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# Lifespan Communication and Career Development of Black Teachers: A Socio- Ecological Approach

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**LIFESPAN COMMUNICATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF  
BLACK TEACHERS: A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH**

by

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## ABSTRACT

### LIFESPAN COMMUNICATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK TEACHERS: A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Old Dominion University, 2017  
Director: Dr. Thomas J. Socha

This thesis unlocks the lifespan story of nine Black participants as they reflected on the communicative practices that guided their career journey towards becoming a teacher. Through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological development model, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem were examined to understand the content of career-related memories and with whom or what the communicative experiences occurred with across the participants' lifespan. This study also takes an in-depth look at how the content of the memories evolved across Erikson's (1964) childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood developmental periods, and the influence of the proximal and distal socio-ecological environments during these times.

Through the Lifeline Interview Method (LIM) and the Twenty Statement Career Test (TSCT), a Grounded Theoretical Approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to allow the theories "grounded in" the data to emerge. The data revealed the most impactful communicative experiences across the lifespan primarily resonated within the home through experiences with parents; in the school through positive and negative experiences with a teacher; and through television shows with Black-leading actors, such as *Julia* and *The Cosby Show*. The communicative experiences that took place during one's adolescence developmental period were most reflected on and included a teacher.

The communicative practices within the distal and proximal environments both impacted the developing person. The distal communicative experiences that resonated from a television show influenced the development of the individual, but it was the experiences within the proximal environments that had the most significant impact on the participant's career journey. Building upon the existing relational dialectical work of Baxter and Montgomery (1996), an unexpected finding emerged from the study that revealed the intrapersonal dialects toward career identity development that include: *Recognition-Rejection*, *Committed-Uncommitted*, and *Expressed-Hidden/Withheld*. Implications for future studies are to develop a better understanding of the relational dialectics of vocational identity development and each dialectical tension. There is also a need to develop a deeper understanding of the communicative practices around the Black body and those of whom not only reach their authentic career identity but especially those who successfully secure their career identity within a White dominant occupational space.

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“Yes, I made it, so you can too.”  
Joycelyn Elders, M.D.

This thesis is dedicated to my children, Naziya, Emerson, and Emon, and all the children that need to hear someone say: You can be whatever and whoever you want to be, because you deserve to be authentically you. As your mother, I am committed toward helping you to get there.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*You can't be what you don't see. I didn't think about being a doctor. I didn't even think about being a clerk in a store, I'd never seen a Black clerk in a clothing store. (as cited in Biggs, 1996, p. 326)*

#### Overview and Theoretical Framework

In *Joycelyn Elders, MD: From Sharecropper's Daughter to Surgeon General of the United States of America*, Joycelyn Elders, born Minnie Jones, shares her story of growing up picking cotton and missing school during harvest times to becoming the first Black Surgeon General of the US appointed by the Clinton Administration (Elders & Chanoff, 1996). She grew up feeling an “ingrained feeling of inferiority” due the color of her skin, as she describes:

There was a difference to being Black that could be felt, if not always seen. I feel there was an ingrained feeling of inferiority. I felt that, you know, we couldn't do things as well as white people. Or if we did, we were ingrained with the feeling that not only did we have to do it as well, we had to do it better in order to be recognized for having done it just as well. (Arkansas Educational Television Network – PBS, 2017)

Elders uttered the famous words: “You can't be what you don't see” (Elders & Chanoff, 1996). These words highlight the importance of representation toward career exploration and acquisition. Elders never dreamed of becoming a doctor until she heard the story of Edith Irby Jones, a Black doctor who became part of her vocational landscape. Elders believed her highest calling would be to become a lab technician, until she met Jones (Elders & Chanoff, 1996). Jones became the symbol of career opportunity, which altered the career journey of Elders for her lifetime to come. Living in times where the Black community continue to struggle for equal

access to career opportunities occupied by predominantly White people, there was and continues to be a need to better understand the communicative practices that diversify the vocational landscape for Black bodies to achieve an authentic career identity that is not constrained by the opportunities they are unable to *see*.

Communication is the vehicle used to create, constrain, or flourish a person's secure identity development (McLuhan, 1964). It is through communication that social environments are created. The statements people make, the questions they ask, and the nonverbal behaviors they exhibit all define the context and background in which people relate, negotiate, and define who they are in comparison to others (Vangelisti, Maguire, Alexander, & Clark, 2007). It is through consistent and repetitive communicative processes that individuals' vocational images are attained and established, but it is also within this space that one develops a constrained and restricted vocational identity that is limited by the hegemonic ideologies of the messages that permeate across the lifespan of the developing individual. Parson's (1909) describes the communicative landscape toward career exploration and acquisition as the *wise choice of vocation*:

In the wise choice of a vocation there are three broad factors: (1) a clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and knowledge of their causes; (2) a knowledge of the requirements, conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work; (3) true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts. (Parsons, 1909, p. 5)

Deliberate spaces of career identity development need to be explored and researched to better understand how one can recognize and disrupt constraining communicative practices that impact

a secure and authentic vocational identity development, especially for the Black body. How can one begin to make a *wise choice*, if one is unable to *see* the available choices?

By establishing a better understanding of the overt and hidden communicative messages throughout the various socio-ecological systems that shape vocational identity development, communicative spaces may present themselves that allow the disruption of hegemonic ideals and depictions of Black work that limit vocational identity scope. A better understanding of the creation of authentic spaces for the Black body to explore personal vocational aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and knowledge of their causes, becomes the necessary foundation to allow for an authentic journey toward exploring and increasing the possibility of securing one's definition of their true career identity.

Black children are being raised in racist-charged environments, or what Daniel and Daniel (1999) referred to as a *hot stove* environment (Daniel & Daniel, 1999). This environment not only impacts the communicative practices that surround the development of the child, but it also grossly impacts one's future career and individual trajectory. Throughout history, the Black body has been put in a submissive position toward the development of an authentic self, ultimately impacting one's self-concept, which research shows directly impacts one's future career identity and aspirations, as this thesis will explore more (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Myers & Diener, 1995; Super, 1991). A Horatio Alger mythic society has created an illusion that everyone and anyone can be whom they wish to be if they have the ability to see it and the courage to ultimately secure it (Weiss, 1969). Individuals do not develop within a vacuum, but through a system that is altered by the individuals and the societal landscape that encompasses these bodies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Centuries of repression have impacted the secure identity development of the Black body, and researchers continue to argue Black children are being born and raised

with the illusion of identity and vocational freedom and potentiality (Cloud, 1996). The Black body is searching for a positive image of self and looking for ways to explore, disrupt, and create an authentic image of self within in the hegemonic landscape they are born into. This study does not look at the Black community as passive or dismissive bodies, but as active individuals and communities who continue to fight for equal opportunity to define who they are within the space of whom they are told be or become. Throughout history, when there has been a system of power, there has also been an oppressed group creating deliberate spaces to disrupt the power system; and this continues today within the pursuit of an authentic Black career identity.

### **Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model**

When studying the theoretical infrastructure of vocational identity development, a conceptually useful starting place is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) biological ecological theory that argues human development is reflective of five environmental systems: *microsystem* – systems that directly affect the child (self, parents, teachers, peers); *mesosystem* – interconnected microsystems that directly or indirectly impact the child; *exosystem* – the larger social system in which the child does not directly function but is impacted; *macrosystem* – the societal landscape which is the outermost layer in the child's environment that continuously permeates all other layers of the system; and the *chronosystem* - the dimension of time as it relates to a child's internal and external environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model looks at human development through a systems theory that examines the direct and indirect relationships that make up the child's environment and how each layer/system has an internal and external effect on the development of the child. It is the bidirectional interaction between the individual's biology, the immediate

environment that may consist of family, school, and immediate community; and the societal landscape that fuels and guides the child's development within the context of whom they are told to be and who they wish to become. Within a child's socio-ecological system, messages in any one layer can ripple throughout the other layers to influence the child's development and vocational future self. While Bronfenbrenner's (1986a) speaks to human development in general, this theory introduces the influence of outer facets on human development and how these systems influence the development of the individual at the center of this ecological model – the child.

There has been ample research conducted to develop a better understanding of career identity development from the perspective of the individual to the societal landscape that impacts the development of the individual. This thesis looks to build upon the existing theoretical infrastructures to better understand the communicative aspects of vocational development of the Black community, and in particular, the positive modes of communication across the lifespan that have helped these Black individuals to not only explore the possible career options, but have guided them toward achieving an authentic vocational goal. By examining the gaps in the current literature and building upon the existing knowledge, one can examine the communicative practices across the lifespan that have impacted the vocational identity development. Building upon the foundation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, this thesis takes a socio-ecological approach toward developing a better understanding of vocational anticipatory socialization practices across the lifespan.

This study first examines the existing vocational development theories to better understand the societal impact on self-concept, especially during the adolescence developmental period, and how this impacts career identity exploration and acquisition for the Black body. This



is ultimately followed by the journey of nine Black teachers as they retrace and look back on the career-development communicative practices across their lifespan that enabled them to achieve their authentic career identity as a teacher.

### **Jablin's Vocational Anticipatory Socialization Theory**

Vocational Anticipatory Socialization theory (VAS) (Jablin, 1987, 2001) argues individuals transition through the lifespan and intentionally and unintentionally gather occupational information from the environment that shapes their image of occupational attainability and desirability. This information is used toward evaluating their career factors and alternatives, and ultimately impacts the final decision toward which career a person decides to pursue (Van Maenen, 1975). Jablin's (1987, 2001) research highlights how individuals are vocationally socialized through a variety of sources that consist of family members, educational institutions, part-time job experiences, peers, friends, and nonfamilial adults, and the media (Vangelisti, 1988). Jablin (1987, 2001) argues the family unit is the immediate source of information that impacts a child's image and perception of work and children often adopt their parents' attitudes, values, and criteria toward evaluating job and career options (as cited in Myers, Jahn, Gailliard, & Stoltzfus, 2011). The family unit often becomes the immediate source of vocational development. Educational institutions are the systems that begin to socialize students with others and help children to start developing a baseline understanding of systems of power, the idea of competition, and perception of work (as cited in Myers, Jahn, Gailliard, & Stoltzfus, 2011). Jablin (1987, 2001) speaks to adolescent experiences, such as the influence of part-time jobs that develop an understanding of the notion of work, the reality and expectations of the work environment, and the value of earning money for a service. Again, consistent with

previous research, Jablin (1987, 2001) also highlights the influence of peers and friends in the acquirement of both positive and negative expectations of a future career identity (Stake & Mares, 2005; Stake & Nickens, 2005). Introducing a mediated lens of influence, Jablin (1987, 2001) also highlights the impact of media toward vocational identity development. Throughout the lifespan, the mediated images of work shape a person's, especially a child's, values and expectations about careers. With so much influence on vocational development and its impact on the developing self-concept, it is argued that media often creates inaccurate, stereotypical images of work and relationship expectations in the workplace (Signorielli, 1993). Some argue mediated images perpetuate hegemonic ideals of work, which lead to constrained and constructed work identities (Steinke, 2005), but it is also this space that can disrupt constrained and constructed vocational identities for the Black body.

### **Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation**

Gottfredson (1981, 1996; Gottfredson & Lapan, 1997) explores the pathway to career interests and abilities, while examining the determinants that lead individuals to *circumscribed* and *comprised* career identities instead of fulfilling their *individual unique selves* and pursuing an authentic career identity. One's self-concept as described by Gottfredson (1981, 1996; Gottfredson & Lapan, 1997) is one's public and private view of self. Self-concept is arguably the image of oneself in comparison to another, which consists of: appearance, abilities, personality, gender, values, and social ranking within the societal landscape. Self-concept is the individual at the center of Bronfenbrenner's (1981) socio-ecological model. It is the image of self after all the hidden and overt messages of the outer layers permeate the individual at the center. As Gottfredson (1981) states: "The self-concept is the object of cognition (the "me"), but it also

reflects the person as actor (the “I”), it is within this space that one’s unique-self can be compromised to reflect the societal approved and negotiated-self” (p. 88). Gottfredson (1981) argues that people hold images of occupations, which are then organized into meaningful, shared cognitive maps of occupations. It is within this space that hegemonic career bodies emerge influencing the individual’s cognitive mapping experience and their vocational journey. Gottfredson (1981) argues it is here that adolescents and adults begin to categorize occupations into three dimensions: masculinity-femininity, occupational prestige level (overall desirability), and field of work. According to Gottfredson (1981), individuals consciously and subconsciously evaluate their compatibility of different careers through a negotiated lens. It is also within this space individuals evaluate the accessibility of securing their future career identity. This process is constant, ongoing, and begins during childhood and continues throughout the span of one’s lifetime.

Bronfenbrenner’s research looks to the child at the center of what he describes as the developmental socio-ecological model. Jablin’s Vocational Anticipatory Socialization theory looks at the socialization process and its impact on the career identity formation between the systems, and Gottfredson explores the impact of these socialization practices toward career identity development and acquisition. While there is a strong foundation toward vocational identity development, there is a need in the literature to explore how people achieve their career goals when the hegemonic messages that surround their development may be limited and narrow within its scope. There is a need in the literature to better understand the messages that surround the Black body regarding career identity. Especially how positive communicative practices and systems disrupt the hegemonic career identity messages that allow this body to see themselves in

*all* of the career options available to the dominant body. Increased understanding will help the individual develop and achieve their authentic career identity.

This thesis builds upon the existing bodies of work to better understand the role of lifespan communication in the career identity development of Black teachers. Through the development of a better understanding of the communicative practices around careers and the support systems put in place, one can then begin to disrupt the hegemonic ideologies of Black work. The researcher interviewed Black teachers to better understand the communicative journeys of becoming a teacher in a predominantly White field. Through the analysis of memorable messages across the career journeys of others, the theory *grounded in* the relationship between the communicative practices across the lifespan and the vocational identity development of Black teachers can be used to help others explore and pursue their authentic career identity (Jones, 2015).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **The Pursuit of an Authentic Black Career Identity**

As one transitions throughout life, an image of self is juxtaposed between the reality of one and the constant and consistent messages that impact the reality of the one at the center. Within the space of self and environment, an individual determines who they are within the space of whom they are told to be; who they want to become within the space of whom they are depicted to be; and the reality of securing one's desired and authentic self resides within the space of whom the environment says one is destined to become. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues, "The ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls. At the innermost level is the immediate setting containing the developing person" (p. 3). Each structure moves with the other influencing direction and development, and if all the systematic layers are stripped away, the developing person is cocooned at the center. Each layer is an environmental context that forms the innermost level, and both directly and indirectly impacts the each other (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) speaks to the need of a deeper understanding of human development that looks beyond the direct observation of the behavior of one or two people in the same place. He argues, to have a true understanding of human development, one must examine the "multi-person systems of interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the object" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21). For the purposes of this thesis, one will argue that there is a need to develop a better understanding of human development to explore what systems can be put in

place to disrupt the hegemonic ideologies of Black work, or the lack there of, that constrain the career identity of the Black person at the center.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) laid the foundation that shifted the paradigm on how one examines human development, as he defines as:

The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing persons lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 21)

From birth until death, the identity of the person is constantly shaped and altered by the interconnected systems that impact the reality of the body at the center of the system. As one's identity develops, simultaneously the vocational identity develops, as both are deeply rooted within Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model. The developmental process is an active arrangement between the environment and the individual within a two-directional space categorized by *reciprocity* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is the active process of reciprocity that allows individuals to be active agents within their development, but an individual's development is also shaped and impacted by the systems surrounding the individual. It is within this space that the individual, becoming an active agent of disruption, can negotiate and dispel the hegemonic ideologies that surround them.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues the socio-ecological environment consists of 5 systems that constantly interact and impact the development of the individual at the center of the interconnected developmental unit. The system consists of the: *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem*, and *chronosystem*. The *microsystem* is the closest system to the

developing individual. It is arguably the system that has the most influence on the child's development from the consistent and regular contact with the individual. The *mesosystem* consists of interconnected microsystems that directly or indirectly impact the child. The systems coming together can form a positive system of support or a negative space resulting in an identity-diffused individual. The *exosystem* is the larger social system in which the child does not directly function but is impacted. It is the system that the other immediate systems come into contact with, and while the developing child may not have direct contact with the outer systems, the reality of the individual is impacted by this interconnected system. The *macrosystem* is the outermost societal landscape of the child's environment that continuously permeates all other layers of the system and positively and negatively impacts the development of the child. It is here that the hegemonic impositions of the Black body shape the identity and vocational development of the child at the center. The *chronosystem* is the dimension of time and how it relates to the child's environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a). It is the history of the Black body that continuously impacts what it means to be Black in America today. It is the history of the struggle and transition that combat or fuel the modern day messages of Blackness.

### **The History Of the Black Body**

Throughout this thesis, the researcher frequently refers to the Black community and/or the Black individual using the terms, Black bodies or the Black body. These terms have historically been used to highlight the Black experience from the Black Body Politics theoretical perspective. This critical-historical lens highlights the history of domination based on the physical features of one that are uncharacteristic of the dominant group, such as the color of one's skin. The Black body becomes the "Other" which has been the historical approach to

“objectify, reconfigure, or disfigure Blacks and Black lives” (Jackson, p. 10). The history of the Black body has been enthralled within the need and thirst for an authentic self, but theorist such as bell hooks would argue, the hegemonic impositions have colonized the minds of the Black community because of the inscriptions of and to the *Black body*. In *We Are Real Cool*, bell hooks (2004) speaks of the pain of the Black experience, especially for the Black male as she states:

It has practically destroyed beyond recognition the representation of an alternative black man seeking freedom for self and loved ones, a rebel black man eager to create and his own destiny. This is the image of the black male that must be recovered, restored, so that it can stand as the example of revolutionary manhood.

(p. 14)

While bell hooks (2004) speaks of the Black male experience, this can be extended to Black women as they, too, struggle to explore what it means to be a Black woman due to the devaluation of the role of the Black woman, especially in the home, being constantly perpetuated (hooks, 2004). Throughout history, research on the Black family has frequently been characterized by unfounded myths and stereotypes, which create a delusion that the Black family is a pathological social unit – a system incapable of rearing individuals who can adjust to the demands of a civilized society (Staples, 1969). Hooks (2004) argues, the attack on the Black family, on the Black home, allows the oppressors to further “dominate and oppress us [Black body] benefit most when we have nothing to give our own, when they have so taken from us our dignity, our humanness that we have nothing left, no *homeplace* where we can recover ourselves” (p.42). The attack on the Black family is an attack on the *homeplace*. It is here that the struggles of the Black body are casted upon the individual and not the hegemonic constraining environments that further perpetuate White privilege and Horatio Alger’s



mythology that not only leads to constrained vocational identities, but ultimately impacts the *future* family unit and *future* developing individuals within these *future* systems. Bell hooks (1992) argues that for the Black body to progress in America, Black America has to *decolonize* their minds to find and articulate their authentic self; but to do this, they have to break down the mental barriers that reinforce their Whitewashed reality.

Theorizing Black experience in the United States is a difficult task. Socialized within White supremacist educational systems and by a racist mass media, many people are convinced that our lives are not complex, and are therefore unworthy of sophisticated critical analysis and reflection. Even those of us righteously committed to Black liberation struggle, who feel we have decolonized our minds, often find it hard to ‘speak’ our experience. The more painful the issues we confront the greater our inarticulateness. James Baldwin understood this. In *The Fire Next Time* he reminded readers that ‘there has been almost no language’ to describe the ‘horrors’ of Black life. Without a way to name our pain, we are also without the words to articulate our pleasure. Indeed, a fundamental task of Black critical thinkers has been the struggle to break with the hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being that block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe, and invent ourselves in ways that are liberatory. (hooks, 1992, p. 2)

As bell hooks (1992) reiterates, for one to decolonize one’s mind, one has to be able to *see* and *unlock* what colonizes that mind. It is only then that one can begin the journey to liberation.

