Intersectional Identity and Well-being During COVID-19: An Investigation into the Disproportionate Effects of Stress and Burnout on Educators Holding One or More Marginalized Identities

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ABSTRACT

This intersectional study critically examines the mechanisms contributing to perceptions of stress, stigma, burnout, and well-being for educators holding one or more marginalized identities. Survey data were collected from American educators (N = 450) in the spring of 2021 to assess inequities experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyses reveal the unequal effects of prolonged stress on the health of marginalized educators. Results of this study highlight the utility of intersectional inquiry for understanding the disproportionate effects of public health crises on marginalized members of the public and can inform educational and public health policies that promote equity and inclusion while reducing hierarchical systems of power and oppression. Furthermore, this research underscores the need to reevaluate best practices for sampling and data cleaning to decenter norms of Whiteness and heteronormativity and embrace the multifaceted nature of identity.

Keywords: COVID-19, educator, intersectionality, stress, burnout, stigma, well-being

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's well-being in a variety of ways as they have coped with prolonged stress induced by this global health crisis (WHO, 2020). In the midst of health consequences that have accompanied the pandemic, people have also faced significant distress and disruption as they navigate new challenges within their professional and personal lives (Cahapay, 2020; Restubog et al., 2020). The stress of managing increased responsibilities and competing demands is especially pronounced for educators (e.g., McDonough & Lemon, 2022). Those in academic positions serve as a form of caregivers to their students, while also performing care in the home (Fleming et al., 2013). Educators already face high levels of stress and burnout (Haberman, 2005; Russell et al., 1987), with teaching regularly identified among members of the workforce as one of the most stressful occupations (e.g., Johnson et al., 2005). Educators tend to have lower quality of life than people in other occupations, with educators facing declines in physical and psychological well-being, reductions in job satisfaction, and disproportionately high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion (Johnson et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2009). The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened these concerns by compounding the existing levels of stress and burnout with the additional uncertainty of navigating the pandemic (Kim & Asbury, 2020).

Adding another layer to the challenges of working in the education sector pertains to educator identity. While the pandemic has exacerbated stress and accompanying health outcomes for people across the board, the magnitude of these effects is not equal (e.g., Gaynor & Wilson, 2020; Ruprecht et al., 2021; WHO, 2020). Research has revealed a marked difference in the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of educators holding one or more marginalized identities (Ruprecht et al., 2021; Sirotich & Hausmann, 2021). These consequences are on top of existing disparities in workplace stress and burnout faced by educators (Acker & Armenti, 2004).

Pedagogy is a social and structural system rooted in inequities surrounding race, class, sex, gender, and sexual orientation (Oldfield et al., 2006; Ruprecht et al., 2021; Warren & Hancock, 2016). Much of the scholarship examining the experiences of American educators, however, has adopted a rather unidimensional approach to identity that fails to capture the unique and complex experiences of educators who hold multiple marginalized identities (Pugach et al., 2018). This study utilizes an intersectional approach to explore variations in the experience of stress, burnout, and well-being among marginalized educators across the United States. Specifically, I critically examine the ways in which power relations (Acker, 1990; Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020) and social/relational frames (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) shape the educational structures and experiences of educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, I shed light on the ways in which power

and inequity are woven into the fabric of the American education system and discuss how to better support educators while striving toward a more equitable academic landscape.

What follows is an overview of the literature where I begin by outlining the state of affairs within education from a labor market perspective. I then argue that education is a social system marked by privilege and highlights the inequities faced by marginalized educators. Next, I contextualize the logic of my core arguments to the ongoing stress faced by educators during the pandemic. Finally, I argue for the utility of intersectional inquiry to understand the ways in which existing systemic and interactional disparities are exacerbated for educators as they navigate the additional stress that accompanies the ongoing public health crisis.

EDUCATION AS A SEXED, GENDERED, RACED, AND CLASSED LABOR MARKET

The landscape of education is one that is inherently sexed, gendered, raced, and classed. The United States' educational roots are grounded in privilege, with early education systems of the 1600s and 1700s inaccessible to many children on the basis of socioeconomic characteristics (Jeynes, 2007; Kober et al., 2020; Nasaw, 1981). Free public schools were introduced in the 1830s with the goals of reducing systemic inequities and social problems, enhancing diversity, and providing children with opportunities to strengthen their literacy, morals, and productivity as young citizens (Kober et al., 2020; Nasaw, 1981).

Unfortunately, this movement toward a school system that was equal and available to all fell drastically short, as people with marginalized identities on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and motherhood status were socially and physically excluded from accessing an education (Jeynes, 2007; Kober et al., 2020). These trends surrounding equity and access continue into today's education system and are replicated in the opportunities available to people who wish to become educators (Bourabain, 2020; Carter Andrews et al., 2021).

The composition of the educational workforce in the United States looks very different across academic ranks and titles, with the postsecondary education system being far more homogenous than the primary and secondary school systems. There are marked differences in the proportion of female, racial minority, and ethnic minority educators represented in postsecondary academic institutions and in positions of power. For example, despite the historical notion that teaching is "White women's work" (Warren & Hancock, 2016, p. vii), there are only half as many female post-secondary educators as there are female primary school educators (47% vs. 89% female; USDOE, 2021, 2022). Examinations of race and ethnicity reveal similar patterns. Hispanic and racially diverse educators are underrepresented, especially in

higher ranking positions (USDOE, 2020). Across all levels of education, only 6%-9% of educators are Hispanic and 12%-20% of educators are Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or multiracial (USDOE, 2020, 2021).

The lack of diversity in the American education system, especially higher education, calls into question the social, relational, and institutional forces that are driving compositional and occupational disparities. Next, I shed light on the ways in which power and inequity are woven into the fabric of the American education system.

