support from this program as a main support. Of the two teachers who mentioned their assigned mentor, their relationship was for moral support. I did find that the majority of participants had mentors who were either current school leaders in the district, college professors and/or school district personnel. Participants spoke of the role these mentors played in the areas of career guidance and encouragement to remain in the profession when participants were having a hard time. These findings point to a potential benefit that school and district leaders may play in mentoring and retaining Black millennial teachers.

Why Black Teachers?

Three main reasons were cited regarding the importance of focusing on the resilience of Black teachers in education. These included the current and projected demographic disparity, the value of Black teachers in schools, and the value of Black teachers in research. Black teachers tend to be highly concentrated in Title 1 schools and schools where the demographic majority is students of color (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This often leaves non-Title 1 schools with an even wider demographic disparity than Title 1 schools. Nonetheless, 90% of my participants currently were teaching in Title 1, and the one participant who was not currently teaching in Title 1 had spent the majority of their career in Title 1 schools. For participants in my study, teachers worked in schools where the Black teacher population was 4.5%-30% whereas

students of color made up 73%-94% of the student population. 100% of participants worked in schools where the student population was mostly students of color. 6.7% of teachers in America are Black while 52% of students in public schools are students of color. (NCES, 2020; Taie & Goldring, 2014). The demographic disparity seen nationally was visible in the schools where my participants worked.

Recognizing the impact of this disparity on students, researchers have sought to affirm the value of Black teachers in schools and research. Black teachers often serve as role models for Black students (Madkins, 2011; Villegas et al., 2012; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), provide an opportunity for Black students to see themselves represented and reflected in a professional setting (Madkins, 2011), have greater expectations for and perceptions of students of color (Dee, 2005; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Jackson & Kohli, 2016), and are more likely to use culturally relevant and social justice pedagogies in conjunction with school curriculum (Dilworth, 2018; Jackson & Kohli, 2016). The sense of purpose that participants had specifically as Black teachers was narrated by the majority of participants. Participants often desired to be role models for Black students and recognized the weight they carried as a less common racial demographic in schools. Additionally, several participants spoke of having greater expectations for students and wanting to push students of color as a result of non-Black teachers having lessened expectations for students. Two teachers spoke of integration of social justice pedagogies, and three participants spoke of advocating for more culturally relevant instructional materials.

As I consider the experiences and impact of Black teachers, particularly Black millennial teachers, in schools, I would like to draw attention to advocacy on behalf of students of color, Black teachers as supportive to the retention of other Black colleagues, what caused participants to remain, and racism they experienced. I find it interesting that previous literature did not

indicate Black teachers as advocates for students of color as this was notable in my study. 50% of participants specifically spoke of advocating for Black children and families. As previously stated, many participants had a deep sense of purpose and felt a sense of duty as Black teachers. This idea, for some, resulted in them remaining in certain locations out of concern for what might happen if they were not there to support and advocate for students of color in schools where the teaching population was the majority white.

Role of Generational Identity

A conclusion that I believe my study supports is that generational identity does not play as much of a conscious impact as I initially thought upon undertaking the study. When asked about the impact their generational identity had on their experiences as a teacher, only two participants had specific examples beyond being tech-savvy. Many participants did, however, exhibit characteristics of the millennial generation, but adversity in the workplace as a result of their generational identity was not present. I suspect that had participants been more conscious of what specific characteristics differ for millennials, this may have emerged more in my findings.

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) identified teacher attrition rates as highest for novice teachers under 30. This was not the case in my findings as 80% of participants were over the age 30 and persisting in education. The two participants under 30 were most firm in their willingness to remain in education and teach students. Statistics indicate that young and/or novice teachers are most at risk for teacher transfer and attrition (Goldring et al., 2014; Hughes, 2012; Redding & Henry, 2018), therefore I originally contended gaining insight into novice teachers and the millennial generation would yield guidance to better support and retain novice teachers. Due to my sample being largely composed of middle and late professional phase teachers, statistics regarding novice teachers were not aligned.

Despite my own personal experiences which informed my hypothesis, generational diversity was not determined to be a cause of adversity. Common millennial characteristics in personality, skills, leadership and training, and collaboration were evident. The following characteristics were most potent across the majority of participants' personalities and skills that yielded professional competence and efficacy: (a) being tech-savvy, (b) failure not an option, (c) confident and self-assured, (d) willingness to challenge the status quo in society and their organization, (e) prioritizing work-life balance, and (f) more community-focused and comfortable speaking up about injustices (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Hallman, 2017; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013; Smith, 2013). My findings contrast in the areas of multi-tasking, naiveté towards eradication of racial inequities, a sense of entitlement, bringing their entire selves to work, and an expectation of social class diversity more than racial diversity (Brown, 2012; Brown, 2018; Devaney, 2015; Guo et al., 2008; Hallman, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2010; Roberts, 2019; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013; Walker, 2009). Most participants identified technology usage as a strength, but only one participant specifically referred to multitasking. Additionally, participants were well-versed in racial inequities that they and students experienced. Participants did desire racial diversity at their schools and did not discuss social class diversity. They seldom identified specific methods to eradicate the inequities as the focus of data collection instruments was describing their experiences of persisting in education rather than identifying solutions that would better support persistence. Likewise, entitlement and the ability to bring their entire selves to work was not seen in most responses. Participants did not feel eligible to be entitled since they were "othered" in the workplace. Constantly carrying the added weight of Blackness typically co-existed with cautiousness professionally. This cautiousness and hyper-awareness of how others might perceive or react to them because of their

race often disabled the ability to be authentic in the workplace. Several participants described entitlement as a privilege that was only visible in the freedom that white millennial teachers had to “just be.” One finding that I identified that was not apparent in previous studies was that participants identified relatability with students as a result of being millennials. They felt their generational identity gave them an advantage in this area in comparison to other generations. This illuminated another theme I saw. Participants interchanged youthfulness with being a millennial. It is possible that their ability to relate to students is less connected to being a millennial as it is being younger. As this generational cohort continues to age and more of the workforce is a part of Generation Z, it will be interesting to see if millennials continue to see a strong relatability to students.

Other key findings were in the area of millennials’ leadership, training and collaboration preferences. Most participants communicated being relationship-oriented, having expectations for meaningful job training, desiring leadership opportunities, preferring participative leadership, having high expectations for the workplace, positioning leaders as role models, job mobility, and preference for teamwork (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Cogin, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2017; Roberts, 2019; Walker, 2009). Five of 10 participants specifically spoke of a desire to advance in their career in the field of education. Participants were regularly involved in leadership opportunities at the school or district level and described experiences of voicing their opinions within the school setting. High expectations and ideals for the workplace were expressed, and frustration was often narrated when these expectations were not met. Generally, participants had high expectations for themselves as well. When these expectations were not met, efficacy lowered and often took an emotional toll on some. Relationships with leaders were varied, however the majority of participants described

experiences that demonstrated a comfort voicing concerns to leaders. As previously mentioned, many participants viewed leaders as role models as discussed in aforementioned sections regarding mentorship. I do find it interesting that while participants described the impact of supportive leaders, this did not always yield remaining in that school location with that leader. Job mobility was seen in the majority of participants, as previously discussed. Half of the participants were teaching in the second or third school of their career. The idea that the same level of interaction that social media provides is desired by millennials in the workplace was not supported in my findings. Social media information comes at warp speed and covers a multitude of topics. Participants desired clear guidance from school leaders but often set personal, emotional, and social boundaries between them and the workplace.

Though teachers were relationship-oriented and desired teamwork as it supported efficiency in their roles, collaboration was still an area where participants struggled. Conflict resolution skills appeared weak throughout the description of experiences, so although teachers preferred collaboration, they often lacked a repertoire of beneficial strategies to navigate difficulties in situations with strong interdependence. Adversity as a result of collaborating with others in differing generations was not supported by my findings, however, it is worth noting that questions did not ask participants to identify the generational makeup of their teams. My findings do not support the idea that: (a) tensions with Black teachers in other generations exist (Dilworth, 2018), (b) generational differences with communication were contentious (Roberts, 2017), (c) ageism was prevalent with an expectation of conformity (Brown, 2012; Lutz, 2017; Roberts, 2017), (d) age was a reason for minimal leadership opportunities (Roberts, 2017), nor (e) the existence of typification based on prejudice and stereotypes of millennials (Lutz, 2017). One to three participants may have agreed with the aforementioned ideas, however, none of these ideas

were confirmed by a majority of participants. As previously stated, these findings may have been different had questions been more geared towards asking for participants to consider these specific factors. I did not ask participants to identify the generational makeup of their teams.

