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University of San Francisco

Contextualizing BIPOC High School Students' Racialized Experiences Under Trump

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

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Human Rights Education

By
Christina Ung
May 2021

Contextualizing BIPOC High School Students' Racialized Experiences Under Trump

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

by
Christina Ung
May 2021

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Monisha Bajaj   May 1, 2021
_____   _____
Instructor/Chairperson   Date

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis contextualizes public high school experiences of self-identified students of color during Trump's presidency. The study features three recent high school graduates from the same campus, and their perspectives on a series of topics related to their racial identity. It was important that this research served as a space for marginalized voices to share their lived experiences, as they are frequently left out of American curriculum. More specifically in this case, the high school is located in a small, rural town where the population is majority white and politically conservative. Through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), data was collected via narrative methods for the purpose of restorying and counter storytelling. This paper addressed the following questions respectively; (1) how students navigate their racial identity in a predominately white school, (2) how Trump's presidency impacted students of color, and (3) how students of color counter an education space that does not reflect their lived experiences. Findings include experiences of racialized behavior and how the ideologies of the 45th president of the United States of America infiltrated education.

Key words: Trump, rural, storytelling, critical race theory, students of color

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in high school have been continuously underrepresented in American curriculum. Roughly 83% of public-school teachers are white[1] (Martinez, 2020), while the student population is increasingly diverse. At the same time, as the social structures are changing, standard public education becomes less relevant without incorporating the sociopolitical climate. There is minimal research on high school public education in rural America. Rural areas of America will be defined as small towns with less than 8,000 in population, majority white in racial identity, politically conservative and working-middle class that contains vast agricultural land over industrialized centers. On top of that, there is little articulation of the experiences of students of color in majority white schools in those rural spaces. Similar to Sánchez Loza (2020), this paper aims to fill the gap in understanding how youth ideologies are developed in predominantly white and politically conservative environments.

Research typically focuses on adolescents in a homogeneous way, generalizing "American" youth experiences without drawing attention to how their ideas are shaped by race, class, and gender (Sánchez Loza, 2020, p. 4). In addition to understanding the development of ideas, it is key to also focus on how this environment reproduces certain beliefs. Studies that focus on BIPOC youth in high school are typically set in urban, low-income locations where the

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[1] Editorial Note: In opposition to the style guide of the American Psychological Association, I will not be capitalizing the "w" in white when referring to the racial group. Equity can be practiced through language and while Black and Indigenous communities have faced collective oppression in regard to their skin color and cultural background, white people have not. In my practice towards racial justice, the capitalizing of Black, Brown and Indigenous serve as a process to amplify the voices of marginalized groups in traditionally white dominant spaces such as academic literature. I understand that language and perceptions may change, and at this time the "w" will not be capitalized given the context of my writing.

majority of people are of color. While it is important to include BIPOC youth in research, the overlapping contexts of being a student of color in a majority white school that perpetrates a master white colonial narrative can be especially compelling. Ladson-Billings (1998) explains that BIPOC can hold white ideologies which is expected given "…in [a] racialized society where whiteness is positioned as normative, everyone is ranked and categorized in relation to these points of opposition" (p. 9). Due to overwhelming whiteness, students of color can feel notably marginalized which can lead to ostracization, internalized oppression, and assimilation.

Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) contexts are most prominent in published research. Given this position, educators at every level should understand that culture can be look differently across individuals and consist of patterns of behavior derived from historical and present contexts (Brady, Fryberg & Shoda, 2018). By producing narratives that reflect WEIRD experiences, it perpetuates and maintains these experiences as normal. Brady et al. (2018) illustrates a prominent example of how individuals can demonstrate different behavioral and psychological processes depending on the context. Through a psychological study, Asian American women were reminded of their female identity prior to engaging in mathematics and performed worse given the stereotypes that women are bad at math. However, when reminded of their Asian American identity, they performed better since their racial group is associated positively with math (p. 11407). When prompted, overlapping and intersecting identities of race and gender can produce various outcomes if the context expects a certain behavior. In schooling, teachers could approach student success through the power of understanding that they hold a diverse set of cultural backgrounds. Published research typically features WEIRD contexts, and to add even further, the majority of participants are WEIRD. Within the community of a classroom, the curriculum and likely the teachers reflect WEIRD

conditions which put students of color in a unique position. The reality is that WEIRD contexts serve as the dominant narrative and are maintained through published research; as such, students of color have to fight harder to be represented in academia.

When Donald Trump began running for office, many communities felt uneasy while some were empowered by what he represented. Given his position and the election of 2016, educators and students began to notice the racialization of school grounds. This involved the interpersonal relationship between peers, as well as the power dynamics and positionality of teachers and staff. School became a reflection of the apparent American divide. What was personal became political, and political beliefs became personal. Trump came to symbolize, as well as validate, racism, sexism, and xenophobia while personifying white supremacy. Because of this context, students who did not embody the master narrative–namely being white, at least middle class, and heterosexual–were scrutinized.

As a result of the harsh sociopolitical climate under the Trump administration, students of color are exposed to harmful psychological, emotional, and sometimes physical behavior. The problem is that even though Trump is no longer president, these ideologies and acts of oppression will continue to interfere with students' education. Simultaneously under Trump's presidency, the COVID-19 virus had peaked and will linger in people's lives to date. Trump has used his platform to blame China for the pandemic, consistently referring to coronavirus as the "Chinese virus" and "kung flu." This example is prominent since Asian people now have a target on them and through Trump's legitimacy of anti-Asian rhetoric, it has invited other folks to participate. The Stop AAPI Hate Youth Campaign (2020) produced a report from Asian American youth which they shared increased bullying from their peers at school and online. This is one example of how Trump's actions in power have resulted in increased racist behavior.

Without intervention, white students will continue to bypass recognizing their privilege just as students of color will feel trapped in a curriculum that is not relevant to their personal journeys or histories. Students of color hold experiences that can only be expressed by themselves as the direct source of knowledge. Teachers, school administrators, and students themselves should be able to understand and deconstruct the dominant white culture by contextualizing the increased racialization under Trump's presidency and incorporating narrative from students of color.

Trump's rhetoric in schools mirror language he and his followers used during his campaign and has increased racialized harassment, which author Cutler (2018) describes as the "Trump Effect." His racialized discourse opened a curtain that whiteness tends to hide behind. Although educators denounce racism in schools, literature has demonstrated a lack or absence of attending to racist issues on campus (p. 42). Schools that serve a majority white population may not have sufficiently prepared white students to discuss race or understand how to hold people accountable for racist actions (p. 52); moreover, it may be challenging for white students to distinguish racism in a country historically dominated by whiteness. If not provided the tools, students are often led to formulate their own definitions of discrimination when it comes to race and racism using context clues, media, and school curriculum. This can be misleading if students are not conscious of their racial identity in relation to the positionality of other races, ethnicities and/or cultures.

Delano-Oriaran and Parks (2015) believe racial positionality brings different effects to the classroom and the authors discuss how white privilege can create resistance when presented to students as a real phenomenon (p. 15). They believe that people will need to understand whiteness in order to engage in critical discussions on whiteness. Especially with white people, it may be difficult for them to understand how whiteness as a phenomenon relates to their personal

privilege, systemic inequality and institutionalization. In their study, two professors profiled–

Diane who is African American and Sheila who is European American–both noticed white

students feeling guilt and denial in regard to their relationship to white privilege, while also

understanding that many students cannot see beyond their personal stories due to little

experience other than their own (p. 16). During race related discourse, some white students did

not necessarily push back on the topic which the authors interpret as students' inability to either

process the discussion or verbalize their misunderstanding. It is likely white students were and

are not given the tools to express confusion around race, or the ability to be critically conscious.

This is simply new territory for what they have grown to know as normal to become problematic.

Delano-Oriaran and Parks report effective strategies for hosting race related conversations which

begin with constructing a safe space. Both professors aimed to create a classroom environment

for students to practice their understandings in a climate that is empowered to engage in civil and

honest, sometimes challenging, dialogue (p. 17). Students have shared that they were not aware

they could call themselves "white" while also being taught not to call people "Black." In this

example, Black is treated like a bad word, and simultaneously whiteness is not named. It is

possible that using color-based language to describe a person or community can feel

confrontational for white people who then call forth division by naming racial categories. The

hesitancy for calling people "Black" can stem from the avoidance of recognizing racism as a

white person.

    As an African American professor, Diane understands that before she introduces the concept

of white privilege she will need to approach with her positionality in mind (Delano-Oriaran and

Parks, 2015). In her case, she physically restructured the classroom community by hosting class

in a less formal lecture space at a campus center. This created a sense of comfortability and

casualness while Diane practiced vulnerability with her students and presented culturally relative texts. In Diane's case, a combination of these learning approaches was a success for students to share in a safe space while being intellectually productive. Sheila chose a similar approach to shift the classroom environment by creating an online community. As a white teacher that confronts whiteness, Sheila at first could not understand her students' resistance. She came to realize that they do not have the same realities as she holds when it comes to critiquing systems of inequity where whiteness intrudes. She found that the online space allowed her "…to process student resistance prior to face-to-face discussion" (p. 18), in order to connect deeper on defiant commentary. To add to Sheila's approach, it can be beneficial to require students to respond to their peers to increase engagement within the class as well as to interact with conversations on race.

Daniel Tatum (1992) develops Helms' (1984) white racial identity theory. Helms believes white people potentially develop five to six stages, or statuses, in racial identity development in response to racial cues (Helms, 1984, p. 3). First is the Contact stage where white folks lack awareness with institutional racism and their own white privilege (Daniel Tatum, p. 13). En route to leaving this stage is increased interaction with BIPOC which begins the Disintegration stage. During Disintegration there is guilt and discomfort with acknowledging one's whiteness and in an attempt to reduce discomfort, people may reject racism as if it did not exist. At this point, white folks can enter Reintegration and wish to revert to one's own racial group to feel acceptance. Sparking curiosity, the Pseudo-Independent stage is where a white person "often tries to disavow his or her own whiteness through active affiliation with Blacks, for example" (p. 16). The individual is starting to abandon beliefs of white supremacy while still perpetuating systemic racism. Because of this, the person seeks to feel comfortable being white so they enter

the stage of Immersion/Emersion. While earlier they rejected their own whiteness, they are now finding antiracist white leaders to follow and associate with. As they continue this development, white people have redefined their white identity and welcomed the Autonomy stage. They have redirected their energy to confront racism and oppressive systems daily (p. 17). Tatum expresses that allyship and solidarity can be more easily forged with people of color once white folks' antiracist behavior becomes more consistent. These stages are not concrete, rather provide possible timelines and explanations for white students' reactions to race related conversations in the classroom. Each of these stages provides educators an opportunity to intervene when the class is confused, tense, or disengaging. It is important to point out that students of color can also hold characteristics of these stages. To create a trusting space in the classroom, educators and curricula should tend to all students not only so they are seen, but so they can actively deconstruct the power of internalized white superiority.

Background and Need

Donald Trump's position as former president of the United States has established various levels of civil unrest. Educators who serve students of color have found it especially difficult to support their youth and respective families from as early as 2015 through today. The "Trump Effect" is racialized behavior and harassment that mirrors his dehumanizing rhetoric (Cutler, 2018, p. 41). Students and educators who perpetrate this behavior may feel they have been given permission by the president's actions to carry out similar conduct. Contextualizing the Trump Effect further, majority white schools are less likely to prevent racialized harassment not only due to the historic whiteness that dominates schools, but also white students being insufficiently prepared for racial discourse (p. 41). Schools and educators should be flexible with the ever-changing political climate and broaden student potential by analyzing experiences that occur

outside of the classroom. The last four years have been an opportunity to address race and engage in critical thinking. It is crucial to admit that BIPOC know whiteness best since whiteness has been done onto them. This does not mean that race discourse is exclusive to people of color, rather it should also be directed at white people who benefit from racist ideologies. Racism, homophobia and xenophobia have new legitimacy under Trump's administration. White supremacy was given a space and platform within the White House and this atmosphere is defining a new reality.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to conduct a narrative study in order to explore BIPOC student experiences in a majority white high school during the Trump era. This study is conducted with one current and two previous high school students of a small rural town in the Northern California foothills. Youth of color are typically painted in an urban and industrial landscape within a larger city. In this case, high school students of color are located in a rural farm town that is historically conservative when it comes to politics. Trump's presidency has shifted town culture with people selling Trump flags on street corners and pro-Trump protests through the main street. Students are participating and certainly being affected by tensions in their community. This study highlights how narratives of students of color should be included in curriculum and how educators must participate in student centered pedagogy by engaging directly with them. It is difficult for students of color to share their racialized experiences with their white counterparts if space is not created to cultivate this conversation.

Research Questions

1. How do BIPOC students navigate their racial/ethnic identity in a predominantly white school?

2. In what ways has Trump's presidency impacted students of color in a predominantly white school, and how did they come to realize the impact?

3. How can students of color counter an education space that may not reflect their lived experiences?

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) is used as a theoretical framework for this thesis. Deriving from legal scholarship, CRT functions to resist and counter racial narratives dominated by whiteness and applied in education. This theory will be relevant due to CRT's core tenets including counter storytelling, interest convergence and whiteness as property, to name a few. Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2018) describe the history of CRT as a handful of tenets birthed from legal scholars, that are more commonly now used within education scholarship. CRT follows certain structures, such as challenging dominant narratives around race and understanding racism can be partners to other social structures (i.e., classism and homophobia).

More specifically in education, CRT serves to examine links between current systems of inequity and patterns of oppression through history with an intersectional lens (p. 122). Components of CRT include various concepts specific to the theory and application of it. Counternarrative being one, recognizes that people of color hold experiential knowledge (p. 123). This tenet calls to value the narratives of students of color as true knowledge contrasting the blueprint in which white students' narratives serve as the norm. Parents of color can provide insight and critique to inequity and race relations in schooling. Counter storytelling can be engaged by parents and students to resist white dominance, and re-center children of color's experiences (p. 124). The authors urge educators to use CRT as more than an intellectual movement in hopes to become more transformative in praxis. Bell (1980) describes how interest

convergence works when "the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 22). This means that while people of color had momentous eras in history, such as the Civil Rights Movement and *Brown v Board of Education*, white people were still benefiting in self-interest.