EDUCATION AS A SOURCE OF INEQUITY

How do we make sense of educational biases (e.g., hiring, retention, income levels, opportunities for career progression) that disproportionately disadvantage educators? One way to understand the landscape of education is to consider the educational system as consisting of macro-level structures and micro-level interactions furthering hegemonic agendas. Social structures create and perpetuate hierarchies that disadvantage those who hold marginalized statuses in society (Acker, 1990). In other words, educational institutions, like many other organizations, are centered around inequitable distributions of power, control, and prestige, with higher-ranking positions within the organizational hierarchy disproportionately filled by people with societally privileged identities (Acker, 1990).

Inequitable opportunities also lower earning potential for educators on the basis of sex, race, and ethnicity (USDOE, 2022). Specifically, educators identifying as female, Black, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and/or Hispanic tend to have lower incomes and academic ranks, compared to their more privileged peers (USDOE, 2022). Of note, pay gaps in academia based on sex and parental status are not merely a function of working hours; rather, mothers who work comparable hours to their male and childless female counterparts still earn less money, thus, highlighting the motherhood penalty faced by women within the education system (Correll et al., 2007; Sieverding et al., 2018).

In addition to the structural notions of privilege and power infused into the very core of the education system, day-to-day interactions serve to reinforce these hierarchical structures (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). In social relational contexts, identity characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation serve as primary frames guiding people's interactions and beliefs (Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Interactions on a micro-level within the education system also reinforce hierarchies and stratified social structures through status expectations and androcentric practices (Acker, 1990; Fox, 2020).

Not only do these inequities have organizational and relational implications, but they have significant personal consequences. Inequitable

treatment and marginalization of educators with societally underprivileged identities increases levels of stress and burnout (Rabelo & Cortina, 2014; Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). For instance, women, LGBTQ+, and Black employees often experience greater levels of incivility, discrimination, segregation, bias, and harassment in both hiring proceedings and workplace interactions, which is a pervasive and systematic form of disadvantage (D'amico et al., 2017; Rabelo & Cortina, 2014; Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016).

Within academia, women are consistently overworked, more fatigued, and more stressed than men (Acker & Armenti, 2004). Furthermore, mothers are seen as possessing two irreconcilables, competing devotions: one to their family and one to their job (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Blair-Loy, 2003; Collins, 2019; Quadlin, 2018). Because mothers are often viewed as being responsible for the well-being and functioning of the family, they often make sacrifices in their work life, thus, positioning them outside the scope of an ideal worker, which tends to reflect White, heterosexual men who are high-achieving, competent, and committed (Collins, 2019; Daminger, 2019; Mize, 2016).

Outdated, hegemonic power structures within the education system have systematically disadvantaged educators holding one or more marginalized identities. This disadvantage has been seen in such domains as earning potential, social interactions, and educator well-being. Given the deeply rooted nature of these inequities within the education system, it is likely that existing disparities have been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the prevalence of stress and burnout have increased. Next, I contextualize these challenges within the transformed landscape of academia during the pandemic that educators are calling the "new normal" (Cahapay, 2020).

EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND

Existing disparities in the experience of stress and support for marginalized educators have been amplified during pandemic, with sexual and gender minority people and people of color facing worse outcomes than their societally privileged peers (Ruprecht et al., 2020). Specifically, marginalized populations are often exposed to COVID-19 at greater rates, are more susceptible to contracting the virus, and have limited treatment access if they do become infected (Ruprecht et al., 2021; Sirotich & Hausmann, 2021). Furthermore, marginalized populations have faced detrimental psychological, economic, and social effects from the pandemic at levels that are disproportionate to the population average (Haynor & Wilson, 2020; Ruprecht et al., 2021), and the overall mental well-being of these populations has declined (Moore et al., 2021).

Why are marginalized populations having such a disproportionate burden placed on them throughout the pandemic and beyond? One

explanation is that pandemic-related stress compounds the preexisting, chronic stress and stigma faced by minoritized people (Meyer, 2003). In other words, people holding one or more marginalized identities face minority stress, which is a chronic, identity-based stress stemming from invalidating social interactions (Meyer, 2003). The additional stress from COVID-19 exacerbates not only this minority stress, but results in even greater health disparities and worsened health outcomes (e.g., profound declines in well-being; Fish et al., 2021).

Another explanation is that COVID-19 has highlighted the existing interactional and structural barriers that uphold hierarchies of power and oppression (e.g., Acker, 1990). For instance, disparities in access to quality care, as well as lack of health insurance and reliable transportation, have served as barriers to receiving both preventive and responsive care during COVID-19 for many individuals holding one or more marginalized identities (Ruprecht et al., 2021).

Alternately, COVID-19 may be changing the labor market in such a way that it creates new problems and disparities. Whatever explanation we ascribe to the effects of the pandemic on marginalized populations, there is mounting evidence that the effects of the pandemic are far-reaching and devastating to people's well-being. For instance, the gender gap in the education labor market has widened during COVID-19 with mothers disproportionately burdened as they simultaneously managed rapidly shifting work and care demands, all while experiencing lower work productivity and lower job satisfaction (Feng & Savani, 2020).Women have also been facing burnout in public and private spheres to a higher degree than men, highlighting that the effects of the pandemic are not gender neutral (Aldossari & Chaudry, 2021).

People's identities are multifaceted, and unfortunately, it is not feasible to include every possible identity (and combination thereof) in a single study. I am focusing on the identity characteristics of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and parent status in this intersectional inquiry for several reasons. First, there is well-documented evidence of identity-based disparities in relation to stress, burnout, well-being, and stigma among minoritized social groups. Specifically, people who are members of marginalized social groups (i.e., females, women, and people identifying as Queer, non-White, and/or Hispanic) often face increased incivility, bias, and labor expectations in the workplace (e.g., D'amico et al., 2017; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2011; Nadal, 2019; Rabelo & Cortina, 2014; Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). COVID-19 has only heightened these disparities (e.g., Evans, 2020; Simien & Wallace, 2022). Furthermore, the origin of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) centers on race and sex, and the theoretical frames guiding this study (e.g., "a queer sociology") focus on such identities as gender, race,

nationality, and sexual orientation. Finally, I include parenting status because of the expanding body of research on motherhood penalties (e.g., Sieverding et al., 2018) and fatherhood premiums (e.g., Luhr, 2020), which are of particular interest because childcare and employment decisions have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Petts et al., 2021).