In *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, Ronald Jackson (2006) takes a critical-historical approach as he describes to:

Recount the genesis of a phenomenon while mapping contemporary parallels and grappling with age-old problems revisited. This mode of inquiry has become valuable and transitive for its ability to support social reformulations and reconstructions of knowledge in addition to the sociopolitical machinery that functions to perpetuate historically concomitant ideologies. (p. 9 - 10)

Jackson (2006) argues, like hooks, to better understand the individual in the present space of the lifespan, one must have an understanding of the history of the Black experience before one can truly begin to *see* oneself in the modern day Black body. The *chronosystem* contains the historical events that have led to the identity of individuals who are Black in America. Jackson (2006) argues, “slavery and early racial depictions of the Black body have directly influenced the coherent scripting of Blackness in contemporary cinema and television; more importantly, they have had deleterious effects on the psyche of African Americans” (p. 44). He goes on to argue:

These linkages between past and present portrayals are not drawn to erect a nihilistic prophecy that Black bodies are trapped irreversible and deterministically in a web of ontological despair. I believe the point being made is much more sophisticated and interesting. I contend that Black bodies must be aware of their historical and contemporary habitat in order to understand how they actively participate in their own scripting that inscription is not an external activity robbing Black bodies of their agency, but that Black bodies may also rob themselves from their natural and beautiful indigenous identities. (Jackson, 2006, p. 46)

Building upon hooks (1992) and Jackson (2006), the Black body is by no means an *idle* and *passive* body that simply succumbs to the constrained and inscribed images of Blackness. While

they both would agree that some are unable to *see*, and ultimately succumb to hegemonic impositions inscripted upon them, others fight back by *gazing* and *seeing* the hegemonic systems at play.

The gaze is a tool that allows one to see the other, also and to see the other within oneself. This I-Other dialectical tension creates a space for self-reflection that reveals that the “Self is more than the ‘I’ since the Self involves self-consciousness, self-esteem, and a personhood influenced by society and culture (as cited in Jackson, 2006, p. 10). Communication becomes the space of agency to explore, negotiate, and to *see* a true and authentic image of self, and this begins within the *homeplace*. The communicative practices that take place in the *homeplace* become a space of resistance to the outer layers that permeate and shape the Black identity and experience (hooks, 1990). It is within the *homeplace* that the Black mind can begin to be *decolonized* to the hegemonic ideologies of Blackness that have been planted and taken root in modern day Black bodies.

The *homeplace* is part of Bronfenbrenner’s *microsystem*. The microsystem is the immediate system that is made up of individuals who directly communicate and interact with the child at the center of the environment (Bronfenbrenner’s, 1979). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, p. 6) defines the microsystem as “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics.” This system is made up of tightly woven units consisting of the individual at the center and two or more others who pay attention to or participate in one another’s activities – also known as a *dyad* (Bronfenbrenner’s, 1979). Dyadic relationships consist of interpersonal relationships that are frequently set in particular physical, social, and symbolic exchanges. It is these exchanges that spaces of agency become available to disrupt the constraining messages that impact the child

at the center. These exchanges often take place in the home, school, and immediate environments that a person consistently interacts with (Bronfenbrenner's, 1994), which have the potential to expand and become a system of resistance. It is within the immediate environment that the *proximal processes* operate.

The proximal processes are the reciprocal interactions between an individual and environments, incorporating persons, objects, and symbols (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The emphasis is on the reciprocal nature of interaction within the proximal processes. Proximal processes are much more than the direct communicative experiences between individuals. They are also the interactions with objects and symbols that make up the contextual landscape. These processes can be overt or hidden messages that make up the communicative experiences and ultimately impact the communicative experience and development of the individual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). It is through the dyadic relationships that one can learn to break the hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being that block an individual's capacity to see oneself *oppositionally* and to imagine, describe, and invent oneself in ways that are liberatory (hooks, 1992). The proximal processes have the power to disrupt the hegemonic ideologies and to create a space to explore one's authentic "cultural identity" that resides within the macrosystem of one's identity, as described by Stuart Hall:

Is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (as cited in Campbell & Kean, 1997, p. 94)

Hall's definition of cultural identity embodies Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model that can be extended to individual identity development and vocational identity development. Hall speaks to how one's identity is not exclusive from the world around them and Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues, as one goes through life, seeds of *molar activities* are planted from the outer layers that take root within the individual.

Molar activities can be described as the seeds of cultural and individual identity development. These seeds are planted and nourished by the communicative environment that surrounds the individual. If the seed is not nourished, then the seed of possibility is never planted and, therefore, never has the possibility to be mobilized, or unfortunately, it is mobilized. The seeds of human development are positive and negative - as they are the actions of others that directly and indirectly impact the individual. It is within the microsystem that the negative messages can be disrupted and the positive molar activities mobilized. A molar activity is "the principal and most immediate manifestation both of the development of the individual and of the most powerful environmental forces that instigate and influence that development - the actions of other people" (Bronfenbrenner p. 45). It is through the actions of others that a developing individual may flourish or stagnate, but it is here that cultural identity can also flourish, be negotiated, or become stagnated.

A molar activity possesses a momentum of its own and is perceived as having meaning or intent by the participants in the setting; they are persistent and ongoing until the activity is complete (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p 45). It is this unique state of completion that makes molar activities much more powerful than a simple act. Once a molar activity is set in motion, it builds momentum shaping the identity, career trajectory, and the life of the individual at the center. While molar activities vary from their complexity, they are the building blocks toward cultural,

individual, and career identity development and ultimately, career acquisition, and could be used as a site of resistance, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues:

Activities differ in the extent to which they invoke objects, people, and events not actually present in the immediate setting. Such invocation may be accomplished through conversation, story telling, fantasy, pictorial representation, or a variety of other media. (p. 47)

These activities do not only occur in the immediate physical reality, but they also occur in and from the mediated spaces that permeate the physical space. The mediated messages the Black body are exposed to have the ability to become part of their physical reality, equally impacting their image of self and vocational career identity. The symbolic messages that are perpetuated through digital mediums become an equal part of the developmental landscape. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) goes on to argue:

To the extent that activities refer to events occurring in other places at other times, they reflect an expansion of the actor's phenomenological world beyond the immediate situation... If a person in a given setting speaks about her own activities in some other setting, either in the past or in the future, she is exhibiting the ability to create a mental mesosystem. Television brings into the daily experience of children violent events in other places that then find violent expression in the youngster's everyday activities, thus adding an exo-and, perhaps, even more tragically, an entire macrosystem to the child's phenomenological world. (p. 47)

Molar activities are the communicative practices that shape the individual through the various systems that come into contact with the individual at the center, such as those individuals at

home, school, community, or mediated. Through a better understanding of molar activities within these systems, one can better understand the molar activities that expound or hinder the vocational identity exploration of the Black child, especially during vulnerable developmental periods, such as adolescence.

### **Adolescent Vulnerability**

Erik Erikson (1964) argues people go through psychosocial developmental stages across the lifespan. Erikson (1964) defines eight stages of development across the lifespan that result in positive identity or a demised identity: *trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, ego-identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation/self-absorption, and ego integrity versus despair.*

Erikson uses the eight stages of psychosocial development to explore the question:

What ‘virtue goes out’ of a human being when he loses the strength we have in mind, and ‘by virtue of’ what strength does man acquire that animated or spirited quality without which his moralities become mere moralism and his ethics feeble goodness. (Erikson, 1964, p. 219)

Through the performance of life with family, society, and self, human virtues evolve over time and at different stages of a person’s life. As a person transitions from one life stage to the next, they experience challenges. To feel internally fulfilled, they have to secure different virtues to feel accomplished, complete, loved, empowered, and ready for the next psychosocial stage.

Erikson calls these basic human virtues *hope, will, purpose, and competence* as the rudiments of virtue develop during the stages of childhood; *fidelity* as the adolescent virtue; and *love, care, and wisdom* as the central virtues of adulthood (Erikson, 1964). Each of life’s virtues

stem from the possibility of being able to attach and bond with another; attachment is life's building block. It is only by trusting this attachment that an individual is able to explore and challenge his or her own reality. It is from trusting another that one can learn to trust oneself. As social human beings, we are dependent on one another to individually and collectively succeed throughout life. Adolescence is the most important and vulnerable transitional period between childhood and early adulthood, if not the entire lifespan (Erikson, 1964).

Erikson (1964) argues during adolescence, roughly between the years of 12 and 18 years old, an individual is in a state of *ego-identity versus role confusion*. They are trying to fulfill the virtue of fidelity by learning to commit to another while most importantly learning to commit to oneself. During this phase, individuals are negotiating the messages of who they are said to become and who they want to be, while enmeshed in physiological and social disruption (Pecchioni, Wright, & Nussbaum, 2005). Adolescence is a time when a person is thirsty and in need of messages of support, encouragement, guidance, and wisdom, especially from those within their microsystem, but they are also in need of an environment that allows for exploration and anonymity. An adolescent body has to feel safe and secure to explore the world around them without fear of the repercussion of demonstrating an authentic image of self, especially when the young person is exploring what it means to be he or she within all the messages of what they are to they should be. The adolescent is in an identity-diffused state, and needs a safe space to explore and negotiate who they are and who they are becoming (Erikson, 1968). It is during this stage that an adolescent experiences *split self-images* and experiences a *loss of center and dispersion* (Erikson, 1968). It is detrimental during this time that the microsystem becomes the *center* for this *identity-diffused* individual. It is during this time of insecurity, uncertainty, and



confusion, that the *homeplace* becomes a foundation of support to stabilize this transitioning teen.

Working from Erikson's (1964) idea of *ego-identity versus role confusion*, Marcia (1966) identified two dimensions in the process of identity formation: *exploration* and *commitment*. Exploration involves the active consideration of alternative possible identity elements in a quest for a more complete sense of self; whereas commitment represents a decision to adhere to a specific set of goals, values, and beliefs, whether self-initiated or adapted from others. It is from here that the young person tries on possible career identities. They are, however, limited both within the scope of the career identities that they have not only been exposed to, and also by the likelihood of being able to secure the career identity.

During adolescence, a person is grasping for connection and acceptance, while exploring who they are and who they want to be. This is a vital time in identity development, a time when a person needs a space of agency to negotiate the negative messages of whom they are told to be, within and outside of the home. This is especially true of Black children. While Erikson (1964) argues all adolescents go through this psychosocial developmental period of *ego-identity versus role confusion*, the Black body goes through this stage within a *hot stove* environment that has the possibility to warrant an individual and microsystem to focus on day-to-day living, which impacts looking ahead.

### **Hot Stoves and Black Lives**

In 2017, there is a tremendous amount of fear in the Black community for the lives of Black people, especially Black males. With the recent upswEEP in Black unarmed boys and men being killed by White police officers and torch-bearing White supremacists freely marching in

the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, Black families continue to raise children in *hot stove* environments, worried about their day-to-day life expectancy. Daniel and Daniel (1999) state: “The hot stove burns relentlessly from birth through death, and therefore, it is a fundamental part of the context related to understanding African-American caregivers’ early childhood communication with their children” (p. 25). Parents and caregivers have to teach their children about additional safety concerns due to the color of their skin. Daniel and Daniel (1999) use the analogy to speak of the dangers the Black community is subjected to because of the color of their skin. They speak of the dangers of living in a society with constant fear and how this impacts the way Black children are being raised, but there is a need in the research to better understand how this impacts the future career goals and trajectory of members in the Black community.

*Hot stove* conversations begin while a Black child is young and they discuss safety concerns for the here and now. Parents want to protect their children from outside dangers that could possibly have them killed or incarcerated. With so much concern for the safety of the child for today, one questions how this affects the projective thought process for the future, especially when it comes to future career ideologies. What are the long-term effects of cautionary communicative practices, because of one’s core identity marker – race? In what ways does this impact future work and career choices? Do hot stove environments limit future career choices by emphasizing and highlighting particular career paths where Black people readily appear accepted and offer a career path where a Black child can recognize and see someone they can relate to and aspire to be like? It is important for the Black community to not be constrained by being in the margins of society, but to use this space to explore themselves and press against societal constraints (hooks, 1992a). This space is created and expounded upon in the microsystems that surround the developing person. The Black microsystem creates Foucauldian spaces of agency

within an individual's natural and private setting (hooks, 1992). This space needs to be examined to better understand the communicative practices around career identity development that lead to Black bodies to securing their career goals and pursuing careers where an image of self is not readily available.

The Black body is exposed to multilayered systems that constrain one's ability and vision of vocational identity development. However, "even when a person's activities are restricted to experiences in and of the immediate setting, they can take on a high order of complexity through the introduction of another element of the microsystem, relations with people" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.47). It is within this space that the power of interpersonal relationships and the communicative practices that surround these spaces create opportunities to make the unseen seen, and the unachievable achievable. The Black microsystem, such as family, become extremely important toward disrupting the hegemonic ideologies. It is this system that plants the seed to allow a young person to see oneself within an expounded view of the possibilities that are available to them.

The Black body has to be racially socialized to live in a society that is a frequently hostile environment towards being Black in America (as cited in Socha & Diggs, 1999). The developing Black child is raised within a community where the dominant group forces them to "incorporate dominant societal values that insidiously devalue their group" (McAdoo, p. 51, 1985). The importance of other Black bodies being part of a Black child's or adolescent's microsystem, becomes an increasingly important part of the developmental process. It is within these space, that a safe haven can be supplanted to contest the outside messages of what it means to be Black, what Black careers look like, what the quality of Black life is equated to, and what a Black life can contribute to society. The Black home, the Black family, and extending this to the classroom,

has the power to disrupt outside messages by the communicative exchanges within the household and classroom. It is the positive molar communicative activities that an adolescent is exposed to about careers, career opportunities and aspirations that *dignity* can be found in Black work and Black career paths can be expounded upon, but these messages have to be supplanted within the microsystems.

It is within this space of family that members of the system exchange content and relational messages that impact the individual parts of the system (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 2007), which can be extended to other microsystems. It is from the verbal and nonverbal exchanges within a system that a child learns who they are and what they can and cannot become when they grow up. A microsystem can become a space of agency to combat the hegemonic ideals of what it means to be Black in America, which greatly impacts future career choices.

It is within the dyadic relationships that Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the various relationships and possible developmental outcomes: observational dyad, joint activity dyad, and affective relations. The observational dyad, a Black child learns of what it means to navigate a hostile environment by watching another close to him or her navigate the world. The joint activity dyad creates a space of agency where the two bodies work together to develop an authentic identity. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that a “joint activity dyad presents especially favorable conditions not only for learning in the course of the common activity, but also for increasing motivation to pursue and perfect the activity when the participants are no longer together” (p. 57). He also speaks to the importance of reciprocity, what one does impacts the other, and what the other does it also impacts the other, and the balance of power. While Bronfenbrenner (1979) speaks of the importance of reciprocity, he also highlights the reality of

one member of the dyad having more power than the other. While speaking to the importance of the child having a sense of control and power to feel not only empowered, but to grow and develop. Affective relations develop as two bodies in dyadic interactions continue to flourish. However, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that these feelings do not always have to be mutually positive; they can be mutually negative, ambivalent, or asymmetrical. Affective relations lead to primary dyads, which “continue to exist phenomenologically for both participants even when they are not together. The two members appear in each other’s thoughts, are the objects of strong emotional feelings, and continue to influence one another’s behavior even when apart” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 58). Ultimately, a developing person is likely to acquire skills, knowledge, and values from a person where a primary dyad has been established when both are actually present in the same setting (p.58). From his research, Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the dyadic relationships that create an optimal environment for development:

Learning and development are facilitated by the participation of the developing person in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity with someone with whom that person has developed a strong and enduring emotional attachment and when the balance of power gradually shifts in favor of the developing person. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.60)

Although the family system is arguably the principal context from which human development takes place, it is but one of several settings in which developmental processes can and do occur. There is a considerable amount of research in educational literature to support the view that teachers have a significant impact on students’ learning and achievement (e.g., Danielson, 2002; Goldhaber, 2002; Sadeghi & Nikou, 2012), but there is a need for more research into the space of student-teacher relationships that transcend the classroom, and produce

internal feelings of *relatedness* and help a child to transition through developmental periods, especially during adolescence. Adolescence is a developmental period of identity confusion and exploration. It is arguably the most vulnerable period of youth development. It is during this time that a person's present and future self-concept is greatly impacted, and feelings of closeness are needed. A young person needs to see an image of self in other spaces that positively impact how they see themselves.

While Bronfenbrenner (1979) does not speak to it, the microsystem creates a space to be recognized, and it is only through communicative practices within this space that the Black body can truly be seen. Interpersonal relationships create a space for the Black body to be recognized for who they are and not whom society constrains them to be, as Harris-Perry (2011) explains: "Recognition scholarship derives from the concept of *Anerkenung*, or mutually affirming recognition that allows citizens to operate as equals within the confines of the social contract" (p. 36). Recognition is an *animating struggle* of human society and particularly of public life (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 36). Expanding the environments that allow a person to feel connected and recognized by another, help to bridge a community of support around the developing individual and create a system that helps to combat the negative messages of Blackness in another system.

The mesosystem is the system bridging the microsystem to and through the outer layers. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 209) describes the system as the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person, such as between the home and school, or school and the workplace. These two systems may or may not directly interact with the child at the center, but they do impact the developing child. The messages between these systems greatly influence the development, career aspirations, and trajectory of the person at the

center. The mesosystem is the coming together of the dyads that most frequently come into contact with the developing child. While the communicative factors occur in one setting within the microsystem, the mesosystem blends together setting boundaries that the child continuously comes into contact with. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines the mesosystem as “a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person becomes an active participant (p. 209). Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines four types of mesosystems: multisetting participation, indirect linkage, intersetting communications, and intersetting knowledge. The only way a mesosystem can be introduced is when a setting transition is made. The multisetting participation is the most basic mesosystem when the same person engages in two or more settings – home and school. Indirect linkage is when the same person does not directly engage in two settings, but are influenced by the other settings through an individual who is part of their microsystem. Within vocational identity development, while the child may not directly experience the work of a parent, they are greatly influenced by this system. While Bronfenbrenner (1979) does not directly make this connection, the intersetting communications - messages transmitted from setting to another, and intersetting knowledge - messages transmitted from one setting to another with the intent to provide information between persons in other settings (p. 210), it can be argued that between these systems is where media becomes a mesosystem that shapes the identity and alters one’s reality. It is from here that the depictions of the Black body on the television influence the identity development of the Black body that is consistently watching and taking in these symbolic messages. There is a need in the literature to better understand the communicative practices across the lifespan that take place within the home, classroom, and television that impact one’s secure identity, and future career identity.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) focuses on the importance of the relationships that make up the microsystem and mesosystem, and he argues that the communicative practices that stem from these systems are what ultimately shape the identity of the individual at the center. Connell and Wellborn (1991) argue that it is between the linkages of the individual and the systems that secure development may flourish. It is the feeling of *relatedness* that encompasses the need to feel securely connected with others and to experience oneself as worthy and capable of love and respect (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). This sense of relatedness begins within the family system. Numerous studies have found that the quality of one's relatedness is essential to one's self-concept (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Myers & Diener, 1995). One cannot experience relatedness, without being able to fulfill the need of attachment (Maslow 1948a; Adlerfer 1980), but one also has to attach to oneself. From the very beginning of life, the dyad of relatedness begins coming into fruition. Bowlby (1969) argues attachment is the initial bond created between caregiver and child. It is this initial bond created between caregiver and infant that serves as the blueprint for the way this child will view themselves and others. It is in this feeling of attachment that relational schemas develop, and an individual learns how to perform and feel in their adult life (Bowlby, 1969; 1973).

To experience relatedness, one must be able to attach to another. Bowlby (1969) defines attachment as “an inborn system in the brain that evolves in ways that influence and organize motivational, emotional, and memory processes with respect to significant caregiving figures” (Bowlby, 1969, p. 67). Attachment is “as a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings” (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194). To successfully create bonds with others throughout life, one must form a secure attachment with the caregiver during infancy and to continue to feel this attachment throughout the lifespan of development: *childhood, adolescence, young adulthood,*



*middle adulthood*, and *late adulthood*. Attachment is a need. It is the foundation of relatedness, and without attachment, one's identity and career identity is ultimately impaired.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work introduces the impact of an ecological approach toward the development of a child. He introduces environmental components that allow a critical lens to be introduced that not only look to the individual but the society surrounding and impacting the individual at the center. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model offers a foundation to explore not only the development of the individual, but also the career identity that emerges from within this socio-ecological approach.

### **Vocational Anticipatory Socialization**

Vocational Anticipatory Socialization (VAS) is the communicative process by which individuals intentionally and unintentionally receive socializing occupational messages from their environment that affect their career expectations (Jablin, 2001). VAS begins early in life, as children learn about the world of work and continues as adolescents and young adults make educational and career choices (Goodnow, 1988; Levine & Hoffner, 2006). It is through the conscious and unconscious messaging surrounding the meaning of work that a person's career identity emerges. VAS occurs within the immediate scope, or as Bronfenbrenner describes as the microsystem and mesosystem, such as the home and school, but there is also a need to better understand the digital spaces that impact the career development of self, especially within the minority community. Mediated messages of careers, career identities, and the possibility of career acquisition have the opportunity to lead to *dignified* or *constrained* and *constructed* career identities. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach toward vocational anticipatory socialization, one can begin to examine the career identity messages that are shared and

exchanged about Black work across the lifespan and impact career aspirations and ultimately, career acquisition for Black people within minority fields, such as teaching. There is a need in the current literature to better understand the vocational anticipatory practices that lead to successful careers or constrained and constructed career choices.

