EFFORTS TO CREATE A TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOM IN HIGHER EDUCATION: INSIGHTS FROM MEMBERS OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING GROUP

Danyelle Marshall

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EFFORTS TO CREATE A TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOM IN HIGHER EDUCATION: INSIGHTS FROM MEMBERS OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING GROUP

A Dissertation Proposal
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

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

By
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San Francisco, 2022
ABSTRACT

BIPOC students attending a community college in the Bay Area bring traumas to school with them and then they relive their traumas in the classroom through professors’ pedagogy and the curriculum. This dissertation which was conducted during twin pandemics of COVID 19 and racism, researched a group of English professors that teach first generation community college students in their second year and above to understand what they know about trauma and their students and how they begin to conceive efforts to develop trauma-informed pedagogy. Data were collected using a focus group and individual interviews. The focus group created an environment for the professors to discuss among each other how they all wanted to create a trauma-informed classroom and the progress and challenges they saw along the way. The findings offer next steps for researchers to embark to create trauma-informed classrooms in higher educational settings, including professional development on trauma informed community college classrooms, curriculum redesign, evaluation focused on student inclusion, and ongoing assessment.

**Key words:** trauma, trauma informed, BIPOC students, anti-racism, English, community college
SIGNATURE PAGE

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 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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David Donahue 11/2/22
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Colette Cann 11/2/22

Darrick Smith 11/2/22
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the following people who all gifted me with knowledge:

Donnell Marshall (twin) – my life partner 陰陽

John Marshall (father) – my community activist and counselor

Clinton Marshall (mother) – my biggest educational cheerleader

Robert Marshall (uncle) – Thank you for the big words and elevation

I also dedicate this journey to my sister who is now the historian of the family and my ancestors who came before me.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This effort would not have been possible without all who came before me and paved the way. This educational journey has been encouraged by many people. Several mentors were sources of encouragement that propelled me forward toward completion. There is a big thanks to a mentor, Dr. Betty Taylor, who told me not to let anyone deter me from this great endeavor. She created a sisterhood in her class with her students that will not be forgotten. In one of her classes, an acronym was created: WOCHE – Women of Color in Higher Education. This class bonded well and some of us still stay in touch. There is also a big thanks to my University of San Francisco family. Their commitment to me completing this work and continuing to emphasize the significance of this type of research is invaluable. My biggest supporters have been my dissertation committee, my advisor, the Dean of the School of Education.

One brilliant scholar, Dr. Colette Cann gave me words of encouragement when I was at a crossroads, and Imposter Syndrome had firmly planted uncertainty in my thought process. Dr. Cann stated to me: “A doctorate program is for an exchange of ideas and work with other scholars to effect change in the educational system. Your knowledge and work is valid.” This small exchange of words propelled me to continue this research and believe in myself. I shared that I will be the first in my family to make it to this level – no simple feat. I gained strength from this conversation and many others.

The other impactful person on my committee is Dr. Darrick Smith. Our paths have crossed in different settings, but to have him reviewing my work is highly important as we have served some of the same populations. During a conversation, he stated, “your work will be impactful. The program you direct could have been used for doctoral research”. The ability to
speak with him about thoughts and directions of this dissertation was relevant and immensely helpful.

My original advisor, Dr. Susan Katz, took the time to work with me on advising of classes that would be helpful in my dissertation, continued to impress upon me the significance of the research and shared in my fears of being out there on a limb seemingly by myself. Whenever I needed encouragement, she was right there. Her comment always ended, “you can do it – this research is really important”. Dr. Katz also shared the difficulties I may have with getting subjects for this research and recommended me to have a plan A and plan B. Plan A worked out.

My dissertation committee chair, Dr. David Donahue, has been my warm demander. He has used empathetic language to motivate me to continue and complete this process. He listened to me but did not allow my “excuses” to derail me. He gave me timelines and what his expectations were and said to me, “you have the ability to complete this if you write every day.” I digested what I was told and wrote every day, EVERY DAY. I created my own goal of at least a page a day and that worked for me. His support and encouragement has been appreciated.

The USF community is a fabulous environment for learning under the social justice practices within the Jesuit teachings. Creating an environment to meet other scholars that look at spirituality differently helps to create an inclusive community. Some may think of the doctorate process as the end to a journey, I think of it as a new beginning. As a person of the BIPOC community, the microaggressions and questioning will still happen, but this work validates my knowledge and gives creditability to the communities I continue serve.
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CHAPTER I
THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

You bring “you” with you to school. (Professor Marshall, 2020)

Introduction

As a professor in an urban community college, I have worked with thousands of students from all walks of life. They include urban youth, immigrants, students with disabilities (both visible and invisible), English Language Learners, and every affinity group on a college campus. Many professors and students are presented with situations that contribute to uncomfortable conversations and environments on college campuses. The following excerpts are conversations that students and professors have shared with me as well as an “aha” moment I had as a researcher in my own classroom.

Story 1

As a new counselor and professor beginning a career in a community college, it never occurred to me that I would have to work with clients with unresolved traumas – the same traumas I worked with in the community in Oakland, California as a therapist. During my first year at a community college in the East Bay, my first student with a traumatic background came into my office. The student was an African American female. She came into my office, and like all other students before, I greeted her with “How are you today?” This question gave her permission to eventually share her childhood experience, and gave her a safe space to sit and cry in front of me for the next two hours, barely able to speak. We did a series of deep breaths and positive thoughts to keep this student from hyperventilating or having a panic attack. After about an hour and a half, the student was able to speak.

The normal questions I asked my students were not applicable to her, and so I went into my therapist mode. I explained to this student that if I could not help her to calm down, I would
have to call an ambulance for her to go to the hospital so she could get treatment; in other words, I’d have to place her on a 5150 hold. I explained that I could not let her drive in that state and asked if she had a friend or relative whom I could call on her behalf. She stated she was a single mother of three small children. After she gave me the number of a friend, we called that person who stated she would be there in an hour. This gave me an hour. I was not sure it would be enough time through all the tears that this student was shedding.

This student was triggered in English class. This befuddled me because at this time I was naïve enough to not understand how an English class could have triggered her to this degree. She walked me through the process of how she became triggered. The student stated that the teacher asked her to “write about her childhood.” This student saw the look of confusion on my face, which then gave her the space to talk about her experience as she wanted me to understand not only her plight, but to understand her. She began telling me about the trauma she experienced growing up – the beatings, the hunger, the isolation, the lack of protection, the pure suffering. She stated all of it in brutal honesty. My heart ached for her; I knew her pain, I’ve felt her pain, and even experienced some of that pain. She shared with me that as an African American, she was raised in a culture that believed in the religious statement, “Spare the rod, spoil the child.”

After she shared this information about the assignment, I expressed that the teacher’s prompt was not threatening, although she interpreted it to be so. I also took the bold step to explain to her that she needed to speak with “someone” which, for me, is code for a mental health professional, as she needed to deal with her past traumas to be able to complete college. She stated that she didn’t know if she could trust anyone, and then I told her, “You just trusted me.” She stated because I was different, but she could not tell me how.
When the student’s friend arrived, I shared with her friend what had happened with the permission of the student. The friend stated that she was not surprised as she knew she had not dealt with her childhood and had recommended for her to seek help. I told her to continue to persuade her to get help, if for no other reason, for her children. The friend agreed. As I have always done, I followed up with the student a few days later only to find out she had dropped out of school. She stated she was not ready.

**Story 2**

As a conference was wrapping up, a colleague pulled me aside to ask me what I thought about a particular scenario. We chatted for a while. The professor asked me what my thought was about a teacher giving an assignment to a group of students that triggered them as asylum seekers who were English Language Learners (ELL) in community college. At the community college level, special subject matters have two instructors in class - one who helps students with English grammar and the other lead instructor who creates the curriculum and grades the students. The colleague told me about an assignment the lead teacher gave the students to write about their past trauma. No other instructions were given. This colleague, who has heard me deliver messaging about re-traumatizing students of color, asked the teacher, “What if this triggers the students?” The lead teacher’s comment was, “I don’t care; they have to deal with it.” My colleague told me that the next day of class, one third of these ELL students did not return.

**Story 3**

A particular student of African descent expressed that he liked my style of teaching and counseling and asked me to assist him to complete his community college career and transfer to university. I worked with this student for almost two years. He was the only person from his family in California so he had a very small support system. He came from a country on the
continent of Africa after being imprisoned for being an “anarchist,” and was beaten and tortured. One particular day, he came hurriedly to the office asking, “Where is Ms. Marshall? I need to see her now!” in an exasperated voice. When I heard his voice, I went out to greet him and asked what was wrong. I brought him to my office, as my office staff continued to ask if I needed support. A staff member pulled me to the side and stated, I should keep my door open in case I needed assistance.

When we entered my office, I noticed he was sweating, breathing rapidly, pupils dilated, heart beating fast, and his accent thicker because he was so upset. I asked him to calm down as I did not want him to hyperventilate. After about 10 minutes, he stated to me that he was given an assignment from his English professor to “write about your past where you grew up.” He repeated continuously, “I’m dropping out, I’m dropping out!” I again asked him to calm down. He stated, “I told you what I went through being put in jail in my country. You know I suffer from PTSD. I can’t write about that!” After calming him down again, I asked to see his assignment, which he then showed me. After reading it, I stated to him in the calmest voice I could muster, “You don’t have to write about that part of your past. Instead, you are going to write about the past year and what you have accomplished since arriving in the United States.” After reframing the assignment for him, he relaxed; then he started tearing up. He thanked me many times and gave me a hug and explained it was technically against his Muslim religion to give me a hug, but he was so grateful.

These three scenarios are so very closely linked, but not related to the same professor. Some instructors may not imagine the dilemma these students had or their feelings at the time of hearing this assignment, processing it, and trying to accomplish the assignment, or considering to not do it at all and risk not accomplishing their dreams. This next scenario does not have to do
with professors, but the environment where some community college students live. This following story presented the “aha” moment for this researcher as an educator.

**Story 4**

This day was one of my favorites because I was teaching. My schedule involved teaching Tuesdays and Thursdays, then counseling the other three days. The students in this class consisted of majority African American and Latinx students, with Asian/Pacific Islanders closely following, and a few White students, totaling 35 students. The program was geared toward the retention of African American and Latinx male students in college. On this particular day I was teaching a college success class to students who were labeled as “dropouts” from their former high school. This particular class was one of my favorites because my students seemed to have a thirst for knowledge. When I entered the classroom on this day, only a few students (about 10) were in attendance, which was odd because usually around 20 would be in the classroom at this time. Students began to trickle in slowly; many had solemn looks on their faces. Eventually the entire class, 30 students, entered the classroom that day.

That day we were going to discuss the matriculation process to continue the students’ college goals. Like always, I began class by checking in with the students regarding their week. This time there was a hushed tone, and the normally talkative students were not engaged. Instead, my students who were usually the least interactive were volunteering to speak up. I sensed a deafening silence and noticeable tension in the classroom. I allowed this to go on for a few minutes to see if anyone was going to share. I took a bold leap and told the class that I was “feeling something” in the class. I asked, “What is going on?” I waited and waited and waited. I have been trained to allow for empty space in the room and not to fill it.
After about a minute, one of my generally talkative students raised his hand. He stated in a choked voice, “My best friend was killed last night…I didn’t get much sleep.” I said to him, “I am so sorry. How are you doing?” He responded with a crackling, shaken voice, holding back tears, and stated, “I am very sad and mad and I want to do something.” After he said that, another student affirmed, “Yeah, I know how you feel.” Then another student said, “We can’t let this go.” To redirect the class, I asked them how many students knew this person. Every African American and Latinx student in the class knew this young person, including approximately 25 students, both male and female. The only ones who did not know this person were the Asian/Pacific Islander and White students. I then asked the class how many of them have lost more than one young person they knew this month. Every hand in the class went up including the students that identified as API and White students.

Feeling the heaviness in the room, I decided to change the direction of the class for that day. I halted the talk of retaliation and requested the class form a circle, and we conducted a healing ceremony. I had 50 minutes left in class and I had to do something because I couldn’t let these traumatized and grieving students leave my presence without some type of intervention. I asked the students to share their answers to these three questions: What is your fondest memory of him? If you could say one more thing to him what would that be? And, what do you think he would want you to do in his honor?

After the discussion, there was laughter and lots of smiles through the tears. It was close to the end of the class, and I checked in to find out how the students were feeling. The best friend of the youth said to me: “Ms. Marshall, thank you. Nobody has ever done this for me – taking class to let us talk about our friend. I appreciate you. I feel a little better.” We concluded the
period with well-wishing for the fallen youth. Surprisingly to me, every student showed up for class the next day and no retaliatory acts were taken on his behalf.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is a common theme that runs through these scenarios. Each story has some form of trauma attached. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition (DSM 5, 2013) categorizes trauma under the label of “Trauma and Stress Related Disorders.” The general definition is “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violation” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This paper specifically used the term of complex trauma which is, “exposure to multiple traumatic events—often of an invasive, interpersonal nature—and the wide-ranging, long-term effects of this exposure. These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect” (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2007), and the term of chronic trauma “results from repeated and prolonged exposure to highly stressful events. Examples include cases of child abuse, bullying, or domestic violence” (medicalnewstoday.com, Leonard, 2020), which are categorized under the Disorder named above. Other terms used in this study appear in the Definition of Terms section (see p. 22). These two explanations of trauma are imperative for the understanding of what BIPOC students who attend college carry through no fault of their own. This dissertation researched how community college faculty, especially faculty in English, understand the intersectionality of trauma, racism, and education and what they do with this understanding as they plan and implement their curriculum.

The teaching profession is still monopolized by white people, even in the community college system, with a disparity between teachers and students. The lived experiences and backgrounds of the students attending community college do not match that of the backgrounds
and lived experiences of most professors. According to the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Fall 2020 statistics, the percentage of white tenured faculty is 57.49%. All other tenured faculty demographics (African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, Multi-ethnic and unknown) in the community college system total 42.52% (California Community College Chancellor’s Office, 2021). Tenured professors in the California community college system have all achieved a Master’s degree in colleges/universities in the state for teaching credit classes, may or may not live in an urban setting, and often do not understand the environmental triggers that students of color experience. Many professors, therefore, do not understand the experiences of BIPOC students. BIPOC students have lived experiences that include domestic violence, physical/sexual/psychological/emotional abuse, microaggressions, gun and gang violence, poverty and/or homelessness, and other traumatic events (Aruguete & Edman, 2019). According to Aruguete and Edman (2019), Black students and students of color reported higher occurrences of trauma and resiliency contributed to no more diagnoses of other disorders than other ethnic groups.

In 2020, all students experienced trauma, knowingly or unknowingly. Some experienced new traumas, such as COVID-19 related issues along with anti-Blackness racism and anti-Asian racism in the United States. COVID-19 disproportionately affected African Americans and communities of color as does racism. According to Anand and Hsu (2020), there have been many nationally televised events that contributed to racialized events that disproportionately affected BIPOC communities. There is also a disproportionate disadvantage for BIPOC communities in the educational setting. Anand and Hsu said, “Most higher education institutions have ostentatiously committed themselves to antiracism efforts, and yet, there has been little
evidence to show actual change in the institutional power structures in addressing systemic racism” (p. 191). The article also spoke to the school closures and expressed the disparities in housing, food, financial assistance let alone educational opportunities. Anand and Hsu stated, “Community colleges, tribal colleges, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were further impacted, with the majority of students they serve affected by socioeconomic barriers that put them at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19” (p. 191). The health pandemic along with increases of visible racism in 2020 have increased the relevance and importance of this research.

**Race and Higher Education**

Patton (2016) argued that the underrepresentation of Students of Color in higher education is related to a long history of racism in the United States and institutions of higher education. Patton identified three key issues. First, higher education is deeply rooted in racism. From their founding, the first institutions were established as all-White institutions with the oldest, Harvard University, not admitting its first African American students until 229 years after it began (Cohen, 2018). As a result, institutions of higher education are geared toward white, privileged men, and the curricula still represents white ideologies. Campus policies and spaces are not at all geared toward people of color.

Patton’s (2016) second point was that the function of higher education is “intricately linked to imperialistic and capitalistic efforts that fuel the intersection of race, property and oppression” (p. 317). Patton claimed that colleges and universities must acknowledge their “violent, imperialistic and oppressive past” (p. 317). And, finally, Patton argued that U.S. higher education institutions are venues for knowledge production with racist undertones and that “every academic discipline - psychology, biology, geography, philosophy, religion, anthropology, literature and history, has been used to justify colonialism and racism” (p. 321). These practices in academia are still rooted in the belief that students of color, especially Black
and Latinx as well as Native American students (and their families and cultures), are still considered undervalued in schools. This fact contributed to the underrepresentation of students of color in higher education.

According to the *State of Higher Education for Black Californians* published by the Campaign for College Opportunity (2019), 89% of African American students graduated from high school with a diploma or an equivalent, but similar indicators for college graduation are not as great. For example, 63% of African American students who attend community colleges in California do not “earn a certificate, degree or transfer to a four-year college within six years” (p. 4). The study indicated that only three percent of students in community college transfer to four-year universities within two years and only 35% within six years. Also, of the African American students who attended the California State University as freshmen, 57% do not complete their degree within six years and only 9% complete their degree in four years.

**Background and Need**

**The Role of Trauma in the Experiences of Students of Color in Schools**

Much of the research on how experiences with trauma affect schooling has been conducted with K-12 students. There are three types of childhood trauma experiences: acute, chronic, and complex. A training center that trains social workers in the Bay Area, The Bay Area Academy (2018), defines these three types of trauma in this way: 1) Acute Trauma represents a single traumatic event, such as a serious accident, natural disaster, physical or sexual assault, community violence or a school shooting. 2) Chronic Trauma involves a series of multiple events, such as child neglect or exposure to community violence on an ongoing basis. 3) Complex Trauma includes psychological trauma in early childhood that has been chronic and
interpersonal in nature. These traumatic events are usually experienced through the child’s care-
giving system.

Experiences with these forms of trauma can cause long term effects on the brain. According to Myers and Dewall (2016), trauma affects four main areas of the brain, including the brain stem (also referred to as the reptilian brain, which controls the function of the heart, breathing, balance and body temperature); the hippocampus, which controls short-term and long-
term memory; the amygdala, which controls emotions and behavior and plays a huge role in fear factors (flight, fright or freeze); and the prefrontal cortex, which is for planning and personality development.

Children who experience trauma bring these conditions to school. Research documents that teachers notice connections between students who have difficulty developing critical thinking skills and high levels of what is classified as toxic stress in those students’ lives. Children are 76% more likely to have delays in language as well as emotional and brain development if they have five or more stress factors, according to the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES) by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. More importantly, children who suffer from these conditions display behaviors in the classroom that present as defiance, disinterest, and stress or PTSD, anxiety, social anxiety, and an increase in suicidal thoughts. All of these behaviors affect the limbic system contributing to the fight, flight, and freeze responses. The fight reflex may behaviorally appear as defiance or opposition, the flight reflex could resemble daydreaming, hyperreactivity and hyperactivity, and the freeze response can resemble what seems to be no interest at all, a flat affect or blank stare. A student can display behaviors of defiance, disinterest on one day and other behaviors, such as daydreaming or hyperactivity on another day, which makes it difficult to treat and/or manage.
Trust is a huge issue for students who have experienced trauma. These students may have difficulty making friends, may show fear in the classroom, or may be hypervigilant toward others, which are all examples of childhood complex and chronic traumatic behavioral experiences. The ACES report (1998) was a collaborative project between Kaiser and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). The study’s 17,000 participants were predominantly White middle class adults between the ages of 50 and 75 years of age who reflected on their childhood experiences and related these to their trauma. The study focused on specific areas of trauma, such as abuse, neglect, and mental illness.

