I Show Up In The Gym, So I Can Show Up In The Class: A Narrative Study of Urban High School Teachers who Use Physical Activity to Mitigate Stress and Burnout

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Abstract

I Show Up In The Gym, So I Can Show Up In The Class: A Narrative Study of Urban High

School Teachers who Use Physical Activity to Mitigate Stress and Burnout.

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Chairperson: Kristine Lewis Grant, Ph.D.

Research has shown consistent metrics through both qualitative and quantitative studies about the severity and impact of teacher stress and burnout in the educational realm (Consiglio, 2017). The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported to the U.S. Department of Labor (2021) that 71% of teachers left their jobs for job-related reasons that typically included stress and burnout. Teaching is so alarming that a Gallup study provided information that stated teachers and nurses tie in with the most stressful occupations in the United States (Consiglio, 2020). This narrative inquiry study sought to understand how physical activity mitigates workplace stress and burnout of six high school teachers that have taught grades 9th-12th. Each teacher must have taught in an urban populated area for a minimum of three years during their engagement in the physical activity. Teachers were asked to provide a narrative of explanation and exploration of their lived experiences with physical activity as a mitigating factor to their workplace stress and burnout. Data was collected through one-on-one structured interviews and a demographic survey. The research questions presented in this study were (1) What do high school teachers identify as the sources of their work-related stress? (2) How do high school teachers describe their stress management strategies? (3) How do high school teachers describe their motivation to implement physical activity in the management of their work-related stress?

The goal of this study was to provide a deeper understanding and perspective for school districts to begin to better address teachers' needs, such as how to mitigate levels of stress and burnout.

Keywords: Education, K-12 Education, Teachers, Stress, Burnout, Physical Activity, Workplace, Self-Care

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I would lastly like to acknowledge my Drexel cohort members for the continued support throughout this process pre, mid, and post-pandemic. I have made lifelong connections, and I look forward to working with you all.

Dedication

I dedicate this to me. I did it through the ups and downs of life mid-pandemic, and no one can take that from me.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

"We started the year remote. Then we went back to school in October; then we were remote again in November, December. We went back to hybrid [in early February]… It feels like we're building the plane while we're flying it and the destination keeps changing on us." - *Heidi Crumrine, high school English teacher, Concord, NH*

"Being awake all hours of the night, going to bed at 2, 3 a.m., drinking coffee late at night and try to finish work so I can be more prepared the next day." - *Rashon Briggs, high school special education teacher in Los Angeles, CA*

"The level of stress is exponentially higher. It's like nothing I've experienced before." - *Leah Julke, high school English teacher/English language specialist, Fargo, ND*

"There were some points of lowness that I hadn't experienced before. There are some days where I feel like it's hard to keep going." - *Leonda Archer, a middle school math teacher in Arlington, VA*

In an NPR special series titled the "Coronavirus Crisis," Kavitha Cardoza (2021) interviewed K-12 teachers across the United States about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The quotes above convey the teachers' experiences with work-related stress and burnout. Chief among the sources of the teachers' stress included the adaptation to online learning, the frequent changes in teaching format, the long hours and late nights preparing to teach the next day, and the care provided to their students and students' families. These and other

stressors contributed to the teachers feeling that the stress of the 2019-2020 academic year was "like nothing I've experienced before."

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher stress and burnout were major problems in US public schools (Kyriacou, 2001; Maciejewska et al., 2019). In 2017, close to 5000 teachers and school staff completed the Educator Quality of Work Life Survey administered by the American Federation of Teachers. Results showed:

- 61% said their work was always stressful or often stressful

- 58% described their mental health as "not good" for at least seven of the previous 30 days

- 80% reported getting 7 hours of sleep or less a night

- Respondents averaged more than 50 hours of work per week

Research on the widely studied area of teacher stress and burnout has identified multiple sources of teacher stress. A study completed by Clunies-Ross et al. (2008) stated that through self-reported findings, teachers had expressed many concerns with classroom behaviors. These concerns indicated that individual students and collective classroom behaviors are continuous points of contention for teachers. The study further stated that reactive classroom management techniques have a direct correlation with increased teacher stress and decreased student output (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008). Eggers (2017) explained that teachers typically spend increased time prepping students for high stakes standardized tests rather than actually teaching their respective content. Many teachers almost feel obligated to focus on test taking rather than content in order to support their own progression as well as the students' progression (Eggers, 2017). Also, Rogers (2017) reported that over 75% of teachers stated that students in classrooms expressed concerns focused on racism, sexism, and LGBTQ. A study conducted by scholars at American University (2019) concluded that the most prevalent reasons for teacher stress are lack of

resources, low pay, nasty political environment, not being allowed to fail students, too much emphasis on testing, and too much teaching to the test directly affect teacher burnout. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching across the country has presented new and stressful situations and experiences. In more recent research, Consiglio (2020) included classroom behavior, teaching to the tests, socio-political climate, and Covid-19 as sources of teacher stress and burnout. In a study conducted in New Orleans, LA, roughly 85% of teachers have some varying form of worry that students will come to school sick (Markowitz et al., 2020).

Teachers' stress and burnout contribute to their early departure from the profession. The Learning Policy Institute (2016) found between 19 percent and 30 percent of educators quit and/or resigned from their positions in the first five years of teaching for reasons that could be attributed to stress and burnout. In a recent 2020 survey of nearly 1,000 former public-school teachers, RAND reported that "forty-three percent of all teachers who left voluntarily and before their scheduled retirement said they did so because the stresses and disappointments of teaching weren't worth it" (p. 38). A US Department of Labor study (2020) found more dire results: 71% of respondents left their teaching positions due to job-related reasons such as stress and burnout.

Despite the significant scholarly attention devoted to the relationship between teacher stress and attrition, comparatively few studies have examined how teachers cope with their stress. Austin et al. (2005) found that teachers use planful problem solving, self-control, and social support to cope with work-related stressors. Shumba et al. (2016) discovered that teachers employed a range of coping strategies, including prayer, social support from family and friends, and physical activity such as gardening and walking along the beach. A growing number of scholars are exploring mindfulness as a practice to reduce teacher stress (Haydon et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2013; Taylor et al.,2021).

Interestingly, research on teacher stress and physical activity is limited. Sane (2012) conducted a study that inventoried 81 academic professors that completed Maslach's (1996) burnout questionnaire and Baeck's physical activity questionnaire. After completing these questionnaires, results showed that there is a correlation between physical activity and burnout (Sane, 2012). Sane (2012) concluded that there is a positive trend when utilizing physical activity to prevent and/or decrease burnout. The study also concluded that with more physical activity by academic members, the more the amount of burnout is decreased (Sane, 2012). Morales (2019) also conducted a study that wanted to gain more information on if there is any correlation between physical exercise and reducing burnout symptoms between multiple professions such as physicians and teachers. Study results stated that there was a positive association between consistent regular practice of physical exercise to support and mitigate reducing burnout and/or burnout symptoms (Morales, 2019). More research is needed to understand how K-12 teachers employ physical activity as a stress management strategy, particularly during the pandemic.

Problem Statement

While teacher stress and its relationship to attrition are well documented, comparatively little is known about the relationship between teachers and stress management. Research related to this problem takes on greater importance in light of COVID-19, and the intensified stress that teachers have endured because of the expedited transition to online learning and other factors related to the pandemic. This dissertation examined teacher stress and stress management during the pandemic, with attention to physical activity.

Purpose Statement and Significance of Study

Purpose Statement

  The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of urban high school teachers who utilized physical activity to mitigate their work-related stress and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. By engaging urban high school teachers in retrospective reflection on their experiences with work-related stress during the pandemic, this study identified what teachers described as the sources of their stress and their stress management strategies. This qualitative study collected data via questionnaires and interviews to develop complex narratives of how six urban high school teachers experienced and managed their stress during this extraordinarily difficult time for US schools and society.

Significance of Study

  According to a 2016 Gallup poll, 46 % of both teachers and nurses reported high daily stress, which tied teachers and nurses for holding the most stressful occupation in the United States. COVID-19 exacerbated the stress experienced in both of these professions. While the stress that teachers experience is well-known, more scholarly attention is required to understand how teachers cope with their stress. With an increased understanding of which strategies teachers employ, greater steps can be taken to support teachers in their efforts to engage in self-care.

  Physical activity has been shown to be an effective stress management strategy. Lordan and Pakrashi (2014) stated that physical inactivity could lead to severe mental and physical health impairments and even death. Roberts et al. (2019) found that using physical activity in everyday structure can also increase and help to build less distraction and more self-focus. Whitsel et al. (2019) concluded that when employers implement physical activity programs that require moderate levels of exercising, employees' job satisfaction will directly increase. Whitsel

et al. (2019) provides insight into the role of physical activity in addressing teachers' work-related stress.

The researcher chose high school teachers as a focus due to the lack of research with regard to high school and secondary teachers' stress and burnout. Although all teachers experience high amounts of daily stress, high school teachers and high school culture, specifically, exude high levels of anxiety from all tenets of the workplace (Bottiani et al., 2019). Bottiani et al. (2019) discussed how high school teachers are supporting students in their most pivotal and transformational years mentally, emotionally, and physically. These teachers are also managing student stress and behavior in different ways. The manifestation of stress and anxiety and even the way to emotionally support them is different from a 17-year-old as compared to a 7-year-old. For example, the 7-year-old, when frustrated, may have angry outbursts and/or pout and scream. The elementary teacher may support their student by hugging, holding, positive affirmations, reinforcing positive behavior, and calling home for support if possible. The 17-year-old when frustrated may curse out the class and teacher, possibly isolate and become suicidal and/or homicidal, and even possibly become physically aggressive towards other students and staff. The high school teacher may fear for other students' safety and their own before beginning to wonder how to deescalate the 17-year-old. Taking into account students at this age may not want to be touched, may not have the best rapport with teachers in the building, have different outside forces teaching them negative ways to handle stress and confrontation, and may be experiencing a level of trauma that teachers are not prepared to work through and/or process.

Employee stress continues to skyrocket while organizational responsibilities of school districts continue to meet the bare minimum as a course of action for employee social and

emotional well-being. Seidel (2014) reported that nearly half a million teachers look for other places of employment each year. High school teachers are challenged to take care of themselves holistically without any systemic support from their employers. Providing further exploration and understanding of these lived experiences will help school districts to create better programs for teachers to thrive holistically. Across many school districts, there are no realistic concrete interventions that are provided for teachers to take care of themselves and mitigate workplace stress and burnout. Employee stress continues to skyrocket while organizational responsibilities of school districts continue to meet the bare minimum as a course of action for employee social and emotional well-being. Research was done in the corporate world and private sector has found that fitness activity programs have tremendously helped with employee productivity and satisfaction (Whitsel et al., 2019). This study sought to completely close the gap between a theoretical understanding of physical activity in the workplace. In doing so, it is intended to provide a deeper understanding and perspective for school districts to begin to better address teachers' needs, such as how to mitigate levels of burnout with stress reduction, improved self-care, and physical activity as a coping skill.

Research Questions

1. What do high school teachers identify as the sources of their work-related stress?
2. How do high school teachers describe their stress management strategies?
3. How do high school teachers describe their motivation to implement physical activity in the management of their work-related stress?

Conceptual Framework

Researcher Stance

The researcher drew from a social constructivism framework. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined constructivism as a process to describe, interpret, and/or understand truths. Creswell and Poth (2018) have stated that social constructivists aim to understand the world view from the "other's perspective while being influenced by ways that individuals' backgrounds shape their interpretations." The researcher explored how individuals' perceptions of their experiences inform how they shape and describe their responsibilities and, in some cases, lead to stress and burnout in their workplace.

The researcher understood that "multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.20). The researcher explored how lived experiences directly impact human thought. Regarding the axiological beliefs, the researcher understood that participants might have different perspectives on the topic of physical activity and stress management, but do value their own beliefs. The researcher incorporated his beliefs into the design of the research but used epoché (bracketing) to ensure that they are not a detriment to exploring the essence of the experiences with the participants in the study. Gearing (2004) stated that epoché and bracketing are the practical application and implementation that the researcher uses to conduct the study, understanding that the researcher may have experienced this phenomenon themselves and suspending their views in the face of data interpretation (Gearing, 2004).

Experiential Base

I am an African American male in my early 30's that has lived in the different counties in Maryland for most of my life. I possess a Bachelor of Science from Bowie State University in

Child and Adolescent Studies and a Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology. I have previous experience utilizing my analytical skills from my master's level thesis that involved creating a sound research protocol and approval from Bowie State University's Internal Review Board (IRB). I have worked in many different realms throughout my career. In the social service realm, I have been a Child Protective Services Trainer within the Federal government and a Care Coordinator through a non-profit organization. Within the educational realm, I have worked as a behavior aide directly out of college, a teacher's aide later on, and more presently a Dean of Students and Director of School Engagement. In my last position within the educational realm, I was a school administrator in an urban high school.

As a school administrator that has worked in the District of Columbia Public School system, I know far too well the physical, emotional, and mental toll that working in an urban high school setting has on teacher stress and holistic living. I have watched teachers that were excited and prepared to educate today's youth with all they needed at the end of the summer turn into the most isolated, frustrated, upset, and short-tempered teachers in the building by Thanksgiving break. Understanding the impact that this workplace has on teacher well-being without any support to best manages their stress. I can vividly remember multiple teachers coming into my office overwhelmed with negative student behavior, standardized tests coming up, and added on a tour of duty responsibilities. These teachers were on the brink of quitting their positions weekly due to the amount of stress and the toll it was taking on them and their families. Quitting not because of the students but more so because they postulated that no one (school leadership and district leadership) cared about the teachers' well-being. Time and time again, I began to realize and understand the systemic issues with the lack of support for teachers' mental, emotional, and/or physical well-being.

In my life, I have experienced burnout from multiple realms. There are times during my professional career I would stay at work for 12+ hours to ensure that my students and staff were safe and taken care of. I would come in on weekends to get work done that I was unable to do during the week. I would come in earlier than my scheduled time to prepare for the day to meet with staff that needed extra support. This level of commitment created a space of burnout not only in my professional life but also in my personal life. I began to isolate myself from loved ones, had shorter patience with my daughter, had constant headaches, and even passed out twice from the amount of stress and burnout I was experiencing. In the most stressful situations, I was able to use physical activity as an approach. By engaging in physical activity, I was able to decrease my work stress and personal life stress. These physical activity sessions consisted of CrossFit, yoga, meditating, going on walks, runs, biking, weight and strength-training, biking, and even swimming. By practicing all of these different types of movement, I was able to self-manage, cope, and strengthen my emotional and mental fitness while having a positive physical feeling as a result.

Physical activity is a viable approach for addressing teacher stress and reducing teacher burnout because of the benefits associated with it. The benefits associated with physical activity support decreasing stress and burnout strategically. For example, it improves sleep patterns, improves sexual health, and improves mental health and mood. Physical activity also helps to keep thinking, learning, and judgment skills sharp, strengthens bones and muscles, and increases chances to live longer, to name a few. All of the above should be instrumental to the process of decreasing teacher stress and reducing burnout.

After completing my doctorate, I will devote time and energy to the creation of a wellness approach catered to teachers. This research will support the overall expansion and

growth of creating a consultation program that I will present to school districts across the country. As a pioneering advocate of innovative culture in the workplace and educational leadership, this research will address the theoretical underpinning of physical activity mixed with the implementation of physical activity for teachers. The consultation program revamps the way that urban school districts view, promote, and invest in teacher well-being. District leaders will adopt new policies and practices to create a better workplace culture while decreasing teacher stress and burnout.

Researcher Organization of the Literature Review

The literature review explored three streams of research: teacher stress and burnout, stress and physical activity, and wellness activities and initiatives in the workplace. Figure 1 shows the three streams, followed by a brief summary of each stream:

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

Stream 1: Teacher Stress and Burnout

Stream 2: Physical Activity and It's Effects on Stress and Psychological Well-being

Stream 3: Wellness Activities and Initiatives in the Workplace
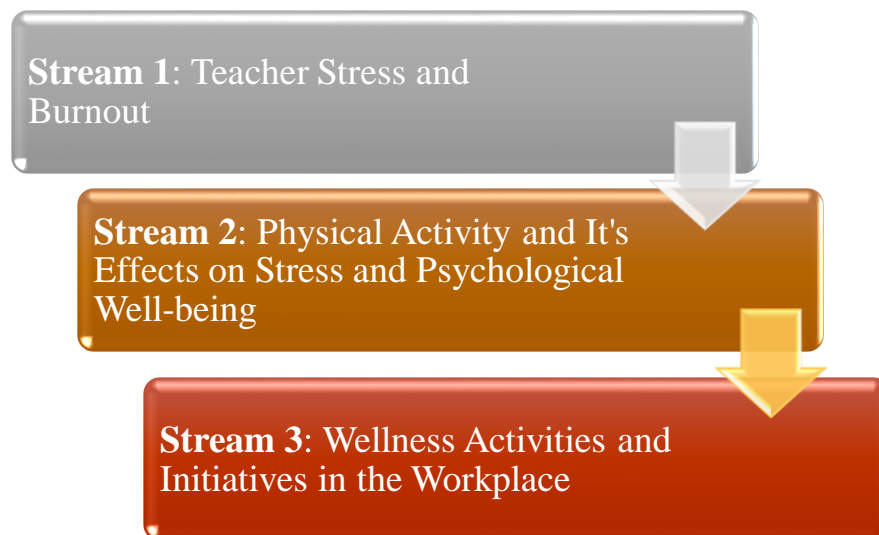
Teacher Stress and Burnout

In this stream, stress is defined, and different levels of stress are examined. Burnout is also described, and its implications for work performance and persistence are considered. Research conducted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) sheds light on the importance of burnout in the educational realm. Major researchers such as Bermejo-Toro et al. (2016) have concluded burnout is an international issue that needs to be addressed for educators worldwide. After the general research on stress and burnout is considered, research related to teachers is reviewed. Research related to the sources of teacher stress and its implications for teacher well-being is reviewed. Zhou et al. (2017) contended creating coping interventions that support a decrease in educator burnout is the most serious topic and requires scrutiny by all scholars and practitioners.

Physical Activity and Its Effects on Stress and Psychological Well-Being

The second stream presented research to explain the effects of physical activity on one's psychological well-being. The stream provided information on how important physical activity is for the human body and the importance that should be placed on it by many medical associations. Afterward, the stream explained multiple theories on physical fitness and psychological well-being. The Self-Efficacy Theory, Health Belief Model, and Theory of Reasoned Action provided groundwork about the strengths of actionable behavior by individuals. Bandura (1994), the author of *Self-Efficacy Theory*, described how physical activity could positively impact an individual. Health Belief Model Theory addresses the apprehension surrounding people's failure to take a proactive approach to physical well-being (Biddle & Nigg, 1970). Theory of Planned Behavior, an adaption of multiple theories before its time, concentrates on the act of successfully believing that one can perform an activity and then following through with that success through implementation (Biddle & Nigg, 1970).

Wellness Activities and Initiatives in the Workplace

Research stated that employers are working to combat issues such as job absenteeism, burnout, and job satisfaction. One technique that many corporate structures have begun to tackle these issues is fitness in the workplace. Not only do employees feel better, but they tend to come to work more frequently once a pattern has been established. Fist and Fist (2003) reported that through research, they were able to increase an employee's brain arousal and physiological structures through fitness activities. Whitsel et al. (2019) have found a direct positive correlation between employees' physical activity and their overall job satisfaction. Studies have been so progressive that physical activity is now considered a "clinically" relevant technique to increase work performance and decrease health risks (Mills et al., 2007).

Definition of Terms

Stress: The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health states that stress is the negative emotional and negative physical response to an experience and/or situation.

Coping Skill: Any type of intervention, whether it be mental, emotional, and/or physical utilized by a person to mitigate stressful experiences and/or situations (Algorani, 2020).

Burnout: "Burnout is a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and reduced personal accomplishments" (Koutsimani et al., 2019).

Physical Activity: "Any body movement generated by the contraction of skeletal muscles that raises energy expenditure above resting metabolic rate. It is characterized by its modality, frequency, intensity, duration, and context of practices" (Thivel et al., 2018).

Urban Teachers: Any teacher that provides educational instruction or implementation in a densely populated area in or in the immediate surrounding of a city (Welsh & Swain, 2020).

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

There were three underlying assumptions for this study. First, every person perceived and experienced stress in different ways. An experience that might contribute to one person deciding to leave the teaching profession may not register as significant to another. Given the difference in how people experience stress, it was assumed that urban high school teachers experienced work-related stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, some people push through and do not try to cope with the stress produced by stressful situations. Based on the longevity of the COVID-19 pandemic, "pushing through" and other avoidance techniques will not have been sustainable. It was assumed that teachers employed stress management strategies to cope with their work-related stress. Third, all participants for this study indicated that they use physical activity as a stress management strategy. Participants engaged in critical self-reflection to explain how and why they use physical activity to reduce their stress.

Limitations

As a qualitative study, the findings were not generalizable to the overall population of urban high school teachers. Despite this drawback, the participants' account of their experiences with work-related stress and their coping strategies will likely resonate with other teachers who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another limitation related to the design of the study concerns the survey. The survey was created by the researcher and was not a validated instrument. The purpose of the survey was to collect demographic information and information on participants' physical activity. Data from the survey served to triangulate data collected in the interviews and provide more details to the participants' narratives.

Summary

Chapter one introduced the problem of practice, explained the purpose and significance of the study, presented the research questions, defined key terms, and explained the assumptions and limitations of the study. Chapter two delved into the review of literature related to three streams of research: teacher stress and burnout, stress and physical activity, and wellness activities and initiatives in the workplace. Chapter three explained the rationale for a narrative design and offered a detailed description of the proposed data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Several disciplines and theories have examined how employees utilize physical activity to mitigate stress and burnout. Studies have shown that organizations and business sectors have adopted physical activity programs for staff as a form of stress management. However, research has been limited in the context of school districts. With teacher stress and burnout contributing to high attrition in urban schools, the proposed study will investigate the possible mitigating effects of physical activity. The following streams are discussed in this chapter in this order: teacher stress and burnout, stress and physical activity, and wellness activities and initiatives in the workplace. Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of each stream.

Figure 2

Key Pieces of Literature in each of the Three Streams

Teacher Stress and Burnout
- Stress
- Burnout
- Teacher stress and Bunrout
- Coping Skills

Physical Activity and Its Effects on Stress and Psychological Well-being
- Physical activity and it's effects on Psychological well-being
- Theories on physical fitness and psychological well-being

Wellness Activities and Initiatives in the Workplace
- Workplace wellness activities and initiatives
- Research on workplace wellness efforts and employee well-being
- Decrease in workplace burnout and negative job satisfaction

Stream 1: Teacher Stress and Burnout

This stream begins by defining stress and burnout. The stream then addresses the specific phenomenon of teacher stress and burnout. Subsequently, the stream provides further

information on the specific sources of work-related stress for teachers and research on the coping

and stress management strategies that teachers have employed.

Stress

The American Psychological Association (APA) (2018) explains that there are three

primary forms of stress that all people may experience at some point in their lifetime. The three

forms of stress are acute stress, episodic acute stress, and chronic stress (APA, 2018). Acute

stress is what most humans experience on a day-to-day basis. The APA (2018) states that this

stress comes from day-to-day pressures and responsibilities from life. Researchers coin this type

of stress as exciting when provided in small doses. However, if the acute stress lasts longer than

a short amount of time, it then becomes overwhelmingly exhausting (APA, 2018). When this

form of stress is pushed outside of short-term fulfillment, this is where mental health issues begin

to arise. Behaviors and symptoms of acute stress are widely recognizable by humans, such as

headaches and/or upset stomachs, among others. Due to the length of acute stress being short-

term, there is not any extensive mental and/or emotional damage that correlates with it (APA,

2018).

Episodic acute stress is a form of acute stress that continues to occur more frequently in a

person's life (APA, 2018). This type of stress hinders progress and productivity due to a person

always being stuck in chaos and/or crisis. Behaviors associated with this form of stress are short-

temperedness, anxiety, hyper-aroused/hyper-focused, and/or lack of organizational skills (APA,

2018). The APA (2018) also states that this type of stress creates deterioration of interpersonal

relationships in both personal and workplace environments.

The last primary type of stress is called chronic stress (APA, 2018). Chronic stress is the

most dangerous type of stress for any person. Chronic stress is a burden that people carry for an

extended amount of time that begins to weigh on them emotionally and/or mentally. This type of

stress can be seen in dysfunctional family dynamics, unhappy marriages, and/or dissatisfaction in

the home or workplace, just to name a few (APA, 2018). The APA (2018) also stated that early

childhood situations and/or experiences that were never processed might manifest into chronic

stress depending on the mental and/or emotional capacity of the person. Finally, chronic stress

has been known to cause serious symptoms such as extreme violent behavior, irrational thinking,

heart problems, and in terrible cases, suicidal and/or homicidal thoughts and actions (APA,

2018).