Buzzanell and Lucas (2013) discuss constrained and constructed career choices, and explore how through communication dignified and chosen career identities can be explored and developed. As Buzzanell and Lucas (2013) explain, individuals have a choice when it comes to career aspirations, but many have limited options from which to choose from (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2013). Looking at the reality of choice, it often tells the tale of privilege and upward mobility (Buzzanell, 2013); while the tale of those less advantaged are often left with constrained choices and stagnated movement with tempered career aspirations through the recognition of their social positioning (Buhler-Niederberger & Konig, 2011). Horatio Alger's mythology presents the idea that through hard work and commitment, one can attain the life they aspire to have (Weiss, 1969), but this notion goes against Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model of development. Society would like to look to the individual and have he or she believe they have the freedom of choice, but it is only by recognizing societal constraints that hegemonic ideals are disrupted and communicative spaces become available to contest constrained choices and authentic choices may be achieved. It is by first recognizing the system and reality that one lives within, and then creating spaces of agency to transgress boundaries that a person's career identity can flourish.

Dignity is defined as a sense of self-worth derived from one's respective social position and basic humanity and the experience of being treated with respect by others (Hodson, 2001; Lee, 2008). It is this space of choice, career choice, and positioning, that a person's dignified

career identity can flourish or stagnate. To have dignity, one must feel a sense of autonomy, freedom of choice or as Sayer (2007) defines as: “Being in control of oneself, competently and appropriately exercising one’s power” (p. 568). Individuals that do not have this feeling of choice cannot derive a sense of autonomy, which impacts their dignity, and ultimately disrupts their development of a secure career identity. Super (1969, 1980, 1990) suggested that career choice and development is essentially a process of developing and implementing a person’s self-concept. According to Super’s (1990) *Self-concept Theory of Career Development*, self-concept is a product of complex interactions among a number of factors, including physical and mental growth, personal experiences, and environmental characteristics and stimulation, it could be argued that self-concept is the individual at the center of the socio-ecological model. The individual’s self-concept is impacted by the reality that surrounds he or she, and ultimately impacts how one views oneself in comparison to others.

### **Theory of Circumscription and Compromise**

Gottfredson’s (1981, 1996) *Theory of Circumscription and Compromise* argues career identities develop over the course of a lifetime. The images of self and career possibilities are impacted by one’s understanding of self in comparison to the larger world and the other (Wee, 2014). As Wee (2014) explains, children progressively eliminate portions of the world of work that do not match their conceptions of who they are and where they exist within the social world. This circumscription process results in a range of occupations an individual finds acceptable. Gottfredson (1981) referred to this as the *zone of acceptable alternatives*. A person also begins to acknowledge and compromise on their perception of self and the reality of their career identity. In this stage, individuals may be inclined to sacrifice roles they see as more compatible with their

self-concept in favor of those they perceive to be more accessible, ultimately, securing careers where they see an image of self (Winter, n.d.). It is within this space where constrained and constructed career choices are reinforced or negotiated. It is also within this space that one decides why one should work, what work is, and for the Black community, what Black work looks like.

Cuilla (2000) argues there are four reasons why people work: meaningful work, leisure, money, and security, which further highlight the discursive and material differences and socio-political forces that enable and constrain career choices across the lifespan (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2013). Buzzanell and Lucas (2006) define career as “an expansive discourse through which work acquires coherence and meaning in individuals’ lives and lifespans” (p. 172). A person’s career holds so much power to a person’s life that it is a part of their identity and self-worth (Cuilla, 2000). Career provides an individual with a sense of purpose and value. While many do not have the luxury of choice when it comes to their career, their career decisions or lack thereof, impact their identity development. Individuals often assume people have equal opportunities to achieve objective career success, but it is these assumptions that subscribe to hegemonic ideologies and stir away from the systemic and contextual factors that support and reinforce infrastructures that lead to advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Buzzanell, 2000; Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991; Cloud, 1996).

One’s self-concept is continuously impacted by the communicative practices that surround the person at the center. This process is a continuous journey that begins from infancy and continues throughout the lifespan. Static components of one’s identity (sex and gender, and race and ethnicity) are core identity markers that shape the reality of the individual. Race is a complex identity marker that arguably leaves some people at an advantage while others are left

at a disadvantage. Throughout lifespan development, race is a major element of a person's identity, as it becomes a frame of reference for how an individual views themselves in comparisons to others- in and outside of their racial group. Racial identity is a surface-level manifestation based upon what one looks like, yet has deep implications on how one is treated, which is powerful, especially on a minority body, such as the Black community (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999).

Ronald Jackson (2006), author of *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, uses Barthes' trilateral construction of the signifying practices: signifier (the form which the sign takes) + signified (the concept it represents) = the sign, to argue that this potential ideal space to develop an authentic identity is constrained by internal and external ideals of Blackness (Chandler, 2009). Jackson (2006) constructed and applied Barthes's concept to the "scripting practices" of the Black identity, which consists of: "the scripter (signified-ideologies of Blackness), scripted (signifier-Black body) and inscription (sign-what it means to be Black)" (p.4). These three components are the constraining forces that are ascribed to the Black community by the dominant society, but they are also the forces that lead to *misrecognition*. Harris-Perry (2011) argues that society's *misrecognition* "shape and impact the development of a private self" (p.38). Recognition is a space of "animating struggle" of human society and particularly of public life (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 36). It is here that highlights the importance of strong figures within the microsystem and mesosystem to help Black adolescents to be and to feel *recognized*. It is this space of recognition that allows relatedness to positively impact the development of one's self-concept (Bowlby, 1969). During the time of adolescence, recognition becomes a vital component of identity development and formation (Erikson, 1968). As Kroger argues:

Identity formation, finally, begins where the usefulness of identification ends. It arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications and their absorption in a new configuration... (as cited in Kroger, 1993, p. 159)

The final identity, then, as fixed at the end of adolescence, is superordinated to any single identification with individuals of the past: it includes all significant identification, but it also alters them in order to make a unique and reasonably coherent whole of them. (as cited in Kroger, 1993, p. 161)

The Black body ascribes the scripting practices of Blackness, which ultimately impact the vocational identity of the Black body that lead to *undignified* career options that are the result of *constrained* vocational identities. It is within this space that there is a need to better understand the *memorable messages* that guide Black bodies toward the exploration and achievement of their career goals in a dominant space, which stem from the home, classroom, and television.

### **The Importance of Black Teachers in the Classroom**

Throughout history, Black teachers have been an integral part to Black mobilization and progression. Since slavery, Black teachers have planted the seed of knowledge that has allowed the Black community to see themselves more than the perpetuated hegemonic ideologies of Blackness. As Elder's stated, "you can't be what you don't see" (as cited in Biggs, 1996, p. 326). In Graham's *Black Teachers - A Drastically Scarce Resource*, from 1987, states:

Most teachers who teach today's children are white; tomorrow's teaching force will be even more so. Yet, increasingly, the students are not white. By the end of

the century, estimates are that more than one-third, perhaps even 40%, of American schoolchildren will be non-white. (p. 599)

While this study was conducted 30 years ago, Graham's projection remains true today. Richard Ingersoll's (2012) *What Do the National Data Tell Us About Minority Teacher Shortages?* looks at the national data to better understand the shortage of minority teachers, and its impact on minority students.

Analyzing the national Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (Ingersoll, 2012) the following information emerged that spoke to the decline of minority teachers. The data found that in the 2011–2012 school year, 37 percent of the nation's population was minority and 44.1 percent of all elementary and secondary students were minority, but only 17.3 percent of all elementary and secondary teachers were minority, which has grown from 12.4 percent in 1987 – 88, but not at the speed of the growing minority space (Ingersoll, 2012). The study broke down the percentage of students and teachers by race and ethnicity from 2011 – 2012. It showed that 55.9 percent of white students and 82.7 percent of white teachers, compared to 44.1 percent of minority students and 17.3 percent minority teachers, which consist of 6.4 percent of Black teachers to 14.4 percent of Black students. 21.1 percent of Hispanic students and 7.5 percent of Hispanic teachers; 5.1 percent of Asian students and 1.9 percent of teachers; 1.2 percent of American Indian students and 0.4 percent teachers; and 2.3 of students that identified as multiracial and 1.0 percent of teachers (Ingersoll, 2012). While this study supports that the Black teacher is now beginning to replenish, there is still a disproportionate number of White teachers than any other group, which continues to introduce hegemonic presence within the microsystem of the Black body. This continuously makes it more difficult to disrupt the hegemonic ideals of Blackness and to create spaces within the classroom that allow students to be *recognized*.

Ingersoll (2012) argues the majority White teacher base is *a major civil rights issue* that is negatively impacting the minority student achievement, as he argues:

The nation's population and students have grown more racially and ethnically diverse, the teaching force has done the opposite. The result, we are told, is that minority students in the nation's schools increasingly lack minority adult role models, don't have sufficient contact with teachers who understand their racial and cultural backgrounds, and often lack qualified teachers of any background, because nonminority teachers eschew schools with large percentages of minorities. The minority teacher shortage in turn, we are told, is a major reason for the minority achievement gap and, ultimately, unequal occupational and life outcomes for disadvantaged students. In short, the minority teacher shortage is considered a major civil rights issue. (as cited in Ingersoll, 2012, p 13)

This civil rights issue is negatively impacting the vocational identity development of Black children, due to the feeling of *misrecognition* (Harris-Perry, 2011). There is ample support for the importance of Black teachers that positively impact the developmental transition for Black children to help them to feel *recognized* and individually and collectively affirmed:

It has long been argued that there is a particular social and emotional benefit to minority children, and especially minority children from high-poverty neighborhoods, from knowing—and being known and recognized by—people who look like themselves who are successful and in positions of authority (more on this later). But there is also a growing body of evidence to suggest that minority students derive academic benefits from having access to demographically similar teachers. (Albert Shanker Institute, 2012, p. 8)



Nicholas Papageorge, Seth Gershenson, and Stephen B. Holt (2016) conducted a study called the *Race Biases Teachers' Expectations for Students*, which argues that White teachers often limit the potential of the Black body through constraining and constructing ideologies that do not positively support the potential of their Black students. White teachers become part of the Black bodies microsystem, which in turn, directly impacts the self-concept and identity development of that student.

Researchers analyzed data from the *Educational Longitudinal Study* of 2002, an ongoing study that follows the development of 8,400 10<sup>th</sup> grade students and found that White teachers had lower expectation of the students' success, especially Black boys. The study had the following findings:

- White and other non-Black teachers were 12 percentage points more likely than Black teachers to predict Black students would not finish high school.
- Non-Black teachers were 5 percent more likely to predict their Black male students would not graduate high school than their Black females.
- Black female teachers are significantly more optimistic about the ability of Black males to complete high school than teachers of any other demographic group. They were 20 percent less likely than White teachers to predict their student would not graduate high school, and 30 percent less likely to say that than Black male teachers.
- White male teachers are 10 to 20 percent more likely to have low expectations for Black female students.
- Math teachers were significantly more likely to have low expectations for female students.

- For Black students, particularly Black males, having a non-Black teacher in a 10th grade subject made them much less likely to pursue that subject by enrolling in similar classes. This suggests biased expectations by teachers have long-term effects on student outcomes, the researchers said.

This study further supports that the microsystems surrounding the developing person, especially during adolescence, significantly impacts the identity and vocational development of the student pursuing a compromised vocational identity.

Throughout history, when there has been a group working to disrupt a dominant power, it has been vital for that group to have an ally from the dominant group. Michael Boucher's (2014) *More Than an Ally: A Successful White Teacher Who Builds Solidarity with His African American Students*, conducted a qualitative analysis to examine the components of a successful Black student and White teacher relationship that positively impacted the students identity development. Boucher (2014) used the work of Milner (2010) to highlight the student teacher journey, as he states: Milner (2010) also described that a teacher seeking to interrogate his or her Whiteness must "develop a 'deeper understanding of the impact of race' and develop relationships with students that 'transcend cultural boundaries'" (p. 46). Milner also acknowledges the difficulty by stating: "teachers make the connections between their Whiteness and their classroom practice" calling it a "difficult task" (p. 46). It is by creating a space of agency through solidarity that a "commitment to social movement" and allyhood begin to exist (Boucher, p. 103, 2014). It is within this space that the teacher recognizes his or her privileged landscape in comparison to the standpoint of the student. While Boucher (2014) argues this develops through a sense of *solidarity*, it continues to reinforce the development of a secure and trusting connection with another through the bond of *relatedness*.

With the current and increasingly growing classroom demographics of White teachers to Black students, research needs to have an improved understanding of the classroom relationships that combat misrecognition of not only what it means to be Black, but also Black careers. There is a need in the literature to better understand the microsystems and the communicative practices of the individuals within these systems to understand how these spaces of agency can be implemented within the home, classroom, and the mediated outlet of the television to explore the career path and identity choices they want to ascribe to their body.

### **Television and the Black Vocational Journey**

As one transitions throughout life, one constantly negotiates whom they are within the constant images depicting who they are or are not. Mediated messages that exude from the television consistently reach the developing child at the center. Jablin (1987, 2001) identified media as one of the systems that vocationally socialize a child to possible career identities that may or may not fit their image of self. Black adolescents have the highest television viewing among any other group (Berry, 1998; Lee & Browne, 1981; Watkins, 2005). Television becomes a system that directly shapes or reinforces an adolescent's *cognitive map of occupations* (Gottfredson (1981, 1986) leading to circumscribed and compromised career identity.

Building upon Cultivation Theory that looks at the long-term effects of television and human development (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), Adams-Bass, Steveson, and Kotzin (2014) analyze television as a storytelling system that actively shares information that help to flourish or constrain a Black adolescent's vocational identity by mobilizing identity affirming or stagnating *molar activities* (Gottfredson, 1981, 1986). Cultivating experiences become *molar activities* (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) that shape the reality of the developing adolescent. Adams-Bass,

Stevenson, and Kotzin (2014) build upon the theoretical infrastructure of Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) (Spencer, 1995). PVEST was developed to implement a phenomenological approach to Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model used to examine the impact of media exposure on racial/ethnic socialization, racial identity, body image, self-esteem, Black history knowledge, and demographics. As described by Spencer (1995), the PVEST is a framework used to evaluate vulnerability level, net stress, reactive coping strategies, emergent identities, and life stages outcomes relative to the experiences of Black youth.

Building upon Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) and PVEST (Spencer, 1995), Valerie Adams-Bass, Howard Stevenson, and Diana Kotzin (2014) researched the effects of the media on the adolescent mind. In the *Measuring the Meaning of Black Media Stereotypes and Their Relationship to the Racial Identity, Black History Knowledge, and Racial Socialization of African American Youth*, 113 Black adolescents and young adults between the ages of 14 to 21 were surveyed to better understand the impact of the mediated images of racial socialization, racial identity, Black history knowledge, body image, and self-esteem. Television remains the most popular medium among Black youth, but Adams-Bass, Stevenson, and Kotzin (2014) argue there is a need in the literature to expose the relationship between racial identity and how Black youth interpret and respond to the mediated images of Blackness. As theorist Stuart Hall (1980) exerts:

Reality exists outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse. Discursive 'knowledge' is the product not of the transparent representation of the 'real' in language but of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions. Thus there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code. (p.55)

It through developing a deeper understanding of the “operation of a code” within a message that one can better understand how an individual “decodes” the messages that are “encoded” by a medium, such as television (Hall, 1980). Adams-Bass, Steveson, and Kotzin (2014) research examines how Black adolescents decode the messages of Blackness that exude from television by exploring the following questions: Research Question 1: Is it possible to develop a valid and reliable measure of adolescent perceptions of positive and negative Black media images for television and magazines? Research Question 2: If developed, what relationship would these perceptions of Black media images have to other aspects of youth identity development including R/ES exposure, racial identity maturity, body image, self-esteem, and Black history knowledge scores? Data were collected through a Black Image Meaning Subscale (BIMS) and the Black Media Messenger Questionnaire “to (a) determine if Black adolescents would be able to identify stereotype messages associated with images of Black people on TV and in print magazines, (b) assess their belief in the media messages identified, and (c) estimate the frequency of exposure to the selected message when watching TV and/or reading magazines” (p. 373).

The results of this study found that racial socialization and Black history knowledge influences television-viewing preferences, and ultimately, those that have a positive cultural identity and/or story to counter the mediated images of Blackness were more apt at identifying the negative messages that were transmitted. As Valerie Adams-Bass, Howard Stevenson, and Diana Kotzin (2014) describe: “youth who receive affirming racial socialization messages seem more able to identify negative and positive stereotypes. Youth with higher Black history knowledge scores were also more likely to identify stereotypes, but not to endorse negative stereotypes as valid representations of Black people” (p. 383).

The vocational identity development of Black adolescents is a complex matter. While there is ample research on vocational development, Black families, Black teachers, and the influence of mediated images of Blackness, there is an apparent need in the literature to apply an ecological approach to explore the VAS practices that allow adolescent Black bodies to resist the hegemonic ideals of Blackness by creating a space to explore and pursue their authentic career journey. While ethnic minorities are still minorities in many career fields, it is important to understand the career journey of Black teachers that have not only secured their career goal, but are also in an important role to impact the career trajectory of the students they serve.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH STUDY

#### Introduction

Vocational identity development is an important aspect of one's overall image of self, and therefore, an individual should never be limited by their career exploratory scope due to the color of their skin. Through a deeper understanding of VAS practices across the lifespan, one can begin to unstitch the communicative experiences around career exploration and acquisition of Black teachers by deconstructing their VAS memories. It is the researcher's hope that this thesis will unlock the positive communicative infrastructures that allow minorities to pursue careers in fields where they are not readily represented. Most importantly, to reveal the necessary infrastructures that allows minorities to explore and achieve their authentic vocational identities.

#### Research Questions

The Lifeline Interview Method (LIM) (Assink & Schroots, 2010) approach is considered “a type of episodic memory for both retrospective (memories) and prospective information (expectations) related to self in regards to the career development of nine Black teachers” (as cited in Assink & Schroots, 2010, p. 1). This qualitative interview tool was used to map the autobiographical memories and lifespan communicative stories around the career exploration and acquisition of Black teachers. In addition to the LIM, participants were surveyed using an adapted version of Kuhn's and McPartland's (1954) Twenty Statements Test (TST). This survey was used to better understand the career aspirations across Erikson's developmental periods:

*childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood* to see what theories emerged from the data. The research was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What does the content of Black Teachers' memories of career-related communication episodes look like over the lifespan?

RQ2: What/who are the sources/participants of career-related communication episodes experienced by Black Teachers over the lifespan?

RQ3: Do the qualities and sources of career-related communication episodes of Black Teachers change over different periods of the lifespan?

RQ4: Can differences in the relative influence of proximal and distal socio-ecological influences on Black Teachers career choices be seen in career-related communication episodes?

## **Participants**

**Participant Recruitment.** The Old Dominion University, College of Arts and Letters' Human Subjects Committee approved the study (as exempt from full IRB review) before participant recruitment began (ODU File 949036-1, September 7, 2016, see Appendix A). Possible subjects were directly emailed by the researcher and invited to be part of the study. The researcher targeted Black teachers and/or schools administrators who were previously teachers to be part of the study. The researcher also used personal Facebook and Twitter accounts to disseminate marketing flyer and encourage social media contacts to participate in the study or share the flyer with others.