Scholars do point out that white folks are not a homogenous group, and with interest convergence, the interests of middle- and upper-class white people were included (p. 126). This is not to undermine the efforts of people of color and their resistance; moreover, it is a critical analysis under heinous power dynamics. This converses with another concept of CRT, which is whiteness as property. Educational experiences such as advanced placement classes and honors programs are property of white students and their families first, especially as the U.S. is one of the few countries to link school funding to property taxes causing stark inequalities in educational quality (p. 128). Whiteness operates as property and in context with power white communities become territorial to whiteness. Property rights in education is the notion that "one group has greater power at its disposal to protect those rights" (p. 127). In this case, whiteness is the source of oppressive structures within and around education.

In their historical timeline of CRT's development in the field of education, Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2018) also note that ideas around race become distorted with color blindness. They describe color blindness to include "formal-race," a binary of categories such as who is "Black" and who is "white." Formal-race then is not connected to social structures and thus does not contextualize the individual experience (p. 125), nor the histories that follow people of color generationally. Educators and schools may reject concepts and conversations on race. By not seeing "color"—a person's actual or perceived racial identity—educators may overlook "race-related patterns in achievement and the potential role of racism in the

underachievement of students of color" (p. 125). Educators will need to realize that recognizing race is not racist, rather it can be an opportunity to empower and elevate the educational success of students of color. Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2018) suggest scholars continue to mark the milestones of CRT and its boundaries to maintain its relevance in a tangible way. Although CRT provides the conceptions and language of interest convergence and counternarrative, CRT needs to be practiced. CRT in education is intersectional and recognizes the interactions between characteristics and positionality. They encourage CRT to be implemented in educational spaces since it is more than just intellectual thought.

Further, Goessling (2018) applies counter storytelling in the presence of a master narrative, while Compton-Lily (2002) expands on the effects of micro and macroaggressions on students, specifically for racialized experiences. These authors pull from foundational work from Ladson-Billings (1998) and Bell (1980) who developed CRT in the fields of education and law respectively. While the core concepts of CRT and their entry into educational scholarship has been reviewed in this section, a more complete review of how CRT has been applied in educational research will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Methodology

Narrative methods are used since the basis of this research is founded in the knowledge of the participant. Salinas (2019) interprets narrative inquiry as a method of seeing an experience as a story. Because narrative draws on lived experiences, it is relevant to investigate the participants' positionality, perceptions of representation of the story, and methods that lead to conclusions. Retelling stories allows the person who experienced the event to have the right to tell it. In this process the storytelling claims their experience. Additionally, "story ownership requires attention to the contexts" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 42), and the conditions

of the situation. In this study, conversations with participants do just that. Narrative begins with experiences and stories told by individuals themselves, and as a method it stands out as both a methodology and phenomena (Crewswell & Poth, 2018, p. 68). Key features of narrative studies include the collaborative engagement between researcher and participant. The narrative framework of restorying will be prominent as it is a process of reorganizing participant stories in a chronological sequence based on the context, such as time and place (p. 72). Restorying of participants' narratives will serve as the counter narrative to their majority white education space. As their stories are told as truth, it is important the findings are presented authentically.

Data collection includes one-hour interviews with students and observations of each individual via Zoom. The setting was through online video calling and based on their high school experience at "Mayfield" High School located in a rural small town of approximately 6,700 in population in the Northern California foothills. Mayfield is a pseudonym as are the participants' names to honor confidentiality. Within the small-town culture, gossip can spread quickly, and I want to reduce any connection the students may have to the events they share. The participants included:

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnic Background	Graduation Year	Parental Makeup
Carmen	18	Female	Chinese	2021	Japanese mother and white father
Fiona	20	Female	Black and White	2018	White mother and father
Jerome	19	Male	Black	2019	White mother and father

Note that all three participants are adopted and have at least one white parent. In this case, all three participants have a white father. This can play an important role in how interactions on race and racism are interpreted. I have direct relationships to current Mayfield students which aided

me in outreach to current seniors and recent alumni. Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), the small town is 97.2% white in population, 3.3% Black or African American, 2.8% Asian, and 5.3% American Indian and Alaska Native, some people being multiracial within these categories (and this is why the aggregate sum of these percentages is more than 100%). There are seven elementary schools within the school district, and ultimately students would arrive at Mayfield, the only high school in town. The high school belongs to a larger high school district in the county that consists of six schools. Similar to the population of the town, the majority of educators are also white. It is common for alumni of Mayfield to return in their adulthood and work as teachers or administrators, carrying on the tradition of being part of this school community.

The study began in February 2021 after Trump left office. The data collected for this study is coded in a narrative format through direct quotes, restorying segments, and summarization of themes that are established from the data. Once the data was collected and analyzed, it was used to understand BIPOC students' high school experiences in a predominantly white community during Trump's presidency. For the protection of human subjects, participants were provided a consent form to complete prior to meeting that informed them of the study procedures and supplied researcher contact information in case questions or concerns arose. There was a discussion of confidentiality of records and identity with participants, including the use of pseudonyms for the school, the town location, and individual names, and the storing of video screen recordings on a secure personal laptop. With recognition of any potential risk, participants may feel psychologically and emotionally triggered when describing racialized experiences at school. Making a plan for minimizing these risks included providing resources in areas of wellness, sharing my personal narrative, and BIPOC centered organizations. Potential

benefits were described, and may include solidarity between researcher and participants, stronger sense of racial identity and providing solace for what can be a distressing conversation. Participants were provided a space to verbalize and question their lived experiences which they may have been unable to do in other contexts.

It is important to note my positionality with Mayfield High School as positive, and with critiques. Being a high school student that was not white or wealthy came with tactics of social survival. Looking back, I know that my sense of discomfort was valid and caused by acts of racism, classism and sexism in the forms of microaggressions, verbal confrontations, and misrepresentation. My family had moved to this town from a city that was, depending on traffic, about a forty-minute driving distance. After only one year of living there, the recession in 2007 hit and my family could no longer afford to stay. The events that made my schooling experience were commuting from the city to Mayfield because the district I actually belonged to was known to have poor funding and not college tracked. Mayfield indeed provided me the experiences and networks for my resumé, though in that exchange I had to disconnect from my neighbors that were low-income, people of color, and products of immigration, just like me.

Limitations of the Study

This study had various limitations that included participant size and selection. Given that this thesis sought to contextualize the political climate, one must keep in mind that the heightened tension of the Trump era may have increased in the awareness of high school ethnic minorities. Students that deeply absorb whiteness in their sense of identity may not be as self-aware as the participants in this study. Given that each adolescent has intersecting identities on top of their ethnic group—sexual orientation, gender, class status, ability—their high school experiences will differ. It must be considered that someone who may identify as a Chinese

American woman, will have a different sense of identity in comparison to a Black man. Along

with this, the participant size is minimal, which means this data is far from being generalizable.

This study cannot speak for all BIPOC high school students in majority white spaces since each

physical location has their own microculture. To that point, the study takes place in a small rural

town known to identify politically as right-leaning and conservative. Finally, the researcher has a

personal relationship with the high school as an alumnus, which may result in a biased lens

towards campus culture. Interpretations of data and the angle of research may be skewed because

of this. Despite these limitations, the rapport that was easily built and my positionality provided

an entry point for this research, and allowed for this Master's thesis project to be carried out in

the time-frame of my academic program.

Significance of the Study

This thesis may be of interest to people who work in education, and in homogenous

communities to be critically conscious of racial and ethnic youth experiences in predominantly

white communities. This study can be significant for teachers to reexamine their curriculum, and

particularly, the administration in rural schools can use this information to revise their school

culture and make strides for a more equitable environment. Policymakers in education may find

this research helpful to consider who is being left behind in standards being set. In addition, this

thesis highlights issues such as systemic racism, sexism and classism that continue to be

identified in educational spaces within the United States. Although the country elected President

Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, the work of contextualizing and deconstructing

systems of oppression does not stop because Trump is not in office. Rather, the ideologies

Trump stands for still exist and may be heightened, which is why this research must continue. As

author Madison (2019) concludes from their study, the classroom is a perfect space for young

thinkers to experience diverse thoughts, and practice critical discourse with informed perspectives (p. 58). This allows underrepresented and/or misrepresented students to feel seen, explore their personal ideologies, and practice brave conversations with people who they may disagree with. The classroom and campus culture as a whole are an environment that should welcome adaptability as every year students may come and go in addition to changing societal structures. Conversations on race and racism are not to serve BIPOC specifically, rather should present as an opportunity for white students as well to deconstruct oppressive systems.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

By contextualizing Donald Trump's presidency in predominantly white schools and engaging directly with students of color, this narrative research study explores their racial and ethnic experiences in this context. Scholarship described in this chapter illustrates the importance of understanding three areas of evidence that demonstrate how white educators' positionality influence learning spaces, how storytelling and narrative can be used as student centered pedagogy, and how racial and ethnic minorities develop their identities in context to larger structures of oppression. Critical race theory (CRT) can be used to frame this body of scholarship. The reasonings mentioned are used to justify that by engaging directly with BIPOC in predominantly white schools, educators can decolonize methods of learning by allowing students of color to be experts and develop a strong sense of identity. The U.S. education system never meant to liberate people to reach their fullest potential through knowledge acquisition, but rather was established as a space for reproducing the social order (Goessling, 2018, p. 656). White dominant narratives are used to describe how whiteness is universal and disregard the lived experiences of people of color. A CRT lens guides the literature through deciphering the methods of praxis and dissecting whiteness in education.

The Application of CRT in Educational Research

Critical race theory (CRT) aims to disrupt the master narrative that perpetuates white privilege and racist ideologies. This section includes a brief history of critical race theory which includes Compton-Lilly's (2018) original scholarship illustrating micro/macroaggressions through a longitudinal study, the work of Goessling (2018) that proposes counter storytelling as

praxis, and the ideas developed by Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2018) that illustrate the past twenty years of critical race theory in education. These authors articulate CRT as a progressive tool for intervening in what could be uncomfortable conversations. Given that critical race theory—even each term alone—is not a part of daily interactions, it can be daunting for educators to change their practices when for so long their operations have been rooted in white supremacy. Dixson and Rousseau (2018) eloquently illustrate the CRT framework's origins, development and future goals. Authors Goessling (2018) and Compton-Lily (2020) provide insight into CRT partnered with a study they performed with the framework in action. They represent the progression of thought in the field of CRT since it is a relatively "new" theory applied in education while building on essential contributors to CRT such as Ladson-Billings (1998) and Bell (1980), to name a few. This is important because CRT is something to be normalized, explored and celebrated. Contrary to what political leaders in the U.S. may think, it is obvious that CRT serves as a threat to the master narrative and threatens the power of whiteness.

The foundational work that defines critical race theory includes exploring a key tenet of micro and/or macroaggressions. Scholarship by Compton-Lilly (2018) articulates data collected from eight students at grades 1, 5, 8 and 11. Parents were also involved in the study. The authors highlight that CRT challenges the master white narrative by putting storytelling front and center as a means of understanding people's experiences and challenges in spaces that are racist, for example. The author describes the CRT framework as a critique of liberalism that challenges historic themes, and a demanding application of theory in how systemic racism contributes to inequitable practices and policies (p. 1318). Compton-Lilly uses "the term micro/macroaggression to situate racist acts within racist ideologies" (p. 1317).

Microaggressions are subtle jabs that can be unconscious executions of racism, amongst classism and sexism. Over time, the negative ideas they have of themselves can be internalized. It is important to note that microaggressions can and will happen outside of school, so educators must understand students may be walking into class carrying racialized experiences. On the other hand, people who perpetrate microaggressions can have their racist ideologies reinforced off campus. If schools and educators choose to be silent on race, students of color will be left in the shadows as these behaviors may go unnoticed and unaccounted for.

Compton-Lilly pulls from Ladson-Billings (1998), a foundational scholar that has developed CRT in the field of education. Ladson-Billings explains that CRT spawned as early as the mid-1970s from critical legal studies (CLS). The leftist legal movement of CLS challenged traditional legal scholarship which contributed an analysis in a social and cultural context (p. 10). "Naming one's reality" is a theme of CRT rooted in storytelling. Simultaneously acting as a counter to white narrative and as BIPOC preservation, storytelling also serves as a method of healing to tend to the wounds of racial oppression. People of color who may feel silenced are able to conquer their lived experiences if allowed the space to verbalize and call attention to what and how their oppression has enacted onto them. By claiming this lived experience, storytelling can allow one to externalize feelings and behaviors not as their fault. CRT sees through the U.S. curriculum as a space that upholds whiteness as supreme and how American education is built for and by white people without the consideration of people of color and their histories on U.S. soil. Martin Luther King Jr. has been granted a spot in U.S. history texts throughout the country as an American social reformer, who happens to be Black. Martin Luther King Jr. has become a sanitized story glossed over in one class period without mention of the impact and history of his extended activism (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). School funding is an example of educational

inequity as CRT claims the lack of funding is rooted in institutional racism. There is an obvious divide in what resources white schools are granted compared to schools with a majority of students of color due to the skewed system that ties school funding to property taxes. Ladson-Billings notes that academic advantage is tied to property and opportunity. This includes physical space of the classroom, access to technology, and inviting buildings (p. 21). Because CRT honors the stories that challenge the dominant narrative, it has been applied to the racist acts of micro/macroaggressions and seeping into the roots of institutions. Given America's deep history with racism, it is difficult to find a system that is not touched by white elitism whether it be politics or schooling.

Compton-Lilly (2020) undertook a study that inferred how microaggressions are enacted from elementary through high school, in partnership with students and their parents. Many families reported how schools did not serve children's best interests and did not fully support them. As early as first grade, students were shamed for not reading fluidly. Marvin is a student in the study and during elementary school, he came to believe he could not read and did not want to read because he was called out for messing up words or the teacher would skip his turn to read aloud (p. 1330). This is an example of missed opportunity in the classroom. A young child who may struggle to read aloud may be reading text that is not their first language, or the words and context used in the reading are not what they experience at home. Marvin's teacher, for example, could have paused when Marvin would "mess up" a word and allow him to try different ways to say the term. Students at this age did not particularly name microaggressions, though parents in this study were aware of the effects it had on their children.

