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Dysconscious Racism and Racial Microaggressions in the Public School System

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DYSCONSCIOUS RACISM AND RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS IN THE PUBLIC
SCHOOL SYSTEM

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Organization and Leadership Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Ryan Lee
San Francisco
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ABSTRACT

Dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions are two forms of racism that exist in public schools today. Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that “tacitly accepts the dominant White norms and privileges” in a given environment while racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace indignations to the target person or group whether it was intentional or unintentional (Sue et al., 2009). Teachers of color face these subtle forms of racism within their own workplaces.

The researcher conducted a qualitative study by interviewing six public school K-6 teachers of color of different ethnicities who teach in various school districts across the South Bay Area, in California to explore and analyze their own experiences with dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions. As an educator of color himself, the researcher was interested in comparing the testimonies of these six teachers to the experiences he witnessed, living and working in the same communities to those interviewed.

As a result, five out of the six participants in the study affirmed and recounted the presence of dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions within their workplaces, among their colleagues and school district officials. In order for progress to be made, the researcher found there needs to be racial consciousness among educators, more CRTs (culturally relevant teachers), a refinement in teacher hiring practices, an introspection of cultural values of school populations, and training and professional development.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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December 11, 2020
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all schoolteachers and fellow educators of color. It is a constant battle you are fighting as minorities in an education system that perpetually fails to recognize your identity. Your voice counts. Thank you for the work you do that positively impacts the young lives of so many individuals. All across our communities, there is a child that needs you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It has been quite the journey, to say the least, since I first even considered delving into this particular research topic. My personal and professional life has dramatically changed on multiple levels throughout this period, and needless to say I am forever indebted to every single person that has either been in my life, or entered my life at some point as a graduate student and researcher. I truly could not have done this all by myself, and so I want to immensely thank those mentioned below.

A big thank you goes to my few but very close friends. These guys have been with me since high school, and some even before, and we remain life-long buddies to this day. Thank you for being understanding during those times when I couldn't "hang out," or for making accommodations on my behalf so we can get together on random Saturdays after I would get out of class or finish my research or assignments. I learned that one definitely needs close friends, or even one close friend, if they choose to go down this path in their educational career. Therefore, I consider myself fortunate to have these friends stick by side over the past couple of years.

Thank you to all my former students. I have been blessed as an elementary school teacher and principal, teaching and engaging with literally hundreds of children. Although I may never step foot into another public school again, you will always hold a special place in my heart for the rest of my life.

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CHAPTER I

Statement of Problem

We are living in unprecedented times in the history of our nation. Although we have entered the 21st century, and decades have passed since the civil rights movement, acts of racial injustice still permeate all parts of the country and exist within all domains, including the education system. In addition to the shocking fact that overt acts of racism still occur today, twenty first century racism also exists in more subtle forms of dysconscious racism and racial microaggression. To define these terms, dysconscious racism is a form of racism that “tacitly accepts the dominant White norms and privileges” in a given environment while racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace indignations to the target person or group whether it was intentional or unintentional (Sue et al., 2009).

Although it is far more challenging to find sufficient evidence of research like the way overt discrimination (e.g. segregation) may offer, nonetheless racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism indeed exist. One recent example from our nation is the tragic death of George Floyd, which has sparked worldwide protests against police brutality, as people voiced their outrage and demanded justice for African Americans who are repeatedly targeted with unjustified force.

This incident, and others like it, have divided our country into those who believed that he was treated with racism through biased police brutality, versus those who believed that he was not being treated based on his race, and that the police officer was simply performing his duties as he would with any other race. This type of scenario is where dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions can help to explain for the subtleties of racism. It is tangibly more difficult to

validate through hard evidence, but the nation has felt this type of racism for some time, and their anecdotal voice of injustice has broken forth.

Given its importance in shedding light in the 21st century to this subtle form of racism in the U.S., this study examines dysconscious racism and racial microaggression in the K-12 public school system, specifically focusing on the “dysconsciousness” (King, 1991) and microaggressions teachers of color face from their colleagues and district/central office personnel.

Background and Need

In examining past literature on racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism in the U.S. education system, the researcher has found support in higher education context mainly where the minority faculty is surrounded by a majority of White students. For example, Helton (2019) raises awareness on the challenges faculty of color experience, and how a lot of it goes unnoticed by White students. Han (2012) recounts her experiences as a minority professor interacting with her racial “others.” Pettit (2019) details the struggles and isolation minority faculty members feel at PWIs (predominately white institutions). The researcher chose to focus on teachers of color instead of students because there has fortunately been a slew of research dedicated towards understanding racism in teacher-student relationships, and steps towards transformations in this area has been progressive. For example, Kim and Sax (2009) examined whether the effects of faculty interaction on student outcomes vary by gender, race, and social class. Parker and Trolan (2019) used data to examine the association between student interactions with faculty and their perceptions on the racial climate on campus. Sue, Rivera, Watkins, Kim, Kim, and Williams (2011) analyzed the classroom experiences of faculty of color when difficult conversations around race occurred.

This previous body of literature was valuable in establishing ground on the topic of these subtle acts of racism in the U.S. higher education system that are faced even by the faculty. While research on racism within education has mainly focused on the experiences of students of color, much less attention has been paid to the overall racial climate of schools or racism's impact on K-12 teachers of color (Jay 2009; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020) In this study, the researcher explored` new territories in understanding dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions faced by teachers in a K-12 education environment, especially in an educational environment where people of color is the majority. K-12 teachers already face significant challenges, ranging from adapting to newly adopted curricula and standards to serving the countless academic, social, and emotional needs of their students on a daily basis. As a teacher of color, an added challenge is navigating the school system as a minority, such that one's own race or culture is never adequately acknowledged, let alone celebrated. Furthermore, teachers of color face these issues of race in the education system on multiple layers simultaneously, within their classrooms and also at the school or district level (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020) The research argues that these subtleties can even become even more easily dismissed in communities where the people of color are still the majority. According to Vaught and Castagno (2008), "White institutions create power hierarchies with or without the immediate presence of White students.

Teachers of color bring a much needed and unique contribution to the teaching field, and there are clear benefits to their role in schools. According to Sleetzer (2001), "teachers of color generally are more committed to multicultural teaching, social justice, and providing children of color with an academically challenging curriculum." However, teachers of color still work in school systems where dysconscious racism and acts of racial microaggression occur. Schools and classrooms are microcosms of society and primary sites of knowledge construction and

production, and teachers are ones to help students navigate how we think and feel about race and racism (Banks, 2004; Rudnick, 2019).

Given these points, the researcher focused on examining dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions teachers may be facing specifically in K-12 public school districts. This was important to study because there is limited research done around this specific phenomenon targeting K-12 school teachers, and the possible presence of racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism in schools today would be detrimental to both teachers and students of color, who are already underrepresented in a variety of ways. The South Bay Area in California, US was chosen for this study, where the majority of the students are the minority. The researcher has personal connections in this area, which helped lessen some of the fears from the interviewees interviewing given the sensitivity of the topic.

Another feature of this location is that while the students are minority, the majority of the teachers are White, which is not uncommon in California public schools. In the state of California, approximately 75% of all K-12 public school students are minorities. However, only 39% of K-12 public school teachers are people of color (California Department of Education, 2020). These teachers are also decision makers who daily shape and influence students' educational experiences. The composition of schoolteacher demography does not reflect that of the culturally diverse student population. Thus, this demography also created an interesting dynamic where the teachers may have been vulnerable to face racism even more so from their colleagues than the students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions in K-12 schools, through the testimony of teachers of color who lived

through possible racism in the workplace in the South Bay Area in California. Teachers can offer a narrative of their experiences that only they are able to provide, as they play a unique and special role in schools. Schoolteachers of color are obligated, to some extent, to conform to a system that was built upon the ideas, fundamental beliefs, and values of cultures different from their own. It was the researcher's intent to unveil the different types of racial microaggressions that teachers face in a possibly dysconscious environment, and ultimately give a voice to those who feel unheard due to their race and ethnic background.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework applied in this research was Critical Race Theory (CRT). The CRT movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado, Richard & Stefancic, Jean, 2017). Lynn (1999) defines CRT as “a legal counter discourse generated by legal scholars of color who sought to inject the issue of racial oppression into the debate about the law and society.” CRT emerged as a response to criticisms of critical legal studies, a theoretical approach that while concerned about how law itself helped to maintain societal inequity, failed to address how the construct of race and the practice of racism operated in these processes (Brown, 2014). Scholars have adopted CRT in various disciplinary areas, including education, to explore the nature of race and racism (Brown 2014; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Solórzano 1997).

The use of CRT in education is based upon racial inequalities in schooling and centers the experiences of people of color, and calls for a focus on social justice (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). Furthermore, “CRT is an explanatory framework that accounts for the role of race and racism in education and works toward identifying and challenging racism as a larger goal of identifying and challenging all forms of subordination” (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015).

Critical Race Theory plays a key role in examining racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism, as it creates the framework for discussions on this topic. It offers an explanation of the phenomena of racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism as it provides a legal standpoint on the issue of racial injustice, and analyzes the power and privilege dominant groups have over minority groups. CRT allows minorities to better describe racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism, and further enhances the concepts of racial injustices experienced by victims. CRT stimulates the conversation about racism within education, and ultimately highlights unfair practices against minorities or people of color and “challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

The CRT tool of *whiteness as property* was explored in this study by analyzing the subgroups of school administrators and district offices and personnel. Whiteness as property is the “legitimation of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of white privilege and domination” (Harris 1993; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Whiteness as property is a notion that reflects the embodiment of Whiteness with the exclusive rights to freedom, to the enjoyment of certain privileges, and to the ability to draw advantage from these rights (Brown 2014; Harris 1993; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). One component of Whiteness as property that is critical to our understanding of this CRT tool in K-12 education is ‘the continued right to determine meaning’ (Brown 2014; Harris 1993). The researcher suggests that the phenomenon of whiteness as property within these hierarchal institutions lead to racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism in K-12 education.

Research Questions

- In what ways do schoolteachers of color experience racial microaggressions in the workplace?
- In what ways do schoolteachers of color experience dysconscious racism in the workplace?
- What systems of support addressing culture and diversity are in place for teachers of color, if any?

Educational Significance

This research is valuable and important because of the direct impact it has on both K-12 teachers and students of color. The study addresses race and the potential racial injustices educators face. Teachers of color are desperately needed in the profession, and the goal of educational employers (i.e. school districts) should be to recruit and retain minority teachers. According to Endo (2015), “the shortage of teachers of color relative to the growing number of racially diverse K-12 students of color has been a contentious point of concern among educational stakeholders. A recent report titled *A State-by-State Analysis of Teachers of Color* notes that while students of color nationally account for over 40 % of the total K-12 student population, only 17 % of K-12 teachers are also of color.” A lack of teachers of color has a negative effect on students of color, as Endo (2015) notes: “the lack of racial diversity among classroom teachers means that K-12 students of color do not have frequent contact with adult role models who understand their communities, cultural norms, and experiences with racial discrimination.” Addressing the topics of racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism in a K-12 setting can help raise awareness among schools and school officials, which it is hoped to motivate further efforts toward equitable change.

Definition of Terms

- Critical Race Theory (CRT): a movement involving a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power.
- Dysconsciousness: an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as a given.
- Dysconscious Racism: a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges.
- Racial Microaggressions: brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The research focuses on racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism, and the impact they can have on teacher of color in K-12 education. The literature review covers the effects these forms of racism have had on individuals in the field of education, as either working professionals or students. Racial microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, and Marta, 2009). People of color may experience these microaggressions on a daily basis, and they leave victims helpless and frustrated. Often times, acts of racial microaggression are unintentional, and perpetrators may not be aware of the harm they cause. According to Sue et al. (2009), “people of color report that their lives are filled with incidents of racial microaggressions and that their well-intentioned White brothers and sisters are generally unaware that they have committed an offensive racial act” (Sue et al., 2009).

Although this act of racism may seem inconsequential from an outsider’s perspective, its consequences for people of color can have a lasting negative impact on their lives. As Sue et al. (2009) state, “studies reveal, however, that racial microaggressions, while seemingly trivial in nature, have major consequences for persons of color: (a) They assail the mental health of recipients; (b) create a hostile and invalidating campus climate; (c) perpetuate stereotype threat; (d) create physical health problems; and (e) lower work productivity and problem-solving abilities. Far from being benign slights, racial microaggressions have major detrimental consequences for people of color.”

Dysconscious racism is another form of racism that “tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness” (King, 1991). Furthermore, “dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (King, Joyce E., 1991). Similar to racial microaggressions, this form of racism may be silent in nature and difficult for victims to identify or prove. Individuals impacted by dysconscious racism may be members of organizations that perpetuate these White norms and privileges, creating a system of racial injustice.

Dialogue is similarly important when addressing dysconscious racism. Jackson (1999) notes an example that encouraged her students to self-explore their own cultural identities, and share their experiences with their peers:

“In my classes, I encourage students to share information about their ethnic backgrounds. In the small group sharing process, they see similarities as well as differences between themselves and each other. An added bonus is that they learn a lot about history through their shared personal stories. The stories are innumerable and illuminating” (Jackson, 1999).

Racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism are typically not deliberate, malicious acts or behaviors toward people of color. Rather, they can be subtle and quiet, and over time turn into accepted forms of treatment and exchange between two or more parties. According to Allen, Scott & Lewis, 2013, microaggressions affect all marginalized groups and are felt through environmental cues as well as verbal and nonverbal hidden messages that serve to invalidate

one's experiential reality and perpetuate feelings of inferiority.” For victims, microaggressions are often difficult to measure or describe when they occur. They create an unsettling feeling of race-based injustice and leave victims helpless and frustrated. Dysconscious racism is the result of norms and beliefs that fail to analyze the racial injustices within a given organization or body. Much like an infection or health issue, it worsens over time if left untreated.

Background of Racial Microaggressions and K-12 School Teachers

The concept of microaggressions first emerged in the 1970s, based upon discrimination against African Americans. This concept of “microaggression” was used to refer to unintentional discriminations against African Americans, such as subtle insults and diminutives. In 1974, Pierce expounded on the concept, writing, “These assaults to black dignity and black hope are incessant and cumulative. Any single one may be gross.” Explicitly linking microaggressions to “racism,” Pierce (1974) argued that they were “the major vehicle for racism in this country ... offenses done to blacks by whites in this sort of gratuitous never-ending way” (Hughey et al., 2017). The researchers also note that although microaggressions may appear insignificant compared to more severe, individually targeted acts of discrimination, their cumulative impact can be just as harmful. Thus, microaggressions are “mini-disasters” that threaten “stability and peace” (Hughey et al., 2017).

Teachers of color are faced with the challenging task of navigating the school system while considering their own culture and the systematic practices and norms within an institution. According to Endo (2015), teachers of color must “negotiate school cultures that mirror societal dynamics including unresolved interracial tensions that are fueled by ongoing disagreements about how race and racism have impacted the lives of historically underrepresented populations of color.” As mentioned earlier, teachers of color must navigate “colorblind” school systems that

do not address or embrace cultural diversity within student or staff populations and do not acknowledge the importance of recognizing different ethnicities. In addition to this phenomenon, “data also revealed that teachers of Color experienced racial insults in their professional contexts, often referred to as racial microaggressions” (Kohli, 2018).

African American Teachers and Racial Microaggressions

There is a disproportionately low number of African American teachers in the country.

According to Brown (2019), “The ensuing absence of African American teachers at school sites and in classrooms across America is an unintended legacy of Brown v. Board of Education.”

Moreover, when looking at the teacher workforce demographics by race and gender, Black male teachers comprise only 2% of the national teacher workforce, while 17% of students in our public schools are Black. For children in public schools today there is a great chance that they may never have a Black male educator (Goings and Bianco, 2016).

Even among the low percentage of African American teachers, it has been noted that “African American teachers report that they experience tension resulting from being treated as outsiders, pressure to conform to the organizations’ prescribed norm, and feelings of having to prove professional competency and worth” (Brown, 2019). This plays a major role in the low number of African American teachers, as racial microaggressions can be a deterrent to enter the teaching profession.

Microaggressions Leading to Teacher Push-Out

The racial microaggressions TOCs (teachers of color) face eventually lead to a high number of teachers exiting the field, feeling pushed out of the profession due to unhealthy work conditions that affect their job satisfaction. According to Navarrao et al. (2019),

TOCs experience racial microaggressions, more direct forms of racism in their preservice

programs and schools, and/or isolation as being the only TOC (or one of few TOCs) on their school campus, often amplifying the exhaustion they face when advocating for better working and learning conditions for their students.

The well-being of TOCs should be a concern, as issues concerning their racial identity and the failure among school staff and officials to adequately address this problem impact them.

Teachers of color

endure racial battle fatigue when combatting racial injustice in schools, resulting in a decrease in their psychological, emotional, and physiological well-being. multiple structural and institutional factors such as poor administrative leadership, low status and wages of teaching (and subsequently, more promising job opportunities in other fields), exhaustion caused by changing preps, secondary emotional trauma, continued racial animus and job instability—all result in TOCs leaving the education field at a higher rate than their White counterparts. (Navarro et al., 2019)

Racial Microaggressions in Teacher Education Programs

Furthermore, TOCs in teacher education programs also experience racial microaggressions and do not feel validated as individuals of color who are assets to the field of education as members of their race, resulting in teachers being pushed out. Most preservice teachers of color experience instances of either prejudice or racism during the course of their teacher preparation programs (Brown, 2014). According to Tolbert and Eichelberger (2016), “teachers of color also reported that, in teacher education programs, their experiences are rarely elicited or valued; stereotypical or essentializing notions of Communities or Students of Color are often reinforced; and racial microaggressions are a key challenge to retention.”

Racial microaggressions are also embedded in teacher education programs, under the

guise of what is considered “professionalism.” According to Marom (2019),

As public servants, teachers are subjected to diverse professional expectations, from dress code to class management, student assessments, and communications with parents. Increasingly in many Western countries there is a neoliberal push to standardize and quantify professional criteria for teaching. Yet, professionalism is not an objective concept, but rather a manifestation of certain explicit and implicit assumptions grounded in certain worldviews.

Types of Racial Microaggressions

Three forms of racial microaggression have been identified by researchers: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation.

Microassaults

A microassault is an “explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (Sue, Derald Wing et al., 2007). These actions are defined more intentional and premeditated than other types of microaggression and can arguably be categorized alongside instances of overt racism: blatant and direct misconduct toward people of other races. Microassaults, though, are defined as being more private in nature, so that perpetrators are spared the threat of individual blame and accountability. According to Sue, Derald Wing et al., 2007, “microassaults are most similar to what has been called ‘old fashioned’ racism conducted on an individual level. They are most likely to be conscious and deliberate, although they are generally expressed in limited ‘private’ situations (micro) that allow the perpetrator some degree of anonymity.”

Microassaults can take place in various settings within a school. For example, researchers note that in an article highlighting Native American students and racial microaggressions in

schools, the authors state that “racially discriminatory microassaults were not limited to extracurricular hours or events; they continued within the walls of the schools. We heard multiple stories of racial discrimination from teachers, counselors, coaches, and school administrators. One elder told us of Native students being asked to leave the varsity team because they missed practice for ceremonial reasons. While other student-athletes missed practice for religious reasons, the coach told them [the Native students] they just weren’t ‘committed’ enough” (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2017, p. 36). Another example of microassaults in schools found in their study is discrimination in school discipline. “School discipline patterns were not only observed by community members but described as reinforcing negative stereotypes and creating difficult learning environments for the Native community’s young people. Furthermore, although not reported with high frequency, there were reports of conscious efforts to avoid documentation of racial disparities in discipline” (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2017).

Microinvalidations

Microinvalidations are “characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Sue, Derald Wing et al., 2007). In addition, they “refer to statements that distort, discount, or deny the impact of race and racism on individuals and in society, such as colorblind racial attitudes (i.e., not ‘seeing’ race) or adhering to the myth of meritocracy (i.e., believing hard work alone [and not race and ethnicity] determines success)” (Mekawi & Todd, 2018). Perpetrators are generally unconscious of their own microinvalidations.

Schools can also be guilty of microinvalidations, by negating the historical importance of certain minority groups and consequently failing to acknowledge and embrace particular races.

For example, the study conducted by Johnston-Goodstar and Roholt (2017) revealed a “generalized ignorance of Native American historical experiences within schools and the impact of this history on contemporary Indian life.” In addition, the voices of Native Americans have been silenced at schools. “Schools have also historically been places, as one community member noted, where American Indian young people have ‘no voice and are not so much included with things.’ Native community and youth interpretations of their experiences in school have been and often remain invalidated” (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2017).

Colorblindness

There are two types of colorblindness: color evasion and power evasion. “Color evasion refers to the denial of race and emphasis on ‘sameness’ across racial and ethnic groups. In contrast, power evasion involves intentional denial of systemic racism, going beyond merely ignoring and minimizing the construct of race” (Mekawi & Todd, 2018). Furthermore, colorblindness does not allow for teachers to discuss the depth and breadth of race and racism, maintaining and legitimating school culture and norms. Colorblind ideology suggests that systemic racism does not exist, that failure and success in school and life are matters of the individual, and that racial identities are not important markers of the experiences of individuals, communities, and societies (Rudnick, 2019)

Colorblindness is a form of a microinvalidation, as the act invalidates the race and cultural values of individuals, and denies the racial realities of ethnic minorities. According to Kim et al., 2018, “Colorblindness has also been positively linked to racism and strong denials of the existence of White privilege which negates the racial oppression that people of color experience. This is problematic given that this belief enables Whites to alienate people of color by denying their own group's privilege and negating the racial reality of ethnic minorities.”

Those who are colorblind may fail to recognize racial microaggressions when they occur and are unaware of the negative outcomes, thus “perpetuating these forms of subtle discrimination” (Kim et al., 2018).

In addition, individuals who take a color-blind perspective engage in the nonrecognition of race. By engaging in the nonrecognition of race or denying race, one still has to acknowledge racial differences before they can be ignored. Thus, people who are “racially color-blind” perceive race, and then pretend to ignore it. They engage in the practice of “noticing but not considering race.” This approach is problematic because ignoring or denying racial differences implies that race does not have any social or cultural meaning (DeCuir-Gunby & Norris W. Gunby, 2016)

Microinsults

Microinsults are characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. Microinsults “represent subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color” (Sue, Derald Wing et al., 2007). New research on microinsults reveals more specifics regarding this form of microaggression; Mekawi and Todd (2018) note that “more recent work has identified microinsults that rely on ‘positive’ stereotypes, such as sexual performance or desirability of a particular aspect of physical appearance” (Mekawi & Todd, 2018). The researchers also identify three types of microinsult: Undesirable Culture (blaming racial and ethnic minority cultures, values, or traditions for racism or disparities), Reliance on Stereotypes (generalizations about someone based on racial or ethnic stereotypes), and Sexual/Physical Objectification (generalizations about physical ability or sexual performance based on race and ethnicity; Mekawi & Todd, 2018).

Well-Being and RBF (Racial Battle Fatigue) for Teachers of Color

Psychological and emotional manifestations result from acts of racial microaggression towards victims. These individuals can experience high levels of stress and anxiety that can increase over years of suffering. When one considers that people of color are exposed continually to microaggressions and that their effects are cumulative, it becomes easier to understand the psychological toil they may take on recipients' well-being" (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). In addition, "although microaggressions are often unconscious, they may lead to mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, trauma, or issues with self-esteem (Allen et al., 2013).

There is evidence highlighting the notion that racial microaggressions have negative psychological and emotional effects on victims. Forrest-Bank and Cueller (2018) note that "there is unequivocal evidence that racial discrimination plays a significant role as a determinant of psychological well-being on people of color in the United States." Furthermore, "a review of research from population studies found that discrimination consistently was associated with detrimental mental health indicators including increased depression and anxiety and lower happiness, life satisfaction, and self-esteem" (Forrest-Bank & Cueller, 2018). In addition, the psychological and emotional effects on teachers can lead to an exodus in the profession among teachers of color. For example, studies have shown that Asian American teachers experience higher levels of job dissatisfaction compared to their White counterparts due to elements of culture and race (Endo, 2015).

There has not been much attention given to the psychological and emotional effects of racism on K-12 teachers of color. Teachers of color experience RBF (racial battle fatigue), which is defined as a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from facing

racism daily (e.g., racial slights, recurrent indignities and irritations, unfair treatments, including contentious classrooms, and potential threats or dangers under tough to violent and even life-threatening conditions) It involves an ongoing toll that can foster doubt, produce anxiety, and be exhausting (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Although teachers of color may work in schools or institutions where the students are predominately minority, their colleagues and superiors are typically White, creating a dominant culture not reflected by the few persons of color.

Teachers of Color's Responses to Racial Microaggressions

Victims of racial microaggressions are often put in situations in which they are conflicted as to whether or not incidents should be “reported” or even identified as acts of racism at all. Teachers of color who experience microaggressions may enter a state of denial to avoid the complications of addressing racism within schools with a predominately White teaching faculty . In a recent study focused on the accounts of new teachers and their encounters with racial microaggressions, the author stated, “The most common response among new teachers to all but the most overt forms of racism appears to be denial of its existence. A frequent finding is that while they readily identified negative or unequal treatment, they were reluctant to describe this mistreatment as racism” (Pearce, 2019).

One explanation for this response is the notion that teachers of color feel the need to protect themselves from the negative perceptions they may receive from others. Pearce (2019) highlights this by stating that “people of color often make strategic decisions not to use the language of racism. If you already pose a problem or appear ‘out of place’ in the institutions of whiteness, there can be good reasons not to exercise what is heard as a threatening or aggressive vocabulary.”

