SWITCHIN' UP: THE EFFECT OF CODE-SWITCHING ON BLACK PROFESSIONALS IN

PREDOMINANTLY WHITE ORGANIZATIONS

By

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THESIS

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Abstract

This study explored how highly educated Black professionals holding at least a four-year degree view use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in relation to their ethnic identity. Additionally, the study investigated whether code-switching impacts participants' organizational identification or their connectedness to ethnic identity. Through interviews, I uncovered that although 3 of 12 participants indicated that use of AAVE felt natural to them, 6 participants use it infrequently or not at all. Surprisingly, using Standard American English (SAE) had little to no effect on most participants' feelings of connectedness to their ethnic identity. This research also uncovered that though all participants may not code-switch verbally, they may still do so behaviorally. Also, participants expressed feeling pressure to be perfect as they believe they are held as an exemplification of the entire Black community. However, some were willing to code-switch and take on the pressure to elevate their rank within their respective organizations to create more opportunities for incoming Black professionals. Finally, I found that participants did not describe AAVE as a major part of their ethnic identity, code-switching does not impact their connectedness to their ethnic identity and organizational identification (OI) is not impacted by code-switching.

Introduction

After the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which made employment discrimination illegal, African Americans were finally extended offers to join companies as more than just "the help." No longer were they relegated to the laborious and manual task of keeping the edifices clean, but instead working at desks, ideating, contributing to projects, and navigating office politics. As African Americans increasingly occupied roles which were typically given to white Americans, they bore the weight of assimilating to the dominant white culture in these corporations. Straightening or removing their sky-bound curls, enduring micro-aggressions, and abandoning the dialect which makes them unique are all expectations for Black professionals to successfully navigate the treacherous landscape that is corporate America. Though significant progress has been made, and Black professionals are freeing their natural hair in the workplace, the language with long-cherished roots in the Black community is still not widely accepted in predominantly white organizations (PWOs). Some professionals may adjust their behavior or language to appeal to the dominant group. One such example is individuals who use African American Vernacular English (AAVE) opting to instead use Standard American English (SAE) in the presence of white colleagues. This practice is called "code-switching." Daily, Black professionals face the communicative dilemma of code-switching to be perceived as more palatable to the dominant group, or not code-switching to feel connected to their ethnic identity. This explorative qualitative study will uncover whether highly educated Black professionals view AAVE as core to their identity, whether Black professionals' use of SAE at work impacts their levels of connectedness to their ethnic identity, and how code-switching impacts Black professionals' levels of organizational identification. The results of this study will pave the way

for developing strategies to create policies and organizational cultures which are wholistically diverse.

Literature Review

A History of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

African American Vernacular English (AAVE), sometimes referred to as Black English (BE), African American English (AAE), Ebonics, and several other names is a dialect with origins in the Caribbean and the American south during slavery. Though its exact origins are hotly debated, the three dominating hypotheses are Anglicist, Creolist, and Substratist. The Anglicist or dialectologist perspective purports that AAVE stems from the "dialects spoken by British overseers with little to no influence from their own native African languages and cultures" (Lanehart, 2017, pp. 80). The creolist perspective suggests that "[AAVE] developed from a prior U.S. creole developed by slaves that was widespread across the colonies and slave-holding areas (though Neo-Creolists acknowledge there likely was not a widespread creole but one that emerged in conditions favorable to creole development)" (Lanehart, pp. 80). Finally, the Substratist hypothesis posits that "distinctive patterns of [African American Vernacular English] are those that occur in Niger-Congo languages such as Kikongo, Mande, and Kwa" (p. 80). These are just three of several competing perspectives and sub-perspectives on the history of AAVE. Though there is not a definitive "beginning" to the vernacular, it has been used by many African Americans throughout North America (Dillard, 1972) and conversations are continuously happening about its appropriateness for use in the professional sphere (Cerdeña et al., 2022; Dent, 2005; Payne, 2000).

As part of a textbook (Devereaux, 2014) developed to help teachers empower their students to use AAVE in class and identify the situations in which it is most appropriate, a non-exhaustive table was developed to list the phonological and grammatical patterns of AAVE based on extant research. The following table provides some examples of AAVE use in everyday conversation.

Table 1.1 - Phonological (Sound) Features, AAE (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011)

Pattern	Rule	Example
Consonant cluster deletion	Many Standard English speakers delete consonants within difficult consonant clusters, for example pronouncing twelfths as twelfs or twelths. Similarly, AAE deletes one or more consonants in constant clusters such as sk, nd, ts, kt, sts, and sks.	*des'* for *desk* *han'* for *hand* *fine* for *find*
Th sound	Depending on where the *th* sound occurs in the word (and how that sound is pronounced) the sound may be systematically changed. For example, th at the beginning of the word can be changed to d, as in that to dat. If the th sound occurs in the middle or at the end, it may be pronounced as a v or f sound[1].	*dese* for *these* *wif* for *with* *smoov* for *smooth* *toof* for *tooth*
Shift in pronunciation of final consonant	When you say "climbin'" instead of "climbing," the pronunciation shifts (where you make that consonant sound in your mouth. Say both words aloud. You will notice when you say "climbing" that the back of your tongue touches the soft part of the roof of your mouth in the back (velar). When you say "climbin'," it is the front of your tongue that touches the hard ridge near the front part of the roof of your mouth (alveolar). This is a common pattern in all dialects, including informal Standard English.	*sittin'* for *sitting* *wonderin* for *wondering* *runnin'* for *running*

[1] "This is a very rule-governed pattern and the explanation here does not cover all of the nuances of this usage. For a full explanation, see Charity Hudley and Mallinson, 2011."

Table 1.2 - Grammatical Features, AAE (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011; Redd & Webb, 2005; Rickford, 1999; Wolfram & Shilling-Estes, 2006)

Pattern	Rule	Example
Understood *be*	Understood *be* occurs when *is* or *are can be* contracted in Standard English. Additionally, it can only occur with the subject of the sentence. For example, "That is where they are" can be changed to "That where they are" but not "That is where they" (Pullum, 1999; Wheeler and Swords, 2006). Finally, it does not typically occur with am. For example, "I funny" does not work, but "You funny" does.	She silly when she sees him. They driving to Florida.
Habitual *be*	Habitual be doesn't mean that something is happening; it means that the action usually, always, or typically happens. For example, "He be home" means "He is typically at home" (although he may not be home at the exact moment this statement is uttered).[2]	He be home. My ears be itching.
Third-person present-tense singular –s	When a third-person noun or pronoun (he, she, it) is placed with a verb, the –s may not be used on the verb.	She love that boy a lot. He move around all the time
Possessive –s	When a noun calls for a possessive, the –s may not be used.	John house is across the street. Have you seen Mary hat?
Plural –s	When a noun calls for a plural –s, the –s may not be used	She has two boy. They were five cat under the house.
Generalization of *is* and *was* with plural and second person subjects	When the subject is second person (*you*) or plural (*we, they*), the use of *is* and *was* may be generalized.	You is crazy. We was going to John's house.
Past tense –ed	Due to the consonant cluster deletion AAE speakers may not use the –ed at the end of verbs in past tense. However, adverbial modifiers (e.g., yesterday, last night) will typically be used to denote past time.	I look for her yesterday. She finish her home work last night.
Stressed *been*	This pattern demonstrates an action that occurred in the past but is still relevant. For example, in Standard English someone may say, "I been	He been gone since September.

		He been laid up for a while.
	married." The meaning is that the person was married but is no longer married. If an AAE speaker says, "I been married," it means that the person has been married and is still married (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). The stressed been may also indicate that a lot of time has passed, and the interlocutor may be late to this information. For example, Person 1: "He in D.C. now?" Person 2: "Girl, he *been* in D.C." OR "Yes! I been told you that," meaning Person 1 divulged this information quite some time ago.	
Multiple negation	Rather than using "double negation," we should use "multiple negation" because some speakers may use three (or more) negative markers in a sentence such as, "I ain't giving no one nothing from this cabinet." Many languages regularly use multiple negation, including Japanese, Russian, and Spanish.	He don't never go down there. I can't hair nothing.

[2]   "Habitual be and understood be are not interchangeable in AAE. Habitual be (AAE): *He be late* = SE: *He is typically late (although he might be early today.)"*

Code-Switching

Code-switching is defined as "the use of two different languages or language varieties within a single conversation or written text" (Benson, 2017). Other terms such as `codemixing', `codeshifting', `language alternation', `language mixture', and `language switching' have been ascribed to this phenomenon, but "code-switching," however, has become the most recognized and widely used term (p. 25). Though the idea of adjusting speech based on the audience is not new, much research about code-switching dates only back to the 20th century. Blom and Gumperz (1972), however, introduced *setting, situation,* and *participant* as the three primary factors which influence language selection amongst adults. *Setting* indicates where the conversation is happening such as the workplace, home, a social gathering, at school or

otherwise. *Situation* is broken down into two categories: *discourse type* and *topic*. *Discourse type* indicates the context in which the conversation is happening such as a professional interview, a formal ceremony, a casual conversation, etc. *Topic*, however, relates to the content of the specific conversation such as a culture-specific conversation, business, travel, etc. Lastly, *participant*, indicates the identity of the participants in the conversation and the perceived status they hold. This can include relatives, co-workers, friends, strangers of a different social status; differing sex and age may also be factors. Gardner-Chloros (2009) cited additional social factors influencing code-switching including "speakers' relative competence and that of their interlocutors, the identities they can express through each language, the acceptability of [code-switching] in their network and particular contexts, and a variety of other factors" (p. 52).

This study will focus primarily on racial code-switching among Black professionals at work. McCluney et al. (2021) define racial code-switching as a phenomenon in which "Black people adjust their self-presentation to receive desirable outcomes (e.g., perceived professionalism) through mirroring the norms, behaviors, and attributes of the dominant group (i.e., white people) in specific contexts" (p. 1). This strategy may include altering one's appearance such as straightening naturally kinky hair (Choi & Mattila, 2016; Koval & Rosette, 2021; Donaldson, 2012), sociolinguistics (Shoulson, 2020; Baker-Bell, 2020), changing self-expressions such as reducing indicators of race in their behavior and avoiding use of AAVE to appear more competent (McCluney et al., 2021; Britt & Weldon, 2015), and job-application adjustments such as Anglicizing ethnic-sounding names to enhance hireability (Kline et al., 2022; Kang et al., 2016).