According to the first ACES study, “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults” (1998), Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, Koss and Marks discovered seven categories occurring in childhood that lead to adverse effects into adulthood. “1. Physical abuse, 2. psychological abuse, 3. sexual abuse, 4. substance abuse, 5. mental illness, 6. violent treatment by mother or stepmother or 7. criminal behavior” (ACES, 1998, p. 248). These researchers also identified 10 risk factors that the study also measured that contributed to deteriorating health. The risk factors included “smoking, severe obesity, physical inactivity, depressed moods, suicide attempts, alcoholism, any drug abuse, parental drug abuse, a high lifetime of sexual partners and a history of sexually transmitted disease” (ACES, 1998, p. 248).

More recently, the ACES research has focused on the role of trauma in the lives of youth of color and the effect on their schooling performance. Burke, Hellman, Scott, Weems, and Carrion (2011), the authors of “The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on an Urban Pediatric Population,” looked at the prevalence of experiences with ACES in a low-income urban community and the effects of ACES on educational experiences. They restated the seven
categories from the original ACES study and added two new categories that affect trauma in children:

1) recurrent physical abuse; 2) recurrent emotional abuse; 3) contact sexual abuse; 4) an alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household; 5) an incarcerated household member; 6) someone who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized, or suicidal; 7) mother or stepmother treated violently; 8) one or no parents; and 9) emotional or physical neglect”. (Burke et al., 2011, p. 409)

In their study, Burke et al (2011) found that youth experiences of ACES are higher in urban communities, and youth who experienced more categories were more likely to experience challenges in learning. The authors wrote: “30–40% of youth exposed to community violence develop posttraumatic stress symptoms such as re-experience (nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and flashbacks), avoidance of traumatic triggers and emotional numbing (constriction of affect) and physiological hyperarousal (hypervigilance, insomnia, behavioral problems” (p. 409). These symptoms impact behavioral and emotional development as well as academic performance. According to Burke et al. (2011), “…learning/behavioral difficulties have been shown to be associated with the development of depression, anxiety, bullying, and suicidality among other outcomes” (p. 409). Burke et al (2011) expanded this into a public health concern as well. The ACES study uses specific categories to explain how negative childhood experiences contribute to adult outcomes that create problems with heart disease/hypertension, obesity, suicidality including depressive symptoms, post-traumatic stress, and STI/STDs. These conditions do not constitute an exhaustive list. The research has unfortunately linked many of these medical conditions, formulated in childhood, to continue into adulthood.
Much of the trauma that students of color experience is the result of centuries of racism in the U.S. In a statement released in 2019, “The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health,” the American Psychiatric Association documented the effects of racism on children. They wrote: “Racism is a core social determinant of health that is a driver of health inequities” (p. 2). The article defines social determinants of health as “the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age” (p. 2). The article explains how the determinants affect many areas of a person’s health by the contributing factors of money, social influence politics, and racism.

Youth who witness or experience racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue carry additional experiences with trauma that can affect them into adulthood. Students of color not only carry trauma from their childhood due to racism, but also continue to experience trauma in college due to racism. According to Smith, Allen, and Danley (2016), Black males continue to experience the trauma of racial microaggressions, Black misandry, and racial battle fatigue in the college system, caused by experiences with “…stereotyping, using extreme hypersurveillance and control” (p. 551). Their experiences with this trauma caused “social-psychological stress responses (frustration, anger, exhaustion, psychological or emotional withdrawal and escapism)” (p. 552).

Black women in college also experience racial battle fatigue. Corbin, Smith and Garcia (2018) conducted interviews of Black women in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) to gain insight into their experiences on the college campus. African American students spoke about how their thought process is always challenged by White peers and faculty. In her interview, one Black student explained, “Even when you speak up, sometimes you aren’t even taken seriously anyway. Like what you’re saying isn’t even true” (p. 634). There are mental and emotional costs
to racial battle fatigue, according to researchers such as Smith, Allen, Danley, Yosso, and Solórzano, to name a few. These researchers share the personal stories of Black males and females, particularly, who suffer microaggressions and macroaggressions on predominantly white campuses across the country.

**Purpose of the Study**

This dissertation focused on a subsection of instructors teaching BIPOC students in the community college setting. The experiences of BIPOC students who have experienced significant life trauma are often triggered in the classroom environment since colleges and universities overlook their traumatic experiences. This dissertation studied the understanding of white professors attempting to create a trauma-informed classroom, how it affected the students in their classroom, and how they thought about the connection between their curriculum and pedagogy with students’ trauma. It points out faculty understanding and misunderstandings about trauma and BIPOC students’ experiences, in order to describe instructors’ base level knowledge as a starting point for further professional education and development. This research offers a new terminology that encompasses an explanation of what BIPOC students who experienced trauma may need in the classroom to help them more likely to excel academically. This terminology does not recommend that educators focus on students’ trauma or make all class lessons about trauma. Instead, it recommends acknowledging the trauma that may be present in the classroom and then designing lessons in a way to ensure the best outcomes with a focus on creating a sense of belonging, addressing feelings of isolation, and building a sense of community within the classroom.
Research Questions

1. How do faculty think about the previous life experiences of the students they serve before creating their syllabus?

2. What pedagogies do faculty in higher education use to support students of color who have previously suffered chronic, complex and racial traumas to feel safe and less isolated in an educational environment?

3. What experiences have faculty in higher education had with students who have experienced trauma?

4. How do professors discuss difficult subject matter with their class?

Theoretical Frameworks

Grounded Theory as an Emergent Method

According to Charmaz (2006), Grounded Theory allows problem solving and imaginative creativity and refinements to be done during and after the experimental phase. Grounded Theory also emphasizes the process rather than the outcome or result. The overall concept is to use the data in analyzing the theories that emerge. Grounded Theory accepts the past, deals with the immediacy of the present, and makes a pathway for the future. This theory works well with new and formalized theories to explain a concept logically as well as using an innovative approach.

Critical Educational Trauma Theory

Critical Educational Trauma Theory is being defined as addressing African American students and students of color who suffer from exposure to include acute, chronic and complex traumas, Racial Battle Fatigue, Racial Trauma, Mundane Environmental Excessive Stress (MEES) and Adverse Childhood Traumas and who are triggered in the classroom with specific
subject matter that does not acknowledge students’ trauma or offer a healing component to students.

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Educational Trauma Theory (Marshall, 2020)

The researcher developed this theory based on other frameworks of scholars, such as William Smith et al. (2007), Shawn Ginwright (2015), Jeff Andrade-Duncan (2007) and others who have written about the plight of African American students and other students of color in predominantly White educational institutions. William Smith (2007) coined the term of MEES to express how everyday stressors not only contribute to obstacles in the education of underrepresented students but also can cause health conditions, illness, and early death. Smith (2007) coined the term “Racial Battle Fatigue” to describe the psychological stress of people of color on “historically” White campuses.
This theory also incorporates the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study redefined by Burke et al. (2011) to explain how childhood trauma affects individuals with the nine factors that include 1) recurrent physical abuse; 2) recurrent emotional abuse; 3) contact sexual abuse; 4) an alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household; 5) an incarcerated household member; 6) someone who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized, or suicidal; 7) mother treated violently; 8) one or no parents; and 9) emotional or physical neglect, and 10) divorce. ACES (1998) researched how these 10 risk factors affected the physical health of individuals into adulthood.

The last aspect included in this theory is racial trauma and the levels of trauma that people suffer throughout their life. These traumas prevail throughout an individual’s life and can be difficult if not impossible to dismiss and move forward. Curriculum and Pedagogy also causes trauma for students. Naming this practice will gain the acceptance of the re-traumatization and oppression of BIPOC students in the classroom and beyond through practiced pedagogy and curriculum development.
**Limitations**

This research relies for the most part on faculty participants and their commitment to speak about their knowledge regarding trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive practices and how they use these practices with their students. One limitation is the understanding that faculty may hold about the preparedness of the BIPOC students suffering from trauma and the training of the professors regarding learning theory with students who suffer trauma and the effect on the outcomes of the students. Another limitation is the small size of this study. Generalizations to all white instructors are not possible, but the findings can contribute to understanding patterns of traumatization in classrooms overall and our understanding of what faculty know about and plan around this process.

**Delimitations**

This research will take place over a four-month time period. I will ask professors to whom I have access to be the research participants and to speak about how they use trauma-informed practices or gain best results in their classrooms. I will use my relationships with faculty and programs for equitable assistance to research participants. This research will help to set the classroom as a safe and brave space to create the best learning environment. The professors will learn about the frustrations of students and the emotions raised in the classroom in order to understand how to redirect students and decrease the trauma they experience.
Definition of Terms

Adverse Childhood Experience Study (ACES)– The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente conducted a study on childhood abuse and neglect and household challenges and later-life health. This study is one of the largest investigations and ranged from 1995 to 1997 with two waves of data collection from 17,000 members centered in Southern California (Felitti, 1998).

Andragogy – the practice of teaching adult learners; adult education (dictionary.com)

Black Misandry - dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against Black men (Smith, 2011).

Microaggressions – “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership” (Sue, et.al 2007, p. 273)

Microassaults - conscious, deliberate and either subtle or explicit … biased attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that are communicated to marginalized groups through environmental cues, verbalizations, or behaviors” (Sue, 2007, p. 274).

Misogynoir – coined by Moya Bailey, a queer Black feminist, created the term to address misogyny directed toward Black women in American visual and popular culture. (Wikipedia.org/misogynoir)

Racial Battle Fatigue - “cumulative result of a natural race-related stress response to distressing mental and emotional conditions. These conditions emerged from constantly facing racially dismissive, demeaning, insensitive and/or hostile racial environments and individuals” (Smith, et.al 2007 p. 555).
Re-traumatization – “one's reaction to a traumatic exposure that is colored, intensified, amplified, or shaped by one's reactions and adaptational style to previous traumatic experiences” (Alexander, 2012).

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy - begins with an awareness of the trauma students may have experienced or be experiencing (in many possible shapes and forms), and a commitment to enacting teaching strategies to support and nurture students in their learning journeys. (library.guilford.edu/resilient-teaching, 2021).

**Educational Significance**

The significance of this research stems from educating professors with an understanding of traumas BIPOC students suffer in the classroom. Faculty members will be the research participants and the catalyst for how institutions of higher education can give students a sense of belonging and the autonomy to create an environment that meets the students’ needs. This research focuses on faculty understanding the ways that BIPOC students who suffer traumas in the higher educational setting are being retraumatized in the classroom. These students have an unspoken vulnerability that runs deep as most have suffered rejection in the classroom at some time. According to Vacarro et al. (2015), many students have internalized the oppression that comes with being different and “…come to believe they are…less than capable” (p. 673). Nothing is further from the truth.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation explores community college instructors’ understanding of how adult students who previously suffered trauma in childhood or prior to college handle additional traumas that arise in their community college classrooms. These students can be re-traumatized when exposed to racial microaggressions (causing racial battle fatigue) or triggering trauma-insensitive pedagogies in their classrooms. Little research exists on how students of color at the intersection of primary trauma, secondary trauma, and race-based trauma experience the classroom (particularly when exposed to additional classroom-based trauma). Few studies have examined how these students feel about their classroom experiences and, most importantly, what type of classroom pedagogy they need to feel supported and succeed academically. Fewer still examine the perspectives of the instructors of these classrooms.

In this chapter, I review significant literature in four specific areas related to this research. The first section looks at extant research on early childhood trauma and the effects of childhood trauma on the well-being and learning abilities of youth (with a focus on youth of color) in an academic setting. In this section I also review literature that links early experiences with trauma to later effects on students’ college experiences. In the second section, I turn to literature that focuses on trauma experienced by African American students, in particular, in an academic setting. These traumas are influenced by everyday racisms, microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue, which affect learning outcomes. The third section looks at literature on trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive pedagogies that have been used in the K-12 academic settings. Though my present research focuses on college students, few past studies have been done on trauma-informed pedagogy in college academic settings (and even less on the use of trauma-informed pedagogy with BIPOC students). The existing research in K-12 settings provides direction for
future work in the area of trauma-informed/trauma-sensitive pedagogy at the college level with students of color. The fourth area examines professional development for community college instructors around issues of trauma informed pedagogy.

**Early Childhood Trauma**

In this first section, the researcher reviewed the relevant literature on the effects of trauma on childhood learning and began by discussing different types of trauma and then switched to research regarding children who have experienced trauma. There is significant research conducted by Dr. Nadine Burke et al. (2011), a leading scholar on trauma experienced by children of color. Her research indicates that early exposure to trauma negatively affects the ability of children to learn throughout their educational careers. This section concludes by examining how these early experiences affect college students. As this research focuses on college students, examining early experiences are important to understanding how early trauma affects the trajectories of learning.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2022), the definition of trauma is:

an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster.

Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea” (APA.org, 2022).

While various traumas affect individuals, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5) only recognizes the new category of Trauma and Stress-Related Disorders, which includes PTSD. Mental health clinicians and psychological journals recognize three main types of traumas - acute, chronic and complex. The first type of trauma, called acute trauma,
refers to individuals who suffer a single event that can have a lasting effect. An example of an acute trauma could be a car accident or fire. The incident has passed, but the memories and emotions have a lasting effect. Acute trauma is different from chronic and complex traumas.

According to Medical News Today (2020), chronic trauma is defined as, “results from repeated and prolonged exposure to highly stressful events. Examples include cases of child abuse, bullying, or domestic violence” (medicalnewstoday.com, 2020). Children raised in violent areas or violent homes or who often hear gunshots or experience drive-by shootings in their neighborhood could be diagnosed with chronic trauma. These experiences could also lead to a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and anxiety. Other traumatic events could include hunger or exposure to parental drug usage in the household.

Complex trauma is different. “It describes both children's exposure to multiple traumatic events—often of an invasive, interpersonal nature—and the wide-ranging, long-term effects of this exposure. These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect” (National Child Trauma Stress Network, 2007). Other complex traumas include exposure to alcoholism, drug use/abuse, and mental illness. Children who are raised in these environments can carry psychological scarring for their entire lives which can also manifest in other ways that become detrimental to the child as an adult.

“Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults” was a study jointly conducted by Kaiser Permanente and the Center for Disease Control (Felitti et. al., 1998). The title of this study has been shortened to Adverse Childhood Experiences Study or ACES. This research study is considered foundational but is limited because it was conducted with mostly White clients of Kaiser Permanente in the Southern California area. Survey questionnaires were initially mailed to over 13,494 participants
(yielding 9,508 respondents) during August-November 1995. A second mailing went out between January-March 1996 and a third between June-October 1997. Overall, the study sent out 17,000 surveys to participants who were mostly White and middle class.

The ACES research (1998) originally began with seven risk factors identified in the questionnaire. Those factors were “1. Physical abuse, 2. psychological abuse, 3. sexual abuse, 4. substance abuse, 5. mental illness, 6. violent treatment by mother or stepmother or 7. criminal behavior” (Felitti, et.al, 1998, p. 248). Originally, the research discovered nine distinctive markers, but now ten markers were identified in childhood and create adverse effects into adulthood. These ten markers are the following: “1. physical abuse, 2. psychological abuse, 3. sexual abuse, 4. substance abuse, 5. mental illness, 6. violent treatment by mother or stepmother or 7. incarcerated relative, 8. divorce, 9. physical neglect and 10. emotional neglect” (p. 248). This foundational research became primary for many other research studies looking at more diverse populations. Dr. Nadine Burke et al. (2011) built upon the ACES research and applied it in the San Francisco Bay Area with children misdiagnosed with other disorders, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Burke found that children’s experiences with trauma mimicked other physiological disorders.

Burke et al.’s (2011) research discovered that Black and brown youth in the San Francisco Bay Area had a number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and were more likely to later manifest diagnoses that make learning more challenging. Burke et al. (2011) used the seven markers of trauma originally identified by Felitti et al. (1998) to explain the difference between childhood disorder misdiagnosis and the effects of trauma on youth of color. Burke et al. (2011) hypothesized that most of the youth in the study would have more than one marker of
the ACES study, and that youth with four or more markers would contribute to these youth being diagnosed with learning differences and behavioral issues in the academic setting.

In this study, Burke et al. (2011) examined the medical charts of 701 BIPOC youth under the age of 21 to determine the correlation between how many categories of trauma a young person experienced and outcomes in learning and health. Burke and colleagues (2011) found that children who experienced at least four categories of trauma were more likely to experience learning and behavioral issues, (not to mention health issues such as obesity). The research determined there was a positive relationship between ACES score and learning outcomes. For example, if a child experienced three categories of trauma, they were assigned an ACE score of three. They found that only “3% of participants with an ACE score of 0 had learning/behavior problems, while 51.2% of participants with an ACE score $\geq 4$ displayed learning/behavior problems” as shown by “low academic achievement” or “history of violent behavior” (Burke et al., 2011, p. 411). In addition, living in a community that experienced significant violence exacerbated these negative outcomes. Burke et al. (2011) found that:

…community violence augments traumatic experiences on their developing systems…30-40% of youth exposed to community violence develop posttraumatic stress symptoms…avoidance of traumatic triggers and emotional numbing…and physiological hyperarousal. These symptoms impact behavioral and emotional development as well as academic performance. (pp. 408-409).

Thus, related to this study, Burke et al. (2011) showed that when children experience trauma early in their lives, their ability to learn in schools is affected. This effect continues into later levels of learning, possibly into college environments.
Hinojosa, Nguyen, Sellers, and Elassar (2019) surveyed over 500 students 18 years or older in a college environment to better understand how experiencing any of the ten categories of trauma during childhood related to health and family barriers at the college level. This research also mimicked Burke et al.’s (2011) research which noted that ACES factors are often misdiagnosed as “…physical, mental, and developmental health problems including, ADHD, anxiety disorders, autism, developmental delays, depression and dental problems…” (p. 532). The nine categories of ACEs that Hinojosa et al. (2019) used were the following: experiencing racism or discrimination, experiencing physical abuse, experiencing sexual abuse, experiencing verbal abuse, witnessing domestic violence, witnessing or experiencing neighborhood violence, witnessing serious mental illness in the home, witnessing substance use disorder in the home, and experiencing extreme economic hardship.

While Hinojosa et al. (2019) did not find a direct relationship between having experienced any of the categories of ACES and academic achievement, they did find that “ACES were related to increased health and family barriers, like the use of alcohol or caregiving, which in turn, led to a greater number of academic barriers reported” (p. 537). Related to this study, they stated:

College students exposed to ACES are more likely to experience depressive disorders, exhibit more health risk behaviors such as increased alcohol use, are at greater risk for eating disorders, face greater rates of insomnia, and have higher rates of polysubstance use. These are all factors that can impede college success, and therefore it is not surprising that there is a higher college dropout rate among college students exposed to ACES (Hinojosa et al., 2019, p. 532).
Furthermore, Forster, Grisby, Rogers, and Benjamin (2017) also conducted research with college students regarding the ACES report. The researchers measured the increased use of drugs and alcohol among college students with identified ACES markers. The markers from the ACES study stated “household substance was comprised of two questions, verbal abuse, physical abuse, exposure to parental intimate partner violence, and sexual abuse” (pp. 299-300). This study was a survey sent to 2953 students over the age of 18 within the college district. The results indicated that for every increase in an ACES marker, the likelihood of alcohol use increased among African American students. This study also confirmed that for Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and those who identified as multi-racial, alcohol use increased. The researchers found that “many students likely use alcohol and drugs in an attempt to cope with ACE related distress as they progress through important transitions to adulthood” (p. 301). They concluded, “The ethnic variation in the relationship between increasing ACE and substance use in this sample builds upon the compelling, but still limited evidence, of the interplay between culture, trauma, and substance use” (p. 30).

Other researchers, such as Warnecke and Levine (2019), also performed a study with first-year college students who had suffered traumas and stress prior to entering college. The authors recruited 54 college-attending, low-income research subjects over the age of 18. They measured the correlation between exposure to traumatic events and the likelihood of dropping out. Warnecke and Levine reported that “at least 66% of college students are exposed to at least one stressor (events or situations that involve actual or perceived death, injury or sexual violence, as well as learning about or witnessing these events)” (p. 1). They used several diagnostic tools in this study that included a Life Stressor Checklist, and Beck’s inventory for anxiety and depression. They also considered the grade point averages (GPAs) of the students from the first
semester and final grades. They noted that traumatic life events contributed to higher dropout rates of this specific population. The overall study indicated that every traumatic life event caused a 24% increase in the students’ likelihood to drop out.

