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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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A Qualitative Study Exploring the Lived Experiences of Teachers of Color in Predominately
White K–12 Environments

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Torine S. Champion

September 2022

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Charles and Ida Thomas, who instilled in me a sense of cultural pride, social justice, and the importance of a good education. I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Richard, and my daughters, Amari, Alani, and Reagan, who encouraged me throughout this process. I would like to thank my family and friends. I am so grateful for all of your love and support. Each of you motivates me to become the best version of myself.

A special honorable thanks goes out to my ancestors. I stand on their shoulders because of their sacrifices and hard work.

This dissertation is in loving memory of my father, Charles Thomas, Sr., who gained his wings during my doctoral journey. I will love you always and forever, Daddy.

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I would like to thank teachers of color who are employed in predominately White K–12 schools. Thank you for your dedication and perseverance in serving our school communities. You are seen and valued. Your passion for educating our youth and collaborating with peers to ensure students receive quality learning experiences is appreciated. We need you. Our students need you. Keep shining!

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the lived experiences of teachers of color and identify commonalities within the lived experiences of teachers of color employed in predominately White K–12 schools. This study utilized interpretive phenomenological analysis as viewed through the White racial frame lens. There were 15 participants that were included in this research study. Participants were teachers of color with at least 5 years of teaching experience in predominately White K–12 environments. Data collection procedures included confidential virtual, semistructured interviews that included specific information the researcher wanted to explore. Six themes were revealed: (a) cultural advocacy, (b) congregating and derogatory comments, (c) lack of academic freedom, (d) lack of professional connectivity and microaggressions, (e) coping strategies while maintaining professionalism, and (f) political divide. The findings revealed that teachers of color build networks with other teachers of color, engage in self-advocacy and prayer, and choose to ignore microaggressions. Some participants decided to engage in race conversations to educate their White peers as a way of fostering understanding and empathy. While teachers of color were silenced and marginalized, they continued to maintain their professionalism in predominately White K–12 environments.

Keywords: racial microaggressions, teachers of color, Latino teachers, African American (and Black) teachers, Asian American teachers, racism, racial battle fatigue, White racial frame, teacher retention, job satisfaction, Brown v. the Board of Education, professional development, teacher preparation programs, race discussions

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Following the murder of George Floyd, my school district engaged in discussions to ensure that we were cultivating an inclusive environment. As a result, during a school board meeting, the board of trustees decided to draft a resolution condemning racism and discussed implementing policies to ensure that our district has equity-centered practices. This topic is especially crucial for teachers of color. A lack of equitable practices toward teachers of color can negatively impact their job satisfaction, affecting teacher retention (Olitsky, 2020). Teacher retention has been a consistent goal for school districts in the United States (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). However, teachers' racial makeup does not align with the number of diverse students in public schools (Endo, 2015; Swanson & Welton, 2019). For several years, diversifying the teaching profession has been an important goal (Amos, 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Sun, 2018). Nonetheless, barriers exist for teachers of color. As a result, they experience additional challenges that impact their job satisfaction (Kohli, 2019).

Every year, teachers decide to transfer to another campus or leave the teaching profession. Teachers of color retention rates vary by state, but the overall rate is less than 15% (Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019). Moreover, Asian American teachers represent only 1.4% of all teachers (Endo, 2015). The number of students of color continues to rise, but the number of teachers of color does not increase (Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019; Endo, 2015). Nonetheless, teachers of color positively affect student achievement and social-emotional wellness (Brooks & Watson, 2019). However, misconceptions about African American teachers' teaching abilities continue to jeopardize their campus experience (Madsen et al., 2019). These microaggressions and biases impact teachers' job satisfaction (Bristol, 2018). The fatigue causes them to leave the

profession. The retention rate for teachers of color is 24% higher than their White counterparts (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). These inequities negatively affect their job satisfaction.

The daily stressors of life as a teacher of color can take a toll on their wellness. Racial battle fatigue refers to the psychological and physiological impact of long-term exposure to racism on people of color (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Isolation, stereotypes, and marginalization negatively impact their campus experiences (Amos, 2016; Bristol, 2018). These experiences are harmful and emotionally draining to teachers of color (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Black male teachers reported feelings of loneliness and wanting to leave their campus. They cited gender isolation and poor relationships with colleagues as reasons for leaving (Bristol, 2018). Latino teachers share the same feelings of alienation. They revealed that they felt used because their workloads were heavier than their peers (Amos, 2016). These inequalities resulted in feelings of inadequacy because they did not feel valued. Teachers of color have a daily choice of ignoring microaggressions or addressing the unequal treatment (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020).

Teachers of color play a significant role in students' success. Their decision to leave their campus or the profession can negatively impact students and the campus. Achievement gaps exist between students of color and White students (Crawford & Fuller, 2017). Ensuring an ethnic match for students is beneficial for their growth (Bristol, 2018). Teachers of color can connect with students and serve as role models (Crawford & Fuller, 2017). They set high expectations for students and challenge them to excel. In addition, they can better understand their background, culture, and experiences (Endo, 2015). By 2026, students of color will account for up to 54% of all school-age students (Madsen et al., 2019). Therefore, efforts should be made to retain and support teachers of color.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers of color face marginalization and microaggressions that their White counterparts do not have to face. African American teachers experience microaggressions pathologizing their cultural values and communication styles, cultural or ethnic insensitivity, an ascription of their intelligence, and being treated as second-class citizens that are hurtful, undermining, and disparaging (Brown, 2019). Asian American teachers face gendered, racial, and sexualized expectations on their campuses (Endo, 2015). A study of Latina bilingual teachers revealed that they felt alienated from their colleagues, had larger workloads, and did not have access to available support (Amos, 2016). Teachers of color experience inequalities, microaggressions, and marginalization that impact their experiences as teachers (Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019; Endo, 2015).

District and school leaders understand the importance of cultivating an equitable environment. While this is the intention, the district is aware that a disconnect might exist. Previous research studies have found that teachers of color experience inequalities that impact their campus experience (Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019; Endo, 2015; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). However, there is a lack of understanding about the relationship between racial microaggressions, teachers' job satisfaction, and teacher retention. Additionally, systems should be implemented to help leaders cultivate a more inclusive environment for all (Brooks & Watson, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Swanson & Welton, 2019).

Professional development is essential in fostering inclusive environments (Brooks & Watson, 2019). School districts should provide leaders with tools and strategies that promote a supportive and inclusive school culture. The steps to design meaningful professional development opportunities for leaders will equip them with the skillset needed to foster an

equitable environment. As a result, teachers' job satisfaction and retention should improve (Brooks & Watson, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Swanson & Welton, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the lived experiences of teachers of color employed in predominately White K–12 schools. I conducted an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study to understand better their unique experiences, feelings, and thoughts about being a teacher of color. Virtual one-on-one interviews were conducted using purposive sampling to identify teachers.

Research Question

RQ1: How do teachers of color describe their lived experiences working in predominately White K–12 environments?

Definition of Key Terms

Equitable practices. Processes and steps taken to ensure the inclusion of marginalized individuals.

Marginalization. Marginalization refers to the treatment of a person and group as being insignificant.

Microaggressions. Microaggressions are verbal and nonverbal insults directed at people of color.

Racial battle fatigue. The psychological and physiological impact of long-term exposure to racism.

Teacher retention rate. The teacher retention rate refers to the proportion of teachers that remain at a school the following school year.

Teachers of color. Individuals employed as classroom teachers who identify as non-White include African American or Black, Hispanic or Latino/a, Asian American, Middle Eastern, Native American, and biracial people.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As stated in Chapter 1, teachers of color have experiences that impact their retention. They experience racism in the form of racial microaggressions that affect their job satisfaction.

Teacher retention is an issue that plagues many school districts. Teachers of color retention rates vary by state, but the overall retention rate is less than 15% (Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019). According to the Texas Education Agency, approximately 40% of teachers are teachers of color (Education Trust, 2020). The daily stressors of marginalization and racial microaggressions contribute to the lack of teachers of color (Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019; Endo, 2015). Previous studies have been conducted on teachers' experiences with microaggressions. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the relationship between racial microaggressions, teacher retention, and job satisfaction (Brooks & Watson, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Swanson & Welton, 2019). This dissertation will add to the discussion and provide leaders with the tools and strategies needed to cultivate an inclusive work environment.

This literature review provides a framework to discuss teacher retention through the lens of racial microaggressions and job satisfaction. Teachers of color enter the teaching profession to make a difference in students' lives and prepare them for their future (Amos, 2020; Burns Thomas, 2020; Sun, 2018). However, they experience challenges that impact their experiences as teachers. Consequently, they leave their campus or the profession due to racism (Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019; Endo, 2015; Sun, 2018). This chapter covers the White racial frame (WRF) as the theoretical framework, the importance of diversifying the teacher workforce, factors that impact teacher retention, which includes racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, and ways to cultivate an inclusive work environment. The literature review was organized to reflect how school leaders could implement practices that foster equity and improve teacher retention.