Toggling between AAVE and SAE can also be a form of self-presentation in which speakers may dial back the presence of racial indicators to "'pass' as a member of the dominant,

non-stigmatized group" (Goffman, 1963; Kang et al., 2016). By presenting a "public face," concealing the actual self, and behaving in accordance with the established norms of professionalism (McCluney et al., 2021), Black professionals can increase their proximity to status, power, and access to networks (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Roberts, 2005).

Because whiteness is often conflated with professionalism, Black professionals may code-switch to be perceived as more professional and capable in the workplace. Additionally, though AAVE is spoken within Black communities and in predominantly Black spaces, there are some whose opinions of the vernacular and its use are still overwhelmingly negative, particularly in professional settings. Some studies have found that dominant group members view speakers of AAVE as ignorant or lazy (Burling, 1973; Smitherman, 1977; Yinger, 1994). Studies on African Americans' views of AAVE use yielded a similar response, with most participants viewing speakers of SAE more likable and competent than those using AAVE (Doss & Gross, 1992; Garner & Rubin, 1986; Hoover, 1978; Mims & Camden, 1985; Koch, et. al, 2001).

As posited by Blom and Gumperz (1972), context is a major factor in determining one's opinion of AAVE. A later study by Garner and Rubin (1986) revealed that although participants held AAVE in high regard, those who used it as their primary communication style in a professional setting were viewed as "uneducated" (p. 42). In a newer study which expands on previous research, Koch, Gross and Kolts (2001) asked participants to rate speakers using preset adjectives, based on the communication style they chose for the respective setting (casual or formal). The authors discovered that the standard English and appropriate code-switching speakers were rated more highly than the Black English or inappropriate code-switching speaker. This reinforces Blom & Gumperz (1972) finding that context matters when selecting the language most appropriate for the interaction. For Black professionals, internally assessing the

situation and prevailing context is a necessary step in the language selection process to avoid association with "stereotypically Black" behaviors which bring negative judgment from their white counterparts (Leonard & Locke, 1993; Maddox, 2004; Popp, Donovan, Crawford, Marsh, & Peele, 2003).

Navigating Black Identity in White Spaces

In spaces where Black professionals are the "cultural other," there is a feeling of compulsion to acculturate or alter their behaviors and speech to appear more acceptable to the dominant culture. This practice is known as identity shifting (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Another term, race-shelving, similarly encapsulates this practice. Tanji Reed Marshall (2018) defines race-shelving as "the recognition of race and the use of power to mitigate its presence by requiring the temporary putting aside of behaviors most associated with a particular race, in this case how language is used in speech and/or writing, and an adoption of behaviors associated with the dominant culture" (p. 53). Black women are doubly marked in predominantly white (and sometimes male) spaces by their gender and race, making them hypervisible or overexposed within their organizations (Dickens, Womack & Dimes, 2016). In this study, hypervisibility refers to Black women's increased distinctiveness or "sticking out" in the workplace by showing indicators of race. The authors discuss how Black women may elect to wear straighter hairstyles instead of braids or natural hairstyles (p. 156). Setting aside certain aspects of their racial identity is seen as a viable solution to blending with the dominant group, reducing their distinctiveness and, thereby, their susceptibility to discriminatory actions or association with negative stereotypes.

This constant shift between two identities can be whiplash-inducing, and impacts one's "sense of self, wholeness, and centeredness. It is invisible and can have devastating effects" (Everett, et. al, 2012, p. 216). In the study conducted by Everett and colleagues exploring workplace stress, coping mechanisms, and identity shifting in Black women, one participant noted "I feel like I live in two worlds" (p. 216). There's a need to put on a persona that is non-threatening and familiar for white employees. Another participant shared a comment from her white colleague: *"Yeah, to us, you're just like a white woman in a Black person's body, because of the way you talk and the way you carry yourself"* (p. 216). Although this person may have meant it as a compliment, it displays a bleak reality. Black professionals are accepted when they communicate and behave in ways that are consistent with white identity. Mirroring white culture in mannerisms and dialect is just one survival method used to create distance between these professionals and the negative stereotypes associated with Blackness (Boulton, 2016). The emotional labor required to uphold this "model Black citizen" image can cause Black women to experience racial battle fatigue (Dickens & Chavez, 2018, p. 770) which can have damaging "psychological, physiological or behavioral effects in Black women and other marginalized groups" (p. 205) in predominantly white environments (Pierce, 1995; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006).

Participants in a similar study described the weight of being a "model Black citizen" or a representative of other ethnic group members and the community at large while at work (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). As it is often true that many predominantly white spaces have very few Black employees, it can feel like every individual has to set an example of what Blackness looks like for their white colleagues. For some, it feels like an opportunity, for others, it is an undue burden.

Predominantly white organizations (PWOs) that leave no room for cultural diversity in any form are missing key experiences that can add value to the business. Cha and Roberts (2019) discuss how codeswitching can limit the creativity of Black professionals while communicating and behaving as a member of the dominant group rather than "tapping into their own cultural resources" while working to accomplish business objectives. Be it marketing campaigns which become virally offensive due to a lack of cultural knowledge such as the Dove soap advertisement (Brooks et al., 2020) or the Pepsi ad featuring Kendall Jenner (Handley, 2017), or excluded demographics from critical communications, inclusivity of all dialects can only improve the current corporate climate.

Theoretical Framework – Identity Negotiation Theory

Ting-Toomey (1988) introduced Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) in 1988. The first iteration of the theory "stressed the importance of validating both group membership identity salience and personal identity salience issues to develop quality relationships and not to the exclusion of emphasizing personal-based identity issues alone" (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 2). The theory was updated in 1993 and stressed the importance of understanding immigrants' and refugees' adaptation processes as well as intercultural competence as a communication resourcefulness phenomenon (Ting-Toomey, 2015). In 1999, the ten core assumptions of INT were introduced which "explain the antecedent, process, and outcome components of intercultural communication" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 40):

1. The core dynamics of people's group membership identities (e.g., cultural and ethnic memberships) and personal identities (e.g., unique attributes) are formed via symbolic communication with others.

2. Individuals in all cultures or ethnic groups have the basic motivation needs for identity security, trust, inclusion, connection, and stability on both group-based and person-based identity levels.

3. Individuals tend to experience identity security in a culturally familiar environment and experience identity vulnerability in a culturally unfamiliar environment.

4. Individuals tend to experience identity trust when communicating with culturally similar others and identity distrust when communicating with culturally dissimilar others; identity familiarity leads to trust, and identity unfamiliarity leads to distrust.

5. Individuals tend to feel included when their desired group membership identities are positively endorsed (e.g., in positive in-group contact situations) and experience differentiation when their desired group membership identities are stigmatized (e.g., in hostile out-group contact situations).

6. Individuals tend to desire interpersonal connection via meaningful close relationships (e.g., in close friendship support situations) and experience identity autonomy when they experience relationship separations.

7. Individuals perceive identity stability in predictable cultural situations and detect identity change or chaos in unpredictable cultural situations.

8. Cultural, personal, and situational variability dimensions influence the meanings, interpretations, and evaluations of these identity-related themes.

9. Satisfactory identity negotiation outcomes include the feeling of being understood, respected, and supported.

10. Mindful intercultural communication emphasizes the importance of integrating the necessary intercultural knowledge, motivations, and skills to communicate satisfactorily, appropriately, and effectively.

Additionally, this version highlighted mindfulness' role in the negotiation process. In 2005, INT was updated to include the five dialectical themes "identity security-vulnerability, inclusion-differentiation, predictability-unpredictability, connection-autonomy, and identity consistency-change across time" and the three identity negotiation competence outcomes (i.e., *feeling of being understood, the feeling of being respected, and feeling of being affirmatively valued*)" (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 3). Since its introduction, researchers have used this theory to study topics such as mental health help-seeking among Black and Latinx young adults (Moore et al., 2020), the role of social media in the acculturation of transient migrants (Yau et al., 2020), and gendered identity negotiations of female breadwinners (Meisenbach, 2010). Because code-switching can be considered an identity negotiation strategy (Ting-Toomey, 2013; Strauss & Cross, 2005), INT has a prevailing presence in code-switching research. One particular study focuses on the identity negotiation strategies of Black professors in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) (Allison, 2008). Black faculty's experiences of a lack of respect from non-Black students at PWIs (Grandison et al., 2022) and questioning of their credibility (Hendrix, 1997). To understand how Black faculty negotiate identity within their institutions, the researcher recruited 16 Black faculty members to participate in focus groups and questionnaires wherein they discussed their individual experiences. One participant explained that she altered her "naturally laid-back style" because some of her students "were not taking her seriously enough" (Allison, 2008, p. 654). Two additional participants noted that code-switching is an identity negotiation tactic they use regularly. "There's a way to be, and then there's a way to be with

white people," another participant noted (p. 655). They did not, however, elaborate further on this meaning. One faculty member in this study co-taught a "Psychology of Black Literature" class in which most of the students were Black as was the other professor. In this class, both professors decided not to negotiate their identities and instead proclaimed "now we gon' be who we really be" (p. 655). In describing the experience, she said:

> It was a completely different dynamic ... it was so affirming to teach. It was so ... for my own soul, for my own self-expression, for my own mind and heart it was so gratifying to teach, and it felt completely different from what I normally do."

Though the participants discussed the ways in which they alter themselves in the classroom, this did not appear to refer to the language they use, as no participant indicated use of AAVE inside or outside of the classroom (Alllison, 2008). According to the researcher, the participants who confirmed that they negotiate their identities did not seem to veer too far away from their usual selves. Instead, the adjustments they reported appear to be mostly behavioral such as "not being as laid back," "laughing at jokes [they] don't find funny," being "more stern" than usual, and "dressing up so as to not be mistaken as a student" (p. 656-657). This appears to be consistent with Goffman's (1959) focus on self-presentation, in that the participants are simply selecting the self to present to their students in class. As Black professionals negotiate their identity and select the face to put forth in given interactions, their decision may impact how they are perceived by others.

Theoretical Framework – Communication Accommodation Theory

Code-switching can be considered a form of convergence as defined by the communication accommodation theory framework. Communication accommodation theory

(CAT) was developed in 1991 by Giles, Coupland, and Coupland. According to the theory, "interactants may modify their speech to be more like their interlocutor (converge) to decrease social distance or to gain their approval" (Willemyns et al., 1997) and, conversely, may "accentuate their speech differences (divergence) to increase the perceived social distance between themselves and others" (p. 4). Though choosing divergent communication styles such as AAVE may be more comfortable or familiar for some Black professionals, the negative perception of the vernacular by their white counterparts "may lead them to feel threatened by Black communicators" as cultural outsiders (Baldwin & Hughes, 2002).