Differences are also visible when comparing lived experiences of Black millennial teachers and white millennial teachers. Brown (2018) and Kohli (2018) determined Black millennial teachers are more likely to identify racism as deeply structural and is maintained in schools thus creating a hostile environment that they must navigate. Griffin and Tackie (2016) determined that Black teachers often described the work environment as disrespectful and identified being pigeonholed into certain positions which hindered career advancement. My findings support these ideas. Participants identified many racial issues and inequities they personally experienced or were aware of. These areas included a lack of culturally inclusive and accurate instructional materials, inequities in classroom placements and student discipline, and micro-aggressive interpersonal interactions. One participant specifically spoke of a time they did not receive a leadership opportunity and expressed that they felt race and/or implicit bias was the cause. Other participants did not identify as being pigeonholed; however, they did feel that they often had to work harder to be just as good as same-age white teachers in their schools. Researchers have affirmed that while white millennials have knowledge of racism and injustice, Black millennial teachers must encounter racism and oppression personally when navigating the work environment (Brown, 2019; Dilworth, 2018; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Kohli, 2019). Black teachers predominantly experience covert racial micro-aggressions which results in the racial-generational demographic feeling marginalized (Brown, 2019; Griffin & Tackie, 2016). While most participants realized that they did not have access to all the same opportunities or supports as white counterparts and described micro-aggressive situations, this was not the case for a small

population of participants. While participants were bothered by what they experienced in their environment as it pertains to race, they did not indicate that this resulted in enduring conflict with others as determined by Brown (2019). Participants seemed to exist and continue to collaborate with those that were micro-aggressive. Additionally, Brown (2012) contended a major theme for Black millennials was the desire for organizations to become more familiar with their characteristics as a racial-generational demographic. Participants did not identify that they wished their organizations made any adjustments based on their racial-generational demographic. They seemed aware of the differences they had to experience and kept persisting. Considering the interplay of both the racial and generational identity of participants in my findings, racial identity had more of an impact on the experiences than generation. Current literature on Black teachers has not focused on how generational identity may impact racial identity and experience for in-service teachers nor has research been conducted comparing workplace experiences of Black millennial teachers to Black teachers in other generational cohorts. While current literature identifies micro-aggression as a common component of the terrain Black teachers must navigate, a gap is visible in the description of its impact on teachers' retention. Racism in the workplace was identified as part of the environment but Black teachers did not identify it as a threat to their persistence. Additionally, it is worth noting that the one participant who stated that they did not experience any racism in the workplace worked in a school with the highest population of Black teachers when compared with other participants. This participant also worked in a school where the principal or assistant principal has been Black during the entire time they have worked there. For this reason, my findings point to the idea that Black colleagues may serve as protective factors for the resilience of Black millennial teachers, as racism was less visible in the school with a higher proportion of Black teachers. Finally, class

placements and behavior management was a notable concern for participants. The majority of participants noticed inequities in how students were placed into their classrooms, and they often noticed receiving more Black students than others and/or receiving less white children in their classrooms. Griffin and Tackie (2016) did identify this trend of Black teachers as disciplinarians in their findings, though I did not find it as salient in other studies. My findings confirm different behavior management expectations for Black millennial teachers when compared to white millennial teachers. I believe the aforementioned comparisons and contrasts from current empirical literature have several implications. These will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Implications

The following section identifies implications and recommendations based on the findings of the study. These findings have many actionable theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. Implications and recommendations are provided in the following areas: (a) terms and definitions by resilience theorists, (b) retention definitions by researchers, (c) relationship-orientation, recruitment, and retention, and (d) recommendations for district and school leaders.

Theoretical Implications

Resilience theory and teacher resilience theory both tout resilience as a systematic interplay of supports that are utilized to navigate and overcome adversity (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Masten, 2014). Recognizing the role of teaching as inherently adverse, investigation of resilience has affirmed retention as a by-product (Gu & Day, 2007). Based on the findings of my study, I believe there are three theoretical implications for resilience and teacher resilience theorists. These implications are in the areas of definitions for resilience, potency of certain protective factors, and the fluidity of factors as protective and risks. Recommendations are provided based on these implications.

Much of resilience research and teacher resilience research has centered around identifying the specific protective and risk factors present in individuals and their surroundings. Researchers then explore how these factors impact the lived experiences of those being studied. Based on my findings, the first implication is that this idea may be too broad and simplistic. All participants in my study can be described as resilient, however their career experiences indicate that resilient individuals may still transfer schools, change roles in education, and/or leave the profession. Resilience is contextual, fragile, and unstable (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Masten, 2014). As I analyzed the lived experiences of my participants, I wrestled with whether one's designation of being resilient should automatically be removed solely because they leave the profession or a school. Can resilience co-exist with attrition? For this reason, as teacher resilience theorists continue expanding the field, I believe terms and criteria that capture resilience as a system should shift by removing retention to the profession as needing to co-exist with demonstration of resilience. All participants in my study can be described as resilient despite the majority having histories of leaving schools and/or desiring to leave the classroom but remain in education. This would allow an opportunity for educational researchers to follow suit as transferring schools is currently counted as having the same detrimental impact as an individual leaving the education profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Redding & Henry, 2018). My research findings indicate that Black educators whether classroom teachers, school leaders, or colleagues to other Black teachers support retention of this racial demographic in education, therefore it is imperative to detach the label of resilience from remaining in the same school and position for individuals, specifically Black and/or Black millennial teachers.

The second theoretical implication is that though theorists have identified numerous protective and risk factors in the experiences of resilient individuals and teachers, specifically, certain protective factors remain most potent in individuals. These factors should be identified and elevated in intervention studies for resilience. In Chapter Four I identified all protective and risk factors visible in participant's lived experiences. For the most part, they all could be whittled into the same major categories previously exhibited in studies by teacher resilience theorists: competence, sense of purpose, and relational networks (Benard, 2004; Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007). For this reason, I believe that factors such as racial and generational identity may not have as notable of an impact on whether or not an individual, specifically a teacher, demonstrates resilience. Protective and risk factors may vary based on racial and/or generational demographic, however, resilience is still achieved despite differences in demographics.

Masten (2014) affirmed several models exist for resilience research, and the most common is person-focused models. My study follows the framework for a person-focused model. Considering the similarities between my findings and other resilience studies that did not control for racial-generational demographic, I believe teacher resilience theorists should shift away from this model towards an intervention model that considers which protective factors are most salient and weighted in the experiences of individuals to see how specific interventions mitigate adversity experienced. Rather than focusing on identifying all present factors that individuals must navigate for positive adaptation, it would be beneficial to categorize the protective and risk factors that have the greatest impact on adaptation for teachers specifically. Beltman et al. (2011) identified frequency of protective and risk factors across studies, however the findings did not categorize which factors were more likely to contribute to retention or

attrition. In my findings I found that factors did not have equal weight. Protective and risk factors can be categorized by weight of impact: low, moderate, or high. For example, racism and unfair class placements were risk factors for my participants. However though the majority of participants identified these factors in their experiences, these factors did not appear to be major contributors of maladaptation, or lack of positive adaptation during moderate to high adversity (Masten, 2014).

Similarly, Bobek (2002) identified being a lifelong learner as part of the resilience-building process, while my findings indicate that though resilient individuals described willingness to learn new skills, efficacy in new or old skills has a greater impact on one's resilience. I would not consider being a lifelong learner as essential for the resilience-building process, that it may be visible in lived experiences. Moving towards intervention studies rather than person-focused models will yield more targeted support that can be in place to intervene for populations of individuals most at-risk for attrition. Pure identification of protective and risk factors in teachers' experiences may create false starts by practitioners who place interventions in place solely because of teachers experiencing identified challenges. My findings indicate that protective factors to navigate risk were self-identified, not corporate, therefore it may be implied that lack of understanding of which factors have a weightier impact on resilience and maladaptation for teachers may yield inappropriate implementation of interventions for at-risk populations.