Examining the associations between distinct identity characteristics and outcomes pertaining to stress, burnout, stigma, and well-being, we can understand how disparities unfold for marginalized educators during the pandemic. However, it is important that we do not stop there. Adopting an intersectional approach is vital for truly capturing the effect of the pandemic on people holding one or more marginalized identities. Because people's identities are not merely additive in nature, it is crucial to consider the intersection of identities (Bowleg, 2008).

One way to better understand how disparities are created and upheld within the education system is to employ intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as a lens through which to view the exacerbation of inequities during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. I align myself with contemporary, justice-oriented scholars who critically engage with intersectional notions of identity (e.g., Bell, 1995; Bowleg, 2020; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995; Giroux, 1992; Matsuda et al., 1993; McLaren, 1998; Pugach et al., 2018). In doing so, I outline why an intersectional approach is necessary for accurately capturing the multifaceted experiences of educators within the U.S. education system during the pandemic.

EDUCATION AS A SITE FOR INTERSECTIONAL INQUIRY

Intersectionality is a way of embracing the multiplicity of identities while spotlighting the complex, intertwined mechanisms that serve to marginalize and disempower Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). As Crenshaw (1989) powerfully stated, "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, [and] any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (p. 140). Extending the original intersectional logic to encompass a range of marginalized identities is beneficial for theory, method, and practice (e.g., Bauer, 2014; Cho et al., 2013).

Within the education system, there is considerable underrepresentation of marginalized educators, especially in positions of power and authority (Brown, 2013; Murphy, 2021). COVID-19 has amplified these disparities, and research on the effects of the pandemic on people holding one or more marginalized identities has found that, despite the abundant messages of solidarity and support splashed across the headlines, in reality, "[w]e're not all in this together" (Bowleg, 2020, p. 917). People with intersecting, or interlocking, identities have their pasts rooted in experiences of oppression and their present realities rife with social, relational, and

systemic inequities (Bowleg, 2020). In identifying power relations as the root of inequality, scholars are able to capture the dynamic interplay of various identities (e.g., Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020). For example, in their "a queer sociology," Moussawi and Vidal-Ortiz (2020) decenter Whiteness and adopt an intersectional lens through which to study race, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, and class. In their theory, Moussawi and Vidal-Ortiz (2020) use queer not as a reductionist term, but as a means of representing people with diverse identities who are often marginalized by society through the privileging of dominant (i.e., normative) identities and experiences.

Intersectional inquiry is not only relevant in sociological and academic contexts; scholars have called for the utilization of an intersectional lens to frame issues surrounding public health (Agénor, 2020; Bowleg, 2012). Whether it be intersecting identities or systemic health disparities, bringing the invisible to light is a first step in disrupting normative conceptions of who (populations) and what (phenomena) is worthy of study (Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). There has been a push in recent years to extend intersectional theorization and methodologies into the sphere of quantitative, social scientific research (Bowleg& Bauer, 2016; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016; Richman & Zucker, 2019).

Identity-based disparities are prevalent in the U.S. education system. Given that burnout is associated with worsened well-being (Harrison, 1999; Koutsimani et al., 2019) and marginalized people have been experiencing stress and burnout at higher rates during the pandemic than societally privileged people (e.g., Aldossari & Chaudry, 2021; Evans, 2020; Haynor & Wilson, 2020; Moore et el., 2021; Ruprecht et al., 2021; Simien & Wallace, 2022), I advance the following hypotheses to guide this study:

H1: Educators with marginalized identities will face a) greater levels of stress and burnout, and b) lower levels of well-being during the pandemic than those with more societally privileged identities.

H2: Educators with marginalized identities will a) contract COVID-19 and b) face stigmatization at greater rates than those with more societally privileged identities.

Finally, I extend an intersectional approach to this study to fully capture the unique experiences of educators holding several marginalized identities. Akin to arguments made by scholars on the merits of intersectional approaches for advancing scholarship on health inequities (e.g., Richman & Zucker, 2019), I argue that an intersectional lens is not only appropriate, but necessary, to fully capture the complexity with which educators holding marginalized identities are experiencing the pandemic and coping with a host of academic-related stressors.

RQ1: Which intersections among educators' identities most shape their experience of stress, burnout, stigma, and well-being during COVID-19?

METHODS

Data Cleaning

Prior to determining the final sample and calculating demographic characteristics, traditional "best practices" for data cleaning (e.g., Osborne, 2013) were employed to screen the data for possible concerns pertaining to quality, missingness, and representativeness. Data cleaning was conducted in several stages. I worked with the survey software company to iteratively replace 175 cases through traditional data cleaning procedures, which involved a data scrubbing service through Qualtrics and me personally cleaning the data following the aforementioned established, yet outdated, "best practices" that call for data that are low quality, missing, and misrepresentative to be removed from the dataset and replaced with "higher quality" data by refielding the survey to additional participants. Specifically, data were replaced when (a) the duration to complete survey was greater than three standard deviations above/below mean, (b) extensive straightlining occurred (i.e., 14 or more of the same response chosen sequentially), (c) illogical combinations of responses were present (i.e., reverse-coded and regular-coded items have same answer back-to-back within a scale designated as a data quality check measure), (d) irrelevant open-ended responses were provided to describe the main education-related stressor (e.g., "very stressor," "Walmart is a good place to work at," "Dana burger"), and (e) data were missing. While missing data, alone, did not constitute a sufficient reason for removing individual cases, missing data were permissible as a data cleaning and replacement parameter by Qualtrics in the presence of other indications of "low quality" data as described in reasons a-d, above.