In their research, the authors assert that interlocutors belong to various social groups which shape the overall identity such as age, race, ethnicity, gender, and religion (Giles et al., 1991). Groups are separated into two categories: *in-groups*, or those to which individuals feel they belong, and *out-groups* or those to which they feel they do not belong. CAT posits that individuals will "adjust their communication with others as a means to both facilitate comprehension and manage social relationships" (Gasiorek, 2015, p. 578). These adjustments can be tools to gain the approval of in-group members or to be seen as one of them. As Tajfel and colleagues uncover in their social identity theory study, "individuals are motivated to establish positively valued differences between the ingroup and relevant outgroup to achieve a positive social identity" (Tajfel, et al., 1979, pp. 35). Employees who code-switch to gain favor with or membership in the in-group may enjoy the rewards of in-group favoritism such as increased career opportunities, invitations to exclusive events, and invitations to be at "the table" when critical decisions are made. This is shown in other studies which demonstrate that verbal mimicry yields rewards such as higher tips (van Baaren, et al., 2003) as well as higher sales and more positive perceptions of the mimicker (Jacob, et al., 2011). By modifying speech to increase

similarity and decrease social distance between the speaker and their interlocutor, or converging, this can increase attractiveness (Giles & Bourhis, 1976; Willemyns et al., 1997). For Black professionals whose primary communication style is AAVE, converging toward their white colleagues in the workplace may yield favorable ratings.

There are several studies citing factors which contribute to Black professionals' decision to code-switch (Boulton, 2016; Dickens & Chavez, 2017; Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Glenn & Johnson, 2012). One such factor is social power. In a 2016 study, Rachel Cotterill and colleagues invited judges and workers to a "speed networking session" to observe who accommodates to whom. The judges were classified as the "high-power group" and the workers were classified as the "low-power group" (Cotterill et al., 2016). Results of this study indicate that workers accommodated toward the higher social power group during a greater percentage of interactions while the judges utilized divergent, non-accommodating communication in a greater percentage of interactions. This is consistent with Giles and colleagues' studies (1991; 2008) which predict that those in lower power roles seek the social approval of a higher-power conversant and, thus, will employ convergent communication styles to achieve this objective. Based on this finding, it is possible to discern that a trigger for a code-switch in Black professionals is the presence of higher social power members. In this context, it is necessary to observe whether whiteness is the sole indicator of "higher social power" status or if rank and title are contributing factors as well.

Theoretical Framework – Organizational Identification Theory

If one must perform this level of labor to keep up a façade, how could they begin to identify with an organization in which they cannot be themselves? The concept of organizational identification (OI) is defined as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an

organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member" (Ashforth & Mael, 1992). Academic research has found that organizational identification increases when there is overlap between an employee's personal identity and the identity of the organization. Support for this is found in a 2002 study conducted by Cerise Glenn and Dante Johnson in which participants who code-switched to interact with white students at their predominantly white institution (PWI) felt disconnected from their social identities and very low levels of organizational identification (Glenn & Johnson, 2002). This finding further clarifies that the impact on Black employees' organization identification levels could be negatively impacted when employers actively ignore or do not embrace their cultural practices or language.

Organizations may also face operational impacts by failing to provide an accepting environment for English variants such as AAVE. In a 2015 study, Maria Karanika-Murray and colleagues hypothesized that organizational identification is positively related to work engagement which is, in turn, positively related to job satisfaction (Karanika-Murray, et al., 2015). After surveying 196 participants across three organizations, they found that "employees who have a strong and positive bond with their organization are also highly engaged in their work, energized, and dedicated to their work, deriving satisfaction from their job as a consequence" (p. 1026). Additional studies have examined the relationship between organizational identification, job satisfaction, and employee retention. Van Dick, et al. (2004) found that strong organizational identification is associated with low turnover intentions. These results are echoed in a later study discovering that employees with strong OI show an increased emotional attachment to their respective organizations which leads to decreased turnover (Stinglhamber et al., 2015). Little research exists showing a causal link between use of AAVE

and organizational identification. However, some studies have discussed the relationship between OI and diversity within organizations and one found that perceived diversity within organizations positively impacts OI (Pepple & Davies, 2020). This is important because marginalized groups place higher value on organizational diversity commitments (Kossek & Zonia, 1993) and follow-through on these commitments can lead to reduced turnover intention (McKay et al., 2007). Though diversity can strengthen OI for employees, it is not enough. Adopting a multiculturalism ideology and valuing diverse groups while celebrating and tapping into their cultural resources, practices, and perspectives will help strengthen OI and retain employees (Fitzsimmons, 2013; Jackson et al., 2019). If an organization is bringing in diverse talent, it must create an environment which is welcoming of distinctiveness in language, behavior, hair, etc.

Additionally, uncovering the impacts of code-switching on Black professionals will help organizations develop policies and create spaces which allow Black employees to be themselves authentically in their organizations. Inaction may lead to worse outcomes than decreased employee retention and organizational identification. As found in a study by Dickens and Chavez (2018), some Black professionals may experience psychological effects and begin "mentally checking out in conversations in predominantly white social or professional environments." In the study, the researchers found four participants who discussed becoming "psychologically paralyzed" and are "mentally checking out" (p. 209). One participant's comment displayed how muted she felt: "Mostly I just won't talk… I would just kind of answer questions yay or nay" (p. 209). Although there is limited literature on a direct link between job performance and organizational identification, social identity theory literature has found that a "strong bond between employee and their organization reinforces their motivation to exert effort for (and on

behalf of) their organizations" (Karanika-Murray et al., 2014, p. 1021) This is echoed in other studies observing the relationship between organizational identification and work engagement (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton *et al.*, 1994). If Black employees reach the stage where they begin checking out mentally in the workplace, they may no longer have the motivation to exert the effort required to perform their job well, which can have impacts on the company overall.

Research Questions

The objective of this study is to determine the effect of convergent communication or code-switching on organizational identification levels among Black professionals.

To examine the effects of code-switching on organizational identification, we have to more deeply understand an individual's identification and the degree to which they believe that language is a large part of their social and ethnic identity. This study, therefore, will address the following research question:

RQ1: To what degree do Black professionals believe that AAVE is a part of their identity?

As found by Dickens and Chavez (2018), identity shifting, which may include code switching, is a coping mechanism some Black professionals may use to reduce their susceptibility to discrimination in the workplace and uphold the "model Black citizen" trope. Though this can be helpful in gaining favor with dominant group members, it may, as found in the Glenn & Johnson (2012) study, contribute to dissonance when interacting with African American peers and when attempting to integrate the performance of mirroring and dissociating with affirming notions of their self-identity (p. 357). Therefore, I pose this research question:

RQ2: To what extent is Black professionals' connectedness to their ethnic identity impacted by code-switching?

Finally, to uncover how or whether code-switching impacts Black professionals' levels of organizational identification, I pose this final question:

RQ3: Do Black professionals who code-switch in organizations have lower organizational identification levels?

Method

To ascertain the effect of code-switching on Black professionals' organizational identification levels, I conducted interviews with Black professionals working full-time in organizations until saturation was achieved.

Participants in this study were non-personally-known LinkedIn connections, referrals from this study's supervising committee member, and other relevant prospective interviewees found online. Interviewees were contacted via LinkedIn or directly via email and told that the interview will cover differing communication styles across cultures. Once briefed on the topic of the interview, potential interviewees were asked if they were willing to participate. Those who agreed to participate were asked two questions to determine eligibility for the study: (1) Do you identify as African American? (2) Are you at least 18 years old? Those who answered "yes" to both questions were emailed a consent form which provided additional information about the study, the process, and the time commitment. In the form, participants indicated their willingness to participate in the interview and consent for their responses to be used in the study. Interviewees were also assured that their organization and personal identity will be kept confidential and information about how the information would be securely stored was provided

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in the consent form. Upon receipt of the completed forms, interviewees were asked about their availability and Microsoft Teams invitations were sent according to the coordinated date and time. On the day of the interviews, participants were read a brief statement which included information about how the interview would proceed and how their identities would be kept confidential. Each interview was recorded and automatically transcribed using Microsoft Teams. The transcripts have been reviewed for accuracy. All personally known interviewees were precluded from the study.

To address RQ1, I drew inspiration from the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) scale which includes questions to measure Black identity in three categories; Centrality or "the extent to which a person normatively defines [themselves] with regard to race," (Sellers et al., 1997, p. 806) Ideology or "the individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes with regard to the way [they feel] that the members of the race should act," (p. 806) and Regard or "the extent to which individuals feel positively or negatively towards African Americans and their membership in that group" (pp. 806-807). Interview questions have been crafted using the MIBI as a guide for determining how connected the interviewee feels to their ethnic identity and how that changes in the workplace. The below questions have been changed into open-ended questions to match the interview format.

The questions include:

Centrality Scale

1. How does your ethnicity shape how you feel about yourself?

2. How do you feel your behavior in the workplace impacts others' impressions of the Black community overall?

3. What level of belonging would you say you have to the Black community at large?

4. How important is being Black in your social relationships?

Regard Scale: Private Regard Subscale

1. What adjectives would you use to describe the Black community at large?

2. How do you feel your Blackness impacts your personal strengths and talents?

Ideology Scale

Assimilation Subscale

1. Have you ever not been your most authentic self at work to get ahead professionally?

    a. If yes, tell me more.

    b. If no, has that ever been a problem? Tell me more…

2. How often, if ever, do you socially interact with your white coworkers?

3. How do you think your organization would change if there were more Black leaders?

Humanist Subscale

1. How much in common do you believe you have with your white coworkers?

2. How do you feel the organization considers race in important hiring decisions?

3. About how much of a person's identity, would you say, should be focused on their race?

Questions to address RQ2 focused on interviewees' perceptions of how they use AAVE and any impacts on their feelings of connectedness to their ethnic identity when they code-switch. The questions used to address include:

1. How often do you use AAVE outside of work? Why or why not?

2. How often do you find yourself code-switching at work? Why or why not?

3. How connected do you feel to your ethnic identity when using AAVE? Why?

4. How connected do you feel to your ethnic identity when using SAE? Why?

To determine the answer to RQ3, Organizational Identification was measured using the questionnaire developed by Mael and Tetrick (1992). Although this is a quantitative scale, some of the questions within this questionnaire were converted to open-ended interview questions for consistency with this qualitative study. The questions are as follows:

1. What do you feel when someone criticizes [organization name]?

2. About how much do you value outside individuals' opinions of [organization name]?

3. How personally connected do you feel to the successes of [organization name]?

4. What do you feel when someone praises [organization name]?

5. How would you feel if a story in the media criticized [organization name]?

Though these questions have been adjusted for the interview format, answers from all interviewees were analyzed for recurring themes. Follow-up and probing questions were used as needed. For example, participants were asked to elaborate on certain responses or to reflect on a relevant event or experience. Interviewees were categorized based on information shared in the interview and in response to the question "How often do you use AAVE outside of work?" Also, the organizations' demographic information was provided as available. Responses for these questions were coded using an inductive approach and a thematic analysis was conducted.

