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## Teachers of Color Creating and Recreating Identities in Suburban Schools

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## Teachers of Color Creating and Recreating Identities in Suburban Schools

### Abstract

In this qualitative study, I explored the socialization experiences of eight teachers in two suburban high schools, and how they described their in - school identities. The findings from the study revealed how the participants constructed their identities differently for reasons that included wanting to deflect particular stereotypic images of their cultural/ethnic group or mitigating their own discomfort in revealing more private aspects of their core identities. The study offers implications for teacher education programs and the critical role that they play in preparing preservice teachers of color to work in suburban school settings, and in exposing all teacher candidates to diverse representations of teachers.

### Keywords

Exploratory Study, Constant Comparative Method, Teachers of Color, Suburban Schools, Identity Formation, Socialization

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## Teachers of Color Creating and Recreating Identities in Suburban Schools

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*In this qualitative study, I explored the socialization experiences of eight teachers in two suburban high schools, and how they described their in-school identities. The findings from the study revealed how the participants constructed their identities differently for reasons that included wanting to deflect particular stereotypic images of their cultural/ethnic group or mitigating their own discomfort in revealing more private aspects of their core identities. The study offers implications for teacher education programs and the critical role that they play in preparing preservice teachers of color to work in suburban school settings, and in exposing all teacher candidates to diverse representations of teachers. Keywords: Exploratory Study, Constant Comparative Method, Teachers of Color, Suburban Schools, Identity Formation, Socialization*

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The education field has long acknowledged the important role that teachers of color play in diversifying school faculty, mentoring and meeting the academic and social needs of minority and non-minority students, and introducing alternative pedagogies to their students because of their unique and diverse cultural and racial/ethnic backgrounds. Scholars have voiced the urgent need for the presence of teachers of color in public schools to support the projected increase in the number of minority students (Branch, 2001; Cochran-Smith; 1995; Justiz & Kameen, 1988), and they are also critical in serving as “role models” to minority students (Branch, 2001; Burant et al., 2002; Rong & Preissle, 1997), many of whom will never have a minority teacher in any of their classrooms before they graduate from high school. Moreover, teachers of color often bring to their classrooms alternative pedagogies that counter traditional notions of schooling and learning by introducing minority students to instructional practices that are “culturally relevant” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000).

While many in the field would agree that minority teachers are needed in our schools, a Schools and Staffing Survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics in 2003-2004 revealed that teachers of color only comprise 16.9% of the nation’s teaching force. According to these statistics, teachers of color work and teach in school settings where they are generally underrepresented (King, 1993). Within the literature on teachers of color that exists, the field is lacking an understanding of the experiences of these educators in predominantly European American suburban schools, and in particular, the ways in which their identities are negotiated in places where the presence of other minority teachers are few and far between. The present study contributes to the gap of knowledge that exists in the literature about the professional and socialization experiences of teachers of color who choose to teach in mainly European American suburban schools.

### **Multicultural Education**

Multicultural theorists have discussed the ways in which multicultural education connects with ethnic identity formation particularly for teachers and students (Gay, 1999; Sleeter, 1996). While multicultural scholars have divergent perspectives about the role and purposes for utilizing multicultural education as a framework for teaching and learning,

Sleeter (1996) argues that it “teaches directly about political and economic oppression and discrimination, and prepares young people to use social action” (p. 7). It is not simply a teaching tool to engage students in critical conversations about inequities of all forms that exist in society, but it cultivates students as activists who challenge the hegemonic structures of power and dominance that privilege certain groups of people while keeping others in a perpetual state of oppression. Understanding then the role of multicultural education as a transformative teaching and learning tool, it can also be regarded as a “social movement articula[ting] counter-ideologies that frame issues and group identity differently from the dominant ideology” (p. 226). For teachers, this means confronting their own biases and prejudices towards different individuals, and challenging their tacit acceptance of privileges that come with being a member of dominant group(s). But it also means constructing identities of “counter-ideologies” that “redefines” (p. 226) the ways in which oppressed individuals are positioned in society. Furthermore, Gay (1999) argues that teachers play a pivotal role in helping students of diverse backgrounds develop “counter-ideologies” that cultivate “positive self-concepts” and identities apart from negative perceptions of their ethnic and cultural groups projected by wider society (p. 202).

Gay also (1999) contends that for some minorities, their identities are constructed and informed by their race, culture, gender, religion, or language (p. 201). Other social dimensions such as, sexuality or socioeconomic standing can also define their identities. Gay further argues that identity construction is an important aspect of multicultural education: “Ethnic identity is a powerful need and valuable resource that should be employed and facilitated by instructional leaders” (p. 196). There is a correlation between the self-actualization process for teachers and the extent to which they will discuss identity issues with their students. Teachers who are more conscious of their emerging identities will display a greater comfort level in helping their students wrestle with their own complicated identities, and unlearn deficit perspectives about their cultural/ethnic groups.