Building upon interest convergence as mentioned in Bell (1980), parents believed teachers taught for a paycheck, not to teach in benefit of the students, rather a job to clock in and

out. Compton-Lilly expanded on this belief summarizing that teachers benefit financially while students were provided inadequate education (p. 1333). During middle school, parents came to verbalize how their children are affected by the lack of resources. As providers to their children, they could not afford to support them as students with a better, rather more white and Western, education. Based on where students physically resided, families of color noticed white suburbs having access to safe transportation to and from school (p. 1334), which further resembles the racialized barriers of educational success. Micro and macroaggressions build upon each other over time. They must be intervened in order to disrupt further oppression of students of color that result in stereotyping, increased drop out, and low retention rates in school. In this case, "CRT privileges storytelling as a viable and essential means of understanding people's experiences, challenges assumptions that treat the experiences of white people as universal" (p. 1343). The author applied CRT through this longitudinal study to demonstrate the racialized experiences of BIPOC youth in school, and how a student's level of success can be inhibited without notice.

Further amplifying the role of CRT in education, Goessling (2018) used CRT to counter the dominant white narrative of Northtown in Portland, Oregon. With a participatory action research (PAR) project, a handful of graduate students and high schoolers acted as co-researchers with one another. Using photography, students were able to practice perspective taking using art and analyzing themes that occurred when presenting their neighborhood. Goessling describes master narratives as "stories that invoke and perpetuate white privilege…based on racist ideology" (p. 649). Critical race theory articulates that these stories shape society and maintain power for a select few. The author highlights CRT contributors Solorzano and Yosso (2001) who frame counter storytelling as a method to reject what is "normal," since the established normalcy presumes whiteness as a shared experience (p. 655). On that note, Channing Brown (2018)

exemplifies this situation where people of color have to decode white references framed around white middle class experiences (p. 53). In the classroom she experienced white educators teach through metaphors of skiing and sailing, as if all students had access to this lifestyle. In order to counter this, people of color's input can serve to intervene and dismantle these stories by providing alternative experiences and a more wholistic learning space. Pacific High School in Northtown was known to be unsuccessful, so Goessling's (2018) project exposed and analyzed the neoliberal education reform challenging the idea of what is successful in context with the master white narrative. Through this study, graduate researchers worked with "at risk" high school students to practice counter storytelling through photography. Goessling argued that the photographic project engages participants and promotes social action since it is centered on countering what is considered a good and bad neighborhood, referencing Northtown's stigma.

Authors Pollack and Zirkel (2013) reveal how CRT based leadership can create equitable schooling. When it comes to reform of school structure, school leadership finds themselves in a rotating narrative where the problem is identified and when proposing a solution, they are met with opposition from privileged teachers and parents who benefit from the system already in place. In this instance, leadership steps back from the proposed efforts and settles for a compromise (p. 297). This model can be correlated to interest convergence, that the community in power wants to remove the threat to their dominance so they resist, and in some cases meet at a middle ground to maintain their status. The author also connects this resistance to the assertion of property rights, given those in power reap the benefits of inequality (p. 298). White families will feud in order to preserve access to elite colleges and advanced placement classes, seen as their property.

Counter-stories can build solidarity among socially marginalized groups, challenge majoritarian narratives, and expose systems of inequity. Even better, this tool fosters cultural resistance and transformative change towards educational inequity (p. 304); whether it be interpersonal between students or from educators in the classroom. The authors state that "…CRT can be helpful to educational leaders as a framework for understanding and – anticipating resistance to change in order to be more effective in their efforts…" (p. 291). If educators were able to anticipate resistance, they may have been able to control the public narrative that stirred debate on the schools restructuring of a science laboratory course (p. 302). This is relative to classroom discourse on a micro level, educators who are able to anticipate reactions to race based conversation and behavior, students may be more equipped to have brave conversations while reshaping an authoritarian master narrative rooted in white superiority.

To conclude, critical race theory claims the stories being told in society are based on racist ideologies and rooted in white privilege. This includes the perpetrating of micro and macroaggressions, counter storytelling, and interest convergence in its application in education. Students of color can experience micro and macroaggressions between their peers, and indirectly by their school culture. If and when given the opportunity to share their experiences, counter storytelling will allow them to claim their truth of a given situation. CRT is a tool for educators and students alike to name one's reality by engaging in race related conversation and literature. Related to this is a body of research is the context of Donald Trump's presidency within the last four years. What was experienced during his election campaign and beyond inauguration day in 2021 can be deconstructed through a CRT perspective.

The Trump Effect

Research demonstrates that Donald Trump's presidency set in motion a violent awakening of white supremacy in America. This includes a study that illustrates global citizenship (Barrow 2017), benefits of engaging in controversial conversations (Madison, 2019), a research on teaching cultural studies (Cashmere, 2018), and reports that claim human rights belongs to all (Todres, 2018). They all add to a growing body of evidence that demonstrates how a master narrative can be oppressive and restricting to people's identity and the way youth choose to live their lives. When taken together, the findings suggest that positioning students as educators challenges the power structures that are typically experienced in classrooms and how Trump's administration altered the learning atmosphere. By participating in (counter)storytelling and contextualizing sociopolitical climate, it allows everyone to bring something to the table. This way students can articulate and gather the language to describe their personal experiences and can alternatively build resiliency within a curriculum that challenges who they are.

Barrow (2017) called for the education of global citizenship to recognize shared humanity, and specifically in the United States, deconstruct the country's nationalism turned exceptionalism. The author recognizes the individual patriotism the U.S. has for itself, while also being a country that is integrated globally through history, policy, plus goods and services. With global education in schooling, students will be able to think critically when it comes to media and insight consumed outside of the classroom. It is essential that youth are provided multiple perspectives to combat hate-based news and smooth out misunderstandings. News outlets can be very biased or hold a single narrative, and without various perspectives cycles of hate-based fear can circulate. The author recognizes teachers have to maintain standardized assessments and

restrictive curriculum, though within those restraints are still opportunity to teach students to participate as global citizens rooted in shared humanity.

Through academic literature, teachers have been identified as being in a paradoxical position. Madison (2019) states that educators with little to no experience in engaging with students on controversial topics will hinder scholarly growth. It can be problematic for educators to manage sensitive conversations when considering familial beliefs, political context, and professional repercussions (p. 51). Technology continues to be present in day to day lives. The author believes it is important for educators to teach media literacy to students to practice and prepare them to analyze and evaluate information in front of them. This skill creates space and improves critical thinking methods. This study focuses on "reverse mentoring" which is a cofacilitation between a graduate student and a sixth grade classroom teacher. The partnership brings fresh perspectives and further support as an informal continuation of teacher training.

The middle school where this study took place is located in a rural farming community in Oregon of about 6,000 in the population, of that 90.4% of them were white (p. 54). Around election day in 2016, students sported Trump stickers and led chants related to his campaign such as "build the wall." To combat increased racialized conduct, the study practiced collaboration between young working professionals and professors with students in the classroom to bridge a gap between real world positions and academia (p. 53). Students were assigned to teams and prompted to choose a topic which the group would like to explore in the context of social justice. Topics ranged from racism to accessibility for disabled people. They would attend "Interview Day" which experts on the selected group topics would be present. Abstract concepts such as racism and ableism became real through interacting with professionals in the field. This strategy allowed students to be agents in their own learning, expressing their interests with the greater

classroom community and furthered opportunity to facilitate ongoing discussions. The classroom setting is an opportunity to cultivate critical, informed thinkers that provides a safe setting to explore a range of perspectives moderated by an educator.

In 2018, Cashmere (2018) presented how to create a transformative learning space post Trump's election. The day after Donald Trump's election in 2016, Cashmere noticed the tension and confusion from students. He reflected upon why they were in this intentional education space, and that it was not because of Trump, "but from the oppressive systems which pre-dated him by centuries" (p. 39). This is an important reminder that Trump is not the sole perpetrator of systemic oppression, rather he amplified xenophobia and white supremacy globally. The author visited Roses in Concrete, a school in Oakland, California where their focus was on educational excellence and healing, rituals created by students, and intentional learning (p. 37). Cashmere wanted to replicate these intentions through teaching methods that "…sought to provide students with language and tools for understanding their own oppression (and privilege)" by deconstructing social justice movements. (p. 36). Each class unit focused on how systems of inequality functioned institutionally and how social justice movements fought against them (p. 40). Contextualizing students' lived experiences alongside their academic knowledge, "…they were able to discover hidden truths about some of the things they had survived." (p. 42).

In connection to the findings of Cashmere (2018), Todres (2018) exhibited how human rights education can begin with children to counter the Trump Effect. Although the effects of Trump's presidency in education are developing, the established research and series of events show that Trump's inability to denounce white supremacists was an acceptance of bigotry. The Southern Poverty Law Center surveyed educators and administrators in K-12 schools and out of 10,000 responses, 80% reported heightened anxiety for marginalized students (p. 333). They

have reported white students using "Donald Trump" as a saying to threaten students of color, bullying in line with election rhetoric, and drawings of swastikas in school and community spaces. In another report by the Human Rights Campaign, since the 2016 election, 70% of 50,000 surveyed adolescents witnessed hate incidents (p. 333). In the Universal Declaration of Human rights (UDHR), it establishes that education "…shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights…" (p. 334); with this foundation, human rights education could potentially build a respective culture away from discriminatory actions. Starting with children, Todres encourages educators to meet children where they are. With children's books, they are already taking time to engage with imagination in a way that captures their interest whether through the narrative, pictures, or textures of the book. A leading example is the publishing group *A Kids Book About* which they address abstract concepts of emotions, racism, grief, and money in terms young kids–and even adults–can understand. Children's literature provides space that is safe and imaginative for children to confront real-world issues. In this case, being honest with children through books and open discussions in early stages of learning that will cause less strain as they age. Teaching children about their rights will lead to strengthened empathy, and these foundational methods can be applied to older adults who may need to deconstruct or unlearn ideas of bigotry.

In summary, research demonstrates that Trump's presidency has created a toxic culture in schooling with the rise of hate-based rhetoric, racialized behaviors and the legitimatization of white supremacy. This includes Barrow's (2017) call to teach students to act as global citizens, Madison's (2019) study exposing students to abstract systems, Cashmere's (2018) examples of teaching methods, and Todres' (2018) engagement in the relevancy of human rights education. Taken together, this body of research validates the increased racialized incidents across the

nation under Donald Trump's presidency. To dismantle further perpetration of the Trump Effect is to acknowledge the positionality of white educators. This includes how they use their privilege, if at all, and how students of color are impacted.

White Dominance in Education

Research demonstrates that racial differences of educators and students matter. The positionality of white educators affects, whether implicitly or explicitly, marginalized students. School context and political climate shape the way students and white educators interact with one another. When it comes to conversations on race, racial hierarchies within student groups can be experienced and need to be discussed. The way teachers define "student problems" can be inherently racist and classist when students do not perform up to par, specifically to the level white teachers perceive as student success. Research on white educator positionality adds to a growing conversation of what makes teachers effective when working with non-white, low-income students; specifically, research has shown that drawing on their personalized histories with race has helped white teachers acquire empathetic skills to apply in the classroom.

Martin (2014) addressed race-based conversations in a high school English classroom as a white teacher. The author did this by contextualizing the required text, *Huckleberry Finn*, with hip hop, contrasting in class and off campus learning. Martin summarizes critical race theory and pedagogy as a context that seeks to identify and transform institutions of society by ending oppression and dismantling the powers of whiteness. Conducted in an English classroom within a school of students deemed "at risk," this study included thirteen 11th/12th grade students, eight of which were male and five female; five identified as African American, two considered themselves multiracial, and six were white. The findings of this study demonstrate that the normalization of using the N-word in popular culture (hip hop) cannot be ignored when the same

term is presented in a classroom. There is a distance between students and their experience with race and schools "must reexamine textual relevancy in light of the constantly changing social context of our classrooms" (p. 245). In this text, Martin follows a traditional curriculum, while using this as an opportunity to talk about race. For Black students in this predominantly white school, they collectively felt culturally alienated, physically isolated, and silenced (p. 248); part of this was the normalization of using the N-word and the school's inability to even recognize systemic racism in this terminology. The author concludes that ethnic minority students can feel isolated by the silence from a school since it translates as a denial of structural inequality. As most teachers and school administrators are white, it is important for them to use their privileged status to ensure students of color's schooling experiences are taken seriously. This is related to the work of Martinez (2020) for the reason that schools question their neutral stance and reflect on the relationship of white educators with diverse student bodies.

In addition to the findings of Martin (2014), Martinez (2020) addressed how student to teacher dynamics and perceptions can impact educational experiences. The author was compelled by the fact that the majority of teachers across the nation are white while the student population varies ethnically. Martinez (2020) studied how teachers can project biases towards students due to their feelings towards the school in general, expectations of students, and teacher training. Data from a national Schools and Staffing Survey from 2003-2004 was used to review teacher responses to student problems such as absenteeism, unpreparedness, and cutting class. The author describes how white teachers may judge students based on stereotypes depending on the demographic (p. 995); moreover, teachers who experience little interaction with the majority group–i.e., people of color–can cause a divide. The results showed that "white teachers perceive more student problems that non-white teachers" (p. 1003), which was significant. Racial

identification of teachers studied included Black, white and Hispanic teachers and all three groups perceived fewer student problems when the study body became increasingly white (p. 1012). It is important to note that these findings do not generalize to all teachers who identify similarly to the participants. Although teacher positionality was critiqued in this study for racial bias, research can go even deeper to the teachers' career history. If a teacher was trained or studied in a certain environment, that can influence how they perceive the next school they work in. The author encourages further research to dissect teacher backgrounds in context to their perceptions of students and the school they teach at. The racial identity of the teacher and student can influence expectations and treatment towards one another. Students feelings towards school can be influenced by interactions with teachers, while teacher's commitment for students' academic success can be questionable. This is relevant to the work of Ullucci (2011) who reviewed the identity development of white teachers who claim to be successful in educating colored students.