Sample

The sample included twelve total participants holding at least a four-year degree, six of whom were female and six male. Of the participants interviewed, four (33%) earned a four-year

degree, seven (58%) earned a master's degree, and one (8%) earned a doctorate degree.

Participants provided the age ranges in which they fall. One out of 12 (8%) was between 18 and

28 years old; eight out of 12 (67%) participants were between 29 and 46 years old; three out of

12 (25%) were between 47 and 58 years old.

Participants were also asked an open-ended question about how often they use AAVE

outside of work. The below table shows the level of use each participant had based on their

answers.

Table 2: Education Level and AAVE Use

Participant #	M/F	Age Group	Education Level	AAVE Use
1	F	47-58	Master's degree	Very often
2	F	29-46	Master's degree	Not often
3	F	47-58	Master's degree	Sometimes
4	F	18-28	Master's degree	Very often
5	M	29-46	Four-year degree	Very often
6	M	29-46	Master's degree	Not often
7	F	29-46	Four-year degree	Never
8	M	29-46	Four-year degree	Not often
9	M	29-46	Master's degree	Very often
10	M	29-46	Four-year degree	Not often
11	M	47-58	Doctorate	Not often
12	F	29-46	Master's degree	Not often

To better understand how frequency of use was determined, the below table includes each participant's response to the interview question "how often do you use AAVE outside of work?"

Table 2.1: AAVE Use (Participant Responses)

Participant #	Response
1	*Every single day, all day, every day, I use AAVE.*
2	*I would say 40, 50 percent of the time, maybe outside of work, but I mean it's pretty light even with that being said.*
3	*Ohh, outside of work. Just… I I mean, I would say sometimes.*
4	*It is my natural dialect…*
5	*Yeah, maybe like a cool 85% of the time like.*
6	*Five percent or less maybe.*
7	*I don't use those and it's just because of how I was raised, so raised to speak proper English, yeah.*
8	*Ohh, outside of work I definitely talk different… maybe 15 to 20%*
9	*Umm, I mean daily, I guess, yeah, yeah.*
10	*I would say maybe I… I don't feel like I do it a lot, to be honest.*
11	*I will probably give it maybe… maybe 20% of the time.*
12	*I don't really use it.*

Additionally, participants were asked whether they believe their organization to be a predominantly white organization or PWO. The below table includes each participant's answer and a comparison of the company's demographic data. All numbers provided are based on the most recent (2022) and readily available diversity reports of each company.

Table 3: Perceived Diversity versus Actual

Participant #	Believe PWO?	Predominant Ethnic Group
1	Yes	White (52%)**
2	Yes	White (63%)
3	Yes	White (65%)**
4	Yes	White (53%)*
5	No	Unavailable
6	Yes	Unavailable
7	No	White (50.1%)
8	Yes	White (57%)**
9	Unsure	Unavailable
10	Yes	Unavailable
11	Yes	White (60%)**
12	Yes	Asian (41%)

Obtained from 2021 diversity report
**Obtained from external source*

Data analysis

With guidance from Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory, analysis was conducted using an inductive approach.

Interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Teams and corrected for accuracy. Filler words were mostly left in the transcript and ellipses added to convey a stutter or long pause. After correcting transcripts and reviewing each, quotes were pulled based on observations from interviews and evident patterns amongst interviewees. These were organized into nine codes and then condensed into seven relevant themes. To protect the identities of the participants, all

personally identifiable information has been removed from the transcripts and the data. Each participant has been assigned a number and their employers have also been anonymized.

Findings

Participants were asked questions from the OI Questionnaire, MIBI Scale, and the AAVE question set. Through these interviews, I was able to understand how each participant's convergent and divergent communication styles manifest in their professional lives and how they navigate the professional space as Black people.

Upon review of the interview data, seven themes emerged: (1) Using AAVE Comes Naturally; (2) Perceptions of AAVE & Use in the Workplace (3) Nonverbal Code-switching; (4) SAE is Black, too; and (5) The Weight of Holding the Door Open; (6) Managing Criticism as Communicators; (7) Personal Investment & Public Criticism.

RQ1: To what degree do Black professionals believe that AAVE is a part of their identity?

Using AAVE Comes Naturally

When discussing the frequency with which participants used AAVE outside of work, 3 of 12 indicated how natural it feels for them to use it:

> It is my natural dialect. If majority of my friends are Black and this is how we speak. It's… I… I don't remember a time without it. (Participant #4, Female, 18-28, Master's degree)

> I don't I… I don't associate it being cool or being myself with being, you know, talking like I would talk regularly. It's… it's who I am. (#8, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

Umm, because it's natural, like it's very natural… I really don't like the fact that

we have to have a term for it. To clarify. So, I'm kind of like I have a love hate

relationship with the term AAVE, and by that I mean I love the fact that we have

something that we can like, [pause] put a name to and call our own…and can say

that is ours as it relates to other ethnicities. But then I don't like the fact that we

have to clarify that by giving it a name. I wish that it could just be umm,

considered English. (#1, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

Participants were also asked how the use of AAVE impacts their levels of connectedness to their

ethnic identity. Whether they indicated frequent or infrequent use of the vernacular, half of all

participants suggested a feeling of comfort or nostalgia when using it:

I think sometimes when I'm using AAVE, then I think it it reminds me of

something it puts me in a certain mind space. (#2, Female, 29-46, Master's

degree)

For me, it's more of a reminiscing sort of thing. Uh, so family's very important to

me growing up and you have a lot of family members. I grew up in the South.

From Arkansas. So you have a lot of family members that you could just

communicate with better… But just, you know, like I said, when you're talking

about more extended family members, it's just and you know, those people that

you love, you want to, you know, you don't wanna make it uncomfortable for

them. And so I would say, uh, you know, just kinda reminds me of… for me it's

more of a nostalgic sort of thing where they you know this kinda reminds me of

these people and this will…this is where it came from… (#11, Male, 47-58,

Doctorate)

Very much connected like to the utmost level, like especially around, umm, other

Blacks, like the most connected possible, and then even I would say so, if if I

thought about it in terms of who I'm speaking with or who I'm around even with

some of my white counterparts, I would still feel connected to my Blackness like

it just really didn't matter… (#1, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

I'm learning now the… the art of language and the art of AAVE, and like, you

know, where certain terms come from. So it's not just like we're speaking slang,

but like it has history to it. So, I definitely feel I feel more connected to my

Blackness when I'm able to use it. (#4, Female, 18-28, Master's degree)

I mean that's as Black as I'mma get. Yeah, that's… that's the norm… I don't need

to… I don't want to complicate my workday any further by like having to pretend

to be somebody I'm not… I'm not about to let like job titles and all of that stuff,

just kind of dictate how I'm supposed to be. (#5, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

Because it seems so it's… it's like familiar and it's at home. Like I feel at home,

even if I don't know you. You… it seems so familiar, and there's this warmth that

comes where we can say something, and you just know… (#6, Male, 29-46,

Masters degree)

The Perception of AAVE & Use in the Workplace

There were some participants who noted that they are not users of AAVE or use it

infrequently. Most of whom cited their upbringing, parents, and lack of exposure to the

vernacular as reasons for not using it. For some, however, it was frowned upon by their parents

who actively discouraged them from using it. Some believe that the negative perception of

AAVE could hurt their professional reputation. Others simply choose not to use it, even at the cost of potentially being perceived as "too proper" by other employees in the workplace.

> …my grandfather always said you needed to be knowledgeable and present yourself in a knowledgeable way in order to get… like… where you wanna be. And that's kind of kind of where it started. Like I remember listening to a song on the radio and mimicking the song, and my mom was like, don't say those words. Those are not real words. Speak the word fully… those were the experiences that I've had that have led me to, like, stay away from from that type of language. (#7, Female, 29-46, Four-year degree)
>
> Maybe I guess depending on who you're around, you don't wanna seem uneducated or, you know, viewed a certain way, you know, that maybe isn't you. (#10, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

> If you are using this type of English in like I said professional settings it's gonna be something that you're gonna get a negative…you know, gonna give you a negative perception… I'm fine with the, you know, if I have to go around people and say people tell me I sound too proper compared to being a professional situation and losing out on something that's very tangible because of, you know, me using slang, that's inapp...uh that other people are are looking down upon, I… I think the I think the costs to me of going too far in the slang direction are are gonna be higher than I perceive the cost of or be perceived to being too proper. (#11, Male, 47-58, Doctorate)

> And so my dad was very against slang and things that sounded, you know, so I let my grammar slip a little bit when… after hours. You know, I would say 40 50

percent of the time, maybe outside of work, but I mean it's pretty light even with that being said. (#2, Female, 29-46, Master's degree)

RQ2: To what extent is Black professionals' connectedness to their ethnic identity impacted by code-switching?