### **The Role of Teacher Education Programs in Teacher Identity Development**

Teacher education programs are highly influential in constructing the images of teaching and teachers for preservice candidates. Britzman (1986) contends that teacher education programs need to assist their students in demystifying traditional ideas about teaching and teacher identities, and to help them construct new professional identities that incorporate a keen sense of personal history, cooperation, and engagement with students and other individuals in their schools, and resist larger social forces that hinder the work of empowering teachers, learners, and schools. She believes that student teachers need to look beyond institutional images of teachers to understand how their histories have shaped and influenced their understanding of the “social forces which directly affect their lives” (p. 452), and have subsequently affected their understanding of schools, students, teaching, and learning. Furthermore, Lytle (1995) argues that teaching and teacher education need to be regarded as “cultural, social, historical and political” arenas (p. 11), yet many teacher education programs do not encourage their students to interrogate commonly accepted ideas and images about teachers. Teacher education programs should expose their students to alternative teaching identities that recognize “other possible purposes” and iterations (Clarke, 2008, p. 191) of their profession. The idea of fostering alternative images of teachers to preservice is particularly critical for students of color who plan on entering the profession. They need to be prepared to teach in a field that is typically dominated by European American teachers, and where they can expect to be one of only a few minority teachers in their future schools.

## **Teachers of Color in Suburban Schools**

There were several themes that emerged from the limited availability of empirical studies (Agee, 1998; Hoggard, 1973; Mabokela & Madsen, 2003; Madsen & Mabokela, 2005; Castaneda et al., 2006) that examined the experiences of teachers of color in suburban school settings. The first finding is that teachers of color felt marginalized and isolated in their schools (Agee, 1998; Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). In Agee's case study of a preservice teacher, she noted that Latasha became an "outsider" among the European American teachers because her race and ethnicity did not align with the "institutional ideology...of the school" (p. 22). The second major theme that emerged from the studies connected to the idea that teachers of color had to prove their value and expertise as teachers in their schools (Castaneda, et al., 2006; Hoggard, 1973; Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). For instance, the African American teachers in Madsen and Mabokela's (2005) study believed that the European American teachers had "low expectations" of their professional abilities (p. 32) and they were recognized only as "token representatives" of their cultural group (p. 31). A third theme that resonated from the studies is the idea that the teachers of color did not feel adequately supported professionally in their schools (Castaneda et al., 2006; Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). For the participants in Madsen and Mabokela's study (2005), the lack of support they felt in their schools heightened their sense of invisibility and created "group boundaries" in their desegregated suburban schools between the European American and African American teachers.

## **The Racialized Experiences of Teachers of Color**

Research studies that have examined the professional experiences of teachers of color across a number of school settings, and in predominantly white schools, have cited how they are often connected to racial incidents or troubling expectations or perceptions about these educators. Burant et al. (2002) cite that teachers of color feel pressured to "be just like all the other (mainly Euro-American) teachers to be successful in the profession" (p. 6). The standard of teaching continues to be informed by Eurocentric constructions of instruction, knowledge, and social behaviors. The research of Hoggard (1973) and Mabokela and Madsen (2003) further support the idea that African American teachers who resemble or behave like their European American colleagues are able to form friendships with them more easily than those who do not. Ramanathan's (2000) study of 47 Asian American teachers in the Midwest revealed that they were willing to "nullify their Asian roots [and] adopt cultural white values" (p. 11) in order to be included into the community of teachers in their schools. Furthermore, teachers of color feel "invisible" in their schools and are often frustrated by a lack of professional support (Castaneda et al., 2006; Mabokela & Madsen, 2003), meaningful discussions about diversity (Castaneda et al., 2006), and experiences with subtle forms of stereotyping/racism (Goodwin et al., 2006; Newton, 2003). The findings from these studies suggest that teachers of color need more professional and social support in mainly white school settings, as well as, critical dialogs about the troubling perceptions about people of color and interactions with European American teachers that can occur in these contexts.

## **LGBT Educators in Schools: The Challenges of "Coming Out"**

It is also important to broaden the notion of identity beyond racial or cultural categories particularly as they pertain to teachers of color. To limit conversations about teachers' of colors' experiences in schools to just these factors marginalizes perspectives offered by educators who self identify in other ways, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or

transgendered (LGBT). For example, Silin (1999) underscores the multiple identities that shaped his life: "I am both a white, male scholar born into the middle class and a Jewish, gay, early childhood educator" (p. 103). He reminds us that LGBT individuals do not fit neatly into social categories (p. 103) but that their lives and identities are complicated and diverse.