**Participant Information.** Study participants were presently or previously certified teachers that identified as Black. As the researcher wanted to understand the stories, journey, and communicative footprints that guided teachers toward their career identity, nine in-depth



interviews took place to using the LIM approach (Assink & Schroots, 2010). The interviewees ranged between the ages of 32 and 63 years old with a median age of 44. The interviewees had a range of 7 to 21 years of teaching experience with a median of 10 years in the classroom. While all participants were required to have been a certified teacher, they were not required to be an active teacher to participate in the study. Of the nine teachers, four were active high school teachers, three were active high school assistant principals, one was a Title 1 program director, and one interviewee was an executive director of a school division. All participants were college graduates with the following post-secondary make up: nine held bachelor's degree, eight held master's degrees, two held educational specialist degrees, and one held a doctorate. The participants represented a diverse demographic background from being raised in a traditional family setting, single-family household, and various mother and other family member dynamics. Five participants identified as being raised within a family system that was below the median income of \$51,000, two identified their family income above \$51,000, and the remaining two indicated that they had varying income experiences across the lifespan from above and then below and equal to the above based on the shifting of family dynamics – divorce and death of parent.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of Teacher Participants*

Characteristics	n
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	4
Female	5
<b>Race</b>	
Black	9
<b>Age</b>	
25-35	2
36-45	3
46-55	2
56-65	2
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	
Bachelor	9
Master	6
Educational Specialist	2
Doctorate	1
<b>Number of Years Teaching</b>	
2-4	1
5-7	3
8-10	1
16-18	1
18-20	2
21-22	1
<b>Current Professional Role</b>	
High School Teacher	
High School Assistant Principal	4
Title 1 Administrator	3
Executive Administrator	1
	1

*Note.* N=9

Table 2. *Family Characteristics of Teacher During K-12 Upbringing*

Characteristics	n
<b>Caregiver System <sup>a</sup></b>	
Mother only	2
Mother and Father	2
Grandmother and Mother	3
Other:	
Aunt and Uncle	3
Mother and Great Grandmother	1
Mother and Aunt	1
Mother, Father, and Grandmother	1
<b>Number of Individuals in Home <sup>b</sup></b>	
3-4	5
5-6	2
7-8	5
<b>Number of Siblings <sup>c</sup></b>	
0-1	3
2-3	3
4-5	1
5-6	2
<b>Median Income <sup>d</sup></b>	
< \$51,000	6
= \$51,000	1
> \$51,000	4

*Note.* N=9

<sup>a</sup> Throughout the participants' K-12 lifespan, some participants did not have a consistent family system. One participant had a mother and father who divorced. One participant identified a split world as her mother and grandmother died, and then she moved with her aunt and uncle as she defines as "mom and dad". Another participant identified various units that helped to raise him.

<sup>b</sup> Throughout the participants' K-12 lifespan, some participants did not have a consistent number that lived within the immediate household.

<sup>c</sup> This number included stepsiblings who may or may not have lived in the immediate household.

<sup>d</sup> Throughout the participants' K-12 lifespan, some participants did not have a consistent median income that was impacted by the a death of a parent or parents' divorce.

### Data Collection Procedures

Participants who met the two mandatory study requirements (self-identified as Black, Biracial or Multiracial with Black and currently or previously holding a teaching license) were

invited to join the study. Arrangements were made via email and telephone to coordinate calendars to meet in-person to conduct the interviews. Interviews were conducted in an informal setting, a local coffee shop or eatery to allow participants to feel comfortable while reflecting on their career journeys over a cup of tea or coffee. Interviews were conducted between December 13, 2016 and December 21, 2016.

The LIM approach was used to offer an “exploratory” and “descriptive” approach to better understand the memorable communicative practices across the lifespan that impacted the interviewee’s decision to become a teacher (Assink & Schroots, 2010, p. 2). This qualitative approach allowed for the *theories grounded* within the data to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The LIM interview approach provided a socio-ecological approach that allowed access to information that is not accessible by other modes of research (Assink & Schroots, 2010). Assink and Schroots (2010) further support this model by Smith’s (2000) research:

Qualitative material can provide information that may not be accessible by other methods. Sometimes qualitative material can best reveal innermost thoughts, frames of reference, reactions to situations, and cultural conventions. In fact, language often tells more about people than they want to disclose, or than they know about themselves, and it can bring to light things a researcher might not think to ask about. (p. 313)

It is within this space that the fruitfulness of one’s vocational journey emerges. Through this qualitative method, the *innermost thoughts* that one may have forgotten come to the surface of the memory as the interviewee reflects and graphs their personal and vocational journey.

Using the LIM grid, one creates a *lifeline* that is used to “purposively study the subjective or self-organization of past and future behavior over the course of the individual’s life” (Assink

& Schroots, 2010, p.2). Using the LIM grid, participants were asked to reflect on desired careers across the lifespan and to rate their desire toward the career from 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest degree of desire. Each plot was further explored for a richer understanding of the desired careers and the communicative environment surrounding the desired vocational identity toward becoming a teacher (e.g. conversation, television shows they watched, something they read).

Participants were instructed to recall the vocational communicative experiences of their past starting from their childhood through present age and beyond. These experiences were mapped as communicative experiences on the LIM grid. Each footprint on the grid was rated and labeled by the interviewee. As the individuals mapped their memorable communicative experiences, they were asked nine questions to better understand the communicative experience. They were asked to reflect on and describe the communicative setting and experience; how the communicative experience began; what feelings were experienced during the communicative act; feelings before, during, and after the communicative experience; why and in what ways the communicative experience was inspirational; in what ways the communicative experience led the individual to becoming a teacher; and finally, participants were asked if they would like to include any additional relevant information.

Interviews were recorded with two electronic devices: a voice recorder and a voice-recording app on the interviewer's cellphone. This approach was used to ensure that there was a backup in the instance one device stopped working. The interviewer also took notes to highlight the interview. The electronic recordings were uploaded to a secure and password protected server that was only accessible by the interviewer and thesis chair. The uploaded files did not include personal identifiers and participants were labeled using subject 1 – 9. The recordings were later reviewed and transcribed using the oTranscribe online system to manipulate the speed of the

recordings. The digital recordings were later destroyed after ensuring transcriptions were accurate and complete.

In addition to the nine interview questions, participants were asked to complete a modified Twenty Statements Career Test (TSCT) that was a modified version of the Twenty Statements Test (TST) developed by Kuhn and McPartland (1954). This *self-attitude* test is used to evaluate one's perception of self by reflecting on and answering the question, "I am..." (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). As highlighted by Carpenter's and Meade-Pruitt's (2008) research: *Does the Twenty Statements Test Elicit Self-Concept Aspects that Most Descriptive?*. The TST method has been used to successfully examine ethnic, gender, generational and birth-order effects and cultural and individual effects on self-concept (p.1). Using this approach to explore the career-concepts that one wanted to embody by reflecting on and answering the question, "When I grow up...". In addition to writing down the various career identities one wanted to embody, participants were asked to indicate which of Erikson's development stage(s) they were in during their time of desire: (7 – 12 years old), adolescence (13 – 18 years old), and young adulthood (19 – 40 years old) (See Appendix B for TSCT).

**Interview Procedures.** In-person interviews were conducted at a local coffee shop or eatery that was mutually agreed upon by the interviewee and interviewer. The meeting occurred during breakfast, lunch, and dinner hours. Each interview began with an introduction, thanking the participants and offering them a cup of tea, coffee, or another beverage. Participants were then informed of the interview next steps and the informed consent form was read verbatim. Participants were asked if they agreed to continue with the study, while being reminded they could withdraw from the interview at anytime. Once consent was met, both the interviewer and interviewee signed the consent form.

All of the interviews were structured in the same format to maintain continuity with the interview process, but each participant's career journey was unique. To develop a better understanding of each individual, basic demographic questions were asked such as sex, age, racial makeup, and current level of education. Basic questions were also asked to verify teaching licensure: "What year did you receive your teacher certification?" and "How many years have you taught/teach?" The researcher wanted a better understanding of participant's family of origin, so questions were asked about the participant's parent/guardian system, number of siblings, and baseline of median income: "Median household income in the US is about \$51,000. In your family of origin, during the time you were in school (K-12), would you say your household's income was above, equal to, or below this amount?"

After the demographic questions were answered, the LIM grid and interview method were explained to ensure clarity was reached. Participants were asked to first plot their current age on the bottom of the grid. They were then asked to reflect on the careers they wanted to pursue across their lifespan. They were asked to plot these experiences across the lifespan and to indicate their desire for this career from 0 - no desire to 10 - really desired. Participants were asked to add a *buzzword* help recall the associated plot and to include the name of the career or a communicative experience linked to the plot (i.e. conversation with mum). Each plot had a series of open-ended questions to deconstruct the internal and external environments that surrounded the desired career, and ultimately, the communicative environment that led the participant to become a teacher (See Appendix C for interview questions).

The final step of the interview process was to complete the TSCT. Participants were allotted 5 minutes to complete the test. The interviewer instructed the participants to first write down twenty different responses to the question "When I grow up..." from their younger

throughout their young adult self. The interviewees were then instructed to indicate throughout what phase(s) they wanted to pursue this career identity. After the allotted time, participants turned in their interview packets, but kept a copy of the informed consent form for their records. The study concluded by again, thanking the participants for their time and feedback, and also encouraging the participant to contact the thesis advisor or researcher if any questions arise.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

A grounded theoretical approach was undertaken to address the research questions and in general to more fully understand the communicative practices that guided five Black females and four Black males toward becoming teachers. Nine in-depth interviews were transcribed and analyzed to see what themes and evidence emerged from the LIM *lifeline*, TSCT, and detailed interviews. Using these data to allow larger themes to emerge, and then linking the themes together allow the *lifeline* of the lifespan to come alive (Tracy, 2013, p. 30). Using a *constant comparative method* to code data by identifying, labeling, and systemizing that belongs to or represents the phenomenon (Tracy, 2013). This method allows for a circular, iterative, and reflexive relationship with the data that allows authentic themes grounded in the data to emerge (Tracy, 2013). Throughout the coding process, a second coder (thesis advisor) was used to assess reliability with the coding process and the emergent categories. The second coder read the transcripts and coding and found the themes do a good job of describing what is going-on among participants' in LIM responses.

The *data immersion phase* began with the researcher listening and relistening to the recorded interviews, transcribing the interviews, and reading and rereading the transcripts to become more familiar and engaged with the data to better understand each participant and most



importantly to allow the participant's story to truly emerge (Tracy, 2013). The story begins to emerge through a series of codes. An open interpretative process was first used to analytically breakdown the corpus of data to allow for a new way of thinking to emerge from the phenomena and to answer the question, "what is going on here?" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Tracy, 2013). Through the primary-cycle of analysis the *first-level* of codes were labeled and grouped based upon similar events/action/interactions to categories and subcategories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The categories and subcategories then became the "basis for sampling on theoretical grounds" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 12).

From the initial phase of analysis, the data were reviewed through the *axial coding* process to test the categories and subcategories to expand their meaning and develop a better understanding of the relationship between the data and the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The *primary-cycle* of coding permitted the story to begin to emerge, the *secondary-cycle* of coding allowed for one to begin to understand the "why" and "how" behind each story. Why did one want to become a teacher and how did they arrive there? Using a constant comparative method of reviewing the data and reflecting on the different pieces of the stories while adjusting the themes as necessary made for an authentic process from which the authentic themes could emerge from and links to be connected.

In addition, the primary and secondary cycle of data analysis, the researcher implemented a third cycle of review to better understand the emerging dialectical tensions that appeared in the first two initial screenings. Interactions with self and others are a complex process that result in dialectical tensions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The existing work of Baxter and Montgomery (1996) look to the individuals in the communicative experience, but Altman (1993) argues that dialectical tensions should also be examined *within* the individuals to better

understand the intrapersonal dialectics that are being negotiated and impact the individual at the center of this process. Building upon Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) and Altman's (1993) work the third cycle of analysis examined the data to see which and if any dialectal tensions were present within the dataset.

Continuing to be immersed in the data and after the primary, secondary, and tertiary coding cycles, a *selective coding* process was implemented to review all categories to see if the data allowed for a core category to emerge inclusive of all of the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The core category represents the central phenomenon of the study, which can be answered by asking: What is the main analytic idea presented in the research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990)? What are the communicative practices that allow for a Black teacher to successfully achieve his or her vocational identity? A constant comparative method was implemented, which consisted of ample readings of the data that coincided with extensive and regular discussions with the second coder to ensure alignment with the researcher's and second coder's interpretation of the data. Based upon these conversations and readings, necessary revisions were made until the grounded theory emerged from the data, resulting in consensus between the first and second coder.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### **Initial Coding Categories And Themes**

The results from this study were derived from nine in-depth conversations around the communicative practices across the lifespan that led to the vocational identity development of Black teachers. The nine interviews resulted in 11 hours and 30 minutes of interview data, and 449 pages of double-spaced transcripts. Through a series of open-ended questions, the researcher engaged in a conversation that allowed the vocational journey of the interviewee to unravel through the Lifeline Interview Method (LIM). The researcher asked demographic questions to develop a better understanding of the participant and the participant's family of origin. The demographic information was used to create a baseline of information for each participant and the collective sample.

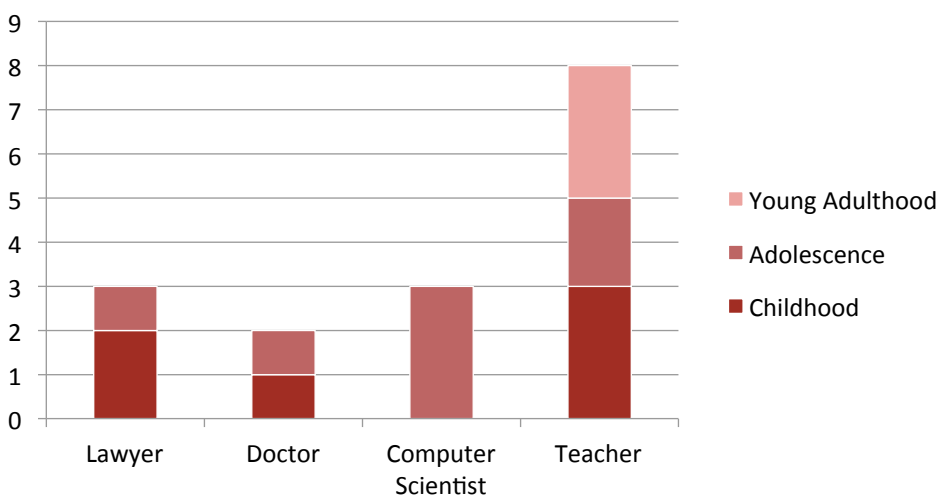
The interviews were the tools used to unlock the memories of Black teachers to derive a better understanding of the communication during their vocational journey across their lifespan. The study sought to expose the communicative sources that made way for a Black body to successfully secure a career identity within a field where minorities are not readily represented, such as teaching. Each interview consisted of a set of interview questions and the completion of a LIM grid and TSCT. Each participant was asked a series of questions to help guide the conversation while they reflected on their career desires and career-focused communicative experiences across their lifespan. Participants were asked questions to better understand the communicative setting – Where they were and how it begun? They were asked to reflect on how

they felt, how they were inspired, and ultimately, how this experience impacted their career journey toward becoming a teacher.

### **Participants Described**

While each participant had a different story that detailed their vocational journey, they had at least two major components for this study in common: self-identified as Black or partially Black and are currently or previously a certified teacher. The diverse backgrounds added to the richness of each story, and while each story left a different footprint, other similarities began to emerge from the data. Of the nine interviewees, five participants were females and four males. Throughout the participant's vocational career reflection, each shared various career aspirations outside of teaching that they wanted to pursue during some point in their lifespan which included being a princess, lawyer, nun-nurse, computer scientist, bioengineer, singer, athlete, business professional, doctor, cashier; and others shared qualities of a person or experiences they wanted to encounter, such as wanting to feel alive, empowered, an inspiration for others, selfless and connected, to serve others, and to travel the world (see D for complete list for Lifeline Interview Method Results). In addition to being a teacher, additional similar career aspirations arose from the data as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Number of Participants with Similar Career Aspirations and the Lifespan Period During which They Occurred



In addition to the various careers that each participant had a desire to pursue, other similarities arose from the data such as the proximal relationships that impacted their career desire. To whom they were speaking with about careers or who were part of their vocational anticipatory socialization process and impacted their career journey. What arose from the data quickly, were the relationships and communicative experiences within one's microspace and mesospace that resonated and greatly impacted many of the interviewees, but television also played a role.

### **Journey Towards Becoming A Teacher**

**Unlocking the memories of the Black teacher career journey.** As participants reflected deeply on their career journeys, each shared his or her vocational pathway toward becoming a Black teacher. Through the examination of memories of career-related communication over the lifespan, themes began to emerge from the unique stories of each

participant. Every story contributed to a broader understanding of the communicative landscape that impacted the participant's career journey, aspirations, and ultimately, career acquisition.

Through a content analysis of the interviews of Black teachers' career journeys, this study breaks down the vocational socialization landscape of the nine participants and the mediums of career-related communication episodes that were experienced by each of them over the course of their lifespans. To protect the identity of each participant, all identifiers that could possibly reveal the participants' identity have been removed. Each interview reflects and unlocks the memories of one's career journey towards becoming a Black teacher and the communicative experiences that helped them to get there.

As one reflects back as far as their memory will take them; stretching it to as far as it can go and answers, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" It is from here that research can begin to trace the career identity of another. As an individual grows and develops across the lifespan, the answer to this question is negotiated and impacted by the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and external dialogues that take place and impact the individual at the center of the environment. The nine participants in this study reflect on the career exploration experiences that took place within their homes, as students in a classroom, and as they watched their favorite television show. Each participant reflected on the positive and negative communicative experiences with parents, siblings, friends, teachers, but also pop culture figures also resonated from the interviews as they discuss the impact of their favorite television shows. The communicative experiences across the lifespan impact each individual in very different ways, but they all reach their goal of becoming a teacher.

As each participant reflects on the communicative experiences within the proximal and distal environments, the impact of these experiences varied for each. To develop a better

understanding of the journey towards becoming a Black teacher, the researcher began by seeking a better understanding of the content of Black teachers' memories of career-related communication episodes across the lifespan; and what or who were the sources or participants of career-related communication episodes experienced by the teachers over the lifespan? It is from here that retroactive communicative experiences begin to emerge that lead nine Black bodies toward successfully achieving their career aspiration of becoming a teacher.

As participants reflected on the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Their earliest memories of career desire were intertwined with play. Participants reflected on playing with siblings and friends as they acted out the career identities they wished to become.

*So my earliest relocation, I was about 6. I didn't go to kindergarten, and so, I was at home and I would make my brothers and sisters be my students, and I wanted to be a teacher. And there, I would have two boys and two girls. I would make sit down, and be my students. It was like play, but I had to be the teachers, and 'you guys gotta be my students and you gotta sit down and listen to me,' and things haven't changed too much (laughing). (Participant 4, age-63)*

The earliest memories of career were embedded in earlier experiences of play, as described by Participant 9 as her parents not only purchased items that deepened the career imitation experiences, but her parents also embraced the art of play by encouraging their daughter and friends to do at home "dance performances".

*At home, life is great. I have both parents. I'm spoiled, everything that I want. So anything I could dream of, you know, they supported. So that was the environment. As far as what I wanted to be... a lot of it was probably [my] parents, because we had company all the time and my dad, you know... [my]*

*family would come over and they'd play cards and things like that and the kids had to perform.*

*And then, anything I wanted, like a... you know, dollhouse, ballerina slippers. They put me in classes. Um, I had the toy cash register so we played that and all of the toy food, you know, the basket so the whole thing. We also played school. We would take turns being the teacher... because if not, I would always be the teacher. (Participant 9, age-44)*

Participant 7 described how his mother encouraged the exploration of not only his teaching interest, but also encouraged him to explore other possible interests, but she was also quick to react when her son showed a lack of interest as evident below:

*Seven years old I was on a football field. I hated every minute of it. I had no athletic desire. I wanted to go read book and play school. You know what I'm saying? And so, I was at football practice and I ran off of the field one day, and I ran home. My mom would try and beat me to get me to go back out there, and then in the end, she was just like, 'no. You want to sit at home and play school; you do that' (laughter). (Participant 7, age-33)*

Play became the initial vehicle of career and identity exploration. It is through the memories of playing with friends and siblings that the interviewees also relived their interest in becoming a teacher. The participants discuss not only the ways they tried on possible careers of interest, but they also describe the supportive environments that created a secure space to play. The ways parent(s) reinforced their child's imagination by purchasing artifacts that embodied the career or simply listening to their child and allowing him and her to authentically explore and



demonstrate what interests them. Through the use of imagination, play demonstrates the internal and private and social and collaborative outlook on the perception of a career identity (Lee Thompson, 2017). It is through play that a person not only displays what they know about a career, but it also creates a space to disrupt hegemonic ideologies around a career when done in a secure and supportive setting such as in one's home.