The final sample size was equivalent for the original/raw data ($N = 450$) and the iteratively cleaned data ($N = 449$); however, the original sample reflected far more sociodemographic diversity and seemed to capture the experiences of marginalized educators with greater frequency than the cleaned dataset. Of note, the original sample consisted of a greater percentage of educators who identify as Black or African American (13.3% vs. 9.8%), Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish (18.7% vs. 14.0%), and Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual (LGB; 12.0% vs. 9.3%). Additionally, more educators (17.6% vs. 14.3%) reported contracting COVID-19 in the original dataset, so there is greater insight into the experiences with stigmatization that educators have faced pertaining to COVID-19. Taken together, these patterns seem to indicate traditional data cleaning processes introduce systematic bias because the cases that were replaced reflect a disproportionate number of racial, ethnic, and sexual minority individuals that one would not expect from chance

alone. Based on empirical evidence documenting the potential misreporting of sensitive information out of fear of social repercussions (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007) and increased stereotype threat among minority respondents (Steele & Aronson, 1995), it is likely that patterns of missing or seemingly low-quality data are driven by engrained, systematic privilege of societally normative identities. Given that the present investigation is focused on intersectionality and the decentering of White, non-Hispanic, heteronormative experiences, the original dataset was used for all analyses.

Sample

To be eligible for participation in this study, people had to be educators (i.e., K-12 teachers, educators in post-secondary education, and graduate teaching assistants) in the United States who were 18 years of age or older. A national sample of 450 educators with a mean age of 37.4 years (*SD* = 13.3) was obtained through data collection efforts via Qualtrics spanning March and April of 2021. Complete sociodemographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 450)

Sample Characteristics	n	%	M	SD	Range
Age	448		37.42	13.34	18-77
Sex Assigned at Birth					
Female	238	52.9			
Male	211	46.9			
Intersex	1	0.2			
Gender					
Woman	230	51.1			
Man	210	46.7			
Transgender	4	0.9			
Non-binary	4	0.9			
Another gender	2	0.4			
Sexual Orientation					
Lesbian	6	1.3			
Gay	12	2.7			
Bisexual	36	8.0			
Straight/heterosexual	387	86.0			
Another orient./prefer not to answer	9	2.0			
Race (select all that apply)					
White	350	77.8			
Black or African American	60	13.3			
Asian	29	6.4			
American Indian or Alaska Native	9	2.0			
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	6	1.3			
Another race not listed	17	3.8			
Ethnicity					
Non-Hispanic	365	81.1			
Hispanic	58	12.9			
Latino	15	3.3			
Spanish	11	2.4			
Highest Degree Earned					
Associate degree	50	11.1			
Bachelor's degree	178	39.6			
Master's degree	171	38.0			
Doctoral or Professional degree	50	11.1			
Title/Position					
Graduate Student	19	4.2			
Teacher (K-12)	249	55.3			Cont'd

Sample Characteristics	n	%	M	SD	Range
Special Education or ESL Teacher	57	12.7			
Adjunct Professor/Lecturer	28	6.2			
(Visiting) Assistant Professor	30	6.7			
Associate or Full Professor	67	14.8			
Type of School					
Elementary	107	23.8			
Middle	84	18.7			
High	118	26.2			
Community College	33	7.3			
Private University	54	12.0			
Public University	44	9.8			
Other	10	2.2			
Marital Status					
Never Married	144	32.0			
Married	263	58.4			
Widowed, Divorced, Separated	43	9.6			
Annual Household Income					
Less than $50,000	74	16.4			
$50,000 - $99,999	194	43.1			
$100,000 - $149,999	109	24.2			
$150,000 and above	58	12.9			
Prefer not to say	15	3.3			
Number of Dependents					
0	182	40.4			
1	60	13.3			
2	96	21.3			
3 or more	112	24.9			
Number of Years Teaching					
Less than 1 year – 4 years	159	35.3			
5-9 years	108	24.0			
10 or more years	183	40.7			
Contract COVID?					
No	371	82.4			
Yes	79	17.6			
Inform Employer?					
No	8	10.1			
Yes	71	89.9			
Receive Time Off?					
Paid time off	60	75.9			
Unpaid time off	13	16.5			
No time off	6	7.6			

Procedure

Prior to data collection, ethics approval was obtained (STUDY00017084) from the Office of Research Protections at a large northeastern university. Educators across the United States were recruited using Qualtrics survey software. Upon meeting the eligibility criteria and providing consent to participate in the study, participants were first asked to respond to an open-ended question identifying the main academic stressor

they faced since the start of COVID-19. Then, participants responded to a series of closed-ended questions derived from empirically validated scales of perceived stress, burnout, and mental well-being. After providing comprehensive demographic information, participants were asked to share their experience with COVID-19, specifically whether they had (a) contracted COVID-19, (b) chosen to disclose that information to their employer, and (c) received (un)paid time off. Participants who self-identified as having contracted COVID-19 were provided with a series of questions measuring felt and enacted stigma. Those who did not self-identify as contracting COVID-19 were directed to the "End of Survey" message. The screening questions and consent form were the only questions that required a response from the subjects; all remaining survey questions utilized the "Request Response" feature. Survey completion took approximately 10 minutes, with slight variation based on survey logic and branching.

Measures

Perceived Stress
Stress was measured using Cohen et al.'s (1983) Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), a five-point, Likert-type scale consisting of 14 items (e.g., "*how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do*"). The PSS is a well-validated and widely used scale (e.g., Cohen, 1986; Lee, 2012) measuring stress appraisals. Cohen and colleagues (1983) drew on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) conceptualization of secondary stress appraisals when creating the items in the PSS to capture people's analysis and evaluation of the resources and strategies to them for coping with stress. Psychometric assessment of the PSS has yielded a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .84-.86 (Cohen et al., 1983). Responses range from "1" (*never*) to "5" (*always*), with greater values representing a higher degree of stress in the present study ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 0.52$, $\alpha = .80$).