In a collection of literature written about the experiences of LGBT teachers in K-12 and higher education school settings, the studies examined how comfortable they felt "coming out" to administrators and colleagues, the extent to which they felt the school climate was a positive one for LGBT educators, and the extent to which they were supported by their school leaders and co-workers when they revealed their sexual identities to them. The literature suggests that the reasons for LGBT teachers choosing to "come out" or not in their schools are complicated and varied. Bliss and Harris' (2008) study of 34 LGBT teachers revealed that a "fear of exposure and fear of losing a job" (p. 18) were the two main reasons why 74% of the participants did not elect to disclose their sexual identities to a principal. On the other hand, for the teachers who chose to "come out" to their principals and colleagues, most of them indicated that they felt supported and accepted (p. 19). In DeJean's study of (2007) 5 gay teachers and 5 lesbian teachers, he reported that most of them had vivid memories of "feeling fearful, being excluded, or having to hide their sexual orientation within the K-12 system" (p. 66) when they were students, yet as adults, all of them are "out" in their classrooms. DeJean (2007) also argues that school location and leadership impact how accepted and welcomed LGBT educators might feel in their schools. All of the participants resided in areas of California that made it "easier to remain out within their classrooms" (p. 68).

Furthermore, in Smith, Wright, Reilly, and Esposito's (2008) survey of 514 LGBT educators spread across all 50 states, they revealed that most of the participants believed that their schools were "homophobic, racist, sexist, and transphobic" (p. 19). Almost half of the participants had negative experiences that ranged from having rumors spread about them, being harassed, and receiving very little civil protections or benefits offered to the heterosexual teachers (p. 19). Many of the participants also felt as if their important life events would not be recognized in same manner as their heterosexual colleagues' events (p. 19). The researchers concluded that based on the survey results, it is difficult to work in a school as an LGBT educator. On the other hand, for those who had decided to "come out" they reported positive outcomes overall. While I did not specifically investigate the socialization experiences of LGBT teachers of color in suburban schools, for one of the participants, Corey, much of our conversations centered on the problematic interactions he had with some of the other teachers because of his sexual orientation. In the literature that was discussed, most of the studies collected survey responses from LGBT teachers that did not provide descriptive individual responses from the teachers about the issues they encountered in their schools. The data from Corey's interviews in this study illuminated specific experiences and difficulties he encountered in one of the Pine Ridge schools.

### **Researcher's Position in the Study**

My interest in the study of teachers of color in suburban schools emerged from my professional experiences as a Language Arts/English Asian American teacher in two different suburban school districts. I worked in schools with a small number of teachers of color. I became good friends with a few of them, and we shared stories about the uncomfortable interactions we had with some of the European American teachers. For instance, one teacher interrupted my class to ask me how Christmas was celebrated in Japan. I promptly responded by telling him that I did not know the answer to his question because I am Korean American. Even after I left teaching to pursue graduate studies, I remained interested in researching this

topic further through a formal study because very few studies exist about the professional experiences of teachers of color in suburban schools. I wanted to understand what the salient issues were for these educators as they were socialized into their schools.

## **Methods**

As indicated in the beginning of the article, I investigated the socialization experiences of eight teachers of color who worked in two different suburban high schools and how these experiences intersected with issues of identity. The following questions were explored: How do teachers of color talk about their in-school identities in two predominantly European American suburban high schools? How are their identities mediated and informed by their socialization experiences within their schools? As several studies on minority teachers have suggested, they do not always feel comfortable invoking their own cultural ethos<sup>1</sup> among European American faculty/staff members, and they often experience explicit or implicit expectations to conform to particular norms e.g. pedagogy, speech, or dress that are representative of the European American teachers in their schools (Burant et al., 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Mabokela & Madsen, 2003).

### ***Research Site***

In an effort to find a research site and participants, I sent out a number of letters and emails to district superintendents in suburban school districts close to where I resided at the time. The assistant superintendent of Pine Ridge was one of the few administrators who responded to my letter. He arranged for me to speak to all of the principals and assistant principals at a 9-12 administrators meeting on October 30, 2008. At the end of that meeting, the principals of both Taft and Roosevelt High Schools expressed an interest in having me present information sessions about the study to the teachers of color in their schools, and have me conduct research in their schools.

The township of Pine Ridge<sup>2</sup> is located a few miles outside of a major metropolitan city in the Northeast, and is known regionally as an affluent town with academically competitive schools. Pine Ridge has two high schools, Roosevelt High School and Taft High School with similar student demographics where European American students comprise approximately 75% of the student body<sup>3</sup>; however, there is more socioeconomic diversity at Roosevelt High School than there is at Taft. For instance, Roosevelt has twice the number of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch programs (10%) in 2006-2007 compared to Taft.

### ***Research Participants***

In total there were 8 teachers who volunteered to be participants. The only criteria I used for selecting the participants is that they self-identified as a person of color, and were employed as a teacher at either Taft or Roosevelt High School. The following table offers information about the participant's name, high school, area(s) of specialization, race/ethnicity, and age at the time of the study:

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<sup>1</sup> Barnard (2000) defines ethos as a "refer[ence] to the customs, the traditions, also the feelings, the collective emotions, either of a given culture or of a given event which is defined according to cultural norms." (p. 151).