Ullucci (2011) explored race and class consciousness in white educators through critical race theory and storytelling methods. The author was interested in the identity development of white teachers who work in racially diverse schools, and if it is related to their education training. Three teachers were highlighted in the study and asked questions such as, how they knew they were white, their relationship to race and class, as well as experiences they had that may have framed their success. The author claimed that schools are not neutral, and educators will actually detour any discussion regarding race. Ullucci studied three white teachers by conducting three to four interviews, each one to two and a half hours in duration. This study included Grace O'Shea who is a daughter of immigrants, comes from a large family and raised in a poor neighborhood. She was primarily surrounded by Black neighbors growing up in Chicago.

Grace struggled academically and personally experienced violence. In this location, Grace was a white minority as people of color filled the majority. Contextually, Grace was surrounded by race centered experiences whether it was directly to her or her community, such as violence against Black bodies (p. 568). Grace explained that no one ever told her that her being white had an advantage, though she feels her upbringing has produced a level of empathy she can have with her students who may be going through similar experiences.

Next, Peter Williams is another white teacher represented in the study who stayed in the city of Detroit, Michigan while white flight breezed through their neighborhood. Growing up his best friends were Black. He recalls being in his mom's car with his friends in a rural town, and someone had called the police on them solely because there were five Black people entering the neighborhood (p. 570). Similar to Grace, Peter struggled academically, and recalls being ridiculed by his math teacher for not knowing how to solve a problem. As a teacher now, he would never do that to his kids because he would not want them to feel the way he did. With 19 years of teaching experience, Gloria Highman embodied a respect for the parents of her students and sees them as heroes. She shares the story of a parent that swam from Vietnam to America leading to work 2-3 jobs and sacrificing time and energy for their children. Gloria grew up in a neighborhood where people of color and being low income were the majority. As a student, Gloria grew increasingly tired of being taught the same curriculum so much that she did not feel entuned to learning. When it came to racial understanding, attending an all-Black school as a white person provided her access to firsthand experiences from her peers. She understood that segregation and socioeconomic differences existed even though she was a kid and unable to name it.

The findings of this study demonstrated that tangible exposure to areas of oppression—classism, sexism, ableism—can be a tool of empathy when white teachers work with students of color who face similar issues. With these three teachers in mind, their stories reflected similar themes across. All teachers went to racial diverse schools, grew up in multiracial communities and had friends of different races (p. 575), while feeling othered in school due to their adversities. The feeling of "otherness" allows these teachers to feel empathy towards students who may feel similar. The majority of school teachers are middle class, white suburban women, which these teachers are not (p. 576). Within the hierarchy of whiteness based on class, language, and national origin, there are varieties in lived experiences of white people and those who are associated with the bottom of the hierarchy feel less than. It is relevant to understand the separate positions of each white teacher, though it is most significant to realize and call out that under systemic racism white people will always be seen as more than people of color. White teachers should be aware of their positionality when teaching majority BIPOC students in order to gauge approaches in curriculum and interpersonal relations.

In summary, research demonstrates that racial differences of educators and students will influence academic experiences. This includes Martin (2014) illustrating in class education with off campus influence, Martinez (2020) articulating teachers racialized perceptions of student problems, and Ullucci (2011) claiming that personal experience shapes levels of white teachers' success when teaching non-white students. Taken together, this body of research exemplifies how white educators' positionality influences learning spaces, either positively or negatively. Either way, students of color are put in a context where they have to put in extra work to navigate education rooted in white superiority. In some cases, students of color sacrifice their

authenticity for white people's comfort. In relation to white educators, ethnic and racial minority students' experiences under these conditions are evaluated further.

Identity of Racial/Ethnic Minorities in Context

Literature has established that students of color's identity development is defined as a process in which the identity is experienced and interpreted across settings (Way, Santos, Niwa, Kim-Gervey, 2008). This includes a study that illustrates social hierarchy within non-white adolescent groups (Way et al., 2008), a study that articulates the relevancy of political context in school curriculum for immigrant students (Jaffe-Walter, Miranda, Lee, 2019), and a study that claims socioeconomic stress and family embeddedness influence school success (Cross, 2020). This is important because taken together, these studies all demonstrate the "otherness" ethnic minorities experience, specifically youth in traditional American public schools. Way et al. (2008) articulate the dynamics of social hierarchy within a given school that is representative of the social, political and economic context of the population and city in which the school resides. This reflects the intersections of identity development as referenced by the findings in Cross (2020). The author concentrates on socioeconomic stress on the family structure and how stress from parent figures can and does affect student success. Jaffe-Walter et al. (2019) argue that educators' silence and neutrality to political discourse is damaging and in hindsight reinforcing false narratives. They specifically studied immigrant students during the Obama "Dreamer era" of 2013 and early 2017 when Trump was inaugurated. In order to advance and support marginalized students, the political climate must be considered, as reinforced in Way et al. (2008). These articles represent the progression of thought concerning identity development in education intersecting with the sociopolitical climate. This is important because as times change,

terminology is developed, ways of living are altered, and conversations evolve. These studies encourage the consideration of BIPOC in context.

Way et al. (2008) addressed segregation on a high school campus between students of various racial and ethnic groups. The author did this by studying an urban public high school in New York City where 80% of students were enrolled in the free lunch program. This study included 167 participants from an English classroom who were interviewed each school year for three years: 40-45% Latinx (Puerto Rican and Dominican), 30-34% Asian American (Chinese), and 14-18% African American students. The findings of this study demonstrate that whiteness infiltrates ethnic intragroup dynamics. Puerto Rican students had a strong sense of cultural belonging, and at the same time sometimes resembled white phenotypes such as having fair skin. These students held a collective pride in being Puerto Rican in America yet also retained the collective agreement of not wanting to be Dominican. Although both groups share ancestors from similar geographies, Dominicans are darker, and are seen as immigrants with different food and language. The negative peer perspective became internalized where Dominican students wished to be Puerto Rican due to them being the desirable group on campus. Peer interaction with African American students was fairly neutral, but what stood out to the author was the negative adult intercommunications. In class, this group of students concluded they felt empowered by having positive Black role models in curriculum, like Martin Luther King Jr. Asian American students were most obviously segregated in the lunchroom by only spending time within their respective circles. They were perceived as physically small, and judged by their accents, and immigration status. Because they were the ethnic group at the bottom of the social hierarchy, they were targeted as victims of verbal harassment and physical assault. There was much hesitation in identifying with other Asian Americans due to self-depreciation from

internalized hatred. They reported the desire to be Black or Puerto Rican but did not have the language to explain why. Although an ethnically diverse campus, students still managed to place certain ethnic groups above others. Intersected with the context of being an adolescent in a public high school, students' survival strategies ranged from resistance to assimilation.

The author concluded that the groups of students reflect identity development that can be applied to the larger patterns of the United States. Given the localized context of this specific part of the country, district, and school population, the students served as an example of identity development of students of color. Way et al. (2008) confirmed the "…patterns of resistance and accommodation in identity development are a reflection of larger political and social context of the United States…" (p. 77). This included the worth of those who have lighter skin over darker skin and the political climate around immigration status. The interacting dynamics provide insight to how identity classification can influence education and interpersonal relationships. These findings are not conclusive since Puerto Rican students may not be at the top of the social hierarchy in another context, such as the West Coast or rural south. This is related to the work of Jaffe-Walter et al. (2019) who analyze political contexts as a factor that shapes students' experiences in school. There is more inquiry needed to study identity development in high school with and between BIPOC students, especially in relation to how educators may attempt to address such development.

Jaffe-Walter et al. (2019) debated whether educators should participate in political discourse, and to what extent, given schools typically remain silent on controversial topics. There is an expectation that U.S. public school teachers should remain silent, synonymous with neutral, to allow students to develop and express their opinions. This sounds like a welcoming agenda, though students are not given the tools or provided the safe space to do

so. The authors draw ethnographic data from two studies on Internationals Network high schools in New York City who serve a majority of undocumented, low income and multilingual immigrant students. One study captured the Obama-Dreamer movement circa 2012-2013, while the second study took place while Trump rose to presidency in 2016. This student population is particularly vulnerable to deportation, discrimination, and financial inequity.

In the case of Metropolitan High School in 2013, undocumented students became empowered by the creation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2012. This compelled teachers to reevaluate the political context within their school. Educators helped students develop their own opinions by aiding them in access to reliable information about political issues while asking students to explore perspectives in a variety of issues (p. 266). This could have been too radical given another political climate, though in this case of empowered marginalized students, it was relevant. Teachers may feel afraid to engage, for many reasons. In this case, they felt they needed to protect their immigrant students. There was much tension at Bethel High School in 2017 when Trump entered office. Parents and students became increasingly fearful to be in public given their citizenship status. The school was aware of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) being a threat, especially since one of their student's homes was raided. In this moment, the school realized "how quickly changes in policy could impact the school's immediate community" (p. 267). In efforts to alleviate the unease across campus, restorative circles were held after the election to help students process ongoing trauma. Teachers concluded that engaging in political conversations would inadvertently protect students by giving them the tools to think and process.

Students can interpret the silence of educators as complicit and continue to feel marginalized in school as some teachers are afraid to engage. Typical literature in classes like

English and Social Studies gear their audience towards white middle class students which lack consciousness of how marginalized students may feel or experience particular political discussions. Because of this, it is essential to contextualize political discourse with students of color in mind. Civic engagement conventionally lives in the subject of Social Studies and should live in other subject areas of school. "Teaching of controversial issues is essential to support young people in accessing the skills and dispositions to be engaged citizens" (p. 255), which will provide students the opportunity to generalize these skills across curriculum. The high schools in this particular study note that teachers who choose to engage in political discourse may deny or avoid issues at hand in order to avoid conflict. On the other hand, the way teachers deliver controversial content can empower or harm student communities affected by policy. As much as educators would love to foster students' individual ideas, their silence is not neutral, rather the silence sides with dominant narratives.

The findings of this study demonstrated that political context outside the school sphere is relevant and should be incorporated. Contextualizing undocumented students in 2013, a teacher brought students to a protest to practice civic engagement and was supported by their colleagues. Given Trump's political stance in 2017, teachers would not have chosen to expose their students at a public rally as it could be dangerous and inhibit further trauma. Jaffe-Walter et al. (2019) argues that silence during dehumanizing discourse about immigrants is not neutral (p. 272), and calls to teachers to respond to such discourse to ensure immigrant or undocumented students feel supported; moreover, communication around xenophobia is a learning opportunity for all students. Political context shapes how students engage in school and to go further, localized geography is also important. Where the school is located can affect how the political context is treated in classroom discourse. Although this study focused on undocumented, multilingual and

immigrant students in New York, the premise of its findings can be applied to various locations where students of color reside.

Cross (2020) explored timely high school graduation rates and college enrollment in association to life outcomes such job security and financial earnings. The variable being studied is "socioeconomic stress versus extended family embeddedness in explaining group differences…on these outcomes" (p. 692). These factors play a role in social inequality starting in childhood and into adulthood. Family structure can influence the level of a student's academic success. Children growing up without two biological parents are at risk of experiencing academic problems and can be due to economic resources, family instability, and parental socialization (p. 693). This is not to say that a two biological parent household cannot also produce academic problems, rather more commonly students outside of this nuclear structure tend to be disadvantaged due to lack of access to resources and opportunities. The author describes socioeconomic stress hypothesis as "a family's ability to cope with stressful situations and crises" (p. 694), which can be a result of family's availability to resources and the capacity to facilitate coping practices. The second factor of extended family embeddedness suggests students of color are more likely to be surrounded by extended family members when compared to their white peers. Families of color tend to live in closer proximity to one another and benefit from familial support given their collectivism in contrast to whites.

Methods used by Cross (2020) draw from a collection of data that ranges from surveys and interviews from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics circa 1985 to 2015. Dependent variables studied were on-time high school completion—graduating without repeating a grade— and college enrollment. Based on the data at hand, three racial groups (Black, Hispanic, white) had significant differences. Whites were shown to have the highest rates of on-time high school

completion and college enrollment (p. 700), and Hispanic students followed. In the results, Black students were most likely to be in a single parent household. This exemplifies the racial oppression that intersects financial abilities and academic success. Given the findings, resiliency in students should be considered when measuring life outcomes. A young person resilient to traumatic life events such as financial and familial instability can still graduate from high school timely and enroll in college. The needs of students of color and their respective families should be met or attended to for a more equitable education experience. Because financial wealth can equate to success, historic and systemic disparities do not traditionally favor people of color in America. The ethnic and racial identity of students are meaningful for how teachers approach processes of learning and for administrators to structure priorities of their school.

Racial and ethnic identity are mentioned as two separate entities. Although they are typically used interchangeably, Williams, Tolan, Durkee, Francois, and Anderson (2012) describes racial category as one defined by others for you, and ethnicity defined by within group members (p. 304). It is valuable for adolescents to explore their ethnic-racial identity so they can better understand their knowledge of self within and across contexts. Youth who rely on external resources to understand their identity may face difficulty given the external resources in school for example, reflect a white middle class experience. Douglass, Wang and Yip, (2016) explain how salience, "defined as the relevance and significance of ethnicity-race in a specific situation" (p. 1397), will vary depending on the moment and individual. Variability within ethnic-racial identity is when adolescents are more aware of their identity above other times where they may not be consciously aware of their ethnic-racial identity at all. In text, the authors pulled a quote from a young African American female who clarified that when she is surrounded by peers that

are not Black, she realizes she may be the only Black person there (p. 1398). In that moment, her ethnic-racial identity is in the front of her mind.

Ultimately in schooling, racial and ethnic identity is significant in how students of color experience academia and how educators approach racialized contexts. Way et al. (2018) show that even within the general classification of "students of color," racial hierarchy still exists due to features of white superiority such as of citizenship status, skin color and various cultural practices. American ideologies are practiced through othering racial groups by associating value to these experiences. Teachers have the opportunity to respond to heightened sociopolitical events, exemplified in Jaffe-Walter et al. (2019). To further add, Cross (2020) contextualizes systemic inequities of socioeconomic status and family structures in relation to race and its influence on student success. Overall, the identity of belonging to a certain racial or ethnic group comes with circumstances that can lead to various levels of academic involvement and whether or not schooling is a positive experience.