Finally, my third implication is that protective and risk factors are more fluid than currently identified by theorists. Researchers have identified resilience as contextual, fragile, and unstable (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Masten, 2014), however I have not seen theorists recognize the fluidity of factors in the resilience-building process. My findings determined that a

factor may be protective in one school year while it becomes a risk in another. The opposite can also be said. Additionally, the same factor may be experienced as a risk for one individual while it is considered protective for another. Conclusions in resilience and teacher resilience research can often be viewed as formulaic where a specific set of identified factors automatically yield resilience for all. This is not the case. For example, all participants in my study identified a sense of purpose as a major contributor to their persistence. They often utilized this factor to help navigate and overcome challenges, however several participants identified a sense of purpose also manifested in a savior complex that was emotionally draining thus becoming a risk factor and threat to their resilience. Protective and risk factors are not experienced or perceived the same. Several participants in my study taught in the same schools. Though their lived experiences converged at times, more divergence was seen in their navigation of their shared environment to become resilient. For this reason, it is my recommendation that resilience and teacher resilience theorists expand definitions of protective factors, risk factors, and resilience to encompass fluidity of these terms in the resilience building process.

Empirical Implications

Three empirical implications and recommendations can be gleaned from the findings in my study as researchers continue determining ways to address the critical Black teacher shortage and recruit and/or retain Black millennial teachers. These implications and recommendations refer to: (a) redefining retention definitions and focuses, (b) the impact of relationships on recruitment and retention, and (c) teasing out Black millennials as a specific cohort of teachers.

Current studies and findings of teacher retention center on classroom teachers. Retention is seen when teachers remain in the classroom at their schools, whereas transferring to another school is viewed as the same as attrition due to the similar impact that occurs when a teacher

transfers. My findings indicate that redefining and refocusing the aforementioned distinctions may shift how the Black teacher shortage is viewed. Career advancement, seeking leadership opportunities, and job mobility are common characteristics for millennials (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Cogin, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Walker, 2009). Additionally, the majority of participants were in the middle year professional phase of their career, which Gu and Day (2007) affirmed, this phase is typically when teachers begin to consider the next direction of their professional life. This was also evident in my findings. Participants were involved in leadership at their schools and desired participative leadership experiences where they had an active hand in decisions being made in the school or district. At the time of the study, two participants were actively seeking administrator positions while others spoke of advancing in the field in the near future.

All participants demonstrated a strong commitment to the profession as being driven by a sense of purpose, pertaining to student success, was visible in all experiences. Participants' strong sense of purpose enabled them to become and remain resilient. Based on current definitions of teacher retention, all participants in my study, though meeting criteria to be resilient, will not meet the criteria to be identified as retained in the profession. As a result, their voices and experiences will be mislabeled or go missing in empirical literature despite being ripe to describe their protective and risk factors that yielded persistence in the field. Research has determined that those who transfer schools leave an undeniable impact on the schools they leave. Based on my findings that show Black colleagues and leaders had a notable impact on a Black millennial teacher's retention, mobility does not have the same detrimental impact when considering how Black educators help Black teachers remain in the profession overall. Broadening the view of criteria for retention and attrition in the literature ensures Black teachers

who persist in the field, despite position or location mobility, continue to have their voices included in empirical literature as a means of informing researchers and practitioners of potential factors that may impact minimizing the Black teacher shortage.

The second implication is the role of relationships on recruitment and retention. Millennials are commonly known for being more relationship-oriented when compared to other generational cohorts (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Cogin, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2017; Roberts, 2019; Walker, 2009). This was visible in the results of my study. My findings support that connection to Black educators was supportive in the resilience and retention of my participants in the field of education. The participant who taught at a school with the highest percentage of Black teachers declared they had not had any experiences with racism while racism was pervasive in the experiences of the majority of participants. Four participants were currently in schools with Black principals and satisfaction at their locations was identified in contrast to other participants. One participant identified safety and support they felt from collaborating with Black colleagues while another participant narrated regularly taking actions to ensure the persistence of other new Black teachers on their team.

Additionally, mentorship was salient in participants' experiences. Though three participants identified having assigned mentors who were helpful when they began working in the school, those participants who had mentors, specifically Black leaders as mentors, often narrated the most long-term professional commitment. For this reason, I recommend further investigation of the potential impact of relationship-oriented recruitment and retention to support Black teachers, specifically Black millennial teachers. Previous research findings indicate that methods used to recruit Black teachers are archaic and insufficient (Dilworth, 2018), therefore as researchers continue to determine what interventions will fill the gap in the teaching workforce

for this racial demographic, exploration of the role of relationship-oriented interventions will be key.

Finally at the time of this study, minimal studies were available on Black millennial in-service teachers. Studies were either focused on Black teachers or millennial teachers, not both. My findings support that the co-existence of racial and generational demographics render Black millennials and white millennials as having stark contrasts when viewing the work environment and racism. Though racism was experienced by Black millennial teachers, it did not have a notable impact that appeared to move teachers towards attrition. Nonetheless, in a time of typifying generations and rapid, surface-level interventions in hopes of increasing teacher retention, researchers and practitioners need to be aware of the differences of these cohorts to understand their lived experiences and implications for practitioners in the educational field.

Practical Implications

Based on the findings of my study, I have identified four practical implications and recommendations that are applicable to a variety of stakeholders including human resources professionals, school district leaders, and school leaders. These implications and recommendations apply to: (a) capitalizing on relationship-orientation to retain Black educators, (b) a word of caution for initiatives involving high collegial interdependence, (c) the role of implicit and explicit bias in Black millennial teachers' job satisfaction, and (d) consideration for matching teachers to school placements.

As previously mentioned, my findings indicate that Black millennial teachers are relationship-oriented and feel a sense of safety and support from other Black educators. Together, I believe these factors may be powerful in enabling this at-risk population of teachers to persist in education and remain in the field. While districts may consider the utility of their

current mentoring programs to address this implication, teachers as assigned mentors were not as impactful as mentors who were leaders in the school or district. School divisions may consider a mentor-mentee program that seeks to pair Black millennial teachers with Black leaders in the school district. This may include Black school principals, school assistant principals, instructional coaches, human resource professionals, etc. Pairing Black millennial teachers with professors in nearby colleges may also be supportive as two participants indicated being mentored by leaders at the collegiate level. Most participants identified Black leaders as mentors, however, one participant did identify a mentor who was non-Black, therefore pairing a Black millennial teacher with a non-Black leader may also support retention. Participants who had school or district leaders as mentors often heeded advice provided by mentors when they were at a point of distress or frustration in their career. Additionally, it may be supportive to facilitate group mentorship between Black leaders and Black millennial teachers as a recruitment and retention intervention, as some participants indicated feeling supported by Black colleagues. One participant indicated that attending a focus group with other Black millennial teachers to discuss experiences was beneficial to their well-being and feeling less “othered.” Finally, it is imperative that leaders allow Black millennial teachers to opt-in to these opportunities, as two participants did express too much emphasis is placed on race, and one participant avoided meetings where racial inequity or equity was elevated as a topic of discussion.

Another practical implication pertains to the role of biases of school leaders on the experiences of Black millennial teachers. Career advancement and leadership opportunities have been determined to be desired by millennial teachers (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Guo et al., 2008; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Walker, 2009), and my findings support this. It is reasonable to conclude that lack of leadership opportunities and career advancement will impact

the retention of Black millennial teachers in the field of education. The majority of participants were conscious that their racial identity often did not afford them opportunities that their same-generation white counterparts received automatically. Participants described a racially hostile environment at times as they narrated cautiously navigating interpersonal experiences by trying not to affirm negative stereotypes about Black people. Many participants identified having to manage their tones and communication to not be perceived angry or hostile while white teachers were free to speak as they chose.