Coping is defined as the process of minimizing stress or conflict, often involving the

regulation of emotions. Coping with racial microaggressions or racism requires coping skills beyond those needed for dealing with everyday emotions or situations. Additionally, coping with racism requires protecting the self, engaging in self-control, and confronting the racism that was experienced. Protecting the self requires focusing on one's individual psychological and physical safety after experiencing a racist event such as a racial microaggression. Experiencing racial microaggressions elicits strong emotions and requires the victim to be cognizant of how they react as well as how others may perceive that reaction. Although developing active coping skills is essential for addressing racial microaggressions, having a strong sense of racial identity is another way to cope, because racial identity serves as a sense of support and community (DeCuir-Gunby & Norris W. Gunby, 2016)

For teachers of color, coping with racism is a multi-layered skill that is beyond mundane emotions and daily occurrences. Coping with racial microaggressions requires protecting the self, engaging in self-control, and confronting the racism that was experienced. Teachers of color are forced to follow this process when experiencing microaggressions in order to respond to some degree while maintaining a level of professionalism as educators working to serve the needs of students (DeCuir-Gunby & Norris W. Gunby, 2016)

District and School Level Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are especially evident at the district and school level of urban education, particularly schools that serve predominately African American and Latinx students. According to Allen et al. (2013), "many of these practices are perpetuated today through school policies and operational structures such as overcrowding of urban schools, the placement of less qualified teachers in urban schools, and bias in standardized testing, amongst others."

Additionally, when school districts choose to formally address racism within the

institution, conversations may begin around race but often leads to inaction. Acts of racism remain unchallenged on a structural level and continue to repeat itself school year after school year. Furthermore, while adhering to a White property framework, districts cannot address their own structural inequities (Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

Dysconscious Racism

According to King (1991), dysconscious racism is a “form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness.”

Furthermore, “dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including attitudes, perceptions, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (Jackson, 1999). As stated in King’s definition, dysconscious racism is an acceptance of the norms and privileges that exist among Whites in a system that leads to inequities and racial injustice for people of color.

According to Anderson, Narum, and Wolf (2019), the term *dysconscious* should be set apart from *unconscious*, as the two terms do not go hand-in-hand. The authors stated, “The term *dysconscious* is then not to be understood as synonymous with *unconscious*, but rather as implying something real yet habitually uncontested and indicating that this acceptance is almost certainly unrecognized.” Therefore, dysconscious racism is a conscious state of being, and it highlights the automatic lack of attention racism receives. There is a high level of acceptance in a system where dysconsciousness exists and a low level of critique and objection. This mindset is the result of miseducation that “bypasses any precarious ethical judgment about societal

inequality and possibly produces teachers who are indiscriminating or altogether unaccustomed to questioning White norms and privilege” (Anderson et al., 2019)

Three categories within dysconscious racism are outlined in a study in which students explained racial inequity. Category I addresses dysconscious racism as a result of slavery. It begins and ends with slavery and the implication is that Black/White inequality is the result of inequity that began during slavery. Category II is the denial or lack of equal opportunity for African Americans (e.g., less education, lack of jobs, low wages, and poor healthcare). Category III is the part of a societal framework in which racism and discrimination are normative and makes the appropriate connections between racism and other forms of inequity (King, Joyce E., 1991).

Cultural Appropriation and Acculturation

Acculturation revolves around the notion that people of color learn explicitly, via racism, microaggressions and racial trauma, about their positionality and how to accommodate White people’s needs, status, and emotions. Acculturation forces people of color to be perpetually aware of White cultural norms and expectations and, importantly, to subscribe to them in order to fit in and to “take care of” White people’s feelings around race, ethnicity, and culture—during which people of color may be forfeiting their own psychological and emotional welfare, internalizing stereotypes and demeaning ideological systems, and experiencing poor health (Holoien & Shelton 2012; Liu et al., 2019) . Liu (2019) argued that people of color learn these “cultural and social practices and continue to enact them so they may live and thrive in the United States; what they also may learn as part of this acculturative process is that the status for White people may be different from what it is for people of color”

White culture, norms, and expectations have remained dominant through individual

actions and cultural and institutional structures in the United States. Thus, one can also understand that racial traumas and microaggressions are reasonably expected outcomes of an acculturative process that racializes people of color as “other,” “marginalized,” and “not-American” (Devos & Banaji, 2005). The acculturation theory is relevant even for people of color who are born in the United States, because they must begin “accommodating themselves to White culture from the day of their birth” (Liu et al., 2019).

One way to maintain the hierarchy and protect White privilege is for White people to acculturate people of color to the ideals of White culture and not toward the cultures or ways of knowing of peoples of color. In this process, the more persons of color acculturate, the more likely they will be perceived by White people as one who has assimilated to the “White culture” and thus targeted less often for questioning by White people (Kunst, Thomsen, Sam, & Berry, 2015). In addition, White people tend to prefer “color blindness” in order to avoid an awareness of race and racism and to avoid potentially being labeled as “racist” (Liu et al., 2019). People of color are coerced into adapting to “White spaces.” Therefore, to survive and live in White spaces—geographic areas perceived by White people to have boundaries and protections for White privilege; White people; and their behaviors, culture, and norms—many people of color have had to learn and adopt White cultural norms and values, regardless of personal choices, and often at substantial psychological costs. (Liu et al., 2019)

People of color are, therefore, constantly learning that one of their places and roles in White dominant culture is to be “invisible, innocuous, quiet, and unthreatening because success in White dominant culture demands these behaviors and beliefs.” Research also suggests that people of color quickly learn to adopt attitudes and behaviors that minimize their presence and lower their expectations or entitlements, silence their voices, and subdue their expressions, which

may be perceived as threatening. In other words, although people of color may not be able to hide their skin color, being racially innocuous means that they are able to behave in ways that may soften their racial, ethnic, and cultural expression so as not to stand out (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009).

For example, some people of color may intentionally change how they speak, dress, and/or eat to camouflage themselves in White spaces. For others, becoming racially innocuous may be a means by which they “thrive” within White spaces such as business and education; that is, becoming racially innocuous may come with rewards such as privilege, advancement, and promotion that may allow some people of color to “retain nuanced ways that challenge and critique the White cultural status quo.” On the other hand, some people of color may believe that adopting adequate aspects of White culture and its value systems will translate into some of the protections and privileges enjoyed by their White counterparts. (Liu et al., 2019)

Contribution to Literature Base

Although there are numerous studies that examine race in education, particularly around racial microaggressions, the majority of the literature focuses on higher education studies. Furthermore, qualitative studies on race in education conducted within K-5 or elementary school populations are exceptionally limited, especially one explored in this location in the state of California. Finally, the researcher has personal ties with this specific study, as he experienced dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions throughout his entire life in both his personal and professional career as an educator in the geographic location of the study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Restatement of Problem

As noted above, racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral acts of shame, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate racial slights and insults to the target person or group. Dysconscious racism is another form of racism that accepts dominant White norms and privileges and is an uncritical habit of mind that justifies racism. Both racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism are faced by teachers of color in their day-to-day work lives, and it is important to explore this phenomenon in order to give voice to these teachers' experiences, and ultimately to raise awareness of these issues among people involved in schooling in general.

Research Design

The researcher conducted a qualitative study, holding ethnographic interviews lasting for approximately 45 minutes with participants on their experiences as teachers of color in a public-school setting. Ethnographic interviewing is a method where there is ongoing mutual respect between the interviewer and interviewee characterized by a genuine exchange of views that creates meaning of the world around the interviewees (Stage & Manning, 2003). This is a qualitative narrative study, because the researcher expected to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism through interviewing teachers of color. The researcher analyzed the narratives and life experiences of teachers who have experienced these injustices in their professional lives. Insights from interviews with teachers of color can be powerful and effective ways to elucidate the challenges teachers of color face and the negative consequences of racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism in the workplace. Endo (2015) highlights the value of examining the unique experiences of teachers of color in the

classroom, stating that “studies that have focused on the experiences of teachers of color at varying points of their trajectories from pre-service preparation to their professional careers have pointed to the added benefits of having racially diverse adult role models teach in all K-12 settings, particularly in urban public schools that serve large numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse learners” (Endo, 2015).

Population

This study was conducted through one-on-one interviews with teachers of color from various local school districts in the South Bay Area. The researcher interviewed six minority teachers in a public elementary school setting (grades K-5 or K-6). Additionally, the researcher pursued and selected a group of teachers varying in gender, ethnicity, and years of teaching experience working across the South Bay Area because he was interested in comparing and contrasting his own experiences with those employed by neighboring school districts. All participants were given an IRB (institutional review board) consent form detailing the purpose of the study, in addition to receiving e-mails from the researcher giving an overview of the study. Participants with the following credentials/characteristics were interviewed:

- 1) Current K-8 classroom teacher.
- 2) Employed by a public school district in the South Bay Area.
- 3) A minority (non-White) male or female classroom teacher.

Figure 1.1

Participant Name	Ethnicity	Yrs of Teaching Experience	Subject/Grade Level Taught
Mark	Salvadoran-American (Latino)	10+ yrs	6 th Grade
Lisa	Mexican-American (Latina)	7yrs	1 st Grade
Pamela	African-American	40+ yrs	3 rd Grade
Tina	Vietnamese-American (Asian)	15+ yrs	6 th Grade
Luna	Mexican-American (Latina)	4yrs	K/1 st –SAI (Specialized Academic Instruction)
Rachel	Korean-American (Asian)	13yrs	Kindergarten

Due to scheduling conflicts and challenges, the researcher interviewed all participants by means of phone calls.

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your upbringing (i.e. childhood, family, where you were born/raised).
2. How has your upbringing shaped you into the person you are today?
3. What led you into the teaching profession?
4. What grade/subject do you teach? For how long?
5. What is your ethnicity?

6. As a person of color, do you ever think about your race and how it impacts your role as a teacher in the classroom?
7. Have you ever experienced challenges or feelings of discomfort in the workplace, among your colleagues, due to of your ethnic identity? If so, what are some examples?
8. What are two examples (racial microaggressions) that stand out? (Ask follow up questions)
9. How did you engage or react into these situations?
10. Do you think the school and/or district adequately integrates non-White perspectives into the system (i.e. adopted curricula, staffing, leadership teams, decision-making, celebrations, holidays, etc.)? If the answer is no, please explain.
11. What are two examples (dysconscious racism) that stand out? (Ask follow up questions)
12. How did you engage or react into these situations, if applicable?
13. As educators, what do you think we can do to better support teachers of color, in regards to their culture and ethnic identity?

These questions in the interviews were specifically designed to address and unveil the potential of the existence of racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism within the workplaces of the participants. Furthermore, it was the intent of the researcher to allow each participant to openly reflect and engage with the researcher in order to explore the phenomenon of racism in schools. The data was processed through a thematic analysis, as the researcher searched for common themes and patterns across various responses from the interviewees.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted ethnographic interviews with six K-5 or K-6 school teachers of color from the South Bay Area. Interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes each, and a

voice-recording device was used to capture the audio from the phone interviews. All interviews took place through telephone, located in the natural environment at the home of the researcher and the homes of each individual participant in the study. Phone interviews were audio recorded in its entirety through the voice recording software installed on the researcher's personal laptop computer.

To start the recruiting process, the researcher partnered with his work colleagues, who were fellow school administrators who have worked in other local school districts, and asked for candidates for this study within their professional network of former colleagues. The researcher presented a \$25 gift card to Starbucks for all those who agreed to be interviewed. Consent forms were sent and collected electronically for participation in the study.

Data Analysis

The researcher used a transcription service from transcribe.com to transcribe all of dialogue within each of the six interviews conducted. After editing the transcriptions, the content from the interviews were grouped and categorized using a thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is used in qualitative data to identify themes and possibly analyze content within the data (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 17)

Based on the 13 research questions stated above, question number seven and eight specifically addressed racial microaggressions and were coded accordingly in data processing, and questions number 10 and 11 specifically addressed dysconscious racism and were also coded accordingly.

Participants were coded under pseudonyms, in order to equally respect the privacy of all participants. For the interviews, pseudonyms Mark, Lisa, Pamela, Tina, Luna, and Rachel were

used in this study. The researcher personally chose to select pseudonyms that began with the same first letter of each participant's actual name.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study was the number of participants, as the sample size did not represent every race and cultural background. The study's participants were individuals who represent the teacher demography in the area; therefore, the sample was representative, but not comprehensive. Another limitation of this study was the timeline of the interviews. Participants in the study are teachers who follow the school year calendar, which may have conflicted with the timeframe the researcher gave the participants to partake in the study. The participants' differing academic calendars from that of the researcher made it difficult to align scheduling and obtain interviews with all of the representative participants. Although there is a copious amount of prior research on the subject of racial microaggressions, the researcher found that there is lack of prior research on the subject of dysconscious racism, particularly in the field of K-12 education. The majority of the research and key findings have been drawn from a limited number of resources.

Researcher Positionality

I was born and raised in the Bay Area, more specifically Silicon Valley. This is my home, and it is the only home I know. The demographics in the area have evolved since I was a young child attending elementary school in the late 1980s to early 1990s, and ethnic "minorities" are now the majority. Back in 1987, when my family and I moved into the San Jose house they still own and reside in, I was five years old, and surrounded by White neighbors and White peers whom I played with in the neighborhood. Over the years that slowly changed, as more and more of our White neighbors moved out and families of color moved in. As an Asian-American boy, I

did not know how to react to this phenomenon, nor did I even care that it was happening. Now our community is filled with less families, White or otherwise, and more single professionals working in the tech industry.

The fact of the matter is “in the state of California, approximately 75% of all K-12 public school students are minorities. However, a staggeringly low number of K-12 public school teachers are people of color” (California Department of Education, 2013). I have always wondered how this obvious disproportion of students of color to teachers of color impacts the daily lives of teaching staff, as people who may already live with the challenges of being ethnically diverse in a structural system heavily dominated by White privilege and supremacy. Do these teachers experience racial injustices (racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism) in the workplace, and what is being done, if anything, to support them as teachers of color?