Burnout
The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Scale (MBI-ES; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 1986) was employed to assess the frequency with which participants have experienced three core components of educator burnout: emotional exhaustion ($n = 9$), depersonalization ($n = 5$), and reduced personal accomplishment ($n = 8$). Sample scale items reflecting each component of burnout include: emotional exhaustion (e.g., "*I have felt emotionally drained from my work*"), depersonalization (e.g., "*I've become more callous toward students since the transition to remote instruction*"), and reduced personal accomplishment (e.g., "*I have accomplished many worthwhile things as an educator since the transition to remote instruction;*" items reverse coded). Responses to this five-point, Likert-type scale range from "1" *(never)* to "5" (*always*). The MBI-ES has demonstrated strong

psychometric properties (e.g., Gold, 1984; Iwanicki & Schwab, 1981), with established reliability values as follows: emotional exhaustion (α = .88 - .90), depersonalization (α = .74 - .76), reduced personal accomplishment (α = .72 - .76), and composite burnout (α = .83 - .84). All subscales in the present study possessed high internal consistency: emotional exhaustion (α = .91), depersonalization (α = .87), and reduced personal accomplishment (α = .86). A composite variable was created by averaging scores across the three burnout subscales (*n* = 22 items) such that larger values indicate greater levels of burnout (*M* = 2.72, *SD* = 0.61, α = .89).

Mental Well-being

Participants' mental well-being was assessed using the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (Lamers et al., 2011). Sample scale items capturing the frequency with which educators have experienced various indicators of positive mental well-being include: emotional well-being (e.g., "*feeling happy*"), social well-being (e.g., "*feeling that you had something important to contribute to society*"), and psychological well-being (e.g., "*feeling that your life has a sense of direction and meaning to it*") well-being. Responses for this five-point, Likert-type scale range from "1" (*never*) to "5" (*always*). Empirical tests of the MHC-SF demonstrate strong internal consistency for all (sub)scales reflecting positive mental well-being: emotional well-being (*n* = 3, α =.83), social well-being (*n* = 5, α = .74), psychological well-being (*n* = 6, α = .83), and composite mental well-being (*n* = 14, α = .89). All subscales in the present study possessed high internal consistency: emotional well-being (α = .83), social well-being (α = .84), psychological well-being (α = .85), A composite variable was created by averaging participants' scores across all three types of well-being, with higher values indicating greater levels of overall mental well-being (*M* = 3.50, *SD* = 0.73, α = .92).

Stigma

Participants' perceptions of stigma were assessed using Boyle's (2018) Felt Stigma scale and Enacted Stigma scale. The Felt Stigma scale is a four-item measure that provides insight into participants' personal assessment of how their potentially stigmatized experience (i.e., COVID-19 diagnosis) would be perceived by others (e.g., "*I have been fearful that others would reject me if they knew about my COVID-19 diagnosis*"). Participants' experiences with being stigmatized by others were measured using the Enacted Stigma scale, which is a 15-item measure assessing the actual instances of stigmatization that educators have experienced (e.g., "*People have discriminated against me because of my COVID-19 diagnosis*"). Responses to both of these five-point, Likert-type scales ranged from "1" (*strongly disagree*) to "5" (*strongly agree*). These two scales have strong psychometric properties (Boyle, 2018), with reliabilities of .86 and .94 for the

felt stigma and enacted stigma scales, respectively. Composite variables were created such that larger values indicate greater levels of felt stigma ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.28$, α = .88) and enacted stigma ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.34$, α = .98).

Main Academic Stressor
Participants were presented with one open-ended question asking them to "*describe the main stressor you felt related to your teaching or academic life.*" Open-ended responses reflected a variety of stressors, including difficulties with work/life balance, student engagement, job (in)security, and converting lesson plans into meaningful online activities and assessments.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses
Bivariate correlations were assessed in SPSS to examine the associations among the dependent variables of interest prior to analyzing the ways in which aspects of identity were related to experiences of stress, burnout, well-being, and stigma. Perceived stress was positively associated with burnout and negatively associated with mental well-being. Burnout was negatively associated with well-being and positively associated with both felt and enacted stigma. Mental well-being was positively associated with felt stigma, and felt stigma was positively associated with enacted stigma. The correlation matrix is provided in Table 2.

Table 2
Correlation matrix for all variables of interest in the present study

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceived Stress	---				
2. Burnout	.57**	---			
3. Well-being	-.54**	-.43**	---		
4. Felt Stigma	.08	.34**	.32**	---	
5. Enacted Stigma	.00	.41**	.20	.83**	---

$N = 450$.
**$p < .01$.

A series of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were also run to examine whether the national trends in identity-based differences in income and title across educators is persistent through COVID-19. There was a significant effect of sex on income [$F(1, 448) = 13.71$, $p < .001$] and title [$F(1, 448 = 10.19$, $p = .002$], with people identifying as female earing less annually and having a lower title at their place of employment. There was a significant effect of race on income [$F(4, 449) = 5.27$, $p < .001$], with people identifying as White making significantly more money on an annual basis than people identifying as Black or another race (e.g., Pacific Islander) that is

often underrepresented. There was a significant effect of ethnicity [$F(3, 449)$ = 2.85, p = .037] on title, with people identifying as Latino having a higher title than people identifying as non-Hispanic. There was a significant effect of being a parent on both income [$F(3, 449)$ = 14.20, p < .001] and title [$F(3, 449)$ = 4.98, p = .002]. People having two or three children had a higher annual income and higher title than those with zero or one child(ren). However, mothers did not have a significantly different annual income or title than non-mothers, so the effects of being a parent on income and title are likely driven by fathers.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicted that people with a societally marginalized identity status would have higher levels of stress and burnout, and lower levels of well-being. A series of one-way ANOVAs were performed on each of the categorical-level identity characteristics, with variance assessed for the three dependent variables (i.e., stress, burnout, well-being). Results were mostly consistent with predictions. People identifying as female and/or a women had higher levels of stress and lower levels of well-being than males and/or men. Bisexual people had lower levels of well-being than heterosexual people. Mothers experienced higher levels of burnout than non-mothers. Interestingly, when considering parents as a whole, however, people identifying as a parent had higher levels of well-being than non-parents. There were no statistically significant effects of race or ethnicity. Results for H1 are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Hypothesis 1: Results from a Series of One-Way ANOVAs