Summary

This literature provides context for understanding the thesis developed in this paper. The body of scholarship helps us understand why engaging in narrative methods in predominantly white schools can decolonize methods of learning and teaching by allowing students of color to be experts and develop a positive sense of identity. Each body of information has aided in the understanding that CRT can be framed as a mindset and in practice. Reported by Cashmere (2018), empowered students of color from Chicago lead meetings that "unsilenced" their stories and spoke openly to their hopes for an evolved world (p. 43). This act of imagination is vital to putting theory into action to create a transformative learning space. Looking at racialized discourse as an opportunity to develop empathy and increase critical thinking skills is an

essential perspective in keeping students of color safe in the classroom. Practices such as counter storytelling, contextualizing lived experiences and listening to people of color are not exclusive to a classroom, rather skills that can be generalized to the larger community.

In this study, I explore identity development of ethnic minority high school students in a majority white American high school under the post-Donald Trump administration. With the collective literature in mind, this thesis benefits from the foundational work of CRT, the various ways it has been applied, and stories of students shared. In Cashmere's (2018) study, the Cultural Studies classroom had the mantra of "Loving Everyone, Being Mindful and Questioning Everything," which served as an informed healing space safe for students to share and learn from one another. A large goal in producing this work is to provide space for rural high school BIPOC a chance to verbalize and be involved in a sociopolitical climate that has made headlines daily. To tap into the potential of young students is to invest in a progressive future.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

At the outset of this Chapter, I reiterate the research questions that guided this study:

1.   How do BIPOC students navigate their racial/ethnic identity in a predominantly white school?

2.   In what ways has Trump's presidency impacted students of color in a predominantly white school, and how did they come to realize the impact?

3. How can students of color counter an education space that may not reflect their lived experiences?

The research features narrative stories from Carmen, a current Mayfield High School senior, plus Fiona and Jerome, recent graduates of the school. The intention in opening this discussion is to situate the location of the high school and experiences of racialized behavior under Donald Trump's presidency in search of understanding students' experiences within his term. Each participant engaged in a one-hour conversation ranging from campus culture, peer interactions and teacher to student relationships. This research is rooted in storytelling and oral history practices that see each participant as holding truth; therefore, each themed section is titled with a line said by each participant. To create a safe space, I shared my high school anecdotes and research ideas transparently. I provided participants the option to choose when they would like to conduct the interview and all three chose Saturday, February 20, 2021.

It has been six years since I graduated Mayfield and, in that duration, I was able to deconstruct, process, and verbalize inequities I faced under the structure of race in a majority white high school. When asking my interview questions to the participants, I gathered various

themes that were relevant across all three students. While I asked about their racial and ethnic identity in context to the school, students were very aware of whiteness. All participants had clear opinions on their teachers in connection to specific events, while carrying strong reflections on Donald Trump's influence on and off campus. Within the curriculum and Mayfield culture, participants claimed race and racism to be a low priority. Although there were overlaps in the findings, each student presents an individual perspective to a larger phenomenon.

The findings do not solely focus on race, given it is unavoidable to allow other structures of inequity to be isolated from the conversation. All connected in theory and lived experiences, race and racism were the foundation of the findings. Participants were asked interview questions derived from the research questions, plus follow up questions and comments that deepened the dialogue. Each section will reference the literature review and research questions.

"Do You Like K-Pop?"

An overarching theme is that participants would refer to race and racism as "it" or "that" when telling their stories. Considering the context of the conversation was based on questions around race, it is understandable why they may not feel the need to name it. Previously mentioned literature has established that racial and ethnic identity is significant in how students experience education and approach racialized contexts. This section will reference the first research question and provide narratives on race-based experiences. It can include distressing and or discomforting content for readers that include racial erasure and internalization. Fiona starts to illustrate how her family structure shaped her racial identity.

> It's a fairly small school so nobody was really a stranger, but more so with my close
> friends there were just kind of the fun slurs thrown around. Probably towards the end of
> my sophomore year I didn't know what my ethnic background was, my mom just told me

that I was a really tan white person. For like the first 15 years of my life or

whatever…obviously I wasn't just a really tan white person. Now more so, looking back

just because it's more of a collective picture, I would say it's more hurtful now than it was

at the time. I think it's a weird thing at Mayfield to be a student of color because it's just

not talked about at all, it's literally not mentioned…By the time I did know my ethnic

background it wasn't something that I was walking around saying, or anything like that, it

wasn't really relevant, and nobody really asked. Everybody liked to make comments

about the color of my skin…and just kind of in passing or asking questions. (Interview,

February 20, 2021)

Fiona explained she was usually the darkest person in the room and although it was obvious in

perception, its implications were not something she was consciously aware of. This is

representative of her peers' idea of race, often defined by skin color, rather than the socially

constructed and systemic foundations of race.

Living, and I would add surviving, the small-town bubble meant to let go of the parts of

them that were different from the majority narrative. Fiona identifies as a person of color and is a

quarter Black. She was adopted by a white couple and was raised in this small rural town. This

positionality is similar to Jerome who also identifies as Black and adopted by white parents.

Coming out to Mayfield, it was so fucking cool and I'm not gonna lie. I liked it because I

was so different you know, like you're only one out of five or six so you can bring that

bold statement and everyone is checking it and you're like yes, yes. I took it in a definite

positive way for sure. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

This confidence does not hide the fact that Jerome experienced anti-Black behavior from his

peers. He first moved to town in grade school and shares the time when he knew racism would

follow him throughout his education. At this time, I had asked Jerome how he navigates his racial and ethnic identity in a majority white space. Coincidently, Jerome and I attended the same K-8 school in town.

> I was in sixth grade and come this group of eight graders that are always on the soccer field when we were playing this game called cuppies, and they kept calling me burnt cookie. I'm like this little kid and I was like bro, wait what's that mean? Then come up after school, maybe a week, week and a half later, I got chased out getting called the N-word all the way up the street, bruh, like I'm being straight up with you. There's that one far tree right off the corner of the street. I got barked up getting hounded and my mom even pulled up too, right when that happened, she went "Get the F away from my son!" all this stuff and that was my first like actual experience with that. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

There was a fairly long driveway to get to the elementary school classrooms. On that route you would pass two parking lots and the main office. I can imagine at the time of this event, there were no adults or staff patrolling the outskirts of school grounds. If they were, I would hope that they would intervene. Then again, with the perception of seeing a group of boys chasing one another, they might not think twice.

Inflicting Whiteness Through Stereotypes

I had asked participants if they believed peers perceived them in a certain way, and to no surprise that racial stereotypes were confirmed, challenged, and very apparent. Jerome recalls distinct correlations with high school athleticism and race.

> …The one thing that shocked them when it came to it was when I joined up for swim and water polo. Then everyone's like whoa whoa whoa, what do you mean? Multisport, but now

you're in the water? Like fuck yeah I'm in the water, what you mean? It's the most stereotypical place I've probably ever been to like school-wise or heard of school-wise. Everyone thinks of stereotypes, as it is. There's no if, ands, or buts to it. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

A white dominant narrative prescribes the identity of a Black person that can be indirectly consumed, especially if not debunked at an early age. The fact that Jerome has compartmentalized this incident shows how impactful stereotyping can be. Additionally, Jerome sees himself as someone who reads people and could notice that peers who did not know him, and he did not know them, would interact with Jerome by trying to confirm their stereotypes about him. He could tell they were listening to him not of genuine curiosity, rather to find the one characteristic that was Black enough. In these cases, students interacting with Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) can have various motives in their actions, such as searching for attributes rooted in media stereotypes to confirm their negative attitudes. Whether they are being authentic in their conversations, they may be looking to instigate or trigger something in their peer with malicious intent. Specifically, in homogenous schools dominated by whiteness, some folks may have little to no experience interacting with BIPOC and are not aware of the racial dynamics when sharing space.

Race and racism are typically regarded as a problem BIPOC face; therefore, it is believed to be their problem to fix. This narrative is part of the silencing of BIPOC experiences and colorblindness that is ultimately serving whiteness. In its reality, racism is done onto BIPOC communities because of white supremacy and its deep historical perpetration. In many ways, white narratives have tried and achieved to spin racism as something they cannot partake in because they are not people of color. It is noticeable in education that race is controversial and

there is little to no opportunity to articulate the matter. Carmen confirms Fiona's point that race

is not something that is talked about at school. Racial identity seems to be tiptoed around and

discussed through questions, microaggressions and empty commentary.

> I definitely feel like it's not talked about at all. I feel like my Asian identity is kind of
>
> pushed aside. It's kind of like it's Carmen not Si Na, which is my Chinese name. It's
>
> definitely not talked about at all really around school. The most recognition I get is if
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> they see my Chinese name on the roster they'll go "Oh what does it mean?" and I'll tell
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> them, but that's pretty much it. I feel like I know my friends, my friends love, appreciate
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> and understand it. I've definitely gotten some like you know bad racial slurs thrown at
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> me, luckily [it's all] in the past, but I feel like my peers just kind of see me as anyone
>
> else. I feel like I don't really know because I don't ask them but they kind of just buzz
>
> over it. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

Carmen has a white father and Japanese mother and seem to carry a strong identification to her

racial and ethnic identity. People with such confidence can respond to stereotype threat in

different ways. Weber, Kronberger and Appel (2018) describe stereotype threat as a stress-

related mode of being and suggest negative stereotypes onto certain groups of people that not

only undermines their abilities, but also places psychological burden. Examples of groups that

may experience stereotype threat include women, gender nonconforming people, ethnic

minorities, and or people with disabilities. For myself, I was transformed when I learned to name

the uncomfortable feeling I had with my peers was indeed stereotype threat. Being a young

Asian woman, a prominent example is when someone–especially white men–watch me park my

car and I start to worry they believe I am a bad driver because of the associated stereotype to my

race and gender. In connection to Asian stereotypes, Carmen encountered more evident racism when peers would ask questions that confirmed those threats.

> "What do you want to be, you want to be a doctor I guess? Or something smart?" or "Do you like K-pop? I'm assuming you like K-pop" and then kind of the nitty gritty stuff. They'd call me "ching chong". I'm trying to remember because I wrote a whole essay about it for my class and it was kind of while ago I kind of blocked it out. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

As I continued to converse with the participants, I could tell my questions were triggering old memories left buried. Looking back at their experiences they were able to connect ongoing themes related to race. Carmen recalled a very specific memory from her junior year where a girl that sat by her would put her elbows on her desk, hands holding her face up while fingers would rest by the corners of her eyes, pulling back. She demonstrated it for me, and Carmen felt it was obviously mocking Asian features. In the wake of the spike in anti-Asian racism during Covid (Hauser, 2021), these acts of racism and xenophobia are certainly mirrored by the discourse at the national level from the time when Carmen would have experienced the, and up until this day with ongoing anti-Asian comments by President Trump (such as "kung flu" and the "China virus") fueling a spike in anti-Asian hate crimes.

It seems common for students of color to bear the brunt of coded whiteness. Sometimes the most dangerous aspects of white supremacy go unseen or disguised as compliments and jokes. I grew curious of Carmen's perspective and asked where she thinks this sense of entitlement comes from for people to openly display racism. She references a specific person at her school in her reflection.

I really don't know why but from what I've heard and what I have gathered together

about him is that he's just really ignorant. I think he was raised that way because you can

see it in his other siblings. I could see where he gets it from. I could just see from the

small, tiniest interactions I've had with them, so it was interesting. (Interview, February

20, 2021)

Her conclusions are clear due to her observations and feelings being situated in this dynamic.

The peer who picked on her happen to sit next to a Filipina student as well. Although she was

half white, she did not look it. Carmen considers the fact that she was "popular and of his status"

that this perpetrator chose Carmen to pick on. She adds, "It's just who he is I feel like, because

he's that kind of person who would just say what he wants to say." Experiences so personal to

Carmen may not seem as hurtful to those watching on the outside. She did not mention any other

students intervening. On top of her commentary, it is typical for male students, especially white,

to not be held accountable for their actions. This is not only a consequence of the dominant

narrative, because it can also be a precursor to further actions of white supremacy and toxic

masculinity. It is likely the male student in this position was never told "no" based on Carmen's

description.

Solidarity with Other Students of Color

Being a BIPOC high schooler in a white rural town comes with the attempts to make light

of the racial tension. Part of these efforts were collective with other students of color. There is a

natural sense of comfortability when across the room is another student of color, and at some

points it can be an effortless union. Carmen for example met two friends in P.E class.

…We kind of bonded over, not even the fact that we had different ethnicities, but as we

were getting closer, we're like "Hey guys look at us! We're the diversity in this whole

class!" …overall it's good interacting with other people who are of color. (Interview,

February 20, 2021)

Jerome had a similar feeling of unification with students of color on the football team and

connecting with a varsity player.

I remember the first day of school freshman year it was all the homies from the football

team, and it was all Black people and then a couple other homies. He comes over and he's

like all "So this is the ethnic circle at Mayfield huh?" That's the first thing I remember! I

looked around and I'm like wow like we actually are! Right here in the whole quad.

(Interview, February 20, 2021)

On the contrary to this moment of solidarity, Jerome made a point to discuss a white friend that

apparently tries to act in ways that are stereotypically Black. Specifically with rap music, Jerome

knows his friend can consume all the rap he wants, but will not truly represent what he may be

rapping about. I could tell Jerome was referencing the way white folks absorb Black culture as

their own, especially to seem cooler or gain clout socially. "I couldn't take this kid through any

street of [the city] without him double looking and being worried," given his friend would not

feel comfortable leaving affluent suburbia. I understand his connection since I grew up in a

neighborhood that was low income and the music you would hear on the streets would be hip

hop. This connects to a larger conversation of the romanticization of urban areas that white

people can consume and keep their distance without having to experience the realities of living

in a poor neighborhood.

With his friend in mind, Jerome points out that certain towns that are predominately low

income and people of color are not to blame. The city and street names he was referring to in our

conversation were areas I grew up in. "It's a fucking income thing bruh it's not a fucking danger

thing. I know half these people at Mayfield couldn't drive through [the city] without getting fucking freaked," attesting to negative attributes of nearby neighborhoods prescribed as unsafe. When I was at Mayfield, I did not invite friends over for this very reason, in addition to the embarrassment I felt knowing my home would look very different from my peers living spaces.