<sup>2</sup> All of the names of the town, district, and schools were changed.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics obtained from greatschools.net, and the New Jersey Department of Education 2006-2007.

Name	Age	High School	Area(s) of Specialization	Race/Ethnicity
Corey Smith	37	Roosevelt	French and Spanish	African American
James Moore	51	Roosevelt	Math	Indian American
David Lyons	42	Taft	Special Education	African American
Larry Charles	49	Taft	Applied Technology, Small Engines	African American
Sophia Lewis	30	Taft	Math	African American
Rebecca Williams	57	Taft	Spanish	African American
Mary Riley	65	Taft	English, U.S. History, African American Studies	African American
Lauren Davis	41	Taft	Math	Hispanic American

**Table 1: Research Participants**

### *Data Collection*

I began my research in February 2009 and continued through June 2009. I chose to design the research as an exploratory study because I sought to understand how the participants were socialized into their suburban high school, and how they talked about their identities within this setting. Since there are so few preexisting studies about this topic, an exploratory qualitative study enabled me to “explore little-understood phenomena [and] discover important categories of meaning” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Furthermore, a qualitative approach enabled the research study to unfold and emerge instead of designing it to be “tightly prefigured” (p. 3), which was important because I wanted to co-construct certain aspects of the research design with the participants. I wanted the teachers to have a sense of ownership over the study, and as a researcher it was important to mitigate the power dynamics that often exist between researchers and participants by inviting the teachers to take a more active role in the research process (Creswell, 2007). Based on the feedback I received from the teachers, the main method of collecting data evolved into weekly semi-structured interviews (also known as research conversations). I met with each teacher during his/her free period, approximately 8-10 times, for about 45 minutes per session. I gained prior consent from each teacher to tape record each meeting, and I took handwritten notes as well. IRB approval was sought and granted prior to the start of the study.

### *Data Analysis*

I utilized aspects of Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) grounded theory method as a framework for analyzing and coding the transcripts from the weekly conversations with the participants because it is an effective tool for rigorous, systematic analysis of qualitative data. I should state here that with grounded theory methods, the researcher is establishing a “discursive set of theoretical categories” (Creswell, 2007, p. 160); however, I approached the present study as mainly an exploratory one that utilizes grounded theory methods. I viewed the study as an opportunity to initiate critical conversations about the topic of in-school identities with the participants, to develop preliminary theories about what they are experiencing in their schools, and to present implications for further research around the findings.

I utilized “initial, focused, and axial” coding (Charmaz, 2006) to analyze and organize the data. First, I quickly read through all of the interview data and openly coded them. Next, I carefully sifted through the transcripts line-by-line and did more focused, critical coding and took notes about important ideas that emerged from them. I also used “constant comparative methods” to see notice similarities/differences across participants’ stories that revolve around

certain ideas/issues. Third, I enlisted “axial coding” and looked over the coded ideas from the transcripts, and I identified major themes that encompassed the multifaceted and complex “properties” (Seale, 1999, p. 97) of the approximately 136 socialization incidents and stories that were shared by the participants. I also used member checks and asked the participants to verify the accuracy of the data by reviewing specific transcripts, which they had all agreed to do. Any omissions or inaccuracies in the transcribed data were corrected upon the request of the participants. One of the major themes I derived from the data at the selective coding stage related to the teachers’ revelations about their identity construction within their school, and in many cases, their in-school identities were influenced by their socialization experiences interacting with their European American colleagues.

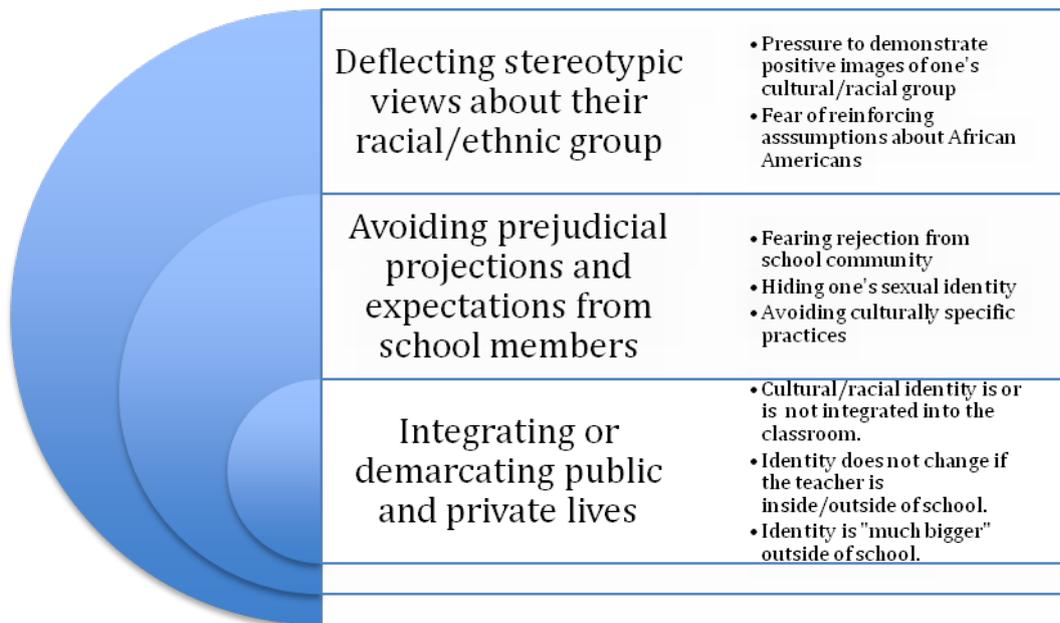
### **Findings: Consciously Constructing Identities**