These research studies indicate that many students in college suffer from ACES. In addition, these studies show that experiences with ACEs affect the wellness of college-age students. For students of color, particularly Black students, these experiences with ACEs are often exacerbated by additional experiences of institutional racism once they go to college. William Smith and colleagues (2011) wrote about what African American students experience on a daily basis. Their writing on the concept of “racial battle fatigue” explores the experiences of Black students in both their daily life and on the college campus. This research, which is explored in the next section, speaks to the racial trauma, microaggressions, and microassaults BIPOC students experience in higher education.

**Racism, Racial Trauma, and Higher Education**

Medical professionals as well as scholars have written about the effects of racism on children and their health. In “The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health,” Trent, Dooley, and Dougé (2019) give a working definition of racism as:

a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks…that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources (p. 1).

This definition indicated that racism is a social construct which plagues society as a whole. Trent et al. (2019) cite health professionals who define racism as a public health crisis. What these medical professionals tracked were the increased rates of suicide because of the
isolation and discrimination the clients experienced in the public school system due to institutionalized racism that was found to knowingly or unknowingly discriminate against individuals from historically marginalized groups.

Educational scholars have also claimed similar findings regarding the effects of racism on students of color. Watts and Erevelles (2004) used data from the K-12 system to illustrate how Black students and other students of color are mislabeled in the educational setting and how low-income students of color specifically are retraumatized by racism in schools. Though the study focused on the structural violence of educational institutions, the researchers found that the mistreatment of Black students and students of color caused racial trauma.

Scholars like Smith (2011) and his colleagues have given a name to this type of trauma – “racial battle fatigue.” Smith (2011) studied Black men in a college setting and measured their reaction to racial traumas while attending predominantly White institutions. The authors described racial battle fatigue “as …both physiological and psychological” (p. 556). Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) also explained that social ideologies and practices contribute to the continued racist acts by White people (p. 557). This research project had 36 self-identified African American male students from Harvard, University of California, Berkeley, Michigan State University, University of Michigan, University of Michigan Law School, and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The students were recruited through email or electronic media, advertisements, college social clubs, and organizations. This research focused on the psychological effects of students with Racial Battle Fatigue syndrome. The focus groups were held in classrooms or conference rooms at the different campuses between April and May 2000. Smith, et.al (2011) used eight areas of inquiry:
“(a) types of racial discrimination experienced by students, (b) psychological responses occurred from each racial incident experienced by the students, (c) how students reacted to racial discrimination, (d) how mundane racism affected their ability to perform academically, (e) the advantages of having a critical mass of students of color on campus, (f) whether the racial climate for students of color has improved or worsened in the past few years, (g) whether they would recommend their college to students of color, and (h) what advice students would give for the study” (p. 560).

Smith et al.’s (2011) findings were categorized into two major themes: anti-Black male stereotyping and marginality, and hypersurveillance and control. Many of the Black males reported that they were being surveilled on and off campus by police leading to negative psychological responses to interactions with police. These male students also experienced a sense of not belonging on their respective campuses. Some of the responses shared included feelings of frustration, anger, disbelief, shock, and other reactions that are deemed inappropriate by white people. Smith’s et al. (2011) labeled these attacks as microaggressions and microassaults on Black males and found that Black men suffer from misandry (hatred of men), thus causing the reactions that were described.

Similarly, Smith, Hung and Franklin (2011) addressed the educational environment of Black men at historically White institutions (HWI) and how mundane, extreme environmental stress (MEES) affects them. This research focuses on the physiological impacts of racism, microaggressions, and societal constructs that allow Black misandry to continue. 2864 adults participated in phone interviews conducted by African Americans with a research firm. This data was collected through a collaboration between The Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University in March and April 2006. 1328 African American men (ages 18-29), 507
African American women, and 1029 other racial groups participated in the study. This study used the information of 661 vetted African American male participants for their research. Some participants did not complete the intake process for the research. These Black male participants were asked about their experiences with racism, including experiences of disrespect, poorer services, being thought of as stupid, being identified as dishonest, and having others express fear of them.

Smith et al.’s (2007) study had found that MEES affects Black males and increases social problems across all educational levels, Black males encounter many microaggressions on college campuses as well as off campus, and MEES contributes to approximately 40% of the mundane stress felt by Black male college students. The researchers also found that while PWI’s encourage underrepresented and marginalized populations like Black males to remain in academic settings, they do nothing to help them acclimate to these same environments.

Although Smith et al.’s (2007) research focused on Black males, Corbin, Smith, and Garcia (2018) also did a project on Black females called Trapped between Anger and Being the Strong Black Woman: Black College Women Coping with Racial Battle Fatigue at Historically and Predominantly White Institutions. This research examined the relationship between media images, coping strategies, and the racial battle fatigue that African American females experience at PWI’s or HWI’s. The researchers used a counter narrative to give voice to the participants by “using interviews of the student experiences and the incongruent experiences of the African American female in the HWI” (p. 631). The authors emphasized the psychological effects and exhaustion from constant explaining or weariness of voicing feelings around naïve statements that trigger high emotions with defending microaggressions and suffering racial battle fatigue, leading to being labeled as “angry Black women”. The researchers also talked about “picking
battles” - as mental gymnastics – trying to decide when to walk away and when to engage to dispel myths regarding Black misogynoir – and not being labelled as they defined as an “angry Black woman” (p.638). The authors concluded with the need for more African American professors and professors of color to connect with the students described in this study. The overall conclusion is the necessity for understanding the plight of African American females and allowing them to express authentic, warranted emotions and understand that the link between media categorization and African American females’ negative experiences.

Research has been conducted on mitigating the racial trauma of African Americans and other students of color. For example, Hardy (2013) studied how racial trauma permeates the psychosocial cultural perspectives of youth. He found that racial trauma invades the environment of youth – from the educational system to the juvenile justice system, which contributed to the oppression of these youth and leads to an “assaulted sense of self, internalized devaluation, and internalized voicelessness” (p. 25). Hardy gave concrete examples of what can be done to help youth in a therapeutic setting to understand their rage that encompasses racial battle fatigue, MEES, racial trauma, and other factors plaguing the African American student. Recommendations included acknowledging the experiences of the youth and allowing youth to tell their story without fear of retribution, along with racial storytelling and validation of the youth. The next section gives an overview of what is being done to address trauma in K-12 educational settings. Unfortunately, there is limited information on what can be done in the college system.

**Trauma-Informed or Trauma-Sensitive Pedagogy in the College Setting**

Trauma-Informed teaching has been implemented in the K-12 system for at least 10 years. It has been used historically by teachers of color with students of color in creating a loving
village environment to combat racial trauma even before this term was coined to combat racial trauma that youth experience in and out of school. Early educators also created an inclusive environment to strengthen the relationships between parents, teachers, and students as a commitment to social change. For example, Duncan-Andrade (2007) conducted his research in urban schools in Los Angeles, California that had suffered traumas and were disengaged in the educational system. He implemented a three-year program of effective teaching methods for teachers committed to social justice and social change in the educational environment. The overall emphasis of this program was to aim toward using equitable teaching practices in institutions for urban students. The teachers that Duncan-Andrade hand selected for the project were those that wanted to transform teaching. The techniques that some of the professors used were creative activities that were relevant to the students and influence change within their school and community. The methods used were effective and were replicated at other school systems.

Guajardo, Guajardo, and del Carmen Casaperalta (2008) wrote about transformative change in an educational institution in Texas. The authors used storytelling to build closer relationships with the community and wrote a text on how to change a school from being a traditional atmosphere to one of inclusion. Guajardo et al. (2008) highlights the courageous conversations that helped to foster strong relationships between teachers, students, and peers within this community. Trauma was nothing new to veteran educators in the K12 system. The students at these schools had experienced multiple traumas by the environmental nature and location of the students and part of marginalized communities. Their families were migrant workers, so expectation of educational completion were low. There was also no push for these students to go to college. Guajardo et al. (2008) were creating trauma-informed schools before
the term was created. The researchers share the major components of their research to include trust, respect, honesty and dignity for transformation.

In addition, work needs to be done on how to teach young people how to direct their trauma-based triggers. Jennings (2019), author of “Teaching in a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom,” shares her philosophy of how supporting and caring for students along with redirecting their behavior can have an impact in de-escalating students who have been triggered. The author gave information for resilience building with the students and how parents should be included in any type of student transformation. Jennings (2019) states that teachers can teach students social support, healthy emotional skills, and motivations to learn in an academic setting (p. 14).

As stated earlier, the K-12 system has incorporated trauma-sensitive practices into educational institutions, but colleges and universities have not done so as widely. Only a few urban colleges have created safe environments for Black students and assisted with their ability to thrive in the educational settings. For example, the Minority Male Community College Collaborative (2016), also known as M2C3, established a research center to support underrepresented and marginalized students at San Diego State University. Wood Urias, and Harris III (2016) expressed the need for colleges to utilize the research department more efficiently and to create data that measure areas of needs and outcomes-based assessments. The authors also expressed how to engage all areas of the college to include student voices and implement change necessary to assist African American students in the college setting. Although the authors did not label their work as trauma-informed, their study should be included in the scholarly literature as practices for healing of racial trauma.

Although not much research exists on the use of trauma-informed pedagogy in higher education, Carello and Butler (2014) showed that faculty, in their effort to teach about trauma,
are actually re-traumatizing their students. Carello and Butler suggest that 66% to 85% of college students have trauma histories and 9% to 12% of students have experiences with PTSD. According to Carello and Butler (2014), some professors stated that they are “ill-prepared” for the writings of their students and do not know how to repair the harm done. These authors have presented the problem and shown how it continues. It is time that educational institutions understand that re-traumatization of students is becoming more common and is detrimental to students.

There are many scholarly articles about trauma informed care within the mental health field. One article by Sherwood, VanDeusen, Weller and Gladden (2021) wrote about the importance of trauma informed care and the unprecedented steps to transform educational spaces during COVID 19. Sherwood, et.al wrote about the collective trauma of humanity due to a pandemic and the toll it is taking on essential workers. Essential workers include doctors, nurses, other personnel at hospitals, and especially mental health professionals. Transformations included virtual or online teachings, especially in higher education. Sherwood, et.al (2021) also shared the mental health challenges of BIPOC, immigrant and refugee students that realized how their housing, food, and financial resources were lost when universities closed. They do share the important elements of trauma informed teaching, which are “trustworthiness, transparency, safety, peer support, collaboration, culture and gender should be taken into consideration” (p. 101).

Another scholar, Killian (2021) researched if COVID 19 was a source of trauma and the uniqueness professors held with the trust that students give to professors and their peers by sharing personal information in the classroom. The focus was on adjunct faculty and their ability to manage the trauma of students. This work recognizes that there is an informational gap in
literature regarding trauma-informed care amongst faculty and their andragogical practices. This research still did not focus on BIPOC communities and the re-traumatization of BIPOC students in the community college setting.

**Professional Development for Trauma in Higher Education**

Based upon her experience and review of the literature, this researcher expresses the need for professional development around trauma in higher education. West, Day, Somers, and Baroni (2014) used students to help create the training curricula for teachers to become trauma informed. West, et al. (2014) research corroborated other studies of youth with trauma that suffer deficits of “attention, memory, organization, comprehension and self-regulation” (p. 59). The research indicated the difficulty youth have with communication and ability to bond with other peer and adult relationships. They found the student voice to be effective as the youth clearly articulated what was needed in the classroom to handle student trauma.

Professional development focuses on teaching professionals to adhere to their roles as teachers. Venet (2019) wrote about the importance of professors being clear on what they teach in their classroom. The author stated that a “crucial aspect of trauma-informed work is providing a caring, safe environment that supports all students, regardless of our knowledge about each student’s history” (p.1). Venet describes situational traumas that affect students and their abilities to function fully in the classroom, including financial stress, family conflict, and involvement with the law. The students also have difficulty in developing relationships with trusting adults. The author expresses how a teacher’s “savior mentality” can be detrimental to students since this can lead to becoming the only one the students can rely on. Instead, the students need to expand their social network to include other support systems that may be better suited to help them.
Davidson (2017) wrote a trauma-informed practices guide for teachers and professors. This book challenged teachers and professors in post-secondary education to recognize the challenges for students with trauma. Davidson used practical language for teachers and professors to recognize the signs of trauma in the classroom, identified above, with the inclusion of fear of risk taking, missing many classes, and having anxiety about exams, public speaking, group work, and helplessness. Davidson also explains how students who suffer trauma may still have lasting effects. As a result, the classroom teacher needs to be compassionate towards the student by allowing them to share as much or as little information regarding the trauma, but never forcing them to do so.

Zartner (2018) explains the vicarious trauma that teachers experience by working with students with trauma, along with the stages that a professor can experience if the professor is not aware. The author describes the terms of vicarious trauma (VT), secondary traumatic stress (STS), compassion fatigue, and finally burnout. The author shares other professional environments that suffer from VT such as attorneys, mental health professionals, social and human service providers, and community professionals. Zartner (2018) acknowledges that professional environments need to make education and support mandatory for environments that work with people who suffer from traumas.

The review of literature indicates there is a great need for more professional development offered for trauma-informed pedagogy and andragogy in higher education. As Zartner (2018) stressed, professors are “trained to devalue and de-center emotion in our classroom as well as in our own research” (p. 6). Unfortunately, in the 21st century, as more BIPOC students enter higher education with trauma backgrounds, professors have to learn how
to be authentic, compassionate and understanding to gain the confidence of the students - not offer false hope or hold the savior mentality towards students of color.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

This dissertation examined college professors’ understanding of their pedagogy and curriculum and how that contributed to students’ traumatization. Some subject matters force some students to re-experience their trauma in the classroom environment, often triggering students. This dissertation not only examined faculty understanding of their practices, but also acknowledged students’ experiences, particularly those of BIPOC students with significant life trauma. Furthermore, it offered a theoretical pedagogy that explains what BIPOC students who have experienced trauma need to excel academically. This pedagogy does not recommend that educators focus on students’ trauma or make all class lessons about students’ trauma. Instead, it recommended acknowledging the trauma and then designing lessons in a way to ensure best outcomes with a focus on creating a sense of belonging, addressing feelings of isolation and the building of community. This research sought to understand the beliefs and experiences of faculty with students who have experienced trauma as a starting point for instructors’ professional development to support the success of BIPOC students who have experienced trauma.

Research Questions

This research seeks to answer these questions:

1. How do faculty think about previous life experiences of the students they serve before creating their syllabus?

2. What pedagogies and andragogies do faculty in higher education use to support students of color who have previously suffered chronic, complex and racial traumas to feel safe and less isolated in an educational environment?
3. What experiences have faculty in higher education had with students who have experienced trauma?

4. How do professors discuss difficult subject matters with the class?

**Research Design**

This qualitative research study used Grounded Theory as, as described by Kathy Charmaz (2016) to inform the design and a new term, Critical Educational Trauma Theory, coined by this researcher. Charmaz has recognized that the methodology of Grounded Theory has been around since the 1960’s and describes Grounded Theory as a tool to make theory resemble reality rather than theory based on experiences or solely through speculation. This theory draws on specific cases rather than imagined variables. Grounded Theory follows a format: 1) data collection; 2) note taking; 3) coding; 4) memoing and 5) sorting, and 6) writing. It allows for the possibility of multiple meanings and themes and tries to understand phenomena that cannot be explained by other theories. Charmaz also found that the research design may not allow for full empirical research; thus her constructivist approach to Grounded Theory allows flexibility in refining the design of the study as it allows for discovery and exploration.

A constructivist approach to Grounded Theory also supports the examination of emerging theories such as the theory this researcher has coined, Critical Educational Trauma Theory. This theory is created to demonstrate how the early childhood traumas of BIPOC students are triggered in different ways while attending college. The common element that collectively affects BIPOC students are ACES and Racial Battle Fatigue, PTSD, and racial trauma. These traumas are triggered and exacerbated by teachers and professors in the classroom that introduce subject matter, such as writing about the student’s trauma. This theory was created to help professors understand that the student’s perspective is real and does re-traumatize BIPOC
students in the college setting. This researcher uses Critical Educational Trauma Theory to analyze the data received from the faculty to understand their knowledge and experience with traumas students display in the classroom, and the methodology of Grounded Theory is used to develop new insights that help to refine the Critical Educational Trauma Theory.

**Data Collection**

Data collection began in the Spring semester of 2021 over the course of four months. Due to COVID 19, the collection of data changed from being in person to a virtual medium. This research has two parts. This researcher gathered a forum of professors for a focus group and then conduct individual interviews with five professors to allow them to share how they conduct lessons in their classroom. The research has two parts to gain a comprehensive overview of faculty understanding and classroom practice related to student’s traumas. The focus group lasted approximately an hour and the interviews, which consisted of five participants, lasted an hour also.

**Part I – Focus Groups**

This researcher recruited five participants of diverse teaching professionals to engage in a courageous discussion as part of the focus group for this study. The focus group consisted of three tenured English professors and then a dyad group that was a tenured professor from Interdisciplinary Studies and a tenured professor in Public Health. The focus group and dyad sought to gain understanding of their classroom engagement, relationship building and best practices with students, and results for learning outcomes. The questions elicited information about the participants’ pedagogical and andragogical practices during “twin pandemics,” which are the COVID 19 virus and the anti-Blackness movement and the effects these practices have on the students being served. The focus group and dyad discussed racial issues in and out of the
classroom that could trigger students’ trauma with engaging BIPOC students in their classes. This information should illuminate how faculty think about current issues of COVID 19 and the anti-Blackness movement in the United States and how these issues contribute to the trauma students experience. The focus group assisted faculty by offering this forum to share ideas among each other as well as to learn from each other about inclusive teaching practices. This forum was a mechanism for growth within the academic faculty community.

**Part II – Individual Interviews**

Five faculty members were interviewed to learn about their process of creating and implementing class activities and inclusionary practices for a trauma informed classroom. The first set of questions elicited class preparation and assignments that have an effect on students. This set of questions asked teaching professionals about their forethought of students being served and the outcomes to the assignments that students are expected to complete. The next set of questions sought to gain understanding about the connections faculty made between the trauma BIPOC students may experience and the information being taught in the classroom.

These questions also sought to understand what faculty know about the cultural perspectives of the students being taught. The last set of questions were designed to gain understanding into the insight that the teaching professionals may have into their own positionality in the classroom. The questions are designed to inquire about the privilege of the teachers in the classroom and how this may influence the curricula. The questions also inquired if the teaching professionals understood the struggling students and their positionality. The questions also asked about the teachers’ understanding of their own experiences of trauma, if any, and how their experiences may or may not differ from the students being served.
The focus group and all of the interviews for this dissertation were recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The researcher asked clarifying questions of participants at the time of the interview. The researcher did not provide the questions ahead of time, but informed participants about the general areas of questions beforehand. The researcher also did not ask the participants to review the transcripts as she wanted their authentic answers rather than afterthoughts regarding specific questions. This researcher disclosed the desire for authenticity to the participants before the interviews began. The participants also had the option to not participate in the interview process.

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of University of San Francisco and the Institutional Review Board of the college where the research is taking place. Each participant was asked for informed consent. This research was voluntary for all participants. This researcher chose to keep participants anonymous. The focus group shared information among faculty members to help improve the success rate of their students. This researcher anticipated that some questions would trigger certain faculty members when asking about trauma of students and privilege and this researcher checked in with the participants periodically about their emotional state regarding the responses to specific questions.

These interviews and the focus group provided a platform that allowed professors to tell their own stories of lessons learned to help other instructors in developing tools that work towards the goal of avoiding the re-traumatization of BIPOC students.

**Data Analysis**

This researcher analyzed the data by looking for themes that are common among participants and then coded those themes accordingly. Charmaz (2008), a grounded theorist, describes how inductive analysis of data allows the researcher to see patterns and then theorize
the data. She also states that using simultaneous data collection and analysis allows for a richer collection of the data, thus allowing emergent patterns to become clear. The process included open-ended strategies for emergent theories to materialize. This process helped the researcher in analyzing Critical Educational Trauma Theory and the themes related to that theory.