One participant identified a specific situation where they felt implicit bias played a role in them not receiving a leadership opportunity as a white teacher with a similar resume. Though racism was not described as a reason for wanting to leave the profession, my findings indicate that if participants missed leadership opportunities or career advancement as a result of racism, this may be a reason to transfer schools or leave the profession. For this reason, district and school leaders should consider equity audits at every school, particularly those with Black millennial teachers, to extract specific areas where inequities are directly impacting the well-being of students and teachers. Equity audits are audit processes that identify and develop specific strategies to address inequities within the context of a school. Skrla et al. (2004) recommended auditing of systemic equities can be categorized into three categories- teacher quality equity, programmatic equity, and achievement equity, among others. Given participants' narration of the role of implicit bias, it is possible that school leaders and educators may be unaware of how their biases are impacting others, therefore an objective equity audit enables the illumination of how biases and racism may be showing up in the context of schools. Unearthing these specific areas will support district leaders in supporting school leaders in addressing and eradicating long standing systemic equities within schools.

The third implication and recommendation relates to collaborative learning teams as part of the professional learning communities model in Woodrow County. At the time of the study, all participants' schools utilized collaborative learning teams to create supportive environments among grade level teammates. Previous literature indicates that job dissatisfaction as a result of lack of collaboration was cited as a reason for attrition (Bobek, 2002; Olson, 2000). While my findings do support this idea, the amount of collaboration and lessened autonomy for some participants was reason for considering transfer or attrition. One participant expressed shock at the amount of collaboration that would be expected as it did not align with forecasts of the work environment when compared to teacher pre-service experiences. Another participant described pervasive frustration with being tasked to carry the burden of helping new teammates and leading the work of the team as a result of being in a school with high transience. This participant identified this as a reason to transfer schools. I determined that collegial interdependence, specifically collegial conflict, may be a cause of concern for Black millennial teachers. Participants were often frustrated when collaboration and task completion was thwarted, and strategies to overcome conflict on teams were not as visible. For this reason, district and school leaders should be cautious when expecting high collaboration that is self-guided by teams without supports such as meeting structures and strategies to resolve interpersonal conflict. Providing professional development to support instructional coaches, team leads, and other individuals may ensure collaborative learning teams are better equipped to overcome conflict, minimize tensions and resentment, and create high-performing teams that further add to teachers' individual sense of efficacy and teachers' collective efficacy.

Finally, district and school leaders should capitalize on a sense of purpose as a strong predictor of teacher resilience and retention. Sense of purpose was most salient in participants'

experiences. Participants described being deeply committed to the success of all students, and particularly committed to the success of students of color. Diverging from research that indicates higher attrition rates for teachers in Title 1 schools and/or schools with a school population mostly consisting of students of color (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), participants in my study did not express a desire to leave Title 1 schools or schools with a high student of color population. For this reason, retaining Black teachers in the field, and specifically a school district, may be supported through purposeful school placements during initial hiring and/or the transfer process. Building on an earlier recommendation to use relationship-oriented recruitment, human resources professionals and school leaders should be equipped to quickly build relationships with Black millennial teacher candidates, learn more about them, and connect them to school demographics and environments that they feel purposed to work in. Across all participant experiences, despite adversity faced, commitment through a sense of purpose was the anchor that grounded participants and helped them persist. Considering three participants transferred schools that they felt were not best fits for them and what enabled them to thrive, surveying teacher candidates through conversation or a survey instrument may better enable leaders to place candidates in locations that they will be most committed to.

Delimitations and Limitations

Conscious decisions are made by the researcher when delineating the boundaries of the study. These will be identified as delimitations of the study, whereas boundaries that I did not have control over will be narrated as limitations of the study. Delimitations included the research design and criteria for the sample. Limitations include my own subjectivity and sample limitations that narrowed who enrolled in the study.

Synthesis is the goal of qualitative research as opposed to standardization that yielded generalization (Patton, 2015). A transcendental phenomenological study was selected because it supported me in exploring the essence of lived experiences of Black millennial teachers through descriptions from their perspectives. This design allowed me to add these voices of resilient Black millennial teachers to the literature. As an educator belonging to the specific racial-generational demographic that I studied, I was curious of the experiences of teachers in this concentrated demographic and how they were similar or different from mine. In contrast to other methodologies, transcendental phenomenology allowed me to investigate the experiences of 10 participants across multiple schools and describe the similarities and differences in their experience with the phenomenon of resilience. Recognizing my own bias as a member of this demographic whose career primarily occurred in the same school district, transcendental phenomenology and specifically the Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method provided processes that enabled me to unearth my experiences and set them aside to be present with the experiences of the 10 participants.

Investigating the experiences of Black millennial teachers necessitated specific criteria for enrollment. To ensure participants had this specific racial and generational identity, I used the current definition of Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, para. 3) and current literature on millennials to determine a birth span for millennials (Abrams, 2018; Brown, 2012; Cahil & Sedrak, 2012; Gong et al., 2018; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Maier et al., 2015; Ohmer et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019; Tulgan, 2009; Valenti, 2019; Walker, 2009; Yeaton, 2008). At the time of the study, researchers did not have an agreed upon birth span as some began the cohort's birth at earlier or later years than others. As a result, I identified which years were included in all researchers' definitions which led me to set *any person with a birth year*

1984 through 1994 as criterion to be a millennial. This was my original criteria, however, as enrollment in my study waned after seven weeks, I submitted a modification to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board to expand the age of participants to birth years 1980-1996 and secure additional participants. This widening of the birth span remained in alignment with the boundaries set in current literature.

Additional boundaries were delimited in the area of teaching experience. Searching for demonstration of the phenomenon of resilience, it was imperative that participants had experiences successfully adapting to significant adversity. For this reason, I determined that participants needed to have at least three years of classroom experience. Considering questions that asked participants to consider challenges across their career and narrate supports used to persist, setting a minimum of three years ensured participants had a range of experiences to pull from in their descriptions. Finally, considering the majority of current literature on teacher retention, Black teachers, and/or millennial teachers focuses on general education classroom teachers, I excluded non-classroom positions such as Reading Specialists, coaches, principals as well as special education or ESOL teachers.

Delimitations were in my control, however, several limitations existed for my study that were out of my control. The first limitation was my own subjectivity. As someone included in the very racial-generational demographic I was studying, despite use of the epoche process, it is reasonable to suspect that my subjectivity may have impacted the results. Having known several participants and/or the leaders they worked with, I was often concerned about whether or not I was solely describing their experiences or if I was projecting or interpreting them based on my own. Though this may prove to be a potential limitation to my study, the rationale for selection of my specific methodology and data analysis methods were to mitigate this concern.

Acknowledging the potential for subjectivity and interpretation yielded a great level of awareness as I conducted my research. This enabled me to be reflexive throughout the process, and I believe it yielded keeping my subjectivity in check. As detailed in Chapter Four, I regularly reflected and took steps to ensure I was collecting and analyzing data with a fresh lens.

Additional limitations were in relation to the sample. At the time of recruitment and enrollment of my study, the United States was in the midst of a global pandemic and Woodrow County schools were conducting learning virtually. Many participants were fully virtual for the remainder of the year or had not gone back into the school building as the school division was phasing grade levels back into the building by cohorts. At the time of the study, primary grades (Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd) had moved to concurrent learning. It is my belief that this may have contributed to the majority of participants being teachers in upper elementary grades such as 3rd, 4th, and 5th, therefore the study does not include the perspectives of teachers who may have experienced greater adversity by navigating concurrent instruction and/or many primary teachers.

In addition, site permission was only provided for 67% of the school district's elementary schools which included the majority of the school district's Title 1 schools. 90% of participants enrolled worked in Title 1 schools. The schools that I did not receive site permission from represent an area where participants did not desire to work, therefore it would have been beneficial to my findings to enroll participants in this area to compare and contrast findings across schools and illuminate why participants may have felt this way. Nonetheless, I then reached out to principals who would have to grant permission to conduct the study with their teachers and provide me names of the teachers who qualified. Many principals did not reply to my email, and one principal declined participation because teachers were "very stressed right

now so I am not comfortable asking them.” The sample criterion was already narrow, and Black teachers only make up 11% of the elementary workforce in Woodrow County. These factors substantially narrowed participants who were able to be contacted for enrollment, thus my sample was from a concentrated section of the county with several participants in the same schools. Given the variability of resilience development and the vast differences of school environment from school to school, these findings are not generalizable as reflective of Black millennial teachers’ experiences across the division.