The way that physical environment and town culture can center race is a notable factor in the experiences of the participants. Through these stories, racism came in many forms from indirect behaviors, little to no intervention and the explicit calling of pejorative names. Although students were able to find solidarity with other peers of color, the derogatory comments from the rest of the school dominated in memory. It is important to note that stereotypes are one of many roots of racism that can spread through school grounds. The ideas around race and the lack of conversations around racial identity can not only silence students of color, but also inhibit their potential in school. I personally knew that in order to survive a high school that is predominately white, I needed to assimilate in order to protect myself from heightened anxiety around my race.

I Knew This Can't Be Good

With such an embedded community, peer relationships are not the only influencers of students of color's academic experience. Mayfield has a predominately white staff for teachers in the classroom and in administration. I had wanted to see what peer interpersonal interactions were like and found teacher to student relations to be most impactful. Fiona clearly states, "…it wasn't that my peers were seeing me differently, it was that the teachers were seeing me differently and that started to get more and more prominent as the years went on." There are a multitude of factors that can influence teacher perceptions on students. As the majority of teachers in the U.S. are white, it is likely they carry racial biases due to their positionality of race and power as the educator. Perceptions of students of color can influence the way teachers

interact with them. Previously in the literature review, Ullucci (2011) had pointed out that schools and teachers who are silent on systemic oppression may intend to be neutral, but instead continue to commit violence upon BIPOC students by disregarding conversations on race.

Mayfield High School has a very strong personality, and its characteristics were agreed upon by all three participants. Because the staff and administrators were all white, this positionality can have a part in the lack of dialogue on race. I do admit that Mayfield has an array of opportunities in extracurriculars, sports, and academics, though I do critique that then feeds to the ego of the school to maintain their place as the top performer in the district. To put into perspective, Jerome was on track to attend another high school in a nearby town. Mayfield intervened to recruit Jerome to play football at the school.

> Mayfield is a very prideful school, so school pride, school spirit, the athletics there take over everything. One thing that I ran into at this school was I was an athlete. I was only able to go there because they needed me to go play football over there…the first thing I noticed there was like…everyone expected me to be so good, because I was Black playing football. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

The majority of school funding goes to sports and football being a priority. This is a reoccurring theme in terms of teacher to student relationships and how students of color navigate racial identity on campus.

Mayfield also obtains funds from families and local businesses because of the football team. Being a student athlete can put you on top of the social hierarchy. To fast forward into his reflection on teacher relationships, Jerome was openly excited to share his positive experiences.

> All my teachers…I always thought they were the most realist motherfuckers. I got caught with the coolest ones, I guess, who were at least chill with me because I would just give

them 100% respect. When it came to them telling me some shit, I would just give them

an honest answer like now that was one part that was cool too. Being bold, or whatever,

you can kind of say like really what's on your mind without trying to push it, you know.

(Interview, February 20, 2021)

I asked if being a student athlete may have affected the way teachers were more likely to listen to

him, referring to the start of this conversation.

Yeah, that could have probably played a little role. I honestly…that's weird. That goes

back to what I was saying about the school in the first place though, like how important

their sports are. So yeah, I guess maybe that could have had a little difference. (Interview,

February 20, 2021)

There were moments in my conversations with participants that I had to reevaluate my

positionality as a Mayfield graduate from six years ago, and a person who is studying human

rights for their Master's degree. I recognize that after my high school graduation, I had to unpack

and deconstruct the internalized racism I had carried from being a part of that community. The

journey of processing events in the past was on my own time and I recognize that participants

have years to come.

The participants were not only directly impacted by racialized incidents, they witnessed it

upon other students of color. Carmen shares a moment from her freshman year being friends

with a girl who is half Japanese. A group of boys in their class used this friend as a target for

racist behavior.

They would say the normal stereotypes like you can't drive, you eat dogs. I remember we

were doing a *Kahoot* and you know you have to sign up your name? I knew this can't be

good, so of course the guys were putting in "___ eats dogs" or "ching chong." The

teacher was kind of just like "okay delete delete delete" but she never discussed it.

(Interview, February 20, 2021)

In contrast to this experience, Carmen was in another class where they were learning different currencies of various countries. The teacher has presented a currency symbol and asked the class to guess. A boy had responded with Japanese, which was incorrect, and said "What's the difference?" The teacher had corrected him that it was Chinese currency and that it does matter as they are not all one in the same. Carmen believed the debunking of the boys' commentary was respectful on the part of the teacher.

Imagine Teacher Transparency

In reference to the literature review, the neutrality of teachers and schools can be intended to avoid or reduce conflict, yet at the same time serves as a detriment to relationships with students. Not all schools claim to be neutral, and not all schools assert their values transparently. Often times students will need to decode if a teacher shares similar beliefs as them in order to feel safe. Mayfield presents itself with high esteem, and at the same time it is very apparent where the school stands sociopolitically. Note that at the student merchandise store stickers of the school logo filled with a black and white American flag and one blue stripe are being sold. This references "Blue Lives Matter" or the "Back the Blue" movements created to counter Black Lives Matter and violence against Black communities. I had asked the participants for their thoughts on whether or not teachers at Mayfield should share their personal opinions on sociopolitical matters. Jerome took a few moments to speculate:

> …As long as it gets to the point where the students are allowed to say something after because I feel like the teachers have the tendency, especially there, to really take the teacher thing too fucking serious. I was just blessed that they would listen to me with

respect, I could actually say something. I feel like a lot of problems would happen in

there with that, like teachers wouldn't want to hear anyone else's shit other than theirs.

(Interview, February 20, 2021)

There is a sense of danger with imagining Mayfield teachers sharing their sociopolitical

opinions. With the context of a global pandemic and right-winged extremists for example

storming the Capitol, I would understand why students are hesitant. Carmen had added:

That would be so different to have a teacher say their opinions. I would say it would kind

of be nice, because then I could get a testament to see what their views are. I feel like,

would it be bad? I feel like it would be for Mayfield because the whole idea of talking

about different cultures and stuff…they just kind of skip over it, they let it slide under the

rug. They don't talk about it at all. I feel like I mean there's very little recognition at

Mayfield for people of color. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

The question of whether teachers should share their opinions does not exclude the positionality

of the town or demographics of the school. This idea almost makes the school feel less safe when

we imagine what it would be like otherwise.

Although there are larger structures at play given the political climate of the U.S, the

tension it may cause between educators and students could be a disservice to both parties. Fiona

expands on that idea:

I think that especially in such a small place like this town and at Mayfield and the things

that those teachers get away with in comparison to other school districts is absolutely

insane. I think actually it might be a bit of a danger to let them loose and say what they

want to say, because I know that there are a lot of teachers there that are anti-gay or some

of them are literally racist, or anti religion or any of those things that kind of really end

up being super harmful to teenagers…The freedom of speech aspect is very, very strong

at this school and that goes for teachers as well, where they can speak their beliefs

sometimes, and if you ask them a question, they can say the answer, and they will get

away with whatever answer they give. I think in that regard, it would be a bit of a danger,

just because then you have an entire student body that's hearing all of these ideas that are

coming from maybe somebody that they look up to maybe somebody that they hate,

which could be helpful, but I wouldn't want to risk it. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

Fiona makes a meaningful point that teachers have the potential to use their platform to possibly

spread a deeper misunderstanding on race and politics. Without standards on discussing systems

of oppression, teachers are able to speak freely without being held accountable. Contextualizing

even further, teachers at Mayfield can be very comfortable with students to where boundaries

can be blurred in what is appropriate to say.

Curriculum as Missed Opportunity

Generally, the teachers at Mayfield stick to the foundation of high school curriculum that

mirrors the bare minimum. Participants were asked if they see themselves in the curriculum

being taught in connection to research question three. Jerome not only provides reflection on

how curriculum is presented, he also includes expectations for Mayfield.

It's just general school shit. This school for sure does not dive into any of the cultural

news anything like that, I think culture needs to be taught now especially with COVID

and everything. Human love is going to be needed so strongly between everyone. So the

fact that they're probably still going to be lagging on that for years is crazy. You would

even start to talk about stuff or try to start up an open conversation with the teacher and it

would get shut down. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

Although U.S education and high school curriculum has its standards, teachers can and do apply

what they deem is important in the classroom. This could create inconsistencies for student

experiences, and as Fiona says, "…what they value in the teaching curriculum definitely differs

from teacher to teacher." The academic material can be inconsistent or repetitive while students

are graded on their retention and participation in the course. Fiona further explains:

> I would also say that their values are to have a good "high school experience." That kind
>
> of seems like more of their priority than the actual academic portion of things. I would
>
> say that that's more their priority is trying to "prepare you for the real world" however
>
> they see fit, which may not really go well with how other people see fit. So it's kind of
>
> interesting to have the different teachers that value the different things in life. (Interview,
>
> February 20, 2021)

Centering the subject matter of race, self, and curriculum highlight connections that go far deeper

than an individual experience. Fiona reflects on the environment of the school and town that

shapes her time at Mayfield. She makes a compelling point:

> …there were no explicitly Black writers or even on the gender front, I would say a lot of
>
> times we were primarily focusing on men. I was never like "Oh, why are we reading this
>
> book by another man" …I thought that it was normal and they're really good at making it
>
> seem like that's normal. And then suddenly I got to college and people are telling me
>
> things that they've read in high school, and I'm like what? In high school? Like it was a
>
> required reading? That's crazy. It's almost like they're preparing you for life in the town
>
> bubble if that makes sense because they teach you everything you're going to need to
>
> know to be successful, there. I would say I didn't really see a lot of myself in the

curriculum just because I didn't really see a lot of myself in the town in general.

(Interview, February 20, 2021)

The idea of normal compliments whiteness and is a method whiteness cannot live without. "Normal" is a product of the master narrative that silences people who resist otherwise and create a status quo that symbolizes ideas of how one should live their life. I refuse to return to any sense of normal, because my normal is not their normal; it never was. The comfortability of white people living in normalcy that serves white privilege only makes sense and feeds the American culture that sustains inequity. Students of color receive that message clearly. Carmen states that she does not see herself in the curriculum:

>...because it's just so blind to other people of color I feel like it's just designed for white students. There's nothing to back up that claim it's just the atmosphere and the history, of conservative and predominantly white. It feels like I'm trying to be this white version of me or like this other persona that I'm trying to fit in with everyone else, so I would say I can't see myself. Doing my own research on like slavery and other historic events it's like I would have never gotten this from the textbook or the teacher, so I feel like it's very sugar coated like oh it happened, it's okay guys it was bad, but oh well move on.
>
> (Interview, February 20, 2021)

There is validity in her claim that the curriculum is designed for white students because it was created by white people with a white superior complex. With Carmen's example of slavery, I can recall my history classes brushing over the topic as if it is not the foundation of the United States empire. It is the collection of these stories that demonstrate how students of color are positioned in their respective high school roles.

I would like to provide this space for Fiona's story with respect to her junior year at Mayfield, which she stopped going to halfway through. She had finished her high school courses at a community college and eventually graduated early to immediately attend a university. The reason her time at Mayfield came to an abrupt end was due to a "grooming situation" between her and a teacher who is still actively teaching. A handful of literature on grooming analyzes online spaces where people can be more vulnerable to deception versus in person. This includes work by Wood and Wheatcroft (2020) that generally describe the act of grooming as typically carried out by adults to minors by gaining their trust and usually having underlying motives in the groomers' favor. Because of this, Fiona had filed a lawsuit.

> When going to trial, one of the reasons that I was given not to go to trial and to take a settlement offer was because I would never pass the jury in this county for a multitude of reasons. The most frustrating probably being that I was too resilient in this case after the incident and I was going to university at the time so people would think that I was too successful so obviously it wasn't a big deal. Also, that I wasn't white, I was Black. Also, that my parents were incongruent to myself, they were both white. Also, that I was adopted. Also, that I was poor and also because they didn't really want me there anyway. So basically, all the things that we just talked about really came to a head. I was well into my undergraduate by that point in 2019. At the end of 2019 was when that came to a close, but when she looked me in the eyeballs and said that to me, I said no fucking way are you saying that to me right now. And then I said you're right, and then I settled, but I wish that I didn't and also it was just kind of one of those almost self-validating moments, where I was like oh so I'm not crazy and that has been happening this whole time…It just started becoming more and more obvious that they were going to choose

him over me because he had none of the things that I have…Had I launched a lawsuit

right now and had that happen right now with the knowledge that I have, I would know

better than to launch something like that in the way that it was launched, and so it was

extra interesting to me that my lawyers didn't know better at that point. (Interview,

February 20, 2021)

I deeply appreciated Fiona's transparency and willingness to hold space with me. She said it

herself that all the racialized situations she experienced have collectively led up to this event.

Again, the location of the school, positionality of the teacher, and generalization of the

community rise to surface as forces against students of color. She could see that because he is an

established teacher at Mayfield and a white male, the community members that would hold seats

in jury would lean to his favor against a poor, young, female, student of color. As stereotypical

as it may sound, it is a disappointingly predictable response from a county that is majority white,

wealthy, and conservative.

Teachers may not realize the amount of power they hold in impacting students and the

school environment. The participants imagined what would happen if teachers shared their

sociopolitical opinions and ultimately deemed it to be dangerous. This is disheartening not

because of the teachers specifically, rather the potential of schools to be active participants in

conversations on systemic oppression. The collection of stories further represent how students of

color's experiences are not prioritized.

He's Not a Good Person

Donald Trump served a complete term as U.S. President while encouraging a movement

of white supremacy (Goodman & Moynihan, 2020). He not only instigated racist rhetoric around

immigration and sexism through the exploitation of women's bodies, he also represents the

xenophobic foundations of the country. This section will revisit the "Trump Effect" and how Trump's platform increased racialized tensions in schooling. This could be administered through openly racist comments, triggering Trump memorabilia throughout campus, and further silencing of students of color. Fiona distinctly remembers election day, November 3, 2016, her junior year of high school. This same year she started an environmental club to get folks to think about food waste and recycling. Unfortunately, this became a difficult task when students and even faculty began to push back on her efforts.

> Around the start of junior year is when people would start intentionally putting [stuff] into the recycling containers. Just whatever they wanted to just toss it in there and then it came to a point where I would see people…make eye contact with me and switch the trash in the recycling containers and mix them together and then pour it back into the recycling. My classmates even…would just make eye contact, it was just so deliberate I just am so blown away because I wasn't really any person that people messed with in high school...They also knew exactly what way was going to mess with me the most…which was to do what they were doing. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

She knew, and I can understand, that these acts were a direct consequence of Trump's denial of climate change and underlying anti-Black ideologies given Fiona's racial identity. Trump's influence is interesting that with Fiona's experience of increasing awareness on recycling, people would respond extremely. Because Trump would loudly argue environmentalists, it only makes sense that any sentiment in relation to the environment must be resisted.