Literature Search Methods

I utilized the online resources available through the Margaret and Herman Brown Library at Abilene Christian University to conduct my literature review search. I searched for the following terms to locate articles: *racial microaggressions, teachers of color, Latino teachers, African American (and Black) teachers, Asian American teachers, racism, racial battle fatigue, White racial frame, teacher retention, job satisfaction, Brown v. the Board of Education, professional development, teacher preparation programs, and race discussions*. The results derived from my research allowed me to select books and scholarly research articles that aligned with my research study.

Theoretical Lens Discussion

Teachers of color face difficulties navigating within a White racial frame, an in-group superiority, and out-group inferiority (Amos, 2020). Feagin (2013) described WRF as a view that centralizes whiteness as the dominant frame. This Eurocentric view creates inequalities between White people and people of color (Feagin, 2013). Consequently, people of color are oppressed. The WRF operates at the unconscious level in the minds of White people because it is ingrained in every facet of their lives. In addition, it is embedded in various structures and institutions and is connected to their privilege and power (Amos, 2020; Chubbuck, 2004). White ability is considered the norm for everyone (Chubbuck, 2004). As a result, people of color struggle with navigating within this frame. They try to fit in but cannot do so because it is not aligned with their cultural experiences and background.

The racism and racial microaggressions experienced by teachers of color are a result of the WRF. This narrow and oppressive view perpetuates stereotypes and hinders progress toward inclusion. Furthermore, it negatively impacts teachers of color and their white colleagues (Amos,

2020). Therefore, there must be antiracist counter-frames that people of color develop to combat racism and racist views. Counter-framing provides them with a way to share their stories and promote a multiracial work environment that values everyone (Feagin, 2013). Thus, it is crucial to decenter whiteness and promote diversity and inclusion in all educational work environments (Toure & Thompson Dorsey, 2018). Amos (2020) used WRF to examine the relationship between Latina teachers and their White counterparts. Moreover, WRF was used to analyze the study's findings. Feagin and Cobas (2008) investigated WRF in relation to the Latino experience and utilized it during their exploratory analysis and methodology. Likewise, I used WRF to influence my research methods and to analyze the results of this study.

Literature Review

Theories on the White Racial Frame

Studies have been conducted on the impact of WRF on minority groups. Toure and Thompson Dorsey (2018) discovered that school leaders operated within a WRF when they interacted with minority groups in their school community. Leaders perpetuated stereotypes when engaging with students, teachers, and parents. They felt that minority parents were less involved in their students' lives and believed that African American students needed to conform to a WRF. Amos (2020) shared that Latino students were stereotyped for their language acquisition and behavior. They were viewed as inferior to White students. School leaders and nonminority teachers viewed Whiteness as the dominant frame to what one is compared. Latina teachers felt alienated and unappreciated by their colleagues (Amos, 2020). The teachers believed their White colleagues thought their teaching skills were subpar when compared to their abilities. Thus, WRF impacts teachers of color and their experience on campuses.

Diversifying the Teacher Workforce

The population of our nation continues to evolve, and the number of students of color increases. Researchers contend that students of color will make up 54% of the K–12 school-age population by 2026 (Madsen et al., 2019). These projections have created an urge to hire and retain more teachers of color to meet the need of the changing demographics. District leaders across the country understand the importance of diversifying the workforce to meet the needs of students (Grooms et al., 2021). A cultural match between students and teachers has resulted in higher engagement and motivation and improved reading and math scores (Darwich, 2021; Rasheed et al., 2020). Additionally, teachers of color serve as role models for all students, and students benefit from them (Darwich, 2021). However, teachers of color experience challenges that impact their experience on campuses.

Racism in Education

Racism is an unfortunate part of the fabric of this nation, defined as beliefs, acts, and attitudes that belittle individuals or groups of people because of their ethnic affiliation (Clark et al., 1999). The decision of the 1954 case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, resulted in the displacement of African American teachers because White parents did not want their children educated by them (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). These prejudices resulted in a reduction in teachers of color. More than 38,000 African American teachers and school leaders lost their positions (Holmes, 1990). Many students never experience being taught by a teacher of color, which can impact their socioemotional development and academic achievement (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Darwich, 2021). While *Board v. Board of Education* was a landmark case that desegregated schools, it also reduced teachers of color in the workforce. This impact encouraged the narrative

that teachers of color were not as effective as White teachers. These judgments continue to plague teachers of color.

White teachers might have values and beliefs about children of color that affect their quality of education. For example, some White teachers have referred to minority students as “those kids” and blamed their families for factors beyond their control (Boske, 2015, p. 131). These statements and thoughts can hinder students from achieving in class. Moreover, they can impact their socioemotional well-being. For example, African American male students reported being targeted by teachers and administrators. They shared that they are blamed for things they did not do and that the school staff was judgmental and uncaring (Webster & Knaus, 2021). Native American students have experienced tokenism on campuses. They experience stereotypes about where they live and are unable to relate to teachers or their peers. In addition, they feel silenced and ignored (Hunt et al., 2020). Latino students hear “jokes” about cleaning houses, while Asian students are asked about the types of food they consume (Shields, 2019). Students of color are plagued with racist comments and rhetoric that affect them. Today, school systems understand the importance of having a diverse teaching staff and teachers’ impact on all students. Consequently, schools are working to recruit and retain more teachers of color.

Recruitment Practices for Teachers of Color

School districts are making efforts to recruit and retain teachers of color. The changing demographics of students have created a need for an ethnic match (Rasheed et al., 2020). In addition, the social unrest that has resulted from recent events has created a sense of urgency (Davis, 2021). Teachers of color can help foster empathy for cultural differences and facilitate race discussions. Moreover, teacher diversity can benefit students who experience frustrations at school, isolation, and fatigue (Carver-Thomas, 2018). African American male teachers have been

heavily recruited because of the connections that they can make with African American boys (Turaga, 2020). Moreover, teachers of color can serve as role models and help them navigate challenges (Brooms, 2020). Many Latino teachers have been recruited through paraprofessional pools, and being bilingual provides them with an added advantage (Amos, 2016). They can communicate with new arrival students, emerging English language learners, and their parents. Consequently, they can make connections that help them foster relationships. Teachers of color provide students with unique experiences that are beneficial to their growth and development.

Factors That Impact Teacher Retention

Every year, teachers decide to transfer to another campus or leave the teaching profession. While turnover rates vary from state to state, the teaching profession's turnover rates are higher than in other occupations (Bressman et al., 2018). Researchers assert that approximately 50% of teachers leave within their first 5 years in the profession (Redding et al., 2019). In addition, teachers of color have higher attrition rates than White teachers (Texas Education Agency, 1996). Thus, various factors impact teacher retention.

School Leadership. Principals' behaviors play a significant role in teacher retention. Teachers cite principals' ineffectiveness and lack of support as reasons for leaving campus and the profession (Holmes et al., 2019). As the campus leader, principals are expected to provide their school's vision, support, and plan. Consequently, teachers look to them for guidance. Often, principals are inundated with other pressures, and teachers are neglected in the process. When principals focus on authentic student success and support teachers' professional development, teachers are more likely to stay at the school (Holmes et al., 2019). The lack of support that teachers of color endure negatively impacts them.

School leaders have criticized the way that African American teachers interact with their students. Olitsky (2020) asserted that African American teachers could not emotionally connect with their students naturally. Instead, leaders wanted them to interact with their students in a way that felt inauthentic. This identity conflict and mismatch between the school structure and teachers' professional identity impacted their job satisfaction and retention (Olitsky, 2020). Moreover, teachers of color cite a lack of support and access to professional growth opportunities (Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019). The lack of mentoring and coaching opportunities made them feel unsupported, unprotected, and marginalized (Brown, 2019). Endo (2015) revealed that White leaders were unaware that their actions and inactions contributed to teachers' dissatisfaction.

Brooks and Watson (2019) revealed that administrators should understand race issues and use them to inform their leadership. However, racial discussions are discouraged at schools, and maintaining the status quo is encouraged (Swanson & Welton, 2019). As a result, leaders are ill-equipped to discuss racial inequalities related to students of color disciplinary data. Recruiting teachers of color can help facilitate these discussions. In addition, efforts should attract more diverse teachers into school spaces to share insights and address concerns (Swanson & Welton, 2019). Often, measures taken to foster equitable practices have been hindered. As a result, teachers of color decide to leave their campus or the teaching field. Some White principals have attempted to lead race discussions but did not feel prepared or successful in teaching them. Moreover, they received resistance and were unsure how to proceed (Boske, 2015; Brooks & Watson, 2019; Swanson & Welton, 2019). Therefore, school leaders should prioritize diversifying their staff and adopting more inclusive practices.