The final limitation was that participants did not know what characterized the millennial generation in comparison to others. This largely influenced participants’ responses on the impact of their generational identity. Participants’ lack of knowledge of these characteristics thwarted their ability to describe the impact of their generational identity, and though I was able to connect some of their experiences with what the research has affirmed are clear millennial characteristics, reliance on this would have let my results to be more interpretive than descriptive. I did read the list of millennial characteristics (see Appendix N) to participants during the interview which enabled some participants to provide a little more insight. This list was compiled from the literature in Chapter Two. Those participants who participated in focus group interviews were given access to read the document before the group interview, however, only one participant identified that they read it. Since participants were mostly unaware of these characteristics, I suspect that led to the generational identity as a diminished theme in the description of their experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the study findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on the study, three recommendations and directions have been identified for future research. With a

goal of identifying protective and risk factors salient in the lived experiences of Black millennial teachers as a means for determining interventions for the recruitment and retention of this demographic, the central research question and sub-questions should remain mostly intact with slight revisions. Recommendations include use of a mixed methods research design, revision of sample criteria to secure greater variety of participants, and conducting a longitudinal study.

As expressed in theoretical implications and recommendations, specific protective factors and risk factors have a weightier impact on resilience development. Appropriately intervening to address the perpetual Black teacher shortage necessitates identification of supports and challenges that have the highest impact on whether they will remain in or leave the profession. Lack of understanding of which factors mitigate risk more than others may yield inappropriate identification and implementation of interventions for at-risk populations. For this reason, future research should focus on categorizing the impact of factors rather than merely identifying factors present in individuals' lived experiences. This can be achieved through a standardized resilience questionnaire where participants identify the impact of specific protective and risk factors using a rating scale. This would enable researchers and practitioners to have more actionable data that indicates where recruitment and retention efforts should be placed. Utilization of a standardized resilience questionnaire would necessitate a mixed methods research design instead of solely using qualitative methods. Both interviews and a resilience questionnaire should be used and will support greater triangulation of data. While journal entries did not yield the majority of data in my findings, I recommend continuing the journal entries with minor revisions as narration of a specific challenge that participants experienced was beneficial in understanding how they individually navigated specific challenges. Focus group interviews often yielded descriptions of similar anecdotes as individual interviews.

Based on my recommendations, I would revise the central research and sub-questions to the following:

- Central question- What are the lived experiences that Black millennial teachers ascribe as *most necessary* for their resilience in Virginia public school elementary settings?
- Sub-question 1- What do Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual protective factors that *provided the highest impact on* their resilience in public school elementary settings?
- Sub-question 2- What do Black millennial teachers cite as individual or contextual risk factors that *yielded the highest adversity* in public school elementary settings?
- Sub-question 3- How does racial or generational identity contribute to protective and or risk factors in the lived experiences of resilient Black millennial teachers?

Language revisions in the central question, sub-question 1, and sub-question 2 reflect the revised research goal of identifying prioritized protective factors and categorizing the impact of factors in the resilience-building process. Revision of the sub-questions should result in language shifts in data collection instruments that ask participants to weigh protective and risk factors in their responses rather than merely identifying them.

Mixed methods designs should allow future research to shift from person-focused models of resilience and align with intervention models. Intervention models of resilience are intervention experiments that test resilience theory by studying targeted interventions provided to moderate risk in vulnerable populations (Masten, 2014). Testing the impact of specific interventions on resilience building for Black millennial teachers will allow practitioners to become more targeted and responsive to the needs of this demographic. Implications of such research would allow practitioners to align recruitment and retention efforts based on findings

from intervention models. Continuing to rely on person-focused models of resilience will continue to render lists of protective and risk factors while shifting to an intervention model will identify protective factors that can be used to mitigate risk and attrition in this at-risk teacher population.

Final recommendations include more longitudinal studies of teacher resilience for Black millennial teachers and expanding sampling criteria. Findings of my study indicated the fluidity of protective and risk factors, as well as factors being dual identified as both risk and protective. Recognizing the contextualization of factors, future researchers should follow participants through longitudinal studies to better understand what contributes to the fluidity of these factors. Longitudinal studies would also allow researchers to track participants' experiences across different professional phases which was a gap in my study. A minimal number of participants were novice teachers. Current literature identifies novice teachers as most at-risk for attrition (Goldring et al., 2014; Hughes, 2012; Redding & Henry, 2018), therefore longitudinal studies of novice teachers as they transition from early to middle professional phase may be supportive. Other considerations for sampling criteria include: (a) extending sites to include more participants in non-Title 1 schools and (b) participants in schools that *do not* use the CLT structure since this had a notable impact on participants' experiences.

Summary

At the commencement of this study, I set out to describe Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience in Virginia public elementary schools as a means to identify factors that enable or inhibit resilience in this at-risk group. Use of a transcendental phenomenological design would support me in identifying the essence of being a resilient Black millennial teacher. I posited unearthing these factors would serve three purposes: (a) add data to

the research literature as no literature exists regarding Black millennial in-service teachers, (b) allow missing voices of resilient Black millennial teachers to be heard, and (c) aid school leaders, district leaders, policymakers, higher education professionals, human resource staff, and more to gain better insight into factors that support retention of Black millennial teachers.

Findings revealed six major themes in the lived experiences of this teacher population. The essence of being and remaining a resilient Black millennial teacher is a never-ending process. Maintaining an intrinsic motivation to persist is driven by a fixed sense of purpose and progressive competency with a strong relational network which requires consistent evaluation and realignment as resilience is both fragile and fluid. The majority of protective and risk factors identified in the study aligned with theoretical literature while new insights were provided on the fluidity of factors as risk and protective. Additionally, findings confirmed previous empirical literature while offering new insights pertaining to this under-studied teaching demographic.

This study has numerous implications, however two “take-aways” that I believe are most important are the fragility of protective and risk factors and the role of relationships for recruitment and retention. Participants’ descriptions of their resilience building process illuminated the contextualization of resilience. Participants often considered specific factors as protective in one season of their career, and then that factor shifted to a risk in another season. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that yielded a year of virtual learning contributed to this illumination of the fluidity of factors. Researchers should continue exploring the fragility of resilience. Shifting from previous literature that posited recruitment and retention efforts be geared towards novice teachers, practitioners are cautioned against assuming that teachers who seem resilient will remain as such, therefore ensuring teachers become and remain resilient should be a perpetual focus for practitioners.

Focusing on ensuring teachers become and remain resilient necessitates strong relationships. Findings of my study indicate millennials' relationship-orientation permeates factors in their resilience development. Key findings indicate that strong, supportive relationships with colleagues, mentors, students, and/or school leaders have the power to enable this teacher population in mitigating risk. As practitioners continue to determine ways to address the critical Black teacher shortage, integration of relationship-building should be at the center of efforts to ensure this population of teachers is both recruited and retained as resilient individuals in the education profession.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 30, 2020

Jameka Jones
James Swezey

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY20-21-138 Black Millennial Elementary Teachers' Self-Perceived Factors of Resilience: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Dear Jameka Jones, James Swezey:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: November 30, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB. These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: SITE APPROVAL

September 3, 2020

Jameka Jones
[REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Jones

The purpose of this letter is to let you know that your request to conduct research in [REDACTED] schools, titled "*Black Millennial Elementary Teachers' Self-Perceived Factors of Resilience: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study*," in [REDACTED] has been reviewed by [REDACTED] leadership.

Your request has been **approved**; you may recruit participants at [REDACTED] Elementary Schools. Lists of the schools can be found here:

[REDACTED] When contacting building administrators, you may want to indicate that your research proposal has gone through the appropriate approval process. Please ensure that all identifying information has been removed in the final reporting of the study. Thank you for your interest in [REDACTED] as a research site, and we wish you success with your study.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT LETTER

[Insert Date]

Dear Prospective Participant:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. The purpose of my research is to better understand the experiences of Black millennial teachers in Virginia public elementary schools and to **describe Black millennial teachers' self-perceived factors of resilience in Virginia public elementary schools**. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

Participation in the study includes (a) a journaling entry (15-20 minutes), (b) a one-on-one recorded interview (60-90 minutes), (c) a recorded focus group interview with other study participants (50-75 minutes), (d) review the transcripts from your interview and your contributions to the focus group for accuracy (15 minutes). Your name and other identifying information will be collected as part of your participation, but this information will remain confidential.