For the past decade, the American Institute of Stress has been researching the amount of

stress that Americans experience. Their 2019 study reported that about 80% of workers who

completed the study stated they were stressed; this was a 30% increase over the previous year

(Milenkovic, 2019). The 2019 study also found that nearly one million employees missed work

due to work-related stress. Less than 50% of the employees who completed the study felt that

their employers care about work-life balance. This contributes to statistics such as depression

being the lead financial strain for employers, costing organizations upwards of $51 billion

(Milenkovic, 2019). Stress creates such a tough work environment that employee absenteeism

costs employers $26 billion to combat (Milenkovic, 2019). Milenkovic (2019) reported that in

the last year, there had been 120,000 deaths as a result of work-related stress and over $190

billion in healthcare payments yearly. Stress has been known as the 'silent killer', and the

numbers above have shown how important it is to take care of the holistic person.

Burnout

According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), Herbert

Freudenberger coined the term *burnout* as a state of physical exhaustion, mental and emotional

stress that resulted from incidents of prolonged stress and/or frustration in the late 1970s (NCBI, 2020). Many professions experience burnout due to the increased responsibility, workload, and high expectations depending on one's lifestyle and/or pressure associated with work, home, or even school life. However, burnout is largely experienced by people in the "helping professions" experience – including doctors, nurses, teachers, and/or social workers (NCBI, 2020). Burnout comes from a person having a stressful lifestyle and/or experience over continuous amounts of time. A person gets to this point of burnout when they have been overworked, under-challenged, have a continuous conflict with peers and/or supervisors, and remain in high-stress situations (NCBI, 2020). As a person begins to approach this state of burnout, normally, they would then utilize coping techniques to decrease these high levels and feelings (NCBI, 2020). The NCBI (2020) also states that, unfortunately, when most people have gotten to this stage, they have a difficult time being able to utilize and implement their typical coping strategies.

According to the NCBI (2020), there are three primary tenets that explain most signs of burnout:

> Exhaustion: People affected feel drained and emotionally exhausted, unable to cope, tired and down, and don't have enough energy. Physical symptoms include things like pain and gastrointestinal (stomach or bowel) problems.
>
> Alienation from (work-related) activities: People who have burnout find their jobs increasingly stressful and frustrating. They may start being cynical about their working conditions and their colleagues. At the same time, they may increasingly distance themselves emotionally, and start feeling numb about their work.
>
> Reduced performance: Burnout mainly affects everyday tasks at work, at home or when caring for family members. People with burnout are very negative about their tasks, find it hard to concentrate, are listless and lack creativity. (para. 6)

Teacher Stress and Burnout

Teaching at any level is now considered a high-risk profession due to the emotional and physical toll that the job puts on educators (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017). Skaalvik and

Skaalvik (2017) report that teacher burnout is at an all-time high and that it is an international concern. Teachers throughout the country and the world experience many different symptoms associated with burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Bottiani et al.(2019) state that during a national study conducted by Gallup (2014), they found that 46% of teachers have reported that they have "high daily stress." In many cases, this type of stress leads to serious mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and even in extreme cases, suicidal ideations and attempts (Bottiani et al., 2019).

During an empirical study regarding educator well-being and burnout, Bermejo-Toro et al. (2016) concluded that nearly 20% of teachers were suffering from high levels of burnout and that an alarming 20-40% are currently suffering from moderate levels of burnout (Bermejo-Toro et al., 2016). This means that nearly 60% of teachers from this study were experiencing some level of above-average burnout and discomfort.

In 2017, the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, in collaboration with the Collaborative for Social-Emotional and Academic Learning, conducted a study of the emotional states of 5,000 teachers in the United States (Cipriano & Brackett, 2020). The five major emotions expressed during the survey were feelings of being overwhelmed, stressed, happy, tired, and frustrated (Cipriano & Brackett, 2020). Major reasons behind these emotions were a lack of support by administrators, national and state testing, curriculum changes, and work-life balance (Cipriano & Brackett, 2020). Cipriano and Brackett (2020) conducted the same exact study in April 2020 with similar findings, but for different reasons. The study found that the five major emotions expressed by the teachers were anxiety, worry, being overwhelming, sadness, and anxiety. The reasons behind these five major emotions were the uncertainty of and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and the stress of having to manage household family dynamics

and expectations. The same organizations conducted a similar study that found over 80% of the

teachers in the study have communicated that their lack of work-life balance has severely

impacted their ability to teach (Cipriano & Brackett, 2020).

The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence expounds on the theory that emotions play an

integral role within teaching and learning (Cipriano & Brackett, 2020). Studies show that when

teaching with positive emotions, teachers not only promote engagement but foster a more curious

student audience (Cipriano & Brackett, 2020). The same study also pointed out that emotions

such as fear and anxiety disrupt not only concentration but interfere with critical thinking as well

(Cipriano & Brackett, 2020). Cipriano and Brackett (2020) provided further clarity on this lived

experience below:

> Chronic stress among teachers is linked to decreases in teacher motivation and
> engagement, both of which lead to burnout. Teachers who are burnt out have poorer
> relationships with students and are also less likely to be positive role models for healthy
> self-regulation—for their students and their families. It's no surprise that teachers who
> are burnt out are more likely to leave the profession, which impacts student learning and
> puts a huge drain on schools. (para. 17)

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) were able to research different stressors associated with the

theory of teacher burnout in multiple countries. Research conducted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik

(2017) stated that burnout is comprised of four main stressors: classroom management/discipline

problems, time management, low student motivation, and value dissonance. These stressors, in

turn, create spaces of burnout with regard to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and even

personal accomplishment, as shown in the below graphic from Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017):

Figure 3

Structural Model Of Relationships Between Stressors And Burnout
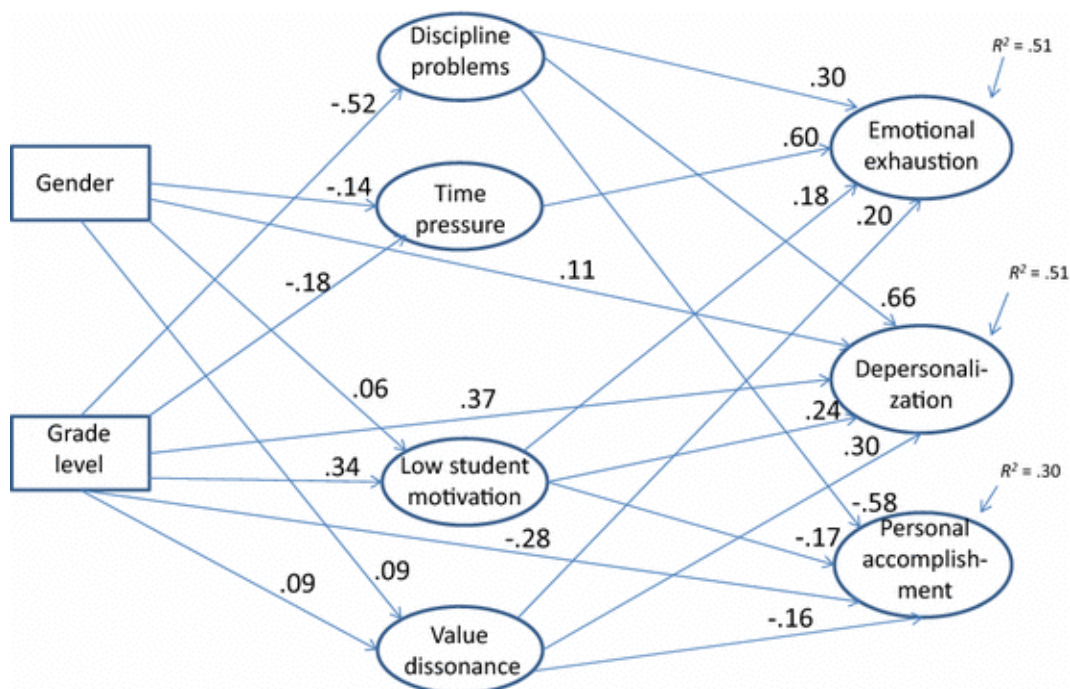
Discipline problems are a major stressor for teachers when having to provide classroom management and working through tough situations with students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Classroom management is a way for teachers to promote successful academic achievement (Rosas & West, 2009). Rosas and West (2009) stated that classroom management had been a major deterrent to the point that teachers transition to other schools or even decide not to work in the educational field. Studies support the notion that new teachers tend to take the backseat to classroom management while following the implemented structures and/or protocols of the given school/institution (Rosas & West, 2009). Teachers are asked to create a supportive classroom environment while managing different comprehension levels, student behaviors, student mental health needs, and providing curriculum instruction (Rosas & West, 2009).

Time management is another major stressor for teachers in the workplace (Carroll et al., 2020). Many teachers' workdays are pre-scheduled, which leaves very little room for any flexibility (Carroll et al., 2020). Carroll et al. (2020) also stated that teachers are required in most cases to adhere to other demands in the school building outside of just teaching, such as lunch

duty for students, committee positions for school development, and informal requests from administrators, all in a day's work.

Student motivation continues to be a consistent concern that teachers feel unprepared for (Daniels et al., 2018). Daniels et al. (2018) stated that teachers have reported that although it is their responsibility to address these issues with student motivation, they feel the crisis is too far for any true change to occur. Trends have shown that teachers have even begun to show less personal responsibility to increase student motivation due to burnout and stress (Daniels et al., 2018). Low student motivation is a major predictive factor of teacher burnout. Research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) found that low student motivation can negatively affect teacher self-efficacy and may be interpreted by teachers as a personal failure. This may lead to a negative correlation between student motivation and teacher self-efficacy.

A change agent is an individual that supports the growth of other individuals or groups that is typically out of the norm (Vandeyar, 2017). van der Heijden (2015) stated that "teachers play a key role in realizing successful changes in education. Among them are real "change agents" at both classroom and school level." Teachers as change agent require a constant state of learning, pivoting, growing, and adjusting. This type of change agent also requires teachers to realize and understand that they cannot depend on systems to make the change, but must continue to push through (Vandeyar, 2017). Vandeyar (2017) provided information on the process of being a change agent in the educational realm by explaining that individuals must go through 'stages of concern.'

Vandeyar (2017) discussed that a teacher's beliefs continue to play an integral and pivotal role in what being a change agent is. It is stated that teacher beliefs directly impact bias and teacher perceptions on the implementation of educational activities (Vandeyar, 2017). Teachers

must take into account their own experiences, whether positive or negative, in order to understand how their belief systems will impact their teaching practices (Vandeyar, 2017). Teachers must be comfortable growing and learning ways to provide instruction differently and that they may not always be correct in their implementation and practice (Vandeyar, 2017).

Lastly, value dissonance may also increase teacher burnout. Value dissonance are the norms and social beliefs of the school. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) stated that each school has different goals and objectives along with core beliefs that all educators should adhere to; a teacher not agreeing and not becoming immersed in these beliefs can be categorized as showing value dissonance. All the above are considered serious work-related stressors among educators (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) classified time pressure as teachers having more responsibilities from administration, tighter windows for grades, an increase of standardized testing, all while having little to no time for rest and recovery throughout the day.

Coping Skills

Although there is much research on teacher burnout, there is little known about the positive ways that teachers employ to counteract these periods of extreme stress. Zhang et al. (2019) concluded that more research needed to be completed about resources for educator burnout. During this study, they were able to provide some mitigating techniques that may be more helpful for educators. These techniques include positive psychological resources such as emotional labor strategies and even psychological capital (Zhang et al., 2019). These two techniques may be used as coping skills, and if properly implemented, educators may be able to mitigate the feelings of burnout (Zhang et al., 2019). Providing teachers with many different interventions may decrease teacher burnout.

Research supports the fact that coping styles play an integral role in the level of burnout felt by educators (Zhou et al., 2017). When coping styles are positive or negative, that interpretation will drive the mindset of the educator. Positive coping can be described as educators taking an approach to high demands, close risks, and potential harm and/or loss and viewing these as personal challenges (Zhou et al., 2017). This positive coping will increase positive interventions necessary to complete tasks and/or goals to be successful in a high-risk situation. These positive attributes create a positive behavior, increased personal buy-in, better communication, and even an increase in direct positive regard to personal development challenges (Zhou et al., 2017). Negative coping, in this sense, would consist of teachers attempting to escape stressful situations, not complying with procedures, and even ignoring potential remedies of the situation. Educators do this by denial of situations, avoidance, and even wishful thinking that does not have any proactive intentions for the situations (Zhou et al., 2017).

There is a direct correlation between teacher burnout and the type of coping used. Positive coping provides a decrease in burnout, and negative coping increases burnout levels (Zhou et al., 2017). Zhou et al. (2017) provided further examples that negative coping can play a larger part in a teacher's holistic life, not just at work. During extremely stressful situations, some may consider ways to self-medicate, which might then lead to substance abuse (Zhou et al., 2017). Teachers may decide to utilize alcohol or even hard drugs such as cocaine and/or marijuana (Zhou et al., 2017). This study also acknowledged that teachers might also begin to avoid others. They may stay away from social situations where they are required to interact, avoid working with a team, and even begin to distance themselves from peers and/or family as a form of isolation (Zhou et al., 2017). Teachers may even begin to be on guard and have

anger/violent behaviors (Zhou et al., 2017). Zhou et al. (2017) stated that operating in this space on being on guard comes from teachers looking at the workplace as a stressful situation and having to protect themselves.

As explained in the above stream, teacher stress and burnout is a major issue within the educational system. Teachers typically cope with the heavy amounts of stress and burnout with negative interventions. The subsequent stream will explain how physical activity and its effects on stress and burnout.

Stream 2: Physical Activity and Its Effects on Stress and Psychological Well-Being

The second stream begins by explaining what types of effects physical activity has on one's psychological well-being. The stream provides information on how important physical activity is for the human body and the importance that should be placed on it by many medical associations. Afterwards, the stream explains diverse theories that lay the groundwork for further understanding of task-oriented goals and objectives.

Physical Activity and Its Effects on Psychological Well-Being

The Anxiety & Depression Association of America state that seven out of ten individuals experience some form of stress and anxiety daily. They also shared that nearly 14% of people surveyed stated that they use some form of physical activity as a means to cope with stress. Although there are many different forms of coping, Jackson (2013) stated that exercise had been considered as one of the most recommended by top health care providers to reduce stress. Studies have shown that exercise has been effective in increasing alertness, improving concentration, and even reducing fatigue (Jackson, 2013). This intervention can prove extremely helpful considering that stress typically drains energy and depletes concentration levels.

The Mayo Clinic (2020) stated that any type of exercise on the body should be considered as a stress reliever. Being able to stay active will ultimately help to boost endorphins and simultaneously lower daily stress and worry (Mayo Clinic, 2020). The Mayo Clinic (2020) provides the following information about exercise and stress relief:

> It reduces negative effects of stress: Exercise can provide stress relief for your body while imitating effects of stress, such as the flight or fight response, and helping your body and its systems practice working together through those effects. This can also lead to positive effects in your body—including your cardiovascular, digestive and immune systems—by helping protect your body from harmful effects of stress.
>
> It's meditation in motion: After a fast-paced game of racquetball, a long walk or run, or several laps in the pool, you may often find that you've forgotten the day's irritations and concentrated only on your body's movements. As you begin to regularly shed your daily tensions through movement and physical activity, you may find that this focus on a single task, and the resulting energy and optimism, can help you stay calm, clear and focused in everything you do.
>
> It improves your mood: Regular exercise can increase self-confidence, improve your mood, help you relax, and lower symptoms of mild depression and anxiety. Exercise can also improve your sleep, which is often disrupted by stress, depression and anxiety. All of these exercise benefits can ease your stress levels and give you a sense of command over your body and your life. (paras. 2-5)

The World Health Organization (2020) defined physical activity as any skeletal movement that requires energy to be exerted in order to move your body. Physical activity is categorized as all movements whether during leisure time, physical workouts, and/or going to or from destinations (WHO, 2020). Physical activity may be moderate and/or vigorous activities, which lead to increased holistic health (WHO, 2020). The WHO (2020) stated that major techniques to improve holistic health might include sports, active recreation, cycling, running, walking, yoga, and/or strength training, just to name a few.

The World Health Organization provides recommendations for many different populations. The following is information regarding the recommendation of physical activity for

adults that are 18-64 years of age, 65+ years of age, and pregnant women. These recommendations help to provide further clarity on ways and lengths of time to engage in physical activity. Adults 18-64 years of age should aim to do 150-300 minutes of moderately paced physical activity or 75-150 minutes of vigorously paced physical activity throughout every week (WHO, 2020). The WHO (2020) also stated that a combination of strength training and/or at least intense work on all large muscle groups should occur at least two days a week. The WHO has the campaign to increase awareness about the health risks associated with a sedentary lifestyle and encourages people to replace sedentary lifestyles with more physical activity for holistic health (WHO, 2020).

The WHO stated that adults 65+ years of age should follow the same above recommendations for adults 18-64 years of age with more focus on weekly physical activity (WHO, 2020). Weekly physical activity for this age range includes more emphasis on functional movements and strength training at a greater rigor for at least three days. This amount of physical activity works as a preventative measure to increase body functionality and decrease common falls (WHO, 2020).

Pregnant and postpartum women also should perform physical activity as well throughout their processes. The WHO (2020) stated that women should perform at least 150 minutes of aerobic activities throughout each week. This aerobic activity should include cardio and strength training activities. Finally, the WHO (2020) provided information stating that pregnant and women experiencing postpartum should reduce and/or limit all sedentary time and replace it with light physical activity.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2021) provides guidelines for understanding the positive symptoms and behaviors of physical activity. There are many

immediate benefits of physical activity, such as increased brain health, increased cognitive abilities for children and adults, and even lower levels of feeling of anxiousness for adults specifically (CDC, 2021). CDC (2021) also stated that when a person has regular physical activity, this helps to increase judgment-making skills, provides a better baseline for decision-making, reduces symptoms of depression, and helps for better sleep. Physical activity also helps to support weight management in areas such as losing body weight, building muscle mass, and losing body fat (CDC, 2021). Research states that in order to maintain weight, individuals should proactively engage in physical activity for 150 minutes per week (CDC, 2021). CDC (2021) informed in order to lose weight and to keep it off, individuals will have to engage in high amounts of physical activity while also reducing calorie intake with food and liquids. Another positive of physical activity is the decreased health risks. Leading causes of death in the United States of America are heart disease and strokes. Studies show that engaging in at least 150 minutes per week of moderate physical activity can lower a person's risk for these diseases (CDC, 2021). Consistent physical activity also has been known to decrease blood pressure and even improve cholesterol levels (CDC, 2021). Consistent physical activity helps to reduce the chances of metabolic syndrome, which is a combination of fat build-up around the mid-section area and lowering the risk of type 2 diabetes (CDC, 2021). Engaging in physical activity also lowers a person's chances of developing common cancers such as bladder cancer, breast cancer, colon cancer, endometrium cancer, esophagus cancer, kidney cancer, lung cancer, and stomach cancer (CDC, 2021).

There are many positive attributes to physical fitness and increased psychological well-being. Without a level of physical activity, humans become lethargic, complacent, and even gain weight (Lordan & Pakrashi, 2014). Lordan and Pakrashi (2014) also stated that physical

inactivity could lead to severe mental and physical health impairments and even death. Gomez - Pinilla (2008) suggested that sports support the psychological side of an increased mental health state. Roberts et al. (2019) stated that using physical fitness in everyday structure will also increase and help to build less distraction and more self-focus. Persons that have been through a tough situation and/or circumstance repeatedly and have worked to increase their resiliency will be better capable and able to rise through many other tough occasions in their lives (Roberts et al., 2019). Not only will this build better confidence, but it will also work to increase productivity in multiple settings. According to Gerber et al. (2014), vigorous physical exercise/activity is associated with lower stress levels, less depressive thoughts, and even decreased insomnia. This study also shows that exercisers typically have better and more undisturbed sleep patterns (Gerber et al., 2014). Participants from this study also reported fewer mental health issues, regardless of high levels of stress exposure (Gerber et al., 2014).

Through physical activity, the brain and the body release many different types of chemicals such as dopamine, endorphins, serotonin, and oxytocin. Berke (2018) defined dopamine as a critical neurotransmitter that supports the synaptic connection in the brain for cell and nerve growth. Dopamine is a major influencer on human behavior in the areas of learning and motivation (Berke, 2018). This then creates stronger brain plasticity for humans (Berke, 2018). The brain typically releases this neurotransmitter during intense cravings, feelings of pleasure, and even the satisfaction reward system in our minds (Berke, 2018). Berke (2018) further expounded that this transmitter is integral to boost attentive behaviors helps to regulate actual movement, motivation, learning, and even responses to emotional stimuli. Studies have shown that in order to naturally increase dopamine levels, one may exercise daily (Berke, 2018).

Exercising or physical activity, in theory increases the satisfaction hormone, that a task was completed, no matter how easy or hard it was (Berke, 2018).

Chaudhry (2020) defined endorphins as the human's natural chemical that is considered a pain reliever. The name endorphins come from two words merged together, which are endogenous, meaning come from the body and morphine which is an opiate pain reliever (Chaudhry, 2020). There are many benefits of endorphins such as lower anxiety levels, increased self-esteem, stronger immune system, and even reduced pain (Chaudhry, 2020). Chaudhry (2020) reported that a natural and healthy way to increase endorphin levels is to engage in regular consistent exercise and/or physical activity for at least 45 minutes, three times a week. Carhart-Harris and Nutt (2017) defined serotonin as a neurotransmitter that supports daily functions and processes within your body, specifically mood regulation, good sleeping habits, stronger memory and learning, and positive feelings along with positive social behaviors. Exercise has been recommended as a way to increase serotonin levels to an optimal state. Activities such as swimming, a fast-paced jog/walk, hiking, and/or even bicycling as a way to increase serotonin (Carhart-Harris & Nutt, 2017). Lee et al. (2009) defined oxytocin as a hormone that works to provide emotional regulation along with positive thoughts and feelings. This hormone is better known as the love hormone due to all of the positive impacts on human emotions and moods (Lee et al., 2009). Lee et al. (2009) stated that studies have shown that practicing yoga provides a natural way to increase this hormone. These benefits help to decrease anxiety and stress, create a better way of life, and to help to decrease depressive symptoms and behaviors (Lee et al., 2009)

Theories on Physical Fitness and Psychological Well-Being

There are three prominent theories about the impact of physical fitness on psychological well-being. A widely used theory in exercise is the Self-Efficacy Theory (SET). This theory is a major staple in many exercises and sports behavior conceptualizations due to the perception of human self and attributes. SET was postulated by Albert Bandura in the mid 1990's. This theory states that one's successful and/or unsuccessful capabilities are directly codependent on their beliefs to reach their desired outcome (Lordan & Pakrashi, 2014). Lordan and Pakrashi (2014) stated that SET is typically broken into four main components, which are cognitive, affective, selection processes, and motivational. Each component is briefly defined below:

- Cognition is related to the process that involves any type of acquisition, organization and any types of information;

- Affective processes involve how well the person homes in on key processes required for regulation of emotional responses and states;

- Motivation involves the level of motivation with consistency of effort for desired outcomes; and,

- Self-efficacy is related to a person's beliefs that their capabilities will produce the desired outcome. (Bandura, 1994, p.75)

The above four components are required to be successful in the outcomes and performance of any given task. This theory has been coined as one of the most useful and wide-ranging theories in exercise theory due to its multivariable use and action-oriented processes. Biddle and Nigg (1970) postulate that this theory may be one of the best because SET focuses primarily on action steps and forward progression rather than the end goal in mind. Creating more productive habits of self-efficacy will in turn increase more productive behaviors.