Charmaz (2008) also states that other hypotheses may arise, thus the inductive analysis of the data is needed. Charmaz suggests comparing data line by line and story by story, known as initial coding. This process helps to align themes and code the data more appropriately. After the initial coding of data, the researcher developed memos describing the emerging themes and then used those themes in purposeful coding of data. The last area that is of major importance to this research is purposeful coding, or making the link between theoretical ideas and the empirical world and checking the data with sampling.

**Site**

This research was conducted at a two-year community college, given the pseudonym of Harvard Hill, a Bay Area college in Northern California that has one of the biggest student populations in the United States. The college has been around since the 1930’s. The college was created by a superintendent of the local unified school district that wanted an environment for high school students to be able to attend to learn trades to earn a living. In the 1980’s, the college then morphed to a junior college that was advertised as an environment to help students who wanted to complete their general education requirements and then transfer to a university. At its peak in the early 2000’s, this college’s student population was approximately 100,000 persons. As time has progressed, with accreditation issues and massive administrative turn over, the college has suffered loss of student retention around 18% between Fall, 2019 and Spring, 2020
according to an article in the San Francisco Examiner (sfexaminer.com, 2020). The latest article listed the student body at about 22,000 students for Spring 2020.

According to the college website, the vision of Harvard Hill College is to “provide a sustainable and accessible environment where we support and encourage student possibilities by building on the vibrancy…and where we are guided by the principles of inclusiveness, integrity, innovation, creativity, and quality” (2020). The same website declares that the mission is to: provide programs and services leading to transfer to baccalaureate institutions; Associate Degrees in Arts and Sciences; Certificates and career skills needed for success in the workplace; Basic Skills, including learning English as a Second Language and Transitional Studies. The educational institution promises that students will improve their critical thinking, information competency, communication skills, ethical reasoning, and cultural, social, environmental, and personal awareness and responsibility.

This institution has a full-service student health center that includes medical exams and psychological services. The psychological services department offers groups, personal counseling and makes referrals to community agencies for further follow up. Due to COVID 19, the center is servicing students remotely.

**Population**

The researcher invited tenured professors who all identified as white to discuss the research questions to gain understanding of their view of the classroom and their positive and negative interactions with students and how they acknowledged the interactions. This researcher began with a focus group and a dyad of professors and then conducted individual interviews with the research participants regarding their practice of trauma-informed/trauma-sensitive pedagogy and andragogy or other practices used for best results in the classroom.
Positionality

This researcher is a second-generation multi-cultured African American woman, who has ancestors from Jamaica and Colombia and bloodlines of Native American roots of Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations and is an educator both inside the classroom and outside. She has been teaching for over 15 years at different colleges and has witnessed many students coming to college with layers of trauma, which include childhood, racial, historical and generational traumas. This researcher also understands and has experienced trauma that rendered her helpless and in denial until the understanding of the experience became clear. The epiphany allowed her to vow to help all those who needed to find their voice, especially in the educational system, and speak their truth about the educational system. As a faculty member, many students speak with me regarding their experiences regarding other faculty and many times I support students with addressing concerns with faculty members regarding uncomfortable issues in the classroom. The engagements have been positive for reflective purposes on the side of students and faculty as the engagements are to seek understanding, which is considered a strength. As a faculty member critical thought about pedagogical and andragogical practices with an empathetic lens regarding faculty positions is necessary.

Researcher’s Background

As a researcher, my interest in this subject matter is based on my work with students of color who are of lower socioeconomic status entering or attending higher education. As a faculty member within the community college system in the Bay Area of California, my experience is that many students are first generation college students who struggle with trauma, which stems from childhood as the ACES report indicates above. As a researcher, it is important for me to gather full and rich data to understand more deeply the experiences and understanding of faculty
with the ultimate goal to improve the student experience in the classroom. The readers also should know that my background is as a mental health professional who counsels people with invisible disabilities both in the college system and in the community. This research also personally affects the researcher because of the invisible disabilities that affect her. The researcher suffers from asthma, allergies, chronic back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and other illnesses. All of these conditions are invisible and can contribute to the insight this researcher has with other students that suffer trauma.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

This research was to learn how a group of professors at a particular institution are trying to create trauma-informed classrooms where they teach. Even though the information gathered indicated that the professors were showing interest toward understanding the traumas that students embodied, the data shared with this researcher did not always reflect understanding of trauma or the creation of a trauma informed classroom. Although the professors highlighted their sharing of teaching methods that included ungrading and self-care techniques, this qualifies as good teaching, not necessarily trauma informed teaching. The professors reported the need and importance of the need, but there is no guide from the institution nor professionals to help create the foundation for the safe environment these professors want to create. These professors are recognized for attempting to transform college classrooms, but more work and support is needed for fruition. They are dedicated to their pedagogy, which is a beginning step, but more support is warranted for success.

In this chapter, I will give the background of the five participants, all professors at Harvard Hill College, who consented to participating in the research. This self-created group began holding regular discussions on incorporating trauma-informed care into their pedagogy and their classrooms via virtual or in-person teaching. All the participants identified themselves as white. Four identified as women and one identified as male. Four of the five professors have taught in the English Department at Harvard Hill and one professor teaches in the Community Health program. Every professor stated that there were writing components in their class that dealt with trauma-inducing subject matter. Three participants were interviewed as a focus group and then individually. There was also a pair of professors who had a dialogue with the researcher and answered the same questions as the focus group as well as answered the individual interview
questions. There were three questions for the focus group and eight individual questions. The first two questions for the focus group asked about race in the classroom and the third question was about race and COVID. The individual questions were categorized as follows: The first three questions were about syllabus creation, the next three questions were about triggering lessons or assignments and the last two questions were about biases and whether the teachers acknowledged their biases with their students.

This researcher developed themes from the participants’ responses to the interview questions by categorizing the responses based on the set of questions. The questions elicited the participants’ points of view regarding the BIPOC community and how the participants used trauma informed teaching in their classes. There are three overarching categories of themes, which were re-traumatization through pedagogy, re-traumatization through curricula, and racism in the college structure. Then there are sub-themes that manifested from the data collected. The sub-themes include the following categories:

Pedagogy:

- Reflecting on teaching
- Striving to be an ally
- Making space for difficult conversations and taking self out of center
- Centering student care

Curriculum:

- Rethinking assignment and assessment
- Incorporating racialized events in the real world
- Talking about the subject of race
- Recurring traumas in the classroom
All of the answers were reflective of participants’ interactions with BIPOC people and how the professors were thinking about how COVID may be affecting this population of students as well. Participants were eager to participate in this research because most want more done at this college to combat inequity in the classroom and lessen the trauma that BIPOC students suffer through curriculum and pedagogy. The group stated they are constantly recruiting professors to discuss and share information regarding how they use trauma-informed practices in the classroom.

Participants

Each participant is currently working at Harvard Hill College. They have been full-time professors, although one was going to step down to part-time at the end of the year when these data were collected. Most of the professors participating in this research worked elsewhere outside of this college setting at some time in their teaching career. The professors have worked at Harvard Hill College from 6 years to 22 years.

Every participant has worked with either special programs (high school to college programs, entry programs into the medical field, affinity programs), the athletic department, English as second language learners (which included asylum seekers and immigrants), or high school students that are underrepresented and marginalized. Two of the professors taught in the high school to college program, one professor taught in the affinity programs, one professor used to teach in English and the interdisciplinary studies department, and the last professor teaches in the Public Health Education Department. The participants were asked broad questions relating to re-traumatization through curriculum and re-traumatization through pedagogy.
### Profile of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>This professor who has blonde, wavy shoulder length haired, between the age of 55 and 60 middle class, wears glasses, presents as a white female with Jewish roots. She has been an instructor at the institution for over 22 years and taught Interdisciplinary subject matter. This professor has also taught to first year college student populations and special high school program.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>This professor, who is blonde with shoulder length straight hair is between the age of 40 to 50 and a middle class person, presents as a white female. She has been an instructor at the institution for over 18 years and teaches in the Health Department. This instructor has also taught in the Interdisciplinary subject matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>This instructor, who is brunette with hair a little longer than shoulder length, around 40 years old, presents as a white, middle class female. She has been an instructor at the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>This professor, who has brunette shoulder length hair, around 50 years old and middle class, presents as a white queer woman who has Jewish roots. She has been an instructor at the institution for over 18 years and teaches in the English Department. This professor has also taught to special populations and first year college students as well as a special high school program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>This professor, who has brown short hair, is between 40 and 50 years old is a middle class cis gendered married male. He has been an instructor at the institution for over 18 years and teaches in the English Department. This professor has also taught to special populations and first year college students and special high school programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Re-traumatization through Pedagogy

Reflecting on Teaching

Each professor was asked questions that challenged them to reflect on their teaching practices, with specific emphasis about building a trauma informed classroom. The process of reflection was key to their evolving understanding of trauma in the classroom. Their reflections touched on issues of safety in the classroom, grit, and what it means to “go deep,” which is an expression for critical thinking, into subject matter. All professors admitted their reflection was a work in progress and they did not have exact answers on how to create a successful trauma informed classroom. According to Dewey, reflection should “develop teachers’ reasoning about why they employ certain instructional strategies and how they can improve their teaching to have a positive effect on students” (Lee, 2005). Each professor reflecting on their pedagogy is examining strategies to improve their outcomes. The professors were engaging in at least some of the four crucial steps that Dewey suggests: the first step is there is a definite meaning-making process that helps a teacher to gain a deeper understanding; the next step is a systematic and rigorous way of thinking that can be equivalent to scientific inquiry; the third step is reflective thinking should happen within a community and, the last step is working toward personal and intellectual growth. This research did not explore the rigor or discipline with the incorporation of trauma-informed teaching with every instructor. Rigor can be subjective in the classroom. This group has built a community as they are all trying to build more trauma-informed classrooms, so they are interacting with each other and building community. The interactions with each other and community are crucial to their reflection on trauma informed teaching. For example, this group meets regularly during the semester to share information learned and have discussions about the process for implementation. Each professor expressed commitment to personal growth
with their pedagogy and to challenge each other to continue making changes to the class. This openness to growth and the challenge of inquiry are characteristic of a reflective stance.

The faculty described their reflection in relation to professional development, particularly professional development they received on creating a safe classroom. Regarding safety in the classroom, the professors referred to training lessons created by Wood, Urias, and Harris (2016) with BIPOC men at San Diego State University. The scholars wrote “Establishing a Research Center: The Minority Male Community College Collaborative (M2C3)” (Wood, et al., 2016). These scholars created a safe space for African American and Latinx males at the university where they work. By safe, they meant sharing experiences of what success can be for the males in their program as well as concrete methods for success, that include tutoring, reflection on goals, constant encouragement and celebrations. The participants of this research referred to teaching they learned from Wood, et al.’s research and shared thoughts about how the training created a platform to discuss what they were doing differently for their students within their teaching practice. One of the professors made this comment:

I think it's really important for students to have a choice but they don't have to write about reciting because I don't want them to have to relive their trauma to get a grade in the class, right? But at the same time having the option to explore that helps, I think then to put their experiences in perspective and see that certain things maybe weren't their fault. This comment indicated to me that this professor had been reflecting on teaching and implementing what was learned from the training provided by Dr. Woods and Dr. Harris’ work “Teaching Men of Color in the Community College System and Supporting Men of Color in the Community College System.” The course was designed as an online education to assist professors with creating a trauma informed classroom. All professors that complete the training
earn a certificate and can receive Continuing Education credits for the course. This professor understood that learning is not a universal process and there was more than one way to teach students, which is why reflection on content, pedagogy, and students is so crucial. Four of the five professors interviewed did not indicate this level of reflection for their students, but were eager to hear these responses, a sign of their openness to more opportunities for reflection. Many of them took the continuing education class of Dr. Woods and Dr. Harris, and were beginning to implement some of the teachings. The professor above, stated: “

We're doing a question about what we're reading around growth mindset; so we're reading Carol Dweck’s work and then create a problem and try to solve it. There's an article that cites Dr. Wood’s and Dr. Harris's work, sort of problem enticing the concept when it becomes sort of about the individual as opposed to the systemic or environmental factors that are at play.

This professor is referring to the difference between the growth mindset and the fixed mindset. According to Dweck, a “growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. Although people may differ in every which way – in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments – everyone can change and grow through application and experience” (Dweck, 2017, p.7).

Students who are thought to have drive and an ability to overcome obstacles are thought to have a growth mindset. Students who have difficulty readjusting to new methods of learning are thought to have a fixed mindset. Dr. Woods and Dr. Harris give methods of assisting professors to incorporate growth mindsets into the classroom.

Another area on which the group reflected in terms of teaching was the question of “grit” in the classroom. Many professors want students to walk away with true learning of a subject
matter but recognize that students grapple with balancing school and other obligations in their life. Most professors go by professional standards, that is for every one hour in the classroom, there should be three hours of homework. That is the collegiate definition of learning and can be used as one measurement to test grit. The American Psychology Association (APA) gives the definition for grit as the following: a personality trait characterized by perseverance and passion for achieving long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously to overcome challenges and maintaining effort and interest over time despite failures, adversities, and plateaus in progress. Recent studies suggest this trait may be more relevant than intelligence in determining a person’s high achievement. For example, grit may be particularly important to accomplishing an especially complex task when there is a strong temptation to give up altogether (https://dictionary.apa.org, 2022). A scholar, Angela Duckworth’s definition states,

“Grit is passion and perseverance for long-term goals…Instead, grit is about having what some researchers call an ‘ultimate concern’—a goal you care about so much that it organizes and gives meaning to almost everything you do. And grit is holding steadfast to that goal. Even when you fall down. Even when you screw up. Even when progress toward that goal is halting or slow” (Duckworth, 2022).

Although these two definitions seem similar, I challenge the definition of Duckworth as not including people who take the time to practice this process described. Many BIPOC students do not have the luxury to solely focus on long-term goals, but have passion and perseverance to just survive - survive school, survive work, survive family. A few professors reflected on grit from the perspective of their students. A reflection by one of the professors stated:
It's sort of a similar issue, I think, to the problem of grit, from what I understand, that's a concept, a lot of instructors have thought they needed to teach students but that a lot of students who've come from communities that have faced historical and systemic oppression, they've got grit like you wouldn't believe so it's not like they need to like be an awake teacher to tell them they need grit, right, it's that there's a lot of systemic factors that are stacked against them.

Through reflection, this professor recognized the plight of the student in an academic setting with limited support as a structural issue. Through reflective dialoguing with other professors, this instructor understood that making changes in pedagogy can create space for all in the classroom. This group discussion created an environment of open, reflective dialogue about creating a trauma informed classroom which leads toward an equitable classroom environment. One professor shared with the focus group how she is changing up her classroom to be more inclusive by:

   letting them be more creative like making a video or, you know, a song or a poem. I'm open to that. I just have to figure out a way to work it in and I think what I'm going to do actually because I'm changing it up so that they can. They're going to choose a full length text to read, instead of me assigning just the one choice that is important when it comes to a trauma informed classroom, you know, letting them choose what they want to read, giving them agency over their decisions.

This professor thought that creativity was a way to create an environment that students would like to be in and participate fully in the class activities. The professor was very aware of her pedagogical practices and understood that to create a trauma-informed classroom would require change on the professor’s part, a process which she continues to reflect on so she can “figure
out” how to make it work. The professor did not say it out loud, but there appeared to be some trepidation about changing pedagogy to align with trauma-informed teaching. The professor’s voice halted a little as she thought out loud as she looked out into the distance as she pondered the changes she would need to make to move toward a trauma-informed classroom.

Most professors are passionate about their pedagogy and want students to be equally passionate and to think critically, or to “dig deep.” When the subject matter is too triggering, many students may shut down, thus doing the bare minimum. The student may not be able to cognitively function fully and gain a block to their thought process, thus the critical thinking is halted. A professor reflected on the struggle of digging deep.

The professor stated, “We want students to dig deep so I guess what I struggle with sometimes is sort of balancing that with the fact that we also want to protect people from triggering situations and how much to do each one.”

This quote gives a picture of how difficult it can be to teach difficult content in a caring and compassionate format and why reflection on practice to avoid retraumatization is critical. Another professor had similar comments that reflected the passion of the professor. He stated:

I’ve always considered teaching, kind of a special profession, it's not just a paycheck. My job is to help engage someone in an educational experience and it's really a big job; it's more than a job I guess is what I'm saying. It's a service, I even think about it in spiritual terms. I see community college teaching as I see education, first of all, as a human right. I want to get people through my classes. I want to engage them. I want to, you know, engage in learning as well.

This professor was reflecting on how much his pedagogy was not just a part of him, but defined him. He felt that his travel abroad gave him insight into students of color with the
struggles of immigrants and thoroughly enjoyed teaching them. He thought of teaching as a calling for him and that it was his duty to create an environment that satisfied his desire to create a safe environment of learning. He said that there was nothing else he wanted to do other than teach and to students of color. He also reflects on how to continue to create a classroom for courageous conversations with his students.

**Striving to be an ally**

There are variations of allyship when the topic of racial equity is being discussed with how white professors understand their role with the inequities of their students and the students’ backgrounds. The professors gave a perspective of allyship from their point of view. An ally is defined as “a person in a dominant position of power working toward ending the system that gives power in the interest of a group with which one does not share a particular social identity” (Patel, 2011, p.78). Some professors believe the attempt at being an ally becomes clear to each student that has an interaction with the professor. Other professors make clear their goal of being an ally to students. For example one professor stated, “I tell my students that I strive to be an ally, and don't proclaim that I am an ally because that's not something I have the right to do, but tell people that I strive to show solidarity, which I think might even be bigger than allies.” This is how one of the professors thinks of allyship, that standing in solidarity was more important to him than allyship. Solidarity is a unity behind a specific purpose or commonality and to be an ally is earned and not claimed.

Another professor thought differently. She gave a specific example of what she considered allyship by helping a student she felt was in need. She stated the following:

It's been really challenging…for example, there was another African American student. I could tell he was getting frustrated. He didn't have the materials, he didn't have support
and so I had suggested that he go to meet with the African American Success or
Scholastic Project. I went personally and sat there because I didn't want him to go and be
like what she's giving me the run around, she told me and this person is not even here. So
I went, and at the time, I was waiting for him and I was going to just give him a warm
handoff.

This statement does stress allyship, in congruence with Patel’s (2011) definition. The professor
tried to leverage her dominant position to connect a student personally to another professional at
the college. This professor went beyond the expectation of a typical teacher as she went to a
specific location to help her student. She was going to give a formal introduction to the counselor
of the student. The student did not show up for the appointment. Even though the professor tried
interventions, it was not that she did not try to use another department to help with this
intervention, thus involving another part of the educational system to contribute to student
success. The next interaction with the student and professor did not go well, according to the
instructor. The professor continued to explain it this way:

I really tried but it ended really badly, and he ended up dropping the class and being
really angry with me. Actually, I think we had a meeting in my office and asked someone
to be there with me. Just because I had an isolated office and I don't know it just seemed
like I had to have someone there, you know, so someone was listening. In the end I just
had to ask him to leave because he was coming at me with such energy and it wasn't a
given so I don't know what to tell you, there have been situations where it just hasn't
worked out.

This other excerpt indicates that the professor was trying to establish allyship, but there
was still fear of the student because of the anger that was shown in another environment.
Although the professor took the step of meeting with the student, she took specific precautions of having someone else in the vicinity of her office for safety reasons, but because trauma is misunderstood with students of color, the other person in the area could have triggered the student, thus causing mistrust. The isolation of the student in the teacher’s office and the vulnerability of the student having to hear he was not prepared for class could have triggered the student so his defense mechanism arose and anger was his protective capacity. Many BIPOC students have been conditioned to use anger to stop conversations. According to Zoccali, et. al, (2007) “defense mechanisms are automatic psychological processes that protect the individual against anxiety and from the awareness of internal or external dangers or stressors. (p. 1428)” A person that has experienced trauma relies on defense mechanisms as protection in many situations, especially when feeling that there is a need for a protective capacity. Unfortunately, professors have not been trained to diffuse conflicts with students in the moment. As students continue to come from environments of trauma, the more tools professors have, the better.