Racial Microaggressions. Microaggressions are subtle, verbal, and nonverbal insults directed at people of color (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Pierce et al., 1977; Turaga, 2020). They can be intentional or unintentional (Dalton & Villagran, 2018; Turaga, 2020). Microaggressions include targeting a person of color who looks different, ascribing intelligence, and overcriticizing (Turaga, 2020). Additionally, there are various types of microaggressions. Microassaults refer to intentional acts that are harmful to people of color. Microinsults are subtly but harmful comments about marginalized people. Microinvalidations seek to invalidate the experiences of people of color (Dalton & Villagran, 2018; Turaga, 2020). Nonetheless, all microaggressions are harmful to teachers of color (Brown, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Turaga, 2020). They contribute to hostile work environments, devalue social group identities, and lower work productivity (Dalton & Villagran, 2018).

Asian Americans have been impacted by microaggressions in the workplace as well. They have reported feeling invisible and ignored when they offer comments (Kim & Cooc, 2021). Moreover, they share that their contributions are often taken from them, and someone else receives credit for their work. In addition, they are often passed over for leadership roles (Kim & Cooc, 2021). Asian Americans experience overvaluations, which are microaggressions based on positive stereotypes, like aptitude for math and a strong work ethic (Kim & Cooc, 2021). Asian American women are more prone to microaggressions than men (Endo, 2015). They are considered hypersexualized, domesticated, and easy to please. These assertions are problematic and belittling.

Latino teachers are often marginalized and alienated by their peers. Teachers did not have collaborative work relationships with their White colleagues (Amos, 2016, 2020). They have weak professional networks and are often isolated and given larger workloads (Amos, 2020).

Moreover, they contend that they experience unequal power relations, lack access to leadership opportunities, and feel silenced (Amos, 2016). Teachers shared that their status as bilingual teachers hindered them from improving their power position (Amos, 2016). While their Spanish language skills and cultural knowledge helped them build relationships with Latino students, their skills negatively impacted their relationships with nonminority teachers (Amos, 2020). As a result, Latino teachers shared that their nonminority colleagues responded with emotionally driven responses like microaggressions, sabotage, and surveillance. Teachers did not feel appreciated, valued, or understood, which led to a hostile work environment (Amos, 2020).

African American teachers encounter microaggressions as well. African American men try to conform to White masculine norms for self-preservation and protection (Turaga, 2020). African American male and female teachers find themselves working twice or three times as hard as their nonminority counterparts while ignoring microaggressions (Brown, 2019; Pitcan et al., 2018). They believe that their performance must be exemplary to maintain positive representations for all African Americans (Brown, 2019; Pitcan et al., 2018). African American men often face isolation because they are feared. Consequently, they decide to leave their campus because of the racial tension (Bristol, 2018). African American females feel invisible as women and African Americans (Pitcan et al., 2018). These events impact their job satisfaction and campus experiences (Brown, 2019; Pitcan et al., 2018).

Teachers of color have encountered microaggressions regarding their intelligence, competence, and capabilities (Bristol, 2018; Brown, 2019; Endo, 2015). They feel trapped in these negative stereotypes and are unsure how to address them. These microaggressions can occur multiple times a day (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Often, the perpetrators of microaggressions are unaware of their acts, which adds to the frustration level of teachers of color (Brown, 2019).

They are not cognizant of how they perpetuate whiteness, which seeks to uphold and center practices that reinforce White dominance over society (Swanson & Welton, 2019). Teachers of color had to face White teachers with lighter workloads, support access, and professional growth opportunities. The complacency of White school leaders was harmful to teachers of color. These incidents can have harmful effects on teachers of color (Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2006).

Racial Battle Fatigue. Teachers of color accrue emotional and psychological damage when attempting to perform, strive, and achieve in an environment that perpetuates Whiteness (Acuff, 2018). Racial battle fatigue refers to stress from racial microaggressions that impact people of color's physical, emotional, and mental well-being (Smith et al., 2006). Moreover, it includes the energy spent addressing and fighting microaggressions (Martin, 2015). These daily stressors can lead to exhaustion, high blood pressure, anger, and hypervigilance (Smith et al., 2007).

Teachers have reported varying experiences with racial battle fatigue. They shared that they were always on high alert for the subsequent racist encounter (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). This leads to feelings of hopelessness and depression. Teachers revealed that they experienced hypertension and problems eating and sleeping (Acuff, 2018; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Pizarro and Kohli (2020) shared that one teacher of color experienced a nervous breakdown due to the constant battles. Acuff (2018) shared that she was depressed, irrational, and had migraines and anxiety. She began to dread the career that she once loved. The ongoing stress of racism and racial microaggressions impact their well-being.

While teachers of color face discrimination and microaggressions in school, they remain committed to ensuring that students of color are in supportive and encouraging environments (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Unfortunately, this happens to the detriment of their wellness. Teachers

reported pressure to combat racism at their schools because they wanted the change to occur (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Moreover, they understand their job as role models for students of color (Bristol, 2018; Crawford & Fuller, 2017). Teachers of color may share the same culture, background, and experiences as their students, allowing teachers to connect with them differently than their White peers (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Endo, 2015). As a result, these teachers can serve as a safe space for students of color, and they can facilitate race discussions that promote tolerance and help students navigate multicultural environments (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020).

Combating Racism and Racial Microaggressions in Educational Work Environments

Professional Development

Leaders and teachers should engage in professional development to reduce microaggressions and racism. Participating in professional development opportunities to increase cultural awareness can change their mindset and behavior (Brooks & Watson, 2019). There are several books, research articles, speakers, and courses that can lead to enlightenment. Coles-Ritchie and Smith (2017) asserted that professional development should include learners of color lived experiences and examine the school context. This will allow for relevance and practical application. Well-designed professional development opportunities will foster more equitable and inclusive environments and improve collegial relationships (Brooks & Watson, 2019; Coles-Ritchie & Smith, 2017; Mayfield, 2020).

Race Discussions. Leaders, teachers, and support staff should engage in race discussions. Discussing race can evoke different feelings, but it is essential to fostering understanding and empathy (Mayfield, 2020). Practices should be developed to normalize the discomfort and encourage vulnerability. Mayfield (2020) recommended the following:

- Establish norms for communication.
- Utilize safe spaces to create a supportive environment for engaging in race discussions.
- Define terms for participants to ensure that everyone uses the same operational definitions.
- Be aware of triggering language and regulate your emotions.
- Adopt a practice that includes a balance of different voices.
- Focus on how the conversations can lead to equitable change for students and staff.
- Build knowledge by reading articles, newspapers, and books.
- Consider using a conversation protocol during the discussion.
- Evaluate the discussion to evaluate the protocol and improve the process.

Race discussions can heighten self-awareness because transformative learning occurs, allowing learners to self-reflect and examine their own biases (Hutchins & Goldstein Hode, 2021; Mayfield, 2020).

Leadership Development. District leaders are among the most crucial people that can positively affect change that fosters inclusive and equitable practices. Teachers and administrators revealed that change is essential to addressing racism in schools (Brooks & Watson, 2019). Leaders can engage in ongoing learning to ensure that staff is sensitive to racial pretexts, context, and posttexts (Brooks & Watson, 2019). Utilizing a transformative sensory curriculum could better equip leaders to address equity, justice, and racism. It could help them make sense of who they are in the world (Boske, 2015).

Moreover, leaders engage in discussions that include self-reflection, which impacts changing their beliefs about social relations. Hutchins and Goldstein Hode (2021) shared that

communication plays a pivotal role in changing viewpoints. Leaders gain self-awareness and empathy by participating in these activities. Their participation could improve their interactions with diverse populations.

Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher education programs prepare all teachers to participate actively in a diverse workforce (Kohli, 2019). Therefore, programs should include coursework on racism, equity, and diversity (Brown, 2019). The courses could help future teachers and leaders understand how microaggressions and unconscious biases impact teachers of color and students of color. Moreover, they could discuss equitable and inclusive practices within organizations (Brown, 2019). This could have a significant impact on combatting racism and working toward solutions. Kohli (2019) contended that future educators should address racism as a collective group because it shows that they might not transform a system alone. Also, programs should offer critical theory access to allow future educators to gain insights from theorists of color. Thus, enhancing teacher preparation curricula could improve the school's culture, collegial relationships, and teachers' job satisfaction (Brown, 2019; Kohli, 2019; Pearce, 2019).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the literature on teachers of color, racism and racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, and ways to cultivate an inclusive work environment. The literature review discussed the available research and highlighted areas lacking, including an investigation into the relationship between teachers of color, racial microaggressions, and job satisfaction. Thus, time should be spent examining this issue and fostering more equitable practices that lead to teacher attrition. In addition, providing leaders with professional

development that can provide them with the tools to cultivate a supportive and equitable culture could improve job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of teachers of color employed in predominately White K–12 schools. It examined their experiences as teachers of color and how those experiences in predominately White environments impacted their job satisfaction and retention. Their interactions with others can be harmful and cause them to leave their campus or the teaching profession (Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019; Endo, 2015). There was limited research conducted on this crucial topic. This research study examined the lived experiences of teachers using personal interviews, which allowed me to understand better their unique experiences, feelings, and thoughts about being a teacher of color. The findings from this study can be utilized to develop a framework that can enhance leadership development curricula, which can equip district and school leaders with information that will help them implement more inclusive and equitable practices. The following research question guided this study:

RQ1: How do teachers of color describe their lived experiences working in predominately White K–12 environments?