**The impact of the Homeplace on the Black teacher career journey.** One's *homeplace* becomes a space to combat the communicative messages that threaten or disrupt the development of an authentic and secure career identity. The familiar unit becomes a positive space for VAS when positive communicative practices are put in place to combat the negative messages that permeate from the outer systems. In *A Tale of Two Legacies: Career Narrative of the Black Family Business*, Jackson (2016) argues the home is a space where career opportunities become available, as he uses Hall's (2003) and Jackson's (2014) research to support his argument:

This influence is a strong force inspiring, discouraging, and persuading career development efforts and producing a perception of available career opportunities constructed and nurtured by the family unit from childhood through early adulthood (Hall, 2003; Jackson, 2014). Understanding how family career legacies are created and maintained provide insight into the structure and environments that inspire and nurture, thus providing a model of how individuals select a successful career path and function and progress in Black family businesses.

(Jackson, 2016, p. 54)

Jackson (2016) focuses on developing a better understanding of how family career legacies are created and maintained, but his research also describes the home as an environment that “inspire(s) and nurture(s), thus providing a model of how individuals select a successful career

path” (p. 54). The influence of the familial unit is a multilevel phenomenon that is impacted by one’s race, gender, environment, and socioeconomic status and as Jackson (2016) argues that these factors should be considered when exploring the *true influence* on the career development of children, adolescents, and adults (Blustein, 2013; Keller & Whiston, 2008). The purpose of this thesis is to explore the career journeys’ of Black teachers to better understand their career paths. As Jackson (2016) argues:

Race is significant in the way the individual relies on the influence of the family to make a decision and affirm his or her career choices at all levels of life stages (p. 55). For example, Black families tend to be interdependent and children’s perceptions of their parents or other influential adults have a major impact on their adult career decision-making (Smith, 2011). Furthermore, the research on the familial influence on career development concluded ethnic minorities, in general, rely on the familial influence in the form of support, expectations, and SES in career selection than those of White American families. (Fouad et al., 2010)

The perception of career desire and career success, as highlighted by Jackson (2016) impacts the career identity and aspirations of the developing child and influences the ultimate career acquisition as was expressed and experienced by Participant 7:

*And you know, my mom, that's my heart and soul, by her telling me that... that you know, 'I always wanted to be a teacher, and I never got a chance to pursue that,' because she went in the military right after she got out of high school. I think that was another piece that was like, aww man, I am doing something I love but fulfilling, [and] making my mom feel fulfilled, because she's living it through me.*

The power of the concluding statement exudes the love of a child for his mother, but it also becomes part of the driving force behind his desire to become a teacher. Not only was Participant 7 pursuing this career identity for himself, but also for his mother. His mother, who decided to pursue another career to provide for her children, ultimately impacted her son's decision to become a teacher, and as research supports, a parent's career aspiration is often shared or reflected on by one's child, impacting the child's future career aspirations (Pezirkianidis, Athanasiades, & Moutopoulou, 2013, cited in P.R. Jackson, 2006). Furthermore, Black parents are often the most influential on their child's career plans and aspirations, and in the setting of career expectations, which were further highlighted within this mother and son relationship (Constatine, Wallace, & Kindaichi, 2005 cited in P.R. Jackson, 2006, p. 55).

The familiar influence was also apparent within the career reflection of Participant 2, as he reflected on the inspiration of a parental figure as he describes the power and inspiration that came from the *business suit* his stepfather adorned everyday for work. It was the influence and symbolization of the *suit* that inspired Participant 2 to become a businessman, as he describes:

*Everyday I would see him get up and put on a suit and tie and [grab] his briefcase and go to work. I didn't know what he did, but I knew that was what I wanted to do. I wanted to put on a suit and tie and go to an office. Everybody else I knew didn't really have to dress up and wear suits, so you know... He did, and he had a briefcase. I felt inspired, you know, that one day I could do that. During I felt happy I guess, because he was my stepdad and doing it. 'Cause I didn't know many that were. And, um, afterwards it made me want to do that or better. It was kinda like competition, like one day I am going to catch up. And before, I don't*

*think I really had a feeling. I just knew people worked. I looked at it at the time being young as that means success.*

The verbal and nonverbal communicative practices around work influence the career choices of those around them, and while Participant 2 did not become a “businessman”, he did become a business teacher, which he partially accredits to watching his stepdad put on his “suit” and go to work everyday. Not only did he want to be like his step-dad, but he actually strived to be better than him, too. It was this desire for more that impacted and guided his career journey, but this desire for more impacted Participant 5 in a different way as she describes her mother’s and aunt’s medical struggles and its impact on their vocational identity and hers as she describes:

*Like we didn't have much, but I learned a lot. We would sit on the stoop and when she wasn't in the hospital, one of them would be there to see me off on the bus. I would have their hospital bags waiting at the door. Right side is my mom, left side is my aunt, and so I have two different earrings (pointing to ears to highlight the symbolization of her love for both). So... when one had to go, I just pick up their bag and off we go. Yea. Cooking my own dinner. Just something I did. Ummm. Thankful. I understand. I think, like I said, the best of both worlds... Literally. Going from eating vegetables with no label to Del Monte, or fresh veggies. I didn't know anything about that. Knowledgeable. Appreciative. So. I don't know if you know much about sickle cell disease. [A] blood disorder where you cells are supposed to be like this... but they take on a sickle shape and they block the airflow and cause severe pain. Severe everything. We call them episodes, as we used to call them. So, um, believe it or not. Neither my mom or aunt could hold down a steady job, because you never know when an episode was going to pop*

*up, but my mom graduated from college with an associate's degree. So if she can do that, you know... That was inspiring. So I shouldn't have any complaints about anything because there's nothing physically wrong.*

After the death of her mother and aunt, Participant 5 went to live with her aunt and uncle in New York, which she describes as a bittersweet transition going from poverty to financial security:

*Umhmm, because when you grow up one-way and then, you look at it as... when your mom gets taken it's a sad time, but it's a blessing as well, because I probably wouldn't have made it if I stayed in Carolina. I probably wouldn't have made it.*

The death of her mother, saved her life, and put her on a career journey towards success. She saw her mother's struggles, but also witnessed her determination, which left Participant 5 feeling success, was the only option. From witnessing the struggles of one mother to hearing to repetitive and continuous words of encouragement from another, Participant 4 reflected on her mother's and father's constant belief in her and all her capabilities even before she and her siblings were able to see it in within themselves:

*My parents. My mother. She pushed all of us, because she didn't even have a high school diploma. She dropped out of high school to go get married. And my dad, just had a high school diploma, but they were very strong proponents of education. And so we all knew that we had to go to school. So my oldest brother graduated as an OCEA director in DC. I mean he retired. Um, then me. Then my brother that is a year younger than I am is a medical doctor. My other sister is a civil servant. Umm, then my baby sister has her MBA. It was education in general... You did that, you get that. That was the driver. I think they knew that was important. You know, my dad [was ] very, very smart, but I think he knew,*

*'I'm, I'm, I'm limited because I don't have that college diploma. I don't have that college degree. I know I am smarter than a lot of these colonels but I, you know, they have it [a diploma/degree] but I don't.'*

Participant 4's parents believed in the power of education. They knew their children deserved and could achieve more, and they never wanted their children to be limited because they did not have the title or "college diploma" that highlighted their capabilities. This messaging was consistent within the home, so much so, that it became part of the ideological outlook on careers as highlighted by Alliman-Brissett's, Turner's, & Skovholt's (2004) research. The family can become a unit to disrupt and mediate the negative messages that can constrain a Black child:

Parents' support of African American adolescents' educational and career development is associated with increases in their academic performance (Linnehan, 2001), their mastery of such career development competencies as career decision-making skills (Otto, 2000), and their persistence in pursuing educational and career-related goals (Pearson & Bieschke, 2001). This increase in performance, competence, and persistence has been hypothesized to lead to a "trickle-up" effect whereby the educational and career development of these young people may supersede those of their parents and grandparents (Hackett & Byars, 1996; Pearson & Bieschke) Black parents lead to their child's higher level of academic and career goals. (as cited in Alliman-Brissett, Turner, & Skovholt , 2004, p.125)

It is the thirst of the parent to want more for their child (ren) that allows their young person to aspire for more and to ultimately achieve it, as best described by Participant 4 as she describes the encouraging words of her mother:

*My mother would always just say, 'you can do it!' Whatever it was... Sports, school, you can do. She would literally just push you into things. 'You go on! You can do it' (laughing) 'Swim...' That's the deep end. You know? And she would say, 'See, I told you so.' Then you would go, yea you are right. I can do it. I didn't think I could, but...*

This is the power of the *homeplace*. The place where in a loving and trusting environment a child is encouraged to dig deeper, try new things, and to believe in oneself. All along the loving parent is saying, “You can do it,” until his or her final says, “I can do!” Demonstrating the power of the *homeplace*. It makes the unbelievable believable and the unattainable attainable. The home is a place to disrupt the *hot stove* environments that the Black bodies are being developed within. The home becomes the foundation to plant the *molar seeds* of possibility. It is through the constant and ongoing positive molar activities as described and highlighted by the study participants that from the seed of hope a secure career identity can begin to flourish. The home is one microsystem that directly impacts the positive and secure identity development of the person at the center. The classroom becomes another microsystem that shapes and molds the vocational identity, which emerges from the conversations as the study participants continue to reflect across their lifespan and the communicative experiences that them become the people and career identity they are today.

**The impact of a memorable teacher on the Black teacher career journey.** The family system is arguably the principal context from which human development takes place, but research also supports that teachers have a significant impact on students’ learning and achievement, directly impacting their future career identity and options (e.g., Danielson, 2002; Goldhaber, 2002; Sadeghi & Nikou, 2012). As participants traced their career journeys, many of

the interviewees reflect on a teacher who positively influenced who they are today. As Participant 1 shares the impact of his second grade teacher, he brings her to life as he describes this magical person:

*She was probably in her thirties. Uh. Um. Mind me. She dressed to us as funny. She dressed like Mary Poppins. Wear these longs skirts. Draped down hair, big sweaters on, [and she would] come to school with hats on. With these big warm hats [on]. She was just real friendly and warm, so we would watch her. We would watch her come in and disrobe all this gear that she had, and we would just think this was so cool. For some reason we did. And while she did this she would talk to us. She would have [a] conversation as she was doing that... As an adult I realized she was making us feel comfortable by like watching her take her coat off and take her sweater off and hang it up. It was like casual conversation, like Mr. Rogers neighborhood kind of thing.*

Participant 1 was being raised during the Civil Rights movement. He was growing up in a *hot stove* environment, but he describes how this “White teacher” took him away from this and created an atmosphere that made him feel safe, secure, and like he could be true to himself despite of the racial tensions that were breeding around them.

*She was actually the first teacher that was actually kind to me in a sense where it made me feel that I belonged in her classroom. Before that it wasn't a really good experience... She lived in the city as well, and she would invite us to her home and different students. She would do things outside of the box like we grew plants in her home. She had a garden in her backyard, a really small backyard. She would just welcome us into her home, and do things on the holidays, like um... [She]*



*made school feel more like a family. Felt safe there. I remember that being the first place I felt safe to express myself and to be free to soften up.*

Participant 2 also reflected on an inspirational teacher. He describes his “White male, fourth grade teacher,” who “inspired” the interviewee through “his encouragement and words of affirmation”, who pushed the participant to do better. Like Participant 1, his teacher was more than simply a teacher. He was someone who created an environment that developed a “personal relationship between a teacher and a child and not just a student being in his class.” His teacher installed this feeling of *belonging* and made him feel that he was “cared” about and helped him to feel “encouraged.” This teacher revealed to him the “qualities of a caring teacher”, but he had another teacher that showed him the impact of a negative experience with a teacher, as he traveled back in his memory to his adolescence years and his ninth grade school year:

*So my ninth grade year. I will never forget it. I had written a paper. And the teacher said that I wasn't able to write that paper. He thought I wasn't able to write it. He thought I plagiarized or stole it from somewhere. So I had to prove to him and my parents. They [parents] knew I did the work. It really pissed me off... Him saying I wasn't able to do it. He said that there was no way I could have wrote that, that poem. I was hurt, I was probably was, um, you know. I don't know what else. I know I was hurt. I felt why couldn't I write it? But then it also made me want to change the negative to a positive by me actually doing something. He was younger, white male, probably in his twenties. Looked like just out of college. It made me want to do better, but it also made want to make sure this didn't happen to someone else, so if I were a teacher I could listen. It was really his*

*negativity that inspired me, his doubt in me. When other teachers gave me, encouragement, he gave me doubt, so it made me want to prove him wrong.*

During adolescence, individuals are in a vulnerable stage of development as they negotiate who they are within the space of who they are told they are meant to be. Participant 2 was told he was not smart enough to be a great writer. His teacher limited his potentiality, which had the potential to lead to not only a constrained ideological standpoint, but also a constrained vocational outlook. Participant 2's parents never doubted his capabilities and knew their son produced the poem. Having a secure foundation at home and a previous positive relationship with a teacher, created a space to negotiate the negative views of a teacher within the interviewee's microsystem. Participant 2 was not the only interviewee to describe a negative communicative experience with a teacher. Of the nine interviewees, seven participants reflected on a negative communicative experience with five of those experiences being with a teacher. Participant 4 always felt strongly about becoming a teacher early within her lifespan, but once she actually started attending school, her interest slowly started to decline when as she describes, "I felt like people were giving me signals that no you can't do this [teaching]. You are not strong. You are not strong in school." Like Participant 2, Participant 4 also had a strong advocate in her *homeplace* that fought for her daughter and refused to allow the opinion of her second grade teacher to constrain her daughter's capabilities.

*You know my second grade teacher told my mother that I was retarded and that I probably wouldn't read or write well. Well, when I got my PhD. She [participant's mother] said I wish we could call her up. And that day at [x university], she said, I just wish we could call and tell... Look now. I had a great first grade teacher, but my second grade teacher... and my mother that day when*

*she told her that, she said, you just don't know my daughter. And so my mother was always that type. 'No. No. I don't know what you are seeing,'*

The power of an advocate made the difference within this interviewee's life. If her mother would have listened to the teacher and treated her daughter as though she was mentally delayed, then perhaps this career journey would have turned out differently as revealed by Participant 1.

Participant 1 describes the negative ramifications of a poor teacher, as he reflects on the influence of the education system and his "incarcerated" older brother:

*How it came about was, we went to the same high school and I would hear the teachers say, 'you are nothing like your brother', he was a nice guy, but... you know, he kind of struggled. And [my brother] really did struggle through school. He didn't really like school and school wasn't really for him. He wasn't really successful and it led him to getting into some trouble. I later discovered this, back then it was before we understood learning difficulties, so he was like dyslexic. And so he never learned how to read well and so he faked it so well... And so he faked it for a long time... So that right there had me like, wow! I could get into this education, [because] people need to know how to recognize these deficits of folks and not just put them in a classroom at the end of the hall, because they were still like that back then. So, that's when I first start saying, maybe I want to teach kids that are like my brother. That really don't have anywhere to turn to... they are just put in the dummy classroom.*

This negative experience of the brother's learning environment greatly impacted his self-concept, because the system failed to see him. Most importantly, the system failed to ask why. Why is this young man shutting down and withdrawn? Why is this young man doing so poorly in school?

And while Participant 1's brother "faked it well", he had no one around him to challenge him to do better, as the interviewee continues:

*He lost his self-esteem, and he lost his will to go to school, because why would you want to go? And so, when we were all honest about that, then is when I was like, I want to get into it [education]... I saw the struggle through school, and we just thought that he didn't have it, but who knew that he was dyslexic. That is major. That must have been so hard for him to sit in class and to try and read and write. No one recognized his disability and as a result, he shut down. 'I am not going to write, because I am getting all these red marks.' So eventually they put him in the slow class, and so I hate to say it that way, but that is how they say it. And so school was a really bad experience for him. Socially, educationally wise, it was just a bad experience. He got a high school diploma, but in our schools you were kinda pushed through. It wasn't the system it is today. So he got a high school diploma but he couldn't read. That's major.*

It was not until he was incarcerated and surrounded by "people like him" that he learned how to read. Participant 1 questions the possibility and potentiality of his brother if he had a teacher that caught his learning impediment sooner. As he questions, "what if he had that one person?"

*He actually learned how to read when he was incarcerated. He was incarcerated and in jail and he learned how to read. Yea. Because they were filled with people like him, yea. And so yes, education played such a major role in his life after the fact, um, and that's when I... He was incarcerated and I was in high school... wow... it is really starting to click now, wow. This is amazing. So I knew I wasn't going to be one of those statistics. It... What makes it amazing is that I saw it take*

*him. I saw how it could influence you in a bad way like it did with him, and in a good way, like it did with me. Perhaps if he had that one person like I had it could have changed his [life] ... you know what I mean...*

“Perhaps if he had that one person like I had” that powerful statement highlighted Participant’s 1 outlook not only on the power of a teacher in his life, but the impact of not having a positively impactful teacher in his brother’s life. Participant 1 clearly saw the impact of education, which became one of the reasons he started to look to education as a career, because for him, “you had to get in the game to change the game.” Participant 5 also saw the importance of a positive student-teacher relationship. She describes wanting to become an educator because she of how teachers were “getting teaching wrong; not the content, but the relationship...” For her, a successful student-teacher relationship was one that had a sense of *relatedness*. It was not what was being taught in the classroom, but the relationship that stemmed from this learning environment that allowed a person to truly learn, grow, and succeed.

**Inspiration from television on the Black teachers’ career journeys.** As one reflected across their lifespan, in addition to parents and teachers, television personas became part of the VAS system. Of the nine participants, four participants recalled the impact of television on their career identity desires. For these participants, it was television shows with a Black-leading actor that impacted their aspirations. These figures not only impacted their career ambitions, but also their self-concept. The interviewees saw the leading Black television characters as someone they could one day aspire to be; they became the beacon for success.

As Participant 5 reflected on her desire to become a doctor, she discussed the influence of the television show called *Julia*. *Julia*, featuring Diahann Carroll, was a NBC situation comedy

that aired from 1968 – 1971 (Smith-Shomade, 2002). At the time, the show offered a groundbreaking depiction of a professional Black woman that was not readily available.

*Here it is at age 16, and my interest started to change, so I am at level 10, and I have been looking at a lot of medical shows, so... I wanted to be an OBGYN, because I love babies, I love children. And I said I want to deliver babies. I started watching all these medical shows, like ER and then Emergency Room those types of things... What was that one that used to come on... Julia with Diahann Carroll. She was a single mother and she was a nurse. And it was rare at that time to see a Black on TV. She was a nurse. She had it... She wasn't in the ghetto like Good Times. You know what I am saying? And she had a son. I can't remember his name, but that peaked my interest. And I was like wow... That's when I started changing...*

Positive communicative forms of Black *recognition* positively influence the identity development, especially for Black adolescents in an *identity-diffused* state. Some critics argue *Julia* provided a *misrecognized* image of Blackness (Smith-Shomade, 2002) that left the dominant group and others with an “enlightened” view of the Black experience. Enlightened racism, as described by Lewis Jhally and Justin Lewis (1992), provides a tokenistic lens of what it means to be Black in America by not acknowledging the authentic experiences that take place in the Black environment. While the *Julia* provided an arguable unauthentic perception of the Black experience during the 1960’s, *Julia* and shows containing Black leading actors still created a space to positively impact the career identity of developing Black children who were being raised in the *authentic hot stove* environments. For Participant 5, *Julia* peaked her vocational interest by *seeing* someone that looked like her in the medical field. Outside of the show

providing a realistic perception of Black reality, it created a space of hope and aspiration for Participant 5 as she watched it.

In addition to *Julia*, two interviewees spoke of the influence of *The Cosby Show* on their career identity development, in particular, Claire Huxtable as described by Participant 6.