Identity *Post hoc comparison*	Stress *F*-statistic *Mean diff. (SD)*	Burnout *F*-statistic *Mean diff. (SD)*	Well-being *F*-statistic *Mean diff. (SD)*
Sex	$F(1, 448) = 10.10**$	*ns*	$F(1, 448) = 10.00**$
Sexual Orientation *Bisexual-Heterosexual*	$F(3, 440) = 3.32*$ $M_{dif} = 0.27\ (.09)*$	*ns*	*ns*
Gender *Woman - Man*	$F(2, 447) = 5.86**$ $M_{dif} = 0.16\ (.05)**$	*ns*	$F(2, 447) = 4.53*$ $M_{dif} = -0.19\ (.07)*$
Race	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Ethnicity	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Children *3-0 children* *3-1 children* *3-2 children*	*ns*	*ns*	$F(3, 449) = 10.19***$ $M_{dif} = 0.47\ (.08)***$ $M_{dif} = 0.34\ (.11)*$ $M_{dif} = 0.31\ (.10)*$
Mother	*ns*	$F(1, 449) = 4.15*$	*ns*

Notes: Significant findings are included in the table. Full results are available upon request.

Sex categories include: Female, Male.

Sexual Orientation categories include: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Straight.

Gender categories include: Woman, Man, Transgender, Non-binary, or Queer.

Race categories include: White, Black, Asian, Another race (single), Multiracial.

Ethnicity categories include: Non-Hispanic, Spanish, Hispanic, Latino.

Children categories include: No children, 1 child, 2 children, 3 or more children.

Mother categories include: Yes, a Mother, Not a Mother.

$* p < .05$ $** p < .01$ $*** p < .001$

       Hypothesis 2 predicted that people with a societally marginalized identity status would have contracted COVID-19 at higher rates and have higher levels of felt stigma and enacted stigma. Chi-square analyses were performed to assess differences in the prevalence of contracting COVID-19, with significant differences identified based on race and ethnicity, but not sex, sexual orientation, gender, or parent/mother status. A series of one-way ANOVAs were performed on each of the identity characteristics, with variance assessed for felt stigma and enacted stigma. Results only showed

statistically significant differences in the experience of stigma for parents, with educators having three or more kids facing higher levels of felt and enacted stigma than people with one or no children. Results for H2 are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Hypothesis 2: Results from a Series of One-Way ANOVAs

Identity	Contract COVID-19	Felt Stigma	Enacted Stigma
Post hoc comparison	χ^2 statistic	*F*-statistic	*F*-statistic
	Likelihood Ratio (LR)	*Mean diff. (SD)*	*Mean diff. (SD)*
Sex	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Sexual Orientation	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Gender	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Race	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Ethnicity	$F(3, 450) = 12.81$**	*ns*	*ns*
	$LR = 11.43$**		
Children	*ns*	$F(3, 78) = 6.78$***	$F(3, 78) = 5.01$**
3-0 children		$M_{dif} = 1.34 (.32)$***	$M_{dif} = 1.20 (.34)$**
3-1 children		$M_{dif} = 1.27 (.45)$*	
Mother	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*

Notes: Significant findings are included in the table. Full results are available upon request. Chi-square analyses necessitated the dichotomization of variables (with binary variable coding outlined in the notes of Table 5). ANOVAs utilized categorical coding, as follows:

Sex categories include: Female, Male.

Sexual Orientation categories include: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Straight.

Gender categories include: Woman, Man, Transgender, Non-binary, or Queer.

Race categories include: White, Black, Asian, Another race (single), Multiracial.

Ethnicity categories include: Non-Hispanic, Spanish, Hispanic, Latino.

Children categories include: No children, 1 child, 2 children, 3 or more children.

Mother categories include: Yes, a Mother, Not a Mother.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Finally, intersections of identity were explored to understand which marginalized groups faced the highest levels of stress and burnout and biggest declines to well-being (RQ1). Identity characteristics were analyzed using Crosstabs in SPSS to determine feasible subgroupings based on sample size

and power. Given the unequal cell sizes across groups and issues of statistical power, identity variables were dichotomized. A multivariate analysis of variance (i.e., MANOVA; general linear model) was performed to test the ways in which people with intersectional identities have experienced stress, burnout, stigma, and well-being during the pandemic. Results indicate that experiences of stress were escalated for Queer Females, Non-White Females, Female Parents, Queer Female Parents, and Queer Hispanic Females. Well-being was jeopardized for Non-White Females, Non-White Women, Non-White Parents, Non-White Hispanic people, Non-White Female Parents, and Non-White Queer Hispanic people. Results for RQ1 are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Research Question 1: General Linear Model (MANOVA) Results for Intersectional Identities

Identity Combination	Stress *F*-statistic	Burnout *F*-statistic	Well-being *F*-statistic
Queer Female	$F(1, 444) = 4.99*$	*ns*	*ns*
Non-White Female	$F(1, 444) = 5.35*$	*ns*	$F(1, 444) = 12.21***$
Female Parent	$F(1, 444) = 3.44^{\dagger}$	*ns*	*ns*
Non-White Woman	*ns*	*ns*	$F(1, 444) = 4.71*$
Non-White Parent	*ns*	*ns*	$F(1, 444) = 7.93**$
Non-White and Hispanic	*ns*	*ns*	$F(1, 444) = 7.19**$
Queer Non-White Female	*ns*	*ns*	$F(1, 444) = 6.46*$
Queer Female Parent	$F(1, 444) = 4.64*$	*ns*	*ns*
Queer Hispanic Female	$F(1, 444) = 3.51^{\dagger}$	*ns*	*ns*
Non-White Female Parent	*ns*	*ns*	$F(1, 444) = 5.18*$
Queer Non-White Hispanic	*ns*	*ns*	$F(1, 444) = 4.04*$

Notes: Significant findings are included in the table. Full results are available upon request. Identity characteristics were dichotomized to allow for multiple comparisons.
Sex categories were coded as: 1 = Female, 0 = Male.
Sexual Orientation categories were coded as: 1 = Queer, 0 = Heterosexual.
Gender categories were coded as: 1 = Gender Minority, 0 = Cisgender.
Race categories were coded as: 1 = Non-White, 0 = White.
Ethnicity categories were coded as: 1 = Hispanic, 0 = Non-Hispanic
Children categories were coded as: 1 = Parent (i.e., have 1 or more children), 0=No children.