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Respondent Vignettes

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of the study was to explore experiences of dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions in K-12 schools, through the testimony of teachers of color who live through racism in the workplace. Below are the research questions:

- In what ways do schoolteachers of color experience racial microaggressions in the workplace?
- In what ways do schoolteachers of color experience dysconscious racism in the workplace?
- What systems of support addressing culture and diversity are in place for teachers of color, if any?

The testimonies from the interview subjects are grouped into five different sections: parental influence, consciousness of racial identity, microaggressions in the workplace, dysconscious racism, and ideas on support for teachers of color.

Mark

Mark is a Salvadoran-American veteran 6th grade teacher in San Jose, California, and has taught a span of grade levels, ranging from 1st to 6th grade. He has also been a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, math) coach for his district. Throughout our interview, Mark argued that economics is a driving factor in inequity and injustice in education. Although he was able to cite several personal experiences of racial microaggressions in the workplace and dysconscious racism, Mark also saw the economic divide between the various student populations he has served. In addition, he also mentioned how Whites may fail to have a different perspective from those individuals of color.

Lisa

Lisa is a Mexican-American bilingual 4th grade teacher in Mountain View, California. Approximately 80% of the student population is Latino. She initially began her career teaching in a DI (dual-immersion) school. The types of racial microaggressions Lisa experienced were targeted towards Latinos, both from school staff and from the parent community. She is obligated to seek out resources herself that address her culturally diverse classroom and incorporate multicultural education, due to the lack of multicultural curricula adoption in the district.

Pamela

Pamela is an African-American 3rd grade teacher in Palo Alto, California. She has taught for over 40 years. Pamela was immediately able to discuss her experiences with racial injustice in the school system, particularly concerning the experiences of an African-American teacher. Unlike many of the other subjects in the study, Pamela was highly vocal when experiencing racial microaggressions, and has been an advocate for students of color through her leadership roles in the district and community. Pamela wants people to have an open and honest dialogue about culture and race, out of mutual respect and curiosity.

Tina

Tina is a Vietnamese-American 6th grade teacher in San Jose, California. She attributes much of her identity to the influence her parents and grandparents had on her early life. Tina's parents had a major impact on her views on school, and the value of learning and receiving an education. Of all the participants in the study, Tina was the only one who stated that she did not experience racial microaggressions in the workplace as a teacher of color. In addition, she works in a school where most of the teaching staff and students are Asian or Asian American, so she

does not necessarily link acts of dysconscious racism to her school or school district.

Luna

Luna is a Mexican-American SAI (specialized academic instruction) teacher in Santa Clara, California. Although she was born and raised in the Bay Area, Luna closely identifies with her Mexican heritage, through cultural values and traditions and use of the Spanish language. As a Latina, Luna has faced experiences of racial microaggression in the workplace. Luna is a caring teacher who sees the need for a greater home-to-school connection with the parent community, as the school she teaches at can be more accommodating and flexible to the working hours of families in order to encourage them to attend school events. She thinks that one way to support teachers of color is to avoid hindering their progress with so many obstacles and requirements as they pursue teaching credentials.

Rachel

Rachel is a Korean-American kindergarten teacher in Santa Clara, California. She has taught and lived in Queens, New York, for most of her teaching career. During the interview, Rachel expressed her perspective on White Americans in her early childhood, viewing Whites in a superior role or status. It was not until her teenage years that she was able to adopt her Korean culture into her own sense of self, which also resulted from the affirmation of her Korean-American peers. Rachel did experience acts of racial microaggression and dysconscious racism in the workplace, particularly towards Asians or Asian Americans, and compared her experiences as a teacher in New York to those in California. She claimed that California and New York, though at opposite ends of the country, are more alike than different.

Consciousness of Racial Identity

In response to questions regarding being conscious of their own racial identity, the participants gave varying answers, yet all individuals emphasized the notion of race and how it impacts their lives as teachers working with students and families of color at their schools. All participants were cognizant of the benefits to their ethnic minority identification in the classroom, and the positive impact they have on their students---especially those who share the same race. As teachers of color they prudently choose to leverage their ethnic identity, primarily with students sharing the same race as them.

As a Latino teacher, Mark stated that whether or not he was conscious about his racial identity as a Salvadoran teacher depended on the school or work environment in which he was employed: “It’s definitely different depending where I’ve taught or I’m teaching at. Prior to doing the coaching thing for a few years, I did hop around.” In schools where the student population was predominantly Latino/a, Mark did not have to think about his race, as opposed to schools that were predominantly White.

In somewhat of a contrast, Lisa was strongly aware of her racial identity as a Mexican-American teacher. She quickly expressed the cultural connection she has with many of her students and their families, as she teaches at a school with a high population of Mexican and Mexican-American students:

Well, I do in terms of I think there’s more of a... I don't know, an understanding or like I understand them that have parents who are working all the time.

The majority of us there in my specific class, again, over 70% of them are Hispanic like me.

Lisa sees her role as an educator as one that provides lessons beyond the classroom,

equipping her students of color with the life skills necessary to succeed, and bridging a gap that may exist between families and the school system.

Then on the side where I do share the same background with the others, it's me trying to give them a positive role model and trying to focus on those responsibilities and values that you might not see that at home. I'm trying to instill that consistency and encouragement and what-not because confidence is low too.

Much like Lisa, Pamela is very conscious about her race, and stated that she is very open and honest when speaking to her African American families. She expresses herself candidly with parents, and advocates for their education on behalf of her students.

As an African-American parent, and I've talked to other African-American parents, I'll make it real. I'll say, "Look, this is what you need to do. You need to show up. You need to come to the meetings. You need to just express that you care about your child, just coming." I learned too as a mother and as a parent and as an African-American parent, you don't leave your kids' education up to anybody. You'd better be in the mix. You'd better be making it happen at home. You'd better be making it happen at home.

As an African-American woman, Pamela expressed many thoughts and experiences on racist viewpoints she has encountered throughout her time not only living in the U.S., but also studying abroad in Spain. It was particularly interesting to hear about her pleasant experiences in Europe, and the racial acceptance she felt as a visitor from America, which differed from the racism she endured living in this country.

I studied my junior year abroad in Madrid. I was treated with respect. I wasn't called the N-word. I was treated with respect. People were more curious about, "Well, where are you from? Oh, you're from California." I would say California. I wouldn't say United

States. “From California, oh. Well, tell me about that.” People were interested. I knew over there I could be me. When I came home, I knew that I would be facing racism head-on.

Pamela is a force of positivity as an African-American female teacher, and desires to see a deeper understanding of racial and cultural acknowledgement in her community.

Pamela commented on race in America, and how people of other ethnicities who are not African American avoid talking to her about skin color. She alluded to the notion that people of color endure acts of racial injustice every moment of their lives, and that their White counterparts are a part of mainstream America, representing the ideal image of our society:

What I’m finding is that people who don’t look like me are afraid to talk about the color of people’s skin. They just talk about race. If you are non-White in this country and you look not like mainstream White America, you’re dealing with it almost on a daily basis.

Like the other teachers of color interviewed, Tina feels a deep connection with students who share her ethnic background. As a Vietnamese-American teacher, Tina knows that Vietnamese parents at her school are comforted by the knowledge that they can turn to her for assistance:

I think a lot of Asian families that I know well, I know I connect with a lot of the kids, you know, or when I speak their language, or words in Vietnamese or whatever, they’re like oh, surprised that their teacher speaks the same language, you know?

According to Tina, she is able to relate to the families of many of her Asian or Asian-American students because she understands the context of the Asian culture and its implications in terms of schoolwork and academia.

I know that a lot of the Asian parents are able to connect with me more because I

understand the culture aspect and how, and I think I understand those parents too because I grew up in an Asian family and they are strict parents, and they're like my parents, they want their kids to do their best, get straight A's, so in a way I am able to connect with them.

Both Tina and Luna understand the deep and rich history behind their cultures, and how it affects the bond between their students and families. Luna repeatedly discussed the relationship between Latino/a culture and formal education. According to Luna, being a Latina meant that the same educational opportunities afforded to other races were not given to individuals of her ethnic background.

I felt like being Latina, school isn't always an opportunity, so I wanted to take advantage of it while I could. I didn't really know at first, but I knew that I always wanted to work with families or with children.

As a natural educator and compassionate person, Luna wanted her friends and family to use her as a resource in navigating through the school system, and to build connections between her Latino community and the education system: "Just being like a minority, too, I always encourage my friends and stuff and family members to utilize me as a resource just because a lot of the time, people also don't know what to do with school."

Luna is also bilingual, speaking Spanish fluently; she has used her bilingualism to her advantage, being able to effectively communicate with Spanish-speaking families at her workplace. She knows families appreciate this about her, and find her to be an asset in the school community:

I think being bilingual has just given me more of an opportunity as well, because I can communicate with more people. I always think, because I know some of the families that

I have had over the years have been Spanish-speaking only, and I always wonder how they must feel when their child had a teacher that didn't speak Spanish. I know a lot of the time, they're eager to communicate with me because they finally can, and they don't have to rely on Google Translate or having to find someone else on campus [to] translate for them. I think that's another thing that I definitely appreciate and has helped me as a teacher, too.

As a classroom teacher working with many EL (English Language) students, Luna is able to work closely with her Spanish-speaking students, utilizing the language to successfully teach particular students: "Like for my Spanish ELs, obviously, I can sometimes even talk to them in Spanish, and then they'll understand it better."

Differing from Luna, Rachel grew up in a community surrounded by peers who shared the same race. As a Korean-American girl growing up in New York City, Rachel developed a sense of her racial identity largely because there was a substantial Korean population in her community. She saw adolescents who looked like her and shared a similar cultural background, and felt connected through peer groups at school and at church. Many of the relationships she formed with her Asian-American peers remain to this day:

When I went to middle school I noticed there were a lot more Asian students because the school was a lot bigger and so I guess in that time of your life you're forming your identity and so I guess I identified myself as more of an Asian person and was looking for more Asian friends. I had a lot more Asian friends in middle school and our friendship continued into high school, college and now into adulthood.

Fortunately, Rachel was not ashamed of her Korean culture because she had a strong network that consisted of other Korean Americans:

I just took more pride in being Asian. I still knew that White people had some sort of power? Dominance? Yeah, even in the school there were a lot of White people, but I started to take more pride in being Asian just because I was surrounded by a lot more Asians in my school.

Additionally, it seemed as though non-Koreans in her school community were largely accepting of the Korean culture and thus did not feel rejected by others in the same environment. For example, she described a time when she was in middle school and her Korean-American friends performed a famous Korean pop song in front of the entire school for a talent show. Rachel was pleased to see the positive reaction from the audience after the performance, including White peers at the school.

As a Korean-American teacher, Rachel does think about her race and how it impacts her students of color. She wants her Asian-American students to feel as though they can relate to her and celebrate their culture and not disregard it because it is not the dominant culture of their school. “As an Asian teacher and with my Asian students, I like that I am somebody they can relate to. In the classroom I’ll bring in a lot of my culture unashamedly.”

Food was a topic of great importance when we discussed Korean culture. Rachel stated that Korean food was not seen as appetizing and worthy of consumption, unlike the typical dishes brought to school events as a child. Korean food was considered too foreign at the time, and this left a lasting impression on Rachel:

I remember as a kid, I remember bringing sushi rolls and a lot of the students were always turned off by it and thought it was disgusting and so they would always reject my sushi rolls whenever we had those events, and everyone would always take the pasta and those Greek cheese dishes. My dish was always unpopular and my dish would always be

left cold and there was always so much left. It was so sad, you know? You felt ashamed for bringing that to school. Even for lunch I would never bring those types of food to the lunchroom. It would always be a sandwich or something that wouldn't smell, or I would just buy cafeteria food.

As a teacher of color, Rachel would question whether the parents of her students would treat her any differently if she were White. Most of her colleagues are White, and she began to consider whether they were perceived as being more competent than her and the few other teachers of color.

I'm thinking about race and how it plays in the education system and I think about the parents that I work with and I wonder especially in the beginning of my teaching career if how, if they viewed me differently because I'm an Asian teacher. Like, how much respect would they give me as opposed to my White colleagues. Maybe I wonder if they don't view me as [being as] capable as my White colleagues.

Microaggressions in the Workplace

Unfortunately, racial microaggressions were evident and reported in the workplaces of five out of the six participants in the study. Microinvalidations were most commonly present, as the individual race and cultures of the participants were easily dismissed and not acknowledged among colleagues and other adults. Although this directly impacted the participants as teachers of color, more tragically, the racial microinvalidations ultimately affected the students of color at the various schools, as their cultures were not embraced and celebrated. In addition to microinvalidations, some teachers did experience the two other forms of racial microaggressions (microassault and microinsult).

Racial stereotyping is a type of microaggression that Mark has witnessed as an employee

at this school. Even though these verbal attacks were not targeted at Mark or even at his race, he felt the discomfort and was bothered by this form of racism that occurs even in schools. Mark recalls one specific incident involving the custodian at his school, and a comment he made about Indian (Asian) people:

People just jump on the stereotypes. Even when I speak to the custodian—it was just recently too at work—he said something about Indians like, “Oh, you know how they are,” and I’m like, “What?” I’m like, “No, no, no, no. I have to correct that.” I was like, “No, maybe that’s your experience of that person, but no.” It surprised me to hear that. I was like, “No. Maybe that was your experience with that person, but you will not generalize people.”