Research Design and Method

This qualitative research study utilized IPA as viewed through the WRF lens. IPA is a research method used to understand individuals' lived experiences through detailed accounts (Smith et al., 2009). This approach allowed me to examine how teachers make meaning of various encounters on their campuses. Moreover, it enabled me to get a detailed account and understanding of their individual day-to-day experiences (Smith & Nizza, 2022). WRF best explains the difficulties teachers of color experience navigating an in-group majority and out-group inferiority (Amos, 2020; Feagin, 2013). Therefore, this qualitative study better helped me understand their unique experiences, feelings, and thoughts about racial microaggressions.

My goal was to understand teachers of color experiences in predominately White K–12 environments. Thus, a phenomenological approach allowed me to interact with teachers and learn about their campus experiences (Alase, 2017). This study focused on teachers’ personal stories and narratives regarding experiences in their work environment. Phenomenology allowed me to examine this phenomenon by hearing first-hand accounts from teachers of color that experienced it.

IPA was utilized during this research study and enabled me to examine how teachers interpret their lived experiences (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Nizza, 2022). Teachers were able to share their experiences without any repercussions (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) contended that IPA includes a double hermeneutic, including the participants’ perception of their lived experiences and the researcher’s effort to interpret those experiences. IPA allowed me to gain insights into teachers’ campus experiences.

Population

The participants were teachers of color with at least 5 years of teaching experience in predominately White K–12 school settings. The teachers of color were purposefully selected and employed in public school districts around the nation. The study participants served as public school teachers with at least 5 years of experience. Most of the participants were either members of the Facebook groups “National Alliance of Black School Educators” or “Houston Area Alliance of Black School Educators.” In addition, snowball sampling was used to locate other participants based on their role, ethnicity, and experience. The population helped me gain unique insights about their experiences as teachers working in predominately K–12 White environments.

Study Sample

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants intentionally based on their experience and position (Gentles et al., 2015). I posted a recruitment invitation in the groups that explained the research topic, specific inclusion or exclusion criteria, expectations, and timeline. The post indicated the selection criteria for participants: teachers of color with at least 5 years of experience. In addition, teachers selected were employed in predominately White school settings. I interviewed a minimum of 10 teachers of color. Smith and Nizza (2022) asserted that small sample sizes should be utilized to allow for comparisons and identify themes. IPA focuses on participants' detailed accounts of their lived experiences. Moreover, there is a heightened focus on the data quality over a higher number of participants (Smith et al., 2009).

Materials and Instruments

Participants were located at different locations; therefore, interviews were conducted via Zoom. As the researcher, I cultivated a safe environment that fostered mutual respect and trust (Chenail, 2011). Consequently, participants shared their lived experiences in predominately White schools. IPA allowed participants to provide detailed, first-person accounts of their lived experiences. IPA enables them to reflect on their experiences and express themselves in a judgment-free way (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Smith and Nizza (2022) asserted that in-depth interviews are the most common way to gather information for IPA. Interviews should be conversational to allow the conversation to flow organically.

Moreover, an interview guide was developed to help steer the conversation (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Crafting an interview guide allowed me to be more prepared by reflecting on the interview process. In addition, it enabled me to design the interview questions logically to help

me manage uncomfortable moments (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Nizza, 2022). As the instrument, I used open-ended questions to explore teachers of color experiences with racial microaggressions and how it impacted their job satisfaction and retention. Interview questions included descriptive and narrative questions that allowed for reflection and provided participants with opportunities to share their experiences (see Appendix A). The interview questions were arranged in an increasingly specific way (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Nizza, 2022). The interview protocol (see Appendix A) consisted of six interview questions and four demographic questions. Each interview question was aligned with my research question (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data Collection

Prior to collecting data, I obtained permission to conduct the study from Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix B). An initial invitation and the consent letter were emailed to teachers of color who are members of the Facebook groups National Alliance of Black School Educators and Houston Area Alliance of Black School Educators. In addition, snowball sampling was used to locate other participants based on their role, ethnicity, and experiences. I scheduled appointments with all teachers of color who accepted the invitation and met the selection criteria. A copy of the interview protocol was sent to the participants for their convenience, along with an embedded link to a private Google form to capture their demographic information. In addition, an email was sent to them, which included the anticipated timeline for the study, a timeframe to schedule their interview, the virtual meeting protocol, and interview length. Before conducting interviews, informed consent was obtained.

Virtual, semistructured interviews were utilized to allow participants to share their experiences in their own words to gain insights about their experiences on predominately White K–12 campuses. Interviews are viewed as a way to learn about a given topic (Chenail, 2011). Moreover, semistructured interviews allowed the interview to be guided by the question. Each interview question was aligned with the research question and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Consequently, participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded. If a participant did not sign the form, they were excluded from the study. Each participant who signed the consent form was given a signed copy for their records. I will destroy all files and hard copies a year after the study is concluded using a digital shredding program. Participants did not receive any incentives. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was recorded, transcribed, and shared with participants.

Participants and Selection Criteria. The participants for this study were teachers of color currently or previously employed in K–12 predominantly White environments and were either members of the Facebook groups National Alliance of Black School Educators or Houston Area Alliance of Black School Educators. The groups allowed me access to teachers of color that fit the description needed for my participants. In addition, snowball sampling was used to locate other participants based on their role, ethnicity, and experience. The teachers of color identified provided unique insights about their experiences as teachers in predominately White environments.

Data Analysis

Smith and Nizza (2022) shared that verbatim transcripts should be generated following each interview. The transcript included everything mentioned by the participants and myself. During transcription, I anonymized participants' responses and replaced their names with

pseudonyms. Additionally, participants had the option of reviewing their interview transcript to ensure accuracy. The audio files, transcripts, and paperwork will remain on my computer (protected by a password) for 3 years and then the data will be digitally shredded.

I used fundamental principles in IPA to analyze the research data (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Nizza, 2022). IPA requires researchers to utilize an idiographic and inductive approach, which includes analyzing each participant's data on its own (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Specific steps were followed (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

1. I organized and prepared the data for analysis. This included transcripts from virtual interviews.
2. The data was reviewed to formulate general ideas from each participant's interview.
3. The data were coded, and all findings were grouped into sections based on similar responses from participants.
4. Categories were generated based on themes found within the analysis of transcripts for each participant.
5. A narrative was created to explain the similarities in responses from the participants.
6. Similar themes were generated to answer the identified research question for this study.
7. The coding process was utilized to identify recurring patterns based on the participants' lived experiences.
8. I determined how each theme would be identified within the study.
9. The data collected were interpreted and analyzed for the study.

Ethical Considerations

Steps were taken to ensure this study was ethical. Prior to conducting the study, I obtained approval from Abilene Christian University's IRB (see Appendix B). Moreover, I submitted an application detailing my research study plans and ensured that all participants signed an IRB-approved consent form. The consent form included the details of the study and was signed by participants. Each participant was treated with respect throughout the study. Likewise, I demonstrated integrity and trustworthiness during each step of the process. I used pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities, and their data was (and is) stored in Google Drive, which included privacy settings. No one had (or will have) access to participants' files. Participants were recruited via two Facebook groups (National Alliance of Black School Educators and Houston Area Alliance of Black School Educators). In addition, snowball sampling was used to locate other participants based on their role, ethnicity, and experience. Virtual interviews were conducted using Zoom, and the interviews were recorded using Zoom's recording system. The data will be digitally shredded using a data service after 3 years following the research study's conclusion.