The research conversations I had with the participants appear to reveal that they consciously constructed their in-school identity, meaning that they may have made decisions about the parts of their identities that they were willing to reveal to members of their school community, and the parts of their identities that they were not willing to bring into their schools. For example, David Lyons stated to me that he is “the same way as a person, in my beliefs, and my appearance.” He does not seem to believe that his identity ever changes, and he is the same person inside Taft High School as he is outside of it. The responses that Corey, Sophia, James, and Larry offered to the questions (particularly numbers 1 and 2 in Table 3) I asked them were also compelling in the sense that some of them stated that their identities remained the same whether they were in their school or outside of it, whereas other teachers seemed to hide certain aspect of their identities in order to feel more comfortable around their European American colleagues, or to fit into the normative culture of their school. In the next several sections, I elected to focus on these four participants, at times, I also mention the responses of the other participants as a way of comparing their responses and to illuminate the subtle differences in their answers.

<b>Individual Interview Protocol: Professional Experiences</b>
1. How would you describe your identity (who you are) outside of the high school?*
2. Does your identity change or remain the same when you are in this high school?*
3. Do you believe a teacher of color is able to easily integrate into the school community here at the high school? Why or why not?
4. Describe your experience being a minority teacher in this high school.
5. Is the high school accepting of diverse perspectives, cultures, and/or backgrounds? Explain.
6. Did the school make a concerted effort to support you when you were hired to teach at this high school? Explain.
7. Do teachers of color and European American teachers interact well in this high school? Why or why not?

**Table 3: Interview Questions**

Within the main idea “Consciously Constructing Identities” there were three central ideas that appeared to emerge from the participants’ responses to questions 1 and 2 in Table 3. Their reasons (please see Figure 1) for maintaining or altering their in-school identities seemed to stem from wanting to deflect stereotypic views that the European American teachers might have about their racial/ethnic group, avoid certain perceptions and/or expectations from their colleagues, or perhaps to demarcate how much or how little their public and private identities overlap inside of their schools.



**Figure 1: Consciously Constructing Identities**

### ***Deflecting Stereotypic Views about Their Racial/Ethnic Group***

One reason why some of the participants may have wanted to alter their in-school identities from their out-of-school identities, was to avoid or divert stereotypic perceptions about their racial/ethnic group. An example of this is if a participant felt responsible for altering preexisting assumptions other teachers might have his/her racial/ethnic group.

Sophia shared a story with me during one of our weekly meetings that appeared to demonstrate her extreme self-consciousness about projecting certain images about African American women, and how she negotiated her identity within her school. Shortly after she was hired as a math teacher at Taft, she discovered that she was pregnant. She struggled intensely during this time with her own discomfort of being “a single mom in this school,” facing the questions other teachers will want to ask her e.g. the identity of the baby’s father, and reconciling her pregnancy with the fact that she was raised in a Catholic home:

[In] September when I came back pregnant, I kept thinking I had to be some type of role model for these kids and here I am, I’m a single mom, Black, pregnant, and I’m just like, I’m not helping, you know, the stereotypes, and you know I felt like there was a lot of weight now on my shoulders...I had to convince myself that I had a job, I’m responsible...I felt like I had to defend myself.

Part of Sophia’s identity appeared enmeshed in how well she represented her ethnic/racial group, and in showing her African American students and her European American colleagues that not all African American women ended up as single mothers. When this did not happen, she may have felt as if she had to “defend [her]self” (Sophia) to anyone who might criticize or question the choices she made in her life. Sophia seemed to believe that she was going to be judged by her colleagues because her status as a single mother did not conform to the

“institutional ideology” of two-parent families in Pine Ridge in which children were raised by a mother and a father.