Health Belief Model Theory (HBM) is a second prominent theory used to explain the impact of physical fitness on psychological well-being. Biddle and Nigg (1970) stated this theory was created by many theorists in the 1950's in accordance with the U.S. Public Health Service to work on further understanding the apprehension surrounding people's failure to implement disease prevention strategies. This theory provides an overarching framework synthesizing the reasons why people do or do not use various preventative health behaviors and why they do or do not delve into risky behaviors (Biddle & Nigg, 1970). Glanz and Bishop (2010) outlined six main components to risky health behavior, which are "risk susceptibility, risk severity, benefits to action, barriers to action, self-efficacy, and cues to action" (p. 34). The HBM theory postulates that people will not actively look for healthy preventative interventions unless they have some level of motivation and/or knowledge. Jones et al. (2015) stated that motivation and knowledge might come from internal and external factors associated with many different health experiences. For example, an internal factor may be if a person knows that a certain illness runs in their family. If there are steps in place to prevent the diagnosis of high blood pressure and/or diabetes, a person is more likely to observe these steps. An example of an external factor may be a campaign related to decreasing stress levels for urban residents in a busy neighborhood city. The campaign would offer preventative insight, information, and techniques on different ways for those people to cope. Thus, elevating the consciousness of the issue for the collective whole. This theory is major is important because without elevating the level of internal and/or external messaging, a person may never take the appropriate steps to a healthier and more holistic lifestyle (Jones et al., 2015).

The third prominent theory is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), later amended to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). TRA postulates that a person's intentions directly

correlate and determine their behavior. It also states that a person's intention also may predict one's attitude and social implications of normative factors (Biddle & Nigg, 1970). Biddie and Nigg (1970) stated that TPB is a modification of the TRA. TPB implements the use of another variable known as Perceived Behavior Control (PBC). PBC is defined as "the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior" (Ajzen, 1988, p. 201). When a person is provided with the correct information to successfully and thoroughly conceptualize the said activity, they are more willing to act out the behavior. Studies show that PBC positively correlates with a positive impact on persons completing the behavior. Both theories may be used when making accurate predictions of intentions. For example, the theories suggest that the motivational effect on persons' intentions to exercise is directly impacted by their own personal attitudes and /or social influences surrounding them (Biddle & Nigg, 1970). In past studies, PBC was able to draw a direct correlation with results. Wankel et al. (1994) concluded that as a person's age increases, PBC becomes a more important factor rather than attitude to complete a selected exercise activity.

This stream described how physical activity affects psychological well-being. It also explained multiple theories on physical fitness and psychological well-being. The Self-Efficacy Theory, Health Belief Model, and Theory of Reasoned Action provide groundwork about the strengths of actionable behavior by individuals. This supports the theme of teachers intentionally working to decrease their stress and burnout. The following stream will explain different and innovative wellness activities in the workplace.

Stream 3: Wellness Activities and Initiatives in the Workplace

The final stream explains how novel fitness in the workplace is for many organizations and the ways that it may be utilized. The stream explains different workplace organizations that

are currently implementing wellness activities and initiatives for their staff/employees. The stream also delves further into the research of workplace wellness efforts and employee well-being.

Workplace Wellness Activities and Initiatives

There are multiple organizations that are now implementing physical activity programs successfully as an initiative to increase employee wellness and health. Each of the following companies supports holistic health with more innovative approaches to increase employee well-being. Martis (2021) provided different organizations within different business sectors that are imploring these amazing programs, such as Accenture, Asana, Draper, Google, Intuit, Microsoft, and SAS. This stream also introduces wellness programs that are currently being implemented in higher educational settings.

Accenture is a consulting company that offers program management to its clientele (Martis, 2021). Martis (2021) stated that Accenture provides an employee assistance program for a plethora of issues related to employee well-being. They have a fitness program that allows each employee to set their own health goals while receiving rewards for health-related activities (Martis, 2021). Accenture has even gone above the game and offered discounts for all employees while including an online fitness program that creates space for employees to work out whenever they would like to (Martis, 2021).

The Asana company provides program management services to its clientele. At Asana, they allow many different options for employee health and wealth. They allow employees to take naps in their customized "nap rooms" while on the clock (Martis, 2021). Martis (2021) also provided information that Asana provides unlimited Paid Time Off (PTO) in order to support each employee's different work-life balance. Asana also offers free daily yoga programs and free

gym memberships to all employees (Martis, 2021). The company also makes it a point to have a culinary team that provides three healthy and nutritious meals to all employees daily (Martis, 2021).

Draper is a creative technology company that helps to design and deploy advanced technology solutions. Martis (2021) explained that at Draper they provide a 10-week weight loss challenge that provides multiple incentives that include gift cards and cash prizes. To complement their incentives, the company also provides Zumba and Weight Watchers sessions for any employee interested (Martis, 2021).

Google, the technology giant, provides a robust wellness program that features services completely onsite for all employees, such as massage services, community bikes, physical therapy, free access to fitness centers, and even 24/7 physicians (Martis, 2021). Martis (2021) also stated that Google has campus cafes and kitchens that stay stocked with nutritious snacks for all. Google even grants employees with flexible fitness hours to work to achieve better work-life balances (Martis, 2021).

Intuit is a financial company that is best known for its support with taxes and financial support to its clientele. Intuit offers a "Fit for Life" program that includes many different classes supporting mindfulness and meditation services and/or classes (Martis, 2021). Martis (2021) also supported employees that engage in taking walks, breathing exercises, and reimburses any class in the above areas. The Intuit company also works on a cultural shift by posting mindfulness tips and movements in every conference room for employees (Martis, 2021).

Microsoft is a technology company that offers all-encompassing services to its clientele. The Microsoft company also supports employee wellness. Not only do they offer educational courses on weight management and fitness, but they also provide free gym memberships for all

employees (Martis, 2021). Martis (2021) explained that Microsoft would even go the extra mile and fund all gym equipment and other physical activities for each employee. At most company sites, they provide free Zumba classes, running tracks, basketball courts, and onsite walking for all employees (Martis, 2021). Microsoft also implemented health screening programs that provide each employee and their spouse with flu shots, diabetes, cholesterol, and blood pressure levels (Martis, 2021).

The SAS company is very familiar with employee wellness. SAS is a company geared towards innovative software and a major leader in analytics. Fitness is a major idea at this company. Martis (2021) stated that at each headquarters of SAS, they offer a fitness center, recreation center, and health care center for all employees.

Furthermore, in Montgomery County, Maryland, the Montgomery County Government offers employees a very robust wellness plan called Live Well (Montgomery County, 2021). Live Well includes the following tenets such as webinars, virgin pulse, and programs and/or special events (Montgomery County, 2021). Through programs and events, the county also offers virtual fitness class offerings, stretch breaks, and even running education series. Montgomery County (2021) offers virtual fitness classes such as chair yoga Wednesday mornings from 7:30am-8:30am and LiveWell Kickstart on Tuesday mornings from 8:00am-8:30am. Chair Yoga is a seated session that helps to improve strength and flexibility. The LiveWell Kickstart is a quick bodyweight workout that supports strengthening your body. The county understands the busy workday and wants to support its employees' holistic health by providing stretch breaks. Montgomery County (2021) provides stretch breaks on Mondays and Thursdays from 2:00pm-2:15pm for a couple of minutes of meditation and stretching. The last program that the county offers is the running education series. This series provides three sessions

surrounding running mechanics, strength training for runners, and building your own running program (Montgomery County, 2021).

Drexel University provides a wellness incentive program that is geared towards improving individual health and workplace wellness while increasing a culture of health throughout the university. This program allows full-time employees the opportunity to participate in a points program where they may earn monetary funds (Drexel University, 2021). For every point earned by the employee, they will receive one dollar. The only way to earn these points is to attend in-person and/or live seminars offered through the university that range from $1-$15 per event. Drexel University also offers a number of activity programs for full-time staff, such as walking club, employee Olympics, the Drexel recreational center, and the IBX healthy lifestyle program (Drexel University, 2021).

Multiple universities in the University of Maryland System offer their full-time employees the option to participate in the state of Maryland's government wellness programs. Universities such as the University of Maryland College Park, University of Maryland Baltimore County, and Bowie State University all participate in this program. This program is in partnership with Wellness 360 (Maryland State Government, 2021). Maryland State Government (2021) states that Wellness 360 provides an 8-week rotational program involving ways to unwind, online seminars and wellness challenges, live cooking demonstrations, and even dental health workshops. Wellness 360 also offers a movement program called Motivated to Move (Maryland State Government, 2021). This program offers weekly physical activity tasks, videos, and reading to supplement cardio logs with the goal to reach 35,000 steps every four weeks (Maryland State Government, 2021). The goal of Motivated to Move is to increase an individuals' time that they are moving.

Physical activity in the workplace has been a new intervention that organizations across the world have implemented to decrease job absenteeism and improve work productivity while eliminating job burnout. Considering the newness of physical activity in the workplace, this topic has not been researched for the K-12 educational realm. School systems have begun to create incentives such as paying for a gym membership, receiving employee discount memberships, and some partnerships with surrounding fitness programs for a lower rate monetarily, but none have been studied where the district has integrated physical activity into the workplace. Due to the underwhelming studies of physical activity programs in school districts, the researcher has decided to focus on studies about physical activity in the business and/or corporate world.

Research on Workplace Wellness Efforts and Employee Well-Being

This section of the stream explains the positive benefits and attributes to workplace wellness and employee well-being. This section also offers different initiatives that have been incentivized for increased employee well-being by different organizations.

As early as 1996, Dailey and Parfitt conducted a review of research and concluded that there is a direct positive correlation between employees' physical fitness, reducing lifestyle risk factors, and positive emotional well-being. In order to decrease job absenteeism, employers must understand the reasoning behind it. Frequent absenteeism may be a result of negative job satisfaction, job burnout, and even self-pity (Fist & Fist, 2003).

Fist and Fist (2003) reported that participating in any physical activity will create change in the brain's arousal and the person's physiological structures. This will then improve many different systems of thinking such as independence, self-esteem, grit, empathy, and even less anxiety (Fist & Fist, 2003). Whitsel et al. (2019) stated that if employers can have employees

physically more active to a moderate level and/or involved in some physical activity that there will be a direct increase in overall satisfaction. In the same study conducted, employees found a "5%-10% wage increase, increased overall family earnings, lower debt, and lower long-term unemployment (Whitsel et al., 2019).

There has been such a positive increase in the correlation of physical fitness in the workplace to decrease workplace stress and burnout that the World Health Organization (2010) made strong recommendations that many different organizations, including schools, implement a fitness program to create a culture that embodies regular physical activity for employees. Research shows that employees who practice regular fitness activity are more productive at work (Robroek, van den Berg et al.,2011). Vatan et al. (2017) stated, "Studies have shown that compared to unhealthy employees, healthy people have a higher capacity for performance of occupational tasks" (p. 297). Vatan et al. (2017) also agreed that with an increase in physical activity programs, employers would notice an improved employee job performance and effectiveness. This study also noted that employees with less physical activity typically have lower productivity (Vatan et al., 2017). Brown et al. (2011) concluded that providing employees with a consistent physical fitness program will have long-standing benefits on productivity such as fewer illness-related issues, fewer healthcare costs per employer, and even an increase of the organization's output and branding.

Furthermore, research shows that employee fitness programs will begin to result in less absenteeism and even decreased healthcare expenses for the employer and/or employee (Dailey & Parfitt, 1996). Evidence supports the idea that meeting a standard physical activity level will directly impact many employee-related health concerns. For example, a scientific study conducted by the World Health Organization (2009) stated that employees who met a certain

physical activity level had "40% lower risk of type 2 Diabetes, 35% lower risk of Heart disease, 25% lower risk of falls, Depression and Dementia, and even 20% lower risk of colon cancer and breast cancer" (para. 9). Mills et al. (2007) facilitated a study that identifies physical fitness as an intervention to health risks. The intervention of physical activity with the participants was so successful that the improvements were considered "clinically" relevant because of the increase in work performance (Mills et al., 2007).

Ablah et al. (2019) provided information on how organizations can support their employees by including physical activity. The researchers further explained that supplementing physical activity in the workplace can improve individual holistic health while creating a new and dynamic workplace culture for the organization (Ablah et al., 2019). Implementing public policy in organizations with regard to workplace physical activity will provide them with more benefits such as tax credits, wellness grants, wellness incentives, and employer-provided subsidies for public transportation and active communities (Ablah et al., 2019).

Organizations are eligible to receive wellness tax credits which, if used correctly, means that physical activity initiatives can be written off up to $10,000 or 25% of the cost annually (Ablah et al., 2019). Another benefit for organizations is workplace wellness grants that are generally offered by the local and/or state governments (Ablah et al., 2019). These grants take all financial restraints off of the organization in order to support true wellness development and initiative at no cost. Employer subsidies for public transportation and communities are a great way to increase physical activity for their employees. Although this benefit requires organizations to make financial contributions, state and/or local agencies may also support these initiatives in order to promote walking and/or bicycling to and from work (Ablah et al., 2019).

Ablah et al. (2019) also described ways that employers can begin to implement wellness activities in their actual workplace and cultural policies. Recommended policies can include a short activity break policy, paid time to exercise, stretching at the beginning of shifts, flex time for physical activity, booster break policy, and finally, walking meetings (Ablah et al., 2019). A short activity break works to decrease sedentary positions of all employees. Short activity breaks provide employees with several health benefits such as better blood triglycerides and glucose levels while increasing short- and long-term individual development (Ablah et al., 2019). Ablah et al. (2019) stated that if enacted correctly, this policy could provide all employees with opportunities not usually afforded to them throughout the workday.

Paid time to exercise can be a hugely impactful policy when implemented correctly. Ablah et al. (2019) explained that allowing employees to engage in physical activity while on the clock at work may help to increase engagement with any wellness initiative in the workplace. Studies have shown that, to many employees, the biggest barrier is the lack of time during the workday and the transition to their personal day (Ablah et al., 2019). Paid time to exercise coupled with gym memberships may help to increase synergistic outcomes for each employee (Ablah et al., 2019). There has not been a set duration or even frequency that best suits this policy, but studies did state that at least 15 minutes will improve the sedentary habits of employees while decreasing stress and better holistic health (Ablah et al., 2019).

In addition to paid time to exercise, stretching at the beginning of each shift is another recommended wellness policy. When implemented, stretching can provide a space for employees, specifically manual laborers, to minimize skeletal injury and improve grounding techniques (Ablah et al., 2019). Stretching in a group with a team also supports and strengthens interpersonal communication and improves rapport building amongst all (Ablah et al., 2019).

Ablah et al. (2019) also identified that flex time for physical activity can prove to be a successful policy intervention for physical activity. Flex time allows the employee to engage in physical activity with no loss of hours in their work shifts or schedules (Ablah et al., 2019). Ablah et al. (2019) stated that employees that were made aware of this policy would be more likely to engage in physical activity at barely any cost to the employer.

Ablah et al. (2019) also explained that booster break policies should be implemented in order to boost the culture and idea of physical activity. A booster break policy provides all employees with at least one 15-minute physical activity break per workday (Ablah et al., 2019). The booster break is typically performed in an open environment/setting that is led by a coworker. This policy helps to build more teamwork and accountability by building team rapport (Ablah et al., 2019). Lastly, Ablah et al. (2019) spoke about having policies that include walking meetings. Walking meetings throughout the workday can be useful for brainstorming and creativity in the workplace, while possibly increasing employees' internal motivation to engage in physical activity (Ablah et al., 2019).

Ablah et al. (2019) recommended certain strategies. This means that all information with regard to new policies is clearly presented and explained. Providing concrete information and details will help employees and others understand the parameters of what is and are not acceptable (Ablah et al., 2019). An example of this could be specific time frames, duration of physical activity, distance and location for physical activity, which leads certain physical activities, and even the specific days of the week depending on the organization (Ablah et al., 2019). Policy as a supplement to a physical activity program will help to drive culture change and organizational goals (Ablah et al., 2019). Ablah et al. (2019) explained that during any type of implementation of a comprehensive physical activity program, the introduction of new and

innovative policies is paramount. Introduction and support include central staircases, informational posters with physical activity programs, on-site exercise locations and/or facilities, higher discounts on gym memberships, creating team challenges, and even starting walking clubs.

Arrogi et al. (2019) conducted a year-long longitudinal study that focused on physical fitness as an intervention. The objective of the study was to use this intervention to explore the correlation between physical fitness and workplace well-being. Researchers were able to determine that physical fitness did increase employee well-being as defined by the study guidelines (Arrogi et al., 2019). Research also found that although there was an increase in well-being, this was not an immediate increase but more of a gradual increase over nine months (Arrogi et al., 2019). This study also concluded that being able to provide physical fitness intervention at the workplace allows for more clients to be affected. Using this as a workplace intervention allows for changed behavior, including interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental, and culturally (Arrogi et al., 2019). Whitsel et al. (2019) concluded that the majority of fitness initiatives have more effect when they are internalized, integrated and accessible for any and all employees on many different levels of the organization. This means that organizations must be able to provide the fitness program with fidelity to all employees while ensuring that the organization is utilizing the intervention to the best of its ability (Whitsel et al., 2019).

The above stream explained the research associated with workplace wellness efforts and employee well-being physical activity and employee wellness. After examining multiple studies, the research supports the following overall highlights addressed in this stream. The first highlight of the research is that physical activity does support positive employee well-being in the workplace. The second highlight is that although physical activity does support positive

employee well-being, research shows that the results are more gradual rather than immediate. The third highlight would be that employee satisfaction and work culture were positively impacted after implementing these wellness activities and initiatives. The final highlight from the research was that physical activity in groups at the workplace increased stronger interpersonal skills between teams and staff at these organizations.

Summary

As previously presented, teacher stress and burnout continue to be a major hindrance in today's educational realm. Teachers experience this workplace stress at significantly higher rates than most other jobs and/or careers. The data expressed that ignoring this phenomenon will only further exacerbate the issue in the coming years, especially with the increased societal expectations and pandemic-related issues. The literature provides more clarity that teachers are utilizing coping skills, but in reality, there is a need for more sustainability and consistency with support from school districts to their employees. Burnout is eminent unless school districts begin to use innovative techniques and/or ideas to address the stressors within school culture that contribute to teachers being overworked, overstressed, and continually burnt out.

As evidenced in this literature review, physical activity is not only an effective intervention to stress and burnout, but a recommended practice by many different world-renowned medical and/or health organizations. Theories presented to accompany this relationship are the Self-Efficacy Theory, Health Belief Model theory, Theory of Planned Behavior, and Perceived Behavior Control. Physical activity provides many different positive effects, such as increased mental toughness, increased holistic healings, decreased stress levels, and increased mood stabilization. Researchers provided data that supports physical activity being one of the best deterrents for burnout and stress for many professions.

There are multiple companies and/or organizations that have worked to integrate wellness programs into their workplace culture. These companies are mostly in the corporate and private sector world. Companies have begun to understand that there is a strong correlation between holistic wellness programs and increased productivity and employee satisfaction. Increased satisfaction and productivity lead to better workplace culture and create stronger buy-in for all staff.

This research bridged the gap between the industries that are being more innovative and the educational industry that tends to be more traditional on holistic employee well-being. In completion of the study, the researcher hoped to show school districts how imperative consistent physical activity aligns to better employee well-being and a positive workplace culture.

In chapter two, past research was carefully reviewed and identified the need for research on physical activity and teacher stress. In this review, there were many different themes introduced about educators' experiences in the workplace, the way physical activity impacts humans psychologically, and examples of physical activity in the workplace. Teacher stress and burnout are serious issues in today's society. By implementing physical activity as an intervention, it can help to decrease teacher stress and burnout as it has in many other business sectors. Chapter three will expound on the methodology and procedures associated with the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of urban high school teachers who utilized physical activity to mitigate their work-related stress and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. By engaging urban high school teachers in retrospective reflection on their experiences with work-related stress during the pandemic, this study identified what teachers described as the sources of their stress and their stress management strategies. In order to fully explore the experiences of urban high school teachers, the researcher used a narrative approach. This chapter explained the research design and rationale, research methods, data collection and analysis procedures, methodological limitations, and ethical considerations of this study.

The following research questions helped to guide this study:

1. What do high school teachers identify as the sources of their work-related stress?

2. How do high school teachers describe their stress management strategies?

3. How do high school teachers describe the role of their physical activity in the management of their work-related stress?

   a. How do high school teachers employ their physical activity in the management of work-related stress?

   b. Are there any opportunities for further information gathering and/or mastery of physical activity provided by the workplace organization?

   c. How do high school teachers describe their schedule and/or routine around implementing physical activity?

Research Design and Rationale

The researcher utilized a narrative approach to investigate the study. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the stories that teachers tell about how they understand the effect of physical activity on their well-being. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that a narrative study aims to explore the life of an individual. Narrative research sought to express participants' lived experiences and stories with regard to a specific situation and/or experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In a narrative inquiry, the researcher creates a story told to them and/or one that was collaborated on together (researcher and participant) as a way to convey a theme and/or pattern (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) also stated that narrative studies look to gain further context and "exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, and enacted" (p. 68). Story telling is a primary way to collect participants' lived and told experiences when using a narrative research inquiry in a study. Moen (2006) explained that all humans continuously produce narratives throughout their life cycle. It helps to create structure and balance with life experiences (Moen, 2006). Therefore, a narrative study allowed the participants to be the most authentic and genuine in their storytelling (Moen, 2006). These stories can be collected in different ways, such as through group conversations, documents, and individualized conversations.

Narrative research takes an in-depth approach to examine the stories that participants talk about their lived experiences. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that collecting participants' stories about their lived and/or told experiences helps to shed light on thoughts, patterns, and themes. During this collection of the data, the researcher worked to collaborate in open and honest dialogue about a specific interaction and/or situation from the participant's point of view

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). This collaboration allowed the researcher to tell the participants' stories while being provided emotional and physical information from said participant. The researcher concluded by narrating the information provided by each participant. After the information was collected, the researcher then had the space to reflect on what was presented while gaining further insight into the participants' perspectives (Moen, 2006).

There are many reasons why a narrative approach was best suited for this study. The researcher sought to understand how participants describe their experiences using physical activities to mitigate burnout. Completing a narrative inquiry allowed the researcher to fully paint the story of how high school teachers use physical activity as a way to mitigate workplace stress as told by the teachers themselves. It also supported the authenticity of the story during the collection of data by having validation checks throughout the study. The researcher utilized the technique of triangulation as a way to show validity in this study. At the conclusion, the researcher created themes and patterns from shared stories and perspectives of the participants.

<div align="center">**Population and Site**</div>

Population and Sample Description

Participants were recruited from various urban public high schools in Maryland and/or the District of Columbia. The researcher strictly focused on urban public high schools due to the severity of the workplace stress, culture, and socio-economic status of the community they serve (Sutcher et al., 2016). Maryland and the District of Columbia were specifically chosen due to the multiple urban educational systems located in these areas. In Maryland, there are 497 high schools that include 57,718 high school teachers. In the District of Columbia, there are 113 high schools that include 5,925 high school teachers.

Six participants were recruited to participate in this study. Dworkin (2012) stated that many researchers in the qualitative realm prefer not to put a number on the sample size of the study. Furthermore, many books, articles, and recommended literary works suggest that the sample size stay between 5 to 50 participants (Dworkin, 2012). Due to the researcher's financial obligations, time constraints, and the depth of work required per participant to delve into research effectively and efficiently, he utilized a sample size between five to seven participants. This sample size allowed the researcher to fully emerge into the data while also meeting critical timelines agreed on for this study.

Six teachers were selected to participate in this study to reflect diversity along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, years of teaching, grade level, and subject matter. The study sought to capture a wide range of teachers, including race/ethnicity and gender to capture a range of teachers' experiences, stressors and coping mechanisms, specifically physical activity. Participants taught across 9th – 12th grades (special education through Advanced Placement), and a range of subject areas including (but not limited to) English, History, Math, Chemistry, and Art. Participants were required to have a minimum of three years teaching at their current or past urban high school. The reasoning for this selection was that having a minimum of three years actually working in an urban school provides participants with a full understanding of the stressors associated with the teaching profession and the urban school context. Eligible participants must have indicated that they use physical activity as a coping skill to workplace stress.

The researcher chose urban high school teachers specifically due to the workplace stress and burnout associated with teaching in this specific demographic and culture. Sutcher et al. (2016) stated that urban teachers experience extremely high levels of stress and burnout due to

low student motivation, lack of resources, violent community issues spilling over into the schools, and lastly, the physical safety of everyone in the building (Sutcher et al., 2016). Mérida-López and Extremera (2017) stated that urban high school teachers before they are able to teach, have to make sure their students are ready to learn. Within urban environments, many times, this looks like teachers feeding their students from their own pockets, providing clothing due to conditions at home, making sure that students have a safe space to go before and after leaving school, and even helping to manage familial troubles that impact student wellness. The culture of an urban environment with regard to positive and negative attributes directly impacts the school building culture (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017). Systemically, urban high school teachers are required to prepare students for many national and local standardized tests. These tests may include (within the DC Metro area of the study) the following Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), ACT, District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System (DC-CAS), High School Assessments (HAS), and Maryland Integrated Science Assessments (MISA) to name a few. School and district leaders pile on work for teachers that includes heavy deadlines, more in the building time, and in most instances, has a direct effect on yearly evaluations and salary (Carroll et al., 2020).