Mother categories were coded as: 1 = Mother, 0 = Not a Mother.

† *p* = .06   * *p* < .05   ** *p* < .01   *** *p* <.001

DISCUSSION

This study set out to critically examine the ways in which educational experiences and structures are shaped by social/relational frames (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) and power relations (Acker, 1990; Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020). Findings from this intersectional inquiry shed light on the dynamic and consequential outcomes of COVID-19 on educators' levels of stress and burnout, experiences of stigma, and mental well-being. Results of this study yield valuable insights for theory and practice by advancing scholarship on identity and well-being within the context of the U.S. education system during the global pandemic.

Theoretical Implications

There are several ways in which this research supports, and is supported by, existing theoretical frameworks. When adopting a social/relational perspective to the role of identity within the power-laden academic context, it is vital to consider how identity characteristics guide educators' perceptions, interactions, and health outcomes (Acker, 1990; Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). The present study demonstrates how the effects of COVID-19 have disproportionately affected educators holding one or more marginalized identities, which extant literature identifies is likely a result of social vulnerability and systemic inequity (e.g., Gaynor & Wilson, 2020). Furthermore, this research reinforces the necessity of adopting intersectional approaches to the study of public health (crises) (Bowleg, 2012), and the power of adopting "a queer sociological" approach (Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020) to best understand how power relations underlie inequality in academic spaces.

In examining these data, I found that the effects of the pandemic on educators' health and functioning were not consistent across identity groups. Analyses revealed that the intersections of sex, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and parent status often produced declines in well-being and increases in perceptions of stress. Furthermore, investigating the intersections of identities produced findings that would not have been yielded with traditional (i.e., singular) approaches to identity. Race, alone, did not exert an effect on well-being, stress, burnout, or stigma. However, race exerted a significant effect on stress and well-being when examining the differential effects of intersectional identities on the outcomes of interest. If this study had stopped after conducting singular identity analyses, the nuanced and profound experiences of people with multifaceted identities would have been completely missed. Despite a wealth of messaging focused on collective efficacy to curtail the spread of COVID-19, the results of this present study,

and the pandemic more broadly, highlight that "we're not all in this together" (Bowleg, 2020, p. 1267).

Although not the main theoretical focus of the study, results of this inquiry echo some of the tenets of critical race pedagogy (CRP), which is "an analysis of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination in education that relies mostly on the perceptions, experiences, and counterhegemonic practices of educators of color" (Lynn, 1999). Although CRP focuses on the education of students, it reasons that CRP might be applicable to academic institutions and educational structures of power. Similar to how CRP combines tenets of critical race theory (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995; Matsuda et al., 1993) and critical pedagogy theory (Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 1998), I argue that adapting a critical intersectional approach to the structures and principles that uphold the American educational system would merge influential theories that aim to address identity-based inequities through a comprehensive approach. In other words, research would explore beyond what is taught and by/to whom, to encompass the perpetuation of systems of oppression in academia. To this point, the sociodemographic characteristics of students reflect a growing diversity in the American student body over the past few decades, but diversity among educators has not shown similar growth (Ramlackhan et al., 2022). Working toward uprooting gendered, classed, and raced education systems would contribute to shifting the landscape of education and paving the way for marginalized educators and students, alike, to be integrated into a supportive academic system. By moving away from the historical educational system that is engrained in identity-based deficit models (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000), intersectionality of identity may be embraced, and a diverse, reformed educational system may flourish.

Practical Implications

This study underscores the dynamic relationship between identity pride and prejudice that exists in the American educational system (Anonymous, 2024)[1]. To best support educators during prolonged stressors, we must first recognize that each person is comprised of a unique set of identities and experiences. Furthermore, it is imperative that the education system is reflective of the communities and individuals that are being served. Put differently, schools should be reflections of communities; they should mirror the social values, norms, and identities of the people who inhabit the larger community (Peña et al., 2021). As such, schools can be sites of transformation and support for members of the surrounding communities. Intentionally incorporating social justice principles and upholding individual

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[1] I would like to thank Reviewer 2 for providing me with the language of "identity pride and prejudice" to poignantly highlight the duality of experiences within the U.S. education system and illustrate the value of intersectional research.

and cultural dignity across social systems can help foster dialogue and the creation of safer spaces (Ramlackhan et al., 2022). There are many ways that schools can be culturally responsive and support diverse educators. Among these strategies are (1) investing in educators and providing support to meet their students' needs and their own needs (e.g., family, identity, well-being), (2) recruiting and retaining diverse educators, (3) "flipping the system" by valuing and promoting people from minoritized identities, and (4) intentionally providing leadership opportunities and avenues for meaningful collaboration (Peña et al., 2021). However, it is crucial to be mindful when implementing opportunities for leadership and career advancement not to veer into the realm of identity taxation (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2011). In other words, actions need to be taken to ensure that educators with marginalized identities are not expected to perform additional unpaid labor under the guise of professional growth (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2011).

Supporting diverse educators is an investment that reaps major dividends. It is imperative that academic systems not only invest financial resources, but that they invest in the social and emotional well-being of educators and commit to structural reform (e.g., Peña et al., 2021). Educators regularly devote themselves to providing quality and supportive learning environments to their students, but they often experience minimal structural support to sustain their personal and professional well-being. Understanding the complexity of norms, stigmas, and the social construction of identities involves acknowledging the intersection of personal and professional experiences in shaping people's identities and driving the factors that can best support diverse educators (Ramlackhan et al., 2022). For example, having safe spaces to openly discuss challenges and support one another can provide educators with the opportunity to set aside the performative aspect of marginalized teachers maintaining safety in majority-dominant spaces (Ramlackhan et al., 2022).