One of the professors gave an example of how he had a misunderstanding with a female African American student as the student thought that he called her out in class by making a statement asking her if she felt a certain way. The professor stated that the student shared with him that she was embarrassed because he said it in front of the entire class. The professor and the student emailed quite a bit. The professor shared the following from the student, “you accuse me of being angry and that's the stereotype of the angry African American woman.” The professor stated that he was trying to “get through to her” because he felt “if I engaged with her through equally thoughtful and kind of intelligent emails” she would see that he was trying to become an ally. The professor stated it happened a couple years ago, and he was still bothered by the interaction. From the statements that the professor shared, it seemed that the allyship was not on
the mind of the student and she could not hear the professor’s reasoning because of the microaggression she felt from the professor. This researcher would also suggest that allyship in this case was presumed by the professor who also tried to impress upon this student his reasoning and make it better. The question is better for whom. This dialogue between this professor and student did not fare well for the student as it seems that this professor really wanted the student to forgive him, but could not accept that was not what she wanted, thus dismissing her. This interchange illustrates how allyship is earned or bestowed, not claimed.

Another professor expressed how she also worked with affinity groups at Harvard Hill to help her students who were struggling to make connections with faculty she felt the students would be able to help. She stated:

I have been working pretty closely with the African American Scholastic Program. And so, I have a lot of their students and so I can let them know and check in with them. And so I really appreciate that and I hope we're able to continue those kinds of things. I would like to emphasize the importance of those kinds of relationships with faculty and counselors and students. And I think, I mean not sure if I differentiate between students, African American students and students of color and other students that are struggling. But I am glad that I have resources like the African American Scholastic Program. I appreciate that City College does have resources available. And, I hope that those kinds of specialized counseling centers don't get marginalized.

This allyship describes an expressed relationship between student, professor and other faculty members. This professor's actions reflect allyship because she has built a relationship with this particular department that serves African American students and is comfortable with sending students to this department for assistance. The allyship is not only between the student and
professor but also with counselors in the department where there is mutual trust and understanding to provide services to the students for success. The professor is utilizing the resources on the campus to assist with her students. It may seem that this professor compartmentalizes the campus relationships, but this professor actually takes or meets students at the different areas on campus, which many professors do not practice. This professor also stated, “that I often encourage students to support one another, and build community with one another, and how important that is.”

There are also instances when professors strive for allyship, but it is not a natural process. One professor recognized how challenging it can be to build allyship. He stated, “I think some students of color must be like ‘oh god, here's another white guy, you know, striving for allyship; I mean, I don't know, it's a lot about putting out invitations and not pushing it.” This professor stated that he strives for allyship from the first class period. The professor also stated that he “invites” people to spaces where he may be lecturing or to have a conference when he wants to learn about something a student states in the classroom. This professor tries to engage from a position of befriending, perhaps not realizing some students still see the hierarchy and privilege the professor holds. A boundary must be set for allyship so that African American students and students of color are not confused by allyship and creating a friendship. This example was about an older student who was an immigrant and had a viewpoint about his country of origin and the traumas suffered there. The professor and the student had coffee and were able to relate on another level and created a friendship from the classroom experience that began with the professor seeking allyship. The student used the professor’s assistance with navigating the college system. The allyship turned into a friendship. Because this student is older, the student
may be able to separate differences with allyship and friendship. Some students of color, especially younger students, may not be able to separate out the hierarchy of this relationship.

**Making Space for Difficult Conversations and Taking Self out of Center**

*Making Space for Difficult Conversations*

80% of the professors interviewed shared examples of how they “made space” for students to have difficult conversations and share observations. Making space is not about creating a physical space, but creating a psychological zone of safety to talk about issues that can cause trauma to students of color. For example, trigger warnings help create a mindset conducive to this space and allow this space to be created. Trigger warnings do not diminish pedagogy, instead they provide opportunities for students to continue to engage with the pedagogy. The professors attempted to create space for difficult conversations. This is moving away from the straight lecture. Lecturing does may not allow students to express feelings around certain subject matter. Some of the comments ranged from teaching about health disparities to feelings around comments made in the classroom.

The professor that teaches public health remembered how she would give trigger warnings in her class when she was showing something in her class that may affect students. There was one incident that she vividly recalled regarding a student’s reaction even with a trigger warning for difficult content. The professor gave this excerpt, “I would try to do a trigger warning before any video I would show, but I didn't always focus on what was relevant to give a trigger warning about. One example, I had an African American woman student. And I didn't know I had heard sometime earlier in the semester that she had had a son who died recently. I gave a trigger warning about other things but the first scene, the first interview, is in front of a funeral procession for a child who was killed in Chicago in the streets. She got up and left the
classroom, and I was like oh my gosh, and somebody else was like, I'll go, I'll go talk to her and also left the classroom and gave her support. And then they came back in when she was ready, and I apologized.” This excerpt illustrates the due diligence of the professor who gave a trigger warning to her students, but did not think that a dialogue in front of a funeral home may have triggered someone. I would suggest that it should have warranted a trigger warning because of the death scene. Many people would not think about that. It is an example that professors do not know who they have in their classroom and although they cannot think of everything, trigger warnings are a good tool to help students to be able to prepare themselves for difficult subject matter. The other important takeaway from this excerpt is that the students supported their fellow student in this moment and the professor allowed this support to happen outside of the classroom. The student that was triggered needed to take space to protect herself. The professor allowed this student to take space for self-care. The professor could have also used this moment and inquired if the class needed to talk about what they had just witnessed to heal the hurt that happened unintentionally in the classroom. Clearly for at least one student, it caused a reaction that was not expected. A discussion may have allowed other students who may have had reactions to express themselves as well. The apology was given, but sometimes a discussion is needed for group understanding as well as having a teachable moment for everyone.

This same professor also shared that films are shown in the classroom. The professor also recalled a student making this comment: “I gave the example of high change around the data, but there's still a lot of student health inequities in my class and there have been students who said it's just hard to see one more film that touches on that. So, I just try to make space to talk about it.” This professor is well aware of the subject matter that is taught, but sometimes may not know the full effect the film or video may have on students, so she gives space to talk about what is
occurring in the classroom. It may also be that students may need less of the videos or films so that the class is less impacted by the films shown.

Then there are other ways of giving students space in the classroom for uncomfortable encounters with the professor. A professor interviewed shared an encounter with a student where he made space for a difficult conversation with a student to express how his questioning made that student feel. The professor’s view was:

I don't know if there's some way that in a relationship we can restore trust. I think, trauma informed teaching is, you know, informing yourself as an instructor of possible traumas that are coming into the classroom. And I don't know, just kind of knowing it's a skill, it seems like a skill to develop knowing when to reach out, knowing when to back away, but also creating this space of trust. So I think that if we've done what we can do to create that safe space in your classroom of trust and respect and acknowledgement.

This excerpt illustrates how the professor allowed a student to express a sentiment about the use of a specific novel that students were being asked to read. The student voiced the opinion of the novel having racist and oppressive content. This is an example of making a safe space in the classroom for a different point of view. The issue resolved itself amicably, but as the professor alluded, without making space, it could have gone differently. The professor thought that safe space is equivalent to making space, which was allowing the student to speak up to the professor. This could be seen as making space, but the discussion should have been with other students in the classroom as some other students may have had the same thoughts and could have made for a robust discussion about race, oppression, and discriminatory practices within literature.
Taking Self out of Center

The professor that stated he was trying to make space in the classroom also had difficulty taking himself from being center. The professor shared a time when there was a negative interaction with a student and vividly remembered the situation. The professor shared, “I was being very thoughtful. I couldn't just disengage because to me that would feel like I was saying you're right, which I couldn't do; that was so painful for me that I wanted to resolve it. I'm also a person who doesn't like conflict. I need to address it and resolve conflict, if at all possible, which is something that I need to work on.” This writer will analyze two viewpoints for this statement. Will the professor work on taking himself out of the center and allowing the student to have feelings, or will the professor work harder on convincing the student to see the issue through the viewpoint of the professor? Both points of view could be true. For a professor to take himself out of center, means in a trauma-informed classroom that there will be different points of view and conversations about the differences, but willing to agree to disagree. If an error occurred that offended the student by the professor, an apology can be offered and allow the offended party to accept or reject it, but sincerity is most important. This is an example of making space and taking self out of center. Often taking self out of the center actually is making space for the student. Taking self out of center also allows the students to express their point of view, without judgment and allow a dialogue to take place so common understanding could occur. The other example of engaging with a student and having extensive communication with the student without permission from the student is not taking self out of center; this writer challenges that it is putting the professor in the center, which can be retraumatizing for the student, especially if there are inequities in the encounter (racial, power struggle, class). No one has the exact same experiences and if a student is courageous enough to speak their truth, it should not be threatened
or not taken as seriously. This does not mean that if a student is the offender, protections cannot be taken by the professor. On the contrary, professors are people that have feelings and emotions as well. When practicing a trauma-informed classroom, listening to students who bring an issue to the attention of a professor, the last thing that should be done is nullifying or dismissing the student’s point of view. It takes courage for many students of color to speak up, but many students of color do not because of the fear of backlash from the professor. Professors have to trust that students have expertise that is different from the professor. This involves vulnerability on both parties to speak their truth for what it is without fear of repercussions.

There are several examples of professors trying really hard to center the student, but they found it difficult, and upon reflection, understood how the student was not centered. The professor gave reasons for not centering students. One reason was their own sensitivity. One professor said, “I kind of wanted to learn how to develop a thicker skin for when a student was experiencing trauma and perhaps, you know, it might not be about me, necessarily; it could be about the student and needing to help the student but also having a boundary. Okay, I think I'm saying, of course, we all have those experiences where I could have done that differently.” Allowing the professor to talk through the thought process out loud during the interview created an “aha” moment for the professor to reflect on the student and their trauma instead of the feeling of the professor. The professor needed to understand that there should be a boundary for the professor with the assistance for their students. In this excerpt, the professor realized that helping a student was necessary in the moment by providing resources, but learning that students may or may not decide to accept the resources regardless of how the professor may feel or think. Most professors sincerely want their students to succeed, but students have to also want that outcome as well. The professor cannot make a student succeed in their classroom.
Privilege was also raised as a discussion during the focus group. All the professors understood they had privileges that their students did not have, but one professor commented as she understood her privilege. Her point of view was, “I think in my own kind of growth, I'm becoming aware of my privilege…I can own that and it's like, who wants to learn from me? I know it's not enough to stop there in a white person's evolution; we have a moment where we're like, oh I have privilege, oh my goodness.” Another professor chimed in also stating, “I present myself as a person of privilege and acknowledge that from the very beginning, acknowledging that I'm very aware of my position in society. So if someone brings up a bias, I totally own it.” On a conscious level, the professors understand that they are white, part of the dominant culture and have societal wealth and power that almost all of their students do not possess but it does not mean that in the moment of a discussion, the professor remembers to be vulnerable and empathetically listen to their student. This level of vulnerability must include that the student may have a valid different point of view and cause the professor to be reflective and not to defend their position. These professors understand that the students they teach also know and understand the power dynamic, but that this dynamic is not only in the classroom, but in society as well. Many students of color voices are silenced due to backlash. There is also an unconscious learning by students of color that confronting a professor about subject matter is not allowed as the definition of student, which is someone who is studying, and cannot be on the same level of the professor; thus, a question or two may be tolerated, but not a challenge. These excerpts about privilege illustrate the internal tension many white professors experience in trying to take themselves out of the center.

Another professor realized how her routine was hindering the learning opportunities of her student as she took time to pass back papers. She stated:
I used to have all these routines in the classroom like where I would like return their work at the beginning but it took so long to return work and so like I just had this routine where I would hand the pile to a student and have them pass it out while I was making announcements or whatever, particularly when there wasn't grades on it if it was just my comments or whatever cuz like that way it's like, including them and like giving them a little bit of like, like I trust them or something I don't know, like asking them to help or kind of whatever be a part of the class.

This statement indicates that this professor understood that her need to practice her routines was jeopardizing the learning time of the students and learned to “trust” that the students were capable of handling the task of returning assignments. Centering the student also builds trust in the classroom and allows students to share their lived experiences in the classrooms and own it without judgment and decentralizes the professor.

One professor suggested that learning can go both ways. The statement was, “I'm sorry it's not their responsibility to educate me, It's my job to do my homework, but that I am open to those conversations because I really value that trust is so important in the teaching and learning process.” This statement shows that listening to conversations is more important sometimes than inserting opinions that may not be needed or wanted. This also allows a professor to take in perceptions regarding how students of color label white professors. This statement should be on every professor’s syllabus as this seems to be the central theme of lessening the trauma students may feel in the classroom. This statement can give the impression that the professor is being genuine about the education of the student. Students of color learn at a very early age that they must code switch when in an academic institution. Code switching is changing vernacular to communicate easier with someone else who is not of that culture. Proper English is expected in
these circumstances, especially in the classroom. At times, some students may not know how to explain an idea or concept in the preferred method that the professor expects. The professor does not know or want to ask for clarity, and the student may not know how to articulate the information differently - thus the idea may be dropped and never clarified. This creates a tension in the classroom and many students feel outcasted and misunderstood.

One of the professors shared that they had been called “racist” recently within the last year, which is quite a heavy word to accept, especially in this climate that racism is actively displayed in American society. The other four professors interviewed stated they have been called a racist at some point in their career and the comments were quite varied in the understanding of why a student felt that comments or actions were racist and the way the professor perceived the word. One of the comments given was, “I tried to defend myself and I mean it was painful to be accused of being racist and I tried to explain myself and I did apologize for singling her out. But then she was really, I thought, out of context. She just kept emailing me page after page and she was kind of attacking me; like I mean, I know, I messed up in the first place.” This excerpt referred to an encounter that the professor had with an African American older female student who sat in the front row. The instructor made a statement about her posture and facial expression in front of the classroom. The professor shared that the student felt singled out and wrote email after email explaining the hurt felt. The professor shared he emailed back and apologized, but the student did not accept the apology. This interaction still remains with the professor to date. The continued thought process about an incident in a classroom with a student and professor could be thought of centering the professor, even though the professor was trying to explain his comment with the student. Sometimes the incident has to be the learning and agreed that the outcome was not what was expected. During the focus group, a colleague
acknowledged, “...the student can be going through a lot, and there could be an outburst so there could be a reaction there could be an interaction. But it's not necessarily always about you, and it's so hard when you're in it and to not defend ourselves.” The acknowledgement that the presentation of the student and their emotional state is difficult and especially difficult if a professor is also having a difficult day. The power dynamic is at play all the time and must continue to be present so that the interaction is not about the professor, but about the student. The professors understand that content can be triggering to the class, thus having an effect on the students.

Another comment from a professor verbalized that students could be triggered. The statement was, “So I think the way that we might potentially trigger that student, I think the way that we respond to it is really important. And I wanted to say that the opposite of this situation is what really kind of triggers me when I find myself struggling, is the opposite when the students are so vocal.” This writer believes that this is the crux of how many professors feel about their vocal students of color. There could be some implicit biases underlying this statement, but the knowledge the professor has about how it makes the professor uncomfortable is a good thing, because many of the professors' students may be uncomfortable by what is being taught daily. The most poignant statement was made by a professor who has done self work toward understanding the trauma of the students.

**Centering Student Care**

Trauma Informed Care teaches not to consciously inflict intentional harm upon students but to help students to take care of self and find their voice. This could be done through creative projects or creative writing assignments. When the professor designs the content of the writing assignments, it can invoke a trauma response from students if the project is related to personal
contexts of students. When students are allowed to create their own project, students will write about what areas they feel secure, not areas that will create more trauma for them. Some professors want to offer writing options to students, but do not know the experiences of students of color in the classroom. Four of the professors interviewed have built some form of self-care for students in their classroom. Many examples were offered that ranged from writing poetry to meditation. One professor’s comment was, “I've built in a self-care thing in the first module. And it's this great video that Alicia Garza made about self-care. And I have some different tools that I actually have gathered from trauma informed research as well as I taught another professor’s trauma and the arts class.” This professor made self-care part of the grade for students in the class. The students had to complete a write up to share what the self-care method was for that week. Students had to write how they participated in a self-care activity during the week for points toward their final grade. This was important because the subject matter of this professor’s course was triggering to many BIPOC students, which was writing about police brutality and race. Another professor also used videos for self-care as well as a self-care inventory. The professor used these tools because “the grounding techniques are different ways of grounding and so I have like a few different tools so they watch the video and then I share those tools with them.” This process allowed the professor to introduce new concepts to students about which they may not otherwise have had the bandwidth to engage in self-care. Asking students to do a minimum of five minutes of self-care as part of their studies can teach the student that relaxation is important and that when they clear their heads of other distractions, they are able to refocus their attention on their studies. An example of a self-care tool is taking a walk after work to be present with family, turning off the television to get a good night’s sleep, not overindulging during the week to stay focused on projects and practicing yoga or meditation to name a few.
Goldberg (2017), a psychologist, offered this definition for self-care. He stated, “Self-Care describes the activities undertaken by individuals and the wider community in order to improve health, prevent disease and manage illness. It encompasses a broad spectrum of activities and decisions that people make for themselves to maintain a good level of physical and mental health” (p. 8).

Some professors are beginning to think of how to welcome students who come into the classroom late and discussing how that student will be greeted. There are some students where it is a habitual pattern for tardiness, but there really could be many reasons. The discussion with the class about what constitutes “late” may be the best suggestion. One professor recognized that it would be best to think about a proper greeting for BIPOC students that enter the class session tardy. The statement was “I need to have a practice where I can have some space between the thought and the response, so that I can choose if a black student walks in late.” This came up during the focus group as the group was attempting to be thoughtful for their students who were really trying to make it on screen to the class session, but were late. So the group participated in a quasi-role-play and a professor stated the following: “Oh, hi. Great to have you.” The discussion of a pattern of behavior also arose and as did suggestions of addressing the students’ pattern by asking what's causing them to be late and what can be done about it while trying not to agitate or upset the students. Although this is one practice, another could be to try to set a meeting with the student to inquire if assistance was needed outside of the class. This may help the student to feel that the professor cares about their learning if it is done compassionately.

An area of concern for the professors was how to build inclusion in the classroom for all students to help each other, but the issue of what the students wanted was an afterthought until a student brought it to a professor’s attention. There was a dialog between a student and a
professor where the student questioned the professor about being “forced” to connect with other students. The professor reported that the student’s comment was, “I don't know why you want me to care about other people. I'm just trying to be successful myself.” The professor acknowledged that the student was an African American woman and stated that she is aware that many BIPOC women are caretakers whether they want to be or not. The professor disclosed that the student challenged the thought of helping her classmates, and said she only wanted to be responsible for herself. The professor shared that the student felt like having those thoughts of worrying about self was wrong. Unfortunately, the professor did not really know how to reassure the student that this time, she did not have to take care of anyone but herself. Allowing the student to care for herself is the epitome of self-care.
Re-traumatization through Curricula

When professors think about how to grade and assess students, it is usually done in the accepted way of academia, which is through letter grading and evaluation of work that is congruent with the completion of the curricula. Letter grades and some evaluation of students' assignments is widely accepted. Most professors may not equate grading and curricula completion with trauma. This researcher also did not intellectually combine the significance of curricula with grading until formulating the questions for this dissertation. The results of the data indicate that more emphasis should be given to outcomes that could be beneficial to BIPOC students. The following categories will share excerpts about how professors are looking at their curricula design, what they have learned and what are still areas of growth for them.