Site Description

This study did not have a specific research site. However, all participants taught in a similar educational context – an urban public high school. The researcher chose to work with urban public high schools due to the working conditions that contribute to teacher stress and burnout (Ingersoll, 2011; Sutcher et al., 2016).

Site Access

Site access was not required because the study does not have a specific research site.

Research Methods

This section describes the researcher's utilization of research methods. The research methods for this study were semi-structured interviews and surveys. Each research method was conducted via Zoom. There were pros and cons to utilizing telecommunications. The pros of Zoom were that it allowed participants to be safe amidst the pandemic, created a safe space for clients to be fully vulnerable, and allowed participants to be where they wanted to for the duration of the interview without having to travel to a said location. The cons of Zoom was that there the researcher was unable to truly read non-verbal communication outside of the neck up from participants, some participants experienced wifi issues, which created a slight bit of frustration, and finally, for some interviews, participants seemed to be burned out from technology due to their job obligations of being in front the camera for extended periods of time.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a primary research method employed by narrative researchers. Seidman (2013) stated that there is value in listening and having dialogue with a participant in qualitative studies. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to prepare questions prior to the interview and create a safe space for open-ended answers and dialogue (Seidman, 2013).

Instrument Description

Each participant participated in one 60-minute interview and one 45-minute interview. During the first interview, the researcher explored the reasons why participants joined the teaching profession, how and why they teach their current subject area and grade level, how and why they came to teach at their current school, what they see as their sources of stress, and how

they manage their stress. Special attention was given to physical activity as an approach to

mitigate stress. During the first interview, the following questions were asked:

1. Why did you become a teacher?

2. Why did you decide to teach in an urban high school?

3. Explain your current role and responsibilities.

4. What does a typical day teaching look like for you at your school?

5. At the end of the day, how stressed are you on a scale of 1-10? Please explain.

6. What are some of the sources of your stress at work? Is it student related? Staff related? Safety related? Administrator related?

7. Tell me about your most stressful day at work? What happened? What did you do to address your stress?

8. What are some of the strategies that you use to manage your work-related stress? Drinking? Smoking? Exercising? Venting?

9. What types of physical activity do you engage in? What is your favorite and why?

10. Does engaging in (insert the types of physical activity the participant described) help you to manage your stress? Please explain. Please provide an example.

11. Where did you learn or gain the knowledge that physical activity would help to decrease stress or burnout?

12. If you were at 10 for feeling stressed before your physical activity, what was your stress level afterwards between 1-10? Elaborate.

13. Have you ever felt burned out? Tell me more about this experience. Why did you stay and continue to teach? How were you able to recover from feeling burned out? What did you do? Did physical activity(ies) played a role in your recovery from burning out?

14. During the 2020 – 2021 academic year, how did COVID-19 affect your workplace stress?

15. Due to COVID-19 did you change the way you engage in physical activity? Did the change(s) help/work? Please explain.

16. Going into the upcoming academic year, what do you expect to be sources of stress and how do you plan to manage your stress? Any lessons or new insights from the past academic year?

17. What advice would you give to a new teacher about how to manage work-related stress?

18. What advice would you give to a principal or superintendent about how to support teachers in managing work-related stress?

During the second interview (approximately two weeks later), the researcher revisited areas discussed in the first interview for clarity and further exploration. The researcher also asked follow-up questions related to data reported on the participants' surveys. The researcher invited the participants to share anything new that came to mind for them since the first interview. The researcher explored new themes and areas that arose from the preliminary analysis of the first round of interviews with participants. This second interview served as a member check to strengthen the internal validity of the data. During the second interview, the researcher posed the following questions:

1. Tell me about a time when you felt supported with regard to your workplace stress? Who/what made you feel supported?

2. What is your experience with school districts providing space for teachers' social and emotional well-being?

3. Tell me a time that the school you work at supported you with workplace stress and workplace burnout?

4. How has the district you work in supported you with decreasing workplace stress and workplace burnout?

5. Describe your vision of a school and/or district that supports teacher social and emotional well-being. (Probe for reduction of stress and burnout, or is this a separate question)

6. Are you aware of any physical activity programs for employee wellness within your organization?

7. Is there any messaging from your workplace offering you any ideas to decrease your stress and/or burnout?

8. Have any of these messages stood out to you the most? If so, which one?

9. If not, do you think it would be impactful for you as a teacher if you received more opportunities from your workplace?

10. Do you feel you would be more willing to engage in physical activity if implementation programs were actionable programming (a yoga instructor, a personal trainer, a weightlifting coach at the workplace) promoted by your workplace at no charge?

Participant Selection

As stated earlier, the researcher accepted five to seven current teachers on a first-come, first serve basis to reflect diversity along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, years teaching, grade level and subject matter. Participants were required to have a minimum of three years teaching at an urban high school. Participants taught across 9th – 12th grades (special education through Advanced Placement), and a range of subject areas including (but not limited to) English, History, Math, Chemistry, and Art. Eligible participants must indicate that they use physical activity as a coping skill to workplace stress.

Identification and Invitation

The researcher advertised this study using a flyer with pertinent information about the proposed study flyer via social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook. The researcher posted the flyer in his educational group text threads. The researcher was clear to have any and all interested participants reach out to the password-protected Drexel email account provided on the flyer in order to protect their identity and privacy through every stage of the process. The researcher provided their Drexel email on the flyer and asked that any interested participants reach out to request more information. Once prospective participants indicated their

interest in the study, the researcher ensured that they met eligibility requirements for the study by having a brief phone call asking the following questions:

1. How long have you been a teacher in an urban public high school?

2. How would you describe your level of physical activity?

    a. Between 0 – 2 hours a week

    b. Between 3 – 5 hours a week

    c. More than 5 hours a week

3. Do you use physical activity to help manage work-related stress?

In order to partake in this study, participants needed to respond with being a teacher for at least three years at an urban high school, with a level of physical activity to be at least 3-5 hours a week, and yes, that they utilize physical activity to manage work-related stress. Once approved through the vetting process, the researcher scheduled the first interview with the participant to take place via Zoom. The researcher sent the participants a confirmation email for the scheduled interview, displaying the date, time, and Zoom link. The researcher created a unique Zoom link for each participant to protect their anonymity and confidentiality and reduce the chance of someone entering the virtual space during the interview. Each Zoom link required a passcode for entry. This confirmation email also included the consent script for the participant to review, as well as instructions to choose a quiet, private, safe, and comfortable location to meet via zoom. The day before the scheduled interview, participants received a reminder email containing the same information.

Data Collection

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher read over the consent form with the participant, asked if the participant had any questions or concerns, and emphasized all

participants' rights. After responding to the participants' questions and concerns, the researcher

obtained verbal consent to participate in the interview and permission to audio and video record

the interview.

During the first 15 minutes of each interview, the researcher requested the participants to

complete a survey. The researcher emailed the participants the survey link. The survey

collected data on the participants' demographic information, stress management strategies, and

physical activity. The survey was created using Microsoft Office Forms from the Drexel

University encrypted Office 365 website.

Once participants completed the survey, the researcher began the first interview. The

interview ranged between 45 to 60 minutes in length. The researcher created a space for the

participants to explain and tell their stories along with their thoughts and feelings completely

individualized. Trust was built with the participant by building rapport. Rapport was established

by asking soft, easy to answer questions and reminding participants that there is no incorrect

answer. All answers and responses are open-ended, meaning you can feel and say whatever you

would like or need to convey the message or tell the story.

At the end of the first interview, the researcher scheduled the second interview to take

place approximately two weeks later. Similar to the first interview, the second interview was

scheduled at a date and time that was convenient for the participant. Confirmation emails were

sent, and a reminder email was sent the day before the scheduled interview.

The second interview began by reviewing the consent script. The researcher reviewed

the participants' rights, secured their consent to participate, and secured their permission to

record before beginning the interview. During the second interview, the researcher clarified

aspects of the first interview that were unclear and sought additional information on stories that

were incomplete. The researcher asked the participants if they have any additional thoughts or insights on their experiences since the first interview that they are willing to share and discuss. The researcher conducted a member check with participants by sharing preliminary findings. The researcher gauged to what extent participants agreed with the researcher's description of early themes and further explored these early themes with the participants. The second interview concluded with a short set of semi-structured interview questions. This second interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked to provide a preferred pseudonym. Pseudonyms were used to refer to participants in the reporting of findings and conclusions to protect their identities and confidentiality. Study data was stored using the participants' pseudonyms.

All audio and video recordings were recorded to Drexel's Zoom Cloud – as secure, encrypted, and password protected site. In the Zoom Cloud, the interviews were transcribed using the Otter.ai feature. Once recorded, the researcher edited the transcript by relistening to the interview and making corrections as needed. After listening to the interview, the researcher made note of things that standout from the discussion – aspects of the interview that speak directly to the research questions, unanticipated and interesting insights about their experiences, and areas requiring further exploration and explanation. These initial notes and reflections are part of the preliminary analysis of the first round of interviews. The interview recordings, transcripts, and early data analysis will be saved and filed in an encrypted password protected platform through Drexel University's 365 Office. All data and analysis were saved to an outlook folder shared with the supervising professor via Drexel's encrypted Office 365 site. All recordings were destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Survey

The purpose of the survey for this narrative study was to triangulate the data collected via semi-structured interviews with the participants. The survey was used to gather background information as well as information concerning the participants' physical activity. Participants completed the survey prior to the interviews. The survey served to deepen understanding of the stories brought to light through the interviews.

Instrument Description

The researcher created a survey using the Forms app in Drexel's Microsoft Office 365. The survey collected data related to three areas: 1) demographic information; 2) sources of stress and stress level; and 3) information about their physical activities. Background information included age, gender, race/ethnicity, number of years teaching, number of years teaching at current school, grade level, and subject areas. The survey section on stressors and stress levels invited participants to choose from a list of common sources of stress for teachers derived from the literature, as well as to write down other sources of stress specific to them. Participants were asked to gauge the stress level on a typical day of teaching on a scale of 1 – 5 (1 minimal, 5 intense), and asked to explain the reasons why they gave themselves this score. Participants were asked to indicate the types of physical activity they engage in and to share their schedule (i.e., how many days a week, how many hours a week, what times of day). The following questions were asked in the survey:

1. What is your chosen pseudonym (the name you created for yourself) for the purposes of this study?

2. How old are you?

3. What gender do you most closely identify with?

4. What race do you identify most closely with?

5. What grade level(s) do you teach?

6. What subject area(s) do you teach?

7. Have you utilized physical activity as a self-care technique from workplace stress?

8. How long have you taught in your current urban high school?

9. How many years have you worked in any high school regardless of setting?

10. What are the top three sources of stress in your work life?

11. Please gauge your level of stress on a typical workday, between 1(minimal)-5(intense).

12. What are three stress management strategies that you use to address your work-related stress?

13. Please share a schedule of your physical activity for a typical week during the school year. Indicate the time and type of physical activity – for example, 6am, Three-mile run or 7:30pm, Yoga Class.

Table 1

Schedule of Your Physical Activity for a Typical Week

Schedule of your physical activity for a typical week during the school year		
Day	Time	Physical Activity
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Sunday

Data Collection

At the beginning of the interview (after all consents have been granted), the researcher emailed the survey and asked participants to complete the survey. The survey data was saved in Drexel's encrypted Office 365 suite to be analyzed.

Data Collection and Procedures

Stages of Data Collection

Data was collected through an internet-based platform called Zoom. This platform was password protected and encrypted for confidential concerns. The data collection process included the following timeline for the collection of data. The researcher proposed to their dissertation committee in late May/early June. After a successful proposal hearing, the researcher completed revisions and submitted an IRB application in June 2021. The researcher received approval from IRB at the end of August 2021. At this point in time, the researcher began recruiting participants and collecting data from August 2021 – September 2021. From October 2021 – December 2021, the researcher analyzed data and drafted chapters 4 and 5. The researcher also edited chapters 1-3 during December 2021. The researcher sent the completed dissertation to the committee in early January 2022. The researcher defended their dissertation in early February 2022. Although, there may be some extended time on certain parts, this timeline was followed closely.

Each research method was via Zoom. There were pros and cons utilizing telecommunications. The pros of Zoom were that it allowed participants to be safe amidst the pandemic, it created safe space for clients to be fully vulnerable and transparent, and it allowed participants to be where they wanted to for the duration of the interview without having to travel

to a said location. The cons of Zoom was the researcher was unable to truly read non-verbal communication outside of the neck up from participants, there were Wi-Fi issues for some participants which created a slight bit of frustration and anxiety, and finally, for some interviews participants seemed to be burned out from technology due to their job obligations of being in front the camera for extended periods of time. The researcher mitigated most of these concerns but drawing on his training and skillset as a psychotherapist. Psychotherapists are trained through school and practice to be able to build rapport with clients and creating a safe space for all individuals that they are working with, all while meeting the clients where they are mentally and/or emotionally. Simpson, Richardson, Castelnuovo and Reid (2021) explain that there are a number of techniques utilized in the creation of building therapeutic relationships which may include active listening, head nodding, eye contact, and providing in the moment feedback.

Data Analysis and Procedures for Each Method

Interview data were analyzed utilizing Saldana's (2015) approach to first and second-cycle data analysis. Prior to coding, the researcher conducted an analytic review and created analytic notes of each participant at the conclusion of each interview. Each analytic note was combined into major theme responses per the research questions. All participants' interviews were reviewed in their entirety at the conclusion of this study to extract any similar lived experiences and major themes. Data was coded utilizing a first cycle coding that includes emotion coding, descriptive coding, and in vivo coding:

1. Emotion Coding was the researcher coding a transcription or narrative with an emphasis on the emotions expressed during a situation and/or experience. These emotions are directly related to the participants' interpersonal experiences of the situations being addressed (Saldana, 2015).

2.   Descriptive Coding was the researcher coding a transcription or narrative by summarizing topics and passages in simple word(s) and/or phrases. These word(s) and/or phrases typically describe the topic of the data (Saldana, 2015).

3.   In Vivo Coding was the researcher coding a transcription or narrative using the actual word(s) and/or phrases from the participants (Saldana, 2015).

After the first cycle of coding, the researcher performed a second cycle coding utilizing *a priori* codes derived from the literature. Data were analyzed for patterns using Saldana's (2015) rubrics. The goal of pattern coding was to examine the data to find repetitive patterns of actions and to see if there were any consistencies throughout. Data was then reduced to identify relevant themes and supportive sub-themes. The researcher made sure to adhere to ethical standards to preserve participants' voices and stories and ensure trustworthiness of the data analysis.

Survey Data Analysis

The researcher used survey data to analyze lived experiences of participants in the workplace. The survey data was used to create the participant charts featuring relevant information on the participants' demographics such as race/ethnicity, gender, years teaching, and their athletic identity. A separate participant section was to feature information about the participants' physical activities – specifying the nature of the physical activity and how often they engage in these activities on a weekly basis. Survey data was analyzed and used to inform and triangulate the descriptions of the participants' stress management strategies presented in the interviews. The researcher compared the survey data along with the interview transcripts to build a true understanding of how participants utilize physical activity to mitigate their workplace stress. The survey data was examined to further understand the relationships of the participants, their work-related stressors, and their physical activity regime. Lastly, the survey data informed

the analysis of the interview transcripts by providing groundwork and baseline for the researcher to understand where each participant is coming from with their storytelling from the interviews.

Methodological Limitations

As with all qualitative studies, the findings from this study are not generalizable. The purpose of this study was not to make generalizations but rather to shed light on multiple perspectives and realities about a similar experience and/or situation. When conducting a narrative study, the researcher aimed to gain insight to build themes and patterns of the said individuals, not to make generalizations. The sample size was not large enough to make overarching assumptions or generalizations, but it did create space to speak about patterns and themes best suited from teachers in the field. Reporter bias was also a limitation due to participants wanting to please and answer correctly to the researcher's study. The researcher continued to remind participants throughout the interview that there was no correct or incorrect response or answer. All answers were received with an unbiased tone and/or response.

Ethical Considerations

During this study, there were a number of ethical considerations that the researcher must consider. Regarding privacy and confidentiality, each participant was given a pseudonym that followed them throughout this study. The pseudonyms were only known by the researcher and supervising chair in the study. Communication to all participants was through password protected emails and virtual platforms. No personal identifying information was recorded from participants during this study. All efforts to keep information anonymous by the researcher were taken into account. At the completion of this study, all audio recordings were destroyed, and all video recordings were destroyed. The researcher made participants aware that considering that this interview is via zoom, he would like them to be in the most private space possible. The

researcher made sure to be in a quiet and private place to maintain confidentiality. Lastly, the researcher followed all protocols and procedures provided by the Drexel University's IRB. Another consideration was the COVID-19 pandemic, it created heightened stress levels and teachers specifically may have been more on edge than normal. Lastly, participants could or could not have shared that they were partaking in illegal activities such as recreational drugs. The researcher disclosed prior to the beginning of the interview that he was a mandated reporter and that the information shared does stay private unless it falls in accordance with physically harming another human being or themselves.

Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the following components of the methodology associated with this study: the research design and rationale, the population and site, the research methods, the data collection and procedures, methodological limitations, and finally, the ethical considerations of this study. The researcher explained in detail why a narrative inquiry approach was best suited for the study and the ways that the data was collected and results extrapolated. The following chapters discussed the findings and results with conclusions and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of urban high school teachers who utilized physical activity to mitigate their work-related stress and burnout. By engaging urban high school teachers in retrospective reflection on their experiences with work-related stress (including during the pandemic), this study identified what teachers described as the sources of their stress and their stress management strategies. The following research questions guided this narrative study:

1. What do urban high school teachers identify as the sources of their work-related stress?

4. 2. How do urban high school teachers describe their stress management strategies?

5. 3. How do urban high school teachers describe their motivation to implement physical activity in the management of their work-related stress?

The researcher chose high school teachers as a focus due to the lack of research on the stress and burnout experienced by secondary teachers. Although all teachers experience high amounts of daily stress, high school teachers and high school culture specifically exude high levels of anxiety from all tenets of the workplace (Bottiani et al., 2019). The researcher strictly focused on urban public high schools due to the severity of the workplace stress, culture, and socio-economic status of the community they serve (Sutcher et al., 2016). Bottiani et al.(2019) stated that high school teachers are supporting students in their most pivotal and transformational years mentally, emotionally, and physically. Sutcher et al. (2016) stated that urban secondary teachers experience extremely high levels of stress and burnout due to low student motivation, lack of resources, violent community issues spilling over into the schools, and lastly, physical safety of everyone in the building. These teachers are also managing student stress and behavior in different ways.

Participants were recruited from various urban public high schools in Maryland and/or the District of Columbia. In total, there were 18 teachers that responded to recruitment efforts. The researcher would like to hypothesize that although the teaching profession is predominantly women, more individuals that identified as men signed up for the study due to the researcher placing a major emphasis on coping through physical activity and/or working out. The first six teachers were selected to participate in this study to reflect diversity along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, years teaching, grade level, and subject matter while working to capture teacher experiences and stressors.

Table 3

Participant Chart

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Gender	Years Teaching	Athletic Background
Desmond	36	African American	Male	4-7 Years	Youth Sports
					High School Sports
Felicia	42	African American	Female	10+ years	Youth Sports
					High School Sports
					College Sports
Fiona	29	African American	Female	4-7 years	Youth Sports
					High School
Kie	30	African American	Male	4-7 years	Youth Sports
					High School Sports
					College Sports
					Professional Sports
Kobe	32	African American	Male	8-10 years	Youth Sports
					High School Sports
					College Sports

Monty	32	African American	Male	8-10 years	Youth Sports
					High School Sports
					College Sports

The six participants ranged in ages from 29-42, with an average age of 33.5 years of age. One hundred percent of the participants identified as African American. Four participants identified as male (66%), and two participants identified as female (33%). All participants teach in predominantly African American urban public high schools in a major urban center in the northeastern United States. The average years of teaching for participants in the study was 8 years with a range between 4 years and 15 years. One hundred percent of the participants engaged in athletic activities in youth sports and high school sports. Four participants continued to play sports in college, and one participant played professionally before becoming a teacher.

The researcher collected data through two semi-structured interviews and a background survey via Zoom telecommunications. Each participant participated in one 60-minute interview and one 45-minute interview. During the first interview, the researcher explored the reasons why participants joined the teaching profession, how and why they teach their current subject area and grade level, how and why they came to teach at their current school, what they see as their sources of stress, and how they manage their stress. Special attention was given to physical activity as an approach to mitigate stress. During the second interview (approximately two weeks later), the researcher revisited areas discussed in the first interview for clarity and further exploration. The researcher also asked follow-up questions related to data reported on the participants' surveys. The researcher invited the participants to share anything new that came to mind for them since the first interview. The researcher explored new themes and areas that arose from the preliminary analysis of the first round of interviews with participants. The second

interview served as a member check to strengthen the internal validity of the data. The survey was used to gather background information as well as information concerning the participants' physical activity. Participants completed the survey prior to the first interview. The survey served to deepen an understanding of the stories brought to light through the interviews.

Data was coded utilizing a first cycle coding that includes emotion coding, descriptive coding, and *in vivo* coding. After the first cycle of coding, the researcher performed a second cycle coding utilizing *a priori* codes derived from the literature. Data were then analyzed for patterns using Saldana's (2015) rubrics. The goal of pattern coding was to examine the data to find repetitive patterns of actions and to see if there were any consistencies throughout. After first and second cycle coding, the researcher utilized analytical memos to determine themes and patterns from the data in correlation to the research questions. Data was then reduced to identify relevant themes and supportive sub-themes.

Data from the background survey was analyzed and used to inform and triangulate the descriptions of the participants' stress management strategies presented in the interviews. The researcher compared the survey data along with the interview transcripts to build an accurate understanding of how participants utilized physical activity to mitigate their workplace stress. The survey data was also examined to further understand each participant, their work-related stressors, and their physical activity regime. Chapter 4 presents the findings and includes a discussion to situate the findings in relation to relevant literature.

Findings

The three major themes addressed from the study are mindset and perspectives, stressors in the workplace, and interventions to decrease workplace stress. Mindset and perspectives explain the background and thought process of each teacher from the study while delving into

why they became teachers initially. The second major theme, called "stressors in the workplace" explains different reasons surrounding workplace stress from teachers' perspectives. The last major theme is called "interventions to decrease workplace stress." This theme addresses different techniques and coping mechanisms that teachers utilize to successfully decrease their stress.

Theme 1: Mindset and Perspectives

Before exploring the stressors and stress management strategies identified by the participants, this first theme, Mindset, and Perspectives, offers important insights about the participants – who they are, why they teach, and how previous experiences inform how they approach the teaching profession. This theme comes from participants' narratives that explained their lifestyles, motivations, and desires within the teaching world. Three sub-themes, change agent, athletes as teachers, and mental toughness are presented. The change agent sub-theme is derived from the teachers' explanations on why they do this work. The athletes as teachers sub-theme describe how the teachers' past experiences in sports inform their teaching and current lifestyles.

Change Agents

Consistent with the literature on teachers of color, study participants explained that they became teachers because of a desire to become a change agent within Black and underprivileged communities. Jabri (2017) explained that a change agent is an individual that coordinates effort in the internal and external needs of a group of people, organization, or process. Participants' experiences mirrored that of revolutionary bell hook's personal experiences of being a change agent. Hooks (2014) explained that, "Teaching students to transgress against racial, sexual, and

class boundaries in order to achieve the gift of freedom, should be teacher's most important goal" (p. 39).

Kobe is a 32-year-old, African American male with a bachelor's and master's degree in education. When asked why he became a teacher, Kobe explained that, "teaching more so fell into my lap." He never actually wanted to teach. He took advantage of an opportunity to work as a substitute teacher in order to make consistent money during a transitional point in his professional career. At first, "subbing was easy money," but Kobe realized that he could connect very well with students. During Kobe's eight-year career as a high school math teacher, students have continued to gravitate towards him. He connected with high school students about the subject of math, and the subject of life. Students turned to Kobe for help with questions about life skills, college, community, and mental health. Kobe stated:

> I have saved students' lives just by talking to them and did not realize it until a student was escorted by the school counselor and the student said, "The only reason I did not kill myself was because I could hear you in my head saying not to."

In ways visible and invisible, Kobe has made a difference in the lives of his students. He has established meaningful relationships with students by listening to them and discussing their questions and concerns. Although he entered teaching as a substitute, he became a teacher because of the change that he could make in his students' lives.