Mark discussed racial comments made by his colleagues (teachers), and how they were directed towards students at the school. He also stated that most of the teaching staff is White, and questioned whether or not certain remarks would have been made had the student population been White:

I honestly wonder if they would say these things if their kids were Caucasian because most of the district is Asian and Hispanic now. Most of the teachers are White. When I hear some of the commentary I’m like... Those are the kinds of things, not directed to me but directed to the kids.

When asked about how he responds to microaggressions in the workplace, Mark was quick to state that he does not engage. Mark avoids the topic altogether, and is cautious out of fear that his assumptions may result into conflict among colleagues:

I don’t engage in that kind of conversation unless it’s been brought up as a conversation that is about that particular thing, unless it’s about some attitudes about kids or something

like that within a workshop or something of that nature. I don't touch the subject with colleagues unless I feel like, again, it seems like it's a microaggression, but it doesn't. I don't want it to blow up into something it may not be.

Conversely, Lisa brought up the fact that comments are made about students of color by some parents at the school. She noted that White parents and staff might feel disregarded because of the heavy emphasis on services and programs dedicated to Mexican students and families. This has caused tension in the school community.

When we hold classes after school and other schools come, it's like comments that come from other parents or "Oh, they're not helping us." These are things that we discuss at the staff meeting, "Oh, they're not helping us because they're helping the Mexican family," or "We're being ignored." You know what I mean? We're the majority. Then they might already sometimes feel neglected, I suppose.

At Lisa's school, teachers have also made comments about their perceived difficulties in teaching Mexican or Mexican-American students, voicing their frustrations as though teaching this group of students is a new task they are taking on as teachers in the classroom.

I've heard a lot of complaints about how challenging it is to teach these students. That's what I hear. They've got comments like, "I've never seen a class like this. This is the most challenging class I've ever had." To me, I'm like, "No." I'm like, "This is normal."

There has been a lack of follow-through and action taken among school staff and administration regarding the issue of negative comments made about students of color.

Discussions always seemed to occur during faculty meetings, but it was simply left at that, without any tangible consequences. Lisa felt very frustrated and discouraged by this:

Well, when we came up across these comments, it's mostly during our staff meetings. It's

more like a discussion that we'll have like, "How can we be more diverse? How can we focus more on different cultures? What teenager in our classrooms should be more welcoming?" Those are the topics that come out of those negative comments.

Pamela talked very descriptively about the racial microaggressions she had experienced and witnessed as a teacher in the school system. Through her tone in describing these incidents, it was clear that these events took a toll on her and left a lasting impression. Pamela is a veteran teacher, with many years of service as a teacher, so through her decades of dedication as an educator, she was able to draw on many moments in her career where she had highlighted racist behaviors or views. A recent incident took place among colleagues during a social gathering; White colleagues were given the advantage over non-White colleagues while playing a game.

Just last month I went to a celebration. We're celebrating, and the person who coordinated the party game had these great questions. Most of the questions were reasonable and fun and great. You get so many points for each question. She created the game. She created the points. We're sitting there, and I think, if I look around, I'm the only African-American person there. There are about a dozen of us of mixed race.

There's Asian. There's White, Latina. Okay. We're mixed, Jewish. There's a mixed race of people, and the person who coordinated these questions is blonde and blue eyes and probably of German descent. Some of the questions were like, "If you..." This is one. "If you have read so many books, give yourself 10 points." Not going to bother anybody, but then she said, "Well, if you have blue eyes, you get 12 points. If you have brown eyes, you get either eight points or five points." Whatever it was, it was lower.

Pamela recounts a time when her school district hired an African-American principal. She happened to have worked at the same school as this new principal, but because she was also

African American, others at the school assumed that she must have personally known the principal to get the teaching job. She felt threatened and uncomfortable because of this, had her own competence as a teacher questioned, and was not believed when she stated that she had not known this principal prior to working at the school:

The principal before, they loved. He had been there for like 20 years, and so just that changing of the guard and how things changed to somebody who doesn't look like us, it's almost like these Republicans getting Obama as the president. It's like, "Oh no. He can't possibly do anything right." Okay. Then he hired me. I didn't know him, and it was a white teacher who told me about the position available here. I come over here, and it's like, "Who are you? Where'd you come from? How do you know him?" They couldn't believe that I didn't know him. Then as I would hear them talk about the principal all the time, of course he's black. They would never say anything about his color, per se. I just felt uncomfortable.

Unlike Pamela's comprehensive reporting and statements on her experiences with racial microaggressions, Tina did not report encountering racial microaggressions in the workplace when asked about her experiences with colleagues. When asked whether she had encountered microaggressions, she responded, "No, actually, I haven't."

Luna is in touch with her Latina cultural identity and heritage, much like how Pamela is connected to her African American roots. She speaks proudly about her Mexican culture and is very knowledgeable about customs and traditions—especially when it comes to music. Luna described an ongoing dilemma she faces in the workplace, where she wants to speak about her festive weekends attending Mexican music concerts, but refrains from doing so because she is hesitant about the type of response she may receive from colleagues. Unfortunately, she is

discouraged from speaking about these weekend adventures:

I'm very into my culture and I listen to Mexican music and other Latin music. I go to concerts. Sometimes, there are times where I would want to share things that I did over the weekend, but then it's almost like whoa, no one would really understand what that means. They wouldn't be able to relate to that experience, because it's something that I feel like is my culture, and if you've never experienced going to a Mexican concert, you wouldn't really know what I'm talking about or how it was.

Both Luna and Rachel did face acts of racial microaggression early on in her teaching career, however Rachel was able to recount an experience that dated back to a time before she became a full-time teacher. Even as a student teacher, Rachel remembered how her White cooperating teacher treated her differently than her other classmates who were also White. This experience became an emotional one for Rachel to relive, but she shared the story to voice her concerns over racial injustices in the school system.

Even when I student-taught it was between me and another White student. And I felt like the cooperating teacher showed a lot more favor towards the White student and part of me felt like it was because of my race. I don't know, it was something that always stuck with me. And another cooperating teacher was extremely rude. Yeah, she was a White teacher as well and so I just had a very bad impression of her and yeah I'll admit I'll think about her race and how she treated me, a White woman treating an Asian student very condescendingly. She even made me cry.

Within some of her friendships with White people, Rachel described how one companion in particular would make "Asian jokes," and they would laugh together about this type of humor. Rachel immediately dismissed the suggestion that racial jokes are microaggressions, instead

rationalizing this behavior by stating that this was the nature of their relationship: “Like my friend Karen, she would make Asian jokes and I wouldn’t feel offended at all because I would find it funny too. I don’t know what you think about that?”

In her current workplace, Rachel does witness acts of racial microaggression among her colleagues. A prime example of this is how some White teachers can be very vocal about their displeasure for ethnic foods. When observing these behaviors, Rachel does become uncomfortable and senses that others feel discomfort as well:

So there was a parent who brought bubble tea for Teacher Appreciation Week, and yeah, not everyone drinks boba, which are the tapioca balls, and so one of the teachers who was White, she tried it and then she just was like, oh my gosh, oh, not for me! And then she spat it out and obviously she didn’t like it so when other teachers were coming who were White, she was basically telling the other teachers not to try it but I was like, “I love this, this is delicious!” And was proudly drinking it as well as another Asian teacher—actually our librarian is Asian. She was like, ‘Oh boba, this is delicious!’ I can tell that she was probably turned off by that and so that for sure made me feel uncomfortable.

Dysconscious Racism

Examples of dysconscious racism were found to be evident all throughout the testimonies of most participants. There was a level of dysconsciousness expressed at the school and district level, failing to break the cycle of perpetuating White culture through decisions and choices made in areas such as school celebrations, curriculum, and staffing. All participants voiced the fact that they take it upon themselves as professional educators to provide adequate learning material that reflects multicultural education for their students, even when it is not provided by the school district.

Mark commented on his views about promoting staff within the district, and how Whites may be given an advantage over individuals of color. He questioned the district's hiring practices in regard to leadership roles in his district. Furthermore, Mark described a colleague of his who became principal of a school and, as a professional of color, may have faced challenges due to a possible lack of acceptance as a non-White administrator.

It just made me wonder about the whole process there. The district itself, when it comes to moving up in a... This is where, again, it's not a clear-cut thing. It just makes you wonder with who rises into the administration roles in the district.

There's something wrong in that district with this where pretty much most of the people that move up in administration are White. Another acquaintance of Mike and I, she got the same treatment. She was a principal, but when things occurred it was such a... She had to leave. It made me wonder too if it was because of her ethnicity than anything else.

As a teacher of color, Lisa knows the profound impact she has on her students, and the need for curricula that reflect cultural diversity. She has not been given adequate teaching resources to address cultural diversity and is obligated to do her own research and search for educational resources herself. She also mentioned the flaws she sees in the adopted curriculum, as it gives students a limited view of different perspectives:

There could definitely be more variety, more diversity. The reading we have in the curriculum has been adapted, but I don't see that. We still have to go out and find those books that bring the different cultures and perspectives into the class. Again, it's up to me to go out and go to the library and find other books where we can read about other people that look like us.

As well as racial microaggressions and negative comments made at school, attempts have

been made by staff to address cultural celebrations and diversity during staff meetings.

Conversations have occurred on this topic, but no action has been taken to expand the school's work and efforts involving culture and diversity among their students: "We've talked about it in staff meetings like, 'How can we add more celebrations or cultural celebrations?' but it hasn't actually been done. It's just like you talk about it. Okay, we need more, and then that's it."

Unlike Lisa's recent experiences with dysconsciousness, although still an issue or problem, Pamela commented that the district she works in is aware of the importance of cultural diversity and integrating non-White perspectives into the school system. She feels that the district is being culturally and racially responsive primarily because of the pressure they face from the community: "I will say that this district is working towards it. It feels like they're working towards it. It's in their face, and they know they need to do something about it."

Tina had a unique response when asked about dysconscious racism, and how the school or district integrates non-White perspectives. She did not believe that the district deliberately negates or fails to recognize perspectives from other races, and attributed her claim primarily to the fact that her school employs a high number of Asian teachers: "You know, I don't, I don't know if they intentionally do that, but I don't really see that. You know, I think there are quite a bit of Asian teachers at our school so I don't really see that."

Although Tina's workplace is culturally matched with the teaching faculty and student population, Luna was quick to point out the lack of diversity among schoolteachers in the district, specifically regarding Latino/a teachers, and noted the dominant White culture within the teaching staff across schools: "I've noticed that there isn't many Latina teachers, so I've worked on two sites. Primarily, I believe both were White-dominant." According to Luna, the school she teaches at embraces multiculturalism, but does not sustain the movement and simply addresses

cultural celebrations with isolated events:

I think the district could do a better job of celebrating those differences. Our site, we have the multicultural events, but I don't even feel like that's even done correctly in a way, because there's just like always low turnout, and there's just not much buy-in, and I feel like because it's like, oh, it's just one day, they're only giving us one day to celebrate our culture, what makes us who we are.

When asked about how the district approaches integrating non-White perspectives, Luna found them to be unsuccessful in their efforts: "I feel like they try to kind of make things not predominantly White, but even then it's kind of just... they also don't do a great job of integrating other races."

Unfortunately, Luna's school district does not provide resources and support to celebrate multiculturalism and incorporate the array of ethnic backgrounds represented in the student population and school community. Like many other teachers of color, she is obligated to take the initiative to ensure that all cultures and races are acknowledged and embraced:

It kind of has to be put on the teachers in a way whether they're going to choose to have those differences be celebrated and accepted and shared, because I feel like if we don't do anything about it, it's kind of just like as is, and we don't ever really get to know where our students are actually coming from.

Luna saw the inequities faced by working parents at her school. One example is how the school does not accommodate the busy schedules of low-income families so that they can attend school functions (i.e. meetings and PTA events):

Because a lot of our families are low-income and they are working multiple jobs or late hours, they can't always attend those meetings, and I feel like it's always, again, a very

low turnout, and it's always a very low population of families that are attending. I feel like a way to increase that buy-in is something else that can be worked on, too, like how can we accommodate the families that can never attend because we always choose to have the meetings at like 6 p.m. on a Tuesday?

Evidently, Luna's experiences with her district's dysconsciousness was very similar to Rachel's experiences, as her school district apparently does not do an adequate job of celebrating the various cultures that make up the student population. Rachel works at a school with many Indian students enrolled, and there is little recognition of Indian culture on campus. Rachel also drew from her own experiences in New York schools and commented that New York is more progressive; other cultures are honored through holidays and days to observe important dates for the communities:

I think in terms of holidays they do not [integrate non-White perspectives], it's the holidays that we celebrate are just very typical but you have students, we have a lot of Indian students and obviously they celebrate Diwali and schools aren't closed for that. We have a lot of Asian students who celebrate Lunar New Year and schools are not closed for that. I don't think it reflects our populations, the holidays our district celebrates.

The teachers and those in leadership positions at the school and at the district level are predominantly if not exclusively White. This inequity and imbalance in leadership is something Rachel finds unsettling; she desires for change in staffing to occur within the school district:

In terms of staffing and leadership, no, I think most of the teachers are actually White. There are two Asians, me and another teacher, and two Mexican teachers. Everyone else is White. Our principal is White, psychologist White. Even our leadership in our school

is mostly White.”