Assumptions

The assumptions of the study included the following:

1. It was assumed that teachers of color had experienced racism and racial microaggressions in school settings (Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019; Endo, 2015).
2. The current study sought to obtain insights into teachers of color lived experiences; therefore, it was assumed that participants would provide truthful and accurate responses.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the following:

1. This study was limited to teachers of color with at least 5 years of teaching experience.
2. I had to depend on the availability and access of participants chosen to participate in the study.
3. As the primary instrument for this study, I was objective, organized, and informed of the data collected.
4. The data collected was based on individual teacher interviews.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were included in this study:

1. The study only included teachers of color from a specific Facebook group.
2. Each participant was asked the same set of interview questions.
3. Participants' responses were analyzed in the same manner.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers of color that work in predominately White K–12 schools. This chapter detailed the research design and methodology of an IPA, which was informed by WRF. Participants signed consent forms. Moreover, interviews were utilized to learn about teachers' experiences, and methods were used to ensure that the results were credible and reliable (Smith & Nizza, 2022). As a researcher, I used procedures that are crucial in ensuring that the study was conducted in an ethical manner.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I presented the findings of this study, *A Qualitative Study Exploring the Lived Experiences of Teachers of Color in Predominately White K–12 Environments*. The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of teachers of color employed in predominately White K–12 schools. Also, this study sought to identify commonalities among participants. This research is important because it seeks to help leaders foster a more inclusive work environment for teachers of color. Within this chapter, I provide an overview of the participants involved in this study. Following the participant overview, I provide emergent themes from the data revealed based on the interviews presented in the words of the participants with summary paragraphs and introductory quotes. Previous studies revealed that teachers of color experience microaggressions that can impact their job satisfaction and other effects previously mentioned in Chapter 2, which is consistent with this study of 15 teachers of color.

The teachers of color in this study represent African American and Hispanic teachers of color that teach in predominately White K–12 environments. Semistructured interviews were conducted to explore the lived experiences of teachers of color to answer the following research question:

RQ1: How do teachers of color describe their lived experiences working in predominately White K–12 environments?

It was crucial that I set aside any personal biases, experiences, and preconceived notions about the research topic to complete the interview process. Participants were asked six demographic questions and seven semistructured questions. I utilized additional probing within discussions for clarification. Following each interview, member checking was conducted to ensure the accuracy of transcribed interviews.

Participants

The following descriptions provide details about each participant's background based on information obtained from the Google form sent to participants prior to each interview.

Participant 1 is an African American female teacher who teaches seventh grade in a suburban school district. She has been a teacher for 19 years.

Participant 2 is an African American male teacher with 9 years of teaching experience in a rural school district. He has taught sixth to 12th graders.

Participant 3 is an African American female teacher with 20 years of experience teaching in urban and suburban school settings. She is a middle school teacher.

Participant 4 is an African American female teacher with 19 years of teaching experience in a suburban school district. She is an eighth-grade teacher.

Participant 5 is currently an African American teacher with 13 years of teaching experience in a suburban school district. She has taught seventh and eighth grades.

Participant 6 is an African American teacher with 20 years of experience in urban school settings. She was a high school teacher.

Participant 7 is an African American teacher with 8 years of experience teaching in a suburban school district. She has taught fifth grade through eighth grade.

Participant 8 is an African American teacher with 8 years of experience teaching in suburban and rural school districts. She has taught sixth through eighth grades.

Participant 9 is an African American teacher with 7 years of experience teaching in a suburban school district. She has taught fifth through seventh grades.

Participant 10 is a female Hispanic teacher with 21 years of experience in a rural school district. She is a sixth-grade teacher.

Participant 11 is a female African American teacher with 10 years of experience teaching in a suburban school district. She has taught seventh and eighth graders.

Participant 12 is a female African American teacher with 6 years of experience teaching in a suburban school district. She has taught sixth through eighth grade.

Participant 13 is a female African American with 14 years of experience teaching in a suburban school district. She has taught sixth, ninth, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades.

Participant 14 is a female African American teacher with 20 years of experience teaching in an urban school district. She has taught ninth through 12th grade.

Participant 15 is a female African American teacher with 13 years of experience. She has one year of experience teaching in a suburban school district and 12 years of experience in an urban school district. She has taught third and fifth grades.

Table 1 provides a summary of participant information.

Table 1*Meet the Participants*

Participant (unique identifier)	State	Years teaching	Grade level	Gender	Community
1	Texas	19	Seventh Grade	Female	Suburban
2	Texas	9	Ninth–12th Grades	Male	Rural
3	Texas	20	Sixth–Eighth Grades	Female	Urban
4	Texas	19	Eighth Grade	Female	Suburban
5	Texas	13	Seventh–Eighth Grades	Female	Suburban
6	Colorado	20	Ninth–12th Grades	Female	Urban
7	Texas	8	Fifth–Eighth Grades	Female	Suburban
8	Texas	8	Sixth–Eighth Grades	Female	Suburban
9	Texas	7	Fifth–Seventh Grades	Female	Urban and Suburban
10	Texas	21	Sixth Grade	Female	Rural
11	Texas	10	Seventh–Eighth Grades	Female	Suburban
12	Texas	6	Sixth–Eighth Grades	Female	Suburban
13	Texas	14	Sixth, Ninth–12th Grades	Female	Suburban
14	California	20	Ninth–12th Grades	Female	Urban
15	Texas	13	Third and Fifth Grades	Female	Suburban

Note. Participants' demographic information was obtained from the Interview Protocol (see Appendix A).

The Interview Process

The 15 participants included in this study shared their lived experiences in confidential, semistructured interviews using the Zoom conference platform. Each participant received a link and password for their interview. The interview protocol included six demographic questions and seven open-ended questions, which are aligned with the research question. Each interview was recorded and only consisted of the participant and myself in a private Zoom conferencing session. Following the interviews, the audio from each Zoom interview was transcribed into textual data utilizing NoNotes transcription services. I emailed participants a copy of the transcript that included the interview questions and their responses to check for accuracy, referred to as member checking. Consequently, the data were coded and analyzed for recurring patterns and themes.

During the interview process, each participant was transparent and honest about their experiences. A few participants shared experiences with racial microaggressions that recently occurred prior to the interview. Two participants disclosed that they left their campuses due to racism and racial microaggressions they experienced. Participants did not acknowledge that I was a viable candidate for the study, and I remained unbiased during the process.

Data Analysis and Themes

Themes were developed based on participants' responses during the interviews. Some participants were not included in the findings, and not all were utilized to determine recurring themes. Thus, some responses were omitted and considered outliers. Participants shared their lived experiences as teachers working in a K–12 predominately White environment. The information obtained from the interviews was used to answer the research question previously

discussed in this chapter. The following topics represent the recurring themes that emerged from the participants' interview responses.

Theme 1: Cultural Advocacy

Teachers of color were asked to describe their experiences being a teacher of color on a predominately White campus. Based on their responses, the following was revealed as recurring themes. Teachers of color are (a) cultural advocates for students of color and (b) intentional about muting their mannerisms. Participants shared that they are often given students of color and students of low socioeconomic status because it is assumed they can easily relate to them. This often leads to a larger workload. Some participants take on roles that allow them to advocate for students of color. They sponsor clubs and want to offer a safe space for students of color. Many participants shared that they have observed their peers give harsher behavioral consequences to students of color. Thus, teachers of color foster authentic connections with students and provide them with a sense of cultural pride. A notable mention was that a few participants stated that they focus on building authentic relationships with students and parents. They want them to feel comfortable asking questions and being involved in their child's education.

Participant 1 shared:

During the election, I will never forget I had one thing that happened. When Beyoncé sung [sang] at the inauguration, one of the White male teachers was just so bitter. He was saying things to his students, Black students, which would be inappropriate and below the belt. He mentioned how she could not sing, and we should be glad that she had an opportunity to sing. My Black children were able to tell me that with comfort because I am Black. I felt like I had to be a sounding board for them and validate them.

Participant 2 commented:

So, regarding the experiences in general, first, they have not been necessarily bad. I do not think they have been bad experiences at either school. I can recall some conversations that occurred in my classroom. I think one reason this happened is because I am a teacher of color. Regardless, there are students who are of a BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] background and feel more comfortable with opening [up] to me about certain things. There are things that kids say, not always bad, but in reference to other students that they would say with me that they probably would not say around other teachers. At times, there are issues that they bring up to me that they would not bring up in another classroom. I feel as a teacher, there is a responsibility, whether placed by me, or whether it pressured by those around, to be somewhat of a voice in this day, you know, to say something about it, because I do not think it will be said if, if not.

Participant 4 said:

Being a teacher of color, we tend to basically get a lot of the students who are the behavior problems. In fact, it is funny that you asked this question because on campus recently, there was a teacher who was having issues with two students being in the same class. I have the same two students in my class. They were trying to make concessions for this teacher, who was not a teacher of color, to have the two students removed and from being in the same class together. They said, well, wait a minute, these two students share another class. They do not seem to have the same problems in their other class. They told her to go in to observe me to see what is working. She came in to observe and tried a couple of the things that was [were] happening in my classroom. Then, they continued to push the issue of having those two students removed from her class. I mentioned that if

they cannot both be in the same class together, they probably should be removed from mine as well. Then suddenly, the whole entire situation just came to a cease and desist because then it will cause a bigger issue. I am familiar with having more difficult students. If other teachers cannot handle students who are behavior issues ... a lot of times, I am called into a meeting with people saying, "I know you work really well with these students, maybe we can move them into your classroom." I am not saying that I would not want any of those students in my classroom, but at the same time, my paycheck is the same as everyone else on my team.