Kie is a 30-year-old, African American male with a bachelor's degree in communication. When asked why he became a teacher, he explained that he "enjoys and loves working with youth in an urban setting because I grew up in it, in my life." He explained that his motivation to work in the educational realm is passed down from generations because "my mother was a teacher, her mother was a teacher. It kind of just felt like the right thing to do." During his six-

year career in the educational field, he expressed: "The epiphany affect when he can help students get to that specific 'aha moment.'" He talked about this moment being the driving force for why he continues to do this type of work throughout the years. Kie stated that, " I get fulfillment from working with youth to provide them with better ways to handle experiences that they go through on a daily." He supports their holistic growth while creating unbreakable bonds with his students. Although Kie became a teacher of education, he also teaches real life to his students. Kie strives to make a difference in the lives of his students in the classroom and in the real world.

Monty is a 32-year-old African American male who has a bachelor's degree in communication, a Master of Education in Urban Education Policy, and a Master of Social Work. Monty has been teaching for 10 years and became a teacher due to the realization of how much he enjoys creating relationships with students. Monty expounded that he is able connect with students in a way that most teachers cannot. He told stories about how amazing it feels to have students learn to think about the implications of their decisions prior to taking action instead of afterward in a reactive way. Monty stated:

> You know, it's a gift to be able to build rapport with these students while also teaching them the basics to life. I am doing this because I know what they need, and that is someone that looks like me.

Monty found solace in knowing that he was fortunate enough to have a strong role model that looked like him throughout his high school career, but he knows this is not the norm. He thrives in being a role model for his students. Monty continues this work because he is a change agent for Black and Brown students that look like him while building accountability and trust.

Fiona is a 29-year-old, African American female with a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in counseling. Fiona has been working in urban public high schools for five years. She attributed her motivation to get into this field to her mother's empowering work as an educator. She stated that she "enjoyed watching the impact that her mother had on her students." Fiona considered herself as on the younger side as a teacher pertaining to her age, and she uses this age difference to her advantage as most times it helps her build relationships with the students. She states:

> Supporting the kids that need the most help, you know the ones that have given up and have nothing. Being able to connect with the girls on their level and meet them where they are so they can begin to create and build strong support and proactive approaches towards life.

Fiona stated that she enjoys the educational field because she can help students tackle their presenting issues. Fiona also stated that although the work is not easy or always the most entertaining, it is rewarding. She, like Monty and Kie, continue to be the guiding light and change agent for students looking for support.

Felicia introduced herself as a 42-year-old, African American female who has earned a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in education. Felicia has been teaching for over 10+ years in urban public high schools. She stated that the reason "she got into this field was to break the chains of generational curses through education." She believes that education is truly the key for students "that look like us" to begin to be better individuals in society. Felicia stated:

> I feel like it is my job to make sure that the next generation that looks like us is equipped with what they need. I want to be a catalyst to support ongoing growth for the African

American race while providing life-changing educational experiences for the students.

She was clear that her motivation behind being and staying in this field was because the goal was bigger than her. She wants to be a catalyst to support ongoing growth for the African American race while providing life-changing educational experiences for the students. Felicia started and continues this work to be the change agent and stays in this work to provide a pivotal point for students to begin to "break … generational curses."

Desmond described himself as a 36-year-old African American male that has obtained his bachelor's degree in communication and a master's degree in positive psychology. Desmond has taught for six years in urban public high schools. He explained his story in the educational field as "purposeful and pointed." He described the journey of working with youth as part of his ministry. He has always worked and supported students in different environments but enjoys the educational realm because that is where the true impact of change comes from. He prides himself on being able to provide a culturally responsive avenue for student engagement while being someone that looks like them. Desmond stated:

> I enjoy being that emotional and social development piece that also is an educator. You
> don't meet many Black men that can hold that type of space for our Black kids. I want
> them to realize that there is more to life than what they see in their community.

Desmond works to provide impactful student engagement and positive outlooks on life while providing students a space of motivation and support through troubling times. Desmond continues this work to increase social awareness and emotional development.

The change agent pattern as discussed above, played an integral role in each of the participants' perspectives and mindset surrounding teaching. Kie and Fiona explained that family members were teachers and the impact of their work. This recognition is a strong cultural tie for

families of color and draws a close cultural connection of older generations continually

providing and educating the youth. Felicia explained the importance of closing the educational

gap between Black students and White students. She was committed to providing educational

equity, so Black students could have the same level of comprehension as White students.

Desmond, Monty, and Kobe explained the importance of their urban youth to see someone that

looks like them with the same skin color and upbringing. This desire reflects a certain political

commitment to racial equity and social justice. Each of the participants wanted to make a

specific change in the lives and circumstances of Black students. These included pivotal,

transformative, thought-provoking, socially, and emotionally supportive approaches to change.

Athletes As Teachers

Throughout the data, participants referenced past athletic experiences and/or situations as

part of their current lifestyles. Participants were able to remember exact teams, organizations,

sports, and/or experiences that made them into the people they are today. Participants' past

experiences with sports and their identities as athletes pushed them through scenarios or

circumstances in the workplace and their personal lives. As presented in Figure 4, the data

indicate that participants played sports as youth in high school and college.

Figure 4

Explaining Commonality Among Athletic Backgrounds
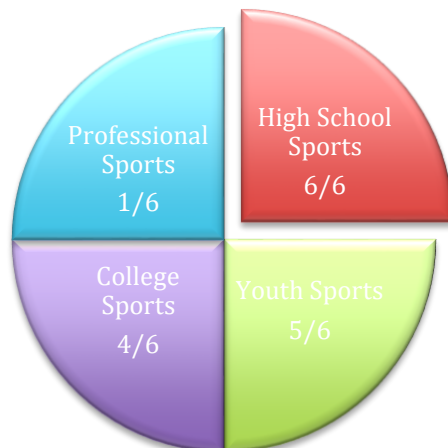
Each participant described their athletic experiences prior to becoming a teacher. Kobe played organized sports with Pop-Warner football and baseball (elementary) until ending his college career in sports. Felecia played organized sports from 6th grade cheerleading until the end of her high school career with track and field. Fiona engaged in cheerleading from middle school until the beginning of her college career. Monty played Pop-Warner football until the end of his college career. Kie played Pop-Warner football, baseball, and basketball (elementary) until ending his career as a professional athlete in the National Football League. Desmond played sports on organized teams from elementary school until the end of high school career on and off.

Monty was clear that he would not have gotten this far in his own educational journey and/or professional journey without sports being intertwined into his life. He went on to further explain that while playing sports, he constantly was challenging his body to work through and process the current task at hand, no matter how hard or stressful. He realized that if he could train his mind to believe it, his body would follow. He maintained a rigorous exercise routine and worked out in his school's gym. Monty stated:

I realized sports was a medium for me to connect with my students. Since I work out at

the gym in the school and the kids see my workouts, they then become intrigued, and it

creates conversation to meet in the middle.

Monty talked about how he could bond with the football players in the Fall and the basketball

players in the Winter, which helped to build a stronger rapport for both parties during the school

day. Monty's athletic identity not only helped him with his own perspective but also how he was

able to connect with his current students.

Kie and Kobe stated their athletic experiences shaped them into the men that they are

today. Both shared stories of how they were able to overcome everyday life stressors because

sports built that for them. Kobe explained:

From past sports experiences, I learned how to handle and deal with high-level stress

situations. That everyday stress won't get to me because I am used to a high-level stress

from sports situations, such as college bowls and final two minutes of a game and we

need to score.

Kobe utilized his athletic experiences to drive the way that he responds to and handles stress. He

holds onto his athletic identity, and it shines bright through his professional perspective.

Kie who has the most extensive athletic experience of the study participants, talks about

how he has learned to work through high-stress situations by being calculated and thoughtful

under extreme activities. For example, Kie said:

Stress is stress, but when you have a 280lb linebacker running at you in the NFL, it's just

a different level. I challenge myself to work through all things, cause when if I can get

through that, this ain't nothing. When I remember that, it really helps me to get myself

together.

Kie and Kobe both expressed a clear connection with how they continue to integrate their athletic identities and abilities throughout their lives.

Fiona's and Desmond's experiences with organized sports created a space of consistency and structure for both participants. Fiona explained:

I did not realize the importance of a structure and routine back then [high school] but that I thrived when I had something other than just school. I was doing well in school because I did not have much space to lollygag. Once school was done, I knew I had about 15-20 minutes to get my life together and then get to practice on time as a team captain.

Desmond explained how being in sports provided him something to look forward to during the day while holding him accountable. He stated:

It provided me with structure that I didn't want but needed as an adolescent kid. With the area I grew up in, it kept me focused on something productive.

Fiona and Desmond held true to their athletic identities by the way they incorporated structure and task-oriented goals into their current workplace and personal life routines.

It is important to note that each of the participants are high school teachers who played sports when they themselves were high school students. This was an interesting point considering, high school is one of the most transformational and pivotal times for children personally and academically. Most students in the high school realm are in a self-discovery phase of life, internalizing mindsets that they think will work best for them, understanding how their actions directly impact the rest of their lives, and learning how to best handle themselves socially and emotionally. Each of the participants experienced a certain level of challenging situations in the sports arena that directly taught and showed them how to best handle stress over

time. Although athletic identity is not the only way to build stress tolerance and understanding, for the participants, it provided a safe space for them to begin to build said tolerance.

Athletic identity continued to show up within the participants' explanations of their ways of life. Each participant described a narrative about how they have incorporated their past lifestyle of athletics, sports, and physical activity into their current way of life. This is a prime example of why athletic identity is a major pattern within participants' mindsets and perspectives.

Mental Toughness

With Kie as the exception, the majority of participants in this study described a high-level of mental toughness. Mental toughness could be explained as an increased resiliency for stress and high tolerance to manage stressful situations in their lives specifically in the workplace. Through stories, Felicia explained the fact that she does not get upset with all the work stressors in her current or past urban high schools. She stated:

> I have built enough of a tolerance to remain neutral at times that most teachers are experiencing high levels of stress and emotional reactions. I literally don't let anything in that school get to me because, I made it up in my mind that I will not take on all those problems.

Felicia stated that she learned early in her career to be able to separate feelings with work, not in a negative way, but in a way to better protect her own sanity. Felicia has a high tolerance for stressful situations and how the experiences weigh on her mindset.

Desmond and Monty both provided similar perspectives on mindsets. Desmond provided stories that supported him in training his mindset to prepare for the workday. He explained:

I would wake up early to meditate to properly set my mind and body up for success during the workday. I figured out to be the most productive and set myself up for success and just ran with the routine in the morning.

Desmond realized that if he could train his mind that he could then build mental toughness and resiliency in the workplace. Desmond implemented a growth mindset to better equip himself with the resiliency that he wanted and needed.

Monty similarly trained his mind surrounding negative thoughts. He explained:

During the day when I would have a negative thought or emotion with work that I would change the narrative. Being able to control my mind was not easy. But anytime I had a negative thought, I just automatically replaced it with something positive. It really works if you are intentional about it.

Monty recognized that he had to train his mind with negative thoughts. He had to work on examining his thoughts and replacing them with positive thoughts to create mental toughness.

Kobe and Fiona presented with slightly different perspectives. Both participants spoke from a space of successful compartmentalization. Kobe explained that he had trained his mind to leave work at work. He described:

There were times where everything wrong was happening in the school building, but once I left those double doors, it was no longer my concern. I give them kids my all from 8:30am-3:30pm, after that, I am out. No matter what is going on.

Kobe was able to compartmentalize his workday. He refused to take the problems from his workplace into this personal life. This level of compartmentalization increased his mental toughness.

Fiona explained one of the most important ways for her to be able to show up at work consistently was by checking her feelings and emotions at the door. She stated:

This helps me address issues from a logical outlook as opposed to with all emotions. If I did not operate like this, I promise I would either be fired or would have quit due to the negativity from everyone in the building.

Fiona was able to block the emotions that she felt during the workday and respond in a logical way. This blocking allowed Fiona to build her mental toughness to stressful situations and continue the work she does.

This first theme, Mindset and Perspectives, explained participants' outlook and narratives pertaining to their lifestyles, motivations and desires within the teaching world. Each sub-theme including change agent, athletes as teachers, and mental toughness explains the teachers' identities and perspectives with relation to this study. The theme explores the holistic perspective of the teachers in this study. The following theme will address stressors in the workplace: student, community, school/district-level.

Theme 2: Stress Here, Stress There, Stress Everywhere

All participants worked in the same school district in different urban public high schools in the same metropolitan area in the northeastern United States. The school district's policies around restorative discipline practices influenced the working conditions and teacher-student relationships for each of the participants. The school district's policies on student discipline and student behavior were intended to provide a safe and inclusive learning environment for students, teachers, and staff. Participants explained that the restorative practices emphasized accountability instead of consequences, resulting in the unintended consequence of placing a strain on teacher well-being and school culture. According to the policy, K-12 students may not receive more than

a ten-day consecutive suspension no matter how egregious the behavior. In addition, K-12 students cannot receive more than 20 cumulative days of out of school suspensions per year. Unless there is a major emergency or a student violates the Gun Free Schools Act, students are allowed to attend their school without obstruction by staff in the building. Once students have reached this maximum number, they are then not allowed to be suspended for the remainder of the academic year.   The resulting narrative from this policy is that students (and parents) now operate from the mindset that they cannot be in suspended after a certain number of days. Students also know which infractions they can and cannot do, and the related discipline protocols for each of them. Ideally, this policy should create a safe space for all individuals in the school building; in actuality, it created a lack of accountability for some students and increased unsafe situations for students, teachers and staff. This district's policy shapes the school context, affects teacher-student relationships, and contributes to teacher stress.

This second theme explores participants' experiences with stressful situations in their respective workplaces – their classrooms and schools. This theme includes three sub-themes: student-related stressors, school-level related stressors, and district-level stressors.

Student-related stressors

Throughout this study, participants continually brought up student-related issues as a major source of stress while in the workplace. Student needs, specifically in the urban public high schools, continue to cause issues in the workplace. Fiona mentioned that students' needs always outweighed most other issues in the school building. Fiona further explained:

> They [students] look at me as the person that will solve every issue in their life because school is the only consistent thing most of these babies have in their lives. It's like we are their mothers at school and are expected to give them all the attention they want since

they rarely get it elsewhere. Doing that for one is okay; doing it for a couple hundred is depleting and stressful.

Fiona described how being the maternal figure for the students impacts her workplace stress and burnout. She understood her students' needs and took on the role as the maternal figure for her students. This approach had the double-edged effect of strengthening her rapport with students while increasing her daily stress.

Monty explained his perspective as one that he is constantly supporting students in and out of the classroom. He told story after story where he was forced due to his own morality to put a student's well-being first. Monty said:

> I cannot count on my hand how many times, I gave one of my kids lunch cause they were still hungry, they don't eat at home. And sometimes they need cafeteria food. Or the times where I had to drop the kid off at home and saw that they lived in poor housing and living conditions. Look there are times repeatedly where I literally gave kids boots and clothes off my back cause they were coming to school in a t-shirt and flip flops during winter cause they didn't have nothing else. These types of experiences don't feel good, it makes you question if the work you are doing is good enough and it becomes stressful happening over and over again with multiple kids.

Monty explained how working to support his students' holistic health with outside school factors directly impacted his stress in the workplace. Monty not only cared immensely about his students' education, but also their livelihood and well-being. He was willing to give his own clothes for students that had less than. He continued to worry and stress about his students' living conditions, and if he was doing enough to care for them.

In addition to students' needs, student behavior was also a source of a stressor for some participants. Desmond noted:

That although not all [student] behavior was negative, the constant redirection and repetitive reminders surrounding student accountability creates a stressful environment. Due to the needs of all the students, I was just always tired. Creatively addressing an issue from a strictly restorative mindset is tough. It soaked up all my energy and was super draining.

Desmond clearly demonstrated how student support could become draining or exhausting in the school system. He worked to provide student-focused innovative ways to support students' varying needs throughout the school day, which depleted his energy and increased his stress.

Felicia's perspective was that student behavior would always be an issue but that it was increased due to COVID-19. Her narrative was:

The students seemed to need much more handholding from previous years. The last time students were in school; they were in middle school. It is now 9th and 10th grade. We are literally in unprecedented times.

Felicia went on to further state that teachers will continue to experience stress in student support until the students become re-acclimated to the in-person school environment. Felicia explained that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected the students' educational journey, but has also increased stress due to teachers having to take this into account for the coming years.

Lack of student motivation was another source of stress for participants. Many of the participants recounted stories that spoke to the concern surrounding student motivation to succeed in their classroom and the school setting. Teachers explained that when there is a lack of motivation in the students, there is an increase of disrespect within the classroom setting.

Students were below grade-level, then frustrated with teachers trying to support and hold them accountable. Kobe shared:

> That a lack of motivation from the students made them not care and disrupt the classroom when others were trying to learn. You know I care about the kids, but I do not tolerate any disrespect. If they cared more about their grades, then they would care more about building with me instead of against me.

Kobe explained how a lack of student motivation continued to affect the classroom. Kobe's frustration with the lack of student motivation clearly impacted the stress level and also the supportive educational environment that he tries to create in his classroom.

Desmond explained a series of events that relate to a lack of student motivation that he has experienced. He explained:

> Students were more focused on presenting as the 'biggest and baddest' student as opposed to coming to school to learn. The fact that students are more worried about looking tough instead of just coming to school to learn then forces me to respond to the increase of presentation instead of pulling up to class to be educated. I be so over it.

Desmond was able to explain how students' mindsets affect their ideas on the importance of school and how this created more stress for him. Desmond's increased stress and frustration come from students' lack of motivation and their mindset on showing up and being 'The Man' or 'The Woman' in school. Desmond's further frustration is that he understands that this mindset is geared towards showing off in the community as opposed to the classroom.

Student behavior was a revolving pattern that presented itself within the stories from the participants. Student behavior in this sense includes all aspects that directly impact the learning environment and/or teacher well-being. Kobe and Felicia explained that students could and

would do whatever they want with no repercussions, which enforces the negative behaviors in the classroom. These behaviors may include fighting, cursing, yelling off task, interrupting the teacher purposefully, and/or even being physically aggressive to the teacher or other students. Kobe explained:

> I feel defenseless. If the teacher put you out, you couldn't come back in the day after you did something disrespectful, rude, or out of line. Nowadays, students can do whatever they want and it sends a terrible message to everyone. Now the teachers can't teach. We can't when dealing with student behavior. Really think about it, you expect me to teach when behavior is poor, then get upset when I say I need help. They [students] don't understand consequences to any of their actions.

Kobe's frustration with student behavior directly impacts the level of stress that he has daily. He must constantly operate in a space of fear and high stress due to student behavior running rampant.

> Felicia stated:

> Thinking back to the times when I was most irritated or stressed, I was upset when students really did not care about things. Picture this, I am teaching in the middle of class and four students start fighting each other. I had to call for security and my lesson was ruined. Come to find out, they were fighting over something trivial that could have been worked out with words. And get this because they had all been suspended so much, they were put back into my class the next day with after school detention. I did not want to separate it because I have seen teachers be really injured and school systems say you should not have intervened. So, I just have to sit there and yell until someone comes and hope I do not get hurt.

Felicia felt stuck and unable to handle student behavior situations at work due to workplace policies and more importantly because she did not want to be injured. With increasingly unsafe environments due to student behavior, Felicia's stress comes from the point of hopelessness.

The sources of student-related stressors over this study were low-income students in need of care, clothing and food; unmotivated students, particularly given COVID, needing redirection and support to get reacclimated to the social expectations of the school, and disruptive students taking advantage of the school's discipline policy.

School-related Stressors

The sub-theme of school-related stressors explores the situations and experiences participants described in their classrooms and school buildings. Expectations after COVID-19 were a major stressor for teachers. Many participants expressed concern with student and teacher accountability due to the pandemic and how it has affected the educational landscape. They also pointed out that schools are handling COVID-19 in different ways. For example, some schools are offering full virtual concepts for students; some are offering hybrid concepts for learning; while other schools are requiring full in-person learning.

Desmond felt frustrated that, in the middle of a pandemic, he was still required to come to the school building. He expressed:

> It's a little wild that they are mandating we come into the building just to, because they want bodies. But when someone passes away due to COVID-19, the school leaders act like it didn't happen. It doesn't feel good. And they keep acting like we are stupid.

Desmond expressed his concern that school policies related to COVID-19 create an unsafe environment. He did not believe that his health was a consideration, nor did he feel respected by his school's leadership.

Monty stated:

 The stress has been so high due to COVID-19 and how my school leader was responding

to my concerns that I took a leave of absence. I had to take short-term disability and start

seeing a therapist because of the amount of stress I was going through with the hybrid

schedule for coming into the building during the pandemic.

Similar to Desmond, the school leaders at Monty's school did little to address his real concerns

about teaching in the school building during the pandemic. Monty felt that his school leaders

were making unsafe decisions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, and this negatively affected

his workplace stress. He elected to see a therapist and took a short-term leave to address his

mental health.

Kobe explained that, although he was not nervous about the pandemic itself, he was not

happy with how school leaders were managing the situation. He stated:

 I know they [school leaders] can't tell who contracts it [COVID-19], but there have been

numerous times now where they knew someone was diagnosed and contracted COVID-

19 but said nothing to their teachers who were in contact as a way to not upset us.

Kobe explained his frustration with the school-level contact tracing and the lack of

communication with teachers. While he understood adherence to the Health Insurance Portability

and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA), he did not see the logic in risking the spread of

COVID-19 in the school. This became a stressful situation because Kobe felt that the teachers

were being placed in jeopardy.

Felicia and Fiona were also worried about the physical environments of their respective

schools. Both were honest that schools, specifically urban public high schools, typically do not

have proper resources to support social distancing and wearing masks for all individuals. Felicia stated:

> These kids not going to keep them masks on. They don't even follow the directions that we have about other things. I don't understand why they [school leaders] think kids will follow this. And we all know, these schools in the hood don't receive the same resources that the white schools get. We don't even have soap in the soap dispensers! It's a recipe for disaster in the middle of a pandemic.

Felicia spoke about the lack of resources and unrealistic expectations that school leaders have whilst in the middle of a pandemic. These unrealistic expectations have created stress at the school level.

> Fiona stated:
>
> It's an unrealistic ask to expect teenagers to not hug each other and to wear their masks appropriately all day long. It won't happen. I don't know why we are setting ourselves up for failure.

Fiona shared Felicia's concerns. She felt that the school's expectations of adolescent behavior were unrealistic. According to Fiona, requiring students and teachers to physically attend school during the pandemic was a "set up for failure." She expressed that this creates a level of stress in the workplace due to poor decision making.

> Desmond explained that during the height of the pandemic, he and other teachers in his building felt underappreciated and made to act like robots. He stated:
>
> We [teachers] felt unsupported the entire time. We were pushed to meet the same level of efficiency with all students. It just didn't feel good. We felt defeated. And, it was not just me. It was the entire team.

Like other teachers on his grade-level team, Demond explained how school-level decision making made him feel underappreciated. His school leaders required him to make a way out of no way during the pandemic, and he felt unsupported to meet these unrealistic expectations. In fact, he felt defeated.

Trauma in the workplace was another pattern that was expressed throughout the study. The trauma experienced while in the workplace involved both primary and secondary forms of trauma. Kie described about a time where he was walking in the hall providing support for a student while on his lunch break. Kie explained:

> The student was on the spectrum and was in a manic state due to something that occurred earlier in a different class. The student was considered a "runner" in the building. He had been so escalated that he then took off running. He ran over another two teachers and stiff-armed security while running out of the building. After that he ran into the street directly in front the school into oncoming traffic. I had to think quickly on my feet and ran into the street and tackled the student before a passing car almost hit both of us. This all happened at 11am and my stress-level was so high that I was shaking from the experience. This was the most stressful day for me because I had to forgive myself for what happened, and also come to realization that it was not my fault in the first place. That traumatic situation will stay in my head forever.

After witnessing a student run past teachers and security, Kie, a former professional athlete, reacted quickly and tackled the student in the street before both of them were hit by an oncoming car. Kie blamed himself for this event, but a teacher should not have to perform such heroic efforts to protect students. There were insufficient measures in place in the school to keep a student "considered to be a runner" safe in the building. This day is etched in Kie's mind. He

was required to take off work and offered counseling to help him process this stressful and traumatic event.