Rethinking Assignment and Assessment

One area that the focus group and the two professors in the dialogue group all stated that they were reviewing was their assessments and outcomes for students in their class. In academia, it is not uncommon for professors to provide a syllabus to students with specific information of expectations in the class. The syllabus includes expectations on participation, how many absences are allowed, when assignments are due and if special support is needed, where those services can be found. Letter grades are given for work produced. Many professors are using rubrics for the quality of work that is expected from the students. A point system is also used to specify the expectations for the A - F grading system. The professors that were part of this research expressed ways of trying to do this differently. Most of these professors had specific techniques they were using for that assessment, which varied between changing their grading policy to the allowance for more creative activities that were not tied to mandated assessments and building community within the classroom as well. One professor who uses a particular
writing book called *They say, I say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (Graf & Birkenstein, 2021) explains to students that this book shows them how to build a good argument for an essay. The professor stated:

> It has a lot of sentence stems and starters to help students accomplish different academic moves that involve joining the conversation of ideas. There's a chapter on three ways to respond: you can agree, you can disagree or you can partly agree and partly disagree. The students are like, they only thought you could agree or disagree; they didn't know you could agree with part but then have a talk about what was missing.

This is an example of rethinking assignments by expanding students' understanding of how to improve their writing skills. Many students of color do not always have prior instruction in this type of writing education which can help them to navigate assignments in other classes that also require some form of writing. None of the other professors stated using this type of instrument to improve writing for their students.

Another professor also spoke of giving students different options in the classroom to inform their grade by allowing students to bring culture into their assignments. The professor stated, “We have an optional oral history project, which is actually interviewing someone else. And of course, that someone else, you know, is totally voluntary. And it really is optional and then, I say that in class I like to share stories and I try to bond.” This professor allows students to use their stories and experiences to build community in her classroom. The significance of this is that many of the students may see their collegiate partners differently and understand that they have commonalities. This process can build community in the classroom, build collaboration, and improve outcomes. According to Roval (2001), there are four components of building community in the classroom. They include spirit or sense of belonging, trust, interaction and
learning. This article was written for building community with distance learning which is in effect at this time due to COVID 19, the pandemic affecting the world. Community building in the classroom also helps students to be successful due to a sense of belonging. One of the professors commented on the usefulness of building community in the classroom. She stated:

In terms of the layout of the content, we start with some community building and kind of setting up expectations. I talk about time management and help students structure their time and have the right expectations for how much time a student should spend to be successful. So the idea is like giving them information so that they can take control of their learning process, supporting that kind of building of inner personal safety so they have a chance to get to know each other.

This professor uses a project based assignment to build her class in a particular way. Another professor has changed her syllabus to accommodate students since COVID 19 is still a pandemic. She stated, “One thing I’ve changed in how I do the syllabus over the last two years, I took out a lot of the language that's like you must and changed it to ‘I prefer.’” This professor shared that the difficulty on students of color during this uncertain time requires flexibility in her classroom with the students and the assignments.

Many of the professors were making changes to their curricula to help benefit the students of color in their class. There were a couple professors that were a little slower than of their colleagues. The professors stated that the change in the syllabus was a work in progress and they may not change the syllabus during this semester. One stated, “I just build on the one (syllabus) I've been using for years. It's something that I want to work on now that I've done the trauma informed sabbatical, but I didn't get a chance to update it for this semester, but I want to work in more areas for information about support, reaching out, using the resources, if they ever
feel like they are blocked in any way I want them to know that I'm there to help them.” This professor acknowledged that more revision of her syllabus was needed to create a trauma informed classroom. Another professor shared that he was learning a lot from the focus group convened for this research and gained inspiration and was going to try to make his syllabus more creative to gain the same results as using traditional grading.

The focus group had a robust discussion about grading and “ungrading.” Two of the focus group members were able to learn from one instructor who had been upgrading for a few semesters. Ungrading can be defined as “an umbrella term for any assessment that de-centers the action of an instructor assigning a summary grade to student work” (Lafayette.edu, 2022). Ungrading creates a positive environment to a trauma-informed classroom when done well. There are many variations to the ungrading process. During the pandemic, professors began to use this process of ungrading. Stommel (2022) wrote in his article, *Ungrading: An introduction*, that grades are not a fair way to determine learning. Grades are not a good way to give feedback or an incentive conducive to learning. They do not encourage collaboration but instead promote competition, and are not fair. The paper suggests that ungrading could provide more encouragement for students of color to do their best work and give them more ownership over their work. He suggests that professors should have conversations with the students about their grading style. He suggests less grading of every assignment, contract grading which is sharing expectations of assignments and the grade the student wants to earn, and having students write reflections on their work and authentically state how the student feels about the level of the assignment they completed.

The important takeaway from the discussion was the intellectual conversation and sharing of ideas that the group gained. This process became a train-the-trainer moment that this
researcher was able to witness in real time. Several of the professors made comments about grading practices within their respective classes. One professor stated the following, “There's this forced quantification of grades. I think there's bias and all of that with what is success, what is achievement. How do we measure that? I think the entire system is kind of biased, and so I feel like my job sometimes feels like it's an act of infiltration. I'm like a white guy who's been privileged enough to even get the job.” This professor is planning to look at his assessment and grading policy differently. He learned about ungrading from his colleague who gave an overview of how she is using ungrading in her classroom. She described how she incorporates student input into their overall grade with final submission in her class. She states:

Their final portfolio is where they make an argument for the grade they should get. They have to include the research paper and then their pick for other things. And it could be anything from the class that they've written. And then they make an argument in their cover letter for their grade so they have to use the syllabus policy for the baseline B, and their work as evidence.

This is an example of ungrading and how students have input into the grade they receive. This assessment process is different from the traditional assessment process. Students who are being introduced to this new process can be anxiety-driven for them. Students are used to grading being absolute, but learning is not. Once students learn that grading is also about learning, it gives a sense of ownership in their work, thus reducing the trauma that can come from not getting a good grade. Students can then trust that they are getting more out of the class than just a grade.
Incorporating Racialized Events in the Real World

Since 2020, the United States has been dealing with anti-racism with the continuous killing of African Americans at an unprecedented rate and Coronavirus that disproportionately affects the BIPOC community. There is also the rise of anti-Asian hate that is plaguing our nation as well. These topics are being discussed in the classroom. There are professors that may or may not take into consideration the triggering rhetoric and propaganda that political airings continue to perpetuate racism in America. These topics can trigger all students, but especially BIPOC students. If presented with authenticity, understanding that some students may be affected and allowing organic conversations to take place, the outcomes can be rewarding. If done inauthentically, the outcomes will be devastating. Inauthenticity can appear to seem to be shallow or not allowing discussion or making statements that are countered to what is known or understood by BIPOC students.

This researcher inquired with the professors how they bring racialized events into their classroom. There were many points of view of this subject and a robust discussion with all of the professors. During this period of time, many African Americans were being killed by the police, the most visible was the lynching of George Floyd. One professor stated that the conversation was brought into the class. One professor stated:

...for example, in 2020, I was teaching a summer class, when you had Floyd and the riots and outrage. And we were right in the middle of studying the American dream and inequality and racism. And I brought it into the classroom. I linked articles and I said use this if you want to in your papers so I made it a part of the discussion in that sense. But also knowing that it might be something that some students might want to approach in
their own way; they and a lot of students did bring it up in the actual discussion board and some students wrote about it in their essay.

This was how one professor handled the racialized event in her classroom. She allowed the students to write about George Floyd and process their feelings in their own way. This is one way of using a trauma-informed approach, which can be somewhat equivalent to journaling as healing; although without making it known that mental health services are available is equally important. This was not the only racialized event. Police violence and anti-Asian hate crimes were also topics of discussion in some classrooms. Another professor spoke about police violence in her classroom every semester. She reported that “so we teach protest poetry and we start with a point about protesting police violence or teaching different poems from traditions that might be addressing racialized issues.” The professor shared that the process of allowing students to write about police violence as a continuous racialized event in a framework of poetry gives an opportunity for creative expression to share experiences. The professor shared that many students thank her for allowing them to write about their experiences openly and honestly, without judgment, which was healing for them.

There are also the health disparities that come with racialized events. One professor shared how African American students react in her classroom when speaking about health disparities, specifically diabetes. The students in the class were surprised to learn from the professor’s perspective of diabetes. The professor shared, “there's nothing biological that would mean Black people get more diabetes. So what's going on there? What are the pathways that connect this through behavior like you live in a neighborhood where there's worse food you eat; that leads to you experiencing more stress. And that leads to more diabetes.” Many students may not put food deserts and diabetes together or the foods consumed in people’s lives that lead to
diabetes. This health condition has disproportionately affected many people of color on a consistent basis. According to Walker, et al. (2016), there are many social determinants that impact race with diabetes. This article examined the results of many cultures of color and the neighborhoods the populations resided. It states how food, environment and race are tied to each other and although controllable, interventions are needed.

Professors also spoke about how they handled racialized events in the classroom. One professor stated that, “I think tricky topics also trigger warnings and how much to talk about it and how little to talk about it definitely need to be said. I now have statements in my syllabus from the very beginning so people understand that we are going to read some material that could be potentially triggering, and that they should let me know if they are triggered and then I say it out loud.” Although this professor who does speak about racialized events in the classroom does have this information in the syllabus, this statement challenges the students to be brave enough to speak their trigger out loud. Many students may not be comfortable with that process and may need to step out of the classroom instead. This statement also expresses compassion for the students that this professor served.

A professor shared that topics such as the Bill Cosby controversy have entered the classroom as well. The professor shared that the class is reading a story that is about a Historically Black College and University and a serial rapist. This triggered an African American student in the classroom. The professor shared that for the student, “it was a heavy story about an African American woman who went to Historically Black University in the 40s and 50s. It was a really heavy story about how she married this guy that became a very famous comedian, very much like a Bill Cosby character, but it is a fictional story, and then he became a serial rapist. So it was super heavy and she was kind of trying to not deal with it in any way.” When the professor
had his students read this story, the racialized event regarding the comedian was in the news at the time and he shared that the student got emotional about it. The professor shared that he spoke with the student after class and the student expressed how the story affected her personally and the subject was difficult to digest. There is evidence of a prelude for the students in the classroom and the professor was unclear there would be a reaction regarding the content of the story.

**Talking about the Subject of Race**

In this era, the subject of race is often discussed, especially in the college classroom. Many professors may not know how to have courageous conversations about race in the classroom. According to Singleton (2008), courageous conversations are effective when educators remain engaged, get comfortable with being uncomfortable, speak truth and allow students to do the same, and expect there to be no closure - it just is. This can be quite difficult for professors who are not used to engaging in courageous conversations, especially around race and trauma. The professors shared some of their experiences of discussions that the students had with the professors that were uncomfortable for them. One professor shared an anecdote about a class where there was one African American female student in the class and discussion about race was on the agenda for the evening. The professor shared that, “one thing that I wanted to bring up is we only have one African American woman in that class. She was telling me when she was actively involved in the discussion that it was really happy for her, I think she liked the story. It was hard for her. I think I’m pretty confident that she liked the conversation, that she felt it was thoughtful. But I was thinking about her, I was like well you know I bet it's heavy for her, but I just I was wondering how it was for her, you know.” Even though this professor was thinking about this student and how she may have felt during a heavy conversation about race,
this researcher did not hear the professor ask her how she felt. The professor was uneasy about sharing this story regarding racial uneasiness in the classroom and sharing the conversation. There are many assumptions that are made during conversations regarding race. When in mixed company, ambivalence exists because perceptions about comments made can cause harm to the person of color, intentional or unintentional harm. One issue that is hard to accept is as a professor, one may not know what to say or ask, and that is uncomfortable. So, nothing is said.

Some of the professors were a little more comfortable with the class discussions because the topic was more familiar. One professor stated, “I had an assignment of a paper that was about analyzing a social determinant of health and many students picked racism or, immigration policy or something else that is racialized in this society.” This professor shared that this assignment is part of the curriculum every semester. She enjoys hearing the voices of the students because the essays “show an inequity, that it's unfair and preventable difference in health outcomes.” This class gives students the opportunity to research health inequities that affect people of color more often and to analyze if there are outcomes that will be of more benefit than adverse effects. This professor also stated that because race appears so often, she tries to normalize the topic of race in her classroom. She stated, “race comes up when we introduce health inequities when we talk about maternal and child health outcomes. It comes up in environmental health where we talk about environmental racism. It comes up so much through the class that I think it gets more normalized to talk about it.” This professor has incorporated the discussion of race into the classroom and encourages these discussions. She has learned that the more a difficult subject around race is discussed, more understanding comes out of the discussion, thus the conversations before are a little easier. White fragility prevents courageous conversation from happening because it is difficult for white people to handle the truth being spoken. In some ways, the white
fragility is re-victimization of the trauma that BIPOC students experience because their voices are silenced because the white audience cannot contend with the language or stories being shared. DiAngelo (2015), “argues that this performance of racialized victimhood serves to counter a disequilibrium white people subconsciously experience when we encounter even a minimal amount of racial stress, triggering defensive acts” (p.123). A professor who is offering courageous conversations in their classes is acknowledging that the lived experiences of students of color are real and not perceived and can handle the discomfort the professor may experience.

Not all of the professors are as comfortable talking openly about race in their classroom. Some shared that there was no response when some students brought up the subject of racism based on events in the classroom. A professor stated, “we're all wanting to de-colonize our curriculum and talk about race, which I think is a wonderful thing. I think it really needs to happen. But I think that is an interesting question that I asked myself - is it too much?” The professor shared that talking about race in the classroom was a good thing, but did not know how much to talk about race. Talking about race, whether in or out of the classroom is still controversial unless in an ethnic studies class or another class that must deal with racial subjects. This researcher acknowledges that white professors' lived experiences are not the same as their students, especially BIPOC students. Having the knowledge of how much talk is needed regarding racial discussion can be difficult.

Another professor gives students the opportunity to discuss race and the relationship to their educational journey or growth mindset. Another professor shared how he incorporates race into his classroom discussions. He shared, “I studied postcolonial literature and I've always lived in a few places and always been particularly interested in World Literature. I seek out conversations about race, and my class read a story, by an African American author and it was
100% about race and took place in the Jim Crow South.” This professor shared that there are some subject matters that are a little uncomfortable but he is willing to engage with his students about the subject of race in the classroom.

One of the final comments a professor made was about the use of articles in the classroom dealing with race. The professor stated:

I will point out that yes we actually do have articles that deal with discrimination against other populations. But, I think what I would do differently is just kind of point out that this is part of our historical identity. Racism is just such a core part and it's only recently that this has come to a stronger light. It's become vocal, people are talking about it in a different way. I think that especially since the summer of 2020 and George Floyd, that this has become more of a national conversation.

This last excerpt seems to suggest that although the media was not intentional, they have given people permission to talk about race. As stated, this professor does talk about race in his classroom, but his contemplation to expand the direction of that conversation is causing him to pause. The conversation around race should not be that uncomfortable to talk about in a college setting.

An unexpected area that arose around race was the college structure itself. Many researchers have written about the college structure and the racial inequities, racial discrimination and minoritizing students of color in the college setting. There are scholars such as Smith (2011) who wrote about Racial Battle Fatigue, and Ladson-Billings (2006) who wrote about the educational debt that affects BIPOC students in the K12 and college system have done research on the racist systems that affect students of color. Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), which include many public institutions, such as Harvard Hill College, have many
embedded structural, systematic racist practices that affect students of color. Some of the professors gave examples of the racist practices that they have noticed in this particular college setting. These statements were not expected as part of the discussion regarding curricula, but structural racism can inform curriculum for many professors.

One professor shared how he is reading a book that talks about race, structural racism, poverty, redlining and the American dream. The book brought up thoughts of the parallel to his professorship. He stated, “I'm teaching in a public school system so it's like the state laws and federal laws are complicit with structural racism. You know, it's part of the pipeline, right. So, I'm teaching within that college, and I'm trying to teach a kind of more of a liberation type of education, which is explicitly biased.” This professor knows and understands that even the institution has an issue with racism that most all employees that work there also tiptoe around changing the structure to illuminate the racist environment. Professors acknowledged that the professorship does not reflect the student population and now with the Coronavirus pandemic affecting the world, much may not change soon. A professor acknowledged, “it (race) came up in every single class because I often teach things about race. We teach in a school where probably 70% or 80% of our students are people of color. So, to be honest, our English department is fairly white, and we've been having a kind of a deep conversation I would say in the last few years especially about decolonization.” The term, decolonization, was coined by Moritz Julius Bonn in the 1930’s. It explained how “colonizers,” which is how settlers occupied and stole land and repurposed the land. This practice has happened globally and is still happening today, especially in many countries of color and perceived poorer countries.

Yet, another excerpt from the focus group also stated, “I think that the community college is a sort of bridge between K12 system with a lot of structural racism and the university system
where you know the people who don't get what they need from the K12 system, can't make it without the Community College bridge. It would be an incredibly more divided society than it already is in many ways.” The professor followed up with a story of a Mexican student taking his class who explained how her attendance at another PWI college in a sociology class remembers the theory about race and society was all in the third person. His recollection of the conversation with the student was how she shared with him her feelings while in the class. He shared that she stated, “This is me. This is my family and she brought it up to the to the teacher, but she was also afraid because she was undocumented and she literally was scared to bring it up because she felt students would be aggressive toward her.” The professor tried to acknowledge his privilege and power dynamic he feels in the classroom as well and identify how that could make the professor uncomfortable. This professor went on to acknowledge, “the majority of my students are students of color. I mean that's an interesting dynamic that I brought up and that we have a department where the majority of the teachers in our English department and using this colonial language as well, are on the lighter side.” This professor also stated that we have a very diverse student body and that, “I'm so depressed because the school is about to let go of almost every part timer. And even like nine full time recently hired full time professors in our English department. It erases a lot of the efforts that our departments made to hire people of color.” These excerpts indicate that this professor and other professors acknowledge that there is a structural racial equity issue when there are very few, if any, BIPOC professors hired to represent the student body. COVID did nothing to assist move the college in a forward trajectory with equitable hiring practices as layoffs have been happening since 2020.
Recurring traumas in the classroom

Trauma is the new buzz word and describes a variety of events. The term trauma is being used in this section to describe experiences of hunger, trauma with subject matter, microaggressions in the classroom with other students and/or professors, and sharing of personal information in the classroom such as abuse or fatalities students experience. This is a vast array of topics, but it is what students, especially BIPOC students, bring to school with them.

According to Carello and Butler (2014), some instructors promote potential risky pedagogical practices involving trauma exposure or disclosure despite indications that these may be having deleterious effects” (p. 153). This area in education brings uncertainty and controversy of being knowledgeable with assisting students who suffer from trauma in the classroom and what is the boundary for assistance and curriculum content. How professors respond to the traumas presented in the classroom is when trauma-informed teaching becomes a practice to minimize interruptions in the studies of BIPOC students.

One professor shared what the professor’s understanding of trauma meant to her. She stated:

My understanding about trauma, just from what I have learned, is that when a response seems disproportionate to the present moment or if the student or someone is sort of stuck in that, that heightened response doesn't shift. It's triggering, all of the past experiences and coming to the survival response. I’m reflecting analytically on what the trigger was but like the disproportionate response is illustrative of what I only can imagine to be like the sort of buildup of all those traumas, over time.

This was one professor's working definition of trauma. The professor shared she was thinking of a particular instance that helped her to articulate this working definition for herself. The
professor’s working definition does fit some trauma responses, but not all variations of trauma. There is no one way to identify trauma and the many different triggers for trauma. This is when tools are needed to assist with the student who is experiencing the trauma and be courageous to speak with the student about that trauma. This researcher contends that no response is disproportionate, just a visceral reaction. Trauma has triggers that affect all senses of the body. This is not understood by most and there needs to be more education around the subject of trauma.

All of the professors shared they had at least one experience with a student of color experiencing some sort of trauma while in class. Some of the professors shared many of their experiences with students in their classroom. One common experience that a professor shared was of a student who was lethargic and could not focus. The professor related:

At some point I just sat down with him and I said I've noticed this change and asked what's going on. He said, oh my God, I'm so sorry. I'm just so hungry. And it turned out he like hadn't eaten for a couple days or he was just really struggling to get enough food, until I started actually bringing him an extra sandwich. My wife suggested that I just bring extra sandwiches and just be like, oh, I have an extra. I didn't eat it; do you want it? He said yes, so then I just started bringing an extra sandwich every night to class. That continued just for the whole semester. He participated a lot more after that.