During an interview with James Moore, he indicated that teachers of color “have to be better than the Caucasian teachers” (James) in terms of their overall qualifications and the expectations that are placed on them that do not appear to be placed on the European American teachers in the math department at Roosevelt. His statement is echoed in Ladson-Billings (2000) argument that “the closer one (a person of color) is able to align oneself to whiteness, the more socially and culturally acceptable one is perceived to be” (p. 17). She underscores the idea that professional competencies in teaching continue to be dictated by those who represent the majority in the field—European American women and men. Teachers of color who “stray” from this “mold” are in danger of being taken less seriously, questioned about their expertise, and perceived as being different.

### *Avoiding Prejudicial Projections and Expectations from School Members*

A second reason why some of the participants may have constructed a different in-school identity from their out-of-school one was to avoid biased projections directed at them from school members i.e. co-workers. For instance, a participant may have chosen to hide vital aspects of his/her core identity i.e. sexuality in order to avoid negative or even hostile reactions from colleagues who are uncomfortable working with someone who is LGBT for instance.

Corey Smith revealed to me early on in the research process that he is a gay man. He talked about the difficulties of sharing this aspect of his identity with the teachers he worked with when he was first hired by Pine Ridge:

So I always feel like there’s this little masquerade...when I first started teaching it was a major problem...I had to really deal with it because every time you’re around they’re always talking about their husband or wives their children and stuff like you can’t talk or share about your life or what you’re about or anything like that. I kind of felt like everything had to be a lie...I always feel like I have that little mask on coming through the door because not everybody can handle it.

Corey may have learned how to cope with working in what he described as a predominantly heterosexual schooling community by hiding his identity as a gay man. He seemed to believe that he had to be cautious about being too open about his sexual identity because not everyone in Pine Ridge is ready to openly embrace and accept a gay teacher. Blount (2000) reminds us that schools have traditionally “regulated the gender norms of students and school workers” (p. 4), and stepping outside of those norms can have severe consequences for someone like Corey especially when he is uncertain of the community’s level of acceptance and tolerance for LGBT individuals. His fear of disclosure is also reflected in the findings of Smith et al.’s (2008) survey of 514 LGBT educators. The researchers cited that 63% of them experienced negative repercussions for “coming out” in their schools (p. 16), and 42% believed that their immediate communities were “unsafe for LGBT people” (p. 15). The researchers concluded that most of the teachers did not believe that their schools were safe or supportive places for LGBT individuals.

Sophia also offered responses that seemed to display her discomfort with revealing certain aspects of herself that are rooted in familial/cultural practices. She was concerned about possibly projecting stereotypes about African Americans to her math colleagues and reinforcing any preexisting perceptions they had about her racial/ethnic group:

I feel like certain things are masked...I try not to do stereotypical Black things here (Taft)...if we're all going to eat like the math department, I won't order fried chicken...just because I don't want to feel like, oh that's typical (of an African American to order this)...I try to do non-Black stereotypical things...or to look like I'm a little more wordly in the sense of like I'm not the stereotypical [African American woman].

Sophia used the same word “mask” as Corey to describe her decision to neutralize her racial identity in order to cope with the discomfort she felt around her European American colleagues. She wanted to appear more “worldly” to her European American colleagues by being the type of African American teacher who is considered “acceptable” to them. Her comments also convey the idea that an African American woman who behaves or dresses in culturally/racially specific ways is not regarded as highly as someone who neutralizes these practices and blends in more with the majority. Burant et al. (2002) and Ladson-Billings (2000) argue that teachers of color are often placed in the position of mitigating their cultural differences and emulating their European American colleagues in order to experience success and acceptance in their schools.

### ***Integrating or Demarcating Public and Private Lives***

A third reason why some of the participants may have maintained or altered their in-school identity was to purposely demarcate their “public lives” from their “private lives.” For some participants, they refuse to change who they are whether they are at Taft or Roosevelt High School or at home or church. Other participants may not feel comfortable merging these two “worlds” together and may believe that it is appropriate to leave their “cultural selves” outside of school.

James offered different reasons for leaving most of his Indian identity outside of his school. For him, sharing his life experiences with the students in his math classes is more important than sharing anything about his cultural background:

Oh I lose all of that...I don't use my identity in terms of how I teach the class. I use my experiences. So, for example, I [write] a Sanskrit symbol (on his lesson plan), which is OM, which means peace. And you know I think it's the kind of thing I want to be encouraging people to embrace, considering what's happening around the world...But in terms of my culture and values, I don't want to impose those values.

While he is highly aware of his cultural identity, James appeared to purposely leave it outside of the school setting because he does not want to force his values or beliefs onto his students. James has lived and seen so many different places around the world. In his math lessons, he tries to connect them to real-life problems that are occurring in the world to educate his students about the plight of individuals living in other countries.

On the other hand, Lauren, another research participant, commented during an interview that, “I don't think about my nationality.” She is half Swedish and half Puerto Rican. Her Puerto Rican father encouraged his children to “pass” as European Americans in order to avoid unpleasant experiences with discrimination. She was not raised to be actively conscious about her cultural roots or identity. The different levels of racial identity awareness exhibited by Lauren and James may be explained by Phinney's (1990) theory of minority identity development in which he characterizes individuals at the early stages of development

(Lauren) as possessing a type of ambivalence towards his/her ethnic culture, whereas, minorities with actualized enacted racial identities are at the final stage of development (James).