Monty detailed a traumatic experience with a student who has mental health issues:

> There was a young lady that had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, adjustment disorder, avoidance, and self-harm. All the mental health team know her well and her triggers. She comes in and she is having a pretty bad day. As we know her, we decided to give her a safe space. But you know how adults in the building that trigger children know they do, and this adult decided to do it. I asked the adult to please not do that so she could work through things. The adult continues, I asked the young lady to come with me. She refused. She then attacked the adult and I had to get in the middle of the issue. The adult leaves, but now she [the student] has a really hard time deescalating. She then replays it over and over and she gets to a space of where she was going to harm herself. School leadership struggles with being able to realize what she actually needs and they decide to call the cops. Cops comes and then make it worse. They grabbed the lady and she refused to calm down, they then put her in handcuffs. The police decided went and slammed her to the ground. I was heartbroken, ball of emotions, super frustrating. I had no idea how to feel. It was the verbal responses from the cops and school leadership that were the most frustrating. That was rough day. She did wind up being arrested and got a suspension. It ended up being overturned but she was out of school for a number of days. She then felt unsafe. I wrestled with my own thoughts for weeks on is this the type of environment that I want to work in. A place where school leadership can't handle situations or where adults can antagonize kids and then walk away like nothing happened. I haven't been right since that day internally.

Monty's account highlighted school personnel, policies and practices that created an environment where a student who needed care and support was instead arrested and abused. From the adult who antagonized the student to the school leaders who call the police, Monty identifies people and policies unable to "realize what she actually needs." Such an environment is not safe for students, nor is it safe for teachers. Despite Monty's efforts to intervene and protect the student, he was unable to defend her and create a space for her to de-escalate. Monty felt that his moral and ethical codes were challenged, and the experience was so gut wrenching that he stated he considered it traumatic and stressful.

Desmond detailed an experience with a student who, from his perspective, was a pretty good student overall but had made some dumb decisions. Desmond explained:

I had a student get arrested in our building a few years ago. The student body and the culture was different and honestly has never been the same. The kid got caught up with dealing drugs trying to do what he saw others in his community do, and he already had kids. He got caught up and was arrested. When he was being arrested, we were still trying to honor this dude while not bringing too much attention to him. The entire team and school had been drained that knew about it. But for me seeing a black man get locked up at 16 was tough and it was painful. We are trying to disrupt that and to see the police come in and arrest him for real charges had me second guessing myself and the work I was doing. Am I making any changes? Am I doing enough? That moment has not left my thoughts to this day and it was over 4 years ago.

For a teacher like Desmond who considers education to be part of his ministry, he is now haunted by questions of whether he did enough to support this young man. Desmond knew this young, 16-year-old Black male to be a good student, and understood his circumstances as a

teenage father. Desmond believed that the student made a dumb decision when he started selling drugs and "trying to do what he saw others in his community do." Instead of having compassion for this young man and offering an alternate route, he was arrested on school grounds. Witnessing this arrest was difficult and stressful for Desmond.

In summary, school-related stressors fall into two categories for participants: policies and practices related to COVID-19 and students with extenuating circumstances. Prior to COVID-19, three participants explained that their schools were ill-equipped to care for students with mental health issues. During the pandemic, school leadership enforced policies that required teachers to come to school. Principals appeared willing to jeopardize teachers' health and well-being based on what participants described as the absence of genuine care and appreciation for their efforts. Poor decision-making by school leaders, coupled with school policies and practices, created stressful working conditions in participants' classrooms and schools. In the next theme, participants shared their experiences and insights with stressors related to and or originating at the district level.

District-level Related Stressors

Participants shared multiple experiences and situations that revolved around district-level stressors, stressors that could not be attributed to students or the school. District-level stressors presented as top-down issues that affected not one school or area but impacted the entire school district. The district-level stressors fell into three broad categories – lack of consideration, lack of support, and lack of communication. Based on participants' accounts, these stressors existed before the pandemic and appeared to worsen during the pandemic.

First, participants described a perception of the general lack of consideration on the part of the school district. A revolving part of this pattern that was shown through the data was that

teachers at the ground-level did not feel as if decisions were being made in their best interest.

From the participants' points of views, decisions and implementation seem to be rushed and not

practical most times. Felicia explained:

> Certain requirements for the district required a certain number of practices at the school-
> level to occur which continually effected instruction on a day-to-day basis. We always
> have unorganized fire drills the second week of school per the district instead of allowing
> us to get settled and there are times that technology for staff and students will be delayed
> coming from the district and we have to just deal with it.

Felicia explained that typical decisions made at the district-level continue to impact day to day

instruction which influences her stress in the workplace. Felicia believes that decisions are not

made with teachers' interest at heart and are more so for the district to say that they did

something.

> Monty shared similar sentiments pertaining to decisions:
>
> Decisions that district make are not in the best benefit for our students or our staff. It's
> stressful to get us to fit the students in the mold of the district expectations. The people at
> the top that create policies and expectations don't understand our community and school
> context. But then you are still held to those standards. More worried about meeting the
> benchmark rather than supporting the students.

Monty shared his frustrations regarding his increased stress with district-level decisions and how

they impact the expectations in the community and the school culture. Monty's frustration and

stress comes from district decisions with policies and benchmarks that do not truly support

student growth and increase teacher responsibilities. The school district's lack of consideration

of the participants' and students' circumstances and how district-level decisions affect the participants' and students' work lives contributed to the participants' stress.

Second, lack of support from the school district contributed to participants' stress and burnout. Specifically, participants explained that they felt there was no support surrounding student behavior. Student accountability was non-existent; and therefore, students assumed that they could do/say anything to other students and/or staff in the school buildings. Kie explained:

My sources of stress and most people in the building source of stress are student behavior with big conflicts that last longer than they should because staff cannot put a kid out of the building due to a suspension number even if it's what the parents and all parties want. Then the issues sit and build and build and when things hit the fan in the school or directly after, the district is looking at us like why aren't yall doing anything. It really messes up the learning environment and keeps everyone staff and students on edge.

Kie explained that due to district policies schools were unable to provide true interventions at times that school staff and the school community needed them the most. This created an unsafe learning environment which increased his levels of stress.

Kobe elaborated:

Never really felt supported. Things that are needed no one could help due to political reasons. I've been supported with band aids. Example, young lady who would always get into fights every week. The band aid was to put security at my door rather than provide the student with more intensive support like a psychologist or therapist. There is a such an anti-suspension culture, that it then impacts the workplace culture. This happens continually over and over every year. And the crazy part, we keep being even more lenient.

Kobe's experience with a lack of support during his workday was frustrating for him. In this account, he described a lack of adequate support for students (who need mental health professionals not guards and police), as well as a lack of sufficient support for himself as a teacher. The absence of appropriate support from the district level is creating a stressful workplace culture for students and teachers alike in Kobe's school.

Fiona told a story where she was mandated to attend a SEL training. She said that district-level administrators rushed and threw something together just to say that they did it. She stated:

> We had a mandatory PD at the beginning of the year that was like a 1-2 hour session. They [the PD facilitators] talked about ways to handle stress and basically said "be better." I think they [district leaders] are interested in SEL for teachers, but do not care to invest in it. Like we need actual therapists to talk through things, not some BS one time before the issues really begin. But again it's something they [district leaders] are interested in but not committed to but due to politics.

Fiona described what she perceived to be a lack of genuine support for teachers' social and emotional well-being in the training. She felt that the district leadership offered the training as part of a political strategy, and that they are not really committed investing in their teachers' mental health. She provided clear examples of how she felt like her school district did not care or support anything regarding teacher well-being. Fiona felt like her school district did not care and therefore, she felt disposable.

Felicia felt similarly. She admitted:

I am breathing so hard right now because it was so much to work through with very little

support from August-December [2020]. I just wish for once decisions made by school

districts were in teachers' favor rather than just to get bodies in and out of the building.

Felicia was visibly uncomfortable telling this story and how she felt about the lack of support

from her district's leadership. She admitted that district-level decisions directly impacted her day

to day routines and schedules which contributed to her stress.

Monty expressed:

I have brought concerns up with the union and/or school leaders regarding the lack of

support that teachers experience. The school district continually created barriers to the

interventions I or the union provided as ways to support their teachers. It's like they want

to do the bare minimum when it comes to employee wellness, and it shows.

In an effort to be proactive, Monty contacted the teachers' union to propose strategies to promote

and protect employee wellness. He explained his frustration with the school district even after

the union supported interventions that he brought to the table. According to Monty, the school

district blocked these efforts. Consistent with Fiona's account of a teacher workshop on social

and emotional well-being, Monty believes that the school district will only "do the bare

minimum" to support teachers.

In addition to the lack of support, participants decried the district's lack of

communication – particularly during the pandemic. Participants expressed extreme concern,

anxiety, frustration, and anger with decisions that ultimately required them to be at risk during a

global pandemic. With so many unknowns about COVID-19 and uncertainty about the future

during the first year of the pandemic, the participants' school district further contributed to their

experiences of teacher stress and burnout.

Kie explained:

Many decisions were made by school district leaders and policies put in place but when decisions are being made with COVID, no one tells us anything. You know when there is increased lack of communication around any topic it then creates a fear due to the unknown.

Kobe expanded:

What stresses me the most isn't the pandemic itself. It's that extra unknown factor that is stressful. It's a workplace culture of the unknown feelings. They really don't say anything but then expect us to just not ask questions.

Kobe similarly to Kie was stressed with the lack of communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was clear that district-level decisions were being made but that there was no funneling of information. Moreover, Kie felt that the district culture discouraged questions, further limiting communication and compounding an already stressful situation.

Fiona shared similar views with COVID-19 being a stressor due to school district expectations that are made but do not translate to the actual school level. Fiona expounded:

Contact tracing with staff and students being diagnosed with COVID-19 is little to non-existent. I feel like I put my life on the line every day that I am required to go into the [school]. ... District-level workers are in a hybrid schedule, but teachers are mandated to show up with hundreds of students daily. Entire grade levels and sports teams were being put into quarantine and teachers were not given the right to know if they came in close contact. You know the CDC said we should be six feet apart, and our school district basically said, "Yeah, but three feet is more realistic so that is what we are going to do."

Fiona explained how district-level decision making put teachers into unsupported and unsafe environments during the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited contact tracing, minimal adherence to CDC guidelines, and mandated attendance made Fiona feel "like I put my life on the line every day" she taught in the classroom during the pandemic. District leaders' decisions and subsequent policies created much turmoil and stress for Fiona.

Desmond shared:

The way my district has handled COVID-19 has been a true eye opener. It makes me not want to work in the school system anymore honestly. I don't want to live on someone else dictating my responsibility to come to work over my own health and safety because they want to look like they are handling things well at the district level. I also got a taste of the virtual every day earlier in the pandemic and I was a lot less stressed than being in the building now.

Desmond provided further insight when he explained that he has become so upset and stressed with the workplace culture of the unknown that he has considered many times looking for employment elsewhere. His stress increased so much regarding health and safety concerns that he has considered looking for a position in an organization that cares about employee well-being.

This sub-theme addressed the district-level stressors to include school district's lack of consideration, and lack of support to school staff and employees have increased workplace stress throughout this pandemic.

Taken together, the sub-themes of student-related stressors, school-level related stressors, and district-level stressors highlighted what participants identified as the sources of their workplace stress. In the sub-theme on student-related stressors, participants explained that the students' needs increased, students' negative behaviors increased, and the support required

increased significantly due to the pandemic. In the sub-theme on school-related stressors, participants explained that school policies in response to COVID-19, unrealistic responsibilities and expectations, and lack of communication in response to the health and well-being of students and staff. In the final sub-theme on district-level related stressors, participants explained that the school district's lack of consideration, support, and communication exacerbated the workplace stress that they endured before and during the pandemic. All of the above patterns have created high-level of stressful situations and experiences for participants in their classrooms and schools. The following theme will address interventions to decrease workplace stress.

Theme 3: Stress Management – Mind and Body

This theme addressed experiences shared by teachers to decrease their own workplace stress. The patterns that are addressed in this theme are non-physical activity and physical activity.

Non-Physical Activities for Stress Management

Participants utilized a range of non-physical approaches and strategies to decrease their work-related stress. Several participants smoked marijuana or drank alcohol to help manage their stress. Kie said:

> From the beginning of me teaching I would self-medicate. After long and exhausting
> days that I could not decompress from that I would smoke marijuana. I knew it was not
> the best thing to do but that I needed some time and space to just have no worries, and at
> that time, I felt like it was the best thing to do.

As a beginning teacher, Kie's coped with his high stress levels by self-medicating to relax and calm down. He acknowledged that this "was not the best thing to do," but marijuana offered the space that he needed "to just have no worries."

Instead of marijuana, Fiona would go out for drinks with her colleagues. She stated:

 When I am really overwhelmed, we would all go to happy hour and just drink our pain

away. It was a place for us to let our hair down even though it wasn't the best activity to

do daily.

When Fiona's stress levels were high from the workplace, she coped by going to have drinks.

Although she understood that "it wasn't the best activity to do daily," in the moment, it was what

she needed to cope and manage her stress.

Desmond also enjoyed drinks with his colleagues. He shared:

Like we all meet in an office towards the end of the school day and agree we need a

drink. We try not to go out because happy hour gets expensive so we will agree on who's

house we going to and stop and get liquor unless they have it already. You know and it's

not like we be super drunk or anything but we legit use the time to soundboard, vent, and

wind down from the craziness from the day. We probably do that once biweekly at least

when school is in. It's almost like we are a cohesive family now after starting to do it

though.

Desmond shared that when his team [Multidisciplinary team including teachers, social workers,

and behavior support staff for 9th and 10th graders] has a draining day, they will all go to a team

member's place of residence and have drinks together. Although they are drinking, this space is

also for team comradery. They work to support and validate each other's thoughts, feelings, and

emotions that were experienced during stressful workdays.

Kobe stated:

Venting and talking to close friends really is important for me when I am stressed. I enjoy

taking a proactive approach over a reactive approach, so I typically will talk to these

group of friends [a mix of teachers that are also friends and friends that work in other professions] on a weekly basis and then extra when/if needed. I put emphasis on physical and mental health because I understand that my brain needs a space to handle both physical and emotional pain.

Kobe stated that he enjoys being able to vent and talk to close friends [to include friends he has known for 10+ years that he can be completely open and honest with] when he is experiencing work-related stress. During conversations with his friends, he found the space that his "brain needs … to handle" the pain and stress related to his work as a teacher. He shared that he enjoys talking to high-achieving individuals in his life because they offer him feedback and advice on ways to be better in the workplace.

Felicia explained that she talks with her boyfriend about the stress of teaching in an urban public high school:

I enjoy talking to my boyfriend when I am home. Honestly, I don't even know if he is listening half of the time, but he just creates a space for me to get it off my chest and move forward. There is no judgement, just safe space.

With her boyfriend, Felicia has a safe space to vent and express her thoughts and feelings verbally without any repercussions. She also has this space with the mother of one of her friends who is a veteran teacher:

I just wanted someone to listen and not give any ways to fix, and there were times where I wanted clear next steps to be provided. I felt that speaking with her [friend's] mother is/was opportune because her mother had been most of the same experiences and she can give some perspective, but also because she understood the stress.

Like Kobe and Desmond, Felicia shared that she enjoyed being able to talk to close friends, especially those with similar experiences, during times of stress. The feelings of sound boarding in a safe space was an important way for Felicia and others to work through their stress. Being able to talk aloud and process her thoughts and feelings was important, as was the affirmation and counsel from someone who has dealt with similar stressors in their professional life.

Fiona described the challenge of talking with friends who do not appreciate the stress of being a teacher:

When I talk to my friends that aren't teachers, it's like, they get it but they don't "get it get it." … They have no idea how hard this work is, but everyone expects you to just suck it up.

Unfortunately, Fiona's friends who were not teachers could not provide her with the support and understanding that she needed to manage the stress of teaching. Fiona could not simply "suck up" the stress of teaching and working in an urban public high school. She needed a space to talk and process the stress of her work, and she found this with her mother. Fiona explained, "My mom [long time high school teacher] understands all the time." As the daughter of a lifelong educator, Fiona found solace in being able to vent to her mom.

Two participants also expressed their needs to be able to do inner self-work as a form of decreasing stress. They expressed either utilizing a self-help book and/or writing in a journal to explain their thoughts and feelings. Kobe stated:

I enjoy self-help books because they create a lane for me to become self-aware. I understand that I may not handle things perfectly, but the self-help books allow me continually grow as a human being.

Kobe utilized self-help books in order to become more understanding of and to build more personal character development for himself. This helped him to acknowledge his pitfalls, develop new strategies, and manage his stress.

Fiona stated:

I have fell in complete love with writing about how I feel. I realized that I can say whatever I want regardless of thoughts. No one can judge me by what I write because no one sees it. The writing helps me to express my true feelings and to take my mask off as an educator and adult. I can complain as much as I want, which is sometimes a lot. I can curse out and whine about whatever I want. And you know the best part of it? I can be reflective. I sometimes will go back and read about how I felt months later and laugh at it because it was either really silly or my whole opinion on a person or topic has changed.

Writing is amazing and I see why people recommend it.

Fiona provided evidence that she really enjoyed journaling. She stated that she has made it part of her daily practice for working through not only workplace issues, but also personal issues.

Several participants spoke about times during or after extreme stressful situations at work that they felt a strong need or urge to isolate from everyone including family/friends/colleagues and loved ones. These participants stated that they felt as if they had been drained of energy from the day or just did not have the mental capacity to entertain others.

Kobe stated:

I would struggle with interacting with my son at the time. It wasn't that I did not want to, I just did not have anything left to give. I legit wanted to hang and catch up with him but I was so tired, all I would do was come home and lay down. If I didn't take that time to myself, I would have inevitably snapped on my son and it wouldn't have been his fault.

Kobe further expounded that, although he knew it was putting a strain on their relationship, he needed that alone time to himself to regroup and work through his stress. Kobe's stress was so high that he was willing to isolate from his family to maintain his mental peace. His family was directly impacted by his workplace stress and stress management.

Like Kobe's experiences with his son, Desmond stated:

You know, I just need like 30 minutes to get my life together in my head before I switch to handling personal life stuff. Sometimes I would just sit in the car because it was the one place where no one would bother me, and I could ignore everything until I was ready.

Desmond needed some alone time to manage and process his own emotions from workplace stressors. Before transitioning to his personal and family life, Desmond would isolate himself from everyone in order to regain his energy and recenter.

Fiona's narrative also aligns with the narrative of Kobe and Desmond. She explained that she detached from everyone. Fiona shared:

I get home and be so stressed every day that I don't speak to anyone. Luckily, I don't live with anyone or have any other responsibilities once I get home. 'Cause I don't talk to anyone [she laughs]. I put my phone on silent, eat dinner, and watch thoughtless tv. It helps me to decompress. People expect us to be superheroes all day long and then do the same thing in our regular lives. We need a reset just like everyone else.

Fiona explained that it is not that she wants to be antisocial or dismissive to anyone, but that she really needed time to self-regulate her own feelings instead of worrying about everyone else. While she felt that others expected her to be a superwoman, she acknowledged her own humanity and cared for herself by isolating and creating the space that she needed to decompress from the stress of her workday.

Participants employed multiple non-physical activities to manage their stress. Some participants smoked marijuana and drank liquor to address the stress and pain. All the participants talked with colleagues, friends, and family to process the stress of their work lives. Many just needed a space to vent without judgment, while others appreciated the advice and guidance their colleagues and loved ones offered. A couple of participants read self-help books and practiced journal writing. Three participants expressed that they isolated themselves for a period of time at the end of the workday to decompress, reset, and transition into their personal lives. Together, all these non-physical activities helped the participants with their stress management. The next section explores the physical activities that participants employed to assist them with managing the stresses of teaching in urban public high schools.

Physical Activity

All participants described a relationship between physical activity and stress. Each participant made it a point to actively engage in physical activity to decrease their workplace stress and burnout. Participants all had varying degrees of the rate of intensity and length of time.

Each participant provided details surrounding their typical physical activities. Time frames surrounding these activities seemed to align with multiple times throughout the week, depending on their actual schedules. Participants engaged in at least four days of weekly physical activities. Desmond, Kie, Kobe, and Monty all explained that there is something ritualistic with working out in a safe space to explore thoughts and feelings. Kobe provided his schedule that he follows every week, no matter what he has on his schedule:

Monday: 6 am or 4:30 pm HIIT Lower Body Workout

Tuesday: 6 am or 4:30 pm - Cycling

Wednesday: 6 am or 4:30 pm - Upper Body HIIT

Thursday: 6 am or 4:30 pm- 30-minute Run

Friday: 6 am or 4:30 pm - Total Body HIIT

Saturday: 8 am - Group Fitness Class

Sunday: Recovery, Yoga, Stretching

Kobe's structure and routine for his physical activities are consistent and daily. He is taking a proactive approach to tackling his stress with this intervention. Kobe created time for his physical activity.

Kie stated that he does the following schedule:

Monday: 11am, 1 mile walk 7:00 pm: 45 min workout (mostly weight training)

Tuesday: 11am, 1 - 1.3 mile walk 7:00 pm: 45 min workout (mostly weight training)

Wednesday: 11am, 1.3 mile walk 7:00 pm: 45 min workout (mostly weight training)

Thursday: 11am, 1 mile walk 7:00 pm: 45 min workout (mostly weight training)

Friday: 11am, 1.3 mile walk 7:00 pm: 45 min workout (mostly weight training)

Saturday: 8am, 45 min HIIT training

Sunday: 7am, 1 hour stretch and recovery

Kie's structure and routine for his physical activities are also consistent and daily. He is taking a proactive approach to tackling his stress with this intervention. Consistent with Kobe, Kie created time for his physical activity.

Monty provided his schedule of the following:

Monday: 5pm-7pm, Gym (weightlifting/cardio mix)

Tuesday: 5pm-7pm, Gym (weightlifting/cardio mix)

Wednesday: 5pm-7pm, Gym (weightlifting/cardio mix)

Thursday: 5pm-7pm, Gym (weightlifting/cardio mix)

Friday: 5pm-7pm, Gym (weightlifting/cardio mix)

Saturday: Gym (yoga class or weightlifting)

Monty's structure and routine for his physical activities are consistent and daily. He

engages in physical activity at the conclusion of his day as a reaction to his daily stress. Like

Kobe and Kie, Monty created time for his physical activity.

Fiona stated that she does the following:

Monday: 6pm, running 2-3 miles Meditation: 20 minutes daily

Wednesday: 6pm, running 2-3 miles Meditation: 20 minutes daily

Thursday: 6pm, running 2-3 miles Meditation: 20 minutes daily

Saturday: 7am, 5 plus mile run

Fiona's structure and routine for her physical activities are consistent and daily. She engages in

proactive activities and reactive activities depending on the day of the week. Like the above

teachers, Fiona created intentional time for her physical activity.

Felicia explained her schedule that she follows:

Monday: 7am, 15-20 walk, 12pm 15–20-minute walk, and 5pm-7pm Gym workout (lift

weights and running)

Wednesday: 7am, 15-20 walk, 12pm 15–20-minute walk, and 5pm-7pm Gym workout

(lift weights and running)

Friday: 7am, 15-20 walk, 12pm 15–20-minute walk, and 5pm-7pm Gym workout (lift

weights and running)

Saturday: whatever I want to do in the morning.

Felicia's structure and routine for her physical activities are consistent and daily. She engages in proactive activities and reactive activities depending on the day of the week. Like Fiona and the above teachers, Felicia created intentional time for her physical activity.

Desmond provided his activity schedule as follows:

Tuesday: 5:30am, Run/jog

Wednesday: 6:00pm, Gym Workout lifting/cardio

Thursday: 6:00pm, Gym Workout lifting cardio

Saturday: 10am, Yoga and stretching

Desmond's structure and routine for his physical activities are consistent and daily. He engages in proactive activities and reactive activities depending on the day of the week. Similar to all participants, Desmond created intentional time for his physical activity.

Participants in this study have very routine forms of how they utilize physical activity. Each participant expressed how important their routines were for their self-care and decrease in stress. Kie holds strong to the routine and structure of his physical activity as a way to proactively maintain his homeostasis as a human being. The routine provides him with consistency for his well-being. Felicia also enjoys the structure that her physical activity routine provides to her. It allows her to be active while also having flexibility during her weekends. Monty and Kobe both stated that they have been following a physical activity schedule since college sports. Monty and Kobe provided that their college coaches engrained in their routines for physical activity. They have continued these routines that were passed down to them since their college sports days. They enjoy waking up earlier than most, they enjoy having a structure, and they enjoy pushing their body to the limit every day to be a better person. They both have

found solace in continuing this routine into adulthood for the fact that it helps ground them in all areas of their lives.