*Okay so at age 5, I wanted to be a lawyer. And, umm, I basically wanted to be a lawyer because Claire Huxtable was my ideal on the Cosby Show, and she was a lawyer. Umm. She was successful, she was attractive, she had a family, and so I thought that would be something good for me to be.*

Participant 5 would regularly watch the show with her grandmother and siblings. Her parents worked non-traditional hours as her mother was a nursing assistant and her father was a juvenile detention officer. She goes on to describe what Claire Huxtable represented to her, and how she allowed her to aspire for more:

*It does make sense. Ummm. I felt hopeful. I guess would be a good way to put it. Umm, and I felt it was a goal I could reach. I knew nothing about how much education it took or none of that, but I thought I could do that, so I felt hopeful. You know growing up in Richmond in a family with 3 children and at the time you don't know you don't have a lot, because it's what you have, but, um, looking at TV and seeing all the things I could have, it just spoke volumes.*

In addition to aspiring to want to become a lawyer, Participant 8 also wanted to be a doctor that also resonated from *The Cosby Show* and other medical related shows. With that said, the participant also wanted a career that would allow her to work “regular work hours,” because she saw the impact of her parents working in places that “never shut”. She lightheartedly acknowledged her naïve perception of what it means to be a doctor and a lawyer:

*So people have to be there all the time. Umm. And probably the same with doctors, but you know, I don't think I really put that together at that point, because Cliff Huxtable was home for all the holidays. He was always home (laughter). He had a baby maybe twice (laughter).*

While the participant laughed at her naïveté, the power of the Huxtables, especially Claire Huxtable, shaped her. The power of the Black woman continued as Participant 9 also reflects on her desire to be a lawyer, again, to be like Claire Huxtable. Claire Huxtable became much more than a career aspiration to Participant 9, she was someone she “so wanted to be.” She impacted Participant 9’s view of what it means to be a parent, and she still strives to be like her today, as she questions “what would Claire do” as she raises her own children. *The Cosby Show* brought the members of her family together. They regularly watched the show like Participant 8’s family, but while Participant 8’s family watched in silence, Participant 9’s family watched in a room full of laughter and banter, as best described by Participant 9:

*We always spoke. We were loud. Spoke, laughed, whatever. My mom or dad might slip something in there like, ‘don’t try it because that’s not gonna be the response we have.’ ‘Cause they didn’t parent like the Cosbys. But um, just a good feeling, you know with it. It’s the same thing with Soul Train. But this had life lessons in it.*

Participant 9 saw Claire Huxtable as having “Black girl magic” and resonating “girl power”. She became part of the family. She was someone Participant 9 *recognized* in a way that challenged her to achieve more:

*She was smart. That was the number one thing. My mom didn’t go to college so it’s like the first, well I won’t say first ‘cause my dad’s sisters, they all went to college. But, um, as far as being in the house, ‘cause I felt like they were in the*



*house with me. It was the first, um, female, you know, who went to college, had the career that she wanted, had more choices in life because of that education. So, just the strength from her, you know? And it's not to take away from my mom. You know? 'Cause that's a different perspective. She hustled on her own and we made it through.*

Claire Huxtable, in the eyes of Participant 9, became part of her *microsystem*. She was someone who she loved so much so that when Bill Cosby's sexual assault scandal came to light it left Participant 9 questioning her childhood as she described as being "destroyed." She had to step back and ask why she "was taking it so personally"? One could argue that it was personal to Participant 9, because as described by the interviewee, *The Cosby Show* was part of the "family"; they were "role models."

The character who exuded from the television was not part of the interviewee's physical or proximal space, but she was a great part of the interviewee's vocational anticipatory socialization environment. The personality traits of Claire Huxtable resonated with two of the interviewees from as young as age-5 and continued to be characteristics they wanted to embody as their present adult selves. This lasting feeling of admiration spoke volumes to the Participant 8 and Participant 9, who both felt Claire Huxtable was part of their space of reality.

In addition, Claire Huxtable and the members of *The Cosby Show*, Participant 9 had a *true hidden figure* who she felt directly impacted her upbringing and decision to become a teacher, as she shares the story of school at Grandma Johnson's house, or better known to most as Katherine Johnson, the famous NASA mathematician. Participant 9 shares:

*Whether it was tutoring or, you know, little cousins or what have you. And this is one person that I didn't put down but I need to mention because she actually*

*taught me how to read. But, you know, the Hidden Figures movie that's coming out? Ok, so Grandma Jackson, my neighbor was her grandson so his sister was best friends, but they had different fathers. But every Saturday we would go to Grandma Johnson's house on X Street and she had, I don't know if it was like a porch or an addition to her house, but she had a classroom set up. And I mean a real classroom. Chalkboards. She had everything on the wall.*

*Um, we did that for years so I'm not sure what age... I love Ms. Johnson and that was my second grade teacher. She reinforced everything you know from school. And my parents really didn't do homework. You know, they didn't. They worked hard and survived but they really didn't push education other than 'you're going to college. You have no choice.' But this was somewhere Saturday mornings, and we would go with my best friend's mom. And my little sister was with us, also. And she would straight teach us. We had no idea she was a mathematician. We had no idea, you know? I knew she was a teacher and now looking back and talking to her family, she's a professor at HU. You know that whole NASA (inaudible). Like, we didn't even know whom we were dealing with. Um, so I'm sure she probably had something to do with it too [becoming a teacher]... Everybody would sit and pay attention. And it was... she made it so fun and, you know, I liked that...*

Grandma Johnson holds a special place in the heart of Participant 9, and she continues to positively impact the lives of children today, as she has become a beacon of hope, success, and possibility.

As each participant completed the LIM grid and retraced their career pathway journey, the content of their memories and with whom or what became alive. These memories consisted of reflecting on the experiences of play with siblings and friends; the supportive home environment that allowed for exploration while setting the expectation of striving for and achieving more. From the positive influence of the *homeplace* to the power of a nurturing classroom teacher who believes in his or her student and deliberately sets up spaces to help one explore the world, but also highlighting the negative effects of a teacher a one's development. To the impact of a television show, as participants reflected on watching *The Cosby Show* with family and being entrenched by the intelligence, beauty, and full of admiration for Claire Huxtable. These were part of the communicative experiences that were experienced by Black teachers across the lifespan and with whom they experienced them with, but how and in what ways did these experiences change over the course of the lifespan developmental periods?

### **Career Identity Development Across the Lifespan**

As the participants recollected their vocational identity development across their lifespans, the earliest memories were recounted at age-5 to age-6 years old for six of the nine participants, while the remaining three participants started their vocational reflections at 12-years old for two of the older participants, and the remaining one, began his career reflection at approximately 15 to 16 years old. Eight of the nine participants began their reflections during Erikson's (1967) *childhood* developmental period, while one of the oldest participants of 62-years old, began retracing his journey during his *adolescence* developmental period.

Looking at the vocational anticipatory socialization practices across the lifespan, the researcher used the interviews and TSCT responses to better understand the qualities and sources

of career-related communication episodes of Black teachers, and how and if there were changes over Erikson's (1967) developmental stages of childhood (7 – 12 years old), adolescence (13 – 18 years old), and young adulthood (19 – 40 years olds). As the participants transitioned throughout the developmental phases, childhood became a time of exploration and exposure to career opportunities. Adolescence became a time when one's vocational identity started to become more crystallized and reality-based. Young adulthood became a time of career immersion with the participants preparing for the field via postsecondary learning experiences and/or actual career acquisition. Research supports that career-related decisions are an ongoing process that are constantly negotiated starting from childhood as Auger's, Blackhurst's, and Wahl's (2005) study on children's career aspirations and experiences highlight. As research supports, children often have gloried career aspirations that are frequently only attained by very few, such as becoming a professional athlete, singer, and/or actor (Bobo, Hildreth, & Durodoye, 1998; Cook et al., 1996; Helwig, 2001), which was also expressed by Participant 2 as he described his desire to be a professional athlete at the age of 5:

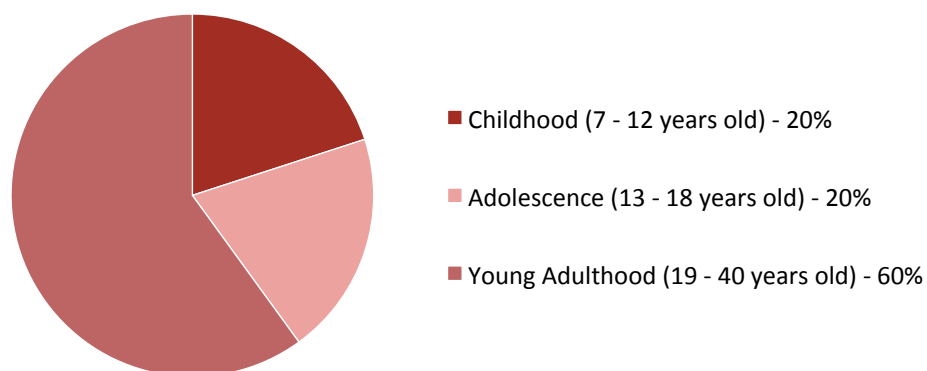
*We used to watch of course a lot of sports, so I wanted to professional sports player. It was on TV. Watching sports on TV, and um, also, people in my home were playing sports so going to their games kinda influenced me. I felt it made me feel good inside... [People gave me] affirmation because they would tell me good [job] if I caught the ball or something like that. Just being around sports in general made me feel good.*

As described by the interviewee, it was not simply watching sports on the television; it was also the effect of sports on his family and the affirmation he received from others for playing sports well.

Participant 2 highlights the importance of not only the career-mediated messages, but also the environments that fostered those messages. Seligman, Weinstock, and Heflin (1991) found that children aged 9 and 10 believed they already made decisions that impacted the future careers they wanted to pursue. A retrospective study by Trice and McClellan (1994) found that 23 percent of adults between the ages of 40-55 had made decisions about their current professions their childhood development period, which further supports the importance of childhood career exposure and exploration.

Of the nine Black teachers interviewed for this study, three participants reflected on wanting to be a teacher during childhood. Three participants identified clear career aspirations toward being a teacher during childhood, and while this may have wavered at times, they knew early within their lifespan that they wanted to become a teacher. The remaining six of the nine interviewees did not always dream of becoming a teacher, but believed teaching chose them as it became apparent later in life. A summary of the participants' desire toward becoming a teacher between the ages of 5 and 40 years old is included in Table 4 below.

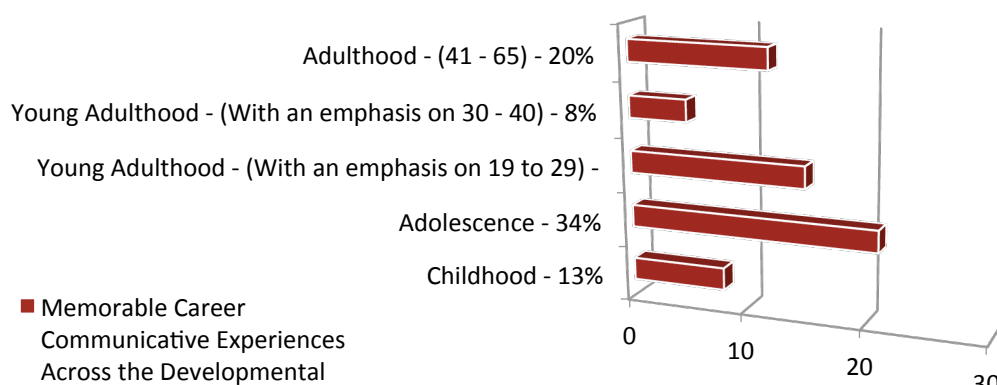
Table 4. Desire to be a Teacher During Erikson's Childhood, Adolescence, and Young Adulthood Development Phases



During the completion of the TSCT, each participant reflected on career aspirations during Erikson's childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood development phases. Of the nine participants, the number of career identities that were desired across the lifespan ranged from six to 13. Two participants included personal and professional attributes instead of career identities, which were not included in the range stated above. As the career identities constantly evolved across the vocational journeys, the qualities and sources of career-related communication episodes of Black teachers remain consistent with the introduction of professional peers, mentors, and supervisors after one achieved their career aspiration starting during young adulthood.

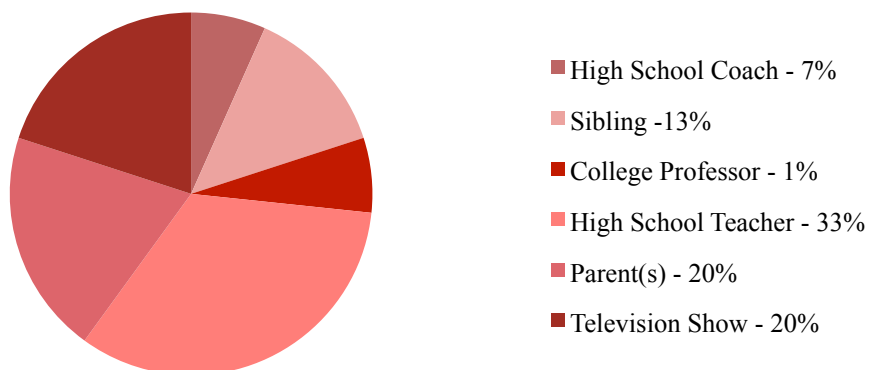
Emerging from the data, the communicative experiences that took place during the adolescence years (13 – 18 years old) and early young adulthood (20 – 29 years old), were heavily reflected on and either validated or strengthened the participant's career desire to become a teacher. During the latter part of young adulthood (30 – 40 years old) and adulthood (41 – 65 years old), participants were within their career and mobilizing their career identity by building upon existing career ideologies. A summary of the memorable communicative experiences that were highlighted by the interviewees and during which developmental period are depicted in Table 5 below. As the table emphasizes, the career conversations during adolescence were most reflected upon by the participants in this study. It was during this period that 34 percent of the participants were greatly impacted by a communicative experience during this developmental phase that impacted their emerging career identity.

Table 5. Memorable Career Communicative Experiences Reflected on During the Lifeline Interview Method and During which Developmental Period



Of the 34 percent of memorable communicative experiences during adolescence for this sample, the communicative experiences that took place with a member within the home/family unit, school/classroom, or exuded from a television show as shown by Table 6 below. The results highlight that 33 percent of the memorable experiences took place with a high school teacher, 7% with a college professor, as one participant was 18 when he started college, and 7% identified a high school coach who was also a teacher just not the participant's teacher. Of this sample a total of 47% reflected on a memorable experience with an educator during adolescence that impacted their career trajectory and identity.

Table 6. Memorable Career Communicative Experiences During the Interviewee's Adolescence Developmental Period with a Person or Television Show



As the previous data supports, the impactful and memorable communicative experiences took place within the home, school and classroom, and through the television, speaking volumes that proximal and distal socio-ecological influences are impacting the career identity development of the developing person at the center. What quickly emerges from the data is the importance of the feeling of relatedness that emanates from the proximal and distal socio-ecological environments allowing one to feel securely connected to another and for one to experience oneself as worthy and capable of love and respect (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). The interviewees reflected on relatedness as they described feelings of “closeness”, “connection”, and “validation” that were part of the positive communicative experiences. The researcher wanted to understand the influence of the proximal and distal socio-ecological influences on the Black teacher's career choices, and if these influences can be revealed in career-related communication episodes?



## The Impact of Proximal and Distal Communicative Practices on the Teacher Experience

As the participants reflected on not only their career journeys, but most importantly, the communicative experiences that impacted them across the lifespan to help breakdown barriers and become a teacher in a primarily White dominated field. The researcher strived to better understand the cognitive maps that guided the nine interviewees toward successfully achieving their career identity. Using the Bronfenbrenner's (1967) socio-ecological model, the proximal and distal environments were examined to see their influences on the vocational anticipatory development of the individual at the center of the developing system. Table 7 below highlights the various proximal relationships that impacted the vocational identity for the interviewee. Table 8 also below, highlights the distal environments that impacted the vocational identity of the interviewee.

Table 7. *Number and Kind of Proximal Relationships Impacting Vocational Identity*

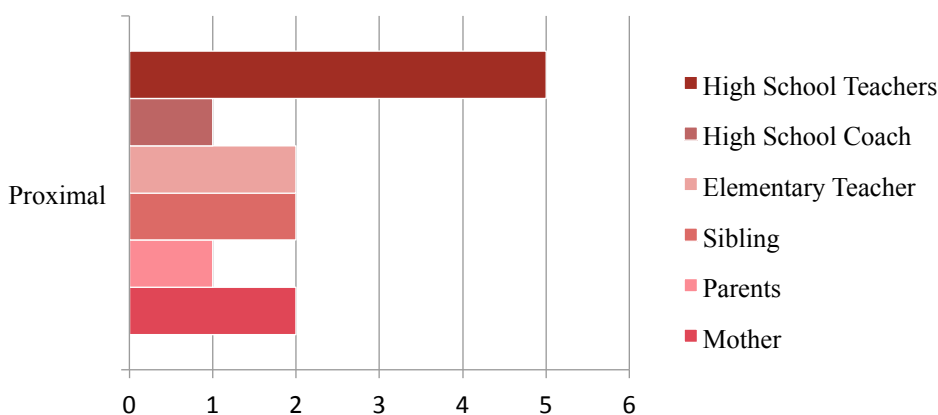
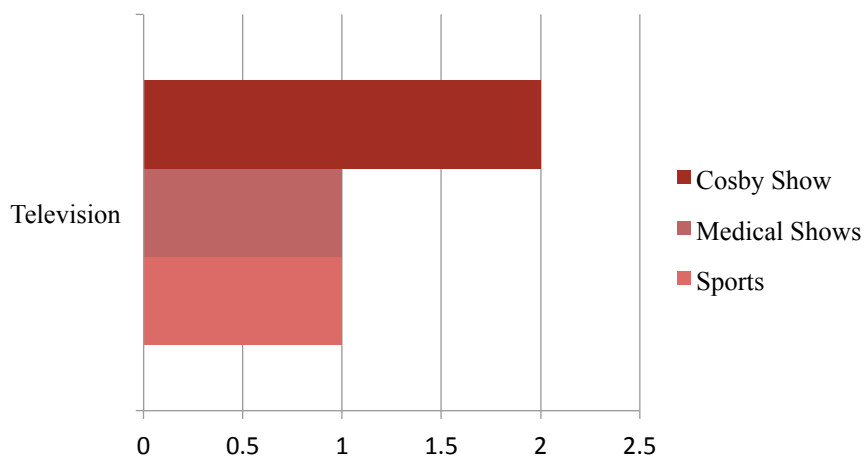


Table 8. Number and Kind of Distal Environments Impacting Vocational Identity



According to the data, the most influential environments are those closest to the individual. The microsystem and mesosystem drastically influence the vocational identities of the interviewees. Four of the nine individuals highlighted the influence of the television shows on their development. Of the four, 75 percent of the participants were influenced by television during childhood, and one interviewee spoke of the influence of television during adolescence. Prominent reflection exuded from the proximal spaces with individuals whom they regularly came in contact with. What also emerged from the study was the influence of a teacher on the vocational identity of the participant. It was the ability to develop a sense of relatedness between the student and teacher that exuded from the conversations. The teachers who created a space where the individuals felt they, “comfortable”, and “like a family member” were the teachers who created this type of environment that made the classroom feel like “home” and because of this, the participants felt “safe”. Participant 1 said it best as he describes the teacher he wanted to be, because of the teacher that he had.

*At that time I didn't necessarily want to be a teacher, but I knew I wanted to be someone like her. [Someone] who people felt comfortable around and were*

*comfortable sharing their experiences [with], and someone who made there day better. I knew that.*

It could be argued that it was the impactful teachers that helped to produce and develop these minority teachers in this study, as described by Participant 8:

*I think looking back over my life; the people that had the most influence over me were my teachers. So that was a big deal to me. I never put it together until that moment when I talk about people that I admire or whatever, it wasn't fictional people, it was my teachers or my school counselor or people that really took an interest in me as a person. And helped me as I moved throughout my life.*

Participant 8 strongly admired Clair Huxtable, but when she looked back, it was she that had a lasting impact on her life; it was those truly helped her to navigate the world around her. Outside of the feelings of relatedness, an unexpected theme started to emerge from the data that highlighted the importance of relational dialectics within the proximal and distal communicative environments.

### **Relational Dialectics of Vocational Identity Development**

Remaining open to emerging themes, it also became clear that the struggle (me-not me) was a part of vocational identity development which suggested that dialectical reasoning may be useful in understanding lifespan communication and career identity development. Relational communicative experiences constantly impact individuals across the lifespan, especially during the adolescence developmental period, which is further supported by this thesis. Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery's (1996) research on relational dialectics provides the foundation for one to look at the "implications of viewing selves, couples, and cultures as social structures,

linked together in continuing dialogue” (p. 184). Continuing to use Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) socio-ecological view towards identity development, themes of relational dialectics of vocational identity development began to emerge building upon Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) relational dialectical themes of *Integration – Separation, Stability – Change, Expression – Privacy* that were pronounced within two dialectal spaces: *Internal Dialect – proximal relationships between the individual* and *External Dialect – distal relations between and around the individual*. What emerged from the research were the *intrapersonal dialects* that the interviewees navigated as their career identity emerged. Adding to the existing relational dialectical structure, the following intrapersonal dialectical spaces were added to the relational dialectical themes originally introduced by Baxter and Montgomery (1996). The intrapersonal spaces are *Recognition-Rejection, Committed-Uncommitted, and Expressed-Unexpressed*. See below for an overview of the Relational Dialectics of Vocational Identity Development.