Nonverbal Code-switching

Some participants mentioned that their code-switching does not always emerge as changing their language around white colleagues. Instead, they discussed how they've adopted certain behaviors to mask their true feelings or mood:

> …the code switching part comes into like the way that I show up, uh, if I'm if I'm smiling then that's the code switch right when I don't feel like smiling. You know that whole week after George Floyd, you know, like my boss didn't even know it had happened for a week, you know. And so I am sitting here pretending to, you know, so it was like a behavioral code switch. Pretend I care about any of what you are talking about. Pretending like my heart is not breaking. (#2, Female, 29-46, Master's degree)

> I have, I guess held back on feedback or opinions because I didn't want to be perceived as like an angry Black woman… (#3, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

> Whenever especially Black men and Black women, if we are disappointed, frustrated about something in the workplace, we could be seen as the militant angry Black male or female. So, we would have to say it with a smile or use

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colorful words that wouldn't make someone else feel uncomfortable, so that that's the form one form of code switching. (#6, Male, 29-46, Master's degree)

I also recognize that if I walk into a room and I'm not smiling to some degree, you know, if if I don't watch my face, then she's angry. (#2, Female, 29-46, Master's degree)

In addition to nonverbal code-switching behaviors, some participants discussed their choice to wear more natural hairstyles in the workplace:

Probably earlier on, like probably when I first started, I probably would not have worn my hair in braids like right out of college or grad school. Just so because of the perceived unprofessional look. (#3, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

I have always worn my hair the same way. I had relaxed hair. It is long. I've always… I don't know how old you are, but in the style of Aaliyah for the majority of my adult life, and I have recently gotten just sick and tired of being sick and tired. I wanna do more physical activity like swim like I do tons and stuff and I hated having to do my hair. And once I saw more African American women wearing non-straightened hair work, I started doing the same thing… Being comfortable for me means looking like me sounding like me, acting like me. (#12, Female, 29-46, Master's degree)

I do like straight styles as well, but I wanna do what's healthy for my hair and sometimes it might just be a braided style or some twists like I never feel umm like bad about wearing twists on camera for work. (#4, Female, 18-28, Master's degree)

SAE is Black, too

In discussing how or whether primary use of SAE affects their connectedness to their Blackness, 8 of 12 participants indicated an enduring connection or a very small impact. Some pointed out that there are Black people who use SAE only and that does not take away from their Blackness.

> Oh, I still feel connected to it, yeah. Because there is a relationship that even when using SAE that we have with our Black counterparts. And so, even though we're using, you know, standard English, there's still this thread that runs between, I believe, Black people where we we understand it a little differently. We understand what's underneath that we can lean into it. The communication style. The way we pronounce words, the way we articulate ourselves just through the movement. Black people… we just… there is a whole vibe just in the way we exchange communication. So, I can I still feel connected regardless if I'm using…Yeah. (#6, Male, 29-46, Masters degree)

> I feel connected as well because my peers use the same language, yeah. My professional peers…well all my peers. I would say not even my professional and my social life, my family. So yeah, very connected. (#7, Female, 29-46, Four-year degree)

> I don't feel like when I use standard English that I'm moving away or outside my identity as as well. It's just not that… not that… just not that warm and fuzzy. (#11, Male, 47-58, Doctorate)

I would just say a little less connected because it is a part of who I am being able to use both. (#1, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

I still feel connected to my identity. It's not as if there aren't well spoken articulate Black folks, so. (#4, Female, 18-28, Master's degree)

…a lot of times it just becomes like a a joke. Like you'll talk... You know, you know, you know, quote unquote "talk white" …and just like laugh about it because you're like, you're kind of like overdoing it. 'Cause they, you know, it's like under the assumption that like, Black people talk like this white people talk like this. And then like and you're Black and you're talking, you know, over exaggerating talking, you know, in the, you know, traditional English, you know, American vernacular, it can be considered, you know, funny culturally, because there's a bias and there's a stereotype around Black people how they're supposed to act and how they're supposed to talk. (#9, Male, 29-46, Master's degree)

Oh, I'm always Black. (#8, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

I don't feel any less black or when using SAE versus AAVE or any other like. (#5, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

I feel fine. Umm. Still feel connected… Because that's just who I am. (#12, Female, 29-46, Master's degree)

The Weight of Holding the Door Open

A common theme amongst the participants was feeling a need to hold themselves to a high standard because they feel a responsibility for future Black talent that may seek

employment at their respective organizations. Additionally, some feel a duty to set a good example and made choices to push themselves further so that they can improve their career trajectory and possibly create those opportunities for other Black professionals.

> I believe the reality is… is that one black person could make it hard for other black people… I try to work as hard as I can outwork other people because I believe that, you know, I'll be held as an example for black people and maybe I could create opportunities for other black people. (#8, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

> …I knew why I was doing it so that I could get to a different level to open the doors for other, for other black people to be successful. However, even in that it does take a little piece of you away because you know in that moment or I knew in that moment I was not showing up as [redacted] myself, I was not showing up as my black self. I realized that I was assimilating to respectability politics within the workplace. I was going in to be the "flavor of the month" for whatever leader it was and majority of the time in health care, non-black, they're white, older men or women. And so it does take a little bit away of you, take pieces away from you because you're like, "I would say this, but I know if I move in this direction then it could possibly prevent me from moving up in my career." (#6, Male, 29-46, Master's degree)

> I don't want them to think that I am weak in any way. I always feel like if I, like mess this up then like they won't hire another black person. (#3, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

Basically, I know how to speak to… white people in a way that they'll understand or is most effective, you know, as far as communication. Sometimes it's just necessary, honestly, to get the results you wanna get. Just the world we live in and I'm not trying to... I'm not trying to fight it. (#9, Male, 29-46, Master's degree)

The burden of being the "model Black citizen" (Dickens & Chavez, 769) and exhibiting certain behaviors lest they face "stereotype threat" (Marx et al., 2005, p. 432) was evident amongst participants. More than half expressed a sense of pressure to exceed expectations within the workplace because their behaviors may be seen as a reflection of the Black race as a whole.

You know that you in some instances you have to work twice as hard. (#1, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

I think what we learn is that we have to be better, right? Like mediocrity is definitely not gonna be tolerated. (#2, Female, 29-46, Master's degree)

Growing up, as you always hear, you have to work harder. You have to do more. (#10, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

I feel like I have to be a very…upstanding... almost make no mistakes. Act in a very professional manner. Not that you shouldn't do that but, there's no room for error. And I feel like if there is, I feel like I personally have let down a black upcoming woman executive because of the impression I may have left on others that I'm working with. (#3, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

…but for them it's if you step out of line this way, it's probably because you're black. If you don't do this this way, it's probably it's more there. They… I think

that they think about race way more than we do. (#1, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

As black people, we do realize that our individual actions do leave an impression for the entire black community… because our white counterparts, they don't have that, say burden, because if one of them makes a mistake, it's OK. It's like ohh, it's that's just that individual, but if a black person makes a mistake, then it's possible that we're shutting the door on others who come behind us. (#6, Male, 29-46, Master's degree)

Well, you know, generally I've been the token black person, so I always feel like, you know, I need to make sure that people know that black people can do lots of things, right, that we put our mind to. (#12, Female, 29-46, Master's degree)

Whenever I'm being professional, I'm trying to not misrepresent my people, not give somebody a reason or justification to exclude us from things. (#8, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

RQ3: Do Black professionals who code-switch in organizations have lower organizational identification levels?

Managing Criticism as Communicators

In discussing how participants feel when the company is criticized by an outside individual or the media, five of them identified as serving in some sort of communication capacity, which affected how they would respond to these criticisms:

So I feel like it it went both ways by being something that I was responsible for doing as part of my job. Umm, it made me feel… Uh, informative and I had to convey a sense of empathy. (#1, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

It's part of my job to value that… the way that we're viewed as an employer that people wanna come work for. So you know, pretty highly. I want people to think it's a good place to work. I'm not invested in a lie about [redacted], you know, but I want people to think highly of it, yes. (#2, Female, 29-46, Master's degree)

So I actually am…in communications, so I represent the company from a communications and PR standpoint…Of course I want to know what's being said about us externally. It helps with framing of the message that we do from an internal and external perspective. So, it is important to get insights from a third party and to hear what others are saying about us, what how they feel about us and how they feel about our work as a healthcare provider. And also just work in the community. (#3, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

Umm, I mean, I work in corporate affairs, so I kinda see those immediately. Again, you don't feel away about it like you know it's… It's at the end of the day you the media's opinion, opinion-based, so you just kinda you read it and if there's something that needs to be corrected, you know, we pass it up the chain to like …to it to our directors and our CEO and stuff. But nine out of 10 I'll be in the room to like, get the quotes and stuff together… (#5, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

I do a lot of social media monitoring and stuff like that, so I… I I'm I'm on the frontlines with regards to yeah, getting feedback from residents or the public on… on issues they feel, umm need to be addressed within the city… We're always funneling information up to the Council, City Council, they have an open door policy… (#8, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

Personal Investment & Public Criticism

Some participants discussed their personal investment in their respective companies and how media criticisms affect their jobs.

…part of my job was community relations, community and public relations, and so I worked very closely with business development who… their staff was responsible for umm bringing in new business for the hospital through whether it be through employers, civic organizations…Uh, through…umm doctor's offices, physicians' offices specifically and then so I worked really closely with them at events and community engagements. (#1, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

Uh, there's been a lot of stuff in the news about [redacted], though lately is kind of it aligned to the Silicon Valley Bank stuff. And a lot of that is not informed. It's kind of frustrating to see umm in in this instance and I'm not saying that every time it is, but in this instance it certainly makes me feel very frustrated because, you know, again there's downstream impacts. You know that the stock price goes down because of the things that are being said, which means people's jobs are at stake, which means, you know, my colleagues are doing overtime trying to figure out how to respond to this… I mean, I'm really afraid of like people not being

able to hire people, not being able to like or… or perhaps even be there being layoffs at some point… And and none of this is rooted in truth, though, you know. (#2, Female, 29-46, Master's degree)

Very much so, being a senior executive within the organization, that… I'm tied to the success. (#6, Male, 29-46, Master's degree)

I feel extremely connected on the team that I work on. We're responsible for people's happiness and enjoyment. So, I take it... Yeah, I'm connected. (#4, Female, 18-28, Master's degree)

Umm, I guess I you know, I'm definitely invested in the company. It's smaller. It's, you know, it's only been around a couple years, but they're kind of leading in the space. So I'm I'm definitely, you know, I'd say I'm significantly invested. (#9, Male, 29-46, Master's degree)

I would feel, I guess, a little uneasy about it or a little nervous as far as what the future of the company would be based off like negative press or something. How would it affect sales? How would it affect my role and you know, ultimately my job? (#10, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

It's, I would say, yeah, to some extent. I am in administration now. So, uh, I've got a greater stake in the… in the organization. (#11, Male, 47-58, Doctorate)

Seven themes emerged from the participants' interviews: (1) Using AAVE Comes Naturally; (2) Perceptions of AAVE & Use in the Workplace (3) Nonverbal Code-switching; (4) SAE is Black, too; and (5) The Weight of Holding the Door Open; (6) Managing Criticism as Communicators; (7) Personal Investment & Public Criticism. Responses to many questions were

diverse. However, 6 out of 12 of the interviewees agree that using AAVE feels natural or evokes a nostalgic feeling when using it; 7 out of 12 agree that using SAE does not necessarily impact one's Blackness, and 8 of 12 agree that Black professionals often bear the weight of being the "model Black citizen" in the workplace as their actions can reflect on the entire Black community.