Rebecca seemed selective about bringing her “cultural self” into the classroom; however, unlike James, she does not intentionally keep it separate from her professional identity or in her interactions with her students. When I asked her if she could bring all of her “cultural self” with her to Taft high school she responded by saying, “Not all of it, but I do bring some. Every now and then I’ll use something from Black English Vernacular (BEV) or something from Black culture if it makes a point pertinent to what we’re doing.” She offered an example of using BEV to teach her students about irregular verbs in Spanish. The point of introducing it into the class was not to teach them something about her cultural background, but to use it to illustrate how verbs are structurally placed in the Spanish language.

Larry Charles had yet a different response from the other participants to the questions I presented to him. He shared that his cultural identity does not change when he is at Taft. While he has multiple identities outside of school that extend beyond the scope of being a teacher i.e. he is a father, a husband, a jazz musician, his cultural/ethnic identity appeared to remain the same wherever he is. However, he felt responsible for “carry[ing] himself in such a way that hopefully I’m a credit to my community and that people will see me in a way that’s positive” (Larry). Perhaps he wanted to represent his racial/cultural group in a positive light, and that meant being aware of what he says and what he does, his behavior towards other co-workers, and exuding an attitude of acceptance for the people around him. He seemed to want to be a person that his European American co-workers would enjoy working with so they will see him as an asset to the school community. Larry’s efforts to demonstrate that he is a good colleague are reflected in studies conducted by Hoggard (1973) and Madsen and Mabokela, (2005) in which they revealed how African American teachers were expected to prove their value, expertise, and competence in their schools, and to establish positive friendships with their European American colleagues.

As stated earlier, David Lyons maintains the belief that he is “the same way as a person, in my beliefs, and my appearance.” He also appeared to see himself as someone who is vocal about injustices he sees in the world or experiences first hand: “If I see something, I let you know what it is. I am not one to be afraid to speak. I am not one to hide when I see inequality or when I see a problem, I interject myself.” However, David does not seem compelled to “be a credit” to the wider African American community, or to garner approval from his European American colleagues. At times, David’s direct approach in addressing issues of bias or prejudice, as they have impacted him or his students i.e. African American at Taft, appeared to have put him at odds with his colleagues and administrators, but speaking up about these issues is a central part of who he is: “I’ve been around social issues so I call it what it is because I’ve seen enough of it to know what it is.”

## Discussion

The in-school identity construction of the participants in the study may have been influenced not only by the ways in which the teachers were socialized into their schools, but also by other factors related to challenging perceptions about their cultural group, making decisions about the places where they “take up” their cultural identities, and how they negotiated their identities around their colleagues. Both Sophia and Larry appeared to make similar comments about presenting positive images of African American women and men because their colleagues viewed him as representatives of their racial/ethnic group. On the other hand, European American teachers rarely experience the same burden to establish “social bonds” with teachers of color (Sleeter, 1996) in these schools.

The idea of teachers of color being placed in predetermined roles in suburban schools and meeting the expectations of European American school members is also echoed in Mabokela and Madsen's (2003) exploratory study of 14 African American teachers who taught in desegregated suburban schools in the Midwest. One major idea that emerged from their interviews with the participants is that of, "stereotyped role induction" which the researchers described as the "stereotypical views that European Americans held about teachers of color" (p. 105), and their implicit beliefs that the African American teachers needed to be "more European American in dress, language, and interests" (p. 106). Sophia's attempts to be seen as more "worldly" by her math colleagues seemed to demonstrate how she was caught in a "Catch 22" (Burant et al., 2002) because she could neither prevent her colleagues from typecasting her as a "typical African American" (Sophia) nor could she avoid the psychological reminders that she is distinctly different from the European American teachers as well (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

Furthermore, the ways in which the participants were socialized into their schools may also be informed by their understanding of acceptability in terms of particular images of their racial/ethnic groups. This seems to be the case in the stories Sophia shared in which she believed that she had to "defend herself" (Sophia) against those who might judge her because she was an unmarried African American single mother. Sophia may have experienced how "social forces" affected the ways in which she was positioned and perceived within Taft High School (Britzman, 1986, p. 452). She may have felt pressured to construct a professional image that challenged stereotypic views of African Americans, but one that also minimized her own racial/cultural identity instead of troubling the "institutional image" of teachers in this school (Britzman, 1986, p. 442). Corey's extreme discomfort, at the beginning of his teaching career, in disclosing his identity as a gay man, also appears to point to the complicated identities that have to be negotiated for teachers of color who are minorities in more than one sense in suburban schools like Taft or Roosevelt. He seemed to believe that Pine Ridge was not ready to embrace a teacher who is openly gay, and disguised this critical aspect of his core identity in order to protect himself from potentially negative responses from what he perceived was a predominantly heterosexual schooling community. Gay (1999) reminds us that identities are not constructed within single categories of race, culture, gender, or sexuality, but rather a person's identity can be developed from several social dimensions. Corey's story seemed to illuminate the idea that for an African American teacher working in a predominantly European American suburban school, negotiating his sexual identity in this setting presented the biggest challenge for him professionally and personally.