Ideas on Support for Teachers of Color

In speaking to all participants in the study, it was obvious to the researcher that these teachers are all proponents for the teaching profession, especially for individuals of color. They all agreed that there is a need for support for teachers of color, yet had an array of ideas on what the support looks like if it was their decision to make. When giving their responses on this particular category, many drew from their own personal life experiences as teachers of color in traditionally and predominately White spaces.

Mark would like to see more empathy and noted that White teachers may fail to recognize that individuals of color have different backgrounds and lived experiences than White individuals. His idea regarding support for teachers of color is for White teachers to raise their level of racial awareness:

I wonder. I don't think Caucasian teachers really even think that there's like, "Oh, you could have had a different experience than I." I don't think it even occurs to them, "I think that the issue would be that I don't think that the majority group really understands perspectives of the others. They are minorities, and I think that being a minority, you're almost constantly aware that you're a minority.

Lisa noted the importance of dialogue about race with colleagues at work. She stated that teachers of color should be supported by being asked how they are doing, and that it goes a long way for someone to check in with them to monitor their mental and emotional status:

I think the first step is talking about it like, "How are you feeling? Are you feeling unsupported?" I think a lot of times we just don't say anything, so we're not aware. If you're not aware, then you're not doing anything about it.

Regarding support for teachers of color, Lisa believes that change must occur in classrooms, where both students and staff of color feel that their cultures are being embraced and acknowledged. The district has failed to adopt quality multicultural resources, therefore teachers may need to collaborate and support one another throughout this process: “Then from there, definitely doing something about how to work in all those different cultures in the classroom, what we’re going to do as teachers and not just wait for the district to come up with that curriculum.”

Similarly to Lisa, Pamela highlighted the urgency of having difficult conversations and dialogue about race to support teachers of color. She referenced the fear that people have when approaching the topic of race, but encouraged those in the school system to initiate those difficult conversations to see how teachers of color can receive the support and care they may need as professionals in a field where they are racially and ethnically outnumbered.

I think people need to stop being afraid to talk because if you don’t talk and if you don’t have those difficult conversations, then you don’t know. Be willing to have difficult conversations. Be willing to say, “Maybe I’m not right. Maybe something’s wrong.” You need to understand that the anger is real and justified. We need to stop looking for the differences and look for what we have in common, bottom line.

Tina advocated for the value of teachers incorporating celebrations of various cultures into their classrooms, and discussed how teachers of color can be supported in educating their students about their own racial identity: “I think allowing or encouraging you know teachers to celebrate their cultures with their kids in the class is important. You don’t have to enforce anything but encourage them to speak to their own students about their cultures.”

As a teacher of color with students from multiple cultural backgrounds, Tina insists that

her students learn about their culture through their parents and family members at home. This level of engagement may serve as a way for teachers of color to feel supported by parents of diverse students.

So I'm always inquiring about how they're celebrating or their customs so it shows them that it's important not only for me to know, but for them to know too. And if they don't know, go home and ask your parents, how do you celebrate this or what do you do during this time of year?

Luna reported that in an ideal situation, she would have schools staffed by teachers from every racial background. Although she understands that this may not be feasible, she sees the value in adults interacting with others who do not look like them.

I wish you could almost have this diverse group of like... okay, we have White, we have Asian, we have Latino, we have African-American teachers on this campus, and kind of have that be everywhere, but it's hard because, again, reality, that's not what it is like.

Teacher training and professional development are important to Luna, as she sees them as opportunities for school staff to get to know one another on a racial and cultural level, and perhaps leverage the multitude of languages and backgrounds.

I think like having trainings, like when we have our professional development days and stuff, almost like at the beginning of the school year, like maybe having a multicultural event, but for teachers, and starting the school year off that way, and that way you kind of know, too, where their speaking teachers are and if I needed, like let's say a student who was Japanese, and there's no Japanese teachers on my campus, where in the district are they? That way, I can use them as a resource.

Luna expressed a desire to make the process of becoming a teacher less stringent by

removing or alleviating some of the requirements, such as testing and coursework. Furthermore, she noted that teachers should be paid higher salaries, as the job can be demanding and unappreciated.

I just wish it kind of wasn't so hard to become a teacher, because I feel like if... I mean, obviously you want to provide students with the most qualified teachers, and when they're going to school, the most qualified candidates, but at the same time, I feel like that's one thing that kind of restricts people from pursuing education and working in education. I wish that teachers did get compensated a little bit more for all of the things that we do.

In terms of support for teachers of color, like Luna, Rachel also valued the emphasized the importance of holidays being celebrated, and for the many cultures within a school community to be recognized. Teachers seeing their own cultures spotlighted would feel empowered and valued.

I think with new teachers, hiring teachers that reflect the population of the school. I think that even if the district doesn't close schools on those holidays, I think the schools should celebrate those holidays. Again like Diwali, we have a big Indian population so it's kind of surprising when the whole school doesn't look like they're celebrating that holiday.

It's kind of just another day, but to the Indian population it's an extremely important day.

It's the same thing with Lunar New Year.

I think also doing cultural celebrations as a whole school, multicultural nights are always a great idea and even among the staff to celebrate culture within the staff, maybe having a potluck and then talking about the foods and having people try their foods.

Parental Influence

All participants in the study expressed the importance of their parents, and how their personal relationships with their parents shaped them into the people and professionals they are today. They spoke highly of their immigrant parents and emphasized how they valued education and hard work for their children, and conveyed the urgency of upward mobility in their families. In addition, the participants showed an appreciation for the role that their mothers and fathers played in their lives, especially during their formative years as young, second-generation children growing up in the U.S. It was obvious that a high degree of sacrifice was made by all the immigrant parents of participants in order to create more opportunities for their children.

Mark described a unique personal experience of immigrating to the United States under a federal law that enabled family members from outside America to unite. His mother and aunt were pivotal in allowing the rest of his family to come to the country. In addition, Mark's mother was a teacher in El Salvador, and he attributes his passion for teaching to his mother's role as an educator:

I was born in El Salvador. We came here in 1980 through the Family Reunification Act under Jimmy Carter. It was through my mom and her sister, my aunt. My aunt was able to immigrate my mom to the United States. Through my mom, then we were all able to come as well. My mom had been a teacher in El Salvador.

An interesting element of Mark's Salvadoran culture is the distinction it has from other Latino cultures, specifically in contrast to Mexican culture. There are differences in the type of Spanish that is spoken among Salvadorans. Growing up in his household, Mark can recount memories of his parents immediately noting the clear differences within the Spanish language, and emphasizing to Mark the importance of correctly using his native language:

With my parents being Salvadorian and being in that community that's mostly Mexican, there are slight differences in culture, for example. Some would say big differences, but... They didn't want me using Mexican slang, for example. That's one thing they were like, "Oh no, you will not. You won't do that." My mom reprimanded me once.

Education and hard work were strongly emphasized by both of Mark's parents, since many of their experiences relating to education and work in El Salvador did not carry over to an equal level of economic status. Mark's parents were repeatedly mentioned as role models for him and his siblings, as they continuously encouraged them to build a strong work ethic and drive in order to succeed in this country:

Coming here to the United States, my parents had both gone to college, I guess. The equivalency here would probably be more of a community college but being in a third-world country, that's a big difference. What my parents constantly pushed was just that you're going to work hard, you're going to go to school, go to college. It was always there. The expectations were there.

Both Mark and Lisa come from a Latino background, and although there were similarities in their upbringing, Lisa's story differed mainly due to the nature of being the eldest of a large family. Lisa had the responsibility of taking care of her younger siblings. Although a child herself, Lisa stated that she also played a motherly role for her brothers and sisters. She also fulfilled the role of translator for her parents, as they relied on her language skills:

I'm the firstborn, so I was the first one to attend college in my family. Growing up, well, I was basically the translator, being the oldest. I was the one who always translated the mail to my parents. They didn't know English. Well, as soon as I could translate, I would translate. That was my role. I have like three other siblings, so we're kind of far apart. I

also took on the role of the second mother.

Although her father died when she was a young girl, Pamela was surrounded by a strong family support system, especially her mother. Pamela's mother was very encouraging, emphasizing the importance of getting an education and working hard to achieve personal and professional goals.

My mother is from Louisiana. My father is from Oklahoma with relatives from Texas. We are predominantly African American. I failed to tell you that my father died when I was little, really little. I didn't have a regular father figure, but Mom would say, "You go out there. You get that education. You don't let anybody take that away from you."

While Pamela had a great adoration for her mother, Tina described a more expansive network of adults that included her parents and grandparents having a major influence in her life from early childhood. From a young age, her family emphasized the importance of school and education, and even passed on the love of teaching and learning to her as a child. Tina depicted her grandfather as someone who passed on the love of learning to his grandchildren:

My family always placed a strong emphasis on schooling and getting an education. I consider myself a lifelong learner and so teaching was one of my, is my passion because I want to instill a love of learning in others, you know?

Tina grew up in a typical Asian immigrant home in America, where her father was working hard around the clock while her mother was busy taking care of the children at home. Tina's father attended school and worked tirelessly at his job at the same time, in order to provide for his family. The language barrier was an obstacle, being new to the country, but they were able to overcome these challenges through perseverance and resourcefulness:

Just so that you know, my mom, when my parents came to America of course, they didn't

have any English skills. My dad was really busy working and going to school at the same time and my mom was at home taking care of us.

As a student, Tina felt heavy academic pressure from her parents, especially because she was the eldest of all her siblings. As the eldest child, Tina noted the role and responsibly she had to set the example for her younger siblings, and a practical way of doing that was through her academic achievements in school. Tina did very well in school, despite her parents' inability to help with her studies.

I had to be really independent for a while because I had to help with myself as far as school goes because my parents couldn't help with homework or anything and I had really high expectations put on me and had a lot of pressure to do well, get straight A's, you know typical Asian parents.

Both Tina and Luna credited their mothers for raising them and their siblings. In addition, Luna had a babysitter who helped raise her as a young child, and even disclosed that her positive experiences with her babysitter influenced her decision to become an educator:

I feel like me kind of spending the majority of my time with a caretaker almost influenced me to have that caretaker, nurturing personality, too, just because someone did it for me, and I always thought, well, if someone's able to do it for me, that's the person I want to be for someone else as well.

Her father was busy working two jobs, providing financially for his family:

Primarily, growing up, my dad worked two jobs. I wouldn't really ever see him during the week, so my mom pretty much did all of our upbringing. I did have a babysitter that I would go to after school, because my mom worked until like 6 p.m.

Luna mentioned that her parents did not have much of an educational background, and

she connects that fact with her family's Latino/a identity. The absence of a firm educational foundation led to an intense value being placed on hard work and long hours: "I feel like being Latina and my parents not having a strong educational background, they were always forced to work very long hours or multiple jobs."

Although Luna is Latina and Rachel is Asian American, both identified with having their fathers work to provide financially while their mothers tended to household and child-rearing responsibilities. Rachel comes from a family of three children, with two elder brothers. Her father worked and her mother was noted as the "constant in [her] life," serving as a "source of comfort, being a stay-at-home mother and fulfilling most of the child-rearing duties and responsibilities for Rachel and her brothers. Growing up in a somewhat traditional Korean household, expectations differed between Rachel and her brothers. Girls are treated very differently than boys by their parents:

In the Korean culture, girls are expected to do more household chores such as cooking and cleaning. When I was younger and thought about having children, I wanted to make sure that if I had a son, the household chores would be the same between him and my daughter.

Rachel has a close relationship with her mother and added that it was her mother who influenced her to become a devoted mother herself to her two young children. She witnessed the behaviors and characteristics of a loving mother first-hand, and she knew that she wanted to be the same kind of mother one day to her own children:

I knew my mom would be home after school, and she would be there, and pick me up from an after-school program. If I was having a bad day, there was comfort in knowing she would always be there for me. She would cook my favorite foods, cut me fruit, and

make my favorite Korean rice cakes.

Figure 1.2

Participant Name	Ethnicity	Yrs of Teaching Experience	Racial Microaggressions Experienced?	If Yes, Types of Racial Microaggressions	Dysconscious Racism Experienced?	If Yes, Examples of Dysconscious Racism
Mark	Salvadoran-American (Latino)	10+ yrs	Yes	Microinsult Microinvalidation	Yes	Euro-centric adopted curricula; Promoting white staff;
Lisa	Mexican-American (Latina)	7yrs	Yes	Microinsult Microinvalidation	Yes	Euro-centric adopted curricula; Failure to acknowledge other cultures through celebrations and traditions
Pamela	African-American	40+ yrs	Yes	Microinsult	Yes	Sustaining Whites in leadership positions through hiring practices
Tina	Vietnamese-American (Asian)	15+ yrs	No	N/A	Yes	Failure to acknowledge other cultures through celebrations and traditions
Luna	Mexican-American (Latina)	4yrs	Yes	Microinsult Microinvalidation	Yes	Lack of ethnic diversity in school faculty (teaching staff); Not making accommodations for working families when scheduling school events

Rachel	Korean-American (Asian)	13yrs	Yes	Microinsult	Yes	Sustaining Whites in leadership positions through hiring practices; Failure to acknowledge other cultures through celebrations and traditions
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CHAPTER V

Discussion

As a former teacher and principal of an elementary school, I can honestly report that racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism do exist in the year 2020. It happens in classrooms, front offices, staff lounges, and even on the playground. If there is one place in the entire world where acts of racism should never occur, I would not hesitate to state that it is at schools, institutions of learning for children. But since racism is sadly a part of our reality, we have a responsibility as educators to address this problem and raise awareness, as with other issues and problems in public education, for in the end racial injustices negatively affect the lives of our children.