Please participate in this study if you:

- were born between 1980 and 1996,
- self-identify as Black or African American,
- have a minimum of three consecutive years of traditional public school teaching experience as a full-time general education classroom teacher, and
- are currently employed as a classroom teacher in an elementary school in County Public Schools

If you are interested in participating, please complete this screening survey:

<https://forms.gle/2mF6EGAfify9m1oF6> please complete the **screening survey** to help me ensure you meet the criteria for the study. Upon receipt of your screening survey, I will follow-up via email to let you know whether you meet the criteria to enroll in the study.

If selected, you will receive an electronic informed consent document that contains additional information about my research. Please read the informed consent document and electronically sign and submit this document to indicate that you have read the consent information and agree to the terms of the study.

If you choose to participate and complete the study, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card after all data has been submitted.

I am looking forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

Jameka Jones
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: *The Manifestation of Resilience in Black Millennial Teachers and Its Potential Impact on the Black Teacher Shortage*

Principal Investigator: Jameka Jones, doctoral candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Co- Principal Investigator: James Swezey, professor, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be:

- *Millennial*- any person with a birth year 1980 through 1996
- *Black or African American*- a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa including Sub-Saharan Africa and Afro-Caribbean groups
- Have a *minimum of three consecutive years of traditional public school teaching experience* as a general education classroom teacher
- *Currently employed as a classroom teacher* in an elementary school in Woodrow County Public Schools in Virginia

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the factors of resilience that Black millennial teachers in Virginia public elementary schools demonstrate. Recognizing that teacher retention is a by-product of resilience (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Tait, 2008), describing the factors that enable or inhibit the phenomenon of resilience in this high-risk group is imperative to address declining diversification by this demographic and generational cohort in the educational workforce. My central research question is: What are the lived experiences that Black millennial teachers ascribe to their resilience development in public school elementary settings?

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a two question online journaling entry (15-20 minutes). You will describe a recent experience when you encountered a challenge in your workplace and explain how you addressed the challenge. This entry can be done at any time during the study. One entry is required, and you are welcome to submit multiple entries...
2. Participate in an online one-on-one interview that will take 60 - 90 minutes. I will ask you 18 questions about your career experiences and resilience. This interview will be video recorded and transcribed, so I ask that you have your web camera on during the interview.

3. Participate in an online focus group interview that will take 50 to 75 minutes with three to six other participants. All participants are asked to participate in an online focus group interview. The group will discuss their experiences using 6 interview questions about your career experiences and resilience. These interviews will be video recorded and transcribed, so I ask that you have your web camera on during the interview.
4. Review the transcripts from your interview and your contributions to the focus group for accuracy. This process should take approximately 15 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

A study of this nature is beneficial to educators, school divisions, and researchers to gain better understanding of factors that resilient Black millennial teachers ascribe to retention in the profession. This is beneficial since recruitment and retention of this racial and generational demographic is a concern for the U.S. public school workforce.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. I will conduct the interviews online, and in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- All data collected from participants will be stored on a password-locked Google Drive account and external hard drive. This data may be used in future presentations. After this study is completed, the data will be removed from the Google Drive account and solely retained on an external hard drive. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus group discussions will be video recorded and transcribed. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked Google Drive account and external hard drive. This data may be used in future presentations. After this study is completed, the data will be removed from the Google Drive account and solely retained on an external hard drive. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. A \$25 Amazon gift card will be provided by email to each participant at the completion of the study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jameka Jones. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at or . You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, James Swezey, at .

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX E: QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1

1. What is your full (first and last) name?
2. What is the best phone number to reach you at?
3. What is the best email address to reach you at?

Section 2

4. Do you self-identify as Black or African American? YES NO
5. Were you born between 1980 and 1996? YES NO
6. Do you have a minimum of three consecutive years of traditional public school teaching experience as a full-time general education classroom teacher? YES NO
7. Are you currently employed as a general education classroom teacher in an elementary school in Public Schools in Virginia? YES NO

APPENDIX F: JOURNALING PROTOCOL

1. Narrate a recent experience when you encountered a challenge in your workplace. Share what was seen, said, heard, felt, etc. by including:
 - a. What happened?
 - b. Why was this a challenge for you?
 - c. How did you address the challenge?
2. If this occurred again, would you change how you addressed it? Why or why not?

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Career Choice and Adaptation

1. What led you to education as a career choice?
2. What has caused you to stay?

Individual and Contextual Protective Factors

3. What personal strengths or supports have helped you persist in education?
4. What relationships, if any, have helped you persist in education?
5. What support does your school or school district have in place that helps you persist in education?

Individual and Contextual Risk Factors

6. What about your school culture or environment are you finding most challenging right now?
7. What about being a teacher are you personally finding most challenging right now?
8. [Refer to question 6 AND question 7] Why do you think these challenges impact you more than others that may be present?
9. What are some ways that you navigate and overcome these challenges?
10. Since first becoming a teacher, how have your ways of navigating challenges in the workplace changed?

Racial and Generational Identity as a Protective or Risk Factor

11. How do you think being a Black teacher has helped or hindered your experience as a teacher at your school?
12. How do you think being a millennial teacher has helped or hindered your experience as a teacher at your school?

13. Considering both your racial and generational identity together, how does being a Black millennial teacher help or hinder your experience as a teacher at your school?

Themes of Resilience Development for Black Millennial Teachers

14. If you could go back in time and give yourself advice at the start of your educational career, what would you say? Why?

Job Satisfaction and Future Career Outlook

15. What is the likelihood that you will continue as a classroom teacher next year?
16. What do you consider when deciding whether or not to change positions or leave the profession?
17. How long do you see yourself remaining a teacher?

Closing

18. What else would you like to share about your experiences?

APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Individual and Contextual Risk Factors

1. What about your school culture or environment are you finding most challenging right now?
2. What about being a teacher is challenging you personally right now?

Individual and Contextual Protective Factors

3. What are some ways that you navigate and/or overcome the challenges from question 1 or 2?

Racial and Generational Identity as a Protective or Risk Factor

4. Considering both your racial and generational identity together, how does being a Black millennial teacher help or hinder your experience as a teacher at your school?

Themes of Resilience Development for Black Millennial Teachers

5. If you could go back in time to your first day as a teacher, what two tips would you give yourself based on what you have had to navigate in your career? Why?

Closing

6. What else do you want to share about your experience or ask each other?

APPENDIX I: JUST LIKE ME! FOCUS GROUP ACTIVITY

Adapted from *Groups at Work: Strategies and Structures for Professional Learning* (Lipton & Wellman, 2011).

Length of the Activity: 15 minutes

Moderator's Materials: Projectable slides with Just Like Me statements

Participants' Materials: Self-created paper sign that says, "Just Like Me"

Introduce the Purpose of the Activity

Moderator says: "Before we begin, we're going to do an activity called *Just Like Me*.

Since this is the first time we are coming together as a group, it is important for us to develop a safe space to share. To support this, we will use this activity to uncover common experiences and characteristics of the group members."

Explain How the Activity will be Structured

Moderator says: "I will project an interest, characteristic, or experience on my screen. If it applies to you, hold up your 'Just Like Me' sign so we can all see. Take a look at who has their sign up. Click the 'Raise Hand' feature if you want to share out or ask any participants to share out about their experience."

Conduct the Activity

The following are statements that will be projected for this activity:

Personal

- My favorite food is a carb.
- I prefer to vacation somewhere warm.
- I am a pet owner.
- I am the oldest of my siblings.

Professional

- I've taught in the same district for my whole career.
- I have been in education for 4 years or less.
- I sometimes get overwhelmed when things change too quickly.
- I have a love/hate relationship with data.
- I feel more productive when I get to work with a team.

Close the Activity

Moderator says: "So I noticed that we all _____. What else did you all notice about our similarities as a group? You can use the 'Raise Hand' feature if you want to share out or type in the chat. [Allow for participants to share out]. As we move into our focus group discussion for the study, continue thinking about the similarities and differences among us as we share out."