Another idea that emerges from the data suggests that for teachers like James, he made a conscious decision to leave his Indian identity outside of school because he did not see the classroom as an appropriate place for it. According to Gay (1999), the ethnic identities and backgrounds of teachers should be perceived as an asset and a "valuable resource" in schools (p. 196). However, James did not seem to view the classroom as a place where he can or should express his ethnic self. There may be a clear division between public and private spaces for James. It is within the private domain that he appears to be able to fully express his cultural identity and beliefs but in the public domain of school, he believed that he should not "impose" (James) these ideas onto his students. Furthermore, James' perspective about integrating one's culture and teaching was not necessarily informed by his socialization experiences within Roosevelt, but rather, he articulated that it was not important for him to use his cultural framework to inform his pedagogy and practice in the classroom, so his students are not made to feel uncomfortable or pressured to tacitly accept his ideas. On the other hand, for teachers like Corey and Sophia who struggled to negotiate their multiple identities within a strongly European American, heterosexual schooling community, the process of constructing their in-school identities seemed to be fraught with much more

tension and challenges because they did not perceive their school communities as places that supported their out-of-school identities, but rather they experienced a form of socializing pressure to adopt cultural values that were informed by the majority culture (Castaneda, 2006; Ramanathan, 2000) of Pine Ridge.

While the limitations of the sample size make it inadvisable to generalize these findings to other similar suburban school settings, the study has important implications for teacher education programs because of the crucial role that they play in exposing preservice teachers to important ideas about teachers and teaching. Britzman (1986), Clarke (2008), and Alsup (2006) have expressed the critical influence that teacher education programs have in shaping the professional identities of preservice teachers. Britzman contends that teacher education programs need to help their students to be more responsive and critical of institutional forces that have contributed to their understanding of what it means to be a teacher, and to be empowered to move away from dominant cultural “myths” and representations of teachers (p. 452). European American teachers are not expected to mitigate their cultural practices/identities in order to be fully embraced and integrated into suburban schools; yet, it is important for these educators to be challenged about how they accept and perpetuate white privilege (Sleeter, 1996). Moreover, preservice teachers of color need to be prepared to teach in suburban schools where they are likely to encounter “socializing pressures” (p. 452) that can directly affect the professional identities they want to “take up” in their schools.

Another important aspect of identity formation for student teachers is to understand how their racial/ethnic/cultural identities inform their professional identity as teachers. Cochran-Smith (2000) argues that teacher education programs need to include assignments and activities that help their students interrogate their beliefs about race and racism, and to create communities within their courses that enable them to “deal with issues of race more openly” (p. 15). As previous studies on teachers of color in suburban schools have shown (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003; Madsen & Mabokela, 2005), as well as the findings from the present study, school members in predominantly European American suburban schools implicitly assume that teachers of color should behave in ways that mirror the majority culture without questioning why these expectations exist for these educators. Offering alternative images and notions about teachers (Knowles, 1992) in suburban schools is not only imperative for preservice teachers of color, but also for European American teaching candidates in order to broaden their perspective about and the range of teaching styles and pedagogies that exist, and to become teachers who will work towards inclusivity and equity in countering dominant images of the teaching profession in their schools. Sleeter and Thao (2007) also argue that teacher education programs need to offer long-term support and commitment to preservice teachers of color when they enter the field so they will remain in schools for the foreseeable future. This means providing better training to preservice teachers of color in helping them to anticipate and overcome any social and professional challenge they may encounter in suburban school settings.

In closing, as the statistics published by NCES (2007) have shown, there is a disproportionate number of teachers of color who elect to work in urban schools, while fewer teachers choose to work in rural and suburban settings. Further research is needed to understand the reasons and motivations for why most teachers of color choose to remain in urban schools over suburban or rural ones. The data from these studies would be important in considering how suburban school administrators can attract more teachers of color to their schools, and how the working conditions or climate in suburban schools invite or detract teachers of color from teaching in these settings. Moreover, the findings from the present study are significant in illuminating the idea that predominantly European American suburban schools present unique challenges to teachers of color in terms of negotiating certain

expectations and pressures from other school members. Many of the participants were not socialized in ways that supported their diverse identities and cultural/racial backgrounds but instead, their “personal and cultural identities [often] collided” (Burant et al., 2002) with Eurocentric and heterosexual representations of teachers at Taft and Roosevelt.

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