There were many different types of activities that participants stated they enjoyed doing. Through deeper narratives from participants, they explained how the activities made them feel during and/or after. For example, running/walking was a primary physical activity that every participant discussed when explaining their experiences during the study. Each participant explained different reasons for why they engaged in running/walking. Some participants saw running/walking as a source of calming and meditative activity, such as Kie, Felicia, and Monty. While other participants such as Kobe, Fiona, and Desmond explained that running/walking was an activity, they continued because of the positive attributes towards the body.

Kie explained why he runs:

It [running] allows me the space to clear all of my thoughts. I have now developed a habit to run long distance because it lets me think. I get time and space to enjoy the actual run but in reality to zone out from all other stressors. And it pushes me because it's like knowing that you're tired but you have to keep trying to finish.

Kie utilizes running as a physical activity to practice grounding, mindfulness, and as a challenging task to focus on. Running for Kie provides him with a safe space to process and a sense of relief after his long days.

Felicia stated:

Running and when I need to walk, those things help me to appreciate the power of the now. It helps me to center myself and even helps me have a space to set my intentions. Also helps with grounding and mindfulness from the everyday hum drum. I have to stay

in the moment and focus on the current. The best and last thing it does for me helps me to realize that things I am dealing with are not that big of deal in the grand scheme of things. Felicia felt running/walking was a source of calming and meditation. She used running/walking as a grounding and mindfulness task. It allowed her to stay present while also discussing and thinking about whatever she needed.

Monty also explained: "Running in the evening super hard but worth it, especially if there is school in session. The combination of running a mile and half and then heavy lifting creates a major stress relief." Monty utilized running/walking to create a sense of restoration and mindfulness after extreme situations and experiences after a long day. Like Felicia, Monty used running and lifting as a space to work on restoring his mind, body, and spirit.

As stated earlier, Kobe, Fiona, and Desmond provided different reasoning for engaging in running/walking. Kobe explained:

When you move, your body naturally releases certain chemicals that support your health. So I run and do the other workouts because I can release stuff like serotonin, which helps to stabilize my mood. I can release endorphins which help me defeat stress and stressful situations by running. So I am doing these things to not only feel better mentally but holistically for my body because I learned that is the best way to take care of yourself.

Kobe enjoyed the physiological process that his body goes through when he is running/walking. The process provides him a space to release the important hormones that help him to physically manage his stress.

Fiona shared that she enjoyed walking and sometimes running because it allowed her to create tasks. She stated:

Like I said, my trainer made me start walking outside of our workout sessions. I would be

required to do about .5 miles to 1 mile every day. He used to tell me that it helps me to

release dopamine into my system. I don't know what exactly the dopamine does, but I

know it helps me feel better overall.

Fiona stated that although she cannot fully describe how the dopamine works, she does realize

how much better, she feels after engaging in the workout.

Desmond had a similar perspective regarding the chemical releases that occur once you

have completed your running/walking:

Working out in general but running specifically helped me to release endorphins. You

hear it in the past, but then I decided to give it a try and I realized that it actually works. I

was like I am going to be my own case study and see if it works. It's starting to become

my only intervention as the resource or outlet for when I was in my head too much.

Desmond understood that running/walking provided him with natural remedies to feel better

mentally, emotionally, and physically. Desmond actively engaged in running to manage his

stress.

In addition to running/walking, the majority of the participants (5) explained that they

preferred to engage in High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) as part of their physical activity

regimen. Kie explained why he practiced HIIT:

I enjoy HIIT because it allows me to be in control of a process from start to finish. I get

to cleanse myself from the energy that I was required to take on throughout the day while

doing a quick workout that doesn't take more than 40 minutes usually.

Unlike teaching in an urban high school where the policies and procedures are determined by the

school and district leadership, Kie was able to exert control over his HIIT routine. He also

enjoyed HIIT because he has a way to expel the stressful energy that he took on throughout the day by engaging in HIIT workouts.

Monty shared:

I love doing HIIT because it is fun. I can use weights, and I look at it as the most challenging mentally and physically. It's that quick movement that is strenuous but possible.

Monty enjoyed HIIT because it provided him with a space to be challenged to show up as his best self. Monty used HIIT to show himself that he can continually grow, push through any challenge, and be a better person in all areas.

Kobe stated:

When I get through my HIIT workouts, I then feel better prepared for the day. HIIT, for me is a continually and evolving activity which makes it probably the best thing because it is that whole body feeling you know of accomplishment.

Kobe allowed the HIIT to set the tone for him to grow while also helping him to be a better person. Kobe used HIIT as an example in real life. If he can complete the HIIT workout, his mindset is that he can complete other tasks put in front of him.

Fiona shared:

I couldn't realize why everyone enjoyed HIIT so much. I did not grow up on or practice it until like three years ago when all the CrossFit places started popping up. But my trainer asked me if I could give it a try, so I did. After trying it a couple of times, that is when I fell in love. It felt like something I knew I could accomplish but also something that challenged me every single time I did it.

Fiona enjoyed HIIT because it was a task that she could set out to accomplish in her mind. She enjoyed the challenge but enjoyed beating the challenge even more.

Weight training was another favorite among the physical activities for study participants. Participants explained that they enjoyed weight training for a multitude of different reasons, but all stem back to decreasing stress and burnout and managing self-care. Desmond stated:

Weight training has and will always be one of my favorites because I can legit see what I am building. At work, it's always something to do or someone to talk to. At the gym while I'm lifting, I get lost in the moment. It gives me the mental opportunity to focus on what the stress is work related or not. Most times, it's where I get my "aha" moments at daily. It's activity that is ritual which allows my mind to go to the source of the stress and work through it. I be in there really having conversations with myself, man!

Desmond utilized weight training when you are consistent that he can then see the results, and he compared that to going through life. Desmond also uses the weightlifting opportunity to work through his stress by talking to himself and generating "aha" moments.

Felicia stated:

I enjoy weight training because it lets me put my anger and frustration into a positive thing that will help me instead of something negative. The weight training helps to exert built up frustration and energy on a daily basis.

Felicia enjoys weight training because it allows her to channel her anger and other emotions from a negative place into a positive outlet. Weight training helps her to expel her frustrations, using a very methodical and productive movement to work through stress.

Kobe shared:

Doing weight training allows my mind to escape and become occupied because I will at a high-level and I don't want to hurt myself. It's a place where I have to be constant and, in the moment, instead of thinking or dreaming about all other aspects of life. It's like I give my mind a break from real day to day issues that are heavy and instead focus on a simple task that requires my energy so I can be safe.

Kobe enjoys the weight training aspect because it forces him to be in the moment. He is required to let go of all thoughts and feelings and stay within the grounding moment of the lifting.

Monty stated:

Being able to measure a gain that you are making does something truly special to you. You know what else, I can't control what is going on in the school building, but I can control what is going on with my body. The lifting is a place of sanctity as compared to a struggle for some.

Monty enjoyed the weight training because it creates a sense of accomplishment from starting and finishing a task and/or goal within each weightlifting session. Being able to envision a task and complete a task is a rewarding feeling that Monty utilized through his weight-training, which set his mindset up for the day. Moreover, weightlifting enabled Monty to exert a modicum of control. He may not be able to control the stressful situations taking place within his school, but he can control his body.

In addition to HIIT and weightlifting, participants also participated in group physical activities. Participants explained that there was a sense of comradery when they engaged in physical activity with other people. For some, it was a place to build relationships and rapport. For some, it was a place to vent during the activity. For others, it was a safe space to work towards a goal in one collective manner. Although the physical exercise activities differed

pertaining to the actual participants, each activity provided a collective bonding experience through the said activity.

> Felicia described a running/walking group comprised of teachers and administrators:
>
> I enjoy groups in order to keep us all committed to time and place. We build a type of comradery when we walk and do the exercises together. We had it to a point where all teachers and administrators ran together. No matter if you finished first or last, we would all wait for everyone to finish and support each other. People were so encouraging.
>
> Looking back on it, it actually improved our relationships when we did run together.

Felicia enjoyed running and walking with her colleagues and administrators because it created camaraderie, and a space of accountability not only for her but for her colleagues and friends. They supported and pushed each other to make it to the finish line. No one was left behind. Moreover, running and walking together also improved their professional relationships in the school building.

> Kie described why he enjoys group physical activities such as pick-up basketball and flag football:
>
> I enjoy the friendships and rapport, and enjoy competing. Being around people and working out refills my cup. It allows me to escape from all the life stressors. It just makes me feel good when we compete and it's a bond created, and we don't have to worry about real life in that moment. In flag football, it is the same thing. Great cardio on top of the fact, it is 11 of us out there trying to score and not be scored on. We all leave our stressors and worries behind and agree to show up and be present within the moment.

Kie explained how he enjoyed being on a team working to accomplish one goal or objective

which is doing whatever to win the game. In addition to getting a good workout and building

relationships, he can be fully present on the game at hand and leave his stress behind.

Fiona enjoyed walking and talking with family:

I get to talk to my mom and my mom's cousin when they join me for my long walks. I

tend to just spill everything because I know they are a safe space while also knocking out

the walk I am doing. Plus when we are catching up or talking about the day, I literally

forget how far we have walked or we have to go. It's like killing two birds with one

stone.

Fiona described how group physical activity allowed her to "kill two birds with one stone:"

working out and bonding with loved ones. She enjoys exercising with someone because she can

vent and get feedback. She explained that connecting with someone while she is walking and

they both just vent feels like exactly what she needs most days

It was clear that physical activity is an important aspect for each of the participants' self-

care and management of stress. Participants presented many different reasons surrounding why

physical activity was so important, but the following were major highlights. The first major

highlights were participants being the moment; they enjoyed not having to think about the

previous situations or moment and also not having to look ahead in the future. The second major

highlight was the sense of accomplishment participants felt. Participants spoke about the

rewarding feeling that they had after every workout and how it set the tone for the day. The third

and final highlight was that participants enjoyed exerting a sense of control over their activity.

Typically, throughout the day, participants were required to follow district policies, school

policies, and administrator recommendations. Having their daily time to control their own narrative and situation was important for the participants.

In combination, this third and final theme explored the plethora of stress management techniques that participants' employed, including a combination of non-physical and physical activities. Participants have a strong self-care routine and regime to manage and decrease their workplace stress. The following section will provide the key findings of this study.

Discussion

The following section will identify and explore three key findings of this dissertation study:

1. Consistent with the research literature, the teachers of color who participated in this study explained that they became educators to be agents of change in the lives of their Black students. However, unlike past research, this commitment did not result in compassion fatigue for the participants.

2. Consistent with past research on teacher stress, the study participants attributed their stress to students, working conditions within the school, and district policies.

3. Interestingly, each of the participants in the study had a background in athletics. Study participants employed practices and strategies developed during their experiences as athletes to help alleviate their work-related stress.

Below, each of these key findings will be explained and then discussed in relation to relevant literature presented in chapter 2.

Finding #1: Consistent with the research literature, the teachers of color who participated in this study explained that they became educators to be agents of change in the lives of

their Black students. However, unlike past research, this commitment did not result in burnout for the participants.

Participants' perspectives and ideals were consistent with previous scholarly research about Black teachers supporting Black students through the achievement gap. Irvine (2003) explained the importance that teachers of color bring to their students. Teachers are more than just a color and race but are a change agent as cultural translators (Irvine, 2003). Irvine also explained that African American teachers operate with a cultural lens that is needed to support and propel Black students. Previous research by Hooks (2014) also showcased the importance of Black teachers supporting and educating Black students through racial, socio-political, and socio-economic justices/injustices with a cultural lens.

All participants were African American teachers who explained that their decision to teach was connected to their passion for supporting today's Black youth in excelling and growing into their best selves. Each participant was committed to making an impact on their student's holistic well-being. Each participant wanted to make a difference for their students and communities, mirroring what Hooks (2014) and Irvine (2003) both stated. Therefore they chose to teach in urban public high schools.

Previous research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) reported that teacher burnout is at an all-time high and that it is an international concern. Teachers throughout the country and the world experience many different symptoms associated with burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Bottiani et al. (2019) stated that during a national study conducted by Gallup (2014), they found that 46% of teachers have reported that they have "high daily stress."

All participants from the study did not mention experiencing actual burnout, although they not only were teaching but were teaching with the change agent perspective. Participants

further explained that their stress management strategies provided them with a space to work through their personal thoughts, feelings, and emotions from the workplace. These stress management techniques encompassed physical and non-physical interventions and techniques. As stated in previous research by the Mayo Clinic (2020), any type of exercise or physical activity should be considered a stress reliever. Participants aligned their physical activity into their stress management techniques and have reduced negative effects of stress, lowered daily stress, and have an improved mood which is consistent with the literature. Participants explained their stress management in many ways to help them decrease their stress. Most ways explained were through positive coping skills and a few negative coping skills. As expressed from the research of Zhang et al. (2019), teachers were able to implement and use emotional resources and psychological resources.

Participants did express the use of a few negative coping skills that they utilized, such as isolation, drinking, and even using recreational drugs. Participants expressed that they knew the repercussions could be detrimental to their mental, emotional, and physical health. Research presented by Zhou et al. (2017) stated that this narrative is not unfamiliar. It also provides context that teachers, like all other human beings, may utilize different ways to self-medicate, such as alcohol, marijuana, and/or even cocaine (Zhou et al., 2017).

Finding #2: Consistent with past research on teacher stress, the study participants attributed their stress to students, working conditions within the school, and district policies.

Throughout the collection of data, all participants expressed three major sources of their stress. These sources included student-related stress, school-related stressors, and district-level

stressors. These sources and stressors have been identified in previous studies. Thus, the findings of this study are congruent with the research literature.

Student-related Stressors

Participants expressed having high amounts of stress surrounding student behavior. Student behavior included disciplinary actions or lack thereof, lack of student motivation, needing to support students' mental and emotional well-being, and even having to play maternal and/or paternal figures in students' lives. Partly consistent with research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017), discipline problems and classroom management continue to be a major source of stress for many teachers. Although discipline was a major issue, participants in this study did not introduce classroom management as a source of their workplace stress. Rosas and West (2009) stated that teachers around the country are stressed because of student behaviors and student mental health needs while being required to provide a supportive classroom environment. Student motivation continues to have an impact on teacher stress. Like research conducted by Daniels et al. (2018), teachers have gotten to a space of having low personal responsibility to increase student motivation because of the stress accompanied with it.

School-level Stressors

Teachers in the study expressed school stressors as a source of their work-related stress. Stress at the school level for teachers came from school policy and procedures, school administrator practices, and individual school protocols. In line with research conducted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017), individual schools have goals and objectives that typically school teachers do not agree with. The disconnect between teachers and school procedures then creates a space of value dissonance for teachers in the workplace. Specifically, from the study, teachers expressed having multiple competing responsibilities that typically required using their lunch

break, staying after school, or getting to school earlier. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) explained how time pressure severely affects teachers' rest and recovery throughout the day.

District-level Decisions

All participants expressed extreme stress surrounding the district policies and procedures with different topics. The top two topics that caused the most stress over the study data were student behavior and discipline policies and COVID-19 policies and procedures. Similar to research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017), teachers in this study expressed that student discipline continues to affect their stress due to unsafe working conditions and a lack of accountability. District-level decisions surrounding student discipline impact teacher well-being and stress on a daily account. District-level decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic have also created more stress for teachers from this study. Teachers expressed extreme disdain and a feeling of uneasiness, betrayal, and overwhelming pressure to show up and be present for students virtually and in person. Aligned to the research from Cipriano and Brackett (2020), they stated that the five major emotions expressed by teachers during the pandemic were anxiety, worry, being overwhelmed, and sadness.

Finding #3: Interestingly, each of the participants in the study had a background in athletics. Study participants employed practices and strategies developed during their experiences as athletes to help address and alleviate their work-related stress.

To better understand the participants' experiences, the following section will explain how the teachers in this study implemented behaviors and understanding of the following theories Self-Efficacy Theory (SET), the Health Belief Model (HBM), and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

Self-Efficacy Theory

The Self-Efficacy Theory (SET) was postulated by Albert Bandura in the 1990's. This theory stated that one's successful and/or unsuccessful capabilities are directly codependent on their beliefs to reach their desired goal or outcome (Lordan & Pakrashi, 2014). Lordan and Pakrashi (2014) shared that there are four main components to SET:

1. cognition through process and understanding information,

2. affective process to regulate emotional responses,

3. motivation to stay consistent to outcomes, and

4. belief in their own capabilities.

Biddle and Nigg (1970) stated that SET might be the most useful and wide-ranging exercise theory due to the action-oriented approach to the process.

All participants exhibited elements of SET in their mindset and approach to teaching in urban public high schools. Throughout the study, participants had many commonalities within their narratives. Participants clearly outlined and managed their understanding surrounding their responsibilities in their professional experiences daily and weekly. This helped them understand their responsibilities and allowed them to plan their holistic care. Each participant created an intentional space for their emotional and mental well-being no matter how busy, chaotic, and hectic their schedules were. Following closely the SET model, all participants implemented self-care and motivational interventions throughout their day to stay consistent with their desired goals and outcomes. Finally, every participant within their narratives concretely and steadfastly believed in their ability to successfully complete their goals.

An example of SET within the participants is as follows. Kie transferred the self-efficacy that he developed in the field to the classroom. If he could handle the stress of an impending

tackle from a 280 lb. linebacker, he knew that he could handle the stress of a school day. Like other participants, Kie practiced the following:

Cognition through process and understanding information: Kie demonstrated this by starting each day new, going in with a mindset of recognizing and processing his goals for the day and writing them down along with meditation.

Affective process to regulate emotional responses: Kie was intentional with addressing his emotional state prior to beginning the day which is the second step to 'regulate emotional responses.' He did this by meditating and deep breathing.

and needs through daily affirmations such as speaking highly to himself.

Motivation to stay consistent to outcomes: Kie routinely listened to motivational videos throughout the day and practiced daily affirmations to and for himself.

Belief in their own capabilities: Kie daily praised himself for small goals that turned into bigger goals for his overall objective and tasks.

Another participant, Monty, implemented a SET mindset. He expressed that he made up in his mind that if he could get through all the tough situations in life, he would not let students be the make or break of his mental and emotional well-being.

Cognition through process and understanding information: Monty established this by setting weekly expectations and goals for the week that he planned to accomplish.

Affective process to regulate emotional responses: Monty admitted to having significant highs and lows; he combatted that by taking daily gratitude walks to realign his thoughts and feelings to his goals.

Motivation to stay consistent to outcomes: Monty demonstrated this by implementing specific daily affirmations of success and positive thoughts about his day prior to walking

into the school building and when walking out of the school building. Monty also took gratitude walks to realign his thoughts and behaviors to make sure they were productive and positive in nature during his lunch break.

Belief in their own capabilities: Monty stated that he would envision himself completing the goals that he set out for himself and then doing everything in his power to manifest them.

Health Belief Model

The Health Belief Model was created by multiple theorists in the 1950's. This theory sought to explain why people do or do not use various preventative health behaviors and why they do or do not delve into risky behaviors (Biddle & Nigg, 1970). HBM theory goes on to state that people will not actively look for health preventative interventions unless they have some level of motivation and/or knowledge (Biddle & Nigg, 1970). Motivations may come from internal or external factors associated with any different health experiences (Jones et al., 2015).

Throughout this study, participants explained why and how they began to take care of their physiological needs. For example, Desmond explained that his educational training and background are where he learned how to deal with stress. Prior to attending graduate school, Desmond did not take his mental and emotional needs seriously. He explained that, after attending graduate school and meeting with subject matter experts in the field of psychology, he realized how important mental health truly was. Desmond learned how stress and burnout could affect the body mentally, emotionally, and physically. He also shared that he was told how important physical movement was for the human body and how it can actively decrease stress and burnout. Once he learned how to prevent and manage stress, he then actively implemented these practices into a consistent daily routine.

Fiona's narrative also demonstrates the Health Belief Model. Fiona expressed that she had never been into weightlifting and strength training as a form to take out her frustration from the day. After speaking with other individuals in her workplace and her physical trainer, she decided to give it a try, and she enjoyed it. Fiona went on to explain that she would have never given it a try if her physical trainer and colleagues had not advocated and spoke so highly about how weight-lifting helps them all decrease their frustration and stress from the day. Fiona was given information explaining the benefits of this specific type of exercise and then began to explore the benefits for herself.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) postulates that a person's intentions directly correlate and determine their behavior (Ajzen, 1988). Biddle and Nigg (1970) explained that a person's intentions might predict one's attitude and social implications of their behavior. This theory suggests that the motivational effect on an individual's intention to implement a task will directly impact their own thoughts and behaviors on said task (Biddle & Nigg, 1970).

The TPB was evident throughout the study with all participants. Across the study participants, intentionally set their schedules and daily routines to have incorporate opportunities to complete tasks. Participants also protected time to complete tasks, which looked like not responding to professional and/or personal responsibilities at the time of said tasks. Throughout the study, participants explained that by creating space into their schedule, they were more than likely to complete the behavior required for the tasks.

For example, Kobe had a strict schedule and routine for physical activity that he implemented weekly. This routine from Kobe's explanation is similar and congruent to his college sports days. Kobe, rather than hoping he could move his body, created a routine that has

the physical activity integrated with his daily schedule. Kobe actively created space to engage in

his task, which then allowed him the space to complete the task. He set his intention to complete

the task a week in advance, therefore not allowing the task to be by happenstance.

Felicia was also intentional in her demeanor to complete physical activity. Felicia stated

that she would take Sunday to map out her physical activity days, such as Mondays,

Wednesdays, and Fridays at 7am, 15-20 Walk, 12pm 15–20-minute Walk, and 5pm-7pm Gym

workout (lift weights and running). On weekends, she would choose any activity that she would

like. Felicia changed her routine up monthly by what type of physical activity she wanted to do

but she would not miss a day no matter what. She stated that when she did this, it made it easier

for her to engage in the activity while also holding herself accountable. Felicia created tasks once

a week that she was intentional on completing all the way to the time when she would complete

the task, the specific activity task, and the length of time it would require.

Study participants employed practices and strategies developed during their experiences

as athletes to help address and alleviate their work-related stress. Analysis indicates that the

relationship between motivation and self-care was prevalent throughout all the above theories.

After further analysis, each theory requires participants to be aware of their holistic needs and

open to self-improvement. This resonates due to the experiences that athletes go through in

training for sports. The significance of the athletic background of participants is that the mindset

is typically one of growth. Participants in their sports careers were continually working to

improve their physical ability to be better. This mindset of improvement was internalized and

translated into other tenets of their life years after no longer competing in the sports realm, such

as professional success and/or holistic self-care. Participants from this study demonstrate that

self-care is a major tenet in their holistic well-being and one that deserves intentional

interventions and techniques for success. The above theories such as SET, HBM, and TPB were all aligned in a way that was useful for each participant to reach their self-care objectives and goals to be their best selves.

Conclusion

This chapter provided in-depth detail surrounding the findings and discussion from this study. The major themes extrapolated from this study were mindset and perspectives, stressors in the workplace, and stress management – mind and body. Provided at the conclusion of this chapter was a discussion outlining three key findings in relation to relevant literature. Chapter five will discuss conclusions and recommendations from this study, as well as the future implications that the study may have on the educational realm.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of urban high school teachers who utilized physical activity to mitigate their work-related stress and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. By engaging urban high school teachers in reflection on their experiences with work-related stress during the pandemic, this study identified what teachers described as the sources of their stress and their stress management strategies.

The statement of the problem to be addressed was that while teacher stress and its relationship to attrition are well documented, comparatively little is known about the relationship between teachers and stress management. Research related to this problem takes on greater importance in light of COVID-19, and the intensified stress that teachers have endured because of the expedited transition to online learning and other factors related to the pandemic. The significance of this study was to bring more scholarly attention to how teachers cope with their stress. With an increased understanding of which strategies teachers employ, greater steps can be taken to support teachers in their efforts to engage in self-care. In addition, physical activity has been shown to be an effective stress management strategy (Lordan & Pakrashi, 2014; Roberts et al., 2019). This study provided insight on the role of physical activity in addressing teachers' work-related stress.

High school teachers were the target population due to the limited research on secondary teachers' stress and burnout. Although all teachers experience high amounts of daily stress, high school teachers experience high levels of stress and anxiety from all tenets of the workplace (Bottiani et al., 2019). Bottiani et al. (2019) stated that high school teachers are supporting students in their most pivotal and transformational years mentally, emotionally, and physically. Moreover, this study focused on urban public high schools. Sutcher et al. (2016) stated that

urban teachers experience extremely high levels of stress and burnout due to low student motivation, lack of resources, violent community issues spilling over into the schools, and lastly physical safety of everyone in the building.