Discussion

The "Using AAVE Comes Naturally" and "The Perception of AAVE" themes helped answer RQ1: To what degree do Black professionals believe that AAVE is a part of their identity? When describing their relationship with AAVE and the level to which they use it, few classified it as core to their identity.

Using AAVE Comes Naturally

There was seemingly a consensus among the participants who use AAVE that using it feels like home, reminds them of family or brings a certain level of connectedness. "…It has history to it…," Participant #4 (Female, 18-28, Master's degree) noted. This indicates that it is more than just a warm and fuzzy feeling for some, but rather a reminder of the ancestral tie to the language and its origins. For some, Blackness and use of AAVE are seemingly inextricably linked and using the vernacular is a strong indicator of the Black identity. "I mean that's as Black as I'mma get. Yeah that's… that's the norm…," says Participant #5 (Male, 29-46, Four-year degree). Even if this may not be a widely accepted idea, a common thread amongst the quoted participants under this theme is that it made them feel more connected to their ethnic identity, especially around other Black people. This finding is consistent with findings from Rahman's (2008) study in which some participants acknowledged AAVE "as an invaluable tool for

expressing close familial bonds and solidarity with the community" (pp. 167). One participant in Rahman's study discusses the historical significance of the vernacular: "I love it. It keeps me close to my family and friends, as well as serving as a living reminder of my history as a member of a distinctive group in this country" (pp. 167). Though these participants may feel more connected to their ethnic identity when using it, the context in which it was used remained a determining factor for the level to which they used AAVE in the workplace.

Perceptions of AAVE & Use in the Workplace

Some participants were infrequent users of AAVE. Others did not use it at all. Of this group, 75 percent cited their upbringing as a key influencer in their decision to limit their use of AAVE. For some Black parents who were born or otherwise raised during the Civil Rights Era, they likely learned how to navigate the world very differently and needed to walk a treacherous path just to get opportunities such as a good education and a good job. This likely shaped their views of what is needed to survive and succeed in the United States. "…My grandfather always said you needed to be knowledgeable and present yourself in a knowledgeable way in order to get… like… where you wanna be. And that's kind of kind of where it started," said Participant #7 (Female, 29-46, Four-year degree) in detailing the reasoning behind her decision to not use AAVE. Similarly, Participant #10 (Male, 29-46, Four-year degree) shared how the people he grew up around influenced his speech.

> And I don't know, maybe I guess depending on who you're around, you don't wanna seem uneducated or, you know, viewed a certain way, you know, that maybe isn't you… I don't think I necessarily think about that, but maybe it's just like been programmed in me. So it's just it just naturally I don't do it… Definitely

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like parents or growing up in church, because even though I went to like a all

black church growing up as well, I would say it was more of like a… It was like

a… we're like… I guess a lot of like educated blacks and stuff go to. So it wasn't

like one that was more on the more urban area. Yeah, like I said and and I don't

think it was like they purposely or said this, but I just feel like it was just a

product of my environment. That's just how I kind of grew up. (#6, Male, 29-46,

Four year degree)

Participant #7 and #10's socialization mirror's Mead's (1934) self-presentation and self-concept

research in which he argues that the self is developed through communicative exchanges with

others. He writes, "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at

birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given

individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within

that process" (pp. 135). Through Participant #10's interactions with his fellow, affluent and

perceived highly educated church members and Participant #7's interactions with her family and

instruction from her grandfather, their selves were formed using SAE as the standard without

AAVE as an option.

Aside from the upbringing of some, there appears to be no widespread disdain for the use

of AAVE in general among participants. Rather, the place or context in which it is used will

shape their opinions of its appropriateness. This is consistent with findings in a previous study in

which the interviewees "generally held [AAVE] in high regard" but those who use it in the

workplace as their primary mode of communication were deemed "uneducated" (Garner &

Rubin, 1986). Participant #10 (M, 29-46, Four-year degree) indicated concern for being

perceived as uneducated if using AAVE in the workplace. "Maybe I guess depending on who you're around, you don't wanna seem uneducated or, you know, viewed a certain way, you know, that maybe isn't you," he said.

Some participants agreed that there is a negative perception of AAVE and that its use in the workplace may be something that should be limited.

> …I would say only 20% of the time it was...I was probably using the actual slang terms because you know, I just…I don't even know if that's what we all should be doing anyway… If you are using this type of English in like I said professional settings it's gonna be something that you're gonna get a negative…you know, gonna give you a negative perception. (#11, Male, 47-58, Doctorate)

Participant #1 (Female, 47-58, Master's degree) for example, suggests there are levels of AAVE use and that, consistent with what Blom & Gumperz (1972) found, setting, situation, and participant are used as indicators for the levels to which someone may use it.

> So again, it's very natural and authentic for me to use like… I think there are levels to AAVE, some are OK in corporate settings like, you know. Say an executive says something to you about this new program that we're gonna be, you know, having or whatever. And now all of a sudden you… it's something you're excited about that's gonna happen at work. I think that it's OK for you to be like, "no way" you know, or "shut the front door" or something like that. But you wouldn't say "get the F out of here" to them like the…You know, there's different things that you are OK saying and some things like you just wouldn't be caught dead saying so…Because there's levels to it, and I remember once I code

switched with my VP, it was like not even that big of a deal for me because again, we had history… You know, she knew me. And like our families, like hung out together. (#1, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

The "participant" indicator informed this participant's decision to code-switch with her boss at the time. The previously established relationship and familiarity with her interlocutor made her feel more comfortable speaking AAVE when necessary. She continues to say that there are levels to code-switching, but the levels to which she would go were different person-to-person.

…there's different levels to the AAVE like you're still using it, but you're not like hardcore using it. But I remember one time…she told me something that the CEO at the hospital had said to her about me being at an event not being important as me, needing to be at the hospital at a committee meeting or something. And so I responded to her and said, "why is he playin' like...my job outside this hospital ain't important?" So I felt like I'd like code-switched like all the way to like AAVE… (#1, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

There were two participants who agreed that there are certain settings in which certain language and behavior is appropriate.

Like of course, you want to bring your authentic self. But the reason why I specify like authentic professional self is that you we're still in a professional setting and my team is very familiar with one another and sometimes it feels as if these are personal relationships and not coworkers… So, I feel more comfortable, you know, not having to code switch. Now in different settings, I'm doing a presentation. Well, of course I'mma put a different hat on, they're like, who is

this? And then meeting new people like I'm going to put on a new hat. And then

you know, gradually I want to be able to bring my authentic professional self to

them. But certain situations call… means that I will behave in a different way.

(#4, Female, 18-28, Master's degree)

But I also realize that in any environment, and so I think this is a little challenge

because I've been listening to a podcast that has a little challenge about, you

know, in environments you… do you have to switch to be in an environment or do

you, umm, kind of absorb the environment and how that environment moves?

And I think in every situation we do in a way. So the way that I behave around my

fraternity brothers, it's just not the same way I can behave at work. Those are two

different environments and so for me that's not a switch or me taking or not

bringing my full self to work. (#6, Male, 29-46, Master's degree)

Participants 4 and 6's levels of use of AAVE is facilitated by the "setting" and "situation"

indicators described in Blom & Gumperz (1972) study, aligning with extant literature.

Though CAT posits that speakers may choose divergent communication styles to increase

the perceived social distance between themselves and their interlocutor (Giles & Coupland,

1991), this may not always be the reason. Participant #5 (Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

acknowledges that setting may mean the terminology is adjusted, but will still use AAVE which,

as he indicated is "the norm" for him.

I mean I can give a presentation and I'm not gonna change my voice for anybody

or anything like that. Like I mean the terminology is gonna obviously change, but

I'm not… I'm not tailoring anything to sound a certain way for anybody at this

point. (#5, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

Conversely, Participant #6, an infrequent user of AAVE, employs the divergent

communication style only occasionally. Still, his attitude toward using it is unapologetic.

> During the pandemic, people were not out and about. There were no events going
>
> on and so that moment impacted me differently because I felt the sense of
>
> responsibility to let my organization know how the death of George Floyd
>
> impacted me as a black person in the workplace. And so after that I said I am not
>
> showing up 100% as myself. So that is that is not allowing others to experience a
>
> fully realized black person and so after that I said "no more." … if I say
>
> something that's Ebonics, you're gonna get it. Because when my Caucasian
>
> colleagues say something that I'm like [confused facial expression], no one
>
> changes anything, people ask questions. Say, "what do you mean by that?" …So
>
> guess what, you can ask me a question and I can educate you. (#6, Male, 29-46,
>
> Master's degree)

When discussing what informs a decision to code-switch, participants cited various

reasons they do so, including the receiver's level of understanding, location, topic, and status as

influencing factors.

> Nature of the meeting. So not necessarily the level of the individual, but the
>
> nature of the meeting… It could be the uh, COO or CEO one-on-one I would feel
>
> comfortable doing it to a certain extent, but if it was in a room with that same
>
> CEO or COO and their boss, I would come down a level but still use words like,

you know, "y'all" and "hey" instead of "hello" and you know different things that could be considered AAVE umm yeah… but I guess to answer your question it would be the the nature of the meeting, the subject matter and like the setting of the the meeting, Like the location of the meeting. UM, if it was within work hours or outside of normal work hours that mattered too. Because we did quite a bit of stuff outside of work hours and away from the office. (#1, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

You know what I feel like? Like code-switching and stuff like. There's, like, I feel like in this environment that I'm at work, there's like less of it because it's really a smaller company and it kind of has a unique culture in itself, not necessarily like specific to Black culture, but just like the crypto web3, it's just the more open, funny, weird type thing. So, I mean, maybe if I'm talking to like the CEO or his number two, I'll kind of… but like even speaking to them, it's still pretty open and I don't necessarily… like… speaking to them I don't feel the need to use that type of vernacular to convey the types of ideas or concepts I'm trying to get across. If we were talking about, you know, I don't know, hip hop music or something particular to black culture, art, I might use that vernacular. But if I'm talking about business and I'm talking about, you know, you know, the the community and stuff, I'm gonna use the vernacular specific to that business or community aspect. So, uh, yeah. It's not like I feel like I can't. I don't feel like… my communication would be as effective if I use that vernacular. (#9, Male, 29-46, Master's degree)

It's just that subconscious umm it's, you know, work. And I would say, you know, even just work just being in a different environment and…one of the biggest things is, I mean…if I don't feel like someone knows… gonna know what I'm saying, then I… I won't say it. Like, I wouldn't say, you know, I wouldn't tell the one- or nine-month-old to…read me 10 words from the encyclopedia. So yeah, I think it's just, it's just like I there's a, there's a way of… way that I talk at work and there's a way that I talk with family and friends and there's a way that I talk with associates or at church… I kind of think it goes beyond work. (#3, Female, 47-58, Master's degree)

I really don't if… if we walkin' through the halls or talking about how we… what's on our weekend, maybe a lil' bit if someone literally catches me at the water cooler, you know, and ask me how my weekend was or how am I doing or they talk about the weather… You know, if they if they my equal, I'll talk one way. If they superior to me, I'll talk another way. (#8, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

Participant #8's language choices changing depending on the social rank of the person with whom he is speaking mirrors that of the workers using an accommodative communication style and converging toward the judges (Cotterill et al., 2016). What seems consistent among most of the participants is that they will assess the environment, the situation, and use social cues to then internally "activate" the self which is best suited for the interaction as part of the identity negotiation process (Ting-Toomey, 1999). In this way, their bicultural identity as members of two cultural groups, Black and American, are not incompatible. Rather, they complement each other,

and these participants have struck a balance at work that still feels authentic but does not threaten their status as an in-group member.