This set in motion a series of events leading up to Donald Trump's electoral win. Tuesday night band rehearsals is where Fiona heard the news. Her concern for the environment heightened and she was expecting the worst for the next four years. The next day was a school

day, so Fiona enters her AP English class on November 4th to a room of peers being exciting for

the new president. She sat there as usual while conversations were happening around her the

election as well as veganism, and coincidently she was and still is vegan.

> One of the girls…came and sat down next to me and was like "Hey what's wrong with
>
> you?" and I was like "Nothing" …somebody from across the fucking room said, "Oh
>
> she's upset because Trump won the election!" and I didn't say anything! I was like no I
>
> don't care, and I don't want to talk about it…then another one of my friends stepped in
>
> who is liberal, but in the white kind of liberal way that now I look back on it and it's just
>
> frustrating. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

This would be one incident where students of color are made the subject of attention at the

expense for white entertainment. In this instance, her white peers assumed she was not a Trump

supporter which is correct. The problem with that is their assumption was based off her dark

features and proximity to environmentalism.

Every participant was asked how Trump's presidency impacted, if at all, their schooling

being surrounded by predominately white people. Jerome had a strong reaction to Trump's

influence:

> The only way it really affected me at school was the people around me. I can tell they
>
> were trying to take politics serious, and I say try because I knew half of them didn't know
>
> what the fuck they were talking about. You had the diehard Trump fans or Trump
>
> supporters who are actually just going too far the distance like wearing the MAGA hats
>
> saying all the stupid shit. Personally, I fucking hate Trump. I do not like Trump. I
>
> personally hate everything that will come out of his mouth, he's not a good person at
>
> heart… (Interview, February 20, 2021)

Jerome makes an interesting point that students who are participating in political conversations can be doing so because that's all they see. I would think it is very difficult to ignore politics when the internet is constantly reporting on it. I understand too that student interest in politics is an act of self-discovery and trying to see how they fit in larger structures of the world. With this in mind, Trump's authority can leverage young people more easily.

As Trump's influence became stronger, so did organizations for racial justice such as the Black Lives Matter movement. On March 18, 2018, Stephon Clark–a unarmed Black man, 22 years of age–was shot and killed in his grandmother's backyard by city police. On March 27, 2018 hundreds of protesters flooded City Hall where city officials held a public hearing (Del Real, 2018). Jerome was planning to attend a basketball game nearby and detoured to this event.

> Do you know the Stephon Clark shooting? [There was] a basketball game and then we marched over to City Hall and we held up City Hall. I had a bunch of my friends from school, all white people too, so when it came to all the protests going down. My homie grabbed me he's like, are you down to stay and listen? And I was like fuck yeah bro let's see what happens. We hear about Stephon, look him up, we actually got involved and I got all these people to actually feel for me on this type of thing. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

Stephon became a local figure and his death by police prompted protests throughout the city. I had asked if the school recognized BLM or recent events of civil unrest and Jerome reported that nothing came from the school even after the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. His sister was still going to Mayfield at this time and the school did not react.

This research has been reflective of Trump's treacherous influence as president and has continued after the 2020 election. Although he was ultimately voted out of the White House, his

values remain present all across America. Carmen noted that the climate of the election made the sociopolitical divide at school very apparent.

> I feel like it all really started with…mask wearing…then the Black Lives movement is where it just kind of amplified. From there on it was just getting louder and louder because of the election. You could definitely tell who was pro-Trump and who was against, and I mean you had those people in the middle…Some teachers would ask like "Trump or Biden?" or "Pro-mask or no mask?" and very controversial questions in the chat. Definitely around November, October, you can see a lot of people on social media posting and there were a certain group of people who are very vocal on Trump's presidency and other people on the other side…so it was very polarized I would say.
>
> (Interview, February 20, 2021)

It was also during this time that the school was participating in remote learning due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Most of the interaction with peers and teachers were through Google Meet, utilizing video calls and the chat box. Carmen said the polling of "Trump or Biden?" took place in this virtual space and how it felt like an awkward ice breaker to take up time. Social media feeds of students would feature pro-Trump or anti-Trump rhetoric around the time of the election. In response to this, Carmen said, "I don't know who [their] target audience was, but it was interesting to see that the most vocal people were the people who weren't voting."

The small town's response to the coronavirus was very minimal that they would notify folks of the public gathering restrictions, such as wearing a mask and keeping a six-foot distance to others but would not enforce them. Students began to come back to campus physically while some stayed remote. There would be the usual "Trump 2020" and "Don't Tread on Me" flags

and bumper stickers on student cars. I wanted to get Carmen's take on why Trump supporters are so abrasive.

> The fact that they're Trump supporters, they take it as their identity, like their persona of "I am a Trump supporter". I feel like they wake up and say it. It's weird I feel like it's just part of who they are. I don't know why they have the feeling to advocate for him…The hardcore people I've seen, they just blindly support him. Even if he's out of office, I feel like they just dug their way into so much denial like "Oh, the election was rigged" and I'm like you weren't part of the election, but okay go for it. There were always the people who had the Trump flags, but it was definitely this year, it was no mercy. Right in your face. It was hard to watch. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

The energy that comes from Trump supporters are insensitive and abrasive. I understand the school perspective of not wanting to "choose a side" in order to present neutrality, though the values Trump symbolizes must be evaluated. As neutral as the school may think they are, they cannot control the political discourse students consume and bring to campus.

Donald Trump's position as the 45th President of the United States evolved drastically through his four-year term. This period of time came with intense division in America's two-party system and elevated violent racism from far Right-leaning conservatives. A "Trump 2020" flag became a symbol of danger for oppressed peoples and showed no mercy on public school grounds. As teachers and administrators avoided critical analysis of political discourse, students adhered to other sources of information. They would participate with family members, social media, and their preferred news outlets. Anything students may consume outside of school can pervade peer to peer interactions, school culture and teacher to student relationships. Students of color are particularly affected given Trump's platform is openly racist and classist.

Anti-Growth Machine

Bringing the conversation back to the location of Mayfield, this section will further dissect the culture of the small town and how its values impact the way students perceive the rest of the world. Participants had moments of clarity with their position at Mayfield as a student of color in conjunction to Trump's presidency. As a small, rural and conservative town, the culture as a whole is self-sustainable. They generally reject outsiders and new developments, so the stores in town are mainly family and locally owned. Mayfield logos and advertisements are at every street block since the school itself is idolized by the town. Fiona exemplifies a component of the town that shapes the lifestyle of being a resident and a student.

> Well in the most high school context possible, probably sports is a really big value for them. They really, really enjoy football and not so much…I mean the other sports are definitely valued I wrestled while I was there. I was also in band…I would say again sports just really comes in at the top. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

As mentioned previously, Mayfield's football team is a priority group and where much funding comes from and goes to. It may sound trivial, but football is something the school values and takes on as part of their identity. In this case, if you do not identify with football as a player or attendee of games then the school did not fully accept you. I claim this from personal experience that every corner of the school centered football. I attended a few games only for the socializing aspect to spend time with my friends. I could not tell you who was playing, what the score was or what the weather was like.

The school also prioritizes families who have had generations of Mayfield attendees. This could be siblings as students or grandparents as staff. It does help to have older family members attend Mayfield so when your time comes the teachers are more comfortable with you. To

receive star treatment throughout your four years at Mayfield you also would have had to either be a school athlete or monetary contributor to the campus. Fiona references them as legacy families:

> I always wanted to be a legacy family so bad. Because the obvious, people treated them differently. You know it was like if you had siblings or you had parents that were putting money into the school, you were treated kind of like royalty and that was awesome to me when I was in high school. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

The campus culture is not without the consideration of family background. With that being said, students with racist ideologies would have adopted the mindset from somewhere. Fiona continues to elaborate on a circle of influence people can have within this town.

> I think it comes from how their parents raised them…The town in its own respect is a very comfortable bubble to be in. Even if you are, God forbid a person of color or a student of color, it is relatively comfortable to be in because it could always be worse. It's just in this way, it feels almost like an evolved form of racism. There were at one point a lot more people of color in the area and it has since become this pocket of, like you said affluence and wealth for a really weird reason, where it's just kind of strange it just kind of ended up like that. We're talking about in my urban politics class right now about cities as growth machines, whereas the town is not a growth machine and they are exclusively anti-growth machine because they want to keep it a small town. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

I resonate with her statement on the comfortability of the town. As I sit in my yard on the edge of the town's parameters, I am surrounded by the elements of wind and sun. My neighbors are farmers, my dog will bark at squirrels every now and then, and other than that I am physically

safe, and it is quite serene. I am privileged to have this space even though I know I do not belong. The "bubble" Fiona references are the habits of this town and its people. Most folks who live here have lived in the same house they were raised in. The stores are mostly the same, and everyone has their day-to-day routines.

The town has a handful of elementary schools that ultimately advance students to attend Mayfield. There is a level of stability in the town's infrastructures as well as families that inhabit the space to a point of predictability. Carmen describes the town as family and community based, considering most people have grown up together because of the proximity of the schools. They would have their own microculture and often host events that cross over to other school campuses. As a person of color navigating this environment, Fiona describes microaggressions without needing to name it.

> Until you know the lay of the land, you don't know what you're working with and what people actually believe because it's this passive, kind of little jabs every now and again…it kind of lulls you into a comfort after a while that you're like well, I can handle that. It's not so bad until something else comes up that you're like okay well that kind of sucks like a lawsuit. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

Sometimes it takes a while to process experiences of discrimination when it happens intermittently. There can be a looming sense of being uncomfortable across contexts, and in this instance, it can be at school surrounded by white peers.

> I do feel a difference. I go to school you know it's fine like I kind of forget that I'm Asian because no one ever really points it out. I go home and I have my traditions. It's very subtle I'll give it that. More recently, I got a new job and I have this tattoo and it kind of ties into my Asian identity. Everyone's asking, "Oh what is your tattoo?" and I have been

explaining. That explaining of my background really made me realize like, I go to school

and I'm this version and I go home and work I'm my own, I'm different in a way. I feel

it's mainly the way I perceive myself. I feel like I can talk about my culture or you know

do things of my Asian traditions and go around and do that stuff openly outside of school.

I just feel like Mayfield is very blind to this stuff it's not because they're gonna hate it, I

just feel like it wouldn't be listened or acknowledged. (Interview, February 20, 2021)

Carmen and I are six years apart in age and I have the same feelings she has reflecting on how

she engages at home and at school. Even though no one directly "points out" that she is Asian,

there are ways to be aware of race without having to actually talk about it. I find this just as

problematic as not recognizing racial identity because in either instance the person of color is not

fully acknowledged.

From football to legacy families, the social hierarchy is established as groups of people

are treated as more deserving than others. Fiona's description of the town being a comfortable

bubble because the longer one stays in this setting, the more normal its traditions feel. With these

traditions including racism, it would be no surprise that after graduating Mayfield students of

color leave with internalized racism towards themselves and people of their ethnic community. It

is not until someone from outside of this environment draws attention to its practices that makes

one realize how problematic the culture is. This realization can also occur when students

themselves leave this environment and navigate their new sense of self beyond Mayfield.

Summary

There are types of racism that sometimes cannot be put into words. Asking participants

questions on navigating their racial identity in a predominately white high school aided in the

practice of sharing their lived experiences. The act of interviewing Mayfield students centers

their unique positionality as an adolescent in a rural, conservative, small town. The findings are guided by the research questions and organized in themes beginning with experiences of racial stereotyping. Each theme naturally builds upon one another as we then explore student to teacher relationships and how racial differences influence those interactions. Many of these excerpts exhibit how the way others see you will impact the way you see yourself. Participant testimonials continue to situate Donald Trump's presidency in their schooling, as well as how this small town's culture interact with the sociopolitical context.

In our conversations, participants exchanged with me their ideas on how their experiences at Mayfield came to be. They share specific incidents of racism throughout their education which exhibits how moments of discrimination are not easily forgotten. The environment of the town and school felt far removed from the rest of the world. Their priorities are not inclusive of the lived experiences of students of color, and are completely unengaged in the dialogue of race, racism, and racial identity. This act further ostracizes students of color from being their full selves and from being reflective in the curriculum.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research was based on the stories from people of color in majority white educational contexts. This is a space to hold, honor, and share the experiences of racism that adolescents bear. This is authentic and genuine dialogue that is missing from daily interactions. By making it to this point in the thesis, participants Carmen, Fiona and Jerome are recognized, as well as other people who have experienced similar situations. In collective solidarity, allow this final chapter to guide the continuous disruption of American education.

Discussion

Based on the findings, it is evident that students of color have an unparalleled high school experience in a primarily white, and politically conservative environments. The collection of interviews is CRT in practice through counter storytelling. Referring to Goessling (2018), CRT declares master narratives as stories that are based on racist ideologies while maintaining power and privilege for white people. The normalization of master narratives establish whiteness as a shared experience that everyone should compare themselves to. Because CRT exists in education to resist and counter racial narratives, it has made room for BIPOC to share their lived experiences as truth. Within the context of Donald Trump's presidency, this research connects current systems of inequity to historical oppression through each of the participants. Jaffe-Walter et. al (2019) debates on whether educators should participate in political discourse and has found silence to be interpreted by students of color as complicit to their oppression. In the case of Mayfield, some teachers were openly conservative or avoided conversations on race. This

inconsistency brings skepticism for BIPOC in school as they continue to feel isolated by teachers and campus climate.

Considering that the majority of teachers in the U.S. are white, teachers lack a sense of positionality when serving students of color. White teachers can project bias to students which influence expectations of youth of color and effects their success in school. Ullucci (2011) studied white teachers' level of cultural sensitivity and their participants shared similar experiences that students of color go through. Relatable situations such as poverty, immigration, and neighborhood demographics formed the white teacher's perception of students of color and the problems they may experience in school. Their proximity and involvement in communities of color allowed them to build relationships with their BIPOC students given their empathy for lived experiences rather than preying on their oppression.