The professor shared that there are some things you would not know about your student until you ask. This act of kindness was not uncommon with many of the professors. Some have a cabinet where they keep snacks for students and share the snacks freely. The professors shared that some of the students who presented tired or with little energy and focus looked forward to that class where they could get a small bite to eat.
Another area that was discussed in the focus group and individual interviews was the extent and appropriateness for trigger warnings. One professor shared her experience of learning about trigger warnings. She stated, “In my reading, the trigger warning is not so much about the content all the time. Students who are traumatized say it’s not the content that concerns them, it's the classroom dynamic that's more often a trigger for students. So, how students are responding, or just the class discussion can trigger students.” This researcher acknowledges that classroom discussions can also trigger students. It also must be acknowledged that the professor creates curriculum about content and designs activities for class engagement, thus professors also have to be clear on what the topic is intended to teach as well. Another professor stated that she was unclear on how to give a trigger warning. She stated, “I guess I don't know in terms of trigger warnings and sort of talking explicitly about trauma. I sort of have been grappling with how much and when, you know, the balancing of it.” This researcher understands the ambiguity of when, how, how often, where and why would these warnings be given. This is an area that this researcher would suggest that consultation should happen to bounce ideas off of colleagues so that trauma responses can be minimized in the classroom. There is controversy in this area about the warning itself on college campuses and if it infantilizes students. The authors Godderis & Root write about the need for warnings to not ignore that students in the class could be harmed by the material being presented. Godderis, et. al (2016) stated, “…that faculty can balance the above noted tensions through fostering a culture of informed learning where instructors respect student autonomy by providing information about topics and materials that are difficult, violent, and/or potentially traumatic” (p. 133). They share how this prepares students for difficult material and if the student’s sense of safety is threatened, the student can make a choice for self-
protection. This also creates a classroom of authenticity and autonomy between professor and student.

Another professor shared her experience of teaching on the subject of traumas and made mention of how many people have died from COVID 19 and Black and brown people suffering more deaths than people in the Holocaust. She shared a student asked, “why are we only talking about white people, meaning the Holocaust?” The student ended up leaving the class. The professor tried to reach out to the student and encourage the student to come back to the live classes, but the student never did, according to the professor. She stated that the student did all the on-line assignments, but never came back to class. At the end of the semester, the student wrote in her summary reflection, that, “her proudest moment was when she had to leave the class because of the white people, and she said what she needed to be said.” The professor summarized this response from the student as the student was in pain and that listening is equally important with BIPOC students. This professor was using the well-known killing of Jewish people in the Holocaust to stress how devastating COVID 19 has been on people, especially people of color and how many Black and brown people are dying disproportionately due to violence. The professor was making an analogy, but the lesson was not on the Holocaust. The teacher did not share that she spoke of the violence that has plagued the Asian community today, which may have frustrated the student.

Another teacher and student incident happened when a professor attempted to share his positionality in the classroom. The professor shared something with the class that triggered a student in the classroom. The issue was taken to the department chair. The professor shared, “a student, who wasn't Black but he was a student of color. He remembered the student stating, ‘I can't. How can I? I can't learn from someone with that kind of privilege.’ I was trying to kind of
acknowledge my positionality, but I think the student was just like, I can't even be in the room which, I understand. So, yeah, I mean I think it's important to acknowledge biases.” This excerpt could have an interaction between the professor and student that triggered the student, but there did not seem to be room to probe for details. The professor shared this information but not what was said that was so offensive to the student to make the student want to leave the class. Again, triggering happens at different times for different reasons. One issue is that professors have to remember the rule of less is more. Depending on what time during the semester this information was shared, the professor could learn to wait a few more weeks to share the information or let someone in the class ask a question related to the triggering subject matter.

A couple professors raised the issue of the reading materials for students in English classes that are traumatizing for students. One professor shared how some English professors use classics in class, like William Faulkner and Mark Twain. He shared:

I think it's an interesting story to look at in terms of stories, is a William Faulkner story called A Rose for Emily. I think Faulkner is really interesting to read in many ways, and kind of like Mark Twain. Kind of like Mark Twain, he talks about the South, aristocracy, and racism. Some people accuse him of being racist because he has racist characters and stories, which doesn't mean he's racist necessarily. I mean, it doesn't mean he's racist at all actually, and in fact I think that it's important to talk about race and have characters and novels that are racist we can talk about, but it's sensitive.

This professor shares feelings about a classic novel. What is not shared is how much of the language in some of these classics offend African Americans by the name-calling, the description of the characters and the privileged differences and the Jim Crow south. These books that are called classics were written during a time when overt racism was an accepted way of life
between African Americans and white people. In this present day, with all of the race baiting and
demoralization of BIPOC people, using this reading material could be interpreted as perpetuating
trauma in the classroom. Martin (2014) wrote an article around the teachings of Huckleberry
Finn with her high school class and the controversy around the use of the racial slur in the book.
She wrote from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective. According to Kim (2021), “CRT is a
school of thought that explores and critiques American history, society, and institutions of power
(including government and legal systems) from a race-based perspective” (learning for
justice.org). Martin used the teaching of the text of Huckleberry Finn as a discussion tool for the
use of the “N” word in this classic and what her students thought about the use of the word. This
researcher emphasizes that if books like these classics are used in the classroom, the students’
feedback should be accepted and alternative readings should be offered as well as these books
are triggering to BIPOC students and reminders of what happened to their ancestors. Another
thought about these authors and their writings are the value of reading these classics and the
effects on the education of BIPOC students. A possibility is to have excerpts read that the
professor wants to apply to their class and have it as suggested reading for those interested.
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, RESEARCH QUESTIONS
DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Study

The purpose of the study was to use Grounded Theory as an emergent method to explore the knowledge of professors at Harvard Hill with how curriculum and pedagogy could retraumatize BIPOC students. This study interviewed English faculty members because this department asks students to write about intimate subject matter. All participants identified as full-time white professors at the college. These interviewees had previously worked together to try to create trauma-informed classrooms at the college and had met monthly to discuss processes and experiences with students during this time of COVID and anti-racism in the United States. These professors have all worked in the college for years and had a desire to assist BIPOC students with succeeding in the college setting and willing to learn different strategies to assist with that process. In this case, they served as an example of what might be hoped for in terms of faculty commitment to learning about trauma informed practice.

This research questioned the professors’ understanding of racism in higher education, racial trauma, the impact COVID has had on higher education from their point of view, and how the professors are adjusting to these changes. There were a variety of perspectives from the interviewees. Some were beginning to create an inclusive, trauma-informed classroom, while others have been using trauma informed practices for a couple years. There is also a professor who was forced to include space for discussion on race and inequalities with the BIPOC community because of the teaching of public health disparities. The professor’s revelations about the transitions in her classroom was equivalent to what other professors were stating they learned in the teaching modules for creating a trauma-informed classroom. The professor that taught poetry also had a developed understanding of racism in the United States because of the poetry
topics she would allow the students to create and share with the class. This professor also had to incorporate courageous conversations into her class due to the nature of topics discussed in the classroom. Two professors had the opportunity to work in programs within the college setting that served BIPOC high school students earning college credits and realized the trauma that these students experienced before getting to college and how that trauma impeded their educational opportunities. The last professor also worked with the same population, but for a shorter time, thus beginning her journey with creating a trauma-informed classroom.

**Research Questions**

This dissertation sought to explore several questions. There was robust conversation with the professors who participated in this research. There were four questions that were asked with a variety of responses and reasonings behind the responses.

1. How do faculty think about the previous life experiences of the students they serve before creating their syllabus?

2. What pedagogies and andragogys do faculty in higher education use to support students of color who have previously suffered chronic, complex and racial traumas to feel safe and less isolated in an educational environment?

3. What experiences have faculty in higher education had with students who have experienced trauma?

4. How do professors discuss difficult subject matter with their class?

These questions ranged from formulating their syllabi before the beginning of the semester taking into account their student population, to pedagogical practices used by the professors to support their BIPOC students with the traumas in the classroom, how have they dealt with students being traumatized in the classroom, and the handling of difficult subject matter. The
professors seemed to benefit from the focus group and questioning as many of the interviewees stated they planned to update their syllabi to incorporate information learned through this process.

The first question inquired about how faculty thought about previous life experiences of the students they serve before creating their syllabus. There were several questions that were asked both in the focus group and individually of the participants which included the subject of race, COVID 19, and inclusionary practices. The range for engagement varied among the professors from full inclusionary practices with discussions of race in the classroom and changing parts of the curricula to a trauma-informed approach when COVID 19, a global pandemic, affected many students that ranged from hospitalization to losing family members. Some of the professors were able to open up the classroom with conversation about the health of the students and gave the opportunity to incorporate self-care and wellness techniques for the students and incentivized the process with part of their grades. Four of the professors had content about race built into their curricula either by readings or writings. The professors shared that having access to training about anti-racism and building trauma-informed classrooms has improved the outcomes of the BIPOC students. The professors used most of their syllabi each semester with some tweaking each semester. Due to COVID 19, all of the professors made a change to their policies for completion of assignments. Many of the professors shared that their policy was so strict, that some students would call in from their hospital bed or while at the bedside of a loved one so they would not be marked absent in class. As all classes became some form of an on-line class, the professors relaxed their demands of being on screen, screen on, and missed class points. Instead, students were informed to communicate with the professors and ask for opportunities to still turn in assignments, albeit late.
Another phenomenon that arose through this research was the realization of how much COVID 19 and other traumas affected BIPOC students in the classroom. The professors listened to the lived experiences of their students and how these experiences contributed to their learning style and how resilience can differ between students. The professors were able to hear from one another about all that students have to handle while trying to finish classes, such as working two jobs, taking care of sick relatives or children, not having enough food, and not having stable internet access during the pandemic. The sharing between the professors seemed to be a learning opportunity for all who participated.

Another research question was the pedagogies and andragogies the faculty use in higher education to support BIPOC students who have previously suffered chronic, complex, and racial traumas to feel safe and less isolated in an educational environment. Since all the professors who participated in this research used writing as a vehicle for expression, all incorporated some exercise into their practice to assist students with self-care and reflection opportunities. Not all professors are in the same place with their development, but this researcher is optimistic that these professors are reflecting on their pedagogies and andragogies to serve the students in their classrooms. One example is that all of the professors stated they give trigger warnings to students when they are using, reviewing, and teaching about subject matter that may be disturbing like race, health inequities, discrimination, slavery, police violence against the BIPOC community and other areas that are known to be a stressor. The discussion in the focus group gained a consensus that warnings should be stated at the beginning of class so that all students can prepare themselves to be aware that difficult content may be shared. The dialogue group shared that they state at the beginning of the semester and in most of their classes that difficult content will be shared. This group shared that the students appreciated the forewarning, thus able to adjust to the
information and participate in the discussions if they chose. These professors shared that the BIPOC students usually fully participated as it gave them the opportunity to share their lived experiences of topics and feel like they were heard and understood. The dialogue group also shared that their classes did not have just one or two BIPOC students, so the discussion was much richer and students did not feel they had to represent their race, culture, or community.

When this researcher interviewed the participants individually, differences emerged in practices among the professors about building relationships with their students. There was a professor that taught his students in a familiar way. This professor loves to build relationships with his students, whether BIPOC or not, and describes an inviting atmosphere in his classroom. He stated that everyone is an adult and he wants them to succeed, thus speaking with them in a friendly, familiar manner. He understands that he needs to balance his friendly persona with the privilege that he holds and that all students may not see him as a friend. Another professor shared that she is not as seasoned in developing her classroom as other professors who are part of the trauma informed classroom group, but she is working on building more collaborative and trauma–informed practices. She shared that she is including students in small activities in the classroom, but working on bigger activities to involve the entire classroom. The last professor of the focus group seemed to have adjusted her pedagogy and andragogy the most for her students. She has incorporated self-care that is part of her grading system, she is using the upgrading technique and educated her other colleagues about some of her processes, and she involves affinity learning communities when she experiences difficulties with BIPOC students. This professor loved sharing her knowledge and has promised future discussion on many of these processes.
The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (Felitti, 1998) categorized seven original trauma markers that affected adults. Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, et al (2011) took the ACES research further and linked trauma to other disorders like Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) within communities of color. This research has shown how some ACES markers follow students throughout life and inevitably show up in college. At times the residual effect may show in the classroom and sometimes just on the college campus. This researcher sought to know what experiences faculty in higher education has had with students who have experienced trauma. The interview questions focused on classroom outbursts or conflicts in the classroom, or students feeling silenced in the classroom. This researcher asked the professors how they handled dysregulated or hostile students, especially BIPOC students. The professors handled these issues very differently. The dialogue group stated they did not have many issues of dysregulation in the classroom. These two professors each remembered an incident in their class about dysregulation and stated that both students were white males. They could not remember why the white males were irate, but the professors remembered that the reaction did not fit the situation. The comments were the students may have been feeling fragile about the discussion that was happening. Another professor remembered an Asian student who commented on so much conversation about white people and thought white people were being centered too much and Asian hate was not being addressed. Yet, another professor had a couple incidents in the classroom where BIPOC students felt singled out in the classroom and the professor attempted to repair the damage. The professor reported feeling successful with one, but did not feel successful with the other student. Another professor did remember a student that was triggered by an introductory scene in a movie being shown and reflected on giving trigger warnings earlier. The professors realized by listening to each other, they all could capitalize from the
stories being shared and they could prepare responses for incidents that occur within the classroom.

The last research question sought to understand how professors discuss difficult subject matters with the class. All of the professors discussed race in their class and had this researcher consider them to have some courageous conversations with the students in their classes. Singleton (2008) stated that courageous conversations are effective when educators remain engaged, get comfortable with being uncomfortable, speak truth and allow students to do the same, and expect there to be no closure - it just is. The professors all agreed that if a discussion on a difficult topic opened in the classroom and there were more than two BIPOC students in the classroom, from their perspective, the conversation flowed freely. Many of the professors felt the conversations were robust and they learned aspects of the students they otherwise would not have known. The professors also recognized that if there were solo BIPOC students, that those students may not participate fully and may only listen to the conversation.

As the media has displayed for over two years now, COVID 19 is a global pandemic that has especially affected many BIPOC students. The professors shared how many of the students, due to fear, were disclosing how family members were hospitalized and/or died and they did not know how to handle this information. One professor shared how one BIPOC student had several family members that had suffered from COVID, and thus was struggling keeping up with assignments. The professor assisted the student to get the student to complete the class, but not without many conversations, which the professor said the student was elated to have.

The professors shared that discussing the COVID pandemic along with racial tension and violence against the Asian community complicated the discussions around race. There is not a dispute that African Americans are brutally attacked and killed by some police officers, but the
attacks on Asians and Asian Americans cannot be dismissed or minimized either. These controversies can make for robust discussions in class, but professors have to create brave spaces to have those courageous conversations. This researcher uses the term, “brave spaces” because the speaker must be equally vulnerable and confident at the same time to speak their truth. The professor must understand that the space is needed and that the professor does not have all the answers for issues that may arise and become comfortable with hearing difficult truths from students. The brave space is also where robust conversation happens and know the difference between conversation and conflict and redirect students in the moment. The last practice professors will have to learn is to become comfortable with silence - These professors are making strides toward developing these classrooms.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

This researcher created the term “Critical Educational Trauma Theory” to encompass other scholars’ terms like Racial Battle Fatigue, Racial Equity, MEES, ACES study, and mental health disorders that plague BIPOC students that can cause trauma responses in the classroom. The term is to contribute to theories that assist institutions with an understanding that educational topics can trigger students in many subject matters. There were two areas that the research sought to understand – re-traumatization of curricula and pedagogy. The research questions covered the topics of re-traumatization of BIPOC students through curriculum as well as pedagogy and andragogy. The questions consisted of the intersectionality of trauma, race, and the higher educational system. As the United States educational system is serving more BIPOC people, the cookie cutter model has to be retired and newer models, such as trauma-informed classrooms created at the college level. Cookie cutter model is a colloquial meaning of treating everyone the same and using the same methods for all without distinguishing individual
characteristics. This is important as this researcher believes that people should not be treated identically - same thought, same outcomes, same understandings of information being taught and delivered in a college classroom. Students are bringing themselves to the classroom; they are not able, nor should they, check their emotions and traumas at the door of the classroom. The professors that participated in this research are understanding that the college setting is changing, thus they must make changes in their classroom for relevancy. This researcher posed some tough questions to the professors, which many were able to answer from their positionality and others acknowledged that they have more work to do in the area of creating a trauma-informed classroom. The professors have chosen to use a shared platform to formulate and share ideas that all could benefit. They are participating in workshops that are challenging them to think differently and possibly feel uncomfortable at times, but that is when real growth happens.

Joseph Lowman (1995) has written books on Mastering the Techniques of Teaching. One comment that has been used repeatedly in writings regarding piquing student interest in the classroom is “The ability to stimulate strong positive emotions in students separates the competent from the outstanding college teacher” (Lowman, 1995, p.21). Most professors are passionate about their pedagogy and may use controversial content within their lessons, but some students may not relate to the teaching style or may be triggered by the content in the classroom, which is classified as re-traumatization. This research is not to minimize any professor’s pedagogy or curriculum, it is seeking to assist professors with creating an environment that is inclusionary and compassionate.

This research can be used as a foundation to expand the development of trauma-informed classroom environments. There has been a great deal of work done at the college level to build inclusion into classrooms for BIPOC students. As stated in Chapter II, Duncan-Andrade (2007)
conducted his research in urban schools in California and his research has been implemented in K12 schools. Wood, Urias, and Harris created the Minority Male Community College Collaborative (2016), also known as M2C3, and they established a research center to support underrepresented and marginalized students at San Diego State University. There are several recommendations that can be made by this particular research. There is also the research by Carello and Butler (2014) that showed faculty, in their effort to teach about trauma, are actually re-traumatizing their students. Also, Venet stated that a “crucial aspect of trauma-informed work is providing a caring, safe environment that supports all students, regardless of our knowledge about each student’s history” (p.1). These are some recommendations to follow.

**Recommendation 1 - Professional Development for Trauma-Informed Classrooms**

All of the recommendations can be created under a professional development umbrella and the professors can receive release time to take classes or participate in group conversation to change outcomes for classes. One area that would be a great first beginning is the understanding of what trauma-informed classrooms really are and an implementation process for the faculty to follow. Trauma-informed classrooms can be done over stages and done in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this research, trauma-informed teaching or trauma-informed classrooms relate to creating equitable teaching practices. As stated earlier, Duncan-Andrade (2007) conducted his research in urban schools in California and implemented a three-year program of effective teaching methods for teachers committed to social justice and social change in the educational environment. It is also an opportunity to build closer relationships with the students and have inclusionary practices for these students. Some of these professors have shared that they are using self-care techniques and allowing students to use alternate mediums to complete assignments. These professors have implemented art, poetry, accepting vernacular for self
expression, discussion boards and group work as a way toward building inclusion in their classes. Several of the professors learned this practice through their trauma-informed lessons and others have incorporated these practices into their curriculum for a few years. These professors are pleased with the progress they have made with their individual classrooms and they all stated that the outcomes in the classroom have been higher since expanding their pedagogy and curriculum.

**Recommendation 2 - Curriculum Redesign with Train the Trainer**

Harvard Hill has many amazing opportunities for BIPOC students to gain skills for trades and entry level jobs. The BIPOC students who want to continue their education and earn a Bachelor’s degree have more classes and challenges within the college. A reason that some of the professors shared are practices that are counter to the population being served. A few professors shared their experiences while holding office hours with their students and how much trauma they were experiencing just with the COVID 19 epidemic. One professor shared that half of her students, BIPOC or not, were sharing their stories of the tragedies their families were experiencing. The professor stated at least three to four of her students in her classes between 2020 and 2021 gave the same story of hospitalization or loss. The professor decided at that time where she could make changes to her curriculum to accommodate students who may have lives outside of college. Another professor shared how one of her students was part of the San Francisco Fire Department and during fire season or other emergencies would miss class, which are some of the lived experiences of students. Both teachers developed a system that allowed students to submit their work for their classes with allowances. One professor drafted a policy around how to submit late work and allowed for extra credit assignments to ensure passage of the class. This is an example of almost individualizing education to fit the student instead of a one
size fits all class policy. Both of these instructors worked with other professors to create a process for this type of allowance and reported receiving great feedback from students.