To address RQ2: To what extent is Black professionals' connectedness to their ethnic identity impacted by code-switching, the "Nonverbal Code-switching, "SAE is Black, too," and "The Weight of Holding the Door Open" themes emerged.

Nonverbal Code-switching

Although half of the participants self-identified as low-to-no AAVE users, three participants shared experiences in which they adjusted their behavior to prevent association with known racial stereotypes, namely the "angry Black woman" or "angry Black man." They discussed hiding their true feelings, holding back opinions at work, and self-monitoring their facial expressions and other nonverbal behaviors. Goffman (1959) suggests that individuals put on a performance when speaking to others in order to evoke the desired response from their interlocutor. This is like wearing a mask to cover the true self and display instead of the self that they are striving to be (p. 12). For the participants, changing their behavior and presenting this unflappable and jovial version of themselves was the mask they wore to prevent being perceived in a negative way. Participant #10 (Male, 29-46, Four-year degree) also discusses tempering his reactions when someone may say something offensive in the professional space.

> You know, sometimes people that don't hang with a lot of black people or, you
> know, they're just clueless to what may be offensive or may… what may offend
> you or you, they may not know how they're coming across. So I feel like you
> have to be strong because you can't always play the victim like and I always, you
> know, take that approach… so it's like some stuff you just have to let roll off your

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shoulders or, you know, roll down your back. Like picking and choosing your

battles. (#10, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

This is consistent with Parker's (2002) study which discussed how some Black professionals will downplay or ignore discriminatory comments or offensive jokes to avoid confirming existing stereotypes such as the "Angry Black Man" or "Angry Black Woman" that some participants mentioned. Although most of the participants referenced changing the way they react to something, Participant #2 (Female, 29-46, Master's) talked about self-monitoring her demeanor. "You know I'm tired today and if I had to see my boss today then he'd be going "well, what's wrong?" Nothing! Nothing. I just don't have the energy to sit up here and, you know, placate you," she says. These participants may be masking their true feelings to cope in their work environments. This is supported by previous research which shows that identity shifting—a practice that is almost identical to masking—is used by Black professionals to reduce their susceptibility to discrimination at work (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Goffman, 1959).

With or without using AAVE, Black professionals can still communicate their ethnicity nonverbally through identity cues (Swann et. al, 2009). One such example is through the clothing or hairstyles they choose. As part of the identity negotiating process, communicators can operate within the confines of the professional space and display the identity which is congruent to that of the dominant group while still seeking identity-confirming experiences at work (pp. 87). Three participants in this study specifically mentioned or were asked about the natural hairstyles they displayed during the interview. Though these three had varying levels of AAVE use (Participant #3 – Sometimes, Participant #4 – Very often, and Participant #12 – Not often), they each have selected this identity-confirming behavior to communicate their ethnic identity. For the lower-level users of the vernacular, this could be a way to uphold the connectedness to Blackness while

maintaining the traditional behaviors associated with professionalism. Swann and researchers (2009) also discuss how individuals may join work teams or committees that are identity-confirming to further convey identity (p. 87). This can include membership in employee resource groups (ERGs) in organizations. Participants 3, 4, 11, and 12 discussed belonging to their respective organization's Black ERG and participating in bespoke events. Participant #11 (Male, 47-58, Doctorate), a very infrequent user of AAVE, serves as the vice president in the ERG for Black employees. Although he could simply participate as a member, he took on a leadership role in the group. While we did not specifically discuss his reasoning for becoming an officer, identity negotiation theory (INT) research supports that this, too, is an identity-confirming activity and, as such, helps him establish the salience of his ethnic identity at work (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

SAE is Black, Too

Consistent with findings from Dickens & Chavez's (2018) study, most of the participants in this study appeared to be identity shifting practitioners. Many learned how to use SAE and AAVE, be it with non-immediate family members or friends, and have mastered toggling between the two in the workplace. Irrespective of their levels of use, however, many of the participants who use SAE reported little to no impact on their connectedness to their ethnic identity. "Oh, I'm always Black," Participant #8 (Male, 29-46, Four-year degree) said. Another suggested that SAE and Blackness are not mutually exclusive. This participant says Blackness can still be communicated whether using AAVE or not. "Black people… we just… there is a whole vibe just in the way we exchange communication" (#6, Male, 29-46, Master's degree). Though these participants may choose not to use AAVE within the workplace, certain patterns in their speech still communicate Blackness. Taylor (1971) introduced Black Standard English

(BSE), which combines the grammatical features of SAE with a selection of phonological elements from AAVE and is primarily employed by middle-class African Americans (Rahman, 2008). BSE offers the familiarity of AAVE while still adhering to the grammatical norms and perceived professionalism of SAE (Rahman, 2008).

Body language, intonation, and pronunciation may be a few additional examples of ways ethnic identity can be communicated through speech. This parallels identification of a speaker's race over the phone even when they don't "sound Black" or use AAVE and the listener lacks visual cues to assess the speaker phenotypically. "If I was speaking to you on the phone and just the way I talk to people and what not…I tend not to use the English slang terms as much, but it's just the way I say things. I think people, you know, understand that I'm African American," Participant #12 (Male, 47-58, Doctorate) says. Identifying Black speakers auditorily is discussed by Kurinec and Weaver (2021) in their study on "sounding Black." Although there is no consensus on the linguistic cues which indicate that a speaker is, in fact, Black, it is likely that one's social environment and level of exposure to Black Americans contribute to their association of certain linguistic cues with a particular race (Perrachione et al., 2010). As such, it makes sense that many participants still view using SAE as part of their identity or, otherwise, as a necessary tool to get ahead.

The Weight of Holding the Door Open

Findings in this study upheld those of Dickens and Chavez (2018) in their study on the "model Black citizen" (pp. 769). One-third of study participants indicated feeling pressure to behave a certain way at work and that a misstep could jeopardize their standing with dominant group members. Some even pointed out that they feel like a representative and that their

behaviors could affect whether the company decides to hire more Black people in the future. "I always feel like if I, like mess this up then like they won't hire another black person" (#3, Female, 47-58, Master's degree). As pointed out in the study, Black professionals expend emotional labor presenting a version of themselves that is congruent with the dominant group for the benefit of those coming behind them (p. 211). Further, 7 participants expressed feeling a need to outperform their colleagues to show that Black professionals are capable and worthy of being hired within the respective organizations. This comes from an old aphorism passed down in Black communities for generations, "As a black person in white America, you've got to work twice as hard to get half as far" (DeSante, 2013, p. 342). An alternative version may have been heard as delivered by Eli Pope played by Joe Morton in the hit TV series, *Scandal*, "You have to be twice as good as them to get half of what they have." It is possible that some version of this may be known to at least participants 1, 2, and 10 and they have felt that in their work lives. Although adjusting their self-presentation can be costly for the emotional wellbeing of the Black professional (McCluney, et al., 2021), for some it feels necessary to achieve the desired result and remain on the upward trajectory in their careers.

Finally, research question 3 asked, "Do Black professionals who code-switch in organizations have lower organizational identification levels?" To address this question, Mael & Tetrick's (1992) OI questionnaire was used as a guide for these interview questions. Responses for these? questions? presented the following themes: "Managing Criticism as Communicators" and "Personal Investment & Public Criticism."

Managing Criticism as Communicators

Five participants self-identified as communication practitioners within their organizations, which shaped their responses about feelings toward public or media criticism of the company. Most of this group of participants did not provide an affective response to the hypothetical situation. Instead, they each gave task-oriented responses including framing the messaging, strategizing responses with leadership, or developing a social media plan. Although these responses do not directly describe how each participant feels about the organization during the given scenario, Scott et al. (1998) argue that organizational identification levels will differ based on a person's role in the company and the activities they are performing in varying contexts. The following is an excerpt from their study:

> Activities influence the identities that are appropriated and reproduced in identification. Only in particular situations, defined significantly by activity and activity foci, will a person identify in particular ways. For example, an engineer on a production team is most likely to identify with that team during group meetings or when an important team-set goal is met; yet, that same person may experience more of an organizational identification during a budget meeting or when the company has just been awarded a major contract. Conversely, the identification process also influences the very activities in which we are engaged. (1998, p. 323)

Using this research, it could be said that these participants' OI levels may change when they must serve as a representative of the organization to respond to criticism.

Personal Investment & Public Criticism

Some participants are employed by publicly traded companies in which they are able to own stock. This, of course, means that the value of the stock they own may change based upon the criticism they receive in the media. Additionally, some discussed how their jobs may be impacted by public perceptions of the company and how, as their position in the company has improved, they have a higher level of investment in the company's success. This is echoed by French (1987) who suggested that employee stock ownership is positively related to organizational identification and that employees with greater shareholdings will have higher OI and commitment to their respective organizations. This is likely related to an employee's desire to see the company's stock increase and, thusly, will be motivated to help ensure the company's success to reap the rewards of a higher stock price. Participants #2 (Female, 29-46, Master's degree) and #9 (Male, 29-46, Master's degree) discussed being invested in their respective companies. Although these were the only participants who acknowledged personal investment, at least four other participants work in organizations with an active Employee Stock Purchase Program (ESPP) or profit-sharing program. Since we cannot confirm their participation in these programs, we cannot apply French's findings to the other participants.