Participants were asked if they see themselves reflected in the curriculum being taught, and to no surprise, they could not relate. Martin (2014) calls to reexamine textual relevancy of literature and class content. As teachers are expected to use certain text due to curriculum, they can take initiative to make it relevant to the students. For students to retain more information, it would be effective to engage with the content by tying subject matter to student realities. Especially for students of color, acknowledging race and racism in the classroom can be beneficial depending on the facilitation by the teacher. Under the master narrative, race is commonly seen as a problem BIPOC face and therefore excluding white people from the conversation. This then farther removes white people from blame and accountability if they believe that race is not their issue to deal with. Predominately white schools are less likely to intervene on racialized harassment. The Trump Effect as situated at Mayfield High is similar to what Cutler (2018) describes as the racist behaviors at school that mirror Trump's reoccurring

rhetoric; therefore, giving people and institutions permission to act the same. If students of color

did not already have negative views of themselves, they are more likely to under Trump's

administration in a town that supports his beliefs. This environment is then a disservice to

BIPOC and white students by isolating them from understanding how to interact with the

country's history and each other.

For the purpose of my research, every context was necessary to describe the impact each

space had with one another. Leonard (2011) applies psychologist Urie Brofenbrenner's (1979)

ecological systems theory to understand student to community relationships and its effect on

education experiences. Figure 1 illustrates the areas of influence upon student development.

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's nested relationships in a public school setting
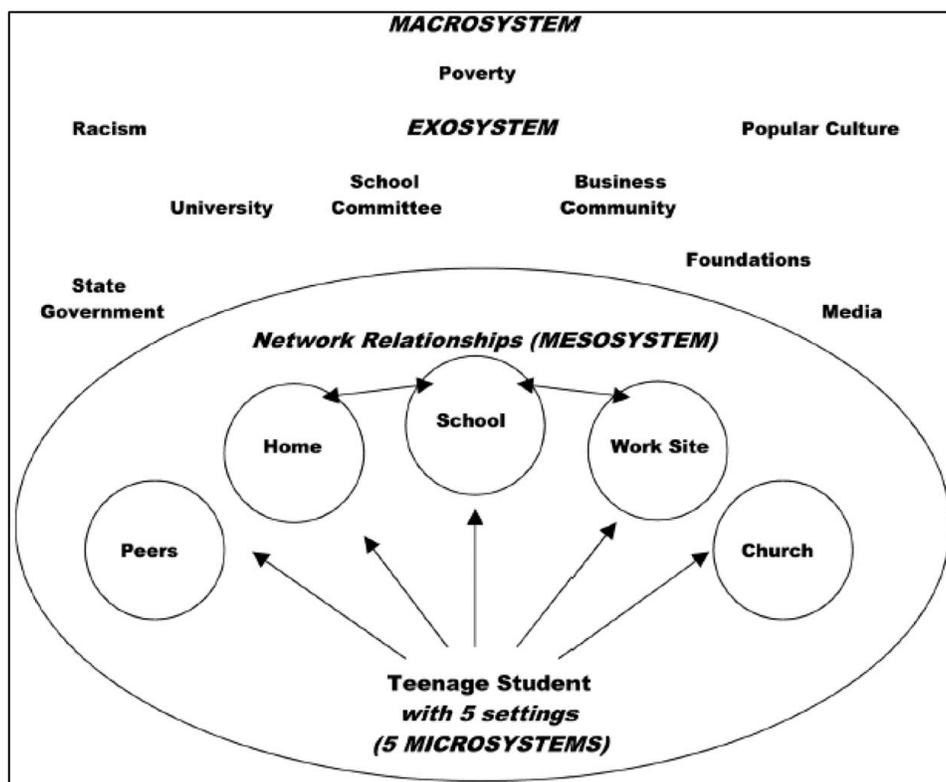
Within a mesosystem are a network of smaller microsystems such as peers, home, and work for

high school students that interact with one another. Students may have varying microsystems that

immediately influence their sense of self and how they go about their day to day lives. The exosystem are people or structures that indirectly involve a student's development such as social media and government. Lastly, the macrosystem is the "cultural and economic conditions of the society" (p. 990), within a chronosystem that situates time and context of all structures in relation to a student's development. For the participants in my research their network of relationships was reflective of Brofenbrenner's theory and situated within physical location and Donald Trump's presidency. I would add that systems described as indirect influence can inherently impact a person's development such as racism. The findings show that this is typically carried out by the network of relationships within home or school.

It is significant to bring attention to the fact that all participants were adopted with at least one white parent. This highlights future areas of study with the influence of white parental figures in raising a child of color in a predominately white environment. The three participants still provided substantial evidence to the research questions in navigating their racial identity in school. This makes me wonder how they were able to realize and recognize racial oppression, whether from their parents or positive peer groups. In conjunction, students may have heightened awareness of racial differences at school due to Trump's encouraging racist rhetoric.

The demographic of Mayfield High School reflects the population and values of the town. Its small town culture believes in a tight community and the dark side is it is rooted in racial stereotypes because people of color are considered the other. The town data is majority white and politically right-leaning which contributes to the Trump flags in people's homes and "Blue Lives Matter" themed merchandise sold at the school store. Although the small town sounds inviting, and it can be comforting to know everyone in the community, its actions show

otherwise. It is what the school and its educators say, or rather not say, that students of color interpret as they do not belong.

Conclusions

In connection to the literature, the findings show that Donald Trump's presidency had directly impacted the high school experience of students of color in a predominantly white school. White supremacy perpetrates a master narrative that people, specifically BIPOC, have to measure themselves to whiteness. In this case, ethnic minority students are unable to be their full selves due to racial stereotypes and narratives assigned to them. There is value put on skin color, types of food, and hair texture and students who do not subscribe to white features are ostracized. My time at Mayfield High was difficult because I spent most of my day at school and coming home to a different culture. Through my drive home I was able to tap into my "Chinese self" versus the white version of me that I put on as a front to guard myself from discrimination. In similar situations, all three participants had moments they felt out of place and generally unwelcomed. Not only did they attend a predominately white high school in a small conservative town, they obtained an education under the presidency of Donald Trump. This paper contributes to filling the gap of research on BIPOC youth. Most traditionally, students of color are studied in low income, urban locations, and neglect the analysis of BIPOC youth in academic spaces that are white and affluent. There exist data on white teacher impact on a majority BIPOC class population, but little research on white teacher impact in classrooms where BIPOC are the minority. In this case at Mayfield, participants found themselves to be the sole ethnic minority, or dark-skinned person in the room.

Without having conversations on race, students will have to define race and racism themselves if school and home do not provide this opportunity. This ambiguity can be dangerous

under the master narrative and can lead students to have internalized racism upon themselves and their ethnic community. CRT as an ideology and praxis is missing from rural locations which are typically dominated by white people. This disconnect from conversations on race allows white communities to be far removed from discussions on racism. The U.S. curriculum grants racism permission to flourish through the neglect and misrepresentation of BIPOC existence.

Although Trump is no longer in office, his influence has greater purpose to supporters that continue to hold his ideologies. Effective January 20, 2021, Joe Biden became the 46th President of the United States with eager determination to undo the damage Trump has inflicted. It is yet to be seen if the Biden presidency will continue to upload institutional white supremacy. Existing as a student, educator, and person of color under these systems is inherently a protest. Behaviors of racism in American education are inflicted through curriculum and normalized through teacher and peer relations without intervention. Students of color hold insight to how whiteness truly acts, and it is time they are given a platform to be heard.

Recommendations

I recognize the limitations of educators within public schooling due to standardized tests and state curricula. However, by making a genuine effort to contextualize the political environment teachers can obtain a learning space that is transformative. Teachers will need to take initiative to prepare students to be global citizens and active participants in their localized communities. I call upon educators to contextualize the history of the school and environment they physically reside in by considering who is being left behind. This is not only an investment in future leaders, these acts also contribute to a more equitable future. Schools can increase teacher representation in terms of ethnic background and shared experiences. Gershenson, Hart, Hyman, Lindsay, and Papageorge (2017) add that a teacher's race can be observable at hiring

and can reduce demographic gaps in education. The authors found with Black male students particularly, that being exposed to a Black teacher during elementary school increases college aspirations and educational attainment (p. 35). Being more intentional with hiring and increasing racial diversity does not solve racism in education. The small town where Mayfield is located does not have readily available educators of color, so a person of color should have a seat in the administration of a school and in a district wide role.

Within the classroom, teachers should give students more autonomy in their learning by giving BIPOC a platform in the curriculum without situating their struggles as the only thing about them. History, English, and Government are subjects that typically have opportunity to discuss race and the history of racism in America. Content that is commonly taught in these classes are surface level overviews of the Civil Rights Movement, and narratives written by white wealthy men. Empowering students to engage their personal connections with these subjects can allow them to be contributors to their own learning. Students can learn from each other and practice how to interact with topics of systemic oppression with the hope that it generalizes outside of school. White students need to know their role in racism and anti-racist work. For a town that has a minority population of people of color, white people do not have the space or experiences in interacting with BIPOC.

There are ways to disrupt the master narrative while making the reality of racism digestible for the structure of high school and through extracurriculars. The creation of clubs and organizations on campus are ways that students of color can gather and share lived experiences. Creating a Black Student Union (BSU), students in Lacey, Washington–a predominately white town–form a collective space founded in "education, outreach, representation, civic engagement and economic empowerment" (Ehrenhalt, 2019). Students confided in art teacher Christie Tran

in their anxieties around the 2016 presidential election and expressed their desires to learn about their own histories. In this union, Black students honor leaders that paved the progression towards Black liberation while practicing community organizing by demanding the district to mandate ethnic studies and restorative justice. It is in this group that students are empowered to share their voices, practice their passions and disrupt whiteness at school.

There are current achievements in progress for U.S. education and racial justice. The College Board has recently launched a new Advanced Placement (AP) course on the African diaspora (Kelley, 2020). This course allows flexibility for high school educators to teach the subject across cultural accomplishments, such as movies produced, led, and directed by Black people. The flexibility also holds opportunity for teachers to educate students on Black history on where the school is located. Differences between small rural towns and large cities can guide conversations on diaspora.

Researchers in education should be considering the contexts which can uniquely impact BIPOC and voice their experiences through academia. Much like this thesis, the goal is to alleviate the gap within published research by highlighting experiences of students of color in areas that are less populated by BIPOC such as rural and conservative towns. Situating this reality opens availability for different approaches in anti-racist education and CRT praxis. Historically, American schooling outlawed people of color from participating fully in education and acted as a colonizing space to westernize BIPOC. To this day, people of color face obstacles of gatekeeping in academia, whether it is financial or family obligations, or merely not knowing how to navigate a curriculum dominated by whiteness. There are already areas of opportunity for educators to enhance their teaching to counter the master narrative and empower students of color to honor their ancestry. So often students get dismissed, and I hope that this research

encourages people to acknowledge Black, Indigenous, and youth of color as valuable

contributors in education rather than victims.

APPENDIX

October 2, 2018

To High School Administration,

My name is Christina Ung, current undergraduate senior and alumni of 2015. My sister is a current Sophomore on campus. We would like to shine awareness on discrimination and harassment that happens on school grounds. Many of these happenings include prejudice against marginalized identities (i.e. gender nonconforming people, ethnic minorities, low socioeconomic status). I welcome open conversation and would enjoy working with the school to create a safer environment. My experience at school has been very beneficial and positive; moreover, there were experiences that have stuck with me since graduating. I bring these ideas up because the high school deserves to be as well adjusted as it perceives to be. I want to also emphasize that my Asian American identity is not the only one who has been questioned or mocked. Fellow alumni and friends of mine come from Mexican, Native, and/or Asian descent which their narratives and experiences have been shared to me, so I am aware that there is more than meets the eye.

I suggest education on interacting with minority populations – not just within the student body, but the faculty as well. Taken from the high school website, the population is 78.08% white. That statistic speaks volumes to the .41% African American or 1.43% Asian students, etcetera. What I experienced first hand is that my minority voice would not compare to speaking upon to my white classmates or majority white faculty. Ethnic identification is not the only area of question, but also how women identifying people are treated. Automatic inferiority is felt when faced with a population that does not understand their own privilege, plus the effects of microaggressions towards minority groups.

"Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs,

or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory,

or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group

membership."

- Derald Wing Sue Ph.D, Psychology Today

This is not a matter of just race, but also gender inclusivity. For example, I would hope that the

students are exposed to what it means to be "transgender" or the respect for nonbinary pronouns

such as "they/them." Although a minority identity, is an identity none the less. These ideas are

very new to our American culture and in order to keep up, we must cultivate a discourse that

includes all identities.

My goal as an educator and professional, which I hope is your goal as well, is to be an

ally for targeted groups that are least represented. This may include mandatory curriculum on

appreciating diversity or diversity/culture fairs - by people of identifying cultures to avoid

cultural appropriation. Culture also includes the hobbies and interests one has, so perhaps a day

to highlight something that is not football could do justice to minority groups. Another area of

concern is the lack of early exposure to sexual harassment education. I find the topic of sexual

harassment to be relevant to current news which students are bombarded with on the daily via

social media. Something that most if not all college universities have is mandatory sexual

harassment training through videos depicting role play and a quiz afterword. Moving forward,

[the program] is a great implementation to the diverse backgrounds walking on campus;

however, it is not enough. There is much systematic and institutionalized discrimination that

lacks critical analysis by the students, perhaps because the majority (White/Caucasian/European)

has not faced discrimination themselves. I find these terms and topics to be important for discussion as well as to be taught to students:

- Skin color (brown, melanin versus being tan)

- Ethnic features (Asian eye shape, Black people's hair)

- Intersectionality

- Stereotype threat

- Religion (not everyone identifies with a religion/spirit)

- Dynamics of privilege (white/light skinned, privilege to education, being able bodied)

- Gender inclusivity

I understand this is a lot to deconstruct, which I have been pondering for the last 3 years since graduating the high school. Much of this is a work in progress, but a conversation needed to be started. My overall desire is for respect and education to where sympathy and understanding can be built. It would be up to the students to change their perspectives, but it would be up to the school to start introducing discussion.

I hope you have reached the end of this letter with thoughtful consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me in any way; I thank you for your time and efforts in past, present, and future.

Christina Ung

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