Participant 5 stated:

I feel like I must represent all the Blackness. Because I am one of 10 Black teachers on my campus, it is exhausting. Being a Black person is not a monolith. Therefore, I cannot speak for every Black person. Things that irritate me may not irritate another person. Having a master's degree in sociology, I am very aware of people and patterns. The second-highest administrator on our campus did two things that stood out to me and floored me. That summer, the administrator decided to do a field trip through our territory and visit some of our students. At the time, only one administrator was a woman of color. Most of the students at that campus were students of color. This administrator decided she wanted to be the driver. When everybody got out of the car to go greet the parents and the family, she stayed in the car and locked the door. She was scared. How is the administrator for these very students? With academic excellence on your mind with these students, how can you be scared to greet them and their families? The second major offense was by the same person. We were doing a data dig. I think this was in response to the campus improvement plan follow-up from the previous year. They decided to go by

demographics. Her example was that we did not meet the target for our African American students because they were lazy. She said that aloud at a data meeting for our whole English department. I made my comment, I said, “Are you serious about that? Did you just say that aloud?” I could not believe it. The second-highest administrator on our campus, who does not look like me, just said this aloud in front of other people. I could not get up and walk away because this is my job. But the 10 or 15 [of] us, maybe 45 total in the department, immediately reacted to that comment. I do not have nice things to say about her. After I was made aware of it, everything else was colored with that lens.

Participant 6 replied:

I will start with the good first. If there is an issue coming that goes down in the school, I am like that “other mother” that they call so that they can come to me. I am honest with them, whether it is good or bad. I am honest with them. Connecting with families is so important, I think that it is a big issue. If there were other teachers, especially Black teachers, that were in our schools and were able to talk with them and share some experiences with them, it would have been great. The other part of being a Black teacher has been not being heard. Being the one who must take it, I do not like calling them our “bad” kids. They will give you all the “challenging” kids. Oh, Ms. ___ can have them. Let Ms. ___ do that. You are kind of like, “Okay, now, you hired these other people. These White people should know how to work with our kids.” All teachers go home fatigued and tired. We are taking on extra, when I say “we,” I mean Black teachers. We are taking on extras. Because part of it for me is wanting my students to know they are supported. So, I am not leaving at 2:30, running out the door. My door is open so that my students can come afterward. If they just want to have a place to just relax, I am not able

to leave because I feel so committed to our babies, so I stay there. I attend after-school events so that they can see that I am there supporting them because that is what kids, our kids want. They want you to support them. I always feel like I must be on, I have to be there. So, that is the extra pressure of that.

Participant 7 reported:

When I think back to just my experiences, I think about the connections that I have with my students. It has been a positive experience. I work at a campus that does not completely reflect the student body. The student population has been predominantly minorities. Whether African American, Hispanic, Asian, or two [or] more races, I feel like those students have an opportunity to see something similar and reflective in me that [I] can relate to. We share similar commonalities, including how we were brought up, the neighborhoods we lived in, and the type of schools we attended. We have so many similarities. When I think of it, I just had some great positive experiences working at a campus with students that are diverse in every single way.

Participant 9 shared:

When I worked with a primarily White faculty and staff, I did notice that sometimes they got a pass on having to deal with some students who might have made things difficult for them to manage in the classroom regarding their behavior. Just some of the things that I heard them say, or they will ask me, “Hey, can you talk to them, or can I send your class for a little while?” I did not have that as much when I did not work with a primarily White staff. When I worked with primarily Blacks and Hispanics, there were times that we did have to give a kid a break, but it was not as much. The administration would go ahead and keep the kid the whole period, or they will not. If I had a student that was

giving me some problems, they would suggest that I handle it or that I try to build a relationship with the student. But it was like that other teacher could have done the same thing, as well. That was pretty much what I noticed a lot. Some of the teachers they would not even get ... Administrators would not even give them those students. That also has to do with my data that if they do have behavior problems, nine times out of 10 they are going to have gaps in learning and that affects your numbers and can affect your evaluation. All those things come into play, but you do not realize it. Even though it might be a fact that White teachers might not be able to handle some of the students, they get a pass and let it go.

Participant 10 responded:

Well, I am Hispanic, so I get a lot of people coming up to me asking, "Can you translate this?" Just because I am Hispanic does not mean I know Spanish. That is one big thing that I am always like, "Stop coming to me for that." A lot of teachers come to me when there is a Hispanic student not doing well. They ask me to talk to them and see if I can reach them. I know this is because I am the same race as the student. They think that maybe I can understand them a little bit better. But at the same time, if you are a teacher, you should be able to teach all students. You should be able to be knowledgeable of different students that are in your classroom, whether it is regarding a race or their disability. You cannot just say, "Oh, because you are African American or because you are Hispanic, you can relate to them better or you can do this." It should be learned throughout the teaching experience.

Participant 12 commented:

While I was at that campus, I did befriend a White woman who had two adopted Black student twins who went to the school as well. She was a teacher on campus. We often talked about the experiences that her children experienced compared to their White counterparts. She mentioned that all the boys were making noise. The school has a large population of White students. At that table, the twins were sitting with their White friends. They got singled out and were told to stop being loud. They were singled out when everybody else was talking as well. My friend mentioned that her children walk through the hallways and are often stopped and asked about their pass[es]. The boys are quite aware that they are Black and that it comes with different responsibilities. They said, "I know I cannot do what my friends do because I know I am going to get in trouble." Then another thing that I did at that campus is discuss equitable practices with some teachers at the school. I could tell that the White teachers are very uncomfortable about it. They were confused as to why we were having the conversation in the first place. They said, "Well, these students all have the same resources." They felt that they could all just make the same grades or have the same output." That felt like a dead-end in that conversation as well.

Participant 14 replied:

I am the only Black teacher on my campus right now. There are only about four of us in the entire district. I am the Black Student Union Advisor. I was not going to let anyone else do that. Honestly, now that I have had my own kids, it is just different. I look at the Black students like, "What if there were my kids?" I really try to make sure that when decisions are made, at least that I know of, they are considering Black students. Do not

make life easy, do not let them have it easier. Just consider them, so they can be properly educated and ready to be released out of high school and into the real world. I just really make sure that on my campus, the Black experience is thought of or introduced in a way to open people's eyes and make them think outside of their box. If I am talking to my friends here, "Oh, I am going to get my hair done," or "Oh, are you going to go get one of your Black haircuts?" or "What are you talking about?" But sometimes, it is just like, "That is not how you say it." Things like that. It is better now, and I think for me at the school that I am at, it is traditionally White. So, the teachers have not changed that much. Most of the teachers on our campus are White. The demographics of the school have changed. Most students are Hispanic or Latino. I do not even know what percentage of Black students we have right now. It is a little bit different, and now that I have been here long enough to kind of see where I fit and how people have received me. I am a lot more open about being Black, talking about the Black experience, and talking about what it is like to be Black even on our campus.

Theme 2: Congregating and Derogatory Comments

The participants discussed the attitudes they have experienced as a teacher of color. Based on their responses, they have encountered (a) comments about their appearance and (b) heard comments about congregating with other teachers of color. Teachers of color have experienced comments about their natural hair. When teachers of color have discussions in the hallway, they are referred to as the "Black Caucus." They often feel they might walk a fine line, so they do not offend anyone.

Participant 4 said:

I am a teacher who is natural, who wears natural hair. At some points in time, I have had teachers make comments about when they thought it was pretty and when they thought, “I am not too sure about that style, or is that yours,” or just wanting to touch it? Sometimes, it makes you wonder if they take you seriously. Sometimes, when you are talking to students who look like you or if you are speaking in AAVE [African American Vernacular English] with students. I think they do not take me seriously, or when it comes down to committees and things of that nature. Sometimes, they do not include me in those things. As a matter of fact, one time, a group of Black teachers were talking, and we were called “The Black Caucus.” Sometimes, because of my demeanor, teachers will say that I am aggressive, even though I know that I am not a very aggressive person. Maybe it is the tone that I am speaking to them in.

Participant 5 stated:

I was in the middle of a conversation with another teacher, and I had a crochet scarf on. My mother crochets because she knows I like to tie them. I had a scarf on tight because it was cold. The counselor walked up to me with the scarf around my neck. An administrator picked up the scarf on my neck while I am talking to another adult and said, “Oh, did you make this?” I thought, “First of all, why are you touching me? Why are you touching anything on me without my permission.” That is an invasion of personal space because if the shoe were on the other foot, I would have been talking to human resources.