APPENDIX J: AUDIT TRAIL

June 11, 2020	Research proposal submitted to dissertation committee.
June 23, 2020	Proposal defense with dissertation committee via Microsoft Teams. Passed defense. Approval of standardized interview protocols.
June 28, 2020	I completed the application process online to receive site approval from the school district.
July 22, 2020	I received an email requesting additional information about the research.
August 2, 2020	I submitted the additional information requested.
September 3, 2020	I received an approval letter from the superintendent's office to conduct research in two elementary school areas.
September 13, 2020	I submitted my application to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board.
September 21, 2020	The IRB application was returned with recommendations for revisions.
September 29, 2020	I re-submitted my application to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board.
October 5, 2020	The IRB application was returned with recommendations for revisions.
October 10, 2020	I re-submitted my application to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board.
October 30, 2020	The IRB application was returned with recommendations for revisions.
November 8, 2020	I re-submitted my application to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board.
November 24, 2020	The IRB application was returned with recommendations for revisions.
November 24, 2020	I re-submitted my application to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board.
November 30, 2020	IRB approval was granted for the research study.
December 1, 2020	I began recruiting participants by contacting every principal at elementary schools I was granted permission to recruit from. Piloting of data collection methods begins.
December 3, 2020	Enrollment and data collection began.
January 4, 2021- March 2, 2021	Transcription of one-on-one interviews and focus groups.
January 26, 2021	I submitted a modification to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board to enlarge the age of participants to birth years 1980-1996.
February 2, 2021	Approval was granted to modify the criteria for my study, and I subsequently secured the final three participants for my study.

February 2, 2021- March 6, 2021	I sent transcriptions to all participants and received verification of accuracy from 9/10 participants. Amazon gift cards were sent upon receipt of transcript verification.
March 16, 2021- June 24, 2021	Data analyzed and coded for writing using Stevick (1971)-Colaizzi (1973)-Keen (1975) method. Reflexivity was ongoing using the epoche process. Coding frequency charts were created to demonstrate triangulation of data. Thick descriptions written through the theme development process.
July 4, 2021	Provided themes to participants for member checking
July 5, 2021	Begun chapter 5
July 9, 2021	Submitted chapter 4 and chapter 5 to committee chair for expert audit review.

APPENDIX K: FOLLOW UP- DENIAL OF PARTICIPATION

[Insert Date]

Dear [Insert name here]:

Thank you so much for completing the screening survey for my study, *The Manifestation of Resilience in Black Millennial Teachers and Its Potential Impact on the Black Teacher Shortage*. I am greatly appreciative of your time and willingness to participate in the study.

A limited number of participants are needed for this study. Unfortunately, I am writing to inform you that you **have not** been selected to participate in this study.

Thank you again for your willingness to join me in researching this topic and adding more data to the literature on resilience in Black millennial teachers. If you have any questions or comments for me, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Jameka Jones
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX L: FOLLOW UP- ACCEPTANCE OF PARTICIPANT

[Insert Date]

Dear [Insert name here]:

Thank you so much for completing the screening survey for my study, *The Manifestation of Resilience in Black Millennial Teachers and Its Potential Impact on the Black Teacher Shortage*. I am greatly appreciative of your time and willingness to participate in the study.

I am writing to inform you that you ***have*** been selected to participate in this study! I am eager to hear your experiences as a Black millennial teacher.

As a reminder, participation in the study includes **(a) a journaling entry, (b) a one-on-one recorded interview, (c) a focus group interview with other study participants, and (d) reviewing interview transcripts for accuracy.**

Here are next steps in the study:

1. Read the informed consent form here [<https://forms.gle/Lb5T1xqGMiFnhsWv6>]. If you agree to the terms of the study, please electronically sign and submit the form.
2. To maintain confidentiality during and after the study, I will assign you a pseudonym. After receiving your data, I will replace any identifiers with your pseudonym.
3. You can submit your online journal entry any time, once I have received your electronically-signed informed consent form. Please use this link [<https://forms.gle/BE2nyernbbFtQdqt8>] to read the instructions for submitting and completing a journal entry.
4. Please use this link [<https://forms.gle/QDEPhjHaEEFuGJQ6A>] to sign up for a one-on-one interview.
5. Multiple times will be provided for participants to join a focus group interview. Please use this [<https://forms.gle/rEjCXTkKrV2U97a3A>] link to sign up for the time that works best for you. A calendar invite with Zoom information will be provided to you prior to the interview.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact me at

Sincerely,

Jameka Jones
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX M: CODING FREQUENCY CHART BY THEME

Theme 1: Sense of purpose as a global positioning system (GPS).

Data Collection Themes	Categories	Codes
Sense of Purpose (Focus Group)	Advocacy	Supporting others
	Purpose and calling	Called to Title 1, seeing students' growth, self-efficacy (non covid), sense of purpose,
Sense of Purpose (Interviews)	Advocacy	Fighting for equity and equality
	Career advancement or position change (including reasons for it)	Career advancement
	Impact of school community	Satisfied at current location
	Purpose and calling	Always wanted to be a teacher, called to position/location, called to Title 1, Focus on the end result to get through tough times, Reasons to stay, Relationships with students and families, Seeing students' growth, sense of purpose, supporting others, wanting to teach families/siblings

Theme 2: Ebbs and flows of self-efficacy (Professional competence) as the *fuel in the tank*

Data Collection Themes	Sub-Theme	Categories	Codes
Ebbs and flows of self-efficacy (Focus Group)	<i>Protective Factor-Self-Efficacy & Professional Competence</i>	Conflict with families	Setting boundaries with students and families (non covid)
		Lessons learned through challenges	(Learning) assertiveness, becoming more patient, becoming more realistic, focus less on others'

Ebbs and flows of self-efficacy (Interview)	<i>Risk Factor-</i> Threats on Self-Efficacy & Professional Competence		opinions and thoughts, learn through challenges, spirituality and faith
		Personality and/or skills	Problem-solver and/or innovative, assertiveness,
		Work-life boundaries or toll of the workload	"Have to prove something," fatherhood to force boundaries, Work-life boundaries,
		Career advancement or position change (including reasons for it)	Second guessing teaching as a career
		Work-life boundaries or toll of the workload	Work-life boundaries (non covid)
	<i>Protective Factor-</i> Self-Efficacy & Professional Competence		
		Impact of school community	Satisfied at current location, School culture and cohesion (non covid)
		Lessons learned through challenges	Assertive, Comfortable with curriculum, communication, competence, counseling others, determined, emotional intelligence, empathetic, "learning to live in the gray," Learn through challenges, Embracing change, Learn to trust self more, Mental health supports, Problem-solver and/or innovative, Reflecting on challenges, Relationships with students and families, savior complex, Slow down and

		give self grace, Worries less about people's perceptions
	Personality and/or skills	Firm in personality and identity, Optimistic, Patient, Problem-solver and/or innovative, Relationships with students and families, Self awareness, Building efficacy, Thorough when learning new information, determined, will do anything to maintain a good relationship, willing to try new things, "I just want to be an achiever"
	School district supports and PD	School (district) supports (non covid), prefers school-based PD
	Students' families as supports	families
	Technology	Learning technology, technology usage,
	Work-life boundaries or toll of the workload	Work-life balance, boundaries, learning to put boundaries in place,
<i>Risk Factor- Threats on Self-Efficacy & Professional Competence</i>	Behavior management & discipline	Behavior management, challenging students, Gaslighting by colleagues, Helpless with a challenging student, Student behavior, Used to having more control over students' instructional experience
	Career advancement or job/ position change (including reasons for it)	Being responsible for kids' success, Burn out, Career advancement or position change, career challenges,

Ebbs and flows of self-efficacy (Journal)	<i>Protective Factor</i> -Self-Efficacy & Professional Competence	Unfair class placements	Class placements
		Conflict with families	Backlash from families when advocating, Students and families (non covid),
		Impact of school community	School (district) supports (non covid)
		Lessons learned through challenges	Having to learn on the job, Teacher prep... unprepared
		Threats to efficacy	Accountability measures, Bad teaching experience, consumed by focusing on other people (non covid), Mental health concerns, insecurity, dissatisfaction with education, Skewed data and accountability through data, Triggered by idea of being seen as mean
	<i>Risk Factor</i> -Threats on Self-Efficacy & Professional Competence	Work-life boundaries or toll of the workload	Work-life balance (emotional), work-life balance,
		Lessons learned through challenges	Learn through challenges, Spirituality and faith
		Personality and/or skills	Calm and positive despite being challenged, Meekness (Strength under control)
		Relationships with students and families	Building relationships, tough conversations, positive relationships with students
		Behavior management & discipline	Behavior management