Employee stress continues to skyrocket while organizational responsibilities of school districts continue to meet the bare minimum as a course of action for employee social and emotional well-being (Seidel, 2014). Research done in the corporate and private sectors has found that fitness activity programs have tremendously helped with employee productivity and satisfaction (Whitsel et al., 2019). This study sought to address the gap between a theoretical understanding of physical activity in the workplace. In doing so, this study aimed to provide a deeper understanding and perspective for school districts to begin to better address teachers' needs, such as how to mitigate levels of burnout with stress reduction, improved self-care, and physical activity as a coping skill.

The following research questions guided this narrative study:

1. What do high school teachers identify as the sources of their work-related stress?
2. How do high school teachers describe their stress management strategies?
3. How do high school teachers describe their motivation to implement physical activity in the management of their work-related stress?

Participants were recruited from various urban public high schools in Maryland and/or the District of Columbia. The researcher strictly focused on urban public high schools due to the severity of the workplace stress, culture, and socio-economic status of the communities they serve (Sutcher et al., 2016). Six teachers were selected to participate in this study to reflect diversity along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, years teaching, grade level and subject matter.

The study sought a diverse group of participants to capture a range of teachers' experiences, stressors, and coping mechanisms, specifically physical activity.

Study participants completed a demographic survey and two semi-structured interviews (an initial 60-minute interview and a follow-up 45-minute interview) via Zoom telecommunications. The demographic survey was used to gather participants' background information as well as information about their physical activity. The survey served to deepen understanding of the stories brought to light through the interviews. Participants completed the survey prior to the first interviews. During the first interview, the researcher explored the reasons why participants joined the teaching profession; how and why they teach their current subject area and grade level; how and why they came to teach at their current school; what they see as their sources of stress; and how they manage their stress. Special attention was given to physical activity as an approach to mitigate stress. During the second interview (approximately two weeks later), the researcher revisited areas discussed in the first interview for clarity and further exploration. The researcher also asked follow-up questions related to data reported on the participant's surveys. The researcher invited the participant to share anything new that came to mind for them since the first interview. The researcher explored new themes and areas that arose from the preliminary analysis of the first round of interviews with participants. The second interview served as a member check to strengthen the internal validity of the data.

Data was coded utilizing a first cycle coding that included emotion coding, descriptive coding, and in vivo coding. After the first cycle of coding, the researcher performed a second cycle coding utilizing *a priori* codes derived from the literature. Data were then analyzed for patterns using Saldana's (2015) rubrics. The goal of pattern coding was to examine the data to find repetitive patterns of actions and to see if there were any consistencies throughout. After the

first and second coding, analytical memos were crafted to explore themes and patterns related to the research questions. Data was then further reduced to identify relevant themes and supportive sub-themes. Survey data was analyzed and used to inform and corroborate the descriptions of the participants' stress management strategies presented in the interviews. Survey data was compared with the interview transcripts to build a true understanding of how participants utilized physical activity to mitigate their workplace stress. The survey data was also examined to further understand the relationships of the participants, their work-related stressors, and their physical activity regime.

After reviewing the data from the study, the researcher found the three following themes:

1. Mindset and Perspectives

2. Stress Here, Stress There, Stress Everywhere

3. Stress Management – Mind and Body

The researcher identified three key findings from the themes of the data.

1. Consistent with the research literature, the teachers of color who participated in this study explained that they became educators to be agents of change in the lives of their Black students. However, unlike past research, this commitment did not result in burnout for the participants.

2. Consistent with past research on teacher stress, the study participants attributed their stress to students, working conditions within the school, and district policies.

3. Interestingly, each of the participants in the study had a background in athletics. Study participants employed practices and strategies developed during their experiences as athletes to help alleviate their work-related stress.

After this summary of the dissertation, this fifth and final chapter presents the conclusions of this study. This chapter also offers recommendations for practice and future research.

<center>**Conclusions**</center>

This section addresses the research questions by drawing on the study's findings. Each research question is presented and accompanied with brief examples from the study.

The study's first research question read: **What do high school teachers identify as the sources of their work-related stress?** This study found that all participants identified a variety of work-related stressors to include student-related stressors, school-related stressors, and district-related stressors. Participants identified the first major source of work-related stress as student-related stressors. Student behavior continues to be a major focus of workplace stress for all teachers in this research study. It was explained through the literature that discipline problems among students continue to be a major stressor for teachers in and out of the classroom (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Participants identified that student behavior has increasingly become more stressful amidst the global pandemic that the world is experiencing. Participants expressed having to provide all students with more emotional support through pandemic related issues that have made themselves prevalent in class. Participants have been required to navigate regressed student behaviors while providing educational support through restorative justice practices that have a lack of fidelity as a requirement by the district.

The second source of participants' work-related stress included a source of stress that was reported was district-level decision making. Participants were very vocal in explaining that district level decisions directly impacted their everyday procedures in the workplace. With context, participants spoke about the uneasiness of district-level decision making regarding the

COVID-19 pandemic. Participants stated that many decisions were made without a true understanding of what was occurring at the school level. Decisions seemed to be rushed, look good on paper, and constantly changing to the point that there was no consistency across the board. Ever changing policies matched with 'out of touch' decision making created an immense amount of stress for all participants. **Participants described feeling expendable by decisions that were made by their respective school districts.**

The final major source of teacher stress was school-related stressors. Participants explained how COVID-19 has increased their stress in the workplace. Participants expressed how school policies and procedures surrounding COVID-19 placed teachers into unsafe environments and predicaments. Participants also explained the decrease of accountability and increased teacher accountability while teachers were trying to navigate the workplace. Participants explained there was a lack of mental and emotional support from administrators. The final source of school-related stress was navigating their workplace during the ongoing pandemic. Teachers were required to go "virtual" at the beginning of the pandemic, then back in-person, then hybrid, then in-person, and now depending on the school back to virtual or in-person.

The second research question read: **How do high school teachers describe their stress management strategies?** All participants shared stories of how they had positive and negative strategies when managing their stress. Teachers explained that they enjoyed venting to a loved one or colleagues about the day-to-day stress they were experiencing in their classrooms and schools. They needed the emotional support to have a safe space without fear of judgment and criticism. Participants stated that they did not use just one coping skill but a plethora such as exercising, sound boarding, and venting. Zhou et al. (2017) stated that applying a multitude of

positive coping skills creates a positive mindset to address the high demands of educators. Participants were forthcoming with utilizing their negative coping skills to mitigate and handle workplace stress. Participants provided examples of how drinking, smoking, and isolation helped them to work through their stress. Participants stated when they followed their routine of self-care with positive coping skills; they were less likely to allow workplace stressors to completely derail their perspectives of the day. This change of mindset then creates a positive behavior correlation with increased workplace stress as a form of personal development challenges (Zhou et al., 2017).

The third and final question for the study read: **How do high school teachers describe their motivation to implement physical activity in the management of their work-related stress?** This study found that high school teachers spoke about their motivation to actively engage and implement physical activity into their work-related stress. Participants explained that they possessed an intrinsic motivation to be the best person holistically socially emotionally and mentally. As stated in the Self-Efficacy Theory postulated by Bandura (Lordan & Pakrashi, 2014), a person's successful or unsuccessful capabilities were directly related to their beliefs of a desired outcome. Participants believed that they could be better holistically and began to operate in that nature. Participants wanted a healthier way to exert energy and created a platform and space to follow through with it. Finally, participants viewed crushing their gym goals and related that to crushing their day-to-day workplace goals. Participants created actionable steps and routines in order to attain a desired outcome. Participants realized that they needed to be intentional with their self-care and physical activity and then embodied it. This coincides with the literature from Biddle and Nigg (1970) in which they explain SET primarily focuses on progression to be better rather than the end goal. All participants had a very clear and structured

plan for how they actively engaged in physical activity. Participants had their schedules down to the time of day and type of activity. Many of the participants stated that they had to work to include physical activity rather than just hoping to do it when time permitted. Rather than waiting, they scheduled time to complete these activities. This corresponds with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) which explains how a person's intention directly correlates and determines their behavior (Biddle & Nigg, 1970).

Recommendations

This last section of chapter five delves into recommendations for practice and future research based on the study results.

Recommendations for Practice

Findings from this study have implications for practice. All participants provided clear and succinct ideas on how school systems can better support teachers in the workplace. These ideas ranged from high-level top-down approaches to systemic issues within the educational system, changes in policy and procedures regarding teacher well-being, and even actionable, innovative ways to support teachers as a holistic employee in the workplace. It is further recommended that school districts explore increased wellness and well-being support for all teachers. Moving forward, district-level leadership, school leaders, and teachers should look to:

1. Create clear messaging to teachers in support of their mental, physical, and emotional well-being utilizing posters around the school, emails sent from individuals that know said teachers, having focus groups and direct conversations on what well-being is, and/or training.

2. Provide biweekly and/or monthly training on ways to manage stress and burnout through innovative techniques (yoga, journaling group, working out, trauma groups).

Understanding that there are a plethora of different positive ways to mitigate stress and burnout, teachers should have multiple options provided by the school organization.

3. Develop and implement biannual workshops to increase understanding surrounding the importance of self-care and self-care routines within the workplace and personal life. These workshops should be facilitated by a licensed mental health clinician that specializes in self-care, stress, burnout, anxiety, and/or executive functioning.

4. Assign at least one licensed mental health clinician to each school site dedicated to being a resource and safe space specifically for teachers in that building. Providing one individual allows teachers to build rapport and trust with the clinician and creates a rapport of support for everyone in the workplace. Clinicians could also provide psychological services for teachers when requested.

5. Re-evaluate policy and procedures that create more realistic responsibilities for teachers, therefore, eliminating the requirement for 8+ hours a day to be successful in their position. Realizing that the educational system has been the same way for over a hundred years, and it is now time to explore new and innovative ways to support teachers and their well-being.

6. Prevention and implementation by higher education programs teaching the future teachers and educators of tomorrow. Understanding that teacher well-being is just as important as teacher curriculum and lesson planning. Possibly implement a required self-care course for teachers to learn what works best for them during times of high stress for the future.

7. Listen to staff. Principals and assistant principals should take a poll of teacher morale and well-being monthly, if not weekly. This poll can be informal, walking the halls during transitions, checking on teachers before their class begins, or directly after. If the general morale is low, per diem a social emotional wellness activity by an outside organization. Possible provide all staff with three options to choose from.

8. Preservice week should be fifty percent information for the upcoming school year with protocols, policies, and updating classrooms. The other fifty percent should be geared towards teacher well-being and retention. Creating an understanding that teachers really do matter, and they are working on ways to better take care of themselves while also providing ways for them to work on taking care of themselves. This holistic approach can provide a strong beginning base of self-care and accountability in the school building, which will improve school and teacher culture.

9. Create a collaborative team within the school. School leadership should work to create a team that effectively collaborates across boundaries. Similar to multidisciplinary teams for students, but for teachers and staff. The team should include representatives from all tenets of school employees (teachers, front office staff, mental health team, school administrators, and janitorial services). This team will meet weekly to address staff concerns with school leadership and work to collaboratively to find a resolution.

10. Teachers should create daily and weekly self-care routines to decrease workplace stress. Each teacher should establish and explore different positive coping skills to create a concrete self-care plan to follow. Preferably, daily coping skills for in the

moment workplace stress. They can also create weekly interventions and/or activities at the conclusion of their workweek to decompress.

11. Teacher Education programs should assist preservice teachers with the development of stress management and self-care. Providing this framework prior to stepping into the field could likely cement the importance of self and stress-management.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is an abundance of literature on the teacher stress and burnout crisis in the educational field. This dissertation contributes to this area of research, but more research needs to be completed on the utilization of stress management activities, especially as it relates to gender. Possible research questions for future research may include:

1. How do stress management techniques differ by gender?

2. In what ways does teacher gender influence their perception of the effectiveness of a stress management approaches?

Research pertaining to the difference and/or correlation of stress management techniques will support future decision-makers to improve and provide resources for teachers in the educational realm.

The second recommendation for further research comes from the athletic background that continued to be prevalent throughout the research. Participants explained many different situations and experiences about how they look at stress as a challenge rather than an obstacle. This outlook was instilled in them by sports experiences from early childhood to young adulthood. Possible research questions for future research may include:

1. How does athletic identity affect the choice of stress management techniques in teachers to mitigate their workplace stress?

2. What key lessons do teachers who were former athletes bring to their teaching and the profession?

Completing further research on the topic of athletic background may provide researchers with more understanding of how teachers gauge and address stress and burnout. In turn, this will help to understand how perceptions and outlook directly affect how teachers handle and manage their stress.

The third recommendation for further research comes from the racial undertone of the participants coupled with their stress. Participants' patterns with being the change agent in their Black students' lives created a high amount of intrinsic stress.

1. Explain how it feels to carry the weight of being a change agent within the lives of Black students?

2. In what areas in the workplace have you had to sacrifice your own self-care or self-needs to be sure to support your Black students?

The intersectionality of identifying as Black and a change agent is an area of exploration for future research.

The fourth recommendation for further research comes from further understanding the relationship between being change agents, being physically active, and managing stress. Participants and their intersectionality of the above should be further explored for relevance of stress management and self-care.

1. How much teacher's effectiveness to manage stress was related to the physical activity and to the identity as change agents?

2. Which mindset and perspective came first, managing stress through physical activity or being a change agent no matter the cost for Black students?

Completing this research will provide further understanding on how being a change agent and physically active both have an impact on stress management.

The fifth and final recommendation of future research surrounds teachers who do not have an athletic background. This study closely aligned with individuals with an athletic background, future studies should explore the opposite population in their stress management and self-care.

1. Explain where you learned how to engage in stress management activities from past and present?

2. What motivates you whether intrinsically or extrinsically to engage in self-care techniques?

This helps to consider the motivations for teachers who are not physically active to work on stress management and self-care and in turn will provide researchers with a better holistic approach of support to all teacher populations.

<div align="center">

Summary

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Teaching is already considered one of the hardest professions in world. Research has clearly documented the levels of stress that teachers experience coupled with the lack of overall systemic support in teacher well-being. It is my sincerest hope that after reviewing this study, district leaders, school administrators, and teachers begin to collaboratively work together to implement better self-care for all employees. Let this study be the wake-up call that we all needed; it's time to prioritize teacher well-being, not only for teachers but also for our future leaders. If their teachers are not their best selves, then our students will not be either. Moving forward in this global pandemic, it is imperative to listen and create space for growth in the educational industry for teacher well-being. Providing teachers with self-care routines that

include a variety of activities and interventions, such as but not limited to physical activity, mental health workshops, and coping skills groups led by mental health professionals will begin to slow the spread of this global issue. If we do not, my fear is that we will have a global teacher shortage that will be just as life altering as the COVID-19 pandemic or worst.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Study

Invitation to Research Study

Fall 2021

Dear Teacher.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting: *A Narrative Study of Urban High School Teachers who Use Physical Activity to Mitigate Stress and Burnout.* The purpose of this study is to explore the lived-experiences of teachers that utilize physical activity as a mitigating factor to teacher stress and burnout. This study is being conducted as a requirement of the doctoral program under the supervision of Dr. Kristine Lewis-Grant at Drexel University.

If you agree to participate, you will participate in two online one-on-one interview lasting approximately 75 minutes and the second interview lasting 45 - 60 minutes during the week of September _____. For the purpose of data collection, I ask that I be permitted to record the interview using two devices (the second is for back-up) and take handwritten notes through the process. The recordings and interview transcripts will be reviewed by myself and only for purposes of identifying key themes, patterns, findings, and results. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, all participants will remain anonymous and will be identified only by pseudonym. Participants are asked to review the attached consent form, prior to the interview I will answer any questions you have about the study and request your verbal consent to participate in the study.

If you are available to participate, I can be reached at 202-870-3315 or by email at mm4985@drexel.edu. If you have questions, I am available to provide more information.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

Marcus Mason
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D. in Leadership and Management
Drexel University, School of Education
Mm4985@drexel.edu
202-870-3315

Appendix B: Consent to Take Part in the Research Study

Drexel University
Consent to Take Part In Research Study

To be reviewed with the participant prior to commencing the interview or focus group.
Verbal consent is to be obtained.

1. Title of research study:
If I Didn't Run Everyday Before Work, I Couldn't Be There For My Students: A Narrative
Study of Urban High School Teachers who Use Physical Activity to Mitigate Stress and Burnout

2. Study Researcher: Marcus Mason

3. Why you are being invited to take part in a research study?
You are invited to take part in this research study. Your participation will deepen the researcher's
understanding of his proposed dissertation topic through the lens of qualitative interviewing.

4. What you should know about this pilot study?
Whether or not you take part is up to you.
You can choose not to take part.
If you decide to not be a part of this research no one will hold it against you.
Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

5. How many people will be studied?
Five to seven people will participate in two one-to-one interviews.

6. What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will participate in a 75 minute semi-structured
interview and a second interview lasting 45 – 60 minutes. The interviews will be scheduled
between 9/1/2021 and 9/30/2021. Interviews will be planned at convenient and quiet locations
that allow for confidentiality. Interviews will be recorded using two devices and transcribed
verbatim; and this data will be used to complete findings.
You may also be asked to share documents and artifacts that relate to the study. All artifacts and
documents you provide will be photographed and the originals returned to you.

7. Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?
There are no known risks to participating in this research study.

8. Will being in this study help me in any way?
There are no benefits to you from your taking part in this research. Beyond the researcher's
learning through an applied experience, there are no known benefits to others from your taking
part in this research.

9. What happens to the information collected?
Efforts will be made to limit access to your personal information. Your name and other identifying information is confidential, you will only be identified by a pseudonym.

10. What else do I need to know?
This research study is being done by a Drexel University student for a qualitative research study under the supervision of Dr. Kristine Lewis-Grant.

Appendix C: Demographic Survey

This demographic sheet will be utilized to collect biographical survey and information regarding each participant. Due to the pandemic and this study being conducted completely online, the demographic survey will be provided through the researcher's school email that is password protected in Microsoft Office Forms.

The questions that will be asked are as follows:
1. What is your chosen pseudonym (the name you created for yourself) for the purposes of this study?
2. How old are you?
3. What gender do you most closely identify with?
4. What race do you identify most closely with?
5. What grade level(s) do you teach?
6. What subject area(s) do you teach?
7. Have you utilized physical activity as a self-care technique from workplace stress?
8. How long have you taught in your current urban high school?
9. How many years have you worked in any high school regardless of setting?
10. What are the top three sources of stress in your work life?
11. Please gauge your level of stress on a typical workday, between 1(minimal)-5(intense).
12. What are three stress management strategies that you use to address your work-related stress?
13. Please share a schedule of your physical activity for a typical week during the school year. Indicate the time and type of physical activity – for example, 6am, Three-mile run or 7:30pm, Yoga Class.

Schedule of your physical activity for a typical week during the school year		
Day	Time	Physical Activity
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Appendix D: Interview Protocols

Semi-Structured INTERVIEW Protocol:
If I Didn't Run Everyday Before Work, I Couldn't Be There For My Students: A Narrative
Study of Urban High School Teachers who Use Physical Activity to Mitigate Stress and Burnout

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer: Marcus Mason
Interview Participant (list pseudonym):

Introduction
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview on [DATE]. This study is being
conducted as a requirement of the doctoral program under the supervision of Dr. Kristine Lewis-
Grant at Drexel University. This interview will be approximately 75 minutes.

With your permission, I will record the interview. The interview will be transcribed verbatim
and used for my class assignments. The recording will be destroyed at the end of my class. To
protect your identity and confidentiality, you will select a pseudonym. Your participation in the
interview is voluntary. You may refrain from answering a question without penalty. You may
withdraw from the interview at any time, and it will not be held against you. There are no right
or wrong answers to the questions. I am interested in understanding your perspectives and
experiences with teachers' stress and burnout and how physical activity helps to mitigate that.

I am conducting this interview as a graduate student completing my doctoral program. In the
event that you disclose information that express a threat to the health and safety of yourself or
others, I am obligated to stop the interview and determine if further steps are needed to connect
you with supportive resources.

Do you have any questions before we begin? (If yes, address the participant's question.) Let's
begin.

Questions
1. Why did you become a teacher?
2. Why did you decide to teach in an urban high school?
3. Explain your current role and responsibilities.
4. What does a typical day teaching look like for you at your school?
5. At the end of the day, how stressed are you on a scale of 1-10? Please explain.
6. What are some of the sources of your stress at work? Is it student related? Staff related?
   Safety related? Administrator related?
7. Tell me about your most stressful day at work? What happened? What did you do to
   address your stress?
8. What are some of the strategies that you use to manage your work-related stress?
   Drinking? Smoking? Exercising? Venting?
9. What types of physical activity do you engage in? What is your favorite and why?

10. Does engaging in (insert the types of physical activity the participant described) help you to manage your stress? Please explain. Please provide an example.
11. Where did you learn or gain the knowledge that physical activity would help to decrease stress or burnout?
12. If you were at 10 for feeling stressed before your physical activity, what was your stress level afterwards between 1-10? Elaborate.
13. Have you ever felt burned out? Tell me more about this experience. Why did you stay and continue to teach? How were you able to recover from feeling burned out? What did you do? Did physical activity(ies) played a role in your recovery from burning out?
14. During the 2020 – 2021 academic year, how did COVID-19 affect your workplace stress?
15. Due to COVID-19 did you change the way you engage in physical activity? Did the change(s) help/work? Please explain.
16. Going into the upcoming academic year, what do you expect to be sources of stress and how do you plan to manage your stress? Any lessons or new insights from the past academic year?
17. What advice would you give to a new teacher about how to manage work-related stress?
18. What advice would you give to a principal or superintendent about how to support teachers in managing work-related stress?

Appendix E: Interview Protocols

Second Interview Protocol:
If I Didn't Run Everyday Before Work, I Couldn't Be There For My Students: A Narrative
Study of Urban High School Teachers who Use Physical Activity to Mitigate Stress and Burnout

Time of Second Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer: Marcus Mason
Focus Group Participants (list pseudonyms):

Introduction
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview on [DATE]. This study is being
conducted as a requirement of the doctoral program under the supervision of Dr. Kristine Lewis-
Grant at Drexel University. This interview will be approximately 45-60 minutes.

With your permission, I will record the interview. The interview will be transcribed verbatim
and used for my class assignments. The recording will be destroyed at the end of my class. To
protect your identity and confidentiality, you will select a pseudonym. Your participation in the
interview is voluntary. You may refrain from answering a question without penalty. You may
withdraw from the interview at any time, and it will not be held against you. There are no right
or wrong answers to the questions. I am interested in understanding your perspectives and
experiences with teachers' stress and burnout and how physical activity helps to mitigate that.

I am conducting this interview as a graduate student completing my doctoral program. In the
event that you disclose information that express a threat to the health and safety of yourself or
others, I am obligated to stop the interview and determine if further steps are needed to connect
you with supportive resources.

Do you have any questions before we begin? (If yes, address the participant's question.) Let's
begin.

Questions
1. Tell me about a time where you felt supported with regard to your workplace stress?
   Who/what made you feel supported?
2. What is your experience with school districts providing space for teachers' social and
   emotional well-being?
3. Tell me a time that the school you work at supported you with workplace stress and
   workplace burnout?
4. How has the district you work in supported you with decreasing workplace stress and
   workplace burnout?
5. Describe your vision of a school and/or district that supports teacher social and emotional
   well-being. (Probe for reduction of stress and burnout, or is this a separate question??)

6. Are you aware of any physical activity programs for employee wellness within your organization?
7. Is there any messaging from your workplace offering you any ideas to decrease your stress and/or burnout?
8. Have any of these messages stood out to you the most? If so, which one?
9. If not, do you think it would be impactful for you as a teacher if you received more opportunities from your workplace?
10. Do you feel you would be more willing to engage in physical activity if implementation programs were actionable programming (a yoga instructor, a personal trainer, a weightlifting coach at the workplace) promoted by your workplace at no charge?

Appendix F: Data Collection Timeline

Below is a timeline associated with this study that explains in detail the weeks of the actual research:

Study Schedule	Activity
Week 1	Advertise for participants
Week 2	Selection of participants and consents signed
Week 3	Begin interviews
Monday	Interview
Monday	Interview
Monday	Interview
Wednesday	Interview
Wednesday	Interview
Wednesday	Interview
Friday	Interview
Friday	Interview
Friday	Interview
Week 4	Interview
Monday	Interview
Monday	Interview
Monday	Interview
Wednesday	Interview
Wednesday	Interview
Wednesday	Interview
Friday	Interview
Friday	Interview
Friday	Interview
Week 5	Transcribe and code data and interviews
Week 6	Transcribe and code data and interviews
Week 7	Write up results
Week 8	Write up results