Table 9. Relational Dialectics of Vocational Identity Development

Relational Dialectal Themes	Intrapersonal Dialects	Interpersonal Dialects	External Dialects
Integration-Separation	Recognition-Rejection	Connection-Autonomy	Inclusion-Seclusion
Stability-Change	Committed-Uncommitted	Certainty-Uncertainty	Conventionality-Uniqueness
Express-Privacy	Expressed-Unexpressed	Openness-Closedness	Revelation-Concealment

Relational dialectics are the interface between selves, couples, and cultures. Individuals, couples, and cultures are structures that are linked together by engaging in continuous dialogue (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 184). While Baxter and Montgomery spoke of individuals, couples, and cultures, this study looks at the individual, microsystem, and macrosystem that made up the environments of the now educators in this study. Unfolded from the data and retro-

reflective career journeys of each participant were the relational dialectics that guided the nine Black bodies toward securing a professional identity in a White dominated field.

**Interpersonal dialectics.** The internal dialectics that take place between two people within the proximal spaces resonate from the data. Internal tensions between the communicative experiences of parent(s) and child or student and teacher emerge. The participants discuss the tensions that were negotiated around self-exploration and the possibility of career attainment. Ultimately, how one's environment makes way for an individual to see the career possibilities in the world and most importantly, being able to see oneself in that career identity.

Within these environments, connection and autonomy are negotiated and aligned with Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) research. One questions in what ways a parent or teacher *connects* in the career exploration experience with the developing individual, and in what ways *autonomy* was given to the young person to explore his or her desired careers. Relationships are complex and the relational tensions that are between the two individuals are as equally complex. What continues to emerge from the data also aligns with Erikson's developmental stages. During childhood, parents and teachers engage in career exploration activities by encouraging play and exploration as evident by Participant 7 as he describes the way his mother and teachers "nourished" and "cultivated" the idea of him becoming a teacher.

*Ingrained in me, um, this whole idea of being a teacher, an educator, um, you know? Because they would they would cultivate, they would nourish [it]. It would nourish me. I don't know how else to put it. You know, my mom would support it, you know? She would take me to the store and I'm buying old school graders. There were old school graders you would have that would tell you how many they got right and what their grade was. And I'm grading worksheets, and we are in*

*church and my mom would have us doing book reports, and um, grading them. You know that type of thing.*

As the participants aged, parents and teachers became a space of encouragement. They challenged their young people and “pushed” their child or student to succeed as detailed by Participant 8:

*I did talk to them [parents], about things like that coming up, and they've always said, 'you can be whatever you want to be. You put your mind to it; you can do whatever you want. You are smart, you know, you can do whatever you want to be, just stick to it.' And neither one of my parents were college educated, so for me, I was a first generation college student. So you know, they always pushed. It was never a question if we were going to go to college...*

The importance of relatedness resonates from the interpersonal dialectical tensions. Participants 7 and 8 felt authentically heard and supported by those they trusted and connected with. If they were unable to connect with the individual, arguably they would not have positively impacted the career trajectory of the individual except for those instances when the participant rebelled against the negative communicative experiences of being told “you can’t do it.”

Within the dialectical tension of *certainty-uncertainty*, this tension had a greater impact the acquisition of a career identity. During childhood the participants fantasized about be a princess, professional athlete, Broadway singer, but as they reached adolescence and young adulthood, career identity attainability became more “realistic” and becoming “independent” became a priority. Participants started to ponder their reality, “Like, uh, if I don't get my act together, I might have to live with my father for the rest of my life” (Participant 4, Age-63), but also “you got to do something to take care of yourself” (Participant 6, Age-46). Participant 3

reflected on relieving the burden from his mother by becoming independent, as he reflects, “I have a responsibility not to be a burden on her. I am not being a burden. I'm the oldest, so I need to leave. So at this juncture, I made the decision, I couldn't get there until 19, I made a decision to go into the service.” The certainty-uncertainty dialectic looks at not only the possibility of being able to acquire a career, but also the possibility of securing “independence.”

The *openness-closedness* dialectical tension within interpersonal relationships explores the degree to which career opportunities and decisions are discussed between people within a microsystem. During adolescence, this becomes an important time of career exploration for each participant. Within these systems, students were free to explore career opportunities, but for most if not all participants, the expectation was to go to college. As shared by Participant 4, “They didn't go to college [parents], but they very much wanted all their children to go to college. It was let's talk about where you are going, and let's talk about what you are majoring in”. Participant 3 also heard this very frequently as he shares, “[Education was] very important. The truth be told, I was so sick of hearing you have to get a good education. I heard it all my life. My mother, grandmother, my aunts, my uncles, everybody wanted me to go to college after I graduated high school”. While parents frequently discussed the expectation and importance of college, some participants were also deterred from their proposed career goal of becoming a teacher and encouraged to pursue something “much more profitable,” as described by Participant 7:

*I really want to be a teacher... 'Why do you want to do that? You could make so much money,' you know, money came in. And I was like, hmm, let me explore this. Oh. I think. Maybe I'm going to go to law school. And I think it was the conversations about money that perhaps made me wanna shift, because they were*

*like... It was to the point where they would even sit me down and show. I had one counselor at X that would show me, 'here is the salary scale for a teacher, and this is a salary scale [for a lawyer];' not scale but the sort of potential earnings for a lawyer.*

With the encouragement to become a lawyer, Participant 7 started to explore this career identity, but it was his mother who encouraged him to “do what makes you happy,” and assured him that she was not going to stand in his way. This participant felt the openness of his mother, which ultimately became the primary vehicle toward him securing his authentic career goal – to be a teacher.

**External dialectics.** The external dialectical tensions of career identity also resonated from the data. As the participants ranged from 32 to 63, the external environments they developed within were very diverse. As one participant discusses becoming the first Black principal in a small southern city to another sharing her experience of being taught by one of the first famous NASA Black mathematicians these external dialectics impacted the developing individual at the center. The *inclusion-seclusion* dialect resonated with the impact of social integration and social division as expressed by Participant 3, “So there was a fight to get equal education, and I was in the struggle, and at that time, we did not get enough guidance, I don't think I did,” but the fight continued as Participant 9, 44, describes, “I wanted to change the world. I wanted to make a change, you know, in society. Whatever, whatever it took.” The youngest participant, Participant 7, 32, describes how race disparities continued to resonate throughout his college experience as he describes frequently being one of very few Black students pursuing a degree in education:



*Often in class I was the only, or maybe another one... There may have been one of other black male, I think when we got our masters' there was one other black male that was in that program. In my internship experiences with the breakthrough collaborative and other places, ahh, there were three of us total, and there would be like 20 teachers. Or 20 college-aged interns. Umm. 3 black males. I think in California, I was the only black male.*

Participant 7 did not readily see an image of self while fulfilling his dream of becoming a teacher, but this did not stop him, because “teaching was what he was born to do.”

The *conventionality-uniqueness* dialectical tension perpetuates through external messaging, but the participants in this study decided to do something different for themselves and their families. To break with convention and become unique by being a minority in a White dominant field as described by Participant 1, “[I was] inspired to make some changes. I had to get in the game to make some changes. Yea. And that's when I actually went to a guidance counselor and started talking about going to college, which was like a big deal. Um. None of my siblings went to college.” The participants deliberately set out to be unique, and fought hard to break conventionality to become and pursue their authentic selves.

As Elders said, “you can’t be, what you don’t see,” and once the participants within this study started to see they also started to believe, as described by Participant 1

*We had a forum with young African American women and men that got their PhD and this way young folks, and they came into the school, it was like my senior year or maybe I was graduating. They inspired me to pursue this after this degree. They said this what you need to be, or this is what you want to be if that is what you want to be you can do this. You know how many PhDs I had encountered*

*[who were] African American female and male before that... I probably walked past them but I never knew them. I never had conversation with them in the school or like that. The only other ones were professors. So I thought that was the only ones. So when they had that forum. That touched me. I could always go further than this degree. It inspired me. I mean I've seen plenty of Caucasian success stories. They are written everywhere; they are all over the place. In every book, they're in every journal... so all my studies leading up to that point were full of Caucasian PhDs and all the African Americans were rebels who caused changed, which was okay... But it didn't... somehow it left out the part that they were intelligent and educated...*

In the *revelation-concealment* dialectic, it speaks to the importance of representation. As expressed by Participant 1 it is important to see people like oneself to help one believe that he or she can do more. Participant 6, 8, and 9, all shared similar sentiments when they saw images of strong Black women in professional roles on television shows. It was the representation that allowed them to start thinking differently, but it was truly the proximal relationships that guided them to get there.

**Intrapersonal dialectics.** As one looks between the microsystem and mesosystem and the messages permeating from the exosystem, the developing individual is cocooned at the center. It is at the center that the intrapersonal dialectical tensions are negotiated. Within this space, one negotiates the messages from the other systems and determines whom they are within in the space of who they are told to be. Building upon the existing work of Baxter and Montgomery (1967), the intrapersonal dialect looks at the tensions between the *recognition-*

*rejection, committed-uncommitted, and expressed-unexpressed* all around the context of vocational identity development.

The tension between *recognition-rejection* is a tension that arguably all that follows builds upon. As the participants in this study retraced their career journey, they recounted moments of feeling recognized by another for whom they are, which ultimately allowed one to recognize his or her own strength, as one described, “You go on and you say, ‘I can do this,’ and then you begin to see and build on those strengths, (Participant 3, Age-63). Another interviewee shared, “People see it in me, and sometimes other people have to see it in you before you see it in yourself” (Participant 7, Age-32). Others described moments of feeling rejected as their intellectual capabilities were challenged and left feeling motivated to “prove him wrong” (Participant 2, Age-39). Participant 6 described a moment with two complete strangers that helped her to recognize her own wants and desires as she describes her experience:

*There was a man, I am not sure who he was, but I think I had to go to him to get, ummm, my cap or something... He was somebody in charge dealing with something in science. He said, 'what do you want to do?' I said, I want to go to medical school, and he said, 'what's your GPA?' I said, 2.5. He said, 'oh, you will never get in there.' He told me that. It hit and hurt. I can't imagine how many children have been told you can't do something. I said, I am going to prove him wrong, so I had told this older black lady that was in one of my classes, and we were sitting out waiting for class to start, and she said, 'don't prove it to nobody, prove it to yourself.' I said, you know what, that's true. I said, ultimately, it's what I feel. So after that man told me that and the lady told me what she told me, I called my mom and said, I want to get my master's in education. She said, 'what*

*made you change your mind?' I said, because I don't want another to tell another child they can't do anything.*

From this communicative experience, Participant 6 was able to truly be honest with herself about her own career desires. Like so many others, she liked the idea of being a doctor, but she felt she was destined to be a teacher.

As the participants navigated *committed-uncommitted* to a particular career this tension became consistently negotiated. Individuals questioned to what degree they should continue to pursue a certain career identity and to what degree they should change. Participant 7 navigated this tension when he was torn whether to follow his heart and become a teacher, or to follow the advice of others and become a lawyer. For him being a teacher was something he was “born to do,” but this started to waver when others introduced to the possibility of providing a “lavish lifestyle” for his family and self (Participant 7, Age-32). He describes the pressures of others and his reaction to their doubt:

*People were like, would always hesitate and say, 'you want to be a teacher, why? Why? You are not going to make any money.' I would say, you know what, if the passion is there the money will come. If the passion is there [and] I know the why behind what I'm doing. It's because I genuinely love it, and I enjoy going to work everyday then I'm okay with being a teacher, and the money will come. You know there's no question. I went to school to major in education.*

Even with the encouragement from others in mesosystem to go another career route, teaching was his authentic identity, and he was able to commit to this decision. This was a similar experience that was experienced by Participant 6 as she battled to find her true authentic identity to commit to. She was unsure whether to commit to pursuing a medical degree or to commit to

becoming a teacher, and for her, her authentic identity revealed itself as a teacher. This is an ongoing tension that one constantly goes through throughout one's career, but it also comes to the place where one begins to question why he or she is unable to commit and questions if it is due to desires or the outside messages permeating in.

An additional ongoing dialect is *expressed-unexpressed* career desires. To what degree one expresses their career desires not only to others, but also to oneself. In what ways does one create spaces to negotiate their possible career identity outside of the messages of who they are told they should become? In what ways are authentic career identities withheld? Are they withheld due to one's inability to *see* oneself within the field, one's own belief in their inability to achieve the career goal, or is it the perception of the career from another.

The participants in this study at times struggled with their decision to become a teacher, due to new interests and the opinions of others about becoming a teacher. When the participants in this study expressed their desires as shared by Participant 7, they were met with a question of "why do you want to teach when you can do so much more?" Participant 3 was also met with resistance when he expressed his desire to be an elementary teacher. He shares his experience, "I knew we had a need there [elementary teacher]. I knew the need was there and he kept telling me, you leave the woman to do that. We need you in secondary school. I said the need for Black males is in elementary school." While this communicative experience happened in the participant's adult life, it continues to highlight that sometimes-expressed career interests are met with opposition, and if one is not truly committed to their authentic career identity then one may be persuaded to pursue and acquire an unauthentic career identity. Participant 8 also shared her thoughts on the impact of too many teachers in the field with unauthentic career identities as she shares:

*Unfortunately, there are a lot of teachers in the classroom for the wrong why. Umm. They're there because [they] couldn't find a job in their field. It was a fall back. It was a plan B, and they don't have that true desire to help people or to move our country forward. Like my teachers did. They were there, because they wanted to be there. So there is a difference. They had a vested interest in, you know, given back and paying it forward. And I just think so often now a days that interest isn't there. And it could be for a variety of reasons. Number one teachers are not compensated nearly as well as they should be for the work that they do. Without teachers, no other profession would be possible.*

The systems the participants developed directly impacted the career desires they expressed or did not express throughout the lifespan. During childhood, the participants described freely dreaming and playing all the things they could do and be in life, but these dreams were also arguably limited by the career ideologies the child was exposed to. During adolescence, career desires became more prescribed to the reality of the developing person. The parent(s) within the microsystems became an integral part of what the participant expressed or did not express about their career aspirations. The parent(s) created an environment that was supportive of the career identity the young person wanted to pursue, but it was contingent upon furthering one's education, which arguably in some ways may have limited the career identities that one expressed and further explored. Upon entering into early adulthood, the participants expressed possible careers and entered postsecondary experiences to pursue their career goal. Six of the nine participants changed their major to education. Participants 3, 8, and 9, discussed the "fulfillment" from mentoring another and realizing that teaching was the right career for them. Participant 8 shares:

*I made the decision to become a teacher based on a conversation and experience that was provided to me by the chair of the math department. Again, I was a computer science major doing well, and he knew me, because I had been in his classes, and he just always talked about how well I did in math and everything so he gave me a job tutoring in the mathematics lab. And that was a game changer for me. That's when I knew. Umm, because when I would tutor someone and they would come back to me and show me their test or tell me about their grade, it was just this sense of fulfillment.*

It was from being open to the experience that allowed Participant 8 to express her authentic career to herself and others.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The final chapter of this thesis provides an overview of the findings of this study, study implications, possible limitations, and discusses in what ways future research can build upon these initial findings. Using the LIM to unlock the vocational journey of nine Black teachers, the researcher set out to better understand the communicative practices surrounding the study participants' journeys toward securing their authentic career identities.

#### Overview Of Findings

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” this simple, yet complex question is readily asked across one's lifespan, but how many truly have the opportunity to *authentically* explore and acquire the career identity that they hope to achieve? This study dug deeper to unlock the career journeys of nine Black teachers who had very different upbringings and stories to share, but ultimately, each found and achieved their career goal of becoming a teacher. The researcher set out to answer four research questions to unravel each career path to better understand the communicative infrastructures that were put in place across the lifespan that allowed nine minorities, living hot stove environments, to secure professional positions in a field that is primarily White. The researcher set out to answer the following questions: RQ1: What does the content of Black teachers' memories of career-related communication episodes look like over the lifespan? RQ2: What/who are the sources/participants of career-related communication episodes experienced by Black teachers over the lifespan? RQ3: Do the qualities and sources of career-related communication episodes of Black teachers change over different periods of the



lifespan? RQ4: Can differences in the relative influence of proximal and distal socio-ecological influences on Black teachers career choices be seen in career-related communication episodes? Each question was a piece of the puzzle toward developing a better understanding of the socio-ecological VAS practices that guided each participant toward their career goal.

To begin, the researcher examined the content of the teachers' memories around career-related communication across the lifespan. The content of the teachers' memories were intertwined with sources of information around the communicative experience and the persons or things that were part of this memory. The participants reflected on their *homeplace* and shared the influence of their parent(s); participants highlighted revered teachers, but also reflected on the hurtful experiences with a teacher who doubted their capabilities; and other interviewees unlocked the "Black magic" that exuded from the television when *Julia* and *The Cosby Show* were on. As each participant *gazed* back throughout their career journey, they were able to *see* and image of themselves and the communicative scaffolds that allowed them to not only find but to secure their career calling.

The researcher had each interviewee travel back in time, reconnect with their past-selves, to also look ahead and connect with their future-selves, as each participant envisioned the communicative atmosphere and career-related episodes across their lifespans using Erikson's childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood developmental periods. While each developmental period had an impact on the career journey, the memories of impactful career-related communication episodes that resonated as the participant traveled back were those from the adolescence developmental period that were frequently with an educator. While the distal experiences such as watching a television show and feeling connected to the character did impact the interviewee, it was the proximal relationships that had the greatest impact. It was the strong

proximal relationships that allowed the interviewee to develop a secure sense of self and self-concept from the *seed of disruption* that was planted to negotiate the hegemonic ideologies that attempted to constrain the career identity of the interviewee. It was through the feelings of relatedness that were developed within the microsystem and mesosystem that the developing person was able to truly find his or herself.

An unexpected finding emerged from the data that highlighted the importance of relational dialectics and how each are negotiated from an internal and external environment. Most importantly, how each tension is navigated from the perspective of the individual cocooned within the developing system. It was within these spaces where the interviewee felt *recognized* or *rejected* that he or she could or could not begin to *see* his or herself in the possible career identities he or she authentically desired. Before one could *commit* to any career one had to be able to *see* it within oneself. In order to see it, one had to be *recognized* outside of oneself by another that one trusted. It was only from the interpersonal built upon connection and trust that the one at the center could begin to truly identify and *express* their honest and authentic career aspirations.

### **Implications For Future Research**

The study reinforced the importance of developing a sense of relatedness not only in the home, but also in the classroom. It is only by first developing a sense of connection that one can begin to develop a positive self-concept. One's self-concept is directly impacted by the feelings of relatedness, which are ultimately impacted by the career aspirations that not only one may pursue, but also they will ultimately acquire. Representation inside and outside of the classroom is important. Diverse images of Blackness have to not only saturate the systems that come into

contact with the individual, but every child deserves the opportunity to *see* someone that looks like he or she to aspire to grow up and be like one day. With this said, the power also resides within those spaces and with individuals the developing person comes into contact with every day. While it is important for a developing Black child to have positive Black role model and teacher, this does not mean they cannot develop positive relationships that are just as healthy and rewarding with an individual outside of one's race. Black children, just like all children, deserve the right to develop an authentic image of self, but this starts with people *seeing* a person for who he or she truly is and not the limiting hegemonic ideologies that are ascribed to one's body.

When a White teacher in the classroom looks at a Black teenage boy or girl, he or she should see that person as having just as much potential as the White child he or she is sitting next to. The teacher should be able to see the next doctor, engineer, mathematician, and ultimately that the student for his or her greatest potential. The teacher has a duty to *see* each young person, because it is through them that developing person will be able to *see* his or herself.

Unfortunately, too many are unable to see the greatness in others that are not like them. They are blinded by what is different, which is leaving far too many young people blind to their potential, guiding them circumscribed and constrained career identities. The classroom is a home away from home, and in this space, positive and negative communicative practices are impactful and powerful. It is the relational dialectics within these spaces that leave too many Black children and adolescents *rejected*, which in turn leaves them unwilling to *express* their desires, leaving them blind to their full potential.