There are some key takeaways discovered after conducting this study. For one, teachers of color do indeed work in environments where dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions exist and perpetuate on a daily basis. Secondly, teachers of color are conscious of their own race and the race of others around them, including colleagues and students, and see the lack of racial diversity in the field of education. In addition, schools and districts are ill equipped to provide the needed and highly desired support to teachers of color, mainly because of White supremacy and the negative impact it has on school communities of color.

Pamela, a participant in the study, candidly expressed her thoughts on one of the first steps in trying to discuss race, as it can be a controversial and uncomfortable topic for many people:

I think people need to stop being afraid to talk because if you don't talk and if you don't have those difficult conversations, then you don't know. Mind you, chances are a lot of people are going to open up their mouths and put their foot in it. Accept that because you

don't know. Most of us, I think most of us who are reasonable can teach you a little grace if your heart is right. You know what I'm saying? If your heart is right. Wait a minute. Come here, let me school you. Let me tell you, you might not want to say that again. I'm not going to be offended, but you might not want to say that in a larger population. Be willing to have difficult conversations. Be willing to say, "Maybe I'm not right. Maybe something's wrong."

Summary of Findings

The following were the research questions of the qualitative study:

- In what ways do schoolteachers of color experience racial microaggressions in the workplace?
- In what ways do schoolteachers of color experience dysconscious racism in the workplace?
- What systems of support addressing culture and diversity are in place for teachers of color, if any?

Essentially, through interviewing subjects in the study, the researcher found that racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism were commonly experienced among schoolteachers of color. Their experiences differed based on the work environment they described. For example, Tina talked about how her school is predominantly Asian or Asian American, in terms of both the student and teaching population. Therefore, her experiences as an Asian-American teacher were vastly different from those of Pamela, who told of her experiences as an African-American teacher surrounded by White colleagues.

Teachers stated that in order to promote cultural diversity among students in their classrooms, they must be proactive in seeking out resources themselves, without support or

direction given by their school district. Additionally, individual support for teachers of color is lacking, as many participants did not feel supported by their employers in regard to their racial background.

Racial Microaggressions in the Workplace

Experiences of racial microaggression were attested to by all but one participant in the study. The following are the different types of racial microaggression noted in the study:

Microassaults

Microassaults in the workplace were not reported by any of the participants. Fortunately, this type of microaggression, which is “meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (Sue et. al, 2007), was not evident among the teachers.

The researcher was not surprised to learn that microassaults were not reported among participants, since these are more blatant forms of racism that does not occur within the field of teaching or education. In the teaching profession, teachers are generally found to be mild mannered and kind professionals, and often times acts of microaggressions are considered to be unintentional and due to a lack of cultural awareness and empathy.

Microinsults

Microinsults were commonly found and reported by interview participants. These subtle snubs, verbal or non-verbal, were frequently made towards teachers of color in the study, who were African American, Asian American, and Latin American.

The types of microinsults reported varied depending on the participant. Pamela, an African-American teacher, was questioned about how she obtained her teaching job; her colleagues assumed she personally knew the principal since he was also African American.

Rachel, an Asian-American teacher, experienced microinsults through the rejection of cultural foods and cultural celebrations and holidays at school. Lisa and Luna, two Mexican-American teachers, faced microinsults through the derogatory comments made by school staff and parents about the academic achievements of Mexican and Mexican-American students, complaining about the difficulties in teaching them and the belief that an excess of resources was given to Latino/a families. Mark, who is Salvadoran American, reported similar experiences from White colleagues, as these types of comments were made about Latino/a students at his school.

Microinsults can be far too common in the workplace, and a school setting predominately comprised of White teachers is no exception. Some teachers can be very vocal and voice frustrations over the low academic performance or behavioral issues among their minority students, or even make snide comments about other races when congregating with colleagues during lunch or after school, or even during faculty meetings, which was evident from one participant's interview. These hurtful comments may be made unashamedly, and are impactful to all school community members of color.

Microinvalidations

There were two key examples of microinvalidations shared by the two Mexican-American teachers. Lisa detailed the issue of how staff at her school would only discuss and brainstorm ideas on how to celebrate the various cultures, primarily the Mexican culture, and not take action to achieve this. According to Lisa, there was never any kind of follow-up from these conversations at staff meetings. Luna faced microinvalidations at work when she felt reluctant to engage with her colleagues about the cultural music she enjoys listening to, drawing from prior experiences of Mexican music not being accepted by her non-Mexican

colleagues.

Invalidating the various cultures across a school campus is commonplace in schools even in the 21st century. Unfortunately, a lot of the conversations and brainstorming sessions lead to inaction, thus not validating cultures but validating the apathy many school and district personnel share time and time again. This can leave students and staff of color feeling rejected and reluctant to show the multi-faceted angles of their race and ethnicity in front of their White counterparts.

Dysconscious Racism in School or District

Dysconscious racism was also evident among all the participants in the study. The following are the different examples of dysconscious racism noted in the study:

Eurocentric Curricula Adopted

A common theme among the responses regarding the curricula adopted was the notion that there is an overwhelmingly strong Eurocentric bias in today's teaching materials; however, school districts are aware of this disparity and are working towards greater inclusion. Teachers are obligated to find their own multicultural educational resources if they choose to incorporate multiculturalism into their teaching practices.

Additionally, there is an absence of core multicultural education curricula, at least within the workplaces of the participants interviewed. With the adopted core curriculum being overwhelmingly biased in favor of White perspectives, and multicultural education resources categorized as supplemental resources, if available at all, teachers interested in teaching their students using inclusive curricula are not being supported and given adequate tools to do their job. The phenomenon that takes place in curricula perpetuates a cycle of tunnel vision and narrow-mindedness and falsifies content or truly disregards quality materials that exist,

which consequently maintains White supremacy.

Lack of Ethnic Diversity in School Faculty

All of the participants in the study are teachers of color at schools where the vast majority of teachers are White women. Asian-American women make up the next highest percentage in teacher demography among the schools in the study, while a deficit remains with a limited number of African-American and Latino/a teachers.

Maintenance of White Educators in Leadership Positions Through Hiring Practices

A repeated response from participants pertained to their school districts' hiring practices, and the majority of the leadership being White. This was evident at both the school level, through leadership teams and committees, and the district level, based on administrative staff.

Although there is a small but notable percentage of teachers and other employees of color in schools and districts, the majority of these professionals remain within their job titles, rarely being promoted to higher-level positions or included in leadership committees. Based on interviews and the researcher's own experiences, members of leadership teams and those in leadership roles even within small school communities are led by White staff, and school wide decisions are repeatedly made by White school personnel, therefore leaving teachers of color feeling voiceless in matters that affect them and their students.

Failure to Acknowledge Other Cultures Through Celebrations and Traditions

A failure to acknowledge cultural celebrations and holidays was noted especially regarding the Asian and Latino cultures. Schools often dedicate a small portion of time and energy to celebrate these events, but they are generally presented as one-time, isolated occasions.

Schools are often guilty of holding singular, one-time events to celebrate cultures and diversity. For example, February is Black History month, and a school may choose to have a short assembly with students and sing songs that read books that reflect African Americans, but those very songs and books will very likely never be mentioned or revisited again. Even a school that clearly has a high student population of one specific minority race may only openly acknowledge that race once a year by hosting a “cultural event,” or potluck. The researcher’s workplace was an elementary school with a large population of Indian and Indian-American families, and each year the PTA (parent and teacher association) would organize an evening to showcase the culture through music, food, and dance. However, that was the extent of celebrating and affirming the Indian culture.

Lack of Accommodations for Working Families

Schools can also neglect to accommodate the busy work schedules of families when scheduling school events. For example, parent conferences and PTA (parent–teacher association) and school site council meetings may be scheduled at times when working families cannot attend, making it practically impossible for families to engage and connect with schools.

The failure to accommodate the busy schedules of families sends a message to school communities that parent attendance is not valued and important. If schools want to increase parent participation and involvement, they need to survey families and plan and schedule around the lives of their community and not to the convenience of school staff and personnel. Parents should feel that their input and attendance at school wide events or committees is indispensable and that the school cannot properly function without a high level of parent and family engagement.

Support for Teachers of Color

There was an absence of systems of support addressing culture and diversity for teachers of color. The following are examples of the kinds of support that were felt to be lacking:

Open Dialogue Around Support for Teachers of Color

Many of the participants in the study suggested the need for educators to engage in an open dialogue regarding support for teachers of color, and to check in with their colleagues about their experiences as teachers of color at their school. Teachers felt that generally these conversations were not taking place, and that it would be beneficial for teachers of color to know that their colleagues are interested in their perspectives and life experiences.

Since dialogue and conversations around teacher race and identity do not occur, teachers of color may see that it is not worth discussing when engaging with peers and colleagues. Typically, new teachers are provided with mentors to serve as coaches and individuals to be professional lines of support. Although these mentors offer a great deal of help and guidance for those new to the profession, teachers of color need to make connections that assists them in navigating the workplace as persons of color.

Open Dialogue and Conversations About Race

The urgency of dialogue about race extended to students, as this was viewed by participants as important to discuss not only with school staff but also in the classroom. Teachers saw the importance of talking to students about race, which suggested that by doing so, teachers of color would gain a greater sense of validation and purpose through their role as facilitators of multicultural education.

Teacher of color perceptions relating to race compared to the perceptions of White teachers differ and that manifests in their actions as teachers in the classroom. The participants

interviewed all alluded to the notion that race is an important factor as their role as a teacher, and furthermore, most of them talked extensively about the positive relationships formed between them and their students who share the same ethnicity. Unfortunately, this type of bond cannot be made between White teachers and their students of color.

Acknowledgement of Cultural Backgrounds of Staff

Acknowledgement of the various races and cultures represented among the teaching staff at schools was a vital component to support. According to respondents, this can be done in variety of ways, such as providing professional development on race, encouraging teachers of color to teach students about their own racial backgrounds, and celebrating cultural holidays at the school that may not be traditionally celebrated.

Despite the fact that the teacher of color population is small and clearly outnumbered, every non-white teacher wants to feel as though their cultural identity matters and is worthy of acknowledgement. Schools are far from reaching the point of conducting adequate professional development pertaining to race, but it can and should start with simple conversations that result from mutual respect and a desire to learn about one another.

Influence of Immigrant Parents

Regardless of ethnicity, the researcher found that children of immigrant parents feel indebted to parents for their hard work and sacrifices made when growing up as young children. This is not any different with the participants in the study, as they all expressed some form of gratitude and acknowledged their parents, knowing their dedication led them to succeed in life themselves. Furthermore, children of immigrant parents may have had both parents working and earning an income to provide for the family, or solely the father out working and the mother at home being a stay at home mother. In both scenarios, mothers and fathers were credited and

lauded by children.

In addition, children of immigrant parents desire to make their parents feel proud of their own accomplishments and successes. For example, the most practical way for this to occur is by meeting career goals and ambitions shared by all members of the family. Immigrant parents tend to push their children to exceed standards in school and earn high grades and be accepted into top universities, consequently leading to a high paying and prestigious job. Children more often than not pay back their parents in one form or another, typically in monetary terms, showing their appreciation for what they have received in the past.

There is a level of deep desire and tenacity from children of immigrant parents to thrive and do you well in this world. Individuals of color understand there are disadvantages to their cultural identity in the workforce and beyond. They also understand their own parents' immigrant stories and the struggles they have endured in order to make it in this country. Although their pathways are much different the road traveled by their immigrant parents, they faced their own struggles and barriers, making sense of their own individual identity.

Most of the participants in the study described the pivotal role their parents had played in their upbringing, thus shaping them into the individuals they are today. Five of the six participants spoke of their parents' being immigrants, and described how their particular family background influenced their lives as students growing up and then as the educators that they are now. It is important to highlight the relationship between teachers of color and their parents, as Areepattamannil and Lee (2014) noted:

It is critical to examine such relationships among immigrant children as well because there is growing evidence that immigrant parents hold higher expectations and aspirations for their children's educational attainment than do the native-born parents. Furthermore,

immigrant parents are more likely than native-born parents to maintain high expectations and aspirations for their children's educational attainment over time.

Consciousness of Racial Identity

Teachers of color are aware of their race and how it impacts their teaching and interactions with students of color. Many of the participants interviewed expressed the fact that they are consciously aware of their own cultural identity and how it impacts the lives of their students in the classroom. The researcher himself is fully cognizant of his race in the workplace and in the outside world. Teachers of color immediately recognize their student population and can identify the disparities that exist even before teaching a lesson on the first day of school. It is critical for teachers of color to be conscious of their own racial identity in order for them to be introspective and reflective for the ways in which they interact with their students of color.