There was one occasion when a content specialist asked if they could touch my hair. There was a situation I was made aware of because I worked at a particular campus where there was only one person of color in administration. This person and I happened

to be close because we shared the same religious beliefs. I found out that the campus was no longer upholding the hair color policy on campus for students because of my hair color. I am not a student. I do not have the same dress code as students. I was hired with fire engine red hair. How am I now the standard of not upholding a written rule for students because my hair is not a distraction. I could not say anything because it would injure the trust I had with the person who told me that because she told me that in trust, but I was livid. Nobody in a supervisory role ... Nobody said anything about my hair colors to me, which is why I continue to wear my hair colors. I was hired with a nontraditional hair color. The entire time I thought my hair has been [a] nontraditional color. The administration was no longer going to uphold a written rule for students. I was not happy. On the same campus, a person on my team who was of a different ethnic background than myself literally went to my administrators and complained about me. I got pulled into a meeting with my supervisors after work one day and was blindsided by two pages of complaints. Only to find out that her real complaint was she just did not like me. That released me. There is nothing I can do about that.

Participant 6 replied:

I receive looks like, “Why is she here?” or “Is she a professional?” or “How did she get here?” Looks of if you wear your hair in the Afro or in a puff like this. They have made comments about my hair, like, “It is amazing when you braid your hair and then you unbraid it and it is not the same.” “Your hair changed. What happened?” Sometimes I get looks when I walk into a room. A prime example that I can think of is when there were three Black teachers, and we were all talking together. Suddenly everyone is looking, and the principal was like, “What’s wrong?” We are like, “Nothing, we are just talking.” I

remember one time I was in a room, and it was myself and two other Black teachers. We were really talking about our Black student alliance that we were trying to organize. You would have thought that we were planning to do something to the school.

Participant 10 reported:

I feel like I am expected to know Spanish or I am expected to help in that area. I do not just eat authentic food from my heritage. It is just like, “Oh, you do not know about this and whatnot?” I receive sideways looks, but I know that I am a professional. I put it off. I know because I am of a different ethnicity that I need to represent myself. I do not want any more comments; I do not want anyone to think I act a certain way because of my race. I try to approach everything professionally so that I do not have any kind of negativity brought on as an add-on because of my race.

Participant 14 stated:

The most common comments are out of curiosity. It mainly involves my hair, “Oh, your hair is different today.” I think in my whole time here, I have had someone touch my hair once, and I was like, “Oh, no.” Also, I need to make sure that the “n-word” is not being used for any reason. I know that teachers have commented about it. They do not know if they can say anything. The same thing just happened with durags. We are not supposed to have anything on our heads unless it is for religious purposes. I am trying to enlighten teachers. You can address the situation. It is just about the rules. If there is an issue, then do something. I must help teachers more so they are able to address Black students. In terms of other looks ... I know that when I first got here, there were two Black men and one other Black woman. So, there were four Black people on campus. But I would hear comments from our advisor because immediately I jumped in helping with BSU [Black

Student Union], “Oh well, make sure BSU cleans up because BSU does not clean up.”

“Excuse me, what?” That is on the advisor. When we have club rush, the students would come by the table and say, “Oh yeah, I am going to sign up for the Black club” and laugh because they are not Black. For the longest time, I would not let my students do club rush by themselves. We even had a situation with the yearbook where just stereotypical Black names or just derogatory Black names are messed up.

Participant 15 responded:

In one incident, one of the teachers said that the Black student or the Black teacher is better working as the in-class support teacher or would be better working with the Black students because they have that Black mentality. They said that they have that connection with them. They tell the students that they need to try and do good because their parents are on welfare and they already do not have anything, so they need to make sure that they do good in school.

Theme 3: Lack of Academic Freedom

The participants discussed how their experiences as a teacher of color differ from White teachers on campus. Based on their responses, they have shared that they lack academic freedom to plan culturally relevant lessons and activities. Many of the participants feel called to provide students with culturally responsive instruction. They look for opportunities to share culturally diverse characters with students and find ways to amplify those voices by telling their stories. Teachers of color want to expose all their students to various cultures, so they can develop an appreciation. A notable mention was that a teacher shared that as the Black teacher on campus, the students did not view her as an authority figure. White students listened to their White teacher but questioned any redirection she gave them.

Participant 1 shared:

I feel like I had a better handle on building relationships with students and their parents. I know about the communication styles for African Americans. It was easy for me, not always meaning that I did not have challenges with parents. However, it was much easier for parents to identify with me because I was interested in building the relationship with them. I find that some of my White colleagues ask for support to help them make parent connections or parent contact. I noticed that I would have success with people outside of my race as well. I do not speak Spanish, but love is a language that everybody understands. Sometimes, I would be that second person in the room for my colleagues to just help them say, "I am sorry." I would just let them know that I am there for them and would coach them up a little bit. Another example is that sometimes they just did not talk to the Black kids. I would be that gulf between saying, "Hey, you know, soften the way that you say it," or telling them how they could approach it, or just approach a student who was having some discipline issues. Sometimes, I am in my classroom minding my own business and I hear the commotion across the hallway. I step out to defuse it so that it does not escalate. Sometimes I accept kids in my classroom that are not even mine. One of the things that is different is that it matters to me that they are not just a statistic and write in that next referral. Let us figure it out. My experience has been that sometimes my White counterparts shy away from that.

Participant 2 commented:

When we go to a contest, we sing [a] certain number of pieces from the list. You pick your contest pieces from that list. Well, if that list does not show a lot of likes, it will not be included. I feel like it would be good to know some things from African cultures,

Gospel is nice, too. I guess the best way to put it is when you are trying to incorporate your culture into the canon is not received or it does not feel like the canon itself is trying to include your culture, it can be a little hurtful. When you put on a Black History Month program and kids wonder why they must go. I am like, “What are we doing if kids are not here to try and celebrate each other’s culture. You can be White and go to a Black History Month program. I can be Black and if there was a White History Month, I would go too because I want to see you be happy being you.” But, yeah, little things like that can poke at you. But it has not made me overall be like, “Well, I am just going to go find a Black school.” I feel like there is still an obligation here. If nobody is here to teach them, things will not get better either.

Participant 5 said:

White privilege is real, and it exists in education from the top down. The recent brash of erasing true history and trying to censor history because of guilt bothers my soul. I was an English teacher, and everything comes through English. The writing topics and self-reflection. A child may not be able to write about an academic subject, but they can always write about themselves. It is easy to bridge the gap between history and current times when a child can understand someone’s impact and then see how that permeates the world that they live in. When I am told that I cannot teach the truth, when I am told I must censor my library and that I cannot have certain books for my students, but these are the books that reflect characters that look like my students. When the only thing you want to bring up about Black history is Black trauma. We have Black excellence. Are we going to talk about the athletes? Can we talk about business acumen? Can we talk about the patents that we still benefit from? Can we talk about the political mavens that pave

the way for others to come behind them? Can we talk about Supreme Court justice? Can we talk about the architects and artists? Can we talk about something other than putting a ball in a hand or a microphone with music? I feel like when it comes to being able to suggest content for lessons, being able to look at programming for a campus, and not feeling like the demographic of the staff reflects the demographic of the population we serve, it is not heard with the same ears.

Participant 10 stated:

I teach sixth-grade reading and writing, and we had no curriculum related to anything for Black History Month. I am an in-class support teacher, so I co-teach. I am not in there creating the lessons or doing the lessons. But I did not make it a point. Instead, I asked a question like, “Are we going to include anything for Black History Month?” They responded that right now, we are going over [the] argument unit. I am just thinking to myself, okay, we can still grab something and include it in the lesson. Working in our district, it is not something that teachers think is important to put in the lesson plan versus I am pretty sure in another district, it is important and needs to be in the lesson plan to show different ethnicities that are going around in the world. That is one disappointment that I see with my experiences as a teacher of color. I see that we have lessons that should be included, but the other teachers do not feel like that it is an important lesson that needs to be included. For some reason, I guess if you do not live through it, you do not experience it, so you do not know any better. But when I bring it up, it is just “Oh, well, we are doing this,” so it is ignored and put on the back end.

Participant 13 replied:

I keep my audience in mind. My audience happens to be little Black boys and Black girls and children who are a minority representation. I am very, very selective when I choose what we are going to read. I like people to see themselves in what we are reading. You can identify with it. That is not the opinion of my school. Therefore, we receive lesson plans that look like this.

Participant 14 reported:

Well, during one of my first meetings, there was an icebreaker question that wanted us to tell them our name, what department I was a part of, and the origin of our last name. Luckily, I was last because the first top that came to mind is, "Well, my name came from the slave owners that had my family." I was like, "I do not know." They do not think about some of those questions. They do not think about things that way. I think that kind of for me, it was just a quick example of the lack of experience with Black people in general. In terms of my experience though, in general, on campus, I hold a very interesting position. Right now, I am the co-math department chair and co-AVID [Advancement Via Individual Determination] coordinator. So, when it comes to me on campus, I am seen as a leader. So, I think that many of the teachers think like this on our campus. They do not look at color very much, which is a good thing and a bad thing because there could be ignorance brought in. But I do not have too many experiences that are different. Okay, I just thought of one because it just happened. We had a huge fight on campus on Monday, and I was helping to try to get kids in their place, and I know I told the kid, "You better not look at me like that." And the other kids around them were like, "Come on, get out the way." So certain things I say can depend on how I say it. I

know this happens with a colleague of mine. I can tell my class one thing and have a smile and have no issues. Another teacher can say the same things, and she is White, and people are upset. I think to my advantage, people, parents, and students will not play with me. They think, “Oh, she is the Black teacher.” Not that anybody has said that, but I think there is a ... I do not want to say fear but an assumption in some regards that I do not play, and I have not done anything different. So, it is not necessarily a negative thing, it is something that helps me with classroom management, and it helps in terms of responses from parents.