While not everyone discussed a financial investment in the company, others discussed their personal investment as contributors to the company's success in a leadership capacity or as high performers within their teams. When asked about their personal connectedness to the successes of their respective organizations, participants shared the following:

> Very much so, being a senior executive within the organization … I'm tied to the success. (#6, Male, 29-46, Master's degree)

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I am in administration now. So, uh, I've got a greater stake in the in the organization… (#11, Male, 47-58, Doctorate)

Very strongly and we are rewarded for things as a group, as a company and when we achieve certain things milestones and we're rewarded and I feel like I have a… I have taken part in receiving that award. (#7, Female, 29-46, Four-year degree)

Since it's a sales role, I do feel personally connected because, umm, I think my territory is a strong performance territory. So, I do feel somewhat responsible because I feel like my territory does generate a lot of revenue. (#10, Male, 29-46, Four-year degree)

Some participants may feel higher levels of OI when they take a more active role in achieving company objectives. French & Rosenstein posited that employee stock ownership positively impacts OI because of the common interest and stake in the company's success (1984). Though research on a direct link between OI and stock ownership is scarce, some researchers agree that owning stock can promote job satisfaction as employees can reap the benefits of their work (French & Rosenstein, 1984; Hammer, Stern, & Gurdon, 1982). For participants who participate in employee stock purchase plans or profit sharing, this may be a contributor to their strong feelings and identification with their respective organizations. Although this is typically true for those of a lower ranking within these companies, it did not hold true for higher ranking individuals, French and Rosenstein found (1984). Other researchers, however, have cited different factors that contribute to strong OI outside of stock ownership. Factors such as "participation in decision-making, self-management team climate, organizational self-esteem, and effective commitment" mediate the relationship between the perception of distributive

fairness and affective commitment (AC) (Jing & Yan, 2022, p. 4). Affective commitment, which refers to "an emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, pp. 67), is a measure that, though seemingly totally separate from OI, is strongly related. In fact, Stinglhamber et al. (2014) argue that OI is a determinant of AC.

For the participants holding high level positions in this study who are not personally invested in their respective organizations, Liu et al.'s (2012) findings which indicate that participation in decision-making leads to feelings of psychological ownership in the organization may apply. As French & Rosenstein (1984) found that shareholding affects OI for lower ranking employees in "nonmanagerial" positions, we can apply this finding to participants holding managerial and nonmanagerial positions in the present study.

Participants #3 (Female, 47-58, Master's degree), #6 (Male, 29-46, Master's degree), and #11 (Male, 47-58, Doctorate) self-identified as executive-level employees during the interview phase. Table 4.1 below will show the language used to self-identify. Table 4.2 below will show each participant's position level, mention of stock ownership, and whether an ESPP or profit-sharing program exists with each respective employer. Information regarding the managerial positions held by the non-self-identifying participants was gathered from their LinkedIn accounts.

Table 4.1: Executive-Level Self-Identification (Participant Responses)

Participant #	Response
3	*I feel like I personally have let down a black upcoming woman executive…* *…and just from, I guess a general executive leadership perspective…*
6	*Very much so, being a senior executive within the organization … I'm tied to the success.*

I am in administration now.

Table 4.2: Executive-Level Self-Identification (Participant Responses)

Participant #	Position Level	Stock Mention?	Existing ESPP / Profit-Sharing
1	Director	No	Yes
2	Director	Yes	Yes
3	Director	No	No
4	Sr. Specialist	No	Yes
5	Sr. Specialist	No	Yes
6	Senior VP	No	Yes
7	Sr. Analyst	No	Yes
8	Specialist	No	No
9	Specialist	Yes	Yes
10	Specialist	No	No
11	Dept. Chair	No	No
12	Manager	No	Yes

Participant #9 (Male, 29-46, Master's degree) is the only participant holding a nonmanagerial role and mentioned a personal investment in his employing organization. Using their findings, it could follow that OI for this participant should be positively affected by stock ownership. Since only one participant meets this criteria, however, we cannot predict with certainty that the findings are replicated here. Liu et al. (2012), however, cited "participation in decision-making" (p. 887) as a factor which determines AC, which is predicted by OI. The U.S.

Department of Labor (2019) uses the following criteria to define employees eligible for Executive Exemption:

- The employee's primary duty must be managing the enterprise, or managing a customarily recognized department or subdivision of the enterprise;

- The employee must customarily and regularly direct the work of at least two or more other full-time employees or their equivalent; and

- The employee must have the authority to hire or fire other employees, or the employee's suggestions and recommendations as to the hiring, firing, advancement, promotion or any other change of status of other employees must be given particular weight.

Using this definition, Participants #1 (Female, 47-58, Master's degree), #2 (Female, 29-46, Master's degree) #3 (Female, 47-58, Master's degree), #6 (Male, 29-46, Master's degree), #11 (Male, 47-58, Doctorate), and #12 (Female, 29-46, Master's degree) are most likely to participate in decision-making at their respective organizations. As such, based on Liu et al.'s (2012) findings, it would follow that these participants are likely to have higher AC and, thereby, are likely to have higher OI. Without further investigation, however, we cannot confirm this finding.

Conclusions

I asked three research questions: (RQ1) To what extent do Black professionals believe AAVE is a part of their identity? (RQ2) To what extent is Black professionals' connectedness to their ethnic identity impacted by code-switching? (RQ3) Do Black professionals who code-switch in organizations have lower organizational identification levels? As this was a small

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sample size and every Black experience is different, the findings only reflect the participants in this study.

1. Using AAVE felt natural to 3 of 12 participants, though 6 of 12 participants indicated very low to no use of it.

2. Using AAVE evoked a sense of nostalgia for 6 of 12 participants.

3. Even Black professionals with low use of AAVE in the workplace may still code-switch behaviorally.

4. Using SAE has little to no impact on Black professionals' feelings of connectedness to their ethnic identity.

5. Some Black professionals are willing to use SAE or code-switch to rise to a level at which they can give more opportunities to other Black professionals.

6. Black professionals feel pressure to be perfect in the workplace as they are sometimes deemed representatives of Black people as a whole.

7. Participants in communication roles may have different OI levels because of the activities in which they take part.

8. Personal investment in an organization may positively impact OI for nonmanagerial employees.

Though I found that Black professionals do not believe AAVE to be a major part of their ethnic identity, nor does code-switching impact their connectedness to their identity and OI is not impacted by code-switching, this study did uncover some interesting findings. All participants in this study were highly educated and gainfully employed. Previous research has found that older middle class African American's have negative views toward AAVE (Smitherman, 2006). However, other research has found that Black participants highly regard AAVE and do not have a

negative view toward the vernacular, but rather they believe that using it in the corporate sphere is not appropriate (Garner & Rubin, 1986; Rahman, 2008). It is possible, then, that participants' middle class and higher education statuses could have had an impact on their levels of use of AAVE.

Implications

There are implications for this research which can be applied within corporations and society in general. Firstly, this research can help non-Black professionals understand the perceived constraints on Black professionals and the pressure felt by them to exhibit certain behaviors when held as the representative. It is important to understand that Blackness is not a monolith and that everyone's Black experience is different. One person's actions do not reflect one way or another on the group.

Also, this research can help organizations, public and private, commit to creating a space where their Black employees feel comfortable speaking in their chosen dialect and won't worry about being associated with negative stereotypes. Though commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) soared to great heights in 2020, growth in the field has stalled (Anders, 2023; Terrazas & Johnson, 2022). Some corporations have laid off their in-house DEI professionals with companies such as Amazon.com Inc., Twitter Inc., and Nike Inc. topping the list (Ayas, et al., 2023). Additionally, politicians such as Texas governor Gregory Abbott and Florida governor Ronald DeSantis have made targeted political attacks at DEI initiatives, though there is much more work to still be done in the space. A lack of diversity can increase the risk of harassment or discriminatory behavior (Lipnic & Feldblum, 2016). As we are entering a time in which the number of DEI professionals is declining, it is important to reinvest in the work that makes the

workplace welcoming for all. This research could help corporations empower their DEI and HR teams to continue that work and develop education around English language variants such as AAVE to better understand colleagues who may choose to use it. Additionally, these teams can develop education around the nonverbal self-monitoring behaviors that Black professionals employ to help non-Black colleagues understand how to perceive these behaviors and not read them automatically as anger. Courses on this subject can highlight the experiences of participants like #3 (Female, 47-58, Master's degree) and #1 (Female, 47-58, Master's degree) who discussed feeling the need to always smile, always needing to be excellent, and other similar behaviors and challenge non-Black employees to be introspective about how the environment they may participate in makes their Black colleagues feel pressured to exhibit these behaviors. It can also help them understand the stress Black professionals endure negotiating their identities verbally and nonverbally and introspectively check their own contributions to that practice.

Limitations

There were some limitations in this study. Firstly, not all participants were familiar with the acronym AAVE. During the interview, participants were provided a definition of AAVE, examples of its previous names such as Black English and Ebonics, and also were provided verbal examples if they did not recognize the meaning from the previous two pieces of information. However, it seemed that some participants associate AAVE mostly with slang terms such as what is often misappropriated as "Gen-Z" slang today like "periodt" or "chileee" rather than the phonological and grammatical features as described in tables 1.1 and 1.2 (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011; Redd & Webb, 2005; Rickford, 1999; Wolfram & Shilling-Estes, 2006). Future researchers should include questions about participants' definition of AAVE and provide examples if needed to ensure that there is consensus on what is being discussed.

Also, about half of the participants self-identified or were listed on LinkedIn as communication professionals. This may have affected the way they answered questions relating to their response to external criticism or negative media coverage about their respective organizations. Without further investigation, this factor of OI remains inconclusive. Additionally, these interviews were conducted virtually, with some participants choosing to be off camera or participating via an audio-only call. As such, this may have affected the level to which they felt comfortable sharing. Lastly, this was a small sample size. Although qualitative research does permit small sample sizes, more data could be extracted from a larger sample size.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies on this topic should include an observation or ethnographic aspect. Although the participants shared their experience in the workplace, observing code-switching in real time and understanding what triggers code-switching behaviors and what that looks like would be interesting. Also, studying nonverbal or behavioral code-switching behaviors among Black professionals can help to further understand the additional labor required to exist in white spaces as a Black professional. Additionally, this study specifically focused on participants who had earned at least a four-year degree or higher at the time of this study. Broadening the participant pool to include diverse educational backgrounds may impact the results. Further, all participants were full-time employees at their respective organizations, about half of whom serve in a communication capacity. Future research should include a wider range of participants at varying levels of their respective organizations and in diverse roles.

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