	Conflict with families	Navigating communication with families
	Unfair class placements	Class placements

Theme 3: Relationships for reassurance and reinforcement

Data Collection Themes	Categories	Codes
Relational networks (Focus Group)	Family and Friends as support	Family as support, Spouse as an educator is supportive
	Mentors as support	Mentors
	Colleagues as supports	Supportive colleagues, value of a collaborative team and delegated responsibility
Relational networks (Interview)	Family and Friends as support	Friendships outside of school, Family as support,
	Mentors as support	Mentors
	Colleagues as supports	Supportive colleagues, Comfort in staying at same location despite craziness, feedback yielded efficacy

Theme 4: Oscillation of collegial interdependence

Data Collection Themes	Categories	Codes
Collegial interdependency (Focus group)	Collaborating with school community	Everyone's voice not heard
	Collegial conflict	Forced self-sufficiency, dealing with conflict,
	Interdependence and autonomy	Tension of collaboration and autonomy, shared responsibility, new team
	Personality and/or skills	Mediator, personalization of others' struggles,

Collegial interdependency (Interview)	Relationship with school/district leaders	School leadership changes, Impact of strained relationship with principal
	Collaborating with school community	Collaboration and community, Connected by negative experiences, Preferences for school community & leadership, school district professional development, Disunity and school culture, Managing people's perceptions of her, supporting others, toxic positivity, Unbalanced support in school environment
	Collegial conflict	Characteristics of a poor work environment for her, dealing with conflict, Fake collaboration and dominant personalities, Feeling violated by teammates, Does not appreciate correction from colleagues, Not heard, cultural differences,
	Interdependence and autonomy	Supportive colleagues, shared responsibility, Collaboration, Departmentalized vs. all subjects, forced self-sufficiency, Impact of teacher and admin turnover, Leading vs. following, Skeptical of others, Tension of collaboration and autonomy, Train the trainer model, unprepared for high collaboration
	Personality and/or skills	Preference for collaboration with school colleagues, Personalization of others' struggles, Mediator, Managing people's perceptions of her
	Relationship with school/district leaders	More opportunities to grow under her current leadership, No micromanaging, Betrayal and/or lack of support from school principal, Disrespected by school leader, Expectations of leaders,

		Lack of support and affirmation from principal, Leadership opportunities indicate being trustworthy by your admin, Leadership preferences- Frustration with lack of input, Tumultuous relationship with principal, impacted by teacher and admin turnover
	Work-life boundaries or toll of the workload	Work-life balance (social), boundaries as team lead
Collegial interdependency (Journal)	Collegial conflict	Challenged by lack of fairness, Feels misunderstood, navigating conflict, regrets apologizing, Supporting others, personalization of others' struggles
	Interdependence and autonomy	Tension of collaboration and autonomy,
	Relationship with school/district leaders	Expectations of leaders, tumultuous relationship with principal

Theme 5: COVID-19 as a cautionary tale: Fragility and contextualization of resilience due to impact on self-efficacy

Data Collection Themes	Categories	Codes
COVID-19 Virtual Learning and Fragility of Resilience (Focus Group)	Conflict with families	Students and families during COVID, family expectations
	Impact of school community	Lack of clarity, School culture and cohesion, disconnected from colleagues
	Threats to efficacy	Second-guessing capabilities, student work effort/lack of accountability, loss of control,
	Work-life boundaries or toll of the workload	Increased workload, implementing boundaries

COVID-19 Virtual Learning and Fragility of Resilience (Interview)	Conflict with families	Students and families during COVID, family expectations, lack of support from families, having to parent through a screen
	Impact of school community	Lack of clarity and communication, collegial conflict, emotionally disregarded
	Threats to efficacy	Loss of control, Second-guessing capabilities, lowered self-efficacy,
	Work-life boundaries or toll of the workload	Increased workload, implementing boundaries, exhaustion, no balance
COVID-19 Virtual Learning and Fragility of Resilience (Journal)	Threats to efficacy	loss of control

Theme 6: Conscious carrying of added weight of Blackness

Data Collection Themes	Categories	Codes
Impact of racial identity (Focus group)	Added roles for Black teachers	Added roles for Black teachers
	Advocacy	Advocate for Black people (teachers, students, families), Advocating for inclusive instruction
	Behavior management & discipline	Different ways of managing behavior
	Benefits of Black educators	Benefit of Black leaders, Black leaders as safe spaces for support, Black principals as mentors and advocates, Cultural influence of collegial relationships, Sought out Black leadership, Preferences for school community & leadership
	Differing opportunities & expectations compared to white teachers	White counterparts given the benefit of the doubt, White millennials entitled and unaware of it, White voices are prioritized over hers

Impact of racial identity (Interview)	Fighting against stereotypes in interpersonal interactions	Communication while Black, managing others' perceptions of them, feeling "othered"
	Purpose and calling	Sense of purpose, desiring to be positive representation
	Advocacy	Advocate for Black people (teachers, students, families)
	Behavior management & discipline	Different accountability based on student racial demographic
	Benefits of Black educators	Benefits of Black teachers, Black leaders as safe spaces for support, Collaboration with Black colleagues, Sought diversity in the workplace,
	Differing opportunities & expectations compared to white teachers	Entitlement, Freedom later than white teachers (regardless of generation), lack of freedom, Only worked with when deemed useful, Loss of opportunities, White millennials' freedom, White teachers more likely to be heard
	Fighting against stereotypes in interpersonal interactions	Communication while Black, managing others' perceptions of them, feeling "othered", People's perceptions because of their Blackness, avoids situations related to race
	Purpose and calling	Personalization of others' struggles, sense of purpose, desiring to be positive representation, preference for Title 1
	Racism	Viewed as competition due to racial or generational identity, microaggressions, racism from families (black and white),
	Unfair class placements	Noticeable disparities in class

Impact of racial identity (Journal)	Advocacy	placements such as receiving majority Black students
	Fighting against stereotypes in interpersonal interactions	Advocate for Black people (teachers, students, families)
	Racism	managing others' perceptions of them, feeling "othered", racism from families (black and white)

APPENDIX N: LIST OF MILLENNIAL CHARACTERISTICS READ IN INTERVIEWS

Characteristics of Millennials		
★ Prefer authoritative, participative leadership	★ Digital natives	★ Bring their entire selves to work
★ See their leaders of role models	★ Expect electronic communication as the primary method of communication	★ Less likely to compartmentalize themselves and their views
★ Seek career advancement and leadership opportunities from leaders	★ Used to instant gratification	★ Integrate their personal values in everything they do
★ Desire opportunities to collaborate	★ Desire constant feedback on job performance	★ More community-focused
★ High levels of communication in the workplace (like social media allows)	★ More inclusive and open to diversity	★ Speak up about perceived injustice
★ Highly expressive and communicative	★ More relationship-oriented	★ Demonstrate activism
★ Expect e-learning opportunities	★ Less likely to see standard-based reform and accountability measures as a threat or risk to their perseverance	★ Expect diversity.. View social class more significant than race... Aware of inequalities of society
★ Desire to be trained on the job	★ More frustrated with lack of collaboration and communication	★ Comfortable discussing social issues and injustice
★ Expect that leaders get to know them and build a relationship with them	★ Less motivated by title and statuses	★ Naivete towards practical eradication of racial inequities
★ Have high expectations for the workplace and highly disappointed when they are not met	★ Ambitious, determined, and goal-oriented	★ Creative problem-solvers... multitaskers
★ Want to please their bosses	★ Failure is not an option	★ Entrepreneurial
★ Want opportunities to help make decisions	★ Job mobility is more common independent of job satisfaction	★ Confident
	★ Work life balance is a priority	★ Self-assured
		★ Independent thinkers... free agency
		★ Image-driven
		★ Sense of entitlement