Another area that gained robust conversation was ungrading. This process can be counterintuitive to most professors because grades mean a lot to students, especially those who are overachievers. That 4.0 student strives toward earning that grade, but are they learning? The ungrading process allows students to decide what grade they want and strive toward that grade. It does not take away from that student who wants 4.0, but it does not penalize the student that wants 2.0 and move on. One process for ungrading is not actually giving grades, but using a scale that shares with students how they are doing in a class. If a student writes a paper, but has some grammatical errors or did not quite get the concept of the five paragraph essay, the ungrading process would be feedback for strengthening the paper to receive a quality paper. Some professors use a point system, some use a method that indicates no grade until the paper is in good condition and understood by the student and the professor. This process can require a bit of work at the beginning of the process, but once a student learns what is expected, the student is able to follow the process and be successful within the class. It is an adjustment for many students at the beginning because academia has taught students to expect a grade for their work and you get one, possibly two attempts to make corrections. The ungrading process gives a student several attempts to correct the process, thus the ability to actually learn from the process rather than just earning a grade. This practice works well for many BIPOC students that come from punitive classroom environments for sub-par work in the classroom. This process gives the student the opportunity to learn and improve skills gradually and retain what they are learning. There is no one way for ungrading, but working with colleagues that are using this process is
strongly suggested because it can become complicated. Clear instructions are needed for students to understand the expectations.

**Recommendation 3 - Inclusionary Practice as part of Evaluation Process**

Professors are expected to participate in professional development, but topics can be individual selections. A recommendation is that racial equity, inclusionary practices and knowledge around trauma-informed practices should be tied to the evaluation process for all faculty as part of the employment process. As stated in chapter one, the community college system has more BIPOC students in the classrooms, but as a professor of this research stated, the majority of the professors are white. One way for white faculty to reflect on their practice and its support for BIPOC students is requiring inclusionary practices. The college could create a professional development day that has different break out areas for multiple classes and hands-on guidance to incorporate a new practice into the curricula of the professors. A system wide training would go a long way to indicate the importance of trauma-informed practices into the college, and give a clear message that the college is approving inclusionary practices into the curriculum. This researcher predicts that more inclusionary practices will assist with retention of BIPOC students, positively affect graduation and transfer rates, and build community within the college. Once again, M2C3 is a program that has created an environment on a college campus that accomplishes these efforts. The university allowed the two creators to have space and create their program to assist with success for BIPOC students. The professors that participated in this research could spearhead some of the workshops to assist colleagues to begin incorporating strategies for trauma-informed pedagogy into their classrooms.
**Recommendation 4 - Data Collection**

A true litmus test would be a four semester trend to determine if retention is higher and grading is higher as well if some of the practices expressed above create better outcomes and retention. This area could be designed by departments that can track this information like Research, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness. This department collects data for equity driven programs and reports on institutional outcomes for Harvard Hill. The data collection can also be tied to outcomes at the end of the semester with the faculty. The professors should also notice a retention in their class by head count and assignments completed. This process could be a great opportunity for professors to enhance their pedagogy and update their older areas of their curriculum to keep student engagement.

**Conclusion**

This research sought to discover if professors at Harvard Hill understood the intersectionality of trauma, race and education. The uniqueness of a group of professors sharing ideas and practices of building a trauma-informed classroom is a great opportunity for the college to expand and support more BIPOC students at the college. These professors were open and honest about their knowledge of race and how they speak about it, their knowledge of trauma and how it presents itself in their classroom and the educational system. There are many opportunities for growth with other professors and sharing of practices amongst colleagues. This research should be continued with empirical data from the practices used to inform the direction of the college. A great liberation said, ““No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption” (Freire, 2000, p. 54).
Personal Reflection

When this research begun, there was very little written information on creating trauma-informed classrooms at the college/university level. The driving force for this research was a program that this researcher was the director of which created opportunities for BIPOC students that stopped out, dropped out, or were expelled from their high schools, but wanted to complete their high school diplomas and gain skills toward employment to help themselves and their families. As community colleges are serving more BIPOC students, changes need to be made to stay viable within communities. During this process, there have been many high profile murders of BIPOC individuals, especially George Floyd, who was equivalent to a public lynching. According to Bor, Venkataramani, Williams, and Tsai (2018), police brutality contributes to traumatic experiences for African American adults up to three months after the incident. Their research was done before the killing of George Floyd and is still true today. The killing of Floyd has also traumatized the young people in ways that have not manifested completely.

This researcher has been social justice focused in education for many years serving BIPOC communities and has been involved with creating change for educational environments. This dissertation is written to transform higher education in order to include those who would otherwise be silenced. The classroom needs to be transformed so that students who experience trauma are welcomed and can find space in the classroom to find their voices, be heard, be cared for and not be further traumatized. Our challenge is to remember why we became educators: We are here to transform spaces and the people in those spaces concurrently. We must be the change we want to see. There is much appreciation for the professors that sought to participate in this endeavor. It is also worth noting that each of these professors also worked with special populations within the college setting. Even though the professors were colleagues and all
identified as white, it could not have been easy speaking to this BIPOC educator that would be critiquing the progress that the trauma-informed group has made at the college. The courageous conversations are needed in many more spaces with many more people involved.

This researcher saw a lot of shared ideas within the focus group and dyad regarding how they encouraged each other to incorporate practices into their classroom and curricula. The professors expressed there was much for them to consider for their trauma-informed work group and share more ideas about assignments with each other. The professors want to grow the group and they should participate in a train-the-trainer opportunity within the college. Even though there is agreement that much more exploration is needed to continue transforming spaces for inclusion, this group is headed in the right direction. Paolo Freire stated, “there's no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom. (p.34)” These professors are congratulated for attempting the latter.
Post Script

While studying for my doctorate, a university professor asked the question – how do you feel about your educational journey? My response was: This is the best thing I have ever done for myself and it is also the worst thing I have ever done. I now have words that describe my experiences in and out of educational settings.

Before this journey in education began, I spent much of my childhood reading as I had many illnesses, so I lived in a very sheltered environment. Reading also became my passion. For context, I grew up in a patriarchal and matriarchal household at the same time. My father was first generation in the U.S. and first Californian who had two immigrant parents; his mother was from Jamaica and his father was from Colombia. My father was raised by a single mother as his father died when he was very young, and he was the youngest of three. My mother migrated to California from the South, Mississippi to be exact. She was also raised by a single mother and was the youngest of four. Her grandmother was Chickasaw and Irish and her grandfather was Choctaw and Black. My mother always told me the story of my grandfather being offered a professorship at Tuskegee University, but turned it down because his wife, my great grandmother, her grandmother, could not read or write English. This does not equate to illiteracy because she was fluent in her native tongue as was he, but he had more American education than she did.

My parents met in San Francisco, California and never left the state. Both my parents were practicing Catholics, thus I attended Catholic schools almost my entire educational career. Growing up Catholic has its criticisms, one being martyrdom. I was also taught over many years within Catholic education that you do for those who cannot do for themselves. I learned how to practice this from my family. From politics, to religion, to social gatherings and community
engagement, including travelling abroad, helping those in need was the mantra in my home, all
the time, every day. My father was ruler of his kingdom when he was home; when he was not
home, which was quite often, my mother ran her queendom.

I had a love of learning from a very young age and school, for the most part, came fairly
easy for me. I began very early tutoring classmates, my brothers, and ventured out to being paid
for tutoring. Tutoring boosted my confidence and self-worth as I was helping those who needed
it, my Catholic teaching. I did not know that this was an indication of my first love of education.
I must also share that because my ambitious mother wanted all her children to have “the best
education possible”, my brothers and I went to predominantly white Catholic elementary school
and traveled to another city by bus to attend. The challenges we faced in this school from our
physical beings to our intelligence had to be defended from students and teachers alike. It was
not until I was an adult that I had the knowledge to understand that was overt and covert racism
that we experienced in this school. It was through a discussion with a gay, white male that drove
home for me it was called racism that we experienced – a word heard and described quite often
in my house, but not contextualized. At this particular school, I watched my brothers be
persecuted because they were Black males and I watched my strong, large and highly intelligent
father, take on this school to protect his children. I witnessed the police being called on my father
because the principal, a white male who held the label as “brother” in the Catholic Church, did
not want to speak to my father about why he was trying to suspend my youngest brother – again,
without cause or trying to expel him from school. I was the lucky one in this school. I liked to
read and I liked to write – I was the good student; I was not like some of the other students. I
began to believe this, that I was deserving of something, but could not name it. My best friend
was a Samoan female and had a brother and sister attend the same school. They were persecuted
also. My best friend fell into the “other” group. That was cognitively incongruent for me. She was just as smart as me. I still wonder today why I was the token “good one”. This was one of many traumatic experiences during my educational journey.

High school was a change for me – still Catholic, but the focus was more on community work, taking care of others and family. Requirements for graduation was community service, religious practice every day, and preparation for family life – another way of practicing martyrdom. I was not geared toward college, per se, but more “woman’s work”, which included office work, family, and charitable engagement. Neither my mother or father attended university, so I was on my own with college. I started my higher educational career at a community college.

I remember bringing in my SAT scores and was apologetic for ranking in the 90th percentile, but not understanding what that meant and had no one to explain it to me. Off to the community college I went with my scores in hand. I remember meeting with the academic counselor and before she could speak, I decided to defend my scores and apologized for my scores not being better and accepting this road so I could figure myself out. The counselor never acknowledge that my scores were actually excellent. I did not find this information out until I applied for university. I also could not define the look on her face as she listened to me. I later figured it out; it was astonishment. She knew my grades were good, but perhaps did not know how to tell me.

When applying to university, I had to produce my scores again and the Dean of Admissions was helping out his department on this particular day. He was assisting me with selecting classes. He viewed my SAT scores and asked me why was I attending community college. I, of course, stated, because I did not have good scores. He gave me the same look as the counselor at the community college. He followed up his look with the statement, “your SAT scores could have gotten you into any university you wanted to attend”. Clearly I did not believe him, otherwise
some type of divine intervention would have happened. Surely someone would have disclosed this information to me before graduating from high school. So, I let him speak and got my classes and continued on with my education at this university and received my second and third degree at the same university. This gave opportunities to become a professor also. I felt an honor to be offered teaching assignments to educate the BIPOC community and assist them with their educational success. I felt a kinship with the students I served.

I was first employed at this same community college I originally attended and worked next to the counselor that assisted me with classes. She did not remember me though. I also was employed at a few different community colleges in the Bay Area. I experienced challenges in these institutions. I clearly remember attending meetings and experienced colleagues dismiss my suggestions and thoughts because they did not like what I shared or stated about BIPOC students and the maltreatment of them within the college setting. The stories within this dissertation were the norm for most of my students, not the exceptions. Many students disclosed the distrust they held with teachers, or the targeting that they felt teachers showed toward them. I was so shocked by some of the stories, that I tried to convince the students that it had to be a misunderstanding. I am not sure if that was to convince my students or myself. This mindset changed when I began witnessing some of the descriptions and language that I heard used toward BIPOC students – the othering, the dismissal, the invisibility of students of color.

I involved myself in spaces to share the knowledge I learned from my students. I experienced microaggressions daily in these environments. I was told many times that I was not “like the others”, so many staff became comfortable making inappropriate statements about students in front of me. When I challenged that thought, I was then dismissed or lied to or gaslit; I must have misunderstood the statement. The witnessing of the microaggressions that many
students shared with me that they actually heard professors say led many of them to drop out. I always shared with the students to contact me if they changed their mind and wanted to return, I would be there to assist them. I was upset by the amount of BIPOC students who dropped out every semester. I began to question the reasons why students would drop out because I could not believe it was just the students. I realized that many of my students brought traumas to school with them and they were triggered in and out of the classroom. I spoke with many professors about this revelation and wondered if it was a general practice or more of a trend. Unfortunately, over the years, the re-traumatization of students in the classroom grew exponentially, which alarmed me. As a practicing mental health professional as well, understanding that triggering a person, especially those who have experienced trauma, and doing this in a public setting could cause and create dire circumstances. Many professors, especially those that were in mental health and/or teaching psychology brought it to the attention of the deans and department chairs also. Students were not asked to just journal their feelings, which could be a trigger within itself, but were asked to write essays on traumas they suffered. Most of these asks were in the English and English as a Second Language Department. There was no mental health offered for healing, the writing was to be the healing. It must be emphasized that many instructors were white presenting, most were of a middle class background and did not experience what the students they were teaching had experienced. It must also be said that many students disclosed to me that they believed teachers were commenting and critiquing their traumas, not their writing. This is not shocking when writing can be a struggle for many students while attempting to complete an assignment and wrestling with unresolved personal struggles. This can and does trigger many students, and, at times to the point of quitting school. When I decided to begin my dissertation, the re-traumatization of students stayed with me and I wanted to write about the detrimental
effects trauma has on students – both what the student brings to school and what they experience in school as well. Once I began my studies, the education gave me language for what I knew to be true, but did not have a label for it before. I can now label it. This process also assisted with synthesizing the traumatic effects students experienced inside and outside of the classroom. It also gave me the permission to unapologetically challenge status quo with professors and educators. I acknowledge that professors would become uncomfortable with courageous conversations regarding these topics, but it was necessary for them to understand how their pedagogy and curriculum affect students who have suffered traumas. I am also well aware of the presence of being a member at a table or in a room bringing a different realization into the conversation – that the problem is not the students unable to do the work.

Many professors wanted me to be invisible until they needed me to be visible. How do you become visible and invisible at the same time? I had to be visible to be present for the students I served, to assist them with their concerns they voiced toward their higher educational experiences; visible to those professors who needed me to mediate an interaction between them and a student because the professor said something to that student suffering from some trauma and the student verbally responded in self-protection. I would become invisible when speaking with white professors as my suggestions were dismissed until there was a need for my assistance with a student. One would think this is a difficult position to be in where there is always an expectation of code-switching, and the blatant expectancy of anything said as law by white professors is common practice for most BIPOC persons. The gaslighting that becomes part of everyday life, the hidden meanings in the conversations (you know, you are not typical, you speak so well, you dress so well) to attempt to create an environment of acceptance and othering of people who were different from the dominant culture. This knowledge that I have gained can
be seen as threatening because I no longer fit the perception others may have of me. I experience different microaggressions now.

I hoped my research process using professors would give some answers to the questions I held. I chose personal interviews and a focus group. Using a focus group allowed colleagues to hear other perspectives and learn from each other. As all participants were white, there was a consciousness that seemed consistent and the group were doing a good job. They did not have anyone giving them concrete direction on how to create curriculum for a trauma informed classroom. All of the professors that agreed to be interviewed for this research worked with students who have experienced trauma. Each could explain a specific type of negative interaction each had as a professor and with which student. The act of healing the harm was more difficult for them to express, acknowledge or share, which is a reminder for me of why this topic is so important. Interviewing the group was uncomfortable for me, not because I was unsure of my line of questioning, but because I knew my questions were direct and challenged thoughts regarding racial and other traumas to the demographic that has been accused of causing the harm. As the focus group began, some of the answers brought me back to those rooms I sat in and had to listen but not participate – so I sat and listened during the research process. There was some information given that showed the professors were trying to create a different environment in their classrooms, but there was only surface level change, not necessarily meaningful change. The individual interviews told a different story. They stated that my questions were hard and required them to reflect. My hope is that they use this process to be reflective with creating their syllabi going forward and continue to hone their pedagogy for themselves, so as to influence better outcomes for their students.
This process was cathartic for me because I was able to interact with colleagues on a different level. I was able to see colleagues differently and seem the vulnerability with them. Their feeling of vulnerability is what should be understood about BIPOC students; the insecurity, the wanting to do a good job, the inability to be honest and real, the lack of knowledge for subject matter being taught. Bringing inclusionary practices into the classroom is one part of revamping classrooms for students who suffer traumas, but being intentional about educating all students is also a big part of the transformation. Now that I have received this education, I plan to continue to use this knowledge as often as possible in all environments. I owe it to my BIPOC community to help create better learning environments for them and their future. My teachings regarding social justice and helping my fellow persons require me to continue this journey to help those whose voices are not being heard.
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Appendix I

Questions for dissertation interviews

Group questions

- Does the issue of race come up in your class? Will you give an example or two?
  How do you handle the issue when it arises?

- Talk about what you do when the student with the hoodie on or the AA student or a student of color sits quietly in the back of the class?

- During this twin pandemic of COVID and anti-blackness movement, what are you doing differently? Why?

Individual questions

1. How do you think about the creation of your syllabus for your students before the semester begins?

2. Can you share an assignment, positive or negative, regarding race that turned out differently than what you planned?
   a. What did you do with that information?
   b. How did you adjust the assignment for the future?

3. How do you incorporate student culture into your assignments?
   a. How do you allow AA students or students of color communicate their creative expression around these assignments?
   b. How do you create space in your classroom for multiple perspectives, opinions, experiences?

4. How do you handle AA students and students of color that may become angry in your class?
a. If the student shows hostility, how do you engage them?

5. How do you engage an AA or student of color to understand their experiences and perspective?
   
a. Has an AA student or student of color shared that an assignment is triggering? How did you engage that student?

6. How do you help AA students or students of color who are struggling in your class?
   
a. Can you describe how you assist them?
   
b. Why do you think that is important to you?

7. The term “implicit bias” is described as having an attitude toward people or associate stereotypes with them without a conscious knowledge. How have you thought as a faculty member about the biases in your teaching practices?

8. How do you acknowledge your biases in the classroom while engaging AA students or students of color with difficult subject matter?
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Danyelle Marshall, a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco (USF). The faculty supervisor for this study is Dr. Colette Cann, a professor and Assistant Dean in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:
The purpose of this research study is to explore how English professors in a community college understand if and how they may be retraumatizing African American students and students of color in the classroom. This study is also to further research if English teachers are aware of trauma-informed pedagogy or practices to use in the classroom.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:
During this study, the following will happen:

1. Danyelle Marshall will conduct a focus group involving all English faculty at least one an additional hour. She will ask you questions about practices used in the classroom, syllabus preparation and interaction with African American and students of color in the classroom.
2. Some of you will also be asked to participate in an individual interview for approximately one hour with Danyelle Marshall to discuss how support happens for students, especially during this environment of COVID.
3. You will be asked by Danyelle Marshall about learning materials you are willing to share, that demonstrates inclusionary practice to help students who have experienced trauma in the classroom feel comfortable.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:
Your participation in this study will involve a focus group session that will last between one and two hours. The one-on-one interview will last approximately one hour. The focus group and interview will be conducted using Zoom, a video conferencing technology. The focus group will be scheduled on a day and time convenient for the group and the one on one interviews will be scheduled at a time convenient for you.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:
The research procedures described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: Emotional
discomfort may arise if the issues of race and racism on campus are discussed. You are free to decline to answer questions or to end your participation at any time. If you wish, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty.

**BENEFITS:**
The possible benefits to you of participating in this study are: Understanding that the current climate with the “othering” of populations has caused undo trauma for many students that are experienced in the classroom as well as outside of the classroom. It will also allow participants to learn from each other practices used to help create an environment of inclusivity for all students.

**PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:**
Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report or document published, Danyelle Marshall will not include information that will make it possible to identify you; she will make every effort to protect your identity. Specifically, you will have an opportunity to choose a pseudonym for yourself. Danyelle Marshall will use pseudonyms for the names of any other people and discussed. The focus group and one-on-one interviews will be video recorded using Zoom, a video conferencing technology sanctioned by USF. The recordings will be transcribed and archived after transcription. Video recording files, transcriptions and all other pertinent documentation will be stored on Danyelle Marshall’s password protected personal computer. Hard copy transcriptions and other documentation will be secured, and Danyelle Marshall will be the only individual with access to it.

**COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:**
This is no compensation planned for this research study.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:**
Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

**OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:**
Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact Danyelle Marshall at 415-740-7998 or dymarshall@dons.usfca.edu, or her faculty supervisor, Dr. Colette Cann at 415-422-4307 or cncann@usfca.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.