Theme 4: Lack of Professional Connectivity and Microaggressions

The participants discussed how their experiences with microaggressions had impacted their job satisfaction. Based on their responses, (a) they deal with microaggressions, feelings of isolation, and invisibility; and (b) they mute themselves for fear of penalty. Participants revealed that they feel ignored and undervalued. Some of their colleagues and leaders do not engage them in conversations when they are near them. Following these interactions, a few participants shared that they may receive an email about an issue or they will learn from another teacher of color that there is an issue. Teachers of color might not immediately hear that they have offended someone. Instead, information is gathered and given to them later. As a result, teachers of color feel compelled to walk on eggshells and mute their responses to avoid offending anyone. They feel uncomfortable in their own skin. Some participants shared that they began to question themselves, their teaching ability, and their career choice.

Participant 1 responded:

I just had an experience with that this year. I got a new assistant principal, and she was very intimidated by me, apparently. Although, I do not know why because I really am a

very easy-going person. I do not ask anybody to call me by my earned title (doctor). I have never been that way. If they do great, if they do not, it is okay. My assistant principal hates talking to me in person, and she is my appraiser. She would send me emails after she would pass by me in the hallway. She would not say anything to me directly. Instead, she would go to her office and send me an email. It really perturbed me. It got so uncomfortable that I just felt like, at some point, that I was not going to be able to have her as my appraiser comfortably. I ended up having a meeting with her and the principal because it is just not okay. I felt like it was just her way of trying to control the way our communication is done, but she could not control the way it was perceived. So, there was another issue that I had. I had a duty spot. I was the new person on staff. These people had metal detector duty together every year. Well, they did not like me, and they did not know me. I would come and say, "Good morning." They would not say anything back to me. They did not want to work with me. They just went out of their way to avoid me. One lady never spoke to me. I had been there for two years. Do you know that this year is the first year that she has ever spoke to me? I just found that to be odd. It is not that I did not speak to her. It is just that she just did not like me. Maybe she did not like my package. I do not know. She would go out of her way to speak to everybody in the lounge except for me. Things like that make me wonder, "What is the core issue? Why are you behaving in this way?"

Participant 5 shared:

Once I am aware, I am uncomfortable. It is very difficult to feel secure and safe when I know these things are happening. Especially when they are not coming from my peers. Instead, it is coming from people who can remove me from my job. It can feel like a

setup because then you are tiptoeing, and you are not authentically yourself. It is also extremely stressful, which can affect your health. It can lower your immune system. It can take the fun out of what you do, and your students suffer. You cannot bring yourself to the table because you are scared that someone is going to get you in trouble.

Participant 6 commented:

It makes you frustrated. You wonder sometimes, “Am I supposed to be there?” You start thinking that. “Am I smart enough?” Because you look around and there are all these little, small things. Like, what does that mean? If I am in a meeting and I am trying to explain something, they might say, “Well, what do you mean by that?” Then, someone else says the same thing and they understand. You start getting voiceless and quiet. You must choose your battles, and it gets tiring. Am I going to fight this battle for this, or am I just going to remain silent and just keep my job?

Participant 7 said:

It really comes down to feeling supported and feeling appreciated. I can think of a campus that I have worked at, and I can bring up a problem or a concern, and I kind of get the shrug ... Like my ideas are irrelevant or my idea is not really being considered, and that really impacted my satisfaction. I heard from a radio DJ [disc jockey] that you go where you are appreciated, not where you are tolerated. I live with that. If I am not being appreciated, and that is from the top down, from the team I work with and from the leaders I work under, if I am not feeling appreciated, I do not need to be in this environment.

Participant 8 stated:

I would say as time has gone on and with the environment of the society that we live in now, it has come a very, very hard to be satisfied with my job. It is now to the point where it is like, if I say this or if I do this, I will hear, “Do not be so aggressive or do not be so loud.” It is going to blowback on me, or it is going to put me in a jam. It is going to put me in multiple meetings and multiple conferences of, “Why is this teacher doing this?” It is becoming very, very difficult with all the microaggressions that I have experienced as a Black woman and as a Black teacher to be very satisfied with my job. Because I feel like more teachers of color are under the microscope now more than ever. More specifically, within the subject that I teach, history. It is like you must be careful or you are going to be “antiracist,” and you cannot teach that. I am not trying to teach the kids to take it to the streets and burn everything down. Because of that, it is making my job less gratifying and less exciting.

Participant 11 replied:

As I have moved through my career and moved from the classroom to an administrative position, I can see where those microaggressions are a lot clearer. I am not sure if maybe I pay attention a little bit more or maybe while I was on campus in a classroom, I was more distracted by my students and teaching. Now that I am in an administrative position, it is blaring. I see it in my own office at times. That is a little eye-opening. It could be something as simple as someone saying, “You are so articulate,” and in their mind, they are thinking that they are giving a compliment. It comes across very differently on the receiving end.

Participant 12 reported:

After dealing with the microaggressions at my previous school, I immediately moved back to Houston. I was very depressed at the time, and I had to start talking to a counselor to talk about it because I was not able to do my job. I was not able to do my job, and it affected my mood. It made me question myself as a person. "Did I do something wrong to these kids?" Now, what did I do to offend them? So, it kind of made me jaded toward White children, I am sad to say.

Participant 15 said:

I was not satisfied. I was not happy. During my first year there, I was so excited when I first started the job because I heard so much about this district. I came from a district and school where the students were very, very low and they struggled so much. I liked working with the students, and I have worked with them for many years, but I was tired. I wanted to work with some students who are not as low. I went to this district, and I just wanted to be a part of the community because I moved to the area. I was excited, and the interview went great. We did it over Zoom. I gave some ideas, and they were so excited about my ideas. The fifth-grade team was there. They were excited, but once I got there and I start sharing ideas, they did not want to hear it. Everything that I said over the interview and my ideas were not accepted. I was like, "Why did they hire me?" Every day, I will come, and I will try to be more positive, but it always seems like something was there to bring me down. I just got very sad, and the first year I thought about leaving and then I said, "I am going to try it again. The kids are here, and I do not want to leave the kids." I tried and I just could not do it. I had a friend there and she was a Black teacher. This was her second year there. Her first year there, she was just to herself. This

year, we became friends, and she was just my go-to. She talked me up quite a bit. I was not satisfied at all.

Theme 5: Coping Strategies While Maintaining Professionalism

Teachers of color were asked to describe how they handle racism and racial microaggressions on a predominately White campus. Based on their responses, they either (a) address the issue directly or (b) ignore the behaviors. If they decide to address the issue, they ask clarifying questions and approach it as a learning opportunity. They seek to inform White teachers about microaggressions and its impact while fostering empathy and understanding. Other teachers of color decide to ignore the infraction to prevent a confrontation or be labeled as “aggressive.” A teacher shared that her focus is on educating students and she does not feel compelled to assist teachers on their journey to cultural competence. A notable mention was that a few teachers stated the importance of prayer and connecting with their support system to cope with racism and racial microaggressions.

Participant 1 shared:

I am a very strong-willed one. I just addressed one teacher, I just said, “I think that is inappropriate.” I am the type to call a spade a spade. I just do not get it when it goes to an extreme, and you treat the kids, or you treat me funny. I am always going to be the child’s advocate. I have spoken up and reported it. Even people who appear to be friendly. I know that some of it is racist. If a child comes to me and complains about something that they have experienced, I know it is racist. I have avoided it, and I err on the side of caution. I have said, “It is not mine to investigate. It is only mine to report.” I had something happen this year that was reported to me by a kid. I reported it because I felt like a White teacher was acting inappropriately toward the student. Nothing happened

because I reported it. Two months later, something big happened. A parent reported something. Then, it took on a whole different level. I felt like my report was not taken seriously because I reported it to a White principal, and it was about a White teacher. This time, it was about a Black child. It could no longer be ignored. I felt if it had been a White kid that had told me what I shared, it would have been handled differently.

Participant 2 stated, "I have just learned to let it go. It is about the student. I am not saying it is right, but you must do what you need to do to get your job done."

Participant 3 replied:

I would just go to work to do what I was supposed to do. If I am doing the job that I was sent there to do and my students were getting what they need from me and my colleagues were being respected by me, that is all I needed to do. I