There are many benefits to teachers of color being conscious of their racial identity. For example a teacher of a specific race can make faster and more meaningful connections with his or her students who share the same cultural identity, having a greater positive impact on student lives, both in academic and interpersonal settings. Racially conscious teachers of color can also create stronger relationships with the school community, especially with families who are from the same cultural background. This can serve as an advantage for all parties, as positive relationships between teachers and parents are something all stakeholders desire.

Unfortunately, the fact of the matter is many racial microaggressions come and go without being addressed. This may be a result of victims not being conscious of their own race. If all teachers of color at a school are fully conscious of their own racial identity, these teachers may be alert to the possibilities that microaggressions can take place in their own work environment. Teachers of color are falling victim to acts of racial microaggression committed by

well-intended colleagues who seemingly appear to be nonthreatening, but in actuality are perpetuating racial stereotyping and negative perceptions of people of color.

As teachers of color, all the participants somehow identified their race, and elaborated on their awareness of their race and how it is an important factor in their role as educators. The ethnicities of the participants were Salvadoran American, Mexican American (or Latina), African American, Vietnamese American, and Korean American. Some were more conscious than others when asked whether they thought about their own race in the classroom as teachers, and how it impacts the lives of their students. The way in which these teachers of color perceived themselves as racial beings and their identification with their particular race may also have influenced how they see students and the outside world. Sharon Tettegah (1996) argues that one's racial identity affects the development of racial attitudes toward oneself and others. Racial identity can thus be perceived as integrating those aspects of personality and attitudes that are based on one's membership in a particular racial group.

Implications for Practice

Racial Consciousness

I believe this long journey towards racial justice and equity in schools begins with all educators being racially conscious. Given that most students in California public schools are students of color, teachers need to look within themselves and see how their racial identity impacts their teaching practices and overall relationships with their students and colleagues. Teachers of color are presented with unique challenges to begin with, as they attempt to navigate an American school system that devalues and disregards the multitude of races and ethnicities that make up schools today. White teachers, by default, may fail to see the utmost importance in fully acknowledging race in their classrooms and embracing these cultures as opposed to

ignoring them and perpetuating a Eurocentric approach to everything school related.

Conversations around race should also take place in order to promote racial consciousness. Schools and school districts should be held responsible to facilitate open and honest dialogue, and listen to staff that are individuals of color. This can take place in more formal settings and forums, such as an ongoing professional development series, or even within informal environments, such as staff lounges or meeting areas. The major problem is that the people within school buildings choose to avoid the topic of race. If there can be a widely accepted level of commitment from all stakeholders, that begins with simply speaking and listening, there will be an easier pathway towards justice and reconciliation.

The benefits to racial consciousness can lead to positive change within teachers or educators themselves, and the lives of students affected in classrooms each day. Haynes and Patton (2019) state that “White faculty with higher levels of racial consciousness tend to employ behaviors in their classroom reflective of an expansive view of equality that disrupts classroom norms and traditions that reinforce racial subordination and instead benefits all students.”

Culturally Relevant Teachers (Professionals)

CRTs (culturally relevant teachers) are needed in the field of education and can directly address racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism in schools today. I would even argue that beyond the teaching role or title, all educators truly benefit from the ideas and philosophies of cultural relevance. It is important to note that CRTs are not exclusive to teachers of color or one specific ethnic group:

CR teachers are not all of color, and not all teachers of color are CR. A CR teacher, regardless of his or her racial or cultural origin, has a conscious understanding of systemic inequities and structures that impact the success and opportunities of racially

diverse students. (Durden et al., 2016)

Refined Hiring Practices

Employers in the field of education need to refine their hiring practices. When looking for teaching candidates, schools and school districts should highly value and prioritize the cultural competence of applicants and only consider those for employment who demonstrate this quality. This quality can be demonstrated by essentially speaking in detail about how they plan to specifically address race in their classrooms among their students.

In addition, there is clearly a need for more teachers of color. The disproportion in teacher demography must be addressed in order to achieve racial justice in the school system. Affirmative action practices should be taken into consideration, as this may help to remedy the staggering low number of teachers of color teaching students of color. This is not to alienate or exclude White teachers in this movement, but a shift in the teaching population needs to occur; otherwise history will repeat itself.

Introspection of Cultural Values that Reflect School Population

Schools need to perform self-assessments on how they serve the cultural values of their community. Although singular events like multicultural nights and potlucks are a step in the right direction, they are not enough to adequately address the rich diversity that fills the classrooms and school buildings each day. Schools can make an immediate change by being responsive to their highest population. For example, if a school's student demography is predominately Mexican or Mexican-American, the school should incorporate Mexican themes into their curricula, on a regular basis, and view the Spanish language as another primary language spoken on campus. Ultimately, students and teachers of color should be in a work or learning environment that not simply tolerates or "celebrates" their various cultures and races, but truly

integrates it into everyday life.

Training and Professional Development

All teachers need professional development to grow in their teacher careers.

Traditionally, professional development topics pertain to core subjects and content (ex. math, literacy, science) and other classroom related areas (ex. classroom management, social emotional learning). The researcher has yet to witness a professional development directly related to addressing race. Much like the aforementioned content areas stated above, the issue of race and the racial identities of students and staff are important and certainly worth unveiling as professionals.

By default, most White teachers are not accustomed to confronting the topic of race and how it impacts them in the workplace. Professional development allows for these teachers to be aware of how important it is to honestly acknowledge race and how being colorblind is detrimental to them and their students. Students and families of color, including staff of color, deserve to be taught and surrounded by adults and colleagues who understand and see them according to their racial identity.

Recommendations for Research

Dysconscious Racism

The topic of dysconscious racism in education should be further explored, as only limited research has so far been conducted on the topic. There is certainly a legitimate concern over dysconsciousness in schools today, as educators can improve on their intentionality and consciousness of how students of color are being taught and educated.

Further research can be conducted on the topic of White supremacy among school leaders in K-12 education. There were limited findings in the research, and this is an area noteworthy

and critical in exploring regarding racial justice in schools today. White educators overwhelmingly manage K-12 schools and school districts, and it is vital to analyze the effects and reasoning behind this added disparity in K-12 education. This is especially valuable to investigate in the state of California, as most of the students and families served in schools today are minorities.

The researcher pursued the presence of whiteness as property among school and school district personnel, and discovered a vast existence of this phenomenon within the workplaces of nearly every participant, including the researcher's own workplace. As mentioned previously, whiteness as property is defined as the "legitimation of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of white privilege and domination" (Harris 1993; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). A key element to whiteness as property is the ability to determine meaning, as this was evident based on interviews and from the personal experiences of the researcher. White educators, whether in the classroom or in areas of leadership, have the luxury and power to define what is important to teach, celebrate, and acknowledge. Therefore, further research can be conducted on the negative effects of whiteness as property in schools and school districts, and how the maintenance of whiteness impacts both teachers and students of color.

Racial Microaggressions

The topic of racial microaggressions should also be further explored in the field of education and in public schools, as many of the subjects interviewed stated that they had experienced microaggressions in the workplace and in their own personal lives. Much research has been conducted on racial microaggressions in the field of psychology, and the effects they have on college students. It is recommended that racial microaggressions be validated in the

world of public-school teachers of color, many of whose experiences are not known. It is a disservice to teachers and students of color when racial injustices are ignored, even if they seem minor and irrelevant to the overall picture of school or education.

Further research can be conducted around racial microaggressions classified school staff (i.e. paraeducators or aides, custodians, secretaries) experience among colleagues, as the researcher did not find anything related to the topic. Frequently, classified staff is left out of the conversation when discussing school matters to any degree, having most if not all the attention geared towards teachers and administrators. Classified staff members happen to make up the majority of school-staffing lists, outnumbering classroom teachers. It would be intriguing to compare their experiences with racial microaggressions (as many of them are individuals of color) to those of teachers of color.

Final Thoughts

I began this exploration of racial microaggressions and dysconscious racism among teachers with the strong assumption that these phenomena do in fact exist in schools today. Although we have entered the 21st century, and decades have passed since the civil rights movement, acts of racial injustice still permeate all parts of the country and exist within all domains, including schools.

As an educator in the state of California, and more specifically the Bay Area, I am aware that our community is primarily comprised of minorities, including the students in school. In addition, the school faculty or teacher demography is the mirror image of the student population, lacking equal cultural representation among teaching staff in schools across the state. The high ratio of students of color to White teachers may have a negative impact on the academic performance of students. According to Utt and Tochluk (2020), “the disparity between the racial

identities of teachers and students in urban schools is a particularly significant issue. White teachers are not being well prepared to teach in urban schools across the United States, which is directly connected to their performance in these schools. Research documents profound negative consequences of having a primarily White teaching force with little critical understanding of race and racism.” This is not a criticism of White teachers, but rather a call for racial introspection and cultural awareness in classrooms today. Though White teachers cannot ever know what it is like to be a person of color, they still have the power and opportunity to learn about their culturally diverse students and incorporate a teaching approach that truly fosters their racial identities. Far too often, teachers are guilty of being colorblind; I was once a perpetrator of this educational mindset, failing to embrace the cultural diversity of my students and their families.

The growing population of students of color and the perpetual cycle of school systems governed by predominantly White individuals at all levels in K-12 public education are phenomena that cannot be ignored. At the very least, their ramifications for individuals of color who exist in these systems should be investigated. Dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions are just two modes of racial injustice teachers of color may face in school systems that are supposed to promote cultural diversity and not discourage it through mistreatment—either intentional or unintentional.

The researcher is writing this section of the dissertation during an unprecedented time in the history of our nation, and beyond. In the months since the first draft of this paper was completed, two major world events have taken place: the spread of a deadly pandemic called COVID-19, and the growth of the mass protest movement against racial injustice, Black Lives Matter. Although both are highly important, the latter has the greater salience for this research into racism in education. Furthermore, the researcher has personally experienced racial

microaggressions and dysconscious racism within his former workplace in recent months, and highlights the key points below.

Black Lives Should Matter in Schools: A Real-Life Microinvalidation Against African Americans

The tragic and unfortunate death of George Floyd has rightly sparked worldwide protests against police brutality, as people voiced their outrage and demanded justice for African Americans who are repeatedly targeted with unjustified force. Floyd died on May 25, 2020, and the crime committed against him immediately alerted a nation that is racially divided. Local and national media spotlighted Floyd’s story and the protests that spread through communities across America. In the opinion of the researcher, it was virtually impossible for anyone not to be aware of these events, and to simply ignore it would have been imprudent.

During these protests, and shortly after Floyd’s death, the researcher attended a virtual work meeting with fellow school administrators, led by the district’s superintendent. The main purpose of the meeting was to brainstorm ideas on how to reopen schools in the fall, for the start of the 2020–2021 school year. At the end of the meeting, attendees were asked if there were any other concerns to share, or if anyone wanted to share what was on their minds. First, the researcher was somewhat surprised that none of the attendees or facilitators of the meeting brought up the topic of racial injustice or the protests happening in our community. Moreover, when given the opportunity, the researcher asked whether the district planned on sending out some kind of message to all families in the district about the racial injustice and protests, to which the superintendent responded by saying, “We haven’t decided yet.”

It was very disappointing to hear that district officials were hesitant to send out even a brief letter to our students and their families letting them know that we unequivocally oppose

racism against African Americans and that this contradicts one of the district's core values (diversity). In the 2019–2020 school year, this specific district had approximately 400 African-American students enrolled in grades K–12. To realize that our district might stay silent, failing to reassure our hundreds of African-American students, was disheartening, and an unfortunate real-life racial microaggression (microinvalidation) perpetrated by the researcher's own employer.

Following a statement sent out by the county office of education approximately one to two weeks after the meeting, the district then put out their own statement, which included some action items to increase racial awareness among students and staff, through changes to practices and reflection on personal biases. The researcher is not confident that the district will follow through on these action items, primarily because the district may fail to prioritize this critical matter, and secondarily because schools are consumed with their reopening plan for the new school year, amid the spread of COVID-19.

White Dominance Can Lead to Dysconscious Racism

The aforementioned school district serves over 15,000 K–12 students and an additional 6,000 students in preschool through adult school. Needless to say, this is a large school district, which is made up predominantly of students of color, with approximately 80% minority students, taught by White teachers who make up 70% of the teaching force (California Department of Education, 2020), and led by an almost 100% White district administration and school board of trustees. In fact, since its inception, the district has never had a non-White superintendent, and only two women have held the superintendent position. Currently, 100% of the school district cabinet members (four assistant superintendents) are White, under the leadership of a White superintendent, and overseen by a board of trustees six out of seven of whom are White.

Additionally, brand new job titles and positions have been created within the district, occupied by 100% White employees, with some in-house individuals to possibly retain their administrative status. In terms of leadership and administration staffing, the district clearly lacks racial diversity and does not seem to be addressing the issue, even moving forward into the new school year.

It is the researcher's hope that light has been shed on racism in our communities as a whole, but primarily in our school system. Educators must be introspective and reflect on the role that they play in the lives of their students. Leaders in school districts should begin to understand the structures they have put in place, and how their own race and privilege impacts the vital decisions they make that deeply affect thousands of students and their families every day. There should be a maximized effort to hire and retain leaders of color in districts, not only to achieve a more equal representation of races, but to achieve the true diversity that emerges from the perspectives of those who reflect the backgrounds of our school communities culturally and racially. The time has come for dysconsciousness to become consciousness, and for real change to take place in our schools.

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