As a final practical implication, this research could inform educational and public health policies, with the goal of making visible the inequities that persist across interactions, systems, and contexts. One place to start would be to address gendered organizations (Acker, 1990). There appears to be differential effects of parent sex on the outcomes of interest in the present study. For instance, mothers faced higher levels of burnout whereas parents, as a whole, experienced greater well-being and had higher incomes and job titles than non-parents. These patterns are echoed in the literature, with women often facing a motherhood penalty in the workplace with employers viewing mothers as employees who are committed to their family at the (presumed) detriment of their work life (i.e., committed parent equates to noncommitted employee), while fathers tend to experience a

fatherhood premium (i.e., committed parent equates to committed employee; Blair-Roy, 2003; Luhr, 2020).

Limitations

The results of the current study reflect larger trends in the literature; however, it is not without its limitations. The cross-sectional nature of these data limits the interpretations that can be made about the effects of identity on well-being and burnout. There are long-standing trends showcasing the disproportionate burdens of social and institutional stress placed on marginalized educators, such as women (Elliott & Blithe, 2021) and faculty of color (Simien & Wallace, 2022). Longitudinal research is warranted to assess the lasting impacts of coping with prolonged stressors for educators holding one or more marginalized identities.

Issues of sample size and statistical power emerged when exploring which intersections of identity most shape educators' experiences with stress, burnout, well-being, and stigma (RQ1). Although all identities included in my hypotheses were also included in my intersectional inquiry, I had to collapse response options into dichotomous variables to preserve statistical power. Although this decision allowed me to examine the intersections of two and three different identities at a time while still retaining all identity characteristics across these analyses, I did have to sacrifice the richness and descriptiveness of some of the identity variables. Employing quota sampling could be a useful strategy for ensuring cell sizes are large enough for complex comparisons.

Another limitation lies in the isolated health context of the study. Although this present inquiry focuses on the heightened structural and interpersonal challenges experienced by marginalized educators, it does not explicitly examine other sociopolitical stressors beyond COVID-19. A social justice pandemic has been parallel to the COVID-19 pandemic, with multiple pathways of inequity present during 2020 and 2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic originated, and data were collected. During this time, the Violence Against Women Act had lapsed (ACLU, 2023b) and many anti-LGBTQ rights bills were introduced across the country (ACLU, 2023a). Social justice movements, such as the Black Lives Matters movement (Garza et al., 2013), held prominence in the social sphere to protest police brutality following the murder of George Floyd. The past few years have been hallmarked by the intersection of three pandemics: social justice, incivility, and COVID-19 (Hammond & Parker, 2020). Although the present study focused on one pandemic at the time, we know that discrimination and threats to safety and personhood have been occurring across a variety of settings, all of which contributes to worsened health outcomes (e.g., Williams et al., 2019).

Future Research

  People possessing one or more marginalized identities are often regarded as less resilient when combating public health disasters based on a host of interactional and systemic factors, such as racism and social inequities that limit access to quality care (e.g., Evans, 2020). Future research would benefit from studying how community connectedness, stigma resistance, and collective resilience could be protective factors in the face of adversity and prolonged public health crises (e.g., Firmin et al., 2017). Furthermore, scholarship should critically engage with what constitutes "best practice" in research methodology to address systematic biases not only in social/public spheres, but in the principles used to guide sampling and data cleaning. There are methodological challenges to conducting intersectional research (Bowleg, 2008), but the opportunity to decenter norms of Whiteness and heteronormativity and embrace multiplicity of identity can spur profound change.

  Another future research direction pertains to who is the subject of intersectional pedagogical research. There is a growing body of literature examining the effects of microaggressions and other discriminatory experiences in academia (e.g., Boyle et al., 2022; Misawa, 2010), but the majority of (intersectional) scholarship still seems to focus on the student experience. While this research path is certainly valid and much needed, scholarship would also benefit from expanding research inquiry into the experiences of educators and the effects of social conditions on their well-being inside and outside of the classroom.

  Finally, integrating sociopolitical events into study designs and analyses, either as variables of interest or contextual factors that shape study findings, would be beneficial across disciplines. At the time of this writing, some progress has been made to protect human rights, such as through the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (The White House, 2022). There are still many areas of human rights, such as reproductive rights (e.g., Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade) and LGBTQ rights (e.g., limiting access to gender affirming care), that have regressed since the data were collected for this study. Over the course of the nation's history, we have witnessed landmark wins and losses in the fight for human rights. The specific triumphs and challenges vary across time, but the fact remains that the social climate will continue to impact well-being.

CONCLUSION

This intersectional study demonstrates the disproportionate effects of coping with prolonged stress on educators holding one or more marginalized identities in the United States. Both identity pride and prejudice tend to exist in the American educational system (Brannon & Lin, 2021), making reflections on the role of identity in personal and professional spheres

simultaneously empowering and fraught with historical oppression. I argue that people are not a single identity, defining experience, or proverbial "box to check;" rather, everyone is a unique combination of multiple identities and experiences. When we are seen as whole people that shape, and are shaped by, social forces, sources of oppression can begin to be dismantled. By challenging the status quo, we can begin to uproot and unearth the very sources of power that serve to oppress the voices, experiences, and lives of those who are marginalized.

Rather than repeating "hollow platitude[s] of solidarity designed to placate the privileged," (Bowleg, 2020, p. 917), let us truly come together and collectively acknowledge the value inherent to each person and the richness of experiences and identities that each person embodies. Collectively celebrating the value inherent to each person is a touchstone for meaningful change, a change which can be fully appreciated by acknowledging the richness of experience and identity that each person embodies.

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