## Limitations And Future Research

This study had a strong structure, but there were limitations that should be highlighted to improve future research. The study is a qualitative study where the purpose is to not generalize but to describe and raise questions. Although typical of many qualitative studies the sample size of this study was small at nine participants. To develop a better understanding of the career journeys of Black teachers, more teachers need to be part of the future data pool. In addition to this, while nine teachers were interviewed, only three teachers were current teachers. All of the participants were in the field of education, but five participants were now serving as education administrators, which provide an additional layer to the study. By having only active teachers that have no additional career desires, this may more closely speak to one finding and securing one's *authentic* career identity. If one leaves the classroom, one may wonder if teaching was truly their *authentic* calling. Additionally, all participants were part of the same school division, except for one participant, who was part of the neighboring division. Deepening the surveyed and interviewed pool will allow for a sample that more closely resembles the demographics of Black America. The participants were also professional colleagues or personal friends of the interviewer, which may have also impacted the responses that were given to the interviewer. The interviewer is in a leadership capacity in the same division with most of the interviewees, which may have impacted the responses.

This thesis provides a foundation for future research to be built upon. It has provided tangible results that can be used to impact the lives of many. It can help teachers and parents by pointing out that their conversations with their children and charges about careers matter. It can also help media producers to better understand the impact and importance of positive and diverse mediated images of Blackness. This thesis helped to continue a conversation that has been going

on for centuries, but it has also contributed some new questions to the conversation that can be explored through additional research studies. Future research can be extended to other fields where Black bodies are minorities within the career field. While this study conducted a retrospective interview method, future research can speak to current Black adolescents to develop a better understanding of the career communicative experiences they are encountering with to offer different perspective on vocational anticipatory socialization practices that are taking place. This study was conducted from the perspective of the teacher, it would be also relevant to better understand how parents are raising their adolescent children to find and pursue their authentic career identities. The *Relational Dialectics of Vocational Identity Development* that emerged from the data is certainly a place for future research. Each tension is in need of deeper exploration to expound the understanding of its impact on vocational development. Finally, a longitudinal study would be encouraged to watch the lifespan story of career identity development for the Black body to evolve before the researcher's eyes.

## Conclusion

*'Yes, I made it so you can too.' Because the fact is that I had plenty of help: a stable family, a working community, teachers who cared, and a church that mattered. But this kind of help is not out there for so many of today's young people growing up in broken homes and broken communities. In a county as rich as ours we all have an obligation to do everything we can to try to balance this out, so these children too can have a chance to cross the river and see what it's like on the other side. (Elders & Chanoff, 1996, p. 343)*

You can't be what you don't see, but with the help from those who truly "care," one has the opportunity to develop an authentic career identity that is not limited by the inscriptions placed upon one due to the color of one's skin. The Black body continues to fight to change the Black experience by creating spaces in hot stove environments that allow individuals to see and disrupt the hegemonic ideologies that attempt to constrain the Black body. As bell hooks argues, before one can disrupt these ideologies, one has to have the courage to stare in the eyes of their oppressor and without fear of repercussions, fight for the same opportunities that are bestowed upon those of the White body. The Black body has to decolonize their minds and strip away the hegemonic inscriptions of what it not only means to be Black in America, but what Black work looks like in America. The Black body has to peel back the layers that blind them to the world of opportunity that is truly available. Once exposed to available opportunities, the Black community has to create deliberate and authentic career exploration spaces that allow the Black body to define who they are and who they want to become while developing a pathway toward successfully agreeing their ultimate goal. As bell hooks (1992a) states, "By courageously looking, we defiantly declare: 'not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality'" (p. 116).

As this thesis highlighted, the *homeplace* is the immediate system that can counter the limiting and constraining ideologies of what it means to be Black in America. In addition to the homeplace, the classroom and television emerged as spaces that allow for an authentic career

identity to emerge. The classroom is one of the primary spaces for a developing individual to explore and identify their future career desires, especially for the adolescent body. Through nurturing and secure teacher-student relationships, the teacher not only plants the seed of possibility, but he or she nourishes this seed by authentically seeing the student for whom he or she is, and the world of possibility that is available for that student. This nurturing teacher challenges the way the young person sees the world around them, and how this young person sees his or herself within this world. As Dr. Elders states: “We all have an obligation to do everything we can” to help those that we come into contact with everyday. This is especially true for those who look up to one for guidance, support, and a sense of hope and connection. As Boucher (2014) highlighted, it is through an allyhood with a parent, sibling, or teacher that feelings of solidarity and relatedness foster an environment where one can begin to decolonize their mind of the negative inscriptions ascribed to them and allow their authentic identity and vocational-self to emerge.

While television is not within the physical and proximal space of the developing person, the Black-leading character, such as Claire Huxtable, felt real to the young person and became someone the interviewees looked up to, felt connected with, and wanted to be like. While Claire Huxtable from *The Cosby Show* was a fictional person, the traits she embodied were admired as the interviewees continued to strive to adorn her character traits throughout their adult development.

Communication is the vehicle used to create, constrain, or flourish a person’s secure identity development (McLuhan, 1964). It is the vehicle to change one’s reality through the positive interpersonal relationships within one’s microsystem and mesosystem that a system can be put in place to negotiate the hegemonic ideologies that attempt to constrain and compromise

the developing and exploring Black body. The strong, empowering, smart, and courageous Black characters who exude from the television, may not be part of one's physical space, but the communicative messages that permeate and reach the developing person are reality shaping. It was important for the Black teachers who were part of this study to see an image of self in mediated spaces. As one reflected across their lifelines, while these spaces were important, it was the allies within one's microsystem and mesosystem spaces who were credited for helping the participants to become the person they are today. What emerged from the data was the importance of teacher-allies.

Children can develop a positive image of self from a nurturing allyhood with a teacher that may not share the same color of skin, but values and *sees the* person for who he or she is and all the possibilities that one has ahead of them. As this study revealed, while it is important to have equal representation, especially in the classroom, it is just as important to have an ally who will fight and advocate for the student and the possibilities within the student.

Through the journey of each interviewee, each participant revealed the communicative infrastructures that made him or her the person and teacher they are today. While each story was unique, each highlighted the importance of authentic bonds with someone who believed in them, and at times, more than they believed in themselves.



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## APPENDIX A

### IRB FORM



#### OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH



**Physical Address**

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Norfolk, Virginia 23508

**Mailing Address**

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1 Old Dominion University  
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Phone(757) 683-3460  
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DATE: September 7, 2016

TO: Thomas Socha  
FROM: Old Dominion University Arts & Letters Human Subjects Review Committee

PROJECT TITLE: [949036-1] Career Identity Narratives of Black Teachers Across the Lifespan  
(Working Title)

REFERENCE #:  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS  
DECISION DATE: September 7, 2016

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 6.2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Arts & Letters Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Randy Gainey at 757-683-4794 or [rgainey@odu.edu](mailto:rgainey@odu.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Arts & Letters Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

## APPENDIX B

### TWENTY STATEMENT CAREER TEST (TSCT)

#### Twenty Statement Career Test (TSCT)

Step 1: Write down twenty different responses to the question “When I grow up...” from your younger (childhood – adolescence) to your young adult self.

Step 2: Indicate throughout what phase(s) you wanted to pursue this career identity. Give yourself **five** minutes to complete this task.

When I grow up...	Childhood (7 – 12 yrs. old)	Adolescence (13 – 18 yrs. old)	Young Adulthood (19 – 40 yrs. old)
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
16.			
17.			
18.			
19.			
20.			

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

#### Research Protocol for Interview

##### 1. Ask the following:

- a. Age:
- b. Sex:
- c. Which of the following terms best describes your understanding of your racial background:
  - Black
  - Bi-Racial (Black and one other race). Other race is?
  - Multi-Racial (Black and more than one other race). Other races are?
- d. Current level of education
- e. Teacher Certification (Year)
- f. Number of years teaching (taught)
- g. Family of origin:
  - (1) During the times when you were in school (K-12), how many individuals lived in the household where you grew up?
  - (2) Do you have siblings? If so, what are their ages?
  - (3) Which of the following would you consider to be the best description of your caregiver system while growing up?

#### Parent/Guardian Demographics

Mother only

Father only

Grandmother only

Grandfather only

Other Relative only

Mother and Father

Mother and Mother

Father and Father

Grandmother and Grandfather

Grandmother and Mother

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- (4) Median household income in the US is about **\$51,000**. In your family of origin, during the time you were in school (K-12), would you say your household's income was above, equal to, or below this amount?

**2. Provide participants with the LIM grid and share the following:**

- a. Reflect on the communicative experiences (e.g. conversations, television show they watched, something they read) you have had over their lifetime that impacted your decision to become a teacher.
- b. Indicate their current age on the bottom of the grid.
- c. Recall career communicative experiences of their past and starting in their childhood through their present age and beyond, and plot these communicative experiences as points on the grid.
- d. For all the points on the grid ask the following questions:**
  - i. As best as you can recall, please describe the communicative setting (person- parent, friend, teacher; television show).
  - ii. Where were you during his communicative experience?
  - iii. How did it begin?
  - iv. Describe the communicative experience and how you felt during it?
  - v. How did you feel prior to this experience, during, and after?
  - vi. Why were you inspired by this communicative experience?
  - vii. In what ways were you inspired by this communicative experience?
  - viii. In what ways did this conversation lead to you becoming a teacher?
  - ix. Is there anything else you would like to add about this communicative experience that influenced your career identity?

**3. Have participants complete the Twenty Statements Career Test(TSCT).**

- a. Step 1: Write down twenty different responses to the question "When I grow up..." from your younger and throughout your young adult self.
- b. Step 2: Indicate throughout what phase(s) you wanted to pursue this career identity. Give yourself five minutes to complete this task.

**4. Conclude the study and thank participants for their time and feedback.**

## APPENDIX D

## LIFELINE INTERVIEW METHOD AND TWENTY STATEMENT CAREER TEST RESULTS

## Participant 1

<b>Current Age: 49</b>		
<b>Desired Career Path/Communicative Experience</b>	<b>Age of Desired Career /Experience</b>	<b>Strength of Interest Toward Desired Career/Impact toward Desired Career</b>
<b>Elementary Teacher</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Grade (approx. 7)</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>High School Coach</b>	<b>High School - approx. 9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> 14 – 15 years old</b>	<b>7.5</b>
<b>Sibling</b>	<b>High School approx. 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> 16 – 17 years old</b>	<b>8.5</b>
<b>College Professor/Program</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>8.5</b>
<b>PhD Students</b>	<b>Senior in College Approx. 21</b>	<b>9.5</b>
<b>Travel</b>	<b>30's</b>	<b>10</b>

## Twenty Statement Career Test

<b>When I Grow Up...</b>	<b>Childhood (7 – 12 yrs. old)</b>	<b>Adolescence (13 – 18 yrs. old)</b>	<b>Young Adulthood (19 – 40 yrs. old)</b>
1. Alive	X		
2. Free	X	X	
3. Travel		X	
4. Work		X	X
5. Successful		X	X
6. Educate		X	X
7. Inspire Others			X
8. Involved		X	X
9. Community			X
10. Empowered			X

11. Selfless			X
12. Spiritual		X	X
13. Connected			X
14. Father			X
15. Partner			X
16. Learner	X	X	X
17. Mentor			X
18. Motivator		X	X
19. Teammate	X	X	X
20. Friend		X	X

## Participant 2

### Lifeline Interview Method Grid Results

Current Age: 39		
Desired Career Path/Communicative Experience	Age of Desired Career /Experience	Strength of Interest Toward Desired Career/Impact toward Desired Career
Sports TV	5	10
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher	9	8
9 <sup>th</sup> Grade English	14	6.5
Stepdad Suit	16	10
Accounting Teacher	17	7
H.S. Teacher	18	9.5
Intern Student Teaching	21	9.5
Parks and Rec	27	10
Leave Job	34	10

### Twenty Statement Career Test

When I Grow Up...	Childhood (7 – 12 yrs. Old)	Adolescence (13 – 18 yrs. Old)	Young Adulthood (19 – 40 yrs. Old)
1. I want to be a pro-athlete	X	X	
2. I want to help others		X	X
3. I want to help students			X

4. I want to help less privileged		X	X
5. I want to be a teacher			X
6. I want to be a coach		X	X
7. I want to create programs/course			X
8. I want to lead adults			X
9. I want to serve others		X	X
10. I want to play sports	X	X	X
11. I want to learn	X	X	X

### Participant 3

#### Lifeline Interview Method Grid Results

<b>Current Age: 63</b>		
<b>Desired Career Path/Communicative Experience</b>	<b>Age of Desired Career /Experience</b>	<b>Strength of Interest Toward Desired Career/Impact toward Desired Career</b>
M. Physics	15 – 16	8
Computer Programmer/ AF	17	9.5
Jet Engine Mech.	18 – 19	8.5
UK WPN Mechanic	24	11
VOC WPN SP	24	11
Greece	27	11
Avan	29	11
Operations Systems Management/ Spec Super. Dessert Storm	31 - 46	3
First Sgt.	46	11
Car Dealer	47	3
Long Term Substitute	48	5.5
Hired as Teacher	49	8.5

#### Twenty Statement Career Test

When I Grow Up...	Childhood (7 – 12 yrs. old)	Adolescence (13 – 18 yrs. old)	Young Adulthood (19 – 40 yrs. old)
1. Molecular Physics		X	
2. Jet Engine Mechanic		X	

3. Computer Programmer		X	
4. Nuclear Weapons Inspector			X
5. Personnel Manger			X
6. Human Resource Manager			X
7. First Sergeant			X
8. Entrepreneur			X
9. Teacher			X
10. Clean Energy			X
11. Vehicle Aud. (?)			X
12. Fed Reserve			X
13. Restore Cars			X

#### Participant 4

##### Lifeline Interview Method Grid Results

<b>Current Age: 62</b>		
<b>Desired Career Path/Communicative Experience</b>	<b>Age of Desired Career /Experience</b>	<b>Strength of Interest Toward Desired Career/Impact toward Desired Career</b>
Teacher (Brothers/Sisters)	6	10
Nun Nurse (Brothers/Sisters/Parents)	14	10
Teacher (Parents)	16	10
Teacher/Counselor (Friends)	21	9.5
Teacher (Friends)	22	8.5
Vocational Eval. (Colleagues/Boss)	30	8.5
School Counselor (Boss & Husband)	40	9
AP (Colleagues)	45	9
ED.S. (Classmates)	50	9.5
Principal-HS	52	10
Executive Director	62	10



### Twenty Statement Career Test

When I Grow Up...	Childhood (7 – 12 yrs. old)	Adolescence (13 – 18 yrs. old)	Young Adulthood (19 – 40 yrs. old)
1. Teacher (Elem)	X		
2. Nurse (Nun)		X	
3. Teacher (Special Ed.)		X	
4. Counselor (School)			X
5. Vocational Teacher			X
6. Voc. Evaluator			X
7. School Administrator			X
8. Navy		X	

### Participant 5

#### Lifeline Interview Method Grid Results

Current Age: 32		
Desired Career Path/Communicative Experience	Age of Desired Career /Experience	Strength of Interest Toward Desired Career/Impact toward Desired Career
Lawyer	12	11
Computer Specialist	17	8
Math	20	8.5
Teacher	23	10
Math Specialist	50	10

### Twenty Statement Career Test

When I Grow Up...	Childhood (7 – 12 yrs. old)	Adolescence (13 – 18 yrs. old)	Young Adulthood (19 – 40 yrs. old)
1. Lawyer	X		
2. Army		X	
3. Broadway Singer		X	
4. Saxophone Player		X	
5. Pianist		X	
6. Computer Science			X
7. Math Major			X

8. Math Teacher			X
9. Music Engineer		X	
10. Author		X	

### Participant 6

#### Lifeline Interview Method Grid Results

Current Age: 46		
Desired Career Path/Communicative Experience	Age of Desired Career /Experience	Strength of Interest Toward Desired Career/Impact toward Desired Career
Music	6	10
Medical Shows	16	10
Mom	23	8.5
Change	45 - 46	10.5

#### Twenty Statement Career Test

When I Grow Up...	Childhood (7 – 12 yrs. old)	Adolescence (13 – 18 yrs. old)	Young Adulthood (19 – 40 yrs. old)
1. Musical Artist	X	X	X
2. OB/GYN		X	
3. Teacher (Biology)			X
4. Artist (Art School)			X
5. Chef			X
6. Success 101 Teacher			X
7. World Traveler			X

**Participant 7****Lifeline Interview Method Grid Results**

<b>Current Age: 33</b>		
<b>Desired Career Path/Communicative Experience</b>	<b>Age of Desired Career /Experience</b>	<b>Strength of Interest Toward Desired Career/Impact toward Desired Career</b>
Teacher (Mom)	5	10
Lawyer (Teachers/Mentors)	15	5.5
Teacher/Principal (Educators)	18	11
Superintendent	33	11

**Twenty Statement Career Test**

<b>When I Grow Up...</b>	<b>Childhood (7 – 12 yrs. old)</b>	<b>Adolescence (13 – 18 yrs. old)</b>	<b>Young Adulthood (19 – 40 yrs. old)</b>
1. Teacher	X	X	X
2. Lawyer		X (15 y/o)	
3. Broadcast Journalist	X	X	
4. Principal	X	X	X
5. Superintendent		X	X
6. Actor	X		

**Participant 8****Lifeline Interview Method Grid Results**

<b>Current Age: 62</b>		
<b>Desired Career Path/Communicative Experience</b>	<b>Age of Desired Career /Experience</b>	<b>Strength of Interest Toward Desired Career/Impact toward Desired Career</b>
Lawyer (Claire Huxtable)	5	2
Doctor (Television)	12	3
Computer Scientist (Hype)	18	8.5
Teacher (Dr. X)	20	10
Admin (Dr. X)	25	8.5

### Twenty Statement Career Test

When I Grow Up...	Childhood (7 – 12 yrs. old)	Adolescence (13 – 18 yrs. old)	Young Adulthood (19 – 40 yrs. old)
1. Lawyer	X		
2. Doctor	X		
3. Scientist		X	
4. Politician		X	
5. Computer Scientist		X	
6. Teacher			X
7. Administrator			X
8. Non-profit			X
9. Entrepreneur		X	
10. Actress	X		

### Participant 9

#### Lifeline Interview Method Grid Results

Current Age: 44		
Desired Career Path/Communicative Experience	Age of Desired Career /Experience	Strength of Interest Toward Desired Career/Impact toward Desired Career
Dancer/Princess/Cashier/Teacher	5	5
Attorney – Claire on The Cosby Show	12	8.5
Politician – Met Jesse Jackson, Gov. Wilder; Civil Rights Attorney	18	9.5
Teacher (Worked at daycare and helped professor)	20	9.5
Teacher	44	10.5
Life Coach	50	10.5

### Twenty Statement Career Test

When I Grow Up...	Childhood (7 – 12 yrs. old)	Adolescence (13 – 18 yrs. old)	Young Adulthood (19 – 40 yrs. old)
1. Princess	X		
2. Dancer	X		
3. Teacher	X		
4. Cashier	X		
5. Attorney	X	X	X
6. Politician		X	X
7. Teacher			X
8. Life Coach			X

## VITA

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### Educational Background

Thomas Nelson Community College Major: Liberal Arts Education	2007 - 2009
Christopher Newport University Major: Communication Studies	2009 - 2012
Old Dominion University Masters of Arts: Lifespan and Digital Communication	2014 - Present

### Honors and Awards

Magna Cum Laude Academic Award, Christopher Newport University	2012
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### Experience

Director, Academies of Hampton, Hampton City Schools	2016 - Present
Teacher Assistant, Old Dominion University	2015 - 2016
Program Administrator, Newport News Public Schools	2014 – 2016
Director, Leadership Programs and Communications, Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce	2012 - 2014

### Publications and Presentations

Socha, T. J., Bernat, S., Harris, S., Hill, B., & Hurd, V. (2016, April). *Peak Interpersonal Communication over the Lifespan: Conceptualization and Pilot Study*. A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern States Communication Association, Austin, Texas.

Ciampoli, L., Goode, M., Harris, S., Hurd, V., Mitchell, S., Mundzic, N., Petrovic-Mudzic, I., State, C., & Suggs, C. (2014). *Excerpts of Childhood Food Autobiographies*. A presentation at the 2014 Old Dominion University Literary Festival, Norfolk, Virginia.

Hurd, V. (2012, April). Everyday use of Twitter and Black Blogs as a Means of Black Resistance. A paper presented at the annual Christopher Newport University PAIDEIA Conference, Newport News, Virginia.