INTERCHANGEABLE OPPRESSION: BLACK FEMALE SCHOOL COUNSELORS’ EXPERIENCES WITH BLACK ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Sonya June Hicks

Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education, Indiana University

August 2021
DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to the Black female educators who strive daily to nurture, protect, and inspire Black girls to achieve, both individually and collectively.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I first thank God, and my Lord Jesus Christ for granting me the mental and physical strength to complete this project.

To my family. First, my dear, loving, and amazing husband. I thank you for you for providing me unending support, encouragement, inspiration, and love throughout this PhD journey. I love you John…We did this together.

Next, to my children. You inspire me to be the woman God wants me to be. You give me life, and you are Gifts from God that I am ever thankful for. Keep making me proud and be the individuals God wants you to be. I love you, Jillian (Javonte), and Matthew.

To my loving parents. I thank my parents “James” Herman Bond and Ola June Bond (Jones) for giving me life and instilling in me God’s principles of love and faithfulness. Your words of wisdom seasoned with love have sustained me and given me the fortitude to achieve. I love and miss you Daddy, and I love you Momma.

To my siblings. Roscoe (Lavern), Sharon, Letitia, and Ramona (Randy “Tac”). Thank you all for being there for me throughout my life, always looking out for me, and being the wonderful people you are. Thank you also for supporting our parents as they entered the later stages of life. I love you all. A special word to my late sister Ramona, who left us too soon. I miss you so, and you are forever in my thoughts.

To my nieces, nephews, and grand nieces and nephews. Thank you for being the smart, talented, and outstanding individuals you are. You inspire me more than you know. Love to my nieces and nephews: James “Scoop,” Jerron (Chanel), Elena, Justen
“Buddy” (Tina), Ramone (Salihah), and Roland; along with my “grands” nieces and nephews: Justice Akhil, Ramona, Amir, Alissa, Nehemiah, Aiya, Nadae, Ava, and Josiah.

To my committee, Dr. Tambra Jackson, my chair, along with members Dr. Chalmer Thompson, Dr. Sha’kema Blackmon, and Dr. Crystal Morton. I count it a blessing to have the support of four accomplished Black women. Your wisdom, intellect, and self-awareness both grounded me and motivated me to complete this project. I am forever grateful to each of you for your presence, along with your guidance, and your belief in me to complete this PhD journey.

To the UES Faculty and staff in the Indiana University-Indianapolis School of Education, along with my classmates in UES “Cohort 5.” Keep fighting the good fight and striving to impact the educational experiences of children. I have learned so much from each of you.

To the research participants. I sincerely appreciate your participation in devoting your time and lending your wisdom and experience toward this project. I could not have completed it without you. Many thanks and Blessings to each of you.

Lastly, a special note to my “PhD sisters” Danielle Tate-McMillan and Latosha Rowley. Thank you for your companionship and for being sources of strength and inspiration to me throughout this process. I look forward to witnessing your continued accomplishments in the realms of education and community. May God continue to Bless you and keep you. Remember, we got this!
While much has been written about the work of school counselors in urban schools, there remains a void of information about the unique experiences of Black female school counselors, particularly in relation to their work with Black adolescent girls in the urban middle school space. This qualitative study seeks to illuminate these experiences via the contributions of four Black female school counselors who have worked in this capacity serving Black girls. Three points of inquiry or Research Questions served as guideposts for this study: (1) What are the personal and professional experiences of Black female school counselors in their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools?, (2) What are Black female school counselors’ perspectives on the ways in which they are supported or not supported in working with Black adolescent girls? and, (3) In what ways (if any) does the concept of “mothering” show up in the relationships and counseling practices involving Black female school counselors and Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools?

Thus far, it appears that Black women’s voices and perspectives have been devalued and ignored in research relating to school counseling. To adequately represent the perspectives and experiences of Black women as a marginalized group, I employed a critical hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, along with a Black feminist framework. I engaged the participants in two semi-structured interviews, along with asking them to construct a reflective vision board, serving as a mosaic of their lifeworlds
as school counselors working with Black adolescent girls. These actions, along with a review of literature on the schooling experiences of Black adolescent girls in urban schools enabled me to acquire data leading to seven overarching themes relating to the following: relationships and connections based on culture and conversation, the need for support from decision-makers on programming, the physical and emotional investment in the work, mentoring, and the marginalization of Black women in school spaces. Lastly, I present conclusions and implications for school systems, school administrators, and professional school counselor organizations to aid in establishing effective practices in serving Black female students and enhancing the overall school counseling profession.

Tambra Jackson Ph.D., Chair
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................1
  Problem Statement .........................................................................................................4
  Research Questions .......................................................................................................6
  Rationale ........................................................................................................................6
  Significance ....................................................................................................................7
  Research Objectives .......................................................................................................7
  Assumptions ...................................................................................................................8
  Operational Definitions ...............................................................................................8
  Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought .......................................................12
  Chapter 1 Summary .....................................................................................................14
Chapter 1 Summary .........................................................................................................14

Chapter 2: Review of Literature ........................................................................................16
  Schooling Experiences of Black Adolescent Girls ......................................................17
    Classroom Experiences ..........................................................................................18
    Teacher Expectations .............................................................................................21
    Cultural Stereotyping .............................................................................................22
    Invisibility/Colonized Visibility ............................................................................24
    Discipline Issues ....................................................................................................26
    Racial and Historical Trauma ................................................................................28
  Meeting the Need: The Black Female School Counselor ............................................30
    Leadership ..............................................................................................................31
    Advocacy ...............................................................................................................33
    Collaboration ..........................................................................................................35
    Consultation ............................................................................................................36
    Dispositions, Benefits, and Concerns .....................................................................37
      Mothering ...............................................................................................................37
      Relational Benefits .................................................................................................39
      Concerns ................................................................................................................39
  Summary of Chapter 2 ................................................................................................40

Chapter 3: Methodology ....................................................................................................42
  Research Design ...........................................................................................................42
  The Phenomenological Research Approach ................................................................44
    History ....................................................................................................................44
  Critical Hermeneutical Phenomenology ......................................................................46
  Feasibility of Research Design ....................................................................................48
  The Steps that Led Me Here .......................................................................................49
    Working in Urban Schools .....................................................................................50
    My Experience is Not Enough .............................................................................53
  Data Collection ............................................................................................................53
    The Urban School ..................................................................................................54
  The Participants ..........................................................................................................55
  IRB Approval and Participant Consent .........................................................................56
    Interview Rationale .................................................................................................56
    Interview Protocol .................................................................................................58
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reflective Vision Boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Participants: Myrna, Jade, Beverly, and Ingrid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Myrna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Jade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Beverly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ingrid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Lifeworld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Lived Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Lived Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Lived Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Lived Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Critical Hermeneutical Phenomenology and BFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Stage One: Immersion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Stage Two: Understanding-Identifying First Order Constructs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Stage Three: Abstraction – Identifying Second Order Constructs and Grouping to Create Themes and Sub-themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Stage Four: Synthesis and Theme Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Stage Five: Illuminating and Illustrating the Phenomena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Dependability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Bridging the Gap and Looking Toward Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Researcher Positionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Analysis Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Chapter 4: What We Do and Why We Do It</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Building Relationships and Connecting with Black Girls Through Culture and Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Navigating Throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Learning on the Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>“I Get It”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>We Need Them and They Need Us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Four Key Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>This is Personal: I See Myself in You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Participant Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Reflective Vision Boards: A Mosaic of Experience – Myrna and Jade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Myrna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Jade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Chapter 5: The “How” Behind What We Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Supporting the Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Support vs Demand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Girls Need Mentoring Too ...........................................................................................112
Wise Counsel ..............................................................................................................113
It is Expected, and it Comes Naturally .................................................................115
Being On-call ...........................................................................................................115
Mothering ..................................................................................................................116
I am a Black Female Professional Educator ............................................................118
The Matrix of Domination .......................................................................................119
The Structural Domain of Power ...........................................................................119
The Disciplinary Domain of Power .........................................................................120
The Hegemonic Domain of Power ..........................................................................122
The Interpersonal Domain of Power .......................................................................124
Reflective Vision Boards: A Mosaic of Experience – Beverly and Ingrid ...........126
Beverly ......................................................................................................................126
Ingrid .........................................................................................................................127
Chapter 6: A Pedagogical Experience .....................................................................129
Thematic Connections to Research Questions .......................................................131
Research Question 1 ..............................................................................................131
Research Question 2 ..............................................................................................132
Research Question 3 ..............................................................................................133
It is All Mothering ....................................................................................................134
Thematic Connections to Literature .......................................................................135
Building Relations and Connecting with Black Girls Through Culture and
Conversation .............................................................................................................136
This is Personal: I See Myself in You .....................................................................137
We Need Them and They Need Us ........................................................................138
Supporting the Work ...............................................................................................140
Girls Need Mentoring Too .....................................................................................141
It is Expected, and It Comes Naturally ..................................................................142
I am a Black Female Professional Educator ............................................................145
What Did We Learn? Conclusions and Added Knowledge ....................................148
A Shared Empathy ...................................................................................................150
We See What Others Cannot See .........................................................................151
The Need is Mutual ..................................................................................................152
Our Work is Important, Let Us Do It ......................................................................153
We Mentor, We Mother, We Care .........................................................................153
Black Female Intersectional Oppression ...............................................................155
Summary ..................................................................................................................156
Research Implications .............................................................................................156
System Recommendations ......................................................................................157
Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research .....................................158
Appendices ...............................................................................................................160
Appendix A: Verbal Script for Participant Recruitment ........................................160
Appendix B: Informed Consent ...............................................................................161
Appendix C: Interview Protocol ..............................................................................163
Appendix D: Instructions for Reflective Vision Board Project ...............................164
Appendix E: Myrna’s Reflective Vision Board ......................................................166
Chapter 1: Introduction

As I mature in Black womanhood, reflections of my early life and school experiences begin to hold much deeper meaning. When I was very young, phrases like “Black Power” and “Soul Power” permeated the language of many Black youth. I now see those youth as activists, speaking a unified language of resistance. I am also grateful for the Black female educators I encountered in school. My mother was one of several Black female teachers at my elementary school, as was the school principal. Many of our school activities consisted of student representations of “Black Arts,” which included visual art, literary art, and music performances celebrating Black people. In fact, we often sang the Black National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” at the start of our school assemblies. Essentially, progressing through the “school of life” has allowed me to grasp the impact of those years. I see clearly how along with my family and church, the school community helped shape my life. The Black female educators at school were mother figures to me, and their children were my classmates. Back then, Black educators were generally revered by the community, which gave them credence and authority. They lived on my street or around the corner, they knew my parents, and they got on me if they saw me doing wrong. There was a sense of kinship within the school community.

As a Black female educator, I channel the nurturing spirit of the Black educators from my past. It shows in my interactions with students, evoking contradicting emotions of joy and pain. Joy, in the opportunity to impact the lives of Black children, who in many ways feel like my own. Pain arises when I see the fruit of systemic racism manifest in their lives through poverty, discrimination, and a compromised educational experience. Nonetheless as a Black woman, I feel a natural interest in the school experiences of Black
girls. I share in their marginalized status of being Black and female, being positioned at the bottom of the societal power structure beneath the Black man, the White woman, and the White man who sits at the top (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Collins (2000) describes this phenomenon as intersectional oppression, akin to Cho (2013), Crenshaw (2013), and McCall’s (2013) “intersectionality” that is displayed within social structures including schools. Subsequently, when Black girls (or Black students in general) are systematically discounted within school systems, my belief is that Black female educators generally yearn to nurture and protect them (Jackson, 2021), while equipping them for survival in an unwelcoming society. In speaking, I draw from my personal and professional experiences as a mother and as a Black female educator. I think of my own children in school and ask myself, who was there to look out for them? Notably, the protective spirit of Black female educators (Jackson, 2021) aligns with the mothering practices discussed in Belgrave & Allison (2014) and Collins’ (2000) discussion of “othermothering,” describing mothering practices rooted in African ancestral traditions of community childrearing.

Moreover, schools are now less connected to communities and Black female educators work on a more complex terrain. Schools have heightened disciplinary surveillance and where power dynamics support dominant perspectives and marginalize minoritized groups. In fact, many urban schools resemble what researchers refer to as “gateways to confinement” for many Black youth, who are subjected to covert and overt denigration from White students and staff, resulting in negative school experiences. This phenomenon is alarming to me as a Black educator, and I continuously seek opportunities to uplift students who are academically and socially oppressed.
Furthermore, my role as a school counselor is primarily to assist students in the critical areas of academic, socioemotional, and career development. Recognizing that marginalized students may receive less attention in these areas, I draw from my personal experiences as a marginalized human, as I work with on their behalf. In this light, research avers that Black adolescent girls who experience marginalization benefit most from interacting with school counselors who possess empathy and a shared racial and gendered background of oppression (Hall, et al., 2013). Black female school counselors possess this shared experience with Black adolescent girls and hold insight on the notion of what it means to be a Black woman in America. We can relate to the navigational journey from adolescence to womanhood, along with the roadblocks that are sure to come. Dominant forces may elicit myriad feelings within Black adolescent girls, including inadequacy, being misunderstood and misjudged, along with exposure to adultification, and criminalization.

Consequently, I am moved to intervene and advocate for Black girls, from both a personal and professional stance. I must advocate for students in ways that my fellow White educators may not understand or agree with. I am learning that too often America extracts Black girls from the protection and innocence of childhood. They are catapulted to adulthood without the time and space of adolescence to grow and develop. I question the role of schools in this matter and ask myself where they fit. Importantly, how do school structures support Black girls' transition from childhood to adolescence to adulthood? Who is there to regard every aspect of her identity as precious gifts to the world? Experience tells me that this type of advocacy can be unpopular and result in social and professional isolation by colleagues who do not embrace a similar stance.
Undeniably, the connection between Black women and girls is concrete and at the same time abstract. To some, you are merely helping “those kids” who look like you. However, the connection is deeper than that. Ultimately, some will never understand the spoken and unspoken connections, and simply cannot relate; thus, they devalue the work you do.

Finally, it is relevant to point out that within educational settings, school counselors’ roles are often enigmatic. Their day-to-day activities are varied and obscure to many, including teachers, administrators, and parents. Nonetheless, there is an abundance of scholarly writing on the responsibilities of school counselors, generically, however there are few published works focusing specifically on the work of Black female school counselors. Thus, it appears that Black women’s perspectives have been largely absent from the major discussions of educational research on school counseling.

Subsequently, my research aim is to understand the experiences of Black female school counselors from their perspectives, regarding their work with Black female adolescent girls in urban middle schools. It is my hope to reveal, proclaim, and explicate that which is unique to Black female school counselors, along with how educational structures impact their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools.

**Problem Statement**

Middle school counselors in urban schools provide key services to their students relating to academic, socioemotional, and career development. They work with adolescents who are navigating the eventful transition from childhood to adolescence via the five stages of growth consisting of: identity development, emotional development, social development, cognitive development, and physical and health development (American Psychological Association, 2008). Within these developmental stages,
research has shown that Black adolescent girls encounter issues in school regarding classroom experiences and disparities in disciplinary responses (Morris, 2016), diminished teacher expectations (Fordham, 1993; Haynes et al., 2016; Mayes & Hines, 2014; Steele, 2010), associations with cultural stereotypes (Bryant et al., 2005), feelings of invisibility or over-visibility (Annamma et al., 2016), and the impacts of various forms of trauma (Morris, 2016). Because Black female school counselors share a cultural connection with Black adolescent girls, their relationships with Black girls are significant (Foster, 1993). Collins (2000) posited, that Black women seek to protect and nurture the youth within their communities, while they themselves experience levels of marginalization within the spaces they work and live. As a result, many Black female school counselors take on roles in school settings that provide high levels of support for Black children beyond the general scope of the school counseling role. For example, Black children can benefit from community connections in terms of scholarship and mentoring opportunities, along with employment recommendations, family services, and leadership development activities. Black school counselors not only seek out these connections but provide active support for student involvement. She becomes the school’s source for initiating programming and interventions to enrich the lives of Black children, which requires a significant investment of time and energy.

Furthermore, Black female school counselors can foster a nurturing and mentoring relationship with their students, particularly with Black girls. They likely feel personally and professionally obligated to prepare Black girls for racial and gendered marginalization both in school and in the outside world. Nonetheless, the unique perspectives of Black women are missing from scholarly discussions concerning the
work of school counselors. It appears that their perspectives have been overshadowed by White standards of femininity, motherhood, and stereotypical views of Black women and girls. Furthermore, the experiences of Black female school counselors and their work with Black girls presents an underexplored phenomenon within the school counseling profession. Ignoring or devaluing these experiences suppresses valuable experiential knowledge and can result in non-inclusive professional practices. Thus, the following inquiries shall be addressed in this research project:

**Research Questions**

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black female school counselors in their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools?
2. What are Black female school counselors’ perspectives on the ways in which they are supported or not supported in working with Black adolescent girls?
3. In what ways (if any) does the concept of “mothering” show up in the relationships and counseling practices involving Black female school counselors and Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools?

**Rationale**

The voices and perspectives of Black female school counselors working in urban schools have been marginalized in research by dominant narratives of White feminism and oppressive structures targeting race and gender. Additionally, their experiences remain underexplored and can be useful in adding knowledge to the school counseling profession and naming educational systems that oppress Black women and girls. Furthermore, the complexity of Black female school counselors’ work with Black
adolescent girls is understudied and devalued in terms of personal and professional implications.

**Significance**

The work of the school counselor is key to the success of all students in terms of academic achievement, socioemotional development, and career development. My work as a school counselor often extends beyond those three areas, and there are few published examples of validation. We know from Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) that societal norms of Whiteness are structurally engrained in schools. Similarly, the personal and professional experiences of Black women have been subordinated in scholarly research and professional practice. This research aims to illuminate the unique experiences of Black female school counselors and their work with Black adolescent girls, in hopes of contributing practical knowledge to the school counseling profession.

**Research Objectives**

- to understand the experiences of Black female school counselors and their work with Black female adolescents
- to reveal how school structures may impact the work of school counselors and the educational experiences of Black adolescent girls
- to highlight areas where Black female school counselors are needed in the urban school setting
- to add practical knowledge to the field of school counseling that will enhance the school counseling profession
Assumptions

- Cultural traditions of African women influence the actions and dispositions of Black and African American women and mothers across the Diaspora.

- Black women and girls reside at the intersection of race and gender, resulting in multilayered oppressive experiences.

- The term “Black” and “African American” represent the same racial group, however unless an in-text citation uses the term “African American,” “Black” will be the default term used in this project.

Operational Definitions

- Adultification - This refers to adults’ generalized perception of Black girls less innocent and ands more adult-like than White girls of the same age, without reference to their individual behaviors (Epstein et al., 2017).

- Intersectionality – The origin of the term “intersectionality” is credited to Kimberle Crenshaw and attributed to the oppression experienced by individuals such as Black women who are subjected to multi-layered (racialized and gendered) societal oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw posited that “Race, gender, and other categories of identity are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (p. 1242). Intersectionality couples neatly with the tenets of Black feminist epistemology and theory set forth by Collins (2000). Collins connected intersectionality to knowledge generation asserting that Black women experiences shape, and are shaped by elements of the social organization, including race,
social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and age

- **Lifeworld** – There are varying descriptions of the lifeworld within the realm of phenomenology. Social scientist Edmund Husserl equated the lifeworld to the life experiences of an individual based on reflection, minus any form of interpretation (Husserl, 1970). Winkle-Wagner et al., (2019) expounded upon Jorgen Habermas’ notion of the lifeworld, defining it as the space where individuals develop and cultivate social adaptations, and where “norms, values and cultural activities” (p. 207) reside. Lastly, van Manen (2016) identified the lifeworld as the space “where knowledge speaks through our lived experiences” (p. 46), via van Manen’s four existential themes: (1) *lived space* or spatiality, (2) *lived body* or corporeality, (3) *lived time* or temporality, and (4) *lived human relation* or communality. Essentially, tapping into an individual’s lifeworld or lived experience is key to accomplishing phenomenological research.

- **Marginalization** – Marginalization is the process through which segments of society based on categories including class, gender, or race, to name a few, are excluded from mainstream activity (Given, 2008). Individuals and groups are marginalized based on the value attributed to them by dominant societal structures, impacting sociopolitical involvement and the ability to participate in societal benefits.

- **Matrix of Domination** – The matrix of domination describes the “overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained” (Collins, 2000, p. 246). The matrix is ubiquitous and impacts multiple facets of society including employment, education and schools, housing,
government, and other social institutions. Joseph, et al., (2016) characterized individuals caught in the matrix of domination as having a both/and stance, where “depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed” (p. 15).

- **Middle-Class** – In the United States, the middle-class can be defined as a household income that falls between the lowest 20% and the highest 20% of the nation’s households (Cable News Network, 2020).

- **Othermothers** – Mothers have held centralized roles within African and families and extended families for centuries, and the care of children was not limited to the biological mother (Belgrave & Allison, 2014). Othermothers are women of the extended family, such as grandmothers and aunts, and women classified as “fictive kin” or “individuals who are not related biologically or through marriage but are treated as though they are” (p. 43). Othermothers and fictive kin often serve in the tradition of “othermothering” as educators, church women, neighbors, and others within a network of individuals who cared for, fed, counseled, and disciplined children for the benefit of individual and community survival Collins (2000). They represent women who play mothering roles in the lives of children. Additionally, othermothering or “community mothering,” has been defined “as a form of mothering that is rooted in political activism” (Story, 2014, p. 5) and demonstrates “a committed connection to Black communities, attending to a socially responsible ethic that is imbued with the idea of political activism to the larger Black community” (p. 5-6). Viewed as a social task, Story connected the mothering practices of Black female educators to fostering academic
achievement, racial socialization, and an “ethic of care” in the schooling Black children (Roseboro & Ross, 2009).

- **Outsider-within** – Individuals acquire identities as “outsider-within” when placed in social locations or border spaces marking the boundaries between groups of unequal power (Collins, 2000)

- **Racial Microaggression** – Sue et al., (2007) present an encompassing description of racial microaggressions as follows: “racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (p. 217). Black women experience racial microaggressions in various settings in the form of racial jokes and slurs, and assignments to segregated spaces, which can cause undue stress on the targeted individual (Belgrave & Allison, 2014). Additionally, Hines & Wilmot (2018) refer to these actions as “anti-Black microaggressions” or racial violence resulting in “spirit murder.” Other terms that fall underneath the microaggression umbrella are (1) *microassaults* or verbal attacks based on race, (2) *microinsults* or demeaning and insensitive verbal slights, and (3) *microinvalidations* that exclude, negate, or nullify another individual’s experiences or feelings (Sue et al.).

- **Working-Class** – The working-class in America can be defined as a class of people who work for wages, usually involving manual labor (Merriam-Webster, 2020).
Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought

Because of pervasive racism and societal norms of White supremacy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), Black experiences must be contextualized with frameworks suitable to acknowledge endemic societal racism. As such, Belgrave and Allison (2014) posited that “the methods, frameworks, and theories used to explain Western norms have been erroneously applied to African Americans” (p. 9), leading to deficit views and inauthentic research practices. Furthermore, research on understanding and interpreting the subjective experiences of Black women requires a framework that values Black women’s ways of knowing and making meaning. Research approaches such as phenomenology that regard experience as knowledge are helpful in producing sound research concerning Black women. Phenomenologist Max van Manen viewed the phenomenon of human experience as pedagogical, and that knowledge speaks through an individual’s lifeworld (van Manen, 2016). Thus, research grounded in a Black feminist theoretical framework combined with phenomenological pedagogy is beneficial toward understanding the lifeworld of Black female school counselors. The epistemological tenets that formulate the theoretical framework of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) established by Collins (2000) are as follows.

1. Lived Experience as a Criterion of Meaning – Collins divided “knowing” into two parts: wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom represents the application of knowledge gained from living as a Black woman. Navigating intersectional oppression constituted survival for Black women, and wisdom is knowledge in action. Subsequently, “knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate” (p. 276).
2. The Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims – Collins argued that women seek an autonomy based on connectedness as an essential component of knowledge, and for Black women, “new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and is usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community” (p. 279). Notably, Collins drew from feminist writers of the past, including Ruth Shays’ perspectives on knowledge and validation of truth for enslaved African Americans, June Jordan on the necessity of the active and passive voices of speaker and listener in language, and Zora Neale Hurston’s use of extensive dialogue with the communities she studied and wrote about.

3. The Ethic of Caring – “Talking with the heart,” (p. 281) is an alternative epistemology used by African American women within the ethic of caring. Believing that knowledge is validated through expressiveness, emotion, and empathy, Collins submitted three components of the ethic of care. The first centers on individual uniqueness; African humanist tradition suggests that all humans share a common spirit but are unique in expression. Second, Collins asserted that emotion is displayed in validation of a perspective or belief. Thirdly, Collins placed significance on empathy within the ethic of care because it allows women to see connection with other women, like sharing a secret through a common experience. This results in a connectedness, not unlike the tradition of “call and response,” or a unique way of knowing found in many Black church services. A biblical connection to Collins’s ethic of care is found in Proverbs 23:7, “For as he thinks in is heart, so is he” (The New King James Version), and
for Black women, expressiveness, emotion, and empathy come from the heart.

4. The Ethic of Personal Accountability – BFT asserts that one must be accountable for his or her knowledge claims. Black women validate knowledge claims based on the presentation of the individual’s core belief systems. We want to know, who are you? Do you mean what you say? Can you back up your words? The ethic of personal accountability aligns with Black women’s ways of knowing and wisdom via “lived experience as a criterion for meaning” (p. 285).

**Chapter 1 Summary**

Women in the United States have historically advanced their concerns of marginalization through feminist agendas. However, the traditional feminist movement does not sufficiently capture the concerns of women residing at the intersection of race and gender (Collins, 2000; Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Thus, it is necessary to view the experiences of Black women and girls through a Black feminist epistemology and Black Feminist thought as a theoretical framework. This framework supports my research questions via interpreting and understanding the meaning of Black female school counselors’ experiences, along with how Black female school counselors feel supported professionally within the school setting, and finally, whether the concept of “mothering” may appear in the counseling relationship.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 describes the overall purpose of the study, including its significance, and rationale, along with the theoretical framework that guided the study. Chapter 2 explores bodies of literature relevant to the project along with an analysis of literature supporting the selected theoretical framework. The study’s methodology is described in
Chapter 3, which includes the research design, research sample, setting and data sources. Aspects of trustworthiness and potential limitations of the study are also discussed in Chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 highlight the study’s main findings per data analysis and a presentation of relevant data. Finally, Chapter 6 will include a discussion of the findings via synthesis and phenomenological interpretation of the data, along with research conclusions, professional implications, and recommendations for further research.
In an extensive discussion on the school “pushout” of African American girls, Morris (2016) argued that Black girls are targeted for disciplinary action in disproportionate numbers resulting in removal from school. The American School Counselor Association or ASCA (2019) mandates that as advocates, school counselors play key roles in supporting the socioemotional needs of all students, especially those who are subjected to inequitable school practices. Morris further posited that school pushout and other forms of marginalization stem from the enigmatic positioning of the Black female by society; she is feared, misunderstood, and devalued. The experience transcends age and like Black girls, Black women experience marginalization and intersectional oppression in diverse workspaces, including schools (Collins, 2000; Morris, 2019; Wines et al., 2015). Furthermore, Carter Andrews et al. (2019) averred that “As Black women educators, researchers, and teacher educators, we have occupied and continue to occupy multiple roles within racialized and gendered educational spaces, just like Black girls in K-12 spaces” (p. 7). For this reason, one might conclude that Black female school counselors possess an intimate understanding of the systemic oppression of Black adolescent girls, and a level of empathy that is beneficial to urban middle school counseling programs.

To further explore the experiences of Black female school counselors working with Black girls in urban middle schools, I engaged in a search of academic databases (i.e., EBSCO, ERIC), which yielded sparse results. This dearth of information represents an absence of Black women’s critical perspectives and knowledge toward enhancing the school counseling profession. Additionally, unlike with Black boys, researchers,
advocates, policymakers, and grant funders harbor an unfamiliarity with Black girls’ challenges in school (Crenshaw et al., 2015), which buttresses a “mischaracterization of their attitudes, abilities, achievements, and overall existence” (Carter Andrews et al., 2019, p. 2). Even so, while some literature was found regarding school counselors’ work with Black girls in urban schools, it was framed primarily from an outsider’s perspective as a “how-to” guide for working with Black girls.

Nevertheless, of the fair sampling of literature describing the oppressive climate in urban schools toward Black girls, many of the reported school-driven approaches are designed to “fix” Black children. Evans-Winters (2019) posited that these informal mechanisms "serve to fix the student as opposed to confront socio-economic inequality and racial hierarchies in society, and force students of various racial, ethnic, linguistic, and social class backgrounds to conform to White middle-class cultures in schools” (p. 47-48). As such, the following paragraphs will present a literary discussion on the myriad issues that plague Black adolescent girls in urban schools, followed by a look at the ways Black female school counselors may assist in addressing these issues.

**Schooling Experiences of Black Adolescent Girls**

Adolescence, defined by Berger (2005) is the period of biological, cognitive, and psychosocial transition from childhood to adulthood, and undoubtedly, a time filled vulnerability to the stressors of life betwixt childhood and adulthood. Evans-Winters (2019) re-appropriated the term “at-risk,” using it, along with “high-need,” as terms to describe the adolescent, indicating his or her social, emotional, and academic fragility. For Black adolescent girls, one can also include the term “marginalized.” They reside in a space of the “other,” as a by-product of chattel slavery, being defined by deficit-laden,
essentialist stereotypes that rob them of their innocence and rarely place them in a positive light (Joseph et al., 2016). Consequently, there is an abundance of literature indicating that during the critical time of adolescence, Black girls regularly encounter oppressive experiences related to race and gender in America’s urban schools (Bryant et al., 2005; Joseph et al., 2016), along with a complexity of issues that impact their school experiences. However, I have narrowed the issues to six that are relevant to this study. Black adolescent girls are (1) challenged by hegemonic ideals of femininity in the classroom (Fordham, 1993; Henfield et al., 2008), (2) subjected to low teacher expectations (Thomas et al., 2011; Steele, 2010), (3) subjected to deficit cultural stereotyping (Holcomb-McCoy & Moore-Thomas, 2001; Morris, 2016; Seaton & Carter, 2018), (4) apt to experience invisibility or colonized visibility (Annamma et al., 2016; Fordham; 1993; Haynes et al., 2016; Muhammad & Dixson, 2008), (5) are disproportionally targeted for disciplinary action (Blake et al., 2011; Hines & Wilmoth, 2018; Morris, 2016) and (6) re-experience racial and historical trauma in school spaces (Morris, 2019; Young & Hines, 2018). These topics are substantive, connecting, overlapping, and may appear redundant at times, however contextually, they are all relevant. The following paragraphs contain supporting literature that helps explicate each topic.

**Classroom Experiences.** In an ethnographic study on the academic experiences of male and female students in an urban high school, Fordham (1993) discussed how Black women and girls participate in gender “passing,” where Black females use silence and self-imposed invisibility to gain acceptance based on the male ideal of femininity. In other words, Black women’s femininity has been evaluated from the male perspective
and is generally based on the societal standard of White beauty and femininity (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Joseph et al., 2016). Fordham asserted that because femininity is “norm-referenced to one group—white middle-class Americans, women from social groups who do not share this racial, cultural, or ethnic legacy are compelled to silence or gender passing” (p. 8). Hence, Black girls may hide or disguise their natural femininity to be accepted in school spaces. Fordham further emphasized the salience of gender passing in high achieving Black girls. She described aspects of their being as “phantom-like;” however subdued, their behavior should not be mistaken for acquiescence but a display of defiance to an oppressive expectation. Conversely, Fordham noted that under-achieving Black girls may exhibit intentional high visibility and notoriety in school spaces, often to obtain care and sustenance from peers and significant adults, along with a negative correlation between their standardized test scores and course grades.

A more recent study by Haynes et al. (2016) described how the norms and expectations of White femininity play out in school spaces through markers of credibility, which boil down to “being well behaved, and earning good grades” (p. 385). School settings also are also environments where Black girls display docile behavior and often de-form themselves based on normative constructions of femininity (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). De-forming behavior disables a Black girl’s agency and independence and compromises her dignity. She portrays a shell of herself, striving to meet an unrealistic standard, while striving to maintain her-self. Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2011) discussed how Black girls become “absorbed with fitting into White mainstream values and ideals,” and use “ill-defined models as benchmarks of their ability to successfully navigate the various other challenges they face during their schooling” (p. 203).
pressure to conform results in internalized pressure and perfectionistic tendencies, compounding the burden of intersectional marginalization (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Collins, 2000; Haynes et al., 2016; Mayes & Hines, 2014). Steele (2010) described this experience as “stereotype threat,” which can result in internal stress and negatively impact student performance. Under stereotype threat, students may become overly critical of themselves, preoccupied with both potential failure and others’ perceptions of her merit and right to belong in the educational space. Joseph et al. (2016) supposed that the “right to belong” complex is rooted in in-school segregation practices that places gifted Black girls’ academic identity at odds with their racial identities, making it difficult to feel positive about both.

Accordingly, being the only Black student in class may mean one of two things; people like you because you are unassuming and shield your Blackness, or you are disliked by your teacher and your peers because you are confident and self-assured in your Blackness. Hence, for acceptance, some may adopt a raceless persona (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Day-Vines et al., 2003). It appears that in either case, a Black girl’s personal power is diminished, while a White girl’s personal power is enhanced in either case. As such, Hines & Wilmot (2018) name schools as “a hyperviolent space that manifests itself through microaggressive behaviors and other forms of racial violence” (p. 63). Relatedly, Carter Andrews et al. (2019) asserted that “For many Black girls, schools are toxic, traumatizing places where they receive mixed messages about who and what is valued” (p. 2), and their actions, words, and bodies can be interpreted as threats to hegemonic ideals. Consequently, they experience harsh judgement and “sprit-murder,” which can be found in racist teaching practices, along with a racialized school or
classroom culture, and continuous exposure to curricula rooted in Eurocentric pedagogy (Hines & Wilmot, 2018). Thus, per existing research, Black girls at various achievement levels have developed coping mechanisms to survive in school spaces, in some cases through gender passing, de-forming the self, or tragically, becoming raceless.

**Teacher Expectations.** Adolescence represents the period of biological, cognitive, and psychosocial transition from childhood to adulthood, when youth crave acceptance by others, and school experiences are salient to their well-being (Berger, 2005). They may struggle with Erik Erikson’s fifth stage of identity development, “identity vs role confusion,” that centers on the question “who am I?” (Erikson, 1980). During this stage, adolescents begin to explore independence and participate in role experimentation, in hopes of finding a comfortable identity. I contend that teacher expectations of student behavior and academic performance likely impact students’ identity or self-image. Research has shown for decades that Black males and females regularly encounter deficit perceptions from both teachers and peers in urban schools, stemming from racism, poverty, and a “cultural clash between students and school” (Delpit, 1995, p. 157). Carter Andrews et al. (2019) posited that this clash is generally supported by the construction of intelligence as White property and a myth of Black anti-intellectualism.

Research by Carter Andrews et al. (2019) gave voice to Black high school girls who grappled with the constructions and myths surrounding Black student experiences. They emphasized “…the impossibility of meeting academic and behavioral expectations often predicated on notions of Whiteness” (p. 8). As such, Black female students are regularly exposed to low academic and behavioral expectations from teachers, and most
often receive disciplinary action based on subjective offenses (Blake et al., 2011; Joseph et al., 2016). This treatment facilitates a master narrative that hinges on racist and sexist conditioning that validates the controlling and stereotypical images of Black women in every societal space (Haynes et al., 2016), thus, impairing Black girls’ achievement, weakening their self-image, and stifling their independence.

Furthermore, in examining Black high school girls’ experiences with racism, Joseph et al. (2016) found that discrimination from teachers was salient and manifested through teacher expectations regarding academic achievement and behavior. The participants reported feeling that teachers pervasively did not believe in their success in advanced academic classes. One participant reported, “They automatically expect that I’m going to be disrespectful, that I don’t care about learning” (p. 18). Supporting literature by Collins (2000) indicated that a system that marginalizes Black girls’ ability is unjust and is a byproduct of institutional structures that perpetuate White norms of White male dominance. Ultimately, Black girls in the study perceived that White teachers generally regarded them as destined for failure, and prone to school violations including defiance, dressing inappropriately, and stealing. Though this study was centered on Black girls’ high school experiences, there is extant literature indicating similar school experiences for Black adolescent girls in the general K-12 setting (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Evans-Winters, 2019; Haynes et al., 2016; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Morris, 2016).

**Cultural Stereotyping.** Dubois (1903) referred to Blacks as living doubly conscious as racialized beings in America. Similarly, Black women regularly navigate life in a White- male-dominated world that subjugates Black woman’s appearance,
attitude, and demeanor (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Joseph et al., 2016). Many offenses toward Black adolescent girls center around physical attributes and colonized views of Black women’s personality and demeanor (Bryant et al., 2005). Similarly, the verve or rhythmic expression that Black girls exhibit may be perceived problematic in the school setting and misjudged as overly aggressive (Belgrave & Allison, 2014; Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Additional research noted that Black girls struggle with negative self-perception of body size, skin color, and physical attractiveness (Holcomb-McCoy & Moore-Thomas, 2001; Seaton & Carter, 2018) along with being characterized as highly sexual (Thomas et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Collins’ (2000) notion of society’s master narrative is personified in the “controlling images” that dehumanize Black women. Collins describes several images, however, there are three that resonate with this project. First, is the historical image of the *mammy*, characterized as the self-sacrificing nurturer, or faithful domestic servant. The mammy character supports a racial hierarchy and is “a symbolic function of oppressions of gender and sexuality” (p. 73). This character can be ascribed to a Black woman or a Black adolescent girl, where both her gender and her sexuality are nonexistent. Next is the *matriarch or sapphire*, who is the mammy’s opposite and deemed overly aggressive and emasculative to her male partners. Like the mammy, the matriarch is central to intersectional oppression, as each represent feminine extremes, as in docile vs. contentious. She is perceived by the dominant culture as angry, loud, and contentious. Third, is the *Jezebel*, characterized as a highly sexualized “hoochie,” along with descriptive terms such as “loud” and “hot mammas” (Bryant et al., 2005; Haynes et al., 2016; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Joseph et al., 2016). Also, as Black
adolescent girls experience physical development almost a year earlier on average than their White female peers, they are often regarded as hyper-sexual (Belgrave & Allison, 2014), and subsequently, their bodies are routinely dehumanized through hegemonic lenses birthed during Black enslavement.

Furthermore, positioning Black adolescent girls under the veil of degrading stereotypes hands them a no-win predicament; if they respond in defiance to a negative portrayal, they are assessed as angry, obnoxious, or combative. Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2011) found that Black girls expend physical and emotional energy negotiating the negative stereotypes about Black girls and women passed down historically and perpetuated through modern media. The sad truth is that school structures, including school personnel and school policies, embrace variations of the controlling images ascribed to Black women, creating an unsafe space for Black girls to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally (Collins, 2000; Thomas et al., 2011).

**Invisibility/Colonized Visibility.** The “Invisibility Syndrome Paradigm” as experienced by African American women and girls was presented by Haynes et al. (2016) and is comprised of tenets or “feelings” including: a lack of recognition or acknowledgement, self-doubt about one’s legitimacy, perceived disrespect and compromise of dignity, and an erased identity. Moreover, Black girls’ responses range from silence to outspokenness; they may appear to acquiesce but are subtly defiant (Fordham, 1993). They are also angry, in response to “unquestioned privileges, racial distortions, silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optness” (Lorde, 2007, p. 124). The terms used by Lorde (2007) illustrated Black women’s responses to White women’s belief in their “inherent superiority.” And the
inherent belief impacts females of all ages, often causing teachers to treat Black girls differently than White girls. Evans-Winters, (2019) recalled her own school experiences where White teachers were apathetic toward Black students, and always devoted more attention to White students. Black children were not intentionally educated by White teachers but were merely being schooled. “Teachers were in essence, passive toward our education” (p. 51), meaning that to White teachers, Black children’s racial identity was invisible. Moreover, these microaggressions or microassaults result in Black girls feeling disrespected, alienated, and isolated, while colorblind educational approaches result in invisibility, feeling consistently overlooked and unacknowledged (Annamma et al., 2016; Haynes et al., 2016; Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Sue et al., 2007). These injustices also elicit resistance as in “self-preservation among the Black girls who find themselves in a bind” (Carter Andrews et al., 2019, p. 1).

Furthermore, invisibility can tragically stifle Black girls’ productivity and motivation, causing her to question, why try, or why put forth the effort? The dominant culture disregards her needs; she learns that her presence is not worthy of acknowledgement, and her strengths and accomplishments are not celebrated. Thus, silencing and alienation of Black girls in urban classrooms parallels Collins’ (2000) discussion of Black women’s position as an “outsider within” (p. 12). Relatively speaking, Black girls are “outsiders” within their AP and honors classes, as are Black women in the realm of leadership within business and academia, calling into question whether they should even be there, or who cares what they think? This systemic marginalization in schools makes Black girls feel unseen, often rendering them
disempowered, and isolated Bryant et al. (2005). Indeed, Morris (2016) said it best, “To be ignored is traumatic” (p. 39).

In contrast, Black females may experience colonized visibility as in over-visibility in diverse school spaces (Bryant et al., 2005). Like stereotype threat, over-visibility, or hyper-visibility burdens Black women and girls with the stress of having to perform under heightened scrutiny, being judged by Eurocentric ideals of individuality and competition (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Hackett & Byars, 1996; Muhammad & Dixson, 2008; Rollock, 2007; Steele, 2010; Wines, 2013). Additionally, existing literature validates that both Black women and girls endure invisibility and colonized visibility imposed both socially and systemically. In sum, when Black girls’ presence, actions, and being are constantly unacknowledged, she experiences invisibility. When her presence, actions, and being are magnified and constantly scrutinized negatively, she experiences colonized visibility.

**Discipline Issues.** The complexity of intersectional oppression in school appears exhausting and insurmountable, now with accounts of Black adolescent girls receiving punishment for simply being themselves. For example, The National Women’s Law Center (2019), asserted that Black girls are “dress coded” at a higher level than their White female peers, meaning their appearance too often elicits disciplinary action by school staff. Being dress coded also places Black girls’ bodies under surveillance and assessed for sexual promiscuity. Along with dress, some hairstyles worn by Black girls, such as braids, dreadlocks, and other natural hairstyles are policed and cited as distracting, messy or inappropriate for school standards (Morris, 2016). Notably, Black girls often regard style and appearance as a form of expression that represents her-self
and buttresses her emotional well-being. Not surprisingly, Black girls cry foul and engage in acts of resistance and self-preservation when faced with inequitable school policies, at the risk of reinforcing cultural stereotypes (Carter Andrews, 2019).

Additionally, in her 2016 book, entitled *Pushout*, Monique Morris discussed extensively the phenomenon of removal from school or “pushout” as a disciplinary action. Morris argued that school pushout impacts Black girls of all ages, placing them on a “truncated age continuum” (p. 34), robbing them of their childhood, and subjecting them to the gaze of those in power. They may be punished for not conforming to societal standards of femininity or a misplaced expectation of womanhood. Similarly, Raffele et al. (2003) revealed that most of the reported infractions committed by Black adolescent girls are for subjective offenses, such as disruptive behavior, disrespect, and defiance. The subjective nature of these “infractions” perpetuates White measures of femininity and stereotype Black girls as hostile and hypersexual (Collins, 2004; Fordham, 1993; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Morris, 2019). Furthermore, the over-policing and under-protecting of Black girls creates an “adultification” of Black girls in American schools and presumes them guilty until proved innocent (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Morris, 2019). Adultification characterizes Black girls as assuming a woman’s persona, being held more blamable for their actions because they are expected to “know-better.” They are presumed to need less nurturing, less protection, to be more independent, to know more about adult topics, including sex (Epstein et al., 2017). Nonetheless, the oppressive experiences of Black girls mimic those of Black women (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Morris, 2016), within the matrix of domination (Collins, 2000). Ultimately, the adultification of Black adolescent girls elicits preoccupation by schools with the behavior
and appearance of Black girls, and lesser focus on student academic needs (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012).

**Racial and Historical Trauma.** The institution of slavery left indelible blemishes on Blacks in America, especially on the Black family. Enslavement withdrew the protection that fostered the sacredness of family; male and female partners were forbidden to marry, and children were sold away from their parents during enslavement leading to family disorganization (Frazier, 1939) and structural instability (Belgrave & Allison, 2014). In later years during the 20th century, Frazier (1939) posited that, oppressive economic structures created fissures within African American families; increased reliance on social welfare resulted in the Black family’s failure to develop self-sufficiency. Other researchers blame the “breakdown” of the Black family for the general deterioration of Black communities in America.

As such, Black children have borne the scars of enslavement and racial oppression within the Black community. Economic opportunities, unemployment, and poverty translate to traumatic outcomes for children and impact multiple aspects of their lives. Many Black adolescent girls in urban schools are scarred by the “afterlife of slavery” (Wun, 2015) as in personal trauma including parental neglect, sexual assault, rape, hunger, physical and verbal abuse, and addiction. Moreover, maladaptive classrooms filled with punitive practices and racial and gender bias result in increased toxic stress for Black girls and impacts their learning (Morris, 2019). Over the past few years, awareness of student trauma has increased with the implementation of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) questionnaire throughout many of our nation’s schools. The ACEs questionnaire asks about events or conditions relating to trauma in a student’s...
home and family life, and calculates a score indicating levels of trauma. Notably, Morris (2019) posited that, girls are disproportionately affected by ACEs, and students with higher ACEs scores are prone to learning difficulties and behavioral problems.

Moreover, research shows that Black women and girls experience higher levels of poverty and receive less protection from institutional racism and societal dangers, such as domestic and community violence, and sex-trafficking (Wun, 2015). Subsequently, Wun (2015) appropriately noted that oppressive societal structures along with instances of racism in school categorically produces racial trauma. This increased vulnerability combined with “constant surveillance without recognition” (p. 13) by school staff further exacerbates racial trauma. As such, uniformed and insensitive school discipline policies and classroom practices directed at Black adolescent girls suggest that “Empathy does not apply to her life and narratives” and “her stories disappear and are disavowed” (p. 9).

Furthermore, research indicates that all forms of trauma significantly impact brain function and that internalized stress can stifle mental processing (Hammond, 2014; Morris, 2019). Hammond (2014) posited that stress coupled with perceived racial bias from teachers results in mistrust and academic disengagement in what becomes a maladaptive classroom. Additionally, the harmful impacts of trauma are more prevalent than one might initially think, as Morris (2019) posited that “more than 70 percent of girls in juvenile detention facilities have a history of trauma” (p. 136). Morris also noted that historical trauma is relived over and over in classrooms that “teach to the historical oppression” (p. 66) by promoting Eurocentric histories, interpretations, and contributions as the norm for excellence (Morris, 2016), rendering the Black experience essentially watered-down, largely absent, or completely erased from traditional curricula.
At last, Morris (2019) proposed that relationships with caring adults in school spaces can foster healing of trauma within Black girls. Thus, the relationships held between Black female school counselors and Black girls are likely beneficial in working toward mitigation of trauma-induced mental health. Morris contended that ultimately, if adults want to facilitate healing for Black girls, they must address the need where it is, by paying attention and initiating conversation, as opposed to chiding Black girls for not being where we want them to be. Hammond (2014) agreed, indicating that minimizing threat builds capacity for growth, and weakens the grip of trauma, in that “Relationships exist at the intersection of mind-body. They are the pre-cursor to learning” (p. 45).

Meeting the Need: The Black Female School Counselor

The previous literary discussion on school experiences of Black adolescent girls in urban schools, elicits the question as to how might these issues be addressed? And by whom? The American Psychological Association (APA) Council on Resilience (2008) indicated that educators play key roles in adolescent socioemotional development through the collective culture of strong, high quality and stable neighborhood schools, and programs that promote social empathy. Additionally, the APA stated that African American youth with well-developed emotional competence can mobilize resources, learn new information, acquire new insights, or develop their talents despite negative messages from society. Furthermore, because school counselors assist students in socioemotional development, along with academic and career development (ASCA, 2019), it follows that school counselors are keenly positioned to impact these issues. Additionally, Black female school counselors as educators are uniquely suited to engage in spirit-healing for Black girls experiencing spirit-murder in urban classrooms (Hines &
Wilmot, 2018), or “active care” (Morris, 2019). Moving further, ASCA’s professional themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and consultation will be presented as foci for the school counselor’s role in improving the school experiences of Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools.

**Leadership.** Researchers have found that marginalized students generally benefit from exposure to school staff who understand the racialized experiences that are manifested in urban classrooms (Bryant et al., 2005; Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Mayes & Hines, 2014; Owens et al., 2011). The previous section described many of those experiences, necessitating further discussion on how counselors can lead in finding solutions. One aspect of counselor leadership involves establishing programs that target the needs of culturally diverse students. They can help promote resilience through racial socialization practices (APA, 2008) and lead school-wide exposure to culturally relevant learning activities that reduce academic stress (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Nassar-McMillian et al., 2009). Counselors should also understand how the school climate greatly influences student success and thus, participate in its evaluation from the perspectives of all students, including identifying aspects of multiculturalism (Nassar-McMillian, 2009). Furthermore, counselor leadership is indispensable in unmasking the inequities resulting in student alienation within educational spaces (Blake et al., 2011).

To ameliorate the alienation and other forms of oppression felt by diverse populations, including Black girls, school counselors can facilitate student groups for collective healing, processing experiences, and to combat experiences of isolation (Day-Vines et al., 2003). As such, Collins (2000) posited, that Black women need spaces where they can speak freely and display “resisting objectification as the Other” (p. 111).
Similarly, Carter Andrews et al. (2019) discussed the need for a committed and intentional focus by schools toward supporting and developing programs that foster the overall well-being of Black girls. For example, Black girls benefit from having a space of refuge to both individually, and collectively unpack, share, examine, and make sense of their intersectional experiences that take place both within the school context and outside of school (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Hence school districts and administration should embrace counselors’ leadership as agents of change (West-Olatunji et al., 2010), along with their expertise in development and facilitation of programs targeting Black girls’ needs.

Furthermore, curricula that is void of cultural responsivity impacts academic achievement (Morris 2016), warranting trite references to the “achievement gap,” in relation to Black students. Burkard et al. (2009) gingerly challenged the term’s usage, generalizing how current problems in education stem from social inequality among ethnic/racial and socioeconomic groups. They suggested that school counselors take a systemic approach to increasing academic equity and access to empowering educational opportunities for all students. Mayes and Hines (2014) agreed, recommending that school counseling programs facilitate greater proficiency in college and career development for African American girls, through advisement on appropriate course work and by facilitating a college-going culture that benefits both students and families (Burkard et al., 2009). Notably, Carter Andrews et al. (2019) listened to Black high school girls, who asserted that their schools did not sufficiently prepare them for careers and/or higher education. This concern can be addressed at the middle school level, where school counselors can impact students’ trajectories by eradicating harmful academic tracking
practices that often exclude Black girls and other students of color from rigorous courses and provide them access to personal enrichment opportunities (Burkhard et al., 2009; Mayes & Hines, 2014).

Finally, in schools where students experience high levels of personal trauma, school counselors can lead in establishing a culture of care and healing through promoting mindfulness practices in students (Morris, 2019), such as attentive breathing and mindful body-centering exercises as de-stressors (ASCA, 2019). Notwithstanding, like trauma, mental health issues in Black adolescent girls often goes unaddressed (Carter Andrews et al., 2019), as many urban schools are under resourced and take a triage approach to addressing issues that are not immediately pressing. In these cases, student achievement levels suffer. Rose et al. (2017) sought connections between mental health and educational outcomes using metrics that included depression, self-esteem, school bonding and mastery. Findings revealed an inverse relationship between mental health problems and academic achievement, meaning higher mental health occurrences were connected to lower achievement levels.

Advocacy. School counselors can intervene as social justice advocates when schools fail to support students in areas such as mental health, academic achievement, and trauma ASCA (2019). ASCA’s middle school standards recommend that school counselors identify student’s academic and socioemotional needs and provide prevention and intervention activities that eliminate barriers to student success. Furthermore, West-Olatunji et al. (2010) acknowledged that Black women as school counselors possess an awareness of the marginalized experiences of Black adolescent girls. They recommend “directly challenging administrators who promote policies and practices that are overtly
and covertly non-supportive of all students” (p. 198), ensuring that students’ needs are addressed, and concerns are vocalized. Similarly, school counselors should advocate for increased diversity in cultural content that is reflective of the student population, to enhance the school experience of all students (Henfield et al., 2008).

Furthermore, existing research suggested that societal oppression is salient for Black women in America of all ages. Haynes et al. (2016) posited that “Black girls, like Black women learn to align their (re)actions to femininity standards found in the master narrative of White womanhood” (p. 385). Sue et al. (2007) also asserted that microaggressions, microassaults, or microinvalidations affect Black women of all ages, recommending proactive social justice counseling that supports meaning-making and interpretation of hidden messages found in microaggressions. Consequently, extant research suggests that school counselors who have themselves been targeted for microaggressive acts should be ideally positioned to be advocates and agents of change.

As agents of change, school counselors can disrupt the status quo by being cognizant of their students’ realities, in terms of sociopolitical and economic marginalization (Bemak & Chung, 2005). These realities often represent systemic oppression of minoritized groups that bleeds into educational spaces and contribute to traumatic school experiences and learning disparities. Bemak and Chung (2005) posited that advocacy must include demanding school-wide or system-wide policies that promote academic success for all students, not just some students. Further assertions indicated that school counselors can and should argue against school policies that disparage students’ cultural practices, identities, emotional well-being, while advocating for school policies that reflect sensitivity to the needs diverse groups. Accordingly, Black female school
counselors are naturally equipped to understand the challenges that confront students whose race and gender is discredited, and properly advocate for equity and flexibility in school policies and practices (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2001). They can, in fact enhance their advocacy efforts by sharing their own experiences of marginalization with their school administration (Dollarhide et al., 2013).

**Collaboration.** Research involving Black adolescent girls by Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) found that as Black girls are subject to multiple stressors within their lives from race, gender, and class marginalization, “the most resilient students were those young women who received support from their families, communities, and school simultaneously” (p. 13). Additionally, as multiple sources have referred to school counselors as agents of change, including Nassar-McMillan et al. (2009) and Bemak and Chung (2005), ASCA (2019) recommended that school counselors engage in collaboration with teachers, administration, community agencies, and others, toward a goal of systemic change, which can result in targeted programming to support students’ academic, socioemotional, and/or post-high school needs. Similarly, Owens et al. (2011) found that counselor collaboration with other school staff can provide leeway for transformative educational practices for targeted groups, such as African American girls. Through collaboration, school counselors should initiate dialogue among constituent groups to promote student need regarding multicultural awareness, career development, and increased achievement for marginalized groups (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2009 & Bemak & Chung, 2005).

Additionally, collaborative outcomes can benefit school counseling programs that have large student to counselor ratios. ASCA (2016) recommended a student to counselor
ratio of 250:1, however many school counselors serve between 300 and 400 students, creating challenges in supporting diverse groups of students (Burkard et al., 2009). To create flexibility in supporting targeted groups, Bemak & Chung (2005) suggested developing relevant activities for classroom or group counseling sessions and initiating greater collaboration with community resources. Examples of collaborative relationships included working with the local health department to promote healthy lifestyles among youth and partnering with local mental health agencies to support students with long-term therapy needs.

Consultation. Collaborative relationships are in essence the result of consultation activities initiated by school counselors. In other words, counselors as “consultants are the facilitators of the problem-solving process in the collaboration model” (Gladding, 2018, p. 227). Per ASCA (2019) consultation involves: (a) gathering information on student needs from families, teachers, administrators, and others, (b) sharing strategies that support student achievement with families, teachers, administrators, teachers, school staff and community organizations, (c) consulting with school counselors and other counseling professionals regarding best practices, and (d) sharing school counseling expertise via facilitation of workshops for families, administrators, teachers or other stakeholders. An additional consultation practice may involve meeting with concerned individuals, including African Americans who are school staff, community members, civic organizational leaders, to evaluate the impact of interventions, and assist with program design and implementation (Day-Vines et al., 2003).

Specifically, Black female school counselors can assist in re-defining the elements used to measure progress in these areas, by first enlightening school staff and
other constituents to the deeply engrained racism and oppressive practices that impact Black girls in school spaces (Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ultimately, school counselors engaging in student-centered consultation and are concerned with supporting the needs of Black adolescent girls must participate in discussion, diagnoses, innovation, program development, and evaluations, regarding structures that involve and impact Black girls (Rosenthal, 2002).

**Dispositions, Benefits, and Concerns**

**Mothering.** Aside from the professional themes that define school counselors’ work, connecting literature provides insight on the maternal characteristics of Black women who work with Black children in educational spaces. Mothering “is germane to education, because teaching in the African American community, as in other ethnic groups, has been dominated by women since the early 20th century” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p. 77). Edwards (2003) described the dispositions and activities that occur when Black women educate Black children as mothering or mother work, as in how Black women facilitate collective healing and nurturing in response to oppressive educational practices. Roseboro and Ross (2009) spoke of mothering as an inherited pedagogy gained through watching “our mothers, grandmothers, and great grandmothers educate in unfathomable circumstances” (p.19). Additionally, Masko (2018) researched student-teacher relationships in an urban middle school and discovered that Black female teachers created a family-like school environment, exhibited care as a central component, and were firm and loving. Masko noted “survival” as a key element of the relationship describing the teachers’ concern for the success and survival of their students amid discrimination and within oppressive environments. Literature ultimately supports the
assertion that Black women can and do step in to provide support toward personal and academic survival much like a mother would.

Other scholars refer to Black women educators who are concerned with the academic and physical survival of Black children, as *othermothers*, who exceed professional expectations and exhibit kinship care (Beaubeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Collins, 2000). They establish authentic relationships, and practice accountability with their “children” and expect the same from them. As such, I assert that like Black female teachers, like Black female school counselors, uniquely serve Black children through their professional behaviors along with instinctual aspects of mothering, supported by the “mother speak” or intuition of mothering afforded them by African tradition (Evans-Winters, 2019). Finally, Black high school girls reported to Carter Andrews et al. (2019) that they appreciated Back female educators who provided “love, advocacy, comfort, and support to Black girls” (p. 32), while holding them accountable as warm demanders.

Consequently, care is a central theme to the mothering work of Black female educators. Noddings (2012) discussed care ethics and relational caring in terms of basic morals toward another consisting of attentiveness, addressing both expressed and assumed needs, and sympathy, through listening within an established “climate of care.” However, Black women’s cultivation of care spaces differ from those discussed in Noddings’ work, which centered White, middle-class women as the norm (Roseboro & Ross, 2009). Nonetheless, Roseboro & Ross (2009) posited that Black woman educators historically understood their multiple oppressions, and infused in their work, educating children toward social transformation and the betterment of humanity. They inserted
critical questions into their work, including, “Is it possible for Black women educators, committed to social justice, may care too much,” and “When, if ever can we remove the mantle of race and gender and be still, if only for a moment?” (p. 35). Accordingly, Dollarhide et al. (2013) wrote about how school counselors of color represent higher stress groups among school counselors, along with greater levels of emotional burnout, guilt, and lack of balance between caring for their students and their own needs.

**Relational Benefits.** Some relational benefits of Black female school counselors working with Black girls are described in Hall et al. (2002), revealing that children who receive counseling services within schools, benefit from having a counselor of the same gender and ethnicity and that cultural differences between school counselors and their students should be minimized. Additionally, a study on empowering African American girls found that school counselors who understand the distinct challenges confronting African American girls should spend time with students in informal settings, providing mentoring, assisting with identity formulation, self-acceptance, and affirmations of beauty (Holcomb-McCoy & Moore-Thomas, 2001). Finally, existing research indicates that Black females of all ages are subject to the gaze of societal expectations, indicating that the oppression of Black women and girls is interchangeable and spans from childhood to adulthood (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Morris, 2016). As such, Black female school counselors are primed as leaders in developing Black girls’ emotional competence along with developing systems that support their needs.

**Concerns.** Although Black female school counselors generally view their work as personally fulfilling and impactful to students, there are obstacles to progress and systemic barriers to success. For example, many school counseling programs are not
properly staffed to adequately support Black girls. Case in point, Owens et al. (2011) interviewed African American high school girls regarding their perceptions and experiences with school counselors. Interview findings revealed a mistrust of White counselors based on societal discriminatory practices (Sue, 2003, Thompson, et al., 1994), a lack of understanding of the role of the counselor, and the desire to see more programming geared to the needs and interests of African American girls. Additionally, Black female school counselors are at times, marginalized through stereotypical bias and exposure to racial microaggressions or microinvalidations, working hard to overcome negative perceptions and dismissal by White administrators (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Wines, 2013). Edwards (2003) further exposed how Black female educators often feel obligated to exhibit “Mammy” behavior, going above and beyond for their students in addition to their regular work assignments.

In sum, a school culture of systemic racism can result in heavy demands for Black school counselors, and while they enjoy their work, it creates internal dissonance within them (Dollarhide et al., 2013). They understand their positioning as role models for Black adolescent girls, along with their role of leaders, advocates, consultants, and collaborators toward the needs of their students. Moreover, in working with Black adolescent girls, they believe the relational benefits indeed outweigh the concerns.

Summary of Chapter 2

Supporting literature suggests that to be effective, school counseling programs must work to extinguish colonized views of Black women and girls, and Black female school counselors are positioned to provide leadership and advocacy through collaboration and consultation practices. In conclusion, I reference Muhammad &
Dixson’s (2008) work on the experiences of Black adolescent girls and Black women in the educational setting. Drawing from the feminist themes of Zora Neale Hurston’s book, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* written in 1937, they celebrated Hurston’s work that “gives voice to the unique experiences of non-White girls and women by examining the ways in which the intersection of race, gender, class and other social identities form a ‘multiply jeopardy’…” (p. 166). Muhammad and Dixson’s writing neatly encapsulated Black women’s impact on the world metaphorically as “de mul uh de world” (Hurston, 1937, p. 14), or as “beasts of burden” (p. 163).

Finally, I submit that the schooling experiences of Black adolescent girls as presented in the literature relate contextually to the personal and professional experiences of Black female school counselors working in urban middle schools. Literature highlighted Black girls racialized and gendered experiences in school pertaining to their academic achievement, socioemotional well-being, and career development, which are the three primary areas focused on by school counselors. Black female school counselors can play key roles in ameliorating the pain and trauma in Black girls caused by intersectional oppression in schools, while they experience the same. With this in mind, it is beneficial to examine the experiences of Black female school counselors regarding the work they do with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools. Why, because this aspect of school counseling is valuable and is understudied by researchers. Also, because school structures can facilitate racial and gendered oppression, they must acknowledge it and seek methods for atonement. Furthermore, this study fills a precious void of information on a segment of Black professional educators while celebrating Black women and girls’ triumph over intersectional oppression.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of Black female school counselors who work with Black adolescent girls in urban schools. The following questions guided the research:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black female school counselors in their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools?
2. What are Black female school counselors’ perspectives on the ways in which they are supported or not supported in working with Black adolescent girls?
3. In what ways (if any) does the concept of “mothering” show up in the relationships and counseling practices involving Black female school counselors and Black adolescent girls?

Research Design

The research questions centered on understanding the experiences of Black female school counselors in urban schools and their work with Black adolescent girls. To address these questions, a qualitative approach proved most feasible as it suggests: (1) using multiple methods for data collection; (2) conducting research in participant’s natural setting; (3) embracing emergent processes; (4) regarding the researcher as the primary instrument; (5) valuing multiple perspectives and meaning held by participants; and (6) acknowledging the impact of the researcher’s positionality on the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). On the contrary, quantitative methods aim to find causal explanations to hypotheses, is context-free and value-free, and seeks a measurable, generalizable product (Holloway & Brown, 2016). Furthermore, Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed when to use a qualitative approach, arguing, “we conduct qualitative research when we want to
empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 45).

Additionally, theoretical frameworks accompany qualitative research processes and provide a lens through which the participants’ perspectives are viewed, as in Black feminist thought. Evans-Winters (2019) discussed extensively Black feminism in qualitative inquiry, citing its usefulness as a theoretical framework in diminishing power dynamics in research involving and analyzing racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of marginalization. “Black feminist thought in qualitative analysis: (1) proffers a social critique of traditional research paradigms and tralatitious interpretations of social relationships; (2) fosters dialogue for understanding unmitigated power and privilege; and (3) strategically agitates the status quo” (p. 19). Evans-Winters further connected the Black feminist framework with qualitative research characteristics presented by Creswell and Poth (2018), citing how Black feminism welcomes Black women’s lived experiences to the forefront as key instruments in the research. It also honors multiple ways of knowing, via the mosaic of texts and artifacts that Black women bring to the research. Lastly, Evans-Winters posited that “centering feminism in qualitative research facilitates critical understandings of how Black women creatively piece together their personal and shared realities into the qualitative research process and with and across cultural contexts” (p. 27). As such, pairing a qualitative research approach with Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework illuminated the rich experiences of the Black female school counselors’ personal and professional experiences with Black adolescent girls.
The Phenomenological Research Approach

**History.** Social scientist Edmund Husserl’s desire for a descriptive representation of experience suitable for the human sciences led to the birth of phenomenological research. Husserl was highly critical of psychology’s use of natural science methods within the human sciences. He valued consciousness and intentionality in research, and that the mind is not separate from the phenomenon. Husserl also believed that phenomenology should remain free from prejudice in order to find the essence, or the true nature of an experience. Thus, phenomenological researchers practice “bracketing” or “epoche,” where the researcher suspends all previous knowledge and pre-conceptions about the phenomena and to find the essence of an experience without consideration of context (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Philosopher Martin Heidegger, a disciple of Husserl fathered an interpretive or hermeneutical phenomenological tradition that valued interpretation and understanding of embedded meanings within the life experiences of humans (Laverty, 2003). While Husserl focused on understanding beings or phenomena, Heidegger focused on *Daesin,* or “mode of being human or the situated meaning of a human in the world” (Laverty, 2003, p. 24). Heidegger held an ontological focus on the meaning of being, and that the researcher could not separate himself or herself from past experiences and thus cannot practice bracketing as reduction. Also, key to Heidegger’s philosophy is the hermeneutic circle described by Crotty (1997). The hermeneutic circle within interpretive phenomenology reflects understanding the whole through first attempting to name and understand the parts and thereby conceiving an understanding of the whole, moving in a
Like Heidegger, philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer embraced hermeneutic phenomenology, viewing the past as key to interpretation without bracketing. Given his belief that humans are rooted in tradition and are influenced by history, Gadamer was known as a traditionalist in the phenomenological realm (Crotty, 1997). According to Gadamer (1986) as cited in van Manen (2016), “when we interpret the meaning of something, we actually interpret an interpretation” (p. 26). He also viewed interpretation as a “fusion of horizons” that constitutes an evolution of understanding and interpretation of multiple meanings of the experience, via the interpreter’s experience and the meaning of participant-generated text. Finally, Gadamer regarded interpretation as, (1) pointing to something, as a revelation of meaning, and (2) interpretation as pointing out the meaning of something that already has an existing interpretation such as art (van Manen, 2016) or via an external framework (Finlay, 2012; Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Finally, like Heidegger and Gadamer, Canadian phenomenologist Max van Manen also rejected Hussurl’s notion of bracketing, believing that one must remember the past in order to acknowledge its existence in interpretation. In his book *Researching Lived Experience*, van Manen (2016) approached phenomenology as a pedagogical human science for educators, guided by pedagogical standards of tact and care. Additionally, van Manen essentially combined description and interpretation in phenomenological experience, stating that, “To do hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that the lived life is always more complex than any
explication of meaning can reveal” (p. 18). van Manen focused heavily on the non-verbal elements via the lifeworld consisting of four existential themes: lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived relations (Finlay, 2012). van Manen’s view of phenomenological research consists of the following components:

(1) “the study of lived experience”, (2) “the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness”, (3) the study of essences,” (4) “the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them,” (5) “the human scientific study of phenomena,” (6) the attentive practice of thoughtfulness,” (7) “a search for what it means to be human,” and (8) “a poetizing activity.” (p. 9-13)

Critical Hermeneutical Phenomenology

In their discussion on critical theory, Winkle-Wagner et al., (2019) referenced Georg Wilhelm Freiderich Hegel, who dealt with class and racial issues and Karl Marx, whose concerns centered primarily on inequalities within social class, as leaders in the critical theory movement. W. E. B. DuBois and Anna Julia Cooper, among others were lesser credited early critical theorists who focused on struggles regarding race, along with feminism from Cooper’s perspective. Furthermore, within critical theory there is a dialectical relationship engaged between science and philosophy in understanding societal dynamics, as the former produced essentialist viewpoint without consideration for diverse human experiences (van Manen, 2016). van Manen (2016) also maintained a pedagogical approach to educational research and suggested that the use of critical theory could dissolve oppressive structures and ideologies that serve to reinvigorate or sustain oppressive structures and ideologies. Similarly, Crotty (1997) posited that the strength of critical theory is that it seeks to create change rather than merely pointing out the need for change.
Key to this discussion is Jurgen Habermas’ (1984) presentation of critical theory. Winkle-Wagner et al. (2019) echoed Habermas, stating that theory can “elevate or center race, class, gender, sexuality, and inequality or any combination of these categories, especially when these categories are overlooked and neglected” (p. 4). Like Paulo Freire with education, Habermas moved toward praxis in his approach to theory and was critical of theorists who merely identified or presented problems without presenting an emancipatory plan of action based on morality and leading to social change. He further surmised that social systems distort communicative rationality, disallowing one to question rules and structures that govern the individual’s actions, resulting in colonization of the lifeworld. To reveal these distortions, Habermas cited hermeneutic reflection as key to disrupting prejudice and authority, as raw interpretation without reflection could be influenced by external conditions that are not epistemologically sound (Mendelson, 1979). His notion of “ideal speech” as a means of expanding knowledge via dialogue and active listening is transformative and naturally produces emancipatory knowledge that is based on openness and void of domination (Trede et al., 2009). Also central to Habermas’ philosophy is his theory of communicative action, characterized by dialogue and active listening on both ends. In a working example of Habermas’ theory of communicative action, Winkle-Wagner et al. problematized the consumption of one-way media messages as “colonization of lifeworld” through social, political, and economic messages, without critical dialogue.

Similarly, the absence of research on the experiences of Black female school counselors represents a colonization of their lifeworld, via silencing, devaluation, and void of ideal speech. To ameliorate this issue, theory, as in BFT illuminates how
dominant ideologies veil the realities of doubly marginalized Black women and unearths embedded power dynamics (Lopez & Willis, 2009). Thus, critical hermeneutic phenomenology combined with Black feminist thought creates emancipatory research that exposes the masked, glossed-over, ignored, and trivialized realities of Black women through the “hermeneutics of suspicion” (p. 731) that challenges oppressive structures. Finally, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach allows for me, the researcher to bring in my own lived experiences as an extension of myself, including my multiple identities, which is aligns with the principles of Black feminist thought (Lindsay-Dennis, 2021).

**Feasibility of Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black female school counselors working with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools. To make meaning of these experiences, a phenomenological research design was employed to describe and interpret the lifeworld of individuals experiencing a concept or phenomenon (Holloway & Brown, 2016). Moreover, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach provided a more realistic assessment of the data, valuing the researcher’s prior experiences that cannot be suppressed (Kafle, 2011; van Manen, 2016). The resulting data yielded a fusion of horizons involving the evolution of understanding and interpretation of multiple meanings of a phenomenological experience.

Furthermore, an appropriate framework was needed to describe the perspectives of individuals and groups residing under the veil of oppression. Collins (2000) argued that “as long as Black women’s subordination within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation persists, Black feminism as an activist response to
that oppression will remain needed” (p. 25). Hermeneutical scholars also support the use of theoretical frameworks as a beneficial component of inquiry, however, not to generate hypotheses as in formal sciences (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Finlay (2012) took a similar view regarding theory asserting that the use of outside theoretical frameworks with hermeneutic projects can enrich the analysis and further questioning. As critical theory aims to advance the voices of marginalized groups through reflection and dialogue toward social change (Habermas, 1984), BFT centers the study on the suppressed voices of Black women. Thus, a critical hermeneutic phenomenological approach and BFT align neatly as both value the lived experience as criteria of meaning, a caring dialogical relationship based on empathy and personal accountability via the researcher’s positionality. Ultimately, the data gleaned from this study will add practical knowledge to the school counseling profession, while also exposing the unique concerns of Black girls in urban schools.

The Steps that Led Me Here

My interest in this research stems from many years of working in urban education, first as a middle school math teacher, and my current role as a high school guidance counselor. The middle school teaching experience afforded me practical insight on adolescent development and the nuances of academic and social performance in middle schools. Moreover, my school counselor training exposed me to developmental theory and the foundations of cognitive and behavioral psychology. Both professional experiences have allowed me to work directly with black adolescent girls and witness firsthand their experiences in the urban school setting. Those experiences also provided scenarios from which to draw understanding about Black female educators’ experiences
with Black girls. Over the next several paragraphs, I will chronicle my educational career by highlighting aspects that are relevant to my positionality within this research.

**Working in Urban Schools.** I began teaching in the early 1990’s when the music listened to by many Black (and White) youth contained told stories of survival amid gang violence and often contained astonishingly explicit (at that time) lyrics. Like now, music themes permeated the culture of urban schools, often running contrary to school standards of appropriateness. Over my teaching career, I taught at a total of four urban middle schools, located within a large midwestern city. Two of the schools were part of the city’s center township and the other two were part of a township bordering the city limits. Additionally, one of the township schools where I was employed was an alternative school for students with behavioral and academic challenges. The center township schools had majority Black enrollment and consisted of families experiencing high poverty, high staff turnover, high levels of student disciplinary infractions, and high rates of academic failure. The bordering township fared somewhat better, having slightly lower rates in each of the previous categories. Throughout, I encountered Black middle school girls within developmental stages ranging from pre-pubescence to late adolescence. Many of these girls had been exposed to negative influences often associated with impoverished neighborhoods and struggling families. Having parents who had jobs or multiple jobs away from the home, they were often left to fend for themselves, and many made poor choices. Moreover, I did not live where they lived, my upbringing was different than was many of theirs, and at times, I even struggled with my own prejudices regarding my students and their families.
I learned that middle school is often where students’ academic trajectory is
determined, as in placement in honors classes or special education, and high school is
where college or career pathways are solidified. Also in middle school, many Black girls
begin to understand their position in society and the limitations placed on them by
racism, and they struggle with making choices. They learn to feel regret, shame and/or
anger at life circumstances; they feel targeted by school staff for subjective infractions
concerning their attitude or appearance; they are cited for dress code violations and
labeled as “loud” or “aggressive” when they show confidence in their opinions and
intellect; they become distressed by societal norms of beauty and “appropriate” behavior
for young women. Finally, at this stage they are navigating a labyrinth toward finding out
who they are.

Now, as a high school counselor, I am charged with supporting students in three
overarching areas: academic, career/college, and socioemotional development. However,
underneath those umbrellas of support lay myriad areas of concern for Black girls. They
carry over from middle school and manifest via personal and academic challenges,
teacher and peer relations, family issues, and concerns surrounding race and gender.
Thus, I have found that being Black and female makes me an automatic resource for
assistance with “Black girl issues” from hair and dress code issues to personality conflicts
with teachers. I note through reflection that I too, endure variations of the racial and
gender marginalization that make school challenging for Black girls. Sadly, that is the
Black American female experience.

Given this connection, I am attuned to my Black female students’ needs, and I
listen to them, counsel them, and advocate for them. I want to see them succeed in life
and to fulfill their dreams. I want them to know that they are intelligent and beautiful in
every way. Thus, over ten years ago, I began co-facilitating an afterschool group for the
Black girls at our school as a safe space to build unity, express frustrations, and process
their racialized experiences. This space also allows for collective healing, where group
members are listened to and embraced without judgement. Building relationships through
group facilitation results in greater accountability to students and supporting additional
students outside of my counselor caseload. Time is spent beyond school hours
chaperoning students to field trips and volunteer opportunities. Students often need help
“filling in the gaps,” including buying food, securing transportation, and more. In all, my
work with Black girls has been fulfilling, and at times it feels a lot like mothering. I put
on the “mother hat” and listen, guide, laugh, and even cry. Despite the personal and
professional investment in this type of “mother work,” my regular work responsibilities
remain in place. School counseling tasks, in general can leave one personally and
professionally drained, and the need to ensure equity for all students presents an
additional negotiation of time and energy. Isolation can also set in, as colleagues may not
share the same passions or connections with students. I have also felt at times, invisible;
the extra time, effort, and investment goes unnoticed and unacknowledged. However, I
still consider it a blessing to serve.

I now realize that in many ways, the intersectional oppression experienced by
Black women and Black girls is one and the same. We are routinely subject to
stereotypical treatment concerning our capabilities. We feel and have felt disrespected
and disregarded. We are under the gaze of others, who scrutinize our appearance, words,
and actions, and we feel the weight of deficit perceptions from others. Like most Black
women in America, I am a victim of generational trauma; the blood of former enslaved men and women runs through my veins, and my parents’ and grandparents’ experiences under Jim Crow racism disturb my soul. Consequently, the cultural connection I have with Black girls evokes a spirit of care and nurturing within me. The scars from discrimination make me anxious to prepare Black adolescent girls for living in an unsafe world, and to encourage them to love and value themselves, as society will attempt to mold them into representations of inferiority.

**My Experience is Not Enough.** Nonetheless, while I have perspective on the experiences of a Black female school counselor’s work with Black high school girls, my perspective alone will not adequately address my research questions relating to counseling Black girls in middle school, at key stages of their adolescence. Additionally, the scant research on the work of Black female school counselors reveals a devaluation of experiential knowledge of Black women. Thus, my aim is to illuminate the school counselor’s experience from the unique perspective of Black women who work with Black middle school girls. Guided by a Black feminist epistemology, this phenomenological project will produce unrecorded knowledge about the work experiences of Black female school counselors and how they serve Black adolescent girls.

**Data Collection**

This phenomenological research study drew experiential data from four school counselors who have worked in urban middle schools located within a large midwestern city. Participants were selected per Creswell’s and Poth’s (2018) recommendation of using purposeful sampling for phenomenological research studies, as in “finding
individuals who have experienced a phenomenon” (p. 151), or satisfy participant sampling criteria. As such, all selected participants have experienced the phenomenon under study; they identify as Black women and are school counselors who have experienced working with Black girls within an urban middle school.

**The Urban School.** An examination of early urban education by Tyack (1974), revealed its primary characteristic as having centralized control within a mosaic of urban powerbrokers, consisting of “experts” in business and higher education. Tyack argued that the impact of shifting economic roles urban schools and the reliance on schools for supplying workers for newly formed industry spearheaded the birth of the urban school system. Moreover, the term “urban” was characterized geographically, by the U. S. Census Bureau in 2000, as clustered areas of at least 2,500 people, and no more than 50,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The schools within these spaces were described as “urban schools” by Lipman (2011), who suggested that urban schools are the product of government subsidized “flight” by White and middle-class citizens from the cities to the suburbs, desiring better housing, and an escape from Blacks who migrated from southern states and Latino/as migrating from southwestern states. Compounding matters was the further devaluation of city property resulting from the suburban boom of housing and industry, producing low-skilled and low-wage jobs, and resulting in economically inferior schools.

Lipman (2011) further posited that urban schools are the remnant of those caught in the web of racism, economic inequality, housing discrimination, and low-wage jobs. Blanchett et al. (2005) agreed, indicating that urban school districts reside within an “economic, political, and social phenomenon” (p. 72) or a larger system of constructed
dysfunction. As a result, “Urban school systems are more than academic institutions; they have also acquired the responsibilities of social and welfare institutions” (Dye, 2012, p. 21). Thus, by definition, the participants in this study are urban school counselors, working in urban schools, and serving students and families who live in urban environments. Specifically, the schools represented in this study are located within the city limits where school desegregation by race took measures in the late 1970’s and produced urban schools like those previously discussed. For example, each school represented in this study has a population where more than sixty percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and at least 70% are non-White students. Additionally, each school has at least 25% Black enrollment with one school having over 50% Black enrollment. Furthermore, these data points symbolize characteristics of the urban environments described in the literature.

**The Participants**

The study participants were four Black female school counselors who have worked in an urban middle school. Their ages ranged from their 30’s to 60’s and they have from 5-17 years of school counselor experience. See Table 1. Their work is guided by the ASCA professional standards within varied contexts of the school setting, which focuses primarily on supporting students’ academic, socioemotional, and career development (ASCA, 2019). However, within these areas are layers of individualized support provided by school counselors. Notably, in this study, the participants contributed rich, epistemologically sound phenomenological data per the tenets of BFT, in the form of experiential knowledge.
Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Myrna</td>
<td>60’s</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Jade</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Beverly</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ingrid</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IRB Approval and Participant Consent

This study obtained approval of “Exemption” status from the Internal Review Board (IRB) of Indiana University on July 10, 2020; thus, written participant consent was not required. Participants were accessed individually by personal contact to gain initial consent. Once initial consent was gained (see Appendix A), I sent each participant a copy of the “Study Information Sheet,” found in Appendix B. The Study Information Sheet provided details of the data collection methods, including estimated time commitment, time frame of when research activities would occur, and financial compensation for participation in the form of a $25 Visa gift card.

Interview Rationale

Seidman (2019) provided rationale for the interview method based on four themes connected to phenomenological research. First, is the transitory nature of the human experience, where the “will be” becomes the “is,” and the “is” then becomes the “was” almost instantaneously. The \textit{lived time}, or evolution of experience over time aligns with the phenomenological philosophy that is based on tradition and past experiences. This was evident in how aspects of the participants’ lifeworld both past and present contribute
to the meaning of the school counselor experience. Secondly, Seidman stressed viewing the phenomenon through the participant’s subjective understanding, gleaned through open-ended questioning, listening, and follow-up, allowing the participant’s point of view to emerge. My research aims were achieved using this method and the findings are grounded in data acquired via this format. Thirdly, interviewing in phenomenological research involves the re-searching and re-construction of the participant’s lived experiences through language and text in the participant’s own words through interviews and written narratives, hence my use of semi-structured interviews with each participant and verbatim transcription. Lastly, Seidman emphasized meaning in context, which is crucial in gaining the participant’s point of view. The participants’ language provided the contextual information that enhances the meaning of lived experience.

Similarly, van Manen (2016) viewed interviews as uncovering aspects of the interviewee’s life story, revealing ways of knowing and being that are unique to specific cultures or cultural groups. Interviews also establish a conversational relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee that can produce understanding of a phenomenon and meaning of an experience. Furthermore, interviews in the hermeneutic phenomenological sense serve two purposes:

(1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering potential narrative material that may serve as resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience. (p. 66)

van Manen likened the interview to a conversation that allows the interviewee to embrace greater intimacy with the experience as in lived time.
As such, I subscribed to the recommended use of fewer open-ended questions that are strongly oriented to the research aims, as opposed to many questions to fill space in the interview. van Manen (2016) also asserted that conversational interviews support the foundational goal of hermeneutics, in gathering various forms of lived experience material, then returning to reflect, collaborate, and dialogue interpretatively or hermeneutically with the participant. Subsequently, I found that Seidman’s (2019) interview themes and van Manen’s assessment of the personal life story align neatly with Black feminist epistemology, as both are rooted in notions of valuing lived experience and context, language and reflection, iterative dialogue toward the co-construction of knowledge, and most importantly, the value of the participant’s own words in knowledge production (Collins, 2000).

**Interview Protocol**

Prior to the interviews, approval was obtained from the IRB to conduct research with human subject participants, followed by participant consent. Beginning the process, I sought guidance from Creswell & Poth’s (2018) recommendations for phenomenological data collection which included conducting two rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant in their natural setting. Interviews were audio- and video-recorded via the Zoom multi-user technology platform and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes with open-ended questions regarding their personal and professional experiences working with Black female adolescent girls. Given the intersectional identities of the participants as Black women, I used questions that reflected the critical nature of the study and spoke to the participant’s social identity and
how it manifested in their work (Turman, 2017). Interview protocol for this study can be found in Appendix C.

I conducted the interviews in my home via the Zoom multimedia platform, with the participants in their home. For me, the natural setting allowed comfortable conversation and I sensed the participants felt the same. Participant surroundings included bedrooms, basements, and background noise including children and televisions. I felt as if I were a part of the participants’ reality, shadowed by the “double consciousness” described by Dubois (1903). I believe I heard the authentic voices of each participant as wives, mothers, homeowners, etc., exposing aspects of their personal identities “at home,” freely speaking about their lived experiences as school counselors. Additionally, via the Zoom platform I observed emotions reflected through body language and/or voice tone, which aided in solidifying those significant statements that give life to the data. Throughout the interviews, I jotted notes in the margins of my script, memoing and making notes for later clarification, while carefully attuning to the participants’ voice inflection and embodiment via the technological platform.

By the end of each participant’s first interview, I had acquired a small list of points to clarify in the second interview. The list was routinely augmented as I listened and re-listened to the first recorded interview, remaining reflective on the tenets of BFT (Collins, 2000), which I had taped to the cover of my journal. “The ethic of personal accountability” came to mind often as I sought to identify ambiguities to be elucidated during the second interview. I wanted to exhibit an “ethic of care,” by maintaining genuine engagement in the dialogue while jotting, listening, and making sure my technology remained intact. The lifeworlds of each participant was the thickening agent
of my research, making foremost their “lived experience as a criterion of meaning” in the study. Ultimately, “the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims” designated the participant an “informant-researcher” (Few et al., 2003), again focusing the research on the participants’ lifeworlds. Sadly, Black women’s stories are often told from the margins (Turman, 2017), and my hope was to center their experiences in this project by “talking ‘with’ and not ‘to’ the participants” (Koonce, 2012, p. 35). In sum, building on the tenets of BFT allowed me to apply the hermeneutics of interpretation in keeping with a framework that honors Black women’s voices.

**Transcription.** Within an hour of completing each interview, I uploaded the audio recording into the *Temi* digital transcription service. Interview transcripts were reviewed while replaying the interviews to determine accuracy of the transcription. No adjustments were made to the transcripts other than “cleaning” the data per minor errors on word transcription.

**Reflective Vision Boards**

Per extant research we understand that school counselors’ experiences are unique in comparison to other school staff, filling multiple job demands throughout the school day (Kim & Lambie, 2018). Notwithstanding, my own professional experiences as a high school counselor validates this notion. Moreover, ASCA (2016) described the school counselor’s roles per four key actions defining the profession. School counselors support students, school staff, and parents in the form of (1) *leadership*, (2) *collaboration*, (3) *advocacy*, and (4) *consultation*. Black female school counselors may also engage in mother-work, as discussed in Ricard (2020). Considering the varied work experiences of school counselors, the participants in this study were asked to create reflective vision
boards consisting of inspirational quotes, words, images drawn by hand, or extracted from print media, to represent meaning of the school counseling experience with Black girls (Turman, 2017).

**Rationale.** Supporting work by van Manen (2016) promoted the value of art or artifacts as data in phenomenological research, citing the historic use of fine arts in phenomenological studies through non-verbal communicative language forms as a “language with its own grammar” (p. 74). Additionally, like music and literary art, I propose that visual art in the form of reflective vision boards aligns with the foundational principals of Black feminist thought. Collins (2000) posited, that Black women need safe spaces where they can “speak freely” as a “necessary condition for Black women’s resistance” (p. 111). In the safe space context of visual art, Black women convey knowledge or ways of knowing via the participant’s reflective mood of artistic text, while also providing the researcher an additional lens through which to view a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Greenwood, 2012; Smithbell, 2010; Turman, 2017). Moreover, I regarded the reflective vision board as a nontraditional data source that allowed the participants’ creative expression to emerge more so than in the interviews. Few et al. (2003) framed the nontraditional data sources as “physical archival evidence of tangible, dynamic states of mind—emotional, spiritual, sexual, rational, maniacal, oppressed, oppressive, and resilient” (p. 211), also indicating how the participant may interpret her lifeworld, in terms of her lived body, lived space, lived relations, and lived time.

**The Process.** The reflective vision boards were designed electronically within the Canva graphic design platform on the Canva website. I selected the Canva website based on its user-friendliness and the graphic options it provided, including archives of
digital and animated photographs of Black women and girls of all ages and in various settings, along with graphic designs containing positive text messages, symbols, and other inanimate objects. Another plus for using the Canva program was its allowance for the user to import images from other sources, including personal items and other web sources. Meanwhile, I suggested the participants consider exporting images from sources such as, Kolumn/Kindred Magazine, Essence Magazine, Ebony Magazine, and Google Images.

I toyed with using the term “vision board,” as it is a somewhat trite concept, in my opinion. That concern led me to insert the term “reflective,” as the final project would represent a reflection of the participants’ lived experiences working as school counselors with Black adolescent girls. Also, in acknowledging the participants’ varying levels of technological expertise, I created a document containing a link to the Canva website, along with step-by-step instructions and suggestions on completing the project (see Appendix D). Instructions for completing the reflective vision boards via Canva were sent to each participant within one day of completing the first interview. My aim was to be as explicit as possible with the instructions so that each participant would feel comfortable completing the project. Finally, I provided my personal phone number on the instruction sheet, along with an example of a vision board I created as a supplemental aid.

To ensure both the participant and I were able to view the images at the same time, I activated the “share screen” option on the Zoom platform during the participant’s second interview. Each participant had structured their board in a fashion that allowed me to address each image in a pseudo-clockwise movement around the board. During the second interview, participant vision boards were reviewed along with several follow up
questions relating to the first interview. Interview protocol relating to the reflective vision board included two main questions along with some follow up questions for clarification:

1. What is/are the primary theme(s) of your reflective vision board?

2. How do the images, phrases, etc. on your reflective vision board represent you and your work as a school counselor with Black adolescent girls?

Field Notes

Keeping the tradition of qualitative data analysis, notes were generated throughout the research process and woven into the reflection, summarization, and making meaning of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I adhered to Goenwald’s (2004) assertion that field notes contain signposts of the participant’s lifeworld, as in “what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the process” (p. 48). Visual interviews allowed this, enabling me to observe the participant’s lifeworld via the lived body, as in the participant’s body language and facial expressions (van Manen, 2016). I noted how the participants’ emotions displayed performatively throughout the interviews, as in enthusiastic recollection of positive work experiences, and excitement when describing the process of constructing their vision boards.

The Participants: Myrna, Jade, Beverly, and Ingrid

Myrna carries on a family legacy of dedicated Black educators. Her mother was a teacher, along with an uncle, and one of her aunts, who was the first Black female principal in her school district. As a result, Myrna says she has wanted to work in education since she was seven years old. She says she was “always exposed to education,” and recalls working in her relatives’ classrooms at start of the school year.
Feeling drawn toward working with children, Myrna decided to attend college as a psychology major. After college, she worked with youth in various capacities both inside and outside of school buildings, soon discovering she enjoyed classroom work, but preferred working with students one-on-one. A vein of Myrna’s employment landed her a position as a mentor at a local organization focused on enriching the lives of young girls. Abiding in the remnant of her roots in education and her background in community psychology, Myrna went on to earn a degree in school counseling.

Undoubtedly, Myrna’s prior experiences have impacted her work as a school counselor, so much that she feels led to this work by God. She values her work with Black girls and believes her primary role is to prepare them for adulthood. She believes like I do, that Black girls have a unique place in the world and have unique needs that should be addressed specifically, centering on Black females’ intersectional identities. Relatedly, Myrna’s identity as a Black woman resides at the forefront of her lived experiences and it colors her lifeworld. For that reason, a message she conveys to the Black girls with whom she works is that there will be challenges in life because you are a woman, and because you are a Black woman. She has lived the oppression and marginalization of Black women. From roadblocks in employment to unjust professional assessment, Myrna has endured discrimination based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, and age. She has felt the wounds of perceived intellectual inferiority, and played the self-sacrificing nurturer often caricaturized by Black women. She also winces at the negative stereotypes regarding Black women’s hostility and feels concern for her students’ relationships with one another.
Nonetheless, Myrna is a knowledgeable and cultivated Black woman. She pours into her students the wisdom she gained throughout her life. Though hard times were prevalent for Myrna and her children, she raised them to set high goals and strive to achieve them. She socialized them to survive in an urban community and is proud of the adults they have become. Myrna also values the sacred relationships of Black women and men as sisters and brothers, an ideal she shares with her students. I see Myrna is a soldier, answering the call to social justice. She works untiringly, and is dependable, trustworthy, loyal, and caring. She embraces the wisdom of her ancestral mothers and applies it to her life and work, viewing her work as a school counselor as maternal and “God-given.” Like the proverbial Mother Nature, Myrna defines her work with Black girls as “planting seeds” through interaction and dialogue that she hopes will produce Black women who embrace every aspect of their being. Though she understands that not every seed will take root, Myra says her investment is worth it “if I reach just one.”

Jade is also a child of educators. Her mother and father both worked in K-12 education as teachers, principals, and later as district level administrators. The K-12 experience was an ever-present influence on Jade’s early life. So much so, she initially wanted to be defiant, and not pursue a career in education. After exploring various courses in college, Jade took courses in human development and family studies and really enjoyed them. She grew personally and professionally, eventually finding her own voice while living and making decisions on her own. It was at this point where Jade realized she wanted to work in the helping field; however, Jade soon discovered that working solely in therapeutic field was not for her. Subsequently, Jade decided to pursue a master’s degree in school counseling while also working as a substitute teacher. She
loved substitute teaching and regards the experience as informative and beneficial toward her work as a school counselor.

Describing herself as introverted and on the shy side, Jade recognizes how these character traits have shaped her personal and professional life. As such, she has come to regard personality and gender as most salient in her relationships with her students, even more so than race. She believes that being a Black woman gives her an obvious connection with Black girls, however, there have been challenges establishing deep relationships with them. She recalled her chagrin when surprisingly, her assumptions about how Black girls would respond to her were inaccurate. Jade senses this is due to her background and how most of her friends growing up were White. She senses that her early life influences along with her personality, and even the way she speaks may have presented challenges in her work with Black girls. Consequently, Jade acknowledges that Black women are not monolithic in their lived experiences.

Moreover, Jade’s display of care and accountability to her students helped to fortify the within-group differences she experienced with Black girls. Even through the challenges, Jade says she is proud to be a mentor and a role model for the Black girls with whom she works. More recently, Jade has begun viewing her work through a mother-lens, and often considers her own children when supporting her students. She credits motherhood with “softening her,” while making her more accountable to be her authentic self, based on her lived experiences. Furthermore, Jade values the time spent with her students wants to make the most of it. For that reason, she remains open to the dynamics of dialogue with all students, especially Black girls. She allows for necessary
silence; however, hearing their voices will allow her students to shine in their own unique way. Jade embraces this aspect as central to her work as a school counselor.

**Beverly** hails from a large family with lots of children present. She speaks fondly of her father’s influence, and how he welcomed the neighborhood kids into his space, and always tried to help them. Beverly’s employment history is diverse, living in different states and working various jobs, eventually returning to the Midwest, and working in a daycare. Soon after, Beverly gained employment in the K-12 setting as a classroom paraprofessional in a middle school. Though she did not particularly enjoy some aspects of the classroom experience, it solidified her love of working with children.

Having her father’s disposition, Beverly prides in her work as a school counselor. She sets impactful goals for her students and is happy when they achieve individual success. More specifically, Beverly says she is very proud of the African American girls in her school. She loves to see their growth and maturity and the rapport she has with them. However, a key concern for Beverly is Black girls’ interpersonal relationships. She spends time mediating between them and their teachers, their parents, and their peers, and believes that ultimately, Black girls’ relationships will improve when they develop love for themselves. Moreover, Beverly also believes that for Black girls, self-love will come when they begin to find their purpose and laments the pressure Black women and girls place upon themselves to be everything for everybody. She wants Black girls to accept their vulnerability when it is necessary, knowing that although they are still young, they will soon take their place as “the backbone of our culture.”

Nonetheless, Beverly values the time she spends dialoguing with Black girls on finding their purpose and connecting her own lived experiences to theirs. Life has taught
her the importance of helping Black girls break stereotypes and the cycles of negativity in which they find themselves. Thus, Beverly seeks to build strong relationships based on authenticity and trust, which comes easily per her experience growing up in an urban community. Ultimately, Beverly holds herself accountable to Black girls as a mentor, role model, and most of all a Black woman subject to the marginalization common to Black females in America.

Ingrid says her “relative experience” is the greatest asset she brings to her work as a school counselor and describes herself as “one of these kids.” Her home was filled with conflict, which she described as, “filled with domestic violence.” Therefore, school was a reprieve for Ingrid, who spent lots of time with her school counselors. She did well in school, though she struggled with acceptance in so-called “gifted” classes and resisted conformity to her environments. In other words, she did not suffer fools in reference to her teachers or her peers. Much of Ingrid’s passion at work stems from her life experiences, which impacts her counseling style and her relationships with her students, particularly Black girls. She wants to be for her students what her school counselors were for her, in providing a safe space away from home.

Consequently, Ingrid maintains an open door with her students and is particularly attuned to the needs of Black girls. She reflects on her own school experiences, and believes she relates well with the Black girls with whom she works. She was that Black girl who is smart enough to succeed in advanced classes but became disinterested in her classmates with whom she had nothing in common. Thus, as a Black woman, Ingrid worries about the future for Black adolescent girls; she is concerned about how society will rob them of their innocence and grow them up too fast. For this reason, Ingrid ranks
mentoring as one of the most important aspects of her work with Black girls. From academic to social challenges, she has a knack for being able to break through to students’ underlying issues, and it draws her closer to them. Furthermore, for Ingrid, engaging in authentic dialogue the key toward mentoring, and supporting Black adolescent girls, and as a mentor, she exudes the innate spirit of care that Black women possess to protect and nurture the youth in their surroundings. In sum, Ingrid sets and maintains high expectations for herself when working with her students; she gives her all and works until she is “good tired.”

Data Analysis

The Lifeworld. van Manen (2016) identified the lifeworld as the space “where knowledge speaks through our lived experiences” (p. 46), along with naming four existential themes within the lifeworld. They are the lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other, and represented by the significant statements. Habermas (1984) contrasted an individual’s lifeworld with hegemonic systems described in Winkle-Wagner et al. (2019) as

The location of publicly held, larger structural concepts such as: the economic system, the system of gender differentiation (e.g., patriarchy, where the idea that men are superior to women is embedded in social structure), and the system of racial differentiation (e.g., White supremacy, the notion that White people are superior to people of color is part of the social structure). p. 204

Subsequently, the lifeworld accounts for the more personal day-to-day interactions and activities that exist in people’s lives. Habermas further purported the prevalence of lifeworld colonization, as in the usurpation of lifeworld ideas replaced by system-driven concepts and values. This form of colonization is void of dialogue and communication is dominated by system structures that invade individual freedoms
(Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). Of equal significance is the process of exploring human experience in context and embracing dialogue and the lived experience, which buttresses the critical aspect of understanding experience, and opposing lifeworld colonization. (Collins, 2000; Habermas, 1984; Holloway & Brown, 2016; Winkle-Wagner, 2019).

Meanwhile, the next few paragraphs present a brief discussion of van Manen’s existential lifeworld themes in connection to the Black female school counselor’s lifeworld.

The four existential lifeworld themes presented by van Manen (2016) are: lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other. According to van Manen, the existential themes are “productive categories for the process of phenomenological question, reflecting and writing” (p. 102). They are the grounds by which all humans experience the world and provide a means to understanding and individual’s lifeworld. Next, is a brief look at van Manen’s four existential lifeworld themes in the context of this study.

**Lived Space.** van Manen (2016) defined the lived space by an individual’s “felt space” (p. 102), of our day-to-day existence, or physical environments of the lifeworld. In this study, the participants’ lived space included her home, the school building, her office space, the classrooms, hallways, and other school spaces where the work occurs. The spatial textures of the carpeting, floors, tables, walls, and chairs also resonate in her lived space, as does the lighting, sound, and aromas that fill the ambiance. Is her lived space comfortable, or does it leave her yearning for serenity? In some instances, her space may be liberating, or in others she may feel bound by the smallness of where she lives and works, like it is not fully her own. Collins (2000) asserted that because of the intersectional oppression often experienced by Black women, a safe space is needed for them to be themselves and to expel their emotions naturally. She may need a private
space to grieve over the hurt she sees in her students or that she herself experiences. For
this reason and others, the Black female school counselor’s lived space is a key
component of her lifeworld.

**Lived Body.** The lived body theme asserts that “we are always bodily in the
world” (van Manen, 2016, p. 103). The lived body is the means of experience, both
physically and emotionally, and manifests our presence in the lifeworld. van Manen
(2016) also described the lived body as being subject to the gaze of others, and maybe
eliciting behaviors such as agility, awkwardness, confidence, reservation, or silence. As
such, the school counselors’ lived body exists for the beckoning of students, teachers,
parents, and other stakeholders. She senses the needs of others, and she answers the call,
in service. She listens and she responds, she hurts, and she cries; she is reflective and yet
in the moment. All the while, racial and gendered discrimination, marginalization, and
the stereotypical controlling images may haunt her (Collins, 2000). Unquestionably, she
is the embodiment of her ancestors who birthed, nurtured, and educated everyone around
her.

**Lived Time.** van Manen’s (2016) third existential theme is the lived time, as in
subjective time as opposed to objective clock-time. It is temporal and may be
reinterpreted as time passes and new pressures and experiences emerge. Similarly, the
Black female school counselor evolves in her counseling style as she matures in the
profession and in the world. She may initially see herself as a “big sister” figure to the
Black girls she serves, and later adopt a mothering style as her lifeworld evolves.
Accordingly, all humans experience lived time within the lifeworld and per van Manen,
“the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person’s
temporal landscape” (p. 104). Thus, having once been adolescents, Black female school counselors can relate to the lived time experiences young Black girls. She anticipates the adolescent’s entrance into an unforgiving world and the pain it may bring. Yet she forgives the world for its shortcomings. She knows that each day is a new one and offers new hope, both for herself and for her students. However, though lived time is temporal, for Black women its impact is life-long.

**Lived Other.** The final existential lifeworld theme is the lived other, which is based on relationality (van Manen, 2016). van Manen (2016) defined the lived other as “the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them” (p. 104). He further posited that it is framed by our interactions with others and what we learn about them indirectly, through which we form impressions and engage in conversational relations that move us beyond our assumptions. The lived other dynamic is vital to the school counselors’ lifeworld, as they share physical and emotional space with their students. Moreover, for Black women who counsel Black girls, their lifeworlds likely overlap via shared experiences of marginalization. In support of her students, she engages them in purposeful dialogue, while adhering to their verbal and body language. She listens without judgement and loves unconditionally. Black women appear to do this with ease, as they value dialogue toward understanding and naturally hold sacred the ethic of care (Collins, 2000).

**Critical Hermeneutical Phenomenology and BFT**

A distinctive attribute of hermeneutic phenomenological research is the leeway in structure allowed within data analysis. van Manen (2016) and Winkle-Wagner et al. (2019) discussed the freedom and flexibility of hermeneutic phenomenological research
methods, indicating there is no predetermined set of methods or procedures. van Manen also suggested that the phenomenological experience is naturally pedagogical as educators must remember the purpose of educational research as “educating children in a pedagogically responsible manner,” (p. 139) and to avoid the tendency to theorize abstractly, failing to achieve the goal of improving children’s educations. Furthermore, employing hermeneutic phenomenology within the critical genre moves the work toward illuminating hidden perspectives, diffusing power dynamics, and ultimately, creating change (Habermas, 1984). As such, this research values the education of children and vitalizes an underexplored perspective of school counseling. Black female school counselors’ work is specified and intentional, and the goal is clear; they are “care-full” educators who speak from the heart (Collins, 2000). Hence, they are conscious of their students’ lifeworld and its interplay with school structures.

To validate this perspective, I drew theoretically and epistemologically from Black Feminist thought, and inspirationally from Few et al. (2003), who argued, “Theory grounds how we identify, name, interpret, and write about experience. The theories we select to explain phenomena results from our own personal experiences and how we understand our social location and that of others in the world” (p. 206). Additionally, I referenced van Manen’s (2016) guide to hermeneutic phenomenological research, in first focusing on a phenomenon of interest, followed by investigative study of the lived experience, identifying essential themes that characterize the experience, describing the meaning of experiences via writing, rewriting, and reflecting, maintaining a pedagogical orientation to the phenomenon, and lastly, balancing the research via the parts and the whole.
Subsequently, the participants’ perspectives were captured in the context of their lifeworld via virtual, face-to-face, audio-recorded interviews. Next, interview data were subjected to verbal transcription, followed by a reading and re-reading of the transcripts, interpretive theme-development, and a fusion of horizons as the culminating act. Additionally, I sought to honor the participant’s lifeworld experiences by employing a Black Feminist epistemology as a context for analysis. This is supported by van Manen (2016) and Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), who cited the theoretical framework as the “centerpiece in managing the data” (p. 199). They described data categorization as structured within tenets of the theoretical framework, followed by iterative, open coding toward refining the data. Next, is theme development which is derived from the textual data in the form of “significant statements’ that provide understanding and insight with regard to how the participants experience the phenomenon” (p. 106). Furthermore, van Manen contended that significant statements can be identified via the “selective reading” approach, which entails reading the text multiple times while assessing each statement for its revelatory value to the participants’ experience.

**The Process.** Throughout the analysis, I remained cognizant of the three pitfalls of data analysis submitted by Holloway and Brown (2016). The first is neglecting to ground your analysis in the data, second, under-discussing your data, and third, failing to engage in dialogue with the related literature. Also, keeping in mind that the defining characteristic of hermeneutical phenomenological research is interpretation, I sought to remain in strong connection to the research focus, moving the analysis beyond description and toward interpretation and meaning making of the participants’ lifeworld (van Manen, 2016).
Subsequently, the analysis structure was patterned after the work of Ajjawi and Higgs (2007), and their six-stages of hermeneutical phenomenological data analysis: (1) Immersion, (2) Understanding, (3) Abstraction, (4) Synthesis and Theme Development, (5) Illumination and Illustration of Phenomena, and (6) Integration and Critique. I chose this method in hopes that the six stages would mitigate the volume of data gleaned from the interviews and reflective vision boards, making the analysis more efficient. Additionally, in keeping with the critical nature of this study, these stages were adhered to somewhat loosely, allowing flexibility for emergent analysis methods (Saldana, 2017). The following paragraphs detail the implementation of this analysis style.

**Stage One: Immersion.** Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) defined the key element of the immersion stage as the organizing of text. Texts were developed via the amalgamation of each participant’s interview transcripts, researcher field notes and participant’s reflective vision boards. The process began with solidifying the data. First, I cleaned the interview data by checking the transcriptions against the audio recordings, correcting any erroneously transcribed language. Cleaning the data ensured that the data accurately represented the participants’ words. Next, I engaged in multiple iterations of reading and re-reading the data and assessing meaning via the hermeneutic circle, as in assigning meaning to the whole by making sense of the parts (Kinsella, 2006). From this, Ajjawi and Higgs asserted that “the researcher remains open to questions that emerge from studying the phenomenon and allows the text to speak…” (p. 623). In other words, the phenomenological data surfaces amid dialogues between the researcher and the text. Field notes were also generated from each participant’s interviews as a brief reflection of the experience.
Notwithstanding, my perspectives and prejudices as a Black woman educator are brought to the research, leading to a fusion of horizons or hermeneutic understanding. Kinsella (2006) described this practice as attending to the prejudices that individuals bring to the interpretive experience. The result is a co-constructed knowledge per the participant’s lived experiences combined with my own personal biases and prejudices as a researcher. Lastly, regarding all data as relevant and reflective of the participants’ lived experiences, I was mindful of the research questions which ground this study. Thus, to further guide my analysis toward theme development, I created a chart shown in Table 2, that displayed my research questions, data sources, and corresponding analysis questions to use in interrogating the data. Developing the analysis questions required me to hone the origins of my research interest, and ask myself, what am I really trying to get at? After several hours of pondering the goals of my research questions and assessing its eventual “marriage” to the data, I arrived at 14 questions to guide the data analysis.

Table 2

*Questions Guiding Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Analysis Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What are the experiences of Black female school counselors working with Black adolescent girls in urban Middle Schools? | Interviews  
Vision Boards  
Field Notes | 1. What are the major focuses of the participant’s counseling work with Black girls in school?  
2. How does being a Black woman impact the participant’s interactions/relationships with Black girls in school?  
3. What are the participant’s goals and motivations in their |
| What are Black female school counselors’ perspectives on the ways in which they are supported or not supported in working with Black adolescent girls? | Interviews | 1. How does the school admin/staff respond to the participant’s work with Black adolescent girls?  
1. What are the participant’s interactions with school staff in relation to their work with Black girls?  
2. How does Black women’s intersectionality impact the participant’s interactions with school staff? |
| --- | --- | --- |
| In what ways (if any) does the concept of “mothering” show up in the relationships and counseling practices involving Black female school counselors and | Interviews  
Vision Boards | 1. What types of emotional investment are evident in the participant’s work with Black girls in school?  
2. What innate or instinctual characteristics of the |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools?</th>
<th>participant impacts their work with Black adolescent girls in school? How?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. How does the participant’s personal identity(s) impact her work with Black adolescent girls?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How does current and historical racism and/or gender marginalization influence the participant’s work with Black adolescent girls?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stage Two: Understanding – Identifying First Order Constructs.** For each research question and corresponding analysis question in Table 2, I pored over the participants’ interview transcripts, using the “selective or highlighting approach” (van Manen, 2016, p. 94), and looking for statements that spoke to each analysis question. The highlights were eventually identified as “significant statements,” or statements that appear to be rich or substantive, and thematic of the counselor’s experiences, which I contend give life to the participant’s data. These significant statements are considered first order constructs of data, as they are expressed in the participant’s own words (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

**Stage Three: Abstraction – Identifying Second Order Constructs and Grouping to Create Themes and Sub-themes.** The significant statements produced in the previous stage are first order constructs, which when subjected to theory and researcher interpretation led to sub-themes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019) or second order constructs known as “abstractions of the first order constructs” (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 624). Additionally, these second order constructs, also known as analytic memos
(Saldana, 2017), reflected the researcher’s personal interpretation of what the participant said, rooted and grounded in the study’s theoretical framework (Turman, 2017).

I began stage three by creating a document containing the first order constructs or significant statements. Next, using the theoretical framework as a repository for the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019), I categorized the significant statements per my own knowledge and understanding in conjunction with BFT. This unification yielded deeper, interpretive meaning of participants’ experiences via the tenets of BFT as in: (1) Lived Experience as a Criterion of Meaning, (2) The Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims, (3) The Ethic of Caring, and (4) The Ethic of Personal Accountability. Finally, actions in this stage produced some 20 second order constructs to be recategorized or synthesized into even broader themes (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Turman, 2017).

**Stage Four: Synthesis and Theme Development.** The abstraction stage allowed for deeper analysis of the school counselors’ experiences that lead to what van Manen (2016) terms as “structures of experience” (p. 179), or broader constructs to begin theme development. Moreover, in this stage, subthemes were renegotiated by reading and re-reading each piece of data, seeking previously unidentified meanings not initially articulated by the participants, via the hermeneutic circle (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Ultimately, the process involved multiple iterations of reviewing each subtheme and its components, and gradually combining the subthemes until a total of seven major themes emerged.

**Stage Five: Illuminating and Illustrating the Phenomena.** A key part of van Manen’s (2016) research algorithm includes reflecting on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon leading to a fusion of horizons. Moreover, the final themes
produced in stage four provided the basis for the fifth stage of illuminating and 
illustrating the school counselors’ experiences. While the study is grounded in the 
participant’s stories, final themes were further informed by theory along with the 
researcher’s beliefs and perspectives, per stages one through three of data analysis. 
Furthermore, the findings of this study will be presented via analysis stage six, 
*Integration and Critique*, highlighting the seven emerging themes, and contextualized 
within participants’ lifeworlds and the tenets of Black feminist thought.

**Trustworthiness**

As a scholar and researcher, I understand that research is naturally subject to 
evaluation by consumers seeking data outcomes that inform their interests. Unlike 
quantitative research, qualitative research processes are ongoing and evolving, requiring 
flexible tools that allow the researcher to be the primary instrument of inquiry to illustrate 
the ever-changing social world (Given, 2008). Furthermore, meaningful qualitative 
research is characterized by trustworthiness, which includes measurements of *credibility* 
and *dependability* (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Additionally, qualitative research must 
be rooted in ethical procedures and engage in trustworthy processes including, 
triangulation of multiple data sources, and collaborative member checks (Creswell & 
Poth, 2018; Bloomberg & Volpe; 2019). The following paragraphs provide a brief 
description of the metrics that characterize the trustworthiness of this project.

**Credibility.** The term credibility is defined as “the quality or power of inspiring 
belief” (Merriam-Webster, 2020). In qualitative research, credibility reflects the degree of 
accuracy to which the research represents the participant’s voice, feelings, and 
perceptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). As such, the primary aim of this research was
to understand the experiences of Black female school counselors working with Black female adolescent girls in urban middle schools, using a hermeneutic approach to phenomenology. Kinsella (2006) equated credible hermeneutic research with understanding rather than explanation, along with interpretation via the participant’s cultural lens, valuing language, location, conversational inquiry within a common language, and the ambiguous interpretive nature of hermeneutics. Thus, using the tools of hermeneutic phenomenological research, accurate interpretations of counselor experiences were presented.

Verbatim transcripts of the participants’ interviews were relied upon to embark on the co-construction of knowledge via mine and the participants’ life worlds, and consistent with hermeneutics, my own traditions, biases, and positionality is acknowledged as part of the interpretive process, creating a fusion of horizons (van Manen, 2016; Trede et al., 2009). On a side note, the concept of member checking has been a common aspect of establishing research credibility per qualitative experts such as Bloomberg & Volpe (2019). However, Crowther et al. (2017) challenged the use of extensive member checking in hermeneutical research, as human understanding is naturally evolving and subject to intermittent reflection and interpretation. Similarly, Sandelowski (1993) argued that participants may alter their stories out of forgetfulness or due to subsequent change in feelings, which may render the data transformed and unrecognizable and in need of further analysis (Holloway & Brown, 2012). Furthermore, credibility for this project is grounded in engagement with the participants, presenting detailed accounts of the research process via thick description, clarification of personal
biases, honest self-reflection from within my positionality, and triangulation in data collection (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

**Dependability.** Along with credibility, trustworthiness is measured by dependability, which provides a basis for broader use of this study (Given, 2008). Establishing dependability also involves the use of triangulation along with detailed explanations of data collection (Creswell, 2018). Hence, my conduction of two in-depth interviews per participant, along with having each of them construct a reflective vision board allowed for creative expression of their lifeworld as a school counselor (Turman, 2017). Additionally, I heeded Few et al. (2003) by using creativity in interview questioning, as in approaching the same interview questions in different ways and allowing the participant to engage in deeper reflection of the experience. Ultimately, properly employed dependability measures will ensure that the data adequately addresses the research questions.

**Bridging the Gap and Looking Toward Findings**

Prior to closing this chapter and assigning data outcomes, I find it appropriate to briefly review the character of this study. This phenomenological research project is hermeneutical and regards interpretation as key in understanding the phenomenon. Hence, the notion of bracketing as practiced in transcendental or descriptive phenomenology is neither beneficial nor possible with interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology (Kafle, 2011; van Manen, 2016). In fact, the hermeneutic branch of phenomenology welcomes the researcher’s pre-disposed beliefs to the research process via interpretative analysis and co-construction of data via the fusion of horizons (van Manen, 2016). This study is also critical in nature; it seeks to humanize and possibly
decolonize the participants (Paris & Winn, 2014), and values emergent forms of data analysis (Saldana, 2017). Essentially, findings were gleaned from participant interview transcripts, vision board captions, and narrative interpretation informed by theory, relevant literature, and researcher positionality.

**Researcher Positionality.** My positionality as a Black woman, mother, teacher, and school counselor was not lost in the hermeneutical process. I could not ignore the fabric of my life, woven by parents who migrated to Michigan from Tennessee in the 1950’s. I could not erase my lived experience as Black adolescent girl who sat in many classrooms with no one else who looked like me. I also could not set aside my experiences as a middle school math teacher interacting with Black adolescent girls in various urban middle school settings. My memories of raising a Black daughter who is now an adult are jarred by the participant narratives, thinking of her experiences attending an urban public middle school. Notwithstanding, my current position as a high school counselor deeply informs my perspective; the urban high school counselor experience is my lived experience, and it colors my lifeworld. Additionally, as a Black qualitative researcher using a feminist approach, my own lived experiences and insights are part of the research; not from an expert stance, but as a significant aspect of the research process (Evans-Winters, 2019). Moreover, I, along with the participants and the Black girls whom we serve are all Black women living in America, and our lifeworlds are regularly subjected to society’s matrix of domination and the controlling images discussed in Collins (2000).

**Analysis Review.** Each transcribed statement was informed by the participants’ lifeworlds and contributed to the findings in this study. However, moving toward the
research findings meant engaging in data analysis in the style of Ajjawi and Higgs (2007), first narrowing down the numerous significant statements from the interview transcripts to enhance data management. Next came reading and re-reading the transcripts, highlighting key words and phrases, and interrogating each transcript via the analysis questions found in Table 2. The process eventually evolved into analytic memoing, and finally, theme development. van Manen (2016) posited that hermeneutic phenomenology propels the data analysis toward pedagogy, or for this study, seeks to understand what it means to be a Black female school counselor working with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools. This is the hermeneutic circle in action, and it fuels the engine of hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology. Ajjawi and Higgs referred to the hermeneutic circle as a “metaphor for understanding and interpreting” (p. 622), as in understanding the whole experience through first attempting to name and understand the parts, then moving in a circular motion through text that is continuously impacted by new information and new fusions of knowledge (Crotty 1997; Kinsella, 2006).

Hence, per stage four of the data analysis, labeled “Synthesis and Theme Development,” I arrived at seven major themes of this research: (1) Building Relationships and Connecting with Black Girls Through Culture and Conversation, (2) We Need Them and They Need Us, (3) This is Personal: I See Myself in You (4) Supporting the Work, (5) Girls Need Mentoring Too, (6) It is Expected, and it Comes Naturally, and (7) I am a Black Female Professional Educator. Considering each theme in relation to the others, it made sense to divide them into two groups based on theme
characteristics. I found that themes 1, 2, and 3 relate to the “what” or the crux of their work with Black girls, and also the “why” of the Black female school counselors work. They speak to the participants’ personal and professional experiences as school counselors, and why they are needed in the school space. More concisely, the participants’ conversation reflects the “what” and “why” of their work, in context, and with whom, indicating what they do and why their work is important. In contrast, themes 4, 5, 6, and 7 represent the participants’ stories also cultivated in relation to context; they speak to “how” the school counselors’ work with Black girls is experienced, and generally reflects the nuances of how they carry out their work as school counselors.

Nonetheless, the participants also created reflective vision boards, individually, to provide visual expression of their emotions, motivations, goals, and other experiences that give meaning to their work with Black adolescent girls. The reflective vision boards brought an additional dynamic to this study’s findings, providing an abstract insight on the participant experiences. Furthermore, Greenwood (2012) posited that

> The recording and reporting of findings is a fundamental component of research. In this case successive understandings were reported through images and texts within the art forms and through verbal and written reflections about the art forms and the ideas that were emerging.” (p. 8)

Thus, moving further, Chapter 4 will detail themes 1, 2, and 3, along with summations of Myrna and Jade’s vision board approach. Chapter 5 will detail themes 4, 5, 6, and 7, along with summations of Beverly and Ingrid’s vision board approach. Lastly, I submit that this study’s findings are a synthesis of the participants’ experiences; they are excerpts from the participant’s stories, informed by my lifeworld, and compiled within the framework of Black feminist thought.
Chapter Four: What We Do and Why We Do It

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of Black female school counselors who work with Black adolescent girls in urban schools. The following questions guided the research:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black female school counselors in their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools?
2. What are Black female school counselors’ perspectives on the ways in which they are supported or not supported in working with Black adolescent girls?
3. In what ways (if any) does the concept of “mothering” show up in the relationships and counseling practices involving Black female school counselors and Black adolescent girls?

In this chapter, I explore three major themes that speak to the void filled by Black female school counselors in urban middle schools, primarily in response to Research Questions 1 and 2. As school counselors, these participants employ a pedagogy that addresses the whole person of Black girls, including their inner voices and what they believe about themselves and other Black girls, along with the judgements and appraisals from external forces (Foster, 1995). While I am careful not to generalize the experiences of all Black female counselors, the themes generated by the participants’ experiences are supported by literature discussions on Black female educators, primarily teachers, who also develop relationships with Black girls as “connected knowers” (Masko, 2018; Pasour, 2004). Like Black female school counselors, they provide guidance on topics such as racial socialization, overcoming stereotypes, and self-empowerment through an ethic of care.
that is unique to Black educators (Lane, 2017; Masko, 2018; Pasour, 2004; Roseboro & Ross, 2009; Thompson, 1998). Additionally, Black female educators embrace the alternate realities felt by Black girls, as these realities involve racial and gendered oppression, and are much like their own (Collins, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2019; Morris, 2019; Pasour, 2004). Furthermore, the next three sections illuminate Black female school counselors’ experiences that is absent from the literature presented in Chapter 2. The study participants engage with Black adolescent girls through building relationships, fostering collective survival as Black females, and fulfilling the participants’ personal and professional motivations. Finally, this information supports Research Question 1, explicating the participants’ experiences working with Black adolescent girls, along with how the participants feel supported and acknowledged by their colleagues in their work with Black adolescent girls, per Research Question 2.

**Building Relationships and Connecting with Black Girls Through Culture and Conversation**

This first thematic finding speaks primarily with Research Questions 1 and 2, regarding the general experiences surrounding the participants’ work with Black girls, along with identifying aspects of mothering may occur within the participants’ work. Reflecting on this theme centered my mind on the term “relationship,” and its etymology in two parts: “relation” and “ship.” Merriam-Webster (2020) defined the noun “relation” as a person connected by consanguinity or by affinity; while the suffix “ship,” refers to a state, condition, quality. Consanguinity, or sharing a common ancestor is the essence of the Black female connection, coupled with the affinity or the inherent likeness among Black females. It is the root of intersectional oppression that is based on gender and race,
and it initializes the relationships among Black women (Day-Vines et al., 2003). These shared experiences place them in the “ship” or the condition in which they reside.

Navigating Throughout. The participants in this study revealed aspects of Evans-Winters’s (2019) navigational process as a major focus of their work, which is also the basis of the counselor-student relationship. Evans-Winters described the navigational process as Black women and girls’ ways of surviving and thriving amid “patriarchy, poverty, and racial, class, and gender bias in schools” (p. 73). Undoubtedly, each participant has experienced the navigational process within their unique contexts, and Myrna, the most senior of the participants bemoaned the challenges of being a Black woman in America, and how societal structures place barriers to success at almost every turn. Her life experiences inform her work and her desire to prepare Black girls for the future. Having come of age during the civil rights struggles of the 1960’s and 1970’s, Myrna is a proponent of unity among Black females, as “sisters.” Her reflective vision board displayed examples of relationships through friendship and mentoring among Black women and girls from a global perspective. She understands how oppression and marginalization can divide Black women, and thus she celebrates examples of solidarity. Furthermore, considering Black women and girls’ unique experiences of marginalization, Myrna is driven to provide healing through her work as a school counselor, stating emphatically that “Black girls have different needs than Hispanic and White girls.”

Supporting work by Collins (2000) noted that the intersectional experiences regarding race and gender for Black women represent a collective knowledge or a “standpoint” that generates practices of both resistance and empowerment. Black women also understand that they are not alone, knowing that most females of color also incur
oppressive experiences in a White-dominated society (Lorde, 2007). However, Black women’s collective standpoint includes the knowledge that our ancestral mothers were once viewed as property for the slave masters’ usage, along with the denigrating, stereotypical labeling of Black women (Collins, 2000). The impact of this, and other forms of historical oppression informs the participants’ work with Black adolescent girls. They relate to the racism that Black girls encounter surrounding hair, complexion, and body image, and speak on it from what Collins (2000) called a “space of shared empathy.” They impart wisdom from their lived experiences with Black girls to aid in the navigational process of growing into a Black woman. Encapsulating the challenges of racial and gendered intersectionality, Myrna offers a premonitory statement of caution, stating that, “number one, you’re a woman, and number two, you’re a Black woman.”

Hence, the participants help Black girls process their racialized experiences happening here and now, in the school space, while also looking toward the future. The literature presented in Chapter 2 highlighted several of these experiences, including receiving deficit perceptions from teachers, disproportionate disciplinary encounters, and stereotypical labeling. Sometimes these experiences are based on perception and sometimes they are proven to be reality. However, like Black women, Black adolescent girls view events through a lens colored by their lived experiences (Guy-Sheftall, 1995), which for doubters, means “the hurt is real,” regardless of outside opinions. So, when a Black female student approached Jade stating, “Ms. So-and-So don’t like Black people,” Jade first acknowledged the girl’s feelings and then took time to help her process the situation. Jade described how she went about breaking down emotional walls to find out what elicited the student’s statement in the first place and examining the racialized
context of the incident. In like manner, all school counselors should be poised to validate the hurt felt by their students, especially considering the complexity of Black girls’ concerns. As such, I suppose Black female school counselors are in most cases better equipped to mediate these issues, bearing in mind the learned distrust in the White-favoring educational system felt by many Black families. Roseboro and Ross (2009), discussed this lack of trust, describing it as the “hermeneutic of suspicion,” felt by Black families and Black students alike.

**Learning on the Job.** Despite this, both Jade and Ingrid discussed some of their own challenges relating to Black female students. They identified some early missteps and misconceptions concerning initial relationships with Black girls. Jade, for example attributed her challenges to within-group differences, as her own adolescent experiences were quite different from her students’ experiences. Jade’s mother and father were both school administrators, so in a sense, she felt comfortable with the system, and most of her friends growing up were White. Additionally, coming from a middle-class economic background, with two college-educated parents, Jade was unlike many of her students who come from working-class families. Oftentimes, within-group differences lay at the intersection of race and class, where one’s race is a constant, immutable aspect of one’s life, and the racial biases felt wholly by Blacks has been a unifying factor (Day-Vines et al., 2003). On the other hand, class statuses can be fluid, and class distinctions are less cohesive, creating caste systems that produce shame and resentment between classes and within racial groups (Hooks, 2000, as cited in Day-Vines, et al., 2003). Similarly, Collins (2000) posited that middle-class families experience oppression differently than do working-class families. As such, Collins questioned the solidarity of Black women
among these two groups, citing the potential of some Black women to engage in the oppression and subordination of other Black women.

These factors likely contributed to Jade’s tension when Black girls did not automatically flock to her. My perception is that Jade exemplified the “acting White” persona (Archer-Banks et al., 2013), which she alluded to in her story. Sensing these differences, Jade confessed that early in her counseling career she feared that she would not connect with the Black girls with whom she worked. She had difficulty understanding their choices and motivations and took a somewhat aggressive approach to counseling them. After developing more patience and flexibility, Jade soon embraced the uniqueness of her Black female students, knowing that while there are self-evident truths common to Black women, we are not prone to static, monolithic ideals, and experiences (Collins, 2000; Guy-Sheftall, 1995). She also came to understand where she fit in the scheme of racial and class oppression, still affirming her Blackness. Despite her recognized differences, Jade concluded by saying, “You have to be Black to understand what it means to be Black.”

Like Jade, Ingrid’s counseling style with Black girls evolved over time. She discussed how her initial approach of teaching cloaked with tough love was not working. Black girls rejected her hard stance, and she became a representation of those who angered them. She stated, “Right there was my wake-up call that I had to change my dynamics on working with them because I was really hard on them, because that’s what people did to me.” Now, Ingrid refers to her office as the “safe space where Black girls can be themselves.” What both Jade and Ingrid failed to grasp initially is that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to working with Black girls. Ricard (2020) posited that
“While living life as a Black woman may produce certain commonalities of outlook, the diversity of class, region, age, and sexual orientation shaping individual Black lives has resulted in different expressions of these common themes” (p. 36)

“I Get it.” The common themes of Black life, however, do strengthen the participants’ relationships with their Black female students. The notion that Black girls’ hair and clothing are key to her self-image is not lost on the participants. They understand how her physical appearance can impact her day, in how she sees herself, along with how others see her. Consequently, the participants empathize with the student who arrives at school with half of a hairstyle (braids or other aspects of hair partially undone). To that extent, grooming, as in a mini hair session, might take place in Ingrid’s office. Consequently, engaging in hair grooming, addressing clothing concerns, and other issues can lead to bonding and rich conversations that emerge within the counselor-student relationship (Edwards, 2005). Meanwhile, each participant discussed at various times advocating for Black girls’ permission to wear a headscarf during the day, which is generally a violation of school dress-code policies. Subsequently, the participants’ understanding of Black girls’ hair, clothing, physical characteristics, and attitudes results in a special counseling connection that serves Black girls uniquely. This connection moves the participants to respond to Black girls’ needs. They assess their roles in the school context, along with their positionality, and they ask themselves, “if not me then who?”

Additionally, the participants all shared concern for Black girls’ interpersonal relationships, not only with teachers, but with other students. While this need falls under the socioemotional work of the school counselor (ASCA, 2019), Beverly spoke about
“social work” as a big part of her work with Black female students, mainly dealing with interpersonal relationships, conflict with other girls, and external influences on self-esteem. Referring to herself as a “sounding board,” Beverly reflected over the numerous conversations she has had with Black girls about their defensiveness. She spoke about “breaking down walls to be able to understand.” Moreover, Morris (2019) appropriately asserted that the defensiveness in Black girls is likely a representation of anger, hurt, or even shame, stemming from forms of trauma in their lives. Drawing from my own experiences, I further interpret Black girls’ defensiveness as a symptom of exhaustion from being misunderstood by others. Our emotions are under assessment, our abilities are diminished, and our appearance is under the “prejudicial gaze” of oppressive systems (Holloway, 1999, as cited in Collins, 2000). Ironically, Blacks sometimes buy into these oppressive ideologies, and employ stereotypical characterizations of Black women and girls. As such, Beverly, along with the other participants mediate these encounters. They delve into their students’ lifeworlds, helping them process the impact of their oppression and how it manifests in their lives.

Despite the negative events that occur, the participants find celebratory moments of pride and accomplishment, both great and small. Beverly is excited to help Black adolescent girls find their purpose in life, so that they are not led by society’s dictations. She cautions them to avoid the stereotypical mammy role, in always having to be selfless and strong, carrying the load, and never appearing vulnerable (Haynes et al., 2016). Jade’s energy is piqued by her desire to help Black girls conquer invisibility and “find inner peace” and to “shine their lights, and not let anyone dim their lights.” Her vision board also reflects how she values her own peace, as all school counselors should do
(ASCA, 2019), and extols the benefits of mindfulness with her students. Ingrid’s counseling relationships with Black girls center primarily on addressing their socioemotional issues and “teaching” lessons of socialization. She wants them to learn, as she did, that the world will assess their personas and their physical attributes based on White female norms (Morris, 2019). She looks for opportunities to break through the trauma her Black female students bring to school, “getting them comfortable enough to speak on their trauma.” She wants to know, “Is this young lady just being defiant or this this a young lady that needs to get her story out?” To enhance the counseling relationship, Ingrid, along with Myrna spoke of the intentionality of opening-up to Black girls about their own racial and gendered experiences, and how they press on to succeed. Nonetheless, each participant is proud of the relationships they have formed with the Black girls they counsel and their unique ability to establish connections. They can relate with Black girls because though their experiences may not be identical, as Black women they have had similar experiences (Collins, 2000; Day-Vines et al., 2003), or know someone who has had that same experience.

Bringing closure to this discussion, we recall from ASCA (2019) that a listening counselor is key to any counseling relationship, and each participant values this skill. They offer patience and take time to peel back the layers of emotion in their students, offering grace and love. The participants also value the authenticity they bring to the counseling relationship, along with the rapport developed with their students, which is largely based on the shared cultural experiences surrounding race and gender. Furthermore, this research shows that developing relationships with students based on connections of culture and conversation is salient for school counselors in responding to
the individual needs of her students. Thus, the following concepts summarize the participants’ relational dispositions surrounding the needs of Black adolescent girls: they acknowledge their realities; they are intentional about listening, they encourage self-acceptance, they provide a physical and emotional space of safety, and they hold a promising vision for the future. Finally, the counselor-student relationship is purposeful, evolving, and complex, to say the least; moreover, it is enriched by Black feminist principles of shared lived experiences, dialogue, accountability, and a high level of care (Collins, 2000). I end this section with words from each participant regarding the formulation, and enhancement of their relationships with Black adolescent girls:

Myrna: “There are certain burdens we carry as Black women that White women have no idea.”

Jade: “I think probably in any Guidance office, there are kids that kind of gravitate toward one counselor over the other, and it probably has to do with gender, or skin color, or personality.”

Beverly: “I’m able to understand some of the things that they’re going through, on a woman basis, race-related, and me being a little bit younger.”

Ingrid: “Just the connection between us, being the same person, just in different age groups.”

We Need Them and They Need Us

This section speaks to the interdependency among Black female school counselors, Black adolescent girls, and urban school systems to address the needs and concerns of Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools. Information in this thematic finding connects with aspects of all three Research Questions relating to participant experiences, levels of support felt by participants, and aspects of mothering that may occur in the participants’ work with Black adolescent girls. To begin with, ASCA (2019) promotes the development of counseling groups focused on identified needs for targeted
groups of students. Additional literature previously presented discussed the benefits of having a school space specifically for Black girls to collectively process their racial and gendered school experiences (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Collins, 2000; Day-Vines et al., 2003).

In this study, three of the participants discussed leading girls’ groups within their schools. Beverly described her group as racially diverse, initially, however over time, the membership primarily consisted of Black girls. She noted the challenges of balancing a school counselor’s varied and myriad tasks (Ricard, 2020), with facilitating an extracurricular group, and how she devotes herself to it despite the workload. She knows if she does not commit the time, the group will fall by the wayside, stating, “I just didn’t want to let it go.” Jade had similar concerns about taking on group facilitation because of family obligations. Myrna expressed concern that her school’s administration did not want her group to consist of Black girls only; therefore, she often makes space in her day to eat lunch with small groups of Black girls, to check in with them about life. Regardless of the challenges, the participants persist and find creative ways to support Black girls, such arranging relevant field trips, or inviting in Black women from the community to speak about college and careers.

Furthermore, because of the cultural connection that exists between the participants and Black girls, along with the ethics of care and accountability held by the participants, attending to Black girls’ needs remains a key aspect of their work. Consequently, Black female school counselors are routinely called upon by colleagues to assist with Black girls’ concerns. They are approached by administrators and other school staff who feel ill-equipped to reach Black girls. “They come to me and say, hey, this girl
is going through something. I really need your help,” Myrna added. Or they may refer a
girl to be in the girls’ group because they “think she needs to be around other girls.” Jade
recalled a White male colleague’s misunderstanding of one of his Black female students’
experiences, and how she intervened saying, “I was like no, this is what they mean.”
Moreover, in the same breath, she bemoaned her colleague’s lack of opportunity to fully
relate to certain students. Jade’s concern was initially puzzling to me. Though, I soon
interpreted it as empathy for her colleague’s professional ego in having to defer one of
his students to a colleague. This is generally not an issue for Black educators working
with White children, as we have indubitably spent our lives navigating as outsiders,
within the “White culture” (Evans-Winters, 2019). I remember hearing older Black
people in my life surmising, “We have to know everything about them, but they don’t
have to know nothing about us.”

Nevertheless, White staff often get by without fully embracing Black culture and
Black communication styles, given the politics surrounding dominant language and
discourse (Delpit, 1995), and Black students often suffer as a result. In response, the
ASCA (2019) school counseling standards challenge school counselors to engage
intentionally with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, it is evident that
urban school systems with Black student populations routinely rely on Black educators to
“handle” Black children (Jones, 2019). Jade reflected on this reliance via her positionality
as a Black woman, lamenting, “Just because I am a Black female doesn’t mean I’m going
to automatically be able to fix the situation.”

**Four Key Behaviors.** This study’s findings provide evidence as to how Black
female school counselors are needed within educational spaces and are beneficial in
supporting the unique needs of Black adolescent girls. This research finding also connects with the four key behaviors of school counselors presented in ASCA (2016).

School counselors are advocates, leaders, collaborators, and consultants who create systemic change by providing equitable educational access and success by connecting their school counseling programs to the district’s mission and improvement plans. School counselors demonstrate their belief that all students have the ability to learn by advocating for an education system that provides optimal learning environments for all students. (para. 2)

The previous quote promotes the school counselors’ involvement in creating structural change, not only at the school building level, but at the district level. I submit that these structural changes benefit the system as a whole; when Black students’ needs are addressed structurally, the impact is usually felt by all students (Jones, 2019).

Furthermore, research shows that Black school counselors contribute greatly to ameliorating inequitable educational practices in school spaces; they value the work, and they are often relied upon by school districts to champion it (Hart Research Associates 2012; Jones, 2019).

Further examining the interdependency among entities in supporting Black adolescent girls, we consider how the four key counselor behaviors presented by ASCA (2019) can lead to structural change in school systems. First, the participants in this study cite advocacy as a key aspect of their work as a school counselor. Myrna spoke about advocating for a young Black girl who is acting out in class. She knows the girl may be misjudged and disciplined as a result; however, she also knows there is something behind the student’s behavior. She chides her White colleagues saying, “It’s the angry Black girl syndrome, and no, she’s not an angry Black girl. She might have a lot of issues that you will never understand.” Because of incidents like this, Myrna stated that she has begun
working on redefining her girls’ group to better support Black girls. She understands their need to process being misunderstood through group validation and continues to promote the need for targeted activities to support Black girls.

Jade again spoke about Black girls’ hair and how, depending on the situation, it may make or break their day. Both Jade and Ingrid recounted how Black girls may need advocacy for time and space to groom their hair during the day, and even to wear a headscarf, which is contrary to school policy. They recalled how some teachers are understanding of these exceptions; however, others want to follow the letter of the law with no empathy for a young girl’s position. This “warped view” ultimately shapes how some White teachers engage with Black girls. Ingrid expressed irritation at how some teachers treat Black girls as women. She remarked, “You see teachers go back and forth with Black girls. They put them on a higher level, and I have to remind them that’s a kid you’re going back and forth with.” She recalls admonishing “out of touch” colleagues, particularly White, male colleagues who try and dismiss Black girls’ trauma as excuses for issues they simply need to get over.

Along with advocacy, Black female school counselors display leadership by taking on tasks that their White colleagues either do not feel capable of doing, or do not want to do. The participants did not share information as to whether their White colleagues engage in any counselor-led group facilitation, however Myrna, Beverly, and Jade show leadership in this area. They are change agents, addressing common concerns among targeted groups, and bringing their needs to the forefront (ASCA, 2016). Relatedly, the importance of implementing culturally relevant programming in their schools was mentioned by all participants. In Beverly’s case, she makes sure school-wide
programs are inclusive; including those that promote and recognize academic achievement. Also, both Myrna and Jade participate actively in district-wide initiatives for equity, confidently representing the counselor’s perspective. For these participants, leadership is not defined by titles or showmanship. They lead by example, doing what is needed for their students, and whether it is acknowledged it or not, they know that their administrators and colleagues need them (Jones, 2019).

The third and fourth key behaviors for school counselors mentioned by ASCA (2016) are collaboration and consultation. All four participants described how they regularly engage in consultation with those in the students’ educational sphere. This includes parents, teachers, caseworkers, mental health, and medical professionals, with the goal of identifying and addressing student needs. The participants also spoke of their efforts to present strong, informed perspectives during interventions for Black girls who are academically, emotionally, or behaviorally troubled. Furthermore, it is equally common for the participants to engage with community members or organizations who want to “give back,” by providing enrichment opportunities for Black girls.

Ultimately, the participants see themselves as mediators and liaisons: they arrange and facilitate parent-teacher-student conferences to address students’ academic needs. They make referrals to outside entities for student mental health support and family resources. They also provide information in formal spaces regarding the academic and socioemotional well-being of the special needs students they serve. Beverly noted, “I am the middle person for teachers and families, and our kids and their families.” While these processes are in place to support all students, the cultural connection the participants hold with Black girls, adds greater dimension to their work. Beverly recounted, at times
feeling the brunt of parents’ frustration during difficult conversations about students. In one instance, an African American mother displayed hostility toward Beverly. She gathered, “I think she just got fed up with her daughter being in trouble, and she took it out on me.”

Finally, in summarizing this theme of “We Need Them and They Need Us,” I reemphasize the four tenets of Collins’s (2000) Black feminist framework: valuing one’s lived experiences as ways of knowing, the use of dialogue to express knowledge claims, along with holding fast to the ethics of care and of personal accountability. These tenets are evident in the participant’s expressions of authenticity, by their willingness to listen to their students’ stories, and share their own stories. They also align with the school counselor professional standards found in ASCA (2019), of supporting students’ academic, socioemotional and career development, which are enhanced by fruitive relationships. They also manifest via the four key behaviors of the school counselors, consisting of leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and consultation (ASCA, 2016). Lastly, this research highlights the interdependency among Black female school counselors and Black female students and their families, along with school staff and school districts who educate Black adolescent girls. Notably, Black female school counselors’ equity work for Black girls can facilitate improved schooling experiences for all students (Jones, 2019).

**This is Personal: I See Myself in You**

This thematic finding speaks to Research Questions 1 and 2, regarding the participants’ experiences working with Black girls and examining whether aspects of mothering occur in their work. Furthermore, central to one’s lifeworld are the experiences that shape the life over time. The lifeworld, according to van Manen (2016) is the space
“where knowledge speaks through our lived experiences” (p. 46). Though some lived experiences are pleasant recollections of the past, others represent young a Black girl’s experiences of oppression and marginalization relevant to that time. However, they all represent the lifeworld of a Black girl, who is now a woman, and whose work influences the lives of young Black girls today. As such, the participants undoubtedly see aspects of themselves in the Black girls they serve, and as the next several paragraphs will show, this thematic finding is at the heart of the participants’ drive and motivation in counseling Black adolescent girls.

**Participant Connections**

This theme seemed to resonate most with Ingrid, who considers her “relative experience” as her greatest asset in working with Black adolescent girls. Ingrid identifies herself as “one of those kids;” she was smart, outspoken, and defensive when it came to interactions with teachers. Similar behavior regarding high achieving Black girls was discussed in Chapter 2, drawing from Joseph et al. (2016). Ingrid loathed being the only Black student in the advanced classes, to the point where she intentionally got herself into trouble to get out of class. She had nothing in common with the other students, who were mostly White; and, if the teacher was being unfair any student, Ingrid felt the need to respond, which also got her in into trouble. She attributes her attitude to the spirit of Black women who are caretakers, saying “I get anxiety if I don’t take care of other people.”

Ingrid, along with the other participants all say they have encountered Black girls who are super smart but feel out of place in honors classes where they are the only Black student there (Day-Vines et al., 2003; Fordham, 1993). When stereotype threat kicks in
(Steele, 2010), the student feels pressed to answer every question correctly to avoid having both the teacher and the students wonder why she is in the honors class in the first place. The participants naturally feel concern for a student in this situation; in fact, as Ingrid stated, they either were that girl at one time, or they may have a friend or relative having similar experiences. Ingrid also connected with Black girls’ trauma, having experienced a “chaotic” home life filled with domestic violence. Yet, as reflected in her vision board, Ingrid lives by the theme “Still, I Rise.” She believes her students can also “rise,” so she provides a reprieve or “safe space” for girls who need an outlet to be themselves. She refers to her office as the “mediation spot,” where “stuff gets worked out,” as in, “is this defiance, or a cry for help?” Ingrid adds, “It’s a huge emotional investment for me, because I see myself in them.”

Having raised Black daughters, Myrna’s insight on this theme is indeed personal. It encapsulates her lived experiences; she was a Black child during the civil rights struggle, became a teenage mother, and eventually grew into a life-long learner and educator. She re-lived it again through her daughters’ progression into adulthood. Like Ingrid, Myrna’s story resembles the lives of many of the Black girls they serve. In sharing her story, she reflects on the accomplishments of her youth, as well as the missteps. She wants her students to avoid the pitfalls that are sure to come, being doubly marginalized as a Black woman, quoting, “There’s two things that you have to overcome as you grow older, the issue of race and the issue of gender.”

Jade perceives her homelife and upbringing as less connected to that of her students. However, she was once a middle school girl and can relate to aspects of adolescence and the middle school experience. She remembers her “12-year-old self,”
and the insecurities of that age. A personal struggle for Jade growing up was being labeled as “acting White,” by other black girls. Admittedly, most of her friends were White and many of her choices growing up were different than those of most Black girls. This dissonance created urgency within Jade to discover and embrace the uniqueness of Black women and girls, and the light within each of us that illuminates our authenticity. It reveals who we are and should not be extinguished or overshadowed. As displayed in her reflective vision board, Jade wants this for the Black girls with whom she works. She wanted this for herself as a Black girl who was labeled as “different.” She sees herself in the Black adolescent schoolgirl who chooses her own path; she is a Black girl who will become a Black woman and maybe someday, a mother of Black children. Her uniqueness is her light, and Jade is compelled to help her shine.

Beverly sees herself in her students as they struggle to find their purpose. Though they are young, Beverly believes that middle school is the prime time for Black girls to begin self-discovery. She recalls her own experiences of going to college and not initially finding her niche in life. This drives Beverly’s intentions of providing her students with opportunities to explore a variety of career options that reflect their strengths and contradict stereotypes, as opposed to being pigeon-holed into menial occupations. Like Ingrid, Beverly was the lone Black girl in many of her classes at school. An image of this notion is found on her reflective vision board, where a young Black girl appears to be the only Black student a classroom; her hand is raised, and she is engaged in learning by seeking information, and she will find her purpose.

Moreover, these and other connections between Black female school counselors and Black girls in the urban middle school epitomizes special relationship between the
two groups. In Ingrid’s case, safety is what she needed, and she provides it for Black girls dealing with trauma. For Myrna, it is Black women’s relationships with one another through throughout life that are anticipated, prepared for, and reflected upon. Additionally, there is the a “light” that Jade sees within herself and other Black women and girls that stems from the self-love which she hopes to reinforce within her students. Beverly’s focus on strength and purpose with her students is borne out of her own journey of self-discovery. Furthermore, these findings are evidence that the participants’ work with their Black female students is personal, and it is epistemologically sound. It is informed via the lived experiences of Black women and girls and the intentional dialogue between them. Lastly, it is fostered by the authenticity and personal accountability displayed by Black women, and the personal connection of love, woman to child (Collins, 2000).

**Reflective Vision Boards: A Mosaic of Experience – Myrna and Jade**

Data for this research project was gleaned from semi-structured interviews of each participant, along with reflective vision boards created by each participant. Each was asked to create her own collage of visual images that represent her school counseling work with Black adolescent girls. This activity allowed the participants to be creative in expressing their emotions, motivations, goals, and other experiences that give meaning to their work. Next is a look at Myrna and Jade’s approach to constructing their reflective vision boards.

**Myrna.** Myrna expressed some initial hesitation in creating the reflective vision board. Her concerns were primarily centered on her prejudged discomfort with the technology aspect of the project. However, as I had expected, Myrna created her
reflective vision board with no problem. She expressed her enjoyment in creating the reflective vision board themed, “Black Girl Magic,” which was spelled out in images of small wooden tiles placed at the top of the vision board. Relatedly, she expressed lament over the fact that she was unable to find an image of a Black ballerina, based on her admiration of the famous Black ballerina, Misty Copeland. Moreover, Myrna’s vision board speaks to her aim of seeing the best in Black girls both individually and wholly, along with a celebration of Black female unity. It troubles her to see the discord and conflict among Black girls and seeks to ameliorate these relationships through her work. It is also notable that Myrna included global representations of “Black Girl Magic” that reveal Myrna’s pride in her heritage as a Black woman. Lastly, key concepts represented in Myrna’s reflective vision board include confidence, uniqueness, strength, and sisterhood.

Finally, Myrna’s reflective vision board is shown in Appendix E as Figure 2, along with a synopsis of her thoughts and motivations in developing the reflective vision boards, as displayed in Table 3. Information in Table 3 represents co-constructed statements by the researcher and the participant via interview dialogue. Any direct quotes within the table represent Myrna’s own words.

**Jade.** Constructing the reflective vision board allowed Jade to relive her daily interactions with Black girls. She drew from her own emotions and dispositions during counseling sessions which might involve helping to de-escalate anger, exploring sexuality, and simply being a listener. Admittedly a reflective person, Jade’s vision board centered on how she sees herself as a school counselor working with Black girls. In part,
she reconciled her own insecurities via the personal growth she experienced over time, and this growth helps her facilitate the magnitude of her students’ needs.

Additionally, a recurring concept during my conversation with Jade was that of “light.” Jade believes that there is a “light” within each girl that may be overshadowed by trauma, racism, and low self-esteem. Like her students, Jade’s lifeworld is shaped by her upbringing; she was a child of educators, growing up as a self-described introvert with friends who were mostly White. Thus, Jade believes in the “light” represents Black girls’ true, natural self, that can be obfuscated my marginalizing forces. It represents the non-monolithic essence of Black girls that is brought forth and nourished through love; hence Jade’s reflective vision board theme: “Love and Light.” When asked if there was anything she would like to add or change on the reflective vision board, Jade stated that she would have included an image with “crying or tears,” representing the emotional connection she feels with her students and their families.

Finally, Jade’s reflective vision board is shown in Appendix F, as Figure 3, along with a synopsis of her thoughts and motivations in developing the reflective vision boards, as displayed in Table 4. Information in Table 4 represents co-constructed statements by the researcher and the participant via interview dialogue. Any direct quotes within the table represent Jade’s own words.
Chapter 5: The “How” Behind What We Do

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of Black female school counselors who work with Black adolescent girls in urban schools. The following questions guided the research:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black female school counselors in their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools?
2. What are Black female school counselors’ perspectives on the ways in which they are supported or not supported in working with Black adolescent girls?
2. In what ways (if any) does the concept of “mothering” show up in the relationships and counseling practices involving Black female school counselors and Black adolescent girls?

The findings presented in this chapter speak to all three research questions regarding the “how” of the participants’ experiences working with Black adolescent girls. This information is absent from the literature presented in Chapter 2 and will add to the knowledge and surrounding the work of Black female school counselors. Furthermore, these findings are presented via four major themes gleaned from the data. The first theme emerges as Black female school counselors follow the guidance of ASCA (2016), and lead, advocate, consult, and collaborate on behalf of their Black female students. These actions require reasonable support from school administration and colleagues to allow progress (Ricard, 2020). Relatedly, Black female school counselors see the need to mentor Black girls, per recent literature addressing the marginalization of Black girls in school spaces. The final two themes involve the intrinsic desire of Black women to
nurture and protect Black children, and lastly, a look at the how the intersectional identities of Black female professional educators impact their work as school counselors.

As the previous chapter aimed to promote understanding as to the “what” and the “why” relating to Black female school counselors’ work with Black girls, this chapter speaks to the “how” via the four themes. The “how” represents how the participants, as Black female school counselors fulfill their motivations and accomplish their goals for the benefit of Black adolescent girls, including obstacles that occur along the way regarding their intersectional identity as Black females.

**Supporting the Work**

This thematic finding connects directly with Research Question 2, and centers on the perceived level of support felt by the participants in their work with Black girls. Looking broadly at the “how” of Black female school counselors’ work with Black adolescent girls, we found that the participants’ professional success and fulfillment requires foundational support at the district level as well as at the building level. Hence, the participants’ work is impacted by school system structures, including caseload size, lack of diversity in staff, and what Myra termed as “recycled racism.” For example, Beverly discussed her desire to start a GSA or Gay-Straight Alliance organization to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ students, however, given the scarcity of time in the school day, she lamented, “there is just not enough time for all groups.” Her administrator came out and told her, “You really don’t have time for that.” Given the size of her caseload, her administrator was right, as Beverly, and the other participants each have between 400 and 500 students on their caseloads. Thus, they are often torn, because at times it feels like almost everything is a priority, and in that case, really, nothing is priority. The scarcity of
time also leaves participants concerned about others’ perceptions of showing favoritism to Black girls because of the time invested in counsel and in group facilitation. Jade validated this, sharing her awareness of conversations among staff members as to “certain students” getting more attention from counselors than others.

Additionally, the “recycled racism” that Myrna spoke of relates to her experience with unfair job assessment, which she believes is connected to race; thus, the familiar saying that “Black people have to work twice as hard” resonates with Myrna. She along with Ingrid agreed that the lack of diversity among the teaching staff also makes their work more challenging at times, adding that “Black girls just don’t have enough Black women to look up to in this building.” This is troubling, given the beneficial relationships between Black educators and Black girls presented in literature via Chapter 2, and the findings presented in Chapter 4. Furthermore, I assert that this concern can be traced to personnel decisions at the district and building level. Black educators are lacking in some spaces, either through poor recruitment, being dismissed or leaving due to lack support and feeling valued, and the attrition of positions once held by Blacks and subsequently re-filled by Whites. Consequently, many Black female school counselors are impacted by a problematic lack of representation in urban public schools, as African American school counselors may face or feel obliged to take on duties to counsel students of color in addition to their other responsibilities” (Knowles et al., 2011, p. 45). Notably, the participants mention feeling exhausted at times, even feeling like they are “everybody’s counselor” (Jones, 2019), which can also turn into professional burnout (Butler, 2005; Ricard, 2020).
**Support vs. Demand.** The participants discussed the strings held by administration as to what work is important, along with demands from school administration and classroom teachers. Amatea & Clark (2005) discussed how school administrators place emphasis on the initiatives that they value, and often in turn, set expectations for school counselors to structure, coordinate, and facilitate processes. This can place school counselors in “on call” mode for everyone; however, Collins (2000) discussed how Black women through professional leadership, can be agents of change, and influence systems and administrators to reassess their vision (ASCA, 2016; Collins, 2000).

Moreover, each participant expressed having a generally supportive school administration in terms of program implementation for Black girls. Notably, the participants in this study appear to have administrators who are open-minded and allow the counselors to initiate activities with little push-back. “Anything I felt like needed to be done, I was supported in it, as long as it wasn’t interfering with academic time,” said Ingrid. Beverly added that, “Our administration is awesome at making sure that whatever somebody wants to do as far as making sure there is inclusion for students, that’s a possibility.” Similarly, Jade praised her administrative staff saying, “I work with a pretty open and accepting administrative staff. I feel that if I had a concern, it would be heard, and people would take it serious.” Myrna’s feelings differed slightly from the other participants’, as she cited some tension in her work with Black girls. Myrna added, “My administration did not want my group to be just for Black girls.” However, she followed with resolve stating that, “If I went to them and said, ‘hey I need to pull these girls aside,’ I don’t think I would get that much objection.”
Still, some strategies implemented by Black female school counselors to assist Black girls proved to be unpopular with classroom teachers. Beverly recalled the responses of some White teachers to her handling of students who struggle with behavioral issues. For example, one of Beverly’s strategies in improving student behaviors is to allow them to earn special privileges over time. “It may be a student that has had trouble with teachers before…they don’t want them in the hall. But I know the relationship that I have with these students, and when I ask them to do something, I know they are going to do it and return.” Myra and Ingrid gave similar testaments, indicating that many White teachers do not understand the dynamics of Black women’s relationships with Black girls. They do not get how Black women can be tough and loving at the same time. When speaking on behalf of her Black female students and the methods she uses to facilitate growth, Beverly regularly lets her colleagues know, “I got this.”

**Girls Need Mentoring Too**

Another “how” relating to Black female school counselors’ work with Black girls, centers on the personal and academic guidance provided to them by their school counselor, which also speaks to Research Question 3, regarding participant experiences and possible examples of mothering with Black girls. This study found that mentoring is a natural byproduct of the participants’ work with Black girls. Merriam-Webster (2020) defined a mentor is “a trusted counselor or guide” or a “tutor or coach.” The following paragraphs describe the aspects of mentoring in which the participants engage with their Black female students.
**Wise Counsel.** Myrna wields her influence to guide her Black female students beyond stereotypical careers. She tells them, “You can be anything you want to be. You’re not confined to that box that says a Black girl can only do certain things.” Because Myrna is a veteran educator, having worked with Black girls in numerous educational spaces, she is cognizant of the limitations often placed on Black girls. As a result, she makes the effort to stay abreast of leadership opportunities for them, not only for the experience, but also for the exposure and social networking opportunities. “It’s important to know how to act and what to say on a job interview,” said Myrna. Additionally, Myrna encourages Black girls to stay active in school activities, and if they are connected to a church, she encourages connection to church activities as well. Overall, Myrna values having moments to mentor her students. In fact, she noted one of her proudest moments as an educator occurred when a former student named her as the most influential person in her life.

Like Myrna, Beverly is energized to steer her Black female students away from stereotypical roles and careers. She runs an extracurricular group at her school that is primarily made up of Black girls, which presents an avenue for mentoring opportunities. She fondly recalled inviting a Black female entrepreneur to speak to the group about her work in business as well as the value of community service. Beverly stated, “I’m really big on having our girls think that we can be more than cooks or beauticians. There’s nothing wrong with those things, but if we get stuck in that mindset, that’s the end goal.” Most of all, Beverly feels proud of her students and finds joy in her work. “I’m very happy and proud of our African American girls in school, I love to see their growth.
Speaking generally, she says, “I get a lot of inspiration from each of them, and I try to be an inspiration to them as well.”

When asked how her work specifically addresses Black girls, Ingrid replied, “Anything that came across my desk that had a Black girl vibe, I recommended a whole bunch of girls.” This spirit of mentoring is prevalent with Ingrid. She speaks of “connecting them with resources for organizations that have programs for Black girls.” Meanwhile, Jade prides herself most in being present and available to her students. She feels that seeing a Black female professional in the building is beneficial to the Black girls within her school. “I want to make that difference…help them see life differently or open their eyes to something new.” As a school leader, Jade hopes to model a level of confidence and self-assuredness that inspires the Black girls in her school. She also hopes to convey this through trusting counselor-student relationships, stating that “One thing I think they should know is that they are valued, and that they should not be afraid to speak up for themselves.”

Put simply, Myrna, Beverly, Ingrid, and Jade have seen adolescence through the eyes of a Black girl, like those with whom they work. They have knowledge of where she stands today, and where her circumstances might take her. However, they know that each Black girl is unique and has a unique circumstance. Thus, they meet her where she is. They provide inspiration, a listening ear, and resources and opportunities for enrichment. Furthermore, viewing the term through Collins’s (2000) Black feminist lens reveals that as mentors, Black female school counselors act out of a sense of accountability or responsibility. They regard knowledge as a by-product of lived experience and dialogue.
as a foundation of relationship. And ultimately, as school counselors, they mentor Black girls because they care.

**It is Expected, and It Comes Naturally**

From my experience, I know that the school counselors’ work with students can generally be categorized in one of two ways. The work is either proactive or reactive, and may be initiated by the counselor herself, or per a request from an administrator colleague, or a parent. Even still, much of the work carried out by Black female school counselors with Black children is innate and is a natural response to the child’s needs (Jones, 2019). This thematic finding speaks to Research Questions 1, 2 and 3, regarding the participants experiences, levels of perceived support, and instances of mother work.

**Being On-Call.** While feeling blessed to help, the participants in this study describe being frequently called upon by colleagues and administrators to intervene in situations with Black girls. Myrna reflected, stating, “They come to me asking, hey, this girl is going through something; I need your help.” Similarly, Beverly sees her colleagues at times struggling to communicate with Black girls, and she knows, eventually they will call on her or even come and get her to help in a challenging situation. Though it makes for a heavier load, Beverly, and the other participants, pride themselves in answering the call to assist when White male or female colleagues are at a loss of how to “handle” Black girls.

Notwithstanding, Jade described at times, having an inner conflict over always being called upon, stating, “Just because I am a Black female, doesn’t mean I’m going to automatically be able to fix the situation.” In one of the few literature sources speaking to the Black female school counselors’ experiences with Black students, Jones (2019)
referenced how Black female school counselors are identified as “resident experts,” when it comes to working with Black students. Relatedly, Jade and the other participants want to help, and they care deeply about each student. However, at times, being the go-to person for Black girls’ issues is a lot, as they already have a full plate. Furthermore, in response to being the resident expert, Jade is honest and states quite frankly, “I don’t have all the answers.”

Black female school counselors are called upon, not only by colleagues and administrators, but also parents. The participants indicated that Black girls’ parents also often view Black female school counselors as resident experts or as an “insider” resource, looking for them to guide their daughters while at school. As a mother, I can relate to the comfort felt in believing that your daughter is in the hands of an adult who likely understands her and will likely do right by her. Jade spoke of a parent giving her permission to advise her daughter, saying, “I give you the green light. You tell her what she needs to hear.” Similarly, a parent told her daughter in reference to Beverly, “This is your mom while you at school, you gotta listen to whatever she says.” Moreover, the sense of being “mom” at school carries a unique responsibility that many Black female educators understand. The responsibility comes from a sense of mothering, which will be discussed next.

**Mothering.** This section specifically addresses Research Question 3, regarding the aspect of mothering that may occur in working with Black adolescent girls. The previous section contained information about parent expectations of Black female school counselors, and how a mother of a Black girl referred to Beverly as her daughter’s “mom” while at school. This mother’s actions reflected her knowledge of how Black
women generally interact with Black children, as described in the following quote from Ingrid about Black women: “We take care of people. It’s just our nature to be mothers, or to mother people.” Ingrid is channeling her ancestors, as Black women in the community, including Black teachers, who have acted as surrogate mothers, or “othermothers” to children in their midst (Collins, 2000; Foster, 1993). Like othermothers, Black female school counselors instinctively nurture the Black girls they encounter, which is fostered by cultural connections and an emotional investment that shapes the relationships discussed in Chapter 4. Myrna validates this notion, stating, “I don’t think you can be a counselor without emotional investment--at least not a good counselor.” Beverly agreed, surmising that “…love conquers everything, when it comes to all the other stuff we have to deal with.” Ingrid used terms like “rejoice,” “pride,” and “worry” in expressing her feelings of both joy and compassion over Black girls’ concerns, and she takes them personal. She says she places herself in the role of a mother at school “for girls who don’t have a mother, or one who is absent, due to working multiple jobs.”

Jade recalled at times, incorporating the “tough love” component of parenting in her work, as in “I’m not doing this to get you in trouble. I’m doing this because I genuinely care.” Additionally, in some cases, she has had to set boundaries with Black girls who find a natural connection with her. They see something in Jade that they are familiar with, and it is something for which they yearn. She recalls buying lunch for one of her students who lacked money that day, remembering, “It was like a motherly thing, then I bought her lunch, and she was starting to get attached.” Jade further discussed the need to manage the relationship, stating, “I love you, but you can’t be down her in my office every day.” Adding more, she insinuated a taxing experience, as in, “I can’t be
everybody’s mom…but I can show them the love and compassion that they may not be getting at home.”

Nonetheless, the nurturing instinct is heightened for the participants who are themselves, mothers and in Myrna’s case, a grandmother. Referencing how instinct impacts her work, Myrna chimed, “We don’t have to write it out or do professional development to learn about it; it’s just something innate within us. It is God-given.” Additionally, having raised daughters herself, Myrna takes pride in how her Black female students respond to her saying, “That sounds like something my mother would say.” Jade also reflected on how being a mother herself and being raised by a Black mother informs her work with Black girls. “I can’t tell you how many times I say, if this was my child, how would I want somebody to help them in this situation?”

Unfortunately, Black women’s instinctual strength of mothering has been at times mischaracterized through derogatory labels, as in the “mammy” or “de mule” (Collins, 2000; Hurston, 1937). They represent the mammy as in the “faithful, obedient, domestic servant” (Collins, 2000, p. 80). Collins (2000) also described the “mule” in this way: “As dehumanized objects, mules are living machines and can be treated as part of the scenery” (p. 51). Furthermore, this thematic finding sheds light on the participants’ internal motivations, coupled with others’ perceptions of their immense strength to support all their students, in many cases as a mother would (Jones, 2019).

**I am a Black Female Professional Educator**

The last thematic finding encapsulates all three Research Questions, centering on the entirety of the Black female school counselor’s experiences working with Black adolescent girls. It is ambient to the other six, and foundational to the intersectional
identities of the Black female school counselor. As such, Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework contextualizes Black women’s experiences within America’s matrix of domination of power, through intersectional oppression and controlling images attributed to Black women (Collins, 2000).

**The Matrix of Domination**

Collins (2000) posited that the matrix of domination has historical origins, spans transnationally, and envelops women of African descent. It frames their experiences through Collins’ notion of four interrelated domains of power, as in the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains. “The structural domain organizes oppression, whereas the disciplinary domain manages it. The hegemonic domain justifies oppression, and the interpersonal domain influences everyday lived experience and the individual consciousness that ensues” (p. 294). Interestingly, the matrix can be analyzed from a both/and stance, and in varying contexts, Black women can move from being a recipient of oppression to one who oppresses others (Joseph et al., 2016). Furthermore, as each matrix domain serves a distinct purpose, there is an elicited response of resistance and activism from Black women to thwart the myriad offenses to their minds and bodies (Collins, 2000). Subsequently, to help illustrate the participants’ perspectives relating to this theme, their words and experiences will be contextualized within these interrelated domains of power.

**Structural Domain of Power.** Collins (2000) discussed how the structural domain of power “encompasses how social institutions are organized to reproduce Black women’s subordination over time” (p. 295). This is evident in educational sphere, as despite most states requiring licensed school counselors to have master’s degree
attainment (ASCA, 2019), the participants indicated that their knowledge, intelligence, and capabilities are still subject to question by some. Beverly recalled an incident where the parent of one of her Black female students challenged her educational background: “I actually had a parent that asked me what kind of degree I had, and where did I get this degree from.” She added, “I’ve had numerous conversations with people, including parents, just challenging my ability to do my job.” Myrna feels the structural oppression through her age identity, being a little older than most of her colleagues, adding, “I find that the older I get, the more people don’t think that you know what you’re talking about in dealing with Black girls.” She continued, “It’s kind of discouraging when people don’t want to listen to what you have to say, coming from all groups, and you know you have the life experience.” This treatment by other Black women is dismissive of Myrna’s knowledge acquired through lived experience. Collins discussed this treatment, acknowledging that discrimination and exclusion can come from all groups, and argued that “Because this domain is large-scale, systemwide, and has operated over a long period of time via interconnected social institutions, segregation of this magnitude cannot be changed overnight” (p. 296). In other words, we as a nation have come to know and accept the functions of the structural domain. Sadly, the foundation of this domain was laid hundreds of years ago, the structure has been built and organized over decades, and sadly, it works as intended.

**Disciplinary Domain of Power.** Collins (2000) argued that the goal of the *disciplinary domain of power* is carried out by “creating quiet, orderly, docile, and disciplined populations of Black women” (p. 299). Said differently, this domain is essentially in place to suppress and police Black females’ minds and bodies. This study’s
findings revealed that like Black adolescent girls, Black female school counselors are subject to high surveillance by those who hold fast to dominant ideals of White femininity and racial stereotypes. Also, in Chapter 2, literature was presented on how Black adolescent girls experience disproportionate amounts of disciplinary action in school, via rigid policies on dress code, or for showing “defiance” through subjective interpretations of their words and actions (Morris, 2016), and silencing (Fordham, 1993).

Similarly, Myrna, Beverly, Jade, and Ingrid each spoke about being professional women, and at times the sole Black person in the room with other professionals. They know that their professional reputation rides on their words and actions. Beverly recalled the carefulness she exhibits in her work, citing, “You don’t want to make mistakes. You don’t want people to think you can’t handle the position.” Ingrid referenced the scrutiny as a form of silencing, “…like having a muzzle on ourselves because we have to squash who we are not to intimidate others or to make others upset.” She summed it up by saying “we have to be on point with everything.”

Beverly and Ingrid also shared experiences of silencing that both included on their reflective vision boards (see Appendices G and H, respectively). Beverly displayed an image of a young Black girl appearing to be the only Black student in class, eagerly raising her hand to participate. She discussed how she saw this young girl defying the silencing that affects many Black girls in majority White classrooms. Ingrid’s vision board reflected a young black girl with her hand over her mouth, which she referred to as a self-imposed muzzling used by Black women and girls to placate dominant groups. Fordham (1993) discussed the silencing of Black girls in school spaces, while Collins
(2000) posited the same for Black women in myriad environments, including the workplace.

Nevertheless, though Black women are subject to the disciplinary domain of power, we learn from it and police the institutions that endeavor to police us (Collins, 2000). In other words, “…just as organizations may keep Black women under surveillance, these same Black women have the capacity to keep organizations themselves under surveillance” (p. 300). Professional school counselors have this capacity and can “check” the equity of their schools via their leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and consultation on behalf of their students.

**Hegemonic Domain of Power.** This spirit of the *hegemonic domain of power* is rooted in maintaining power for dominant groups, giving them the “right to rule” (Collins, 2000, p. 302). In school spaces, this plays out in instances where administrators maintain a colorblind approach to student needs. Myrna’s administrator urged her to dilute the focus of her girls’ group to include all girls, as opposed to primarily addressing the needs and concerns of Black girls. Additionally, the media works through this domain by primarily promoting White women as the standard of beauty, and Black females’ physical features, hair, and skin tone are deemed inferior, and undesirable. The participants know this, and for that reason alone, having an all-Black girls’ group is needed during the critical stage of adolescence. Within the group space, Black girls can develop resilience and empowerment through collective group experiences and learned process their feelings as oppressed beings. Collins (2000) discussed how Black women benefit from opportunities to unpack hegemonic ideologies of oppression and move toward empowerment. Additionally, she spoke of “constructing new knowledge” (p. 305)
and solidifying the validity of Black females’ alternate realities. Apparently, Myrna’s administrator’s justifications for rejecting the “Black girls only” group were for inclusivity purposes; however, it appears that for whatever reason, he was not feeling the “Black Girl Magic” that three of the four participants displayed on their vision boards. Myrna referred to Black Girl Magic as the “majestic uniqueness of Black women and Black girls.” Beverly included the Black Girl Magic image on her vision board to reflect the global phenomenon of uniqueness and strength; our “crown gets knocked off, at times; however, we adjust it, dust it off and bounce back.” Ingrid spoke of the “amazingness” of Black women, adding, “People are stunned by what Black women can accomplish.” She connected Black Girl Magic to Black women’s resiliency, tracing it back to enslavement and having no option to quit.

Furthermore, the participants recalled instances where the hegemonic domain manifests and shapes how and where Black women place themselves in the workspace. Like the disciplinary domain, discussed in the previous section, the hegemonic domain causes Black women to juggle being themselves with trying to match dominant ideals of femininity. Ingrid addressed this issue, stating, “When I get around my colleagues, there is a way I have to act.” She also spoke of Black women and girls having to tone down their behavior around Whites. She reminds her Black female students “there is a time and place for everything. You can come off as passionate and aggressive, as long as it’s not coming off as disrespectful.” Beverly described her concern at performing acceptably around others, stating “sometimes find myself the only Black woman in the room, and being able to positively stand out in that room is important.”
These examples show how the hegemonic domain, and the disciplinary domain impacts Black women; they show allegiance to the dominant notion of “appropriate” behavior, which is also a means of controlling Black women by assessment. Thus, many Black women in workspaces are forced to ask themselves daily, if they are speaking, acting, dressing, or simply looking “too Black.” Despite this statement, I know Ingrid agrees with Jade and the other participants on the importance of Black girls letting their lights shine, while as Black women, they still find challenges in letting their own lights shine. Ultimately, these challenges are buttressed by the hegemonic domain of power and manipulates ideologies such that anything other than White standards of femininity is wrong (Collins, 2000).

**Interpersonal Domain of Power.** As previously noted, aspects of the Matrix of Domination greatly influence how Black female school counselors move and speak professionally, and how they counsel and interact with Black adolescent girls. They feel responsible to try and shield Black girls from the forces of domination, while still preparing them for reality. Hence, the final component of the Matrix of Domination is the *interpersonal domain of power*. This domain is centered on the interactions between and among Black women. Collins (2000) posited that this domain cautions black women to check themselves to avoid becoming the oppressor, stating that

> Although most individuals have little difficulty identifying their own victimization within some form of oppression—whether it be by race, social class, religion, physical ability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, or gender—they typically fail to see how their thoughts and actions can uphold someone else’s subordination. (p. 306)

The spirit of Collins’s argument resembles the participants’ concerns over their Black girls’ interpersonal relationships with other Black girls. They referenced the drama that
ensues from conflict, resulting in fights, arguments, name calling, and other negative interactions. Beverly mentioned her concern over Black girls’ defensiveness, seeming to always have a chip on their shoulders. Myrna spoke of Black girls referring to one another as “bitches” and other derogatory names. Ingrid described how she mediates conflict between two Black girls, and lets them know, “You are perpetuating the stereotype of what they already believe about us. They already believe we are aggressive; they already believe we are rude. They already think we’re ‘bitches.”

Subsequently, Collins (2000) asserted that “the interpersonal domain of power functions through routinized, day-to-day practices of how people treat one another…” (p. 306). Morris (2016) also assessed this behavior as a form of the “blues” for Black adolescent girls resulting from gendered oppression. Morris posited that within gendered oppression, “Black women and girls may appropriate behaviors and ideologies that reflect self-loathing, or degradation, reinforcing the very notions of Black feminine inferiority that deny their full humanity” (Morris 2014, as cited in Morris, 2016). Furthermore, these behaviors are problematic and not only are they harmful to the perpetrator, but they also reflect Collins’ idea of the victimized inflicting subordination, or victimization on another individual. Notably, the gendered oppression described in the previous paragraph is not limited to Black girls. Ingrid, described how at times, she felt she felt mistreated by Black women. She added, “Some of the women who have burned me the most in education have been Black women.” “White people have lifted me up, when some Black people wouldn’t.” Myrna also mentioned feeling discriminated against because of her age by other Black women, and how people try to disregard her wisdom.
Finally, I this thematic finding shows that Black female school counselors routinely engage in acts of resilience to maintain their identities, while assisting Black adolescent girls on doing the same. For example, the participants’ each spoke of sharing with Black girls the history that they never hear in the classroom; how slavery and oppression has shaped Black women to be backbones of their families and often of the community. They also engage their Black girls on how stereotypes, and controlling images such as “mammies,” “sapphires,” or “Jezebels,” came to be, and still carry weight in society. Essentially, the interpersonal domain of power represents the work Black female school counselors do for, and with Black girls. As such, the participants in this study are counselors, teachers, role models, mentors, mothers, and even big sisters to their Black female students. These are chapters in Myrna, Jade, Beverly, and Ingrid’s stories of being Black and female.

**Reflective Vision Boards: A Mosaic of Experience – Beverly and Ingrid**

Data for this research project was gleaned from semi-structured interviews of each participant, along with reflective vision boards created by each participant. Each individual participant was asked to create her own collage of visual images that represent her school counseling work with Black adolescent girls. This activity allowed the participants to be creative in expressing their emotions, motivations, goals, and other experiences that give meaning to their work. Next is a look at Beverly’s and Jade’s approach to constructing their reflective vision boards.

**Beverly.** Beverly’s reflective vision board represents her positive vision for Black girls, one of hope and achievement despite of individual circumstances. Hence, the first image on her reflective vision board which is the phrase, “Yes You Can,” which serves as
the theme of the vision board. Her thoughtful creation also symbolizes how her work as a school counselor aids in helping Black girls find their purpose, discover their “magic,” and embrace self-love. Beverly takes pride in aiding her students’ growth, along with the relationships fostered in the process. She is inspired by her students and hopes she is an inspiration to them.

However, Beverly is also troubled by the anger and hostility displayed by Black adolescent girls in school. She characterizes this anger as defensiveness, which may stem from Black girls’ inability to be themselves. She is cognizant of the marginalization of Black women, and that it starts early. Black women are not “allowed” to experience self-love; they feel pressure to always be strong and be present for others. As such, Beverly encourages her Black female students to accept being vulnerable at times. Additionally, Beverly included “Black Girl Magic” as a celebratory concept that also speaks to self-love, along with the amazingness and versatility of Black women.

Beverly’s reflective vision board is shown in Appendix G, as Figure 4 along with a synopsis of her thoughts and motivations in developing the reflective vision boards, presented in Table 5. Information in Table 5 represents co-constructed statements by the researcher and the participant via interview dialogue. Any direct quotes within the table represent Beverly’s own words.

**Ingrid.** Ingrid’s reflective vision board represents the marginalization and oppression felt by Black women. The cyclical rotation of silencing, stress, frustration, and reward round out Ingrid’s experiences working with Black girls. So much of her work with Black girls is informed by her own adolescent experiences, as she vows to provide the safe space for her students that she needed when she was in middle school. As such,
Ingrid references a Black female student at her school, telling her teacher colleagues, “that girl is me in 20 years.”

Ingrid also embraces the idea of “Black Girl Magic,” believing that Black women are an enigma to outsiders; they are misunderstood and achieve despite the odds. Despite being misjudged, taking care of other people, and despite experiencing “adultification,” Black girls overcome. Ingrid was one of these girls, and at times, she becomes frustrated because she loves them. Consequently, her counseling style with Black girls has evolved, moving from “being hard on them” to being more of a listener or “big sister” at times.

Ultimately, Ingrid is proud of Black women’s toughness and strength in the face of adversity, invoking the mantra defined by Maya Angelou, “Still I Rise” as the theme of her vision board. Ingrid’s reflective vision board is shown in Appendix H, as Figure 5, along with a synopsis of her thoughts and motivations in developing the reflective vision boards, displayed in Table 6. Information in Table 6 represents co-constructed statements by the researcher and the participant via interview dialogue. Any direct quotes within the table represent Ingrid’s own words.
Chapter 6: A Pedagogical Experience

“Life becomes data; data becomes praxis; praxis becomes awareness; awareness becomes critical consciousness.” (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 8)

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of four Black female school counselors who work with Black adolescent girls in urban Middle Schools. This qualitative study was conducted using a critical hermeneutic phenomenological approach of capturing and interpreting the participants’ unique experiences within their lifeworld and guided by the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought. The primary objectives of this study were:

- to describe the experiences of Black female school counselors and their work with Black female adolescents
- to reveal how school structures may impact the work of school counselors and the educational experiences of Black adolescent girls
- to highlight areas where Black female school counselors are needed in the urban school setting
- to add practical knowledge to the field of school counseling that will enhance the school counseling profession

These objectives were achieved by addressing the following research questions:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black female school counselors in their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools?
2. What are Black female school counselors’ perspectives on the ways in which they are supported or not supported in working with Black adolescent girls?
3. In what ways (if any) does the concept of “mothering” show up in the relationships and counseling practices involving Black female school counselors and Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools?

The rationale for this study was generated by the fact that Black female school counselors’ experiences have been underexplored and can contribute practical knowledge to the school counseling profession, while naming educational systems that oppress Black women and girls. This research highlights the complexity of Black female school counselors’ work with Black adolescent girls, from the participants’ standpoints, which are subject to marginalization based on hegemonic standards of feminism. Hence, a Black feminist epistemology was used to illuminate the voices and perspectives of Black female school counselors working in urban schools, having previously been understudied and devalued in terms of personal and professional implications.

Data gleaned in this study were collected through two semi-structured interviews of each participant, along with examination of participant-constructed reflective vision boards as representations of each participants’ work with Black adolescent middle school girls. The first interview centered on the participants’ background, including their life events leading to becoming school counselor, and their experiences working with Black adolescent girls. Participants were asked to design an artifact (Turman, 2017; van Manen, 2016), in the form of a reflective vision board consisting of a collection of images, phrases, or symbols that represented their experiences of working with Black adolescent girls and captured the meaning of these experiences.

The hermeneutic circle was employed for interpreting and understanding the “whole” of the data by iterations of reading and re-reading the “parts” of the interview
transcripts, along with data analysis inspired by Ajawii & Higgs (2007). Findings from this study produced the following seven themes that reflect the participants’ experiences as Black female school counselors working with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools: (1) Building Relationships and Connecting with Black Girls Through Culture and Conversation, (2) We Need Them and They Need Us, (3) This is Personal: I See Myself in You, (4) Supporting the Work, (5) Girls Need Mentoring Too, (6) It is Expected, and it Comes Naturally, and (7) I am a Black Female Professional Educator.

Thematic Connections to Research Questions

Research Question 1. What are the personal and professional experiences of Black female school counselors in their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools? Given the broadness of this research question, invariably, all seven thematic findings embody the experiences of Black female school counselors in their work with Black female adolescents in urban Middle-schools. The first three themes were presented and discussed in Chapter 4 and are as follows: “Building Relationships Through Culture and Conversation,” “This is Personal: I See Myself in You,” and “We Need Them, and They Need Us.” The following four themes were presented and discussed in Chapter 5, and are as follows: “Supporting the Work,” “Girls Need Mentoring Too,” “It is Expected, and it Comes Naturally,” and “I am a Black Female Professional Educator.” The seven themes were generated from the transcripts of semi-structured interviews with the study’s four participants and their individual reflective vision boards. Interview transcripts contained information on the participants’ personal and professional experiences as a school counselor working with Black adolescent girls, along with descriptive dialogue about the participants’ reflective vision boards.
Research Question 2. What are Black female school counselors’ perspectives on the ways in which they are supported or not supported in working with Black adolescent girls? The participants all stated that to the extent of their efforts they feel generally supported by their school and/or district administration in their work with Black girls. They reported that their respective administrative staffs had few issues with the activities or interactions the counselors had with Black female students. Basically, it was indicated that without infringing on classroom learning time, there was a sense of freedom in implementing programs for Black girls as needed. However, one participant indicated that her administration recoiled at allowing her to facilitate a group specifically focused on the needs of Black girls; they wanted the group to be inclusive and beneficial to all girls in the school. Additionally, one participant recalled a male administrator, at times, diminishing Black girls’ experiences as merely excuses.

Furthermore, three out of the four participants noted some challenges with White teachers accepting and understanding their approaches in working with Black female students. They recalled times when White teachers contested the participants’ interventional strategies for Black girls. They wanted more punitive consequences for perceived infractions committed by Black girls, while the participants use their relational connections to mediate assessment of student progress. For example, one participant recalled instances of resentment from teachers regarding her interventions with certain Black girls, as she allowed them various freedoms, such as running errands, and handling other responsibilities. Other instances included teachers treating Black girls as adults and addressing them as such. One participant mentioned putting the teacher “in check,” reminding him or her that they are dealing with a student and not an adult.
Additionally, the participants discussed structural barriers that exist, making their work more challenging. For example, they indicated the lack of diversity among staff, leaving them as one of a few Black women in the building to which Black girls relate. Hence, the participants feel generally accountable to the entire population of Black girls, in addition to their assigned student caseload. They are relied upon to lead, advocate, engage in consultation, and collaboration on behalf of all students, however they feel an additional responsibility to address the needs Black female students. Furthermore, the lack of time to address targeted groups, due to large caseloads is problematic, especially in an urban school setting where the counselors’ work resembles social work and to some extent, that of welfare agents. Finally, while the participants’ indicated they felt mostly supported by their administration and colleagues, structural dysfunction in conjunction with high-need students burdens the participants with additional stressors, which may be perceived as the opposite of support.

**Research Question 3.** In what ways (if any) does the concept of “mothering” show up in the relationships and counseling practices involving Black female school counselors and Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools? Data from this study showed that forms of mothering occurred in the participants’ work with Black adolescent girls. The participants who are themselves mothers, drew from their personal experiences of motherhood in their interactions with Black girls. They put on their “mother hat” and imagine the love and attention they would want their own daughter to receive from a caring adult at school. Whatever the maternal status of the participant, the instinctual characteristic of mothering appears in their work. They engaged in “mother speak,” an intuition derived from socialization (Evans-Winters, 2019), or othermothering,
representing the fluid boundaries of Black women caring for non-biological children (Collins, 2000).

In theme one, “Building Relationships and Connecting with Black Girls Through Culture and Conversation,” the participants acted as a stand-in for the mother in time of trauma or crisis. They drew from their own lived experiences as Black women to support Black girls with concerns relating to race and gender occurring in the school setting. In theme three, “This is Personal: I See Myself in You,” the participants felt they were nurturing someone who looks like “me,” or could be “my daughter.” They remembered times when they were Black girls, dealing with personal, social, and academic challenges; they also connected their students’ feelings with their own daughters, and it influences their work. Additionally, in theme six, “It is Expected, and it Comes Naturally,” mothering emerged in fulfilling the participants’ natural yearning through culture, to care for Black children.

It Is All Mothering

While the three previously mentioned themes represent more concrete instances of mothering, I propose that mothering occurred within each of the seven thematic findings. The energy that is devoted to the well-being of Black girls is central to all aspects of the participants’ work. Whether they are assigned mothering duties by students’ parents, or fulfilling their normal counseling tasks, I see the actions of an othermother, or of the “fictive kin,” defined by Collins (2000) and presented in Chapter 1. As such, the mothering acts carried out by the participants with Black girls are numerous. To name several, they intervene on behalf of Black girls in crisis situations; they suffer alongside them through emotional trauma, while deciphering between
defiance and a cry for help. They provide a safe space where Black girls can be themselves and shine their unique lights; they are a sounding board when the world says Black girls are too loud, too angry, too loud aggressive, too emotional, and too strong. In sum, the participants, as Black women assume the oversight of Black girls, as well as other students on their caseload; however, with Black girls, the oversight is unique, as evident within the thematic findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Essentially, Black female school counselors help buffer the effects of Black girls’ marginalization in school, marginalization that is familiar to them. They have seen it, experienced it, and are in many ways still fighting it as Black women.

**Thematic Connections to Literature**

The purpose of this critical hermeneutic phenomenological research study was to understand the experiences of four Black female school counselors who work with Black adolescent girls in urban Middle Schools, including how supported they feel by other staff and if aspects of mothering occur in their work. Collins (2000) championed a Black feminist epistemology that theorizes the oppression of Black women within spaces dominated by White ideals. As such, the mechanism of this phenomenological study was birthed from within Collins’ Black feminist framework and the notion that, “being Black and female in the United States continues to expose African American women to certain common experiences” (p. 27). Collins’ framework also fittingly honors the voices of Black women and their lived experiences; thus, my aim was to elicit findings that illuminate the stories of the Black female participants of this study. They are school counselors who work with Black adolescent girls, and as Black females they share the intersectional oppression set forth by Collins and presented in Chapter 1 of this
manuscript. Lastly, the next several paragraphs will bridge this study’s thematic findings with the literature discussed in Chapter 2, and broaden the discussion concerning Black female school counselors who work with Black adolescent girls.

**Building Relationships and Connecting with Black Girls Through Culture and Conversation.** DuBois (1903), referred to Blacks in America as doubly conscious, and Collins (2000), extended DuBois’ position to Black women. Collins argued that because U.S. Black women birthed within the African Diaspora are subject to the dominant cultural norms of the West, they become “outsiders-within” (Collins, 2000). Also relevant is Evans-Winters’s (2019) assessment that Black women and girls are “continually navigating the contours of racism, classism, and sexism by virtue of existing in the confines of the matrix of White domination” (p. 15). In this study, the navigation is evident in schools via interactions and conversations between Black female school counselors and Black adolescent girls regarding academic survival, growth, and mastery. Relevant to this finding, Holcomb-McCoy and Moore-Thomas (2001) averred that the oppression of Black women and girls is interchangeable, spanning from childhood to adulthood. Relatedly, the literature presented in Chapter 2, including that of Collins, Haynes et al. (2016), and Carter Andrews et al. (2019) on Black girls’ experiences of marginalization in schools, jibes with literary descriptions of Black women’s racialized experiences in Holcomb-McCoy & Moore-Thomas and Lorde (2007).

As such, this thematic finding expounds upon the deep, unique connections between the participants and their Black female students, further solidifying the relationship between them. Both are figuring out how to be themselves, while attempting to fit a norm that does not fit them; it is exhausting, and bordering on traumatic
(Hammond, 2014). Their capabilities are in question, and their strengths are invisible, as is their being (Annamma et al., 2016). Furthermore, like Black adolescent girls, Black women meander through the labyrinth of social nuances within mediation of social norms, maintaining cultural dispositions, and developing self-acceptance. Finally, Pasour (2004) summarized the link between Black female educators to Black students, referring to the former as “connected knowers” (p. 11), who rely on active dialogue, as in speaking, listening, and observing, to best serve their students.

This is Personal: I See Myself in You. This finding confirmed the instinctual spirit of nurturing possessed by Black women in relation to Black children. In Chapter 2, we saw literary examples of the characteristics of Black female educators who engage in high levels of care with their students, as in Carter Andrews et al. (2019), Evans-Winters (2019), and Roseboro & Ross (2009), and how it relates to mothering (Edwards, 2003). In this study, the participants shared aspects of their lifeworlds that influence their work and how they view their Black female students. It frames their walk, talk, relationships, and their work. Collins (2000) knew this when she developed her Black feminist epistemology, which centered on Black women’s ways of knowing.

Additionally, a dialogical exchange of life stories with Black girls placed the participants in the mode of looking to the future for hope or to reflect fondly or regrettably on the past. They recalled the racial experiences they encountered during adolescence while building connections to the here and now. Nonetheless, the participants’ work with Black adolescent girls is personal; they ask themselves, “How did I feel when this thing happened to me,” or “What if this were my daughter in this situation?” Taking it a step further, they might say, “I experienced that same type of thing
with my colleague, just yesterday.” Furthermore, the participants engage in empathy based on the shared experiences of marginalization. They work on the present by meeting their students where they are (Morris, 2016), and draw from their lived experiences from the past to project hope for the future. Nonetheless, the participants see versions of themselves within their Black female students, through vicarious revival of her own youth experiences, as in “I see myself in you,” and “it inspires me to do what I do.”

We Need Them and They Need Us

The work of the school counselor as stated by ASCA (2019) centers on providing appropriate academic, socioemotional, and career development for all students. Relatedly, Black girls in urban middle schools are at a critical stage in personal development. Additionally, Morris (2019) wrote about education for liberating Black and Brown girls and presented key themes entitled “Empathy Matters,” and another entitled “You Have to be Compassionate.” In her book, Morris addressed school leaders on the need to display empathy and compassion for girls of color when responding to student trauma and addressing subjective discipline offenses. Additionally, ASCA posited, that counselors in urban school settings must also be cognizant as to the role culture plays in the school experience regarding behaviors, peer relationships and achievement. Thus, the participants’ cultural connection with Black girls primes them for unique levels of compassion and empathy in comparison to their White colleagues (Jones, 2019). Furthermore, literature presented in Chapter 2, including Dollarhide et al. (2013) supports the notion that urban schools need representation among their school staff who can relate to Black girls and their lived experiences, and deliver the level of care needed during the critical stage of adolescent development. Thus, Black women in urban schools provide
value in supporting Black girls’ needs; hence, urban schools need Black female school counselors, who in turn need the support of urban school systems (Jones, 2019).

One example of need is presented in ASCA (2019), suggesting that “group counseling is vital in the delivery of the ASCA National Model to students as part of an effective school counseling program supported by school administration and school districts” (p. 35). An abundance of research also presented the benefits of a homogenous school-based group experience for Black adolescent girls, revealing that group participation provides a safe space where Black adolescents can develop strategies to cope with negative affronts through a collective experience of identity formulation, allowing for critical construction of knowledge among group participants (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Day-Vines et al., 2003; Holcomb-McCoy & Moore-Thomas, 2001; Joseph et al., 2016; Lane, 2017; Nassar-McMillan et al., 2009; Shin et al., 2010). Notably, the participants in this study share a deep connection with Black girls based on a common historical, racial, and gendered oppression (Collins, 2000; Holcomb-McCoy & Moore-Thomas, 2001; Lane, 2017). Consequently, Black female school counselors in many cases are ideally positioned to facilitate such spaces to the benefit of Black female students.

Ultimately, this finding is about need, and the stakeholders within the educational sphere are interdependent. As such, this finding revealed that Black adolescent girls need school counselors who can relate their marginalized school experiences, parents need school counselors to be there for their daughters, and school districts benefit from equity work pursued by Black female school counselors. Finally, Black female school
counselors need the backing of district and building-level administrators, colleagues, and parents to best serve all students.

**Supporting the Work**

This theme connects with the previous theme regarding the interdependence of educational stakeholders. A key advancement in the school counseling profession was the move from being called “guidance counselors” to “school counselors,” stemming from the evolving role of counselors’ work in schools (Thomas et al., 2011). Taking a more holistic approach toward advocacy, school counselors are equipped to identify oppressive school structures that inhibit justice, equity, and access for all students (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Dye et al., 2017). Additionally, extant literature showed that school counselors can support students’ emotional health resulting from the trauma imposed by of racism and bias (Hacket & Byars, 1996; Owens et al., 2011; Rose et al., 2017; Seaton & Carter, 2018).

Meanwhile, the overarching mission of the school counseling department within a school is primarily determined by school administration, followed by counseling department leadership (Ricard, 2020). This perception aligns with those held by the study participants, citing building leadership as an either a hinderance or an asset to their work with Black girls. Ricard (2020) examined administration perspectives on the work that school counselors do and found that they generally had less than sufficient understanding of the daily tasks and responsibilities of school counselors. Thus, student needs, especially those of targeted groups should be championed via school counselors’ leadership and should inform system decisions (ASCA 2016). Moreover, the participants reported instances where their intervention strategies with Black girls were questioned by
peers, and requests for specific programming was rejected by school administration. This can be problematic, especially when a school district lacks staff diversity, and administrators and other staff disregard the insight held by connected knowers, as in Black female school counselors regarding Black adolescent girls. However, conversely, the participants reported being called upon regularly for concerns relating to Black girls, making them more accountable to greater numbers of students (Jones, 2019).

Finally, it appears that for the participants, there was existing support from school administration to the extent of their requests. However, the participants still indicated the desire to do more for Black girls and other identified groups of students, but structural barriers, including time, staffing, size of caseload, and concerns over student favoritism hinder their progress. Finally, data presented in this theme echoed what Muhammad and Dixon (2008) and Edwards (2003) contended regarding Black women’s work in school spaces as mammy work, further revealing an underbelly of racism among school staff who complain about Black women’s work with Black girls, devalue their work, while freely working Black women “to death” solving problems for everybody.

**Girls Need Mentoring Too**

“Be mindful to give as much attention to the girls as the boys, because the tendency is to believe the girls will be ‘okay,’ in contrast to the challenges faced by African American men” (Hrabowski et. al, 2002). This passage was written nearly 20 years ago and is still relevant, in my opinion. In Chapter 1, the stated rationale for this study was to center the experiences of Black women who counsel Black girls in urban middle school spaces. This required a look at the oppression faced by Black girls in school settings, and ultimately connecting it to Black women’s oppressive experiences.
Furthermore, mentoring programs for Black boys seems to always be at the forefront of equity work (Morris, 2016), and expectedly, mentoring Black girls emerged as common theme in the participants’ work. The participants in this study discussed their inspirations and motivations that inspire their mentoring work with Black girls. They are driven by the desire to promote career development through self-discovery and finding their purpose, as recommended in Burkard (2009). They challenge high achieving students to seek college admission, and low achieving students to shine, despite their challenges, as suggested in Mayes & Hines, (2014). They also seek opportunities for enrichment, which can include activities such as inviting career speakers to the school and organizing relevant field trips.

Additionally, this theme connects to the first theme on “Building Relationships Through Cultural Connections,” as relationships are at the root of mentoring. It also connects with the theme, “This is Personal: I See Myself in You,” because the participants have seen the pitfalls of life choices, and coach their Black female students to overcome stereotypes and hegemonic ideals of what Black women can and cannot do in life. Furthermore, as evidenced by the participants, Black female school counselors working in urban middle schools remain cognizant of intersectional oppression and act intentionally and accordingly for the benefit of their students.

**It is Expected, and it Comes Naturally**

Here, I present an illustration of four students who might find themselves either in the school counselor’s office, or the principal’s office, or both. Consider four Black adolescent girls who attend Maple Middle School. The first is Maria, whose spirit and verve generally captivates school hallways and classrooms, gradually begins to diminish
She has shut down in her classes, her grades begin to drop, as does her countenance (Hammond, 2014; Rose et al., 2017). Maria is hurting and feels she has nowhere to turn because the counseling staff is mostly White and male. Next is Stacey, who is mild-mannered on most days; however, at times, she comes to school on edge. Her responses to others are loud and boisterous, and she challenges her peers to a fight at the slightest glance. Today, Stacey received a discipline referral for class disruption; however, she has likely experienced trauma in some form (Evans-Winters, 2019; Morris, 2019). Then there is Jada, who makes high marks in school and is a leader among her peers, both socially and academically. She starts the semester in the honors Algebra class, but suddenly finds the class “too hard” and requests a transfer to an easier math class. It appears that Jada may have experienced racial and gendered ostracization in class for being Black and female, along with stereotype threat (Fordham, 1993, Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Steele, 2010). Last is Sheila. Sheila is highly conscious of her appearance, and focuses a lot on her hair, make-up, and clothes. Her teachers comment about her clothing, often chiding her for violating the school dress-code. In essence, Sheila is targeted for perceived promiscuity by both students and staff, despite her high academic performance, and is a victim of both over-visibility and invisibility (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2019).

Literature presented in Chapter 2 chronicle similar instances as those presented in the previous paragraph. Resources including those cited rely on the girls’ status of being Black and female as key to their experiences. For that reason, it is appropriate to filter their experiences through a Black feminist epistemology, noting that each girl is subject to the matrix of domination consisting of structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power (Collins, 2000). Furthermore, this study’s participants
discussed experiences with students like Maria, Stacey, Jada, or Sheila, and how they employ their skillset and cultural background to support student concerns. Viewing their actions via the tenets of Black feminist thought, we see that they validate the students lived experience, then engage in dialogue to ascertain truth; they exhibit an ethic of care and empathy for the student and do it all in the spirit of personal accountability.

Additionally, literature presented in Chapter 2, acknowledges how Black adolescent girls benefit from the support of someone who has wisdom in the form of lived experience, that will listen to them without judgement, provide guidance with an ethic of care, and respond from a position of authenticity and with the ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 2000). Otherwise, Maria, Stacey, Jada, and Sheila, and girls like them will inevitably flounder both emotionally and academically without help in processing their issues.

Subsequently, supporting research by Jones (2019), along with the participant responses, indicate that given the previously described scenarios, Black female school counselors would be most likely called upon to intervene on these students’ behalf. They generally are happy to assist, however the demand can be taxing when only a few Black female staff are on hand to relate to Black girls’ issues. Therein lies the expectation of Black women to assume roles that come natural to them, though, at times in an unnatural, inhumane way. Nonetheless, they avoid the embodiment of these roles through the love in displayed in their work, and the authenticity and humane-ness they possess.

Despite these challenges, Black female school counselors can be activists that advocate for Black girls experiencing trouble and trauma in maladaptive classrooms. They can cultivate safe havens in schools as “functions of trust and love” (Morris, 2019).
They instinctually assume responsibility to socialize Black adolescent girls toward womanhood and impart Black women’s knowledge through the wisdom of lived experience. Nonetheless, as posited by Collins (2000), Edwards (2003), and Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002), the participants, as Black women, are naturally poised to step in and facilitate healing via an inherited pedagogy. Though the demands are continuous, they fulfill their role to support Black girls’ personal and academic survival. It is expected of them; and their response comes naturally.

**I am a Black Female Professional Educator**

This final theme encapsulates the marginalization experienced by Black women in work and school spaces. As previously discussed in Chapter 5, the matrix of domination formulated within societal structures represents four domains of power. The participants in this study found that the organized oppression via the structural domain is alive in their reality. Their qualifications as school leaders are both overtly and covertly questioned by administrators, colleagues, and parents. They feel the suspicion and scrutiny of others concerning their age, physical appearance, words, and actions (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Furthermore, Collins (2000) posited that school systems are inter-connected with other social institutions that favor the stories, needs, and ambitions of Whites over those of Blacks, and sadly, Black female educators in urban schools are subjected to this disfavor along with the Black children who attend those schools.

Additionally, the disciplinary domain of power often relegates professional Black women to “mammified” work as a means of “creating quiet, orderly, docile, and disciplined populations of Black women” (Collins, 2000, p. 299), who get the job done. Still, the participants remain dedicated to their students, and supporting Black girls’
unique needs. As they go about their work, the participants also hold an awareness of the surveillance that polices their behavior. This key aspect of the disciplinary domain functions to monitor and control Black women’s bodies. Accordingly, connecting literature in Hayes et al. (2016) and Joseph et al. (2016) supports the participants’ stories of regulating their behavior, and making sure they are “on point” in all aspects of presentation. Sadly, “on point” typically means it is acceptable for White measures of femininity and professionalism, and both Black women and Black girls live under the domain that seeks to regulate who they are and what they do (Haynes et al., 2002). Furthermore, this theme reifies the mother work of Black female school counselors in “taking care of those kids,” or for this study, Black girls, by laboring with them through trauma, mentoring them through marginalization, and advocating for them amid oppression.

Thirdly, “By manipulating ideology and culture, the hegemonic domain acts as a link between social institutions (structural domain), their organizational practices (disciplinary domain), and the level of everyday social interaction (interpersonal domain)” (Collins, 2000, p. 302). In other words, the hegemonic domain of power is foundational to school structures, it informs the biased lens of scrutiny placed on Black women and Black girls and seeks to regulate their expressions and interactions with others. It fuels the participants’ desire to defy stereotypes while assisting Black female students in developing the resiliency and agency to do the same. This was evident, as the participants experienced what Fordham (1993) referred to as “phantom-like” behaviors, in tempering their words and actions to avoid judgement via a faulty measuring stick. They may ultimately muzzle themselves or labor over how to place their words using an
“acceptable” tone, and remaining concerned over “not measuring up to standard” (Carter Andrews et al., 2919)

Finally, Collins (2000) posited that the interpersonal domain of power operates “through routinized, day-to-day practices of how people treat one another (e.g., microlevel of social organization). Such practices are systemic, recurrent, and so familiar that they often go unnoticed” (p. 306-307). In other words, the interpersonal domain incorporates the everyday experiences of being within the world, how we move and how individuals act around others. Those experiences often represent singular or intersectional subjugation based on race, gender, social class, resulting in unfair treatment per hegemonic systems. Thus, the participants act within this domain in mediating discord among their black female students. They experience it when Black parents question their intellect or educational background. They also feel it when school structures rely upon their knowledge to act as tokens in equity work, and “all things Black” (Jones, 2019). As such, as the participants live through the domains of power, so do their Black female students. Collins verified this, having asserted that schools are appendages of the hegemonic society. Subsequently, this final theme connects with previously discussed literature because it encapsulates the Black female’s being in the world. The participants are Black, and therefore, they experience racism. They are female, and therefore experience gender bias. They are professionals, yet they are not always respected and recognized as such. Lastly, they are educators who extend themselves to help Black girls heal from their past, thrive in the present, and excel in the future.
What Did We Learn? Conclusions and Added Knowledge

While there is extant academic literature citing the experiences of Black of teachers working with Black children (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Joseph et al., 2016), there is little existing information regarding the experiences of Black school counselors and their impactful work with Black children. As such, the purpose of this study was to broaden my understanding of the lived experiences of Black female school counselors and their work, specifically with Black adolescent girls in urban middle school spaces. Secondly, I was interested in how Black female school counselors feel supported by their administrative teams along with their peers. Thirdly, my familiarity with school counseling sparked curiosity within me about the concept of mothering, and if it shows up in middle school counselors’ work with Black adolescent girls. Being a high school counselor myself, I wanted to hear the voices and perspectives of Black female school counselors working with Black adolescent girls in a different space than my own and honor their stories that are missing from the literature. As such, this critical hermeneutic phenomenological research study was grounded in a Black feminist framework and guided by the theoretical epistemology presented in Collins (2000).

Endeavoring to illuminate the experiences of this specific category of Black female school counselors, my research began with poring over literature about the experiences of Black female school educators and Black school counselors, soon finding that this exploration required an extensive examination of the marginalizing experiences felt by Black girls in urban schools. In time, I discovered both literary and theoretical assertions indicating that the oppressive experiences of Black women and girls are generally interchangeable, and this study’s findings validated this notion. Next, was
participant selection, followed by data collection, data analysis, and derivation of themes regarding participant experiences working with Black adolescent girls. Notably, per the hermeneutic vein of phenomenological research, the data analysis and synthesis allowed space for my own beliefs, biases, and overall lifeworld to influence the entire research process (van Manen, 2016).

Although this study’s findings, along with existing literature supports the interchangeable nature of Black women’s and Black adolescent girls’ oppression, this notion, along with presumed cultural connections are not generalizable to all Black female school counselors, which is consistent with qualitative research design. It is, however, a foundation from which to build upon in theory to prevent an “apartheid” situation in schools among counselors and students. Additionally, for Black female school counselors who feel less connected culturally with Black girls in urban schools, or non-Black school counselors in general, we rely on the school counselor’s openness to multicultural perspectives (Gladding, 2018) and the recommendations of Sue and Sue (2016; as cited in Gladding, 2018) who suggested that multicultural counselors should among other things: listen and remain open to others’ stories, supplement their knowledge of diverse cultural groups through book learning and experiential learning, and be willing to explore oneself as a racial/cultural being. Additionally, key recommendations for school counselor actions and characteristics are found in the ASCA National Model, that highlights the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, the ASCA Professional Standards for School Counselors, the ASCA Mindsets for Student Success, and the School Counselor and Professional Program Standards (ASCA, 2019).
Meanwhile, it is important to note that per the discussion in the previous paragraph, aspects of this study’s findings can be duplicated by non-Black female school counselors. For example, like the participants, White school counselors can remain cognizant of and intentionally seek opportunities for Black girls’ personal and academic enrichment and (both within school and outside of school) and share those opportunities with their students. They may also find cross-cultural parallels that aid in their work with Black girls.

Nonetheless, this research adds dimension to the discussion on the types of support received by Black female middle school counselors as they work with a targeted group of students. It describes how they advocate, lead, and collaborate for the benefit of their students, in addition to how the cultural connection and instinctive characteristics of mothering emerge within their work with Black adolescent girls in school spaces. Moreover, moving further in this section, I will briefly revisit this study’s research findings and present corresponding conclusions for each.

**A Shared Empathy.** The first thematic finding, “Building Relationships Through Culture and Conversation,” verified the unique connection that exists between many Black female school counselors and Black girls that is based on culture, ancestral traditions, language, and phenotypical experiences that are useful in the counselor-student relationship. Said differently, there is a general, mutual understanding of the marginalization that Black females experience in various facets of society, including school spaces, not unlike the notions presented in Collins’s (2000) Black feminist epistemology. Relatedly, this study’s participants exemplified the theoretical tenets of Black feminist thought in a way that only Black women can adequately employ. They
value their students’ knowledge acquired through lived experiences, they engage in
dialogue to establish truth, they display an ethic of care based on shared empathy, and
they act out of personal accountability to the survival of the Black female. Hence, we
now understand more deeply, the nuances of many Black female school counselors’
relationships with Black female students in urban Middle school spaces. Also, participant
responses provided keen insight as to how Black women’s stereotypical positioning as
load bearers make them diligent workers under the gaze of White superiors who “see
them” but do not recognize them. This nugget of truth is shareable by primarily Black
female school counselors to the students who most resemble them, and whose
experiences most likely mirror their own. Furthermore, this finding leads me to conclude
that since most Black female school counselors can relate to the intersectional oppression
felt by Black adolescent girls, they operate from a place of shared empathy to uniquely
support Black adolescent girls’ academic, socioemotional and career development needs.

**We See What Others Cannot Not See.** This second theme, “This is Personal: I
See Myself in You,” illustrates how the lived experiences of Black female school
counselors greatly inform their work, and this knowledge, or expertise, is authentic, not
to be taken for granted or assumed easily replicable by others. Thus, school districts
whose mission statements declare idealistic offerings such as, “education for all,” “equity
over equality,” “quality education,” and list goes on, must be mindful of the young Black
female students within their student body. They should lean on educators whose job it is
to advocate for the needs of all students, and whose lived experiences provide unique
levels of expertise. Moreover, the participants, as Black female school counselors,
appeared primely positioned to address the in-school marginalization of the Black
adolescent girl. Figuratively, the participants at one time walked in her shoes, they felt what she felt, they looked like her phenotypically; the hair, skin tone, and other physical attributes elicited similar oppression. They also connected with their Black female students’ sense of expression, and overall vibe. Thus, as Black female school counselors view their Black female students through a personal lens, not easily replicated from a non-Black female standpoint, I conclude that they are positioned to appropriately socialize Black girls for survival amid adolescence and beyond.

The Need is Mutual. The third thematic finding of this study, “We Need Them and They Need Us,” revealed the symbiotic relationship between school counselors and the educational stakeholders in urban school systems. The previous paragraphs highlighted the benefits Black female school counselors can provide Black female students in school spaces, along with the support required from school districts regarding their work. Additionally, as educational decision-makers seek to improve equity among targeted groups of students, related literature asserted that the relative experiences of Black female school counselors likely position them to contribute significantly toward acquiring equity for all students. Nonetheless, the literature presented in this study, along with the research findings portray Black female school counselors as ready and willing to lead, advocate, collaborate, and consult with whomever needed in support of their students. Thus, school administration should value Black female school counselors’ strengths without exploitation, toward enhancing the educational experiences of all students and incorporate their voices and perspectives within the school philosophy (Amatea & Clark, 2005).
Our Work Is Important, Let Us Do it. The fourth finding, “Supporting the Work,” spoke to the levels which the participants feel supported in their work with Black adolescent girls. The participants in this study revealed that they felt mostly supported by school administration in their work with Black girls. However, it is important to note that school administrative decisions do often supersede school counselor recommendations, as occurred in this study regarding implementation of a homogeneous Black girls’ group. They also reported some misunderstandings with classroom teachers who at times, found fault in the participants’ intervention strategies for Black girls.

Nonetheless, even as the participants adhere to the recommendations presented by ASCA, striving to support an underserved, marginalized group of students, data from this finding verifies that Black female school counselors do not always get the support they need from key stakeholders and school administration to lead, advocate, consult, and collaborate on behalf of Black adolescent girls. Additionally, colleagues, as in classroom teachers are not always privy to the demands placed on school counselors, and often speak out of turn regarding their work. Similarly, the cultural connections between Black female school counselors and Black adolescent girls are unique and may be difficult for an outsider to comprehend. As such, I conclude that since administrators, teachers, and parents are not always informed of the school counselors’ obligations, and are not apprised to their perspectives, training and skillsets, greater support is needed in the form of trust, relating to counselor recommendations and expertise.

We Mentor, We Mother, We Care. Themes five and six speak to how Black female school counselors participate in mentoring Black adolescent girls, along with their motivations, and the expectations placed on them by others. Related literature regarding
the schooling experiences of Black adolescent girls presents the immense challenges they face navigating the intersectional marginalization resulting from being Black and female. As such, this study provided evidence that the participants’ positionality as Black women drives their work along with how and why they mentor. Their carry the spirit of their maternal ancestors who nurture the children in their midst, which comes naturally, and they generally engage without hesitation.

At times, however, the participants indicated being relied upon by others, to a level beyond that of their colleagues. They described feeling like the representative for all things Black and female. They are torn between their natural desire to mentor their Black female students and the demands of a system that inadequately serves its Black female population. Meanwhile, they readily respond to the calls from administrators and colleagues to assist with Black female students who may be on another counselor’s caseload. Even still, the participants represent Black female school counselors who serve all their students with professionalism and care. They work tirelessly for the benefit of Black girls, while not neglecting their other students. Consequently, Muhammad and Dixon’s (2008) portrayal of “beasts of burden,” and Hurston’s (1937) characterization of “the mule” come to mind as metaphors for the work carried out by many Black female school counselors.

In general, these two thematic findings revealed the participants’ desires, and motivations that inspire their work as Black female school counselors, along with the weighty demands of their students, colleagues, parents, and administrators. They are often pulled in many directions in serving the needs of all students, while fulfilling their innate desires to nurture the students with whom they likely have the deepest connection.
Ultimately, like a mother in the traditional sense, the participants get weary at times, but they do not cease to care for the children they love.

**Black Female Intersectional Oppression.** The final thematic finding, “I am a Black Female Professional Educator” speaks to the nucleus of this study. This study yielded information on the intersectional experiences of four Black women who experience aspects of racial and gender oppression in life, and in their workspace. Despite their own experiences of marginalization, they assist their Black female students with similar challenges. They embrace the cultural connections they share with Black girls and treasure the relationships that emerge. They see something in each Black girl that reminds them of themselves or someone they love. They fill a void that exists for Black girls looking for examples to navigate life. Furthermore, the support provided by school systems, and other concerned entities is key to the participants’ ability to do the mentoring work that is needed. A lot is expected of them, yet they embrace the spirit of their ancestors to nurture and protect those in their care.

Additional recollection reveals the participants’ stories that speak to the energy and emotional investment they put into impacting the lives of Black girls. They celebrate Black girls’ successes, both large and small; they bear Black girls’ trauma, worry about their futures, while simultaneously leading and advocating on behalf of Black girls. These moments encapsulate the participants’ work with Black adolescent girls; they respond to the remnants of oppression that manifested over centuries; they hear the voices of their maternal ancestors, and through wisdom, they know how the story plays out. Subsequently, this final theme brings together all seven findings, and connects appropriately with the themes of participants’ reflective vision boards. We know that
“Black Girl Magic” is a real, living thing, while acknowledging that “Still I Rise,” through oppression and marginalization; undeniably, we accept that “Love and Light” resides within the souls of Black women.

**Summary**

The concepts within these findings reveal a pedagogy of counseling Black girls in school spaces. This notion aligns with van Manen’s (2016) assertion that hermeneutic phenomenology is a pedagogical discovery. In this case, the participants’ data stands as an account of who they are, and how their life stories inform their work with Black adolescent girls and reifies the critical nature of his study. These factors work in conjunction with the participants’ intersectional experiences based on race and gender and can offer an insider’s perspective on what it means to be a Black female school counselor serving Black adolescent girls in urban middle school spaces. Finally, the title of this manuscript speaks to the oppression experienced by many Black women and girls that is interchangeable, both within and between both groups, and runs on a continuum of recycled racism. Having lived through similar if not identical oppression as their Black female students, Myra, Jade, Beverly, and Ingrid want better, and ultimately the best, for the Black adolescent girls they serve.

**Research Implications**

The first research question in this phenomenological study sought to illuminate the experiences of Black female school counselors as participants, and their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle school. Additional research questions looked within these experiences to discover the levels of support received by the participants, and in what ways, if at all, the concept of mothering occurs in their work.
Based on this study’s findings I submit that school leaders must consider the value of having Black female school counselors not only in urban middle schools, but also in any school where Black girls attend. They must first acknowledge the schooling concerns of Black girls, including the data on discipline practices relating to Black girls and the socioemotional needs relating to racism, gender discrimination and trauma. Additionally, Black female school counselors can play a vital role in mitigating Black female student concerns, given their cultural connections and professional training to assist all students with academic, socioemotional, and career development. Ultimately, Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools deserve to have a caring adult in a helping space who possess the appropriate counseling skills and training, and when possible, one who also understands the pain of intersectional marginalization. Thus, I submit the following practical considerations regarding the school counseling profession along with program and policy initiatives.

**System Recommendations**

School systems with significant Black student populations should:

1. Prioritize understanding of Black girls’ concerns among all counseling staffs and support programming that de-marginalizes and enhances the academic, socioemotional, and career development opportunities for Black female students.

2. Implement staff development among teachers focusing on equitable classroom practices relating to Black girls at all achievement levels.

3. Seek to hire Black females in school counseling positions at all levels, particularly at the middle school level when students are experiencing phases of adolescent identity development and other areas of self-discovery.
4. Include the perspectives of school counselors from diverse racial and gender representations when formulating educational philosophies, adopting school improvement initiatives, and assessing the school climate concerning the well-being of all students.

5. Remain cognizant of the system demands and expectations placed on Black female school counselors in serving Black students that can result in added stress, over-taxing, and professional burn-out.

Professional school counseling organizational bodies should:

1. Make formal recommendations to federal and state educational governing institutions reflecting the need for diverse staffing of school counseling programs within urban schools.

2. Become knowledgeable of and prioritize the concerns of Black adolescent females when presenting and discussing best counseling practices.

Counselor education programs should:

1. Include curricula that speaks to same-race school counseling experiences to prepare future school counselors for potential stressors relating to counseling students with shared experiences of oppression.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Outcomes of this study spoke to the work of school counselors in urban middle schools and may not be applicable to non-urban school settings. Non-urban schools are situated primarily in less racially segregated spaces and generally receive greater funding than do urban schools (Lipman, 2011). Thus, non-urban students and families may not be
subject to the same race and class issues as urban students and their families. However, given the salience of race, gender, and culture in the counselor-student relationship, I assert that school decision-makers in non-urban districts should also seek to staff school counseling departments with sufficient racial and gender representation, coinciding with student enrollment. An additional limitation was that the racial demographic data for the counseling departments or the overall school staff of the schools represented in this study was not factored into the research, which could impact the researcher’s interpretation of findings.

Future studies involving professional school counselors should:

1. Examine more deeply the educational and socioemotional needs of non-White students in K-12 schools at all levels, and critically assess the cultural representation of counseling personnel within school counseling departments and how they might support these students.

2. Interrogate school district-level philosophies on where school counselors are positioned within the district’s long- and short-term mission for improvement regarding racial and gendered biases.

3. Examine student voices from diverse backgrounds in assessing the needs of students in the areas of academic, socioemotional, and career development. Consider student perspectives on what works and what does not work.

4. Explore the experiences of Black school counselors at all levels, looking at the personal, professional, and emotional ramifications of working with Black children in urban school spaces.
Appendices

Appendix A

Verbal Script for Participant Recruitment

Research Project: *Interchangeable Oppression: Black Female School Counselors’ Experiences with Black Adolescent Girls in Urban Middle Schools*

Hello ____________________,

*(potential participant name)*

I am following up with you regarding your possible participation in my research project through Indiana University – Indianapolis. Again, this study focuses on the experiences of Black female school counselors who work with Black adolescent girls in the urban middle school setting. Your participation would require approximately 3-4 hours of your time in total over the next few months. Participant activities will include two one-hour interviews and the completion of an electronic vision board. I would like to send something to you soon via your personal email regarding informed consent and additional information about the study.

Is that OK with you?

*(If not, thank you for your time. Have a great day)*

If so, may I have your personal email address so that I can send the consent information to you?

Thank you!

Do you have any other questions?

If not, thanks again for your time and you will hear from me soon. Have a great day.
Appendix B

Informed Consent

INDIANA UNIVERSITY STUDY INFORMATION SHEET FOR

Interchangeable Oppression: Black Female School Counselors’ Experiences with Black Adolescent Girls in Urban Middle Schools

You are invited to participate in a research study that will examine the experiences of Black female school counselors regarding their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools. You were selected as a possible participant because you identify as a Black female and have worked with Black girls in the urban middle school setting. I ask that you read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have prior to agreeing to participate in this study.

The study is being conducted by Sonya Hicks Ph.D. Candidate, through the Indiana University/IUPUI School of Education.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of Black female school counselors regarding their work with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools. Findings will add practical knowledge to the school counseling profession and toward serving the needs of Black adolescent girls.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things:

Your participation in this study will take 3 to 4 hours of your time. Participation will involve two one-hour interviews conducted via multi-user technology platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. Participants will also participate in creating an electronic vision board, which will take one to two hours. Interview questions and prompts for the vision board activity will focus on your experience as a Black female school counselor working with Black adolescent girls in the urban middle school context.

TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY IS VOLUNTARY
You may choose not to take part in the study or may choose to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or deciding to leave the study later will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled and will not affect your relationship with Indiana University.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION**
The risks associated with this study are minimal. However, if you experience discomfort, you may discontinue your participation at any time. We respect your right not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawing participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

The possible benefits of participating in this project include the opportunity to share your perspective on the school counselor experience for Black women working with Black adolescent girls in urban middle schools.

**WHO TO CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY**

For questions about the study, contact the researcher, Sonya Hicks.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to discuss problems, complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or to offer input, please contact the IU Human Subjects Office at 800-696-2949 or at irb@iu.edu.
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interchangeable Oppression: Black Female School Counselors’ Experiences with Black Adolescent Girls in Urban Middle Schools

Interview #1

1. Tell me a little about how you came to be a school counselor.

2. Tell me about your professional experiences as a school counselor and how you interact(ed) with Black girls.
   a. Primary responsibilities
   b. Rewards
   c. Challenges
   d. Emotional investment

3. What aspect(s) of your identity (such as being Black, being a woman, mother, daughter) resonate most in your work with Black girls, and why?

4. In what ways would you say your work with Black girls differ(ed) from your work with other students, if at all?

5. Do you see any discrepancies between professional expectations of your role and your personal experiences with Black girls?

Interview #2 Vision Board

3. What is/are the primary theme(s) of your reflective vision board? Explain.

4. How do the images, phrases, etc. on your reflective vision board represent you and your work as a school counselor with Black girls?

5. Reflecting over the previous interview and the vision board experience, what else you would you like to share regarding your work with Black girls?
Appendix D

Instructions for Reflective Vision Board Project

You will create a vision board using the tools at: https://www.canva.com/create/posters/.

You will create an account and log in. Your project should contain 5 to 10 items (images, phrases, words, etc.) - basically ANYTHING you feel represents your experience as a school counselor working with Black adolescent girls.

1. On the top right corner of the Home screen, click on “Create a Design,” then click “Poster.” In the template search box, type in “Collage Poster.”

2. Choose one of the suggested free templates.  
   Steps 3-5 is where the creativity begins!

3. Adding Images: The easiest method is to choose items from the Canva website. Choose from the options along the left border of the screen (photos, elements, text), or type in the Search box to bring up categories of words, images, or photos. Be sure to select the ones that are free.

4. You may also upload images from your personal archives or the suggested websites below or from any site you choose:
   - Kolumn Magazine artwork http://www.kindrdmagazine.com/category/african-american-art/
   - Essence or Ebony Magazine websites
   - Google “images” or other online magazines.

5. Add the items to your poster. Archived or web images can be uploaded from your desktop and then dragged onto the page. (Follow instructions as indicated on the site.)

6. Tailor your project by adjusting the size, rotation, etc. of your images to fit them onto the poster per your preference.
7. If you need more than one poster to display your expressions, feel free to add another poster page where it says, “Add a New Page.”

8. Save your project to a folder. Then click on the \(\downarrow\) to download the project. Send it to my email address at XXX for viewing.

9. Be creative and have FUN!

10. If you have ANY questions on how to use Canva or completing this project, please call or text me at XXX-XXX-XXXX. See example on next page.

Figure 1

*Sample Vision Board using Canva App*
Appendix E: Myrna’s Reflective Vision Board

Figure 2

Myrna: “Black Girl Magic”
### Table 3

**Black Girl Magic: Descriptive Information for Myrna’s Reflective Vision Board**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image 1</th>
<th>The Black women is in a space where White women are typically shown, as in ads reflecting society’s views of beauty. She feels good about herself; she is breaking stereotypes, embraces her “natural self,” and is comfortable in her own skin.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image 2</td>
<td>“Black Girl Magic,” celebrates the majestic uniqueness of Black women and Black girls. “It belongs to us, and not everyone can tap into it.” This phrase also celebrates the confidence that exudes from Black women that Myrna she hopes resonates with her students. No “poor me” attitudes allowed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 3</td>
<td>This image represents young Black girls, much like Myrna’s students. They may be small in stature and carry a heavy load. They are determined and often seeking to accomplish goals for their families. The young girl displays confidence and uses the strength instilled within her – “doing what she has to do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 4</td>
<td>The statement “I am who I am and proud of who I am” is the mantra represented in image #4. The young woman’s facial expression, hairstyle, and pose represents confidence and invincibility. She is unafraid to be different and show who she really is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 5</td>
<td>These three young women display happiness, friendship, and connection to one another. There is a “sisterhood” that brings them together, yet they are each unique in their appearance. They seem to be childhood friends celebrating their sisterhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 6</td>
<td>Myrna loved this young woman’s natural hair, and how it “shows the diversity in Black hair.” Black women’s natural beauty is on display, not overshadowed by makeup. There is level of confidence yet some sadness in her eyes; she is processing and thinking about something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 7</td>
<td>The positioning, clothing, and facial paint worn by these three Black women drew Myrna’s attention. She sees an historical or tribal connection between them, and their individual positioning has significance. The woman in the center represents the “yoke” of the trio; her skin is darkest of the three, which represents the origin of the other two women. She also represents history, leadership, and wisdom. The friendship is based on a bond that is developed out of a shared history and struggle. There is unity above all.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Jade’s Reflective Vision Board

Figure 3

Jade: “Love and Light”

![Image 1: A candlelight shining on a young girl's face resonated with Jade. “I feel that my job as a counselor is to let young Black girls shine their light... and not let anybody dim their light or blow their light out.” Also, “to help them figure out how to shine their own light.” The image of the beaming light on the young girl’s face encapsulates Jade’s work with Black girls.]

![Image 2: A young woman seeking inner peace. Jade works at this herself and wants her students to experience it as well. The level of anger held...]

Table 4

| Image 1 | The candlelight shining on the young girl’s face resonated with Jade. “I feel that my job as a counselor is to let young Black girls shine their light... and not let anybody dim their light or blow their light out.” Also, “to help them figure out how to shine their own light.” The image of the beaming light on the young girl’s face encapsulates Jade’s work with Black girls. |
| Image 2 | This is a young woman seeking inner peace. Jade works at this herself and wants her students to experience it as well. The level of anger held... |
by Black adolescent girls bothers Jade, along with the “angry Black woman” stereotype. This image connects with Jade’s reflective nature; however, she realizes that the deep-rooted issues lying within her students produces strong emotions, including anger.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image 3</th>
<th>The headphones symbolize listening, which is an important skill for school counselors. Jade believes Black girls should be “heard instead of fixed.” She allows space for healthy silence, leaving time for reflection on the issue at hand. The headphones also represent Jade’s escape into solitude during tough times.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image 4</td>
<td>This image represents “patience,” which has been a challenge in Jade’s personal and professional development. She reflects on her responses to Black girls whose backgrounds are different than hers. In reflection, Jade recognizes that her upbringing is likely different than most of her students, as are her responses to challenging situations. She believes that patience is a necessity for a successful counseling relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 5</td>
<td>The “rainbow heart” symbolizes her increased concerns with Black girls and their issues with sexuality. Jade stresses her love for her students and wants them to speak freely about their feelings regarding relationships and “coming out.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 6</td>
<td>The heart formed by hands shown in the sunlight represents Jade’s love for her students and how she gives them her heart. She loves her students and loves her job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: Beverly’s Reflective Vision Board

Figure 4

Beverly: “Yes You Can”

Table 5

Yes You Can: Descriptive Information for Beverly’s Reflective Vision Board

| Image 1 | Society attempts to pigeon-hole Black girls into roles based on parameters that marginalize them. Beverly conveys to Black girls that, “you can do anything you want.” Whether it is being a “good friend, a nicer person, a judge, or lawyer,” it is about breaking stereotypes. |
| Image 2 | The term “inspiration” resonates with Beverly in her work with Black girls. They inspire her and she hopes she is an inspiration to them and |
an example for them to be “good people throughout their lives.

**Image 3**
The silhouette of a girl wearing a graduation cap represents Beverly’s work in preparing Black girls for the future, and primarily high school. Middle school as academically foundational for high school she and is intentional about establishing enriching opportunities for Black girls to see themselves as high school and college graduates, and or pursuing their unique career choice.

**Image 4**
“Success” is Beverly’s overarching goal for her students. Success starts with “finding one’s purpose in life,” a task Beverly tackles via dialogue. She supports them in following the path of role models, or in breaking a cycle of failure that preceded them, by “pushing the narrative.”

**Image 5**
“Love” is a big word that stood out to Beverly; it inspires her work and her life general. She loves her job and particularly loves working with African American students. She knows her students appreciate her, stating that “they love me being their counselor.” For Beverly, love conquers everything.

**Image 6**
Beverly likes the happiness expressed by the girls. Their smiles are a counternarrative to the drama and conflict that dominates society’s image of Black girls. “They look like they are doing fine.”

**Image 7**
The “big heart” is filled with self-affirming phrases that Black girls often struggle with. “Girls get stuck being everything for other people” and not able to be their authentic selves. The phrases and actions represent what Beverly sees as essential to Black girls’ success and survival, and she strives to help them in these areas.

**Image 8**
“Black Girl Magic” is a “global phenomenon.” Black girls have so much to offer the world and can be anything they want to be. The crown in the image can “get knocked off” at times, however “we adjust it, dust ourselves off, and bounce back.”

**Image 9**
The young Black girl represents a studious Black middle school girl. She is engaged in learning and is confidently seeking information. She appears to be the only Black student in her class, yet she holds her own, cornrows and all. Beverly can relate to the young girl in both personally and professionally. This also reminds her of her classroom visits, observing and building bridges between student and teacher.
Appendix H: Ingrid’s Reflective Vision Board

Figure 5

*Ingrid: “Still I Rise”*

Table 6

*Still I Rise: Descriptive Information for Ingrid’s Reflective Vision Board*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image 1</th>
<th>The image of the young girl with her hand over her mouth represents how Black women and girls must “kind of muzzle ourselves so as not to intimidate or upset others.” Ingrid “teaches” Black girls that there is a “time and place for everything.” Also, “that girl looks like our girls; her hair looks just like our girls’ hair.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image 2</td>
<td>“No One Gets Us Like Us” says that African American woman have a connection that no one else understands. As a result, Black people are often misunderstood. “We can talk to one another about the struggle...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“People are stunned by what Black women can accomplish.” She believes this resiliency traces back to slavery, where there was no option to quit. Black girls can also be loyal by fixing her sister’s crown without talking about her.

The young woman at the laptop is represents the frustration that Black school counselors sometimes feel in working with Black girls. Ingrid states that “Black girls are our biggest frustration…we love them.” She places a heavy value on relationships with her students and there is frustration when she is not able to connect with or save them all.

Regardless of others’ expectations, stereotypes, etc., we still rise. Ingrid also reflects on professional mentors she has had in her career and looks up to them. They all have lived their lives and raised families, despite the adversities, like her own mother.

This image represents the full circle of Ingrid’s work with Black girls. Her overarching goal is to build better relationships with the Black girls she serves, to foster success, including their graduation from high school and college. The older woman is presenting an award to the younger woman represents the important mentoring relationship that Ingrid so treasures. “People forget that Black girls need mentoring too.”
Appendix I

IRB Exemption Notice

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH
Office of Research Compliance

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION - NEW PROTOCOL
NOTICE OF EXEMPTION GRANTED

DATE: July 10, 2020
TO: Tamra Jackson, Principal Investigator
EDUCATION
Sonya Hicks
UNIVERSITY LEVEL
FROM: Human Research Protection Program (HRPP)
Office of Research Compliance – Indiana University
RE: Protocol #: 2005981818
Protocol Type: Exempt
Protocol Title: Interchangeable Oppression: Black Female School Counselors' Experiences with Black Adolescent Girls in Urban Middle Schools
Funding Source: None

In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and/or IU HRPP Policy, the above-referenced protocol is granted exemption. Exemption of this submission is based on your agreement to abide by the policies and procedures of the Indiana University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) and does not replace any other approvals that may be required. Relevant HRPP policies and procedures governing Human Subject Research can be found at: https://research.indiana.edu/compliance/human-research-protection/index.html.

Submission and Review Information:
Type of Submission: Initial Protocol Application
Level of Review: Exempt
Exempt Category(ies), if applicable:
Category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior
Category 3: Research involving benign behavioral interventions.
Date of Exemption Granted: July 10, 2020
Authorized HSO Signature: [Signature]

Adam Mills

Regulatory Determinations:

Documents Approved with this Submission (for Amendments and Renewals, documents appearing in bold were either added or replaced with the submission):
Attachment Type - Document Version #
Data Collection Instrument - Interview Protocol
Data Collection Instrument - Instructions for creating electronic vision board project.
Recruitment Materials - Verbal script of recruitment email

Page 7
Study Information Sheet - Overview of study protocol to inform potential participants of the purpose, procedures, and risk/benefits of participation.

**NOTE:** If you submitted and/or are required to provide subjects with an informed consent document, please ensure you are using the most recent version of the document to consent subjects.

The following key personnel are approved to participate in the above titled research activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigator Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tambra Jackson</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonya Hicks</td>
<td>Co-PI Student/Fellow/Resident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organizations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indiana University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You should retain a copy of this letter and all associated approved study documents for your records. Please refer to the assigned study number and exact study title in future correspondence with our office. Additional information is available on our website at [https://research.iu.edu/compliance/human-subjects/guidance/index.html](https://research.iu.edu/compliance/human-subjects/guidance/index.html).

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact the HSO via email at ich@iu.edu or via phone at (317)274-8289.
References


https://www.aecf.org/blog/new-study-the-adultification-of-black-girls/


https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263064117_Having_Our_Say_African American_Women_Diversity_and_Counseling


https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219849392


Clonan-Roy, K., Jacobs, C. E., & Nakkula, M. J. (2016). Towards a model of positive youth development specific to girls of color: Perspectives on development,


Hurston, Z. N. (1937). *Their eyes were watching God*. Lippincott Co.


Jones, Y. (2019). “I was the only one in the building”*: Lived experiences of Black school counselors post-Brown V. Board of Education in predominately White schools (Publication No. 13865736) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana State University]. ProQuest LLC


https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6452&context=gradschool_dissertations


Turman, N. T. (2017). *Centering the margins: Elevating the voices of women of color to critically examine college student leadership* (Publication No. 2865) [Doctoral dissertation, Loyola University Chicago]. Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons.


https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815615439


Curriculum Vitae

SONYA JUNE HICKS

Education

2021  Doctor of Philosophy
School of Education, Indiana University – Indianapolis, Indiana
Urban Education Studies Ph.D.
Dissertation Title: Interchangeable Oppression: Black Female School
Counselors’ Experiences with Black Adolescent Girls in Urban Middle
Schools

2003  Master of Science in Education, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana
School Counseling

1991  Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
Teacher Certification, School of Education
Secondary Mathematics

1988  Bachelor of Science, University of Michigan – Flint, Michigan
Computer Science, Minor – Mathematics

Professional Service

2017-2020  Publications Submissions Reviewer
International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE)

Professional Experience

2005-Present  Professional School Counselor
Ben Davis High School
MSD Wayne Township, Indianapolis, Indiana

2002 – 2005  Math Teacher/School Counselor
Bridgeport/Wayne Enrichment Center
MSD Wayne Township, Indianapolis, Indiana

1999 – 2002  Math Teacher
Ben Davis Junior High School
MSD Wayne Township, Indianapolis, Indiana
1994 – 1999  Math Teacher
Julian D. Coleman Middle School
Indianapolis Public Schools, Indianapolis, Indiana

1991 – 1993  Math Teacher
Merle Sidener Middle School
Indianapolis Public Schools, Indianapolis, Indiana

1989 – 1990  Substitute Teacher
Indianapolis Public Schools, Indianapolis, Indiana

Conference Presentations


Honors and Awards

2017  M. G. Raby Distinguished Service Award
MSD of Wayne Township

Difference Maker Award
Indiana Black Expo
Community Engagement

2010-2015 Operational and Educational Consultant
100 Black Men of Indianapolis Summer Learning Academy (2010-2015)

1990 - 2017 Bible School Teacher – Elementary/Middle/High School
(intermittently) Kingsley Terrace Church of Christ

Professional Organizations

American Educational Research Association - member
American School Counseling Association – member
National Alliance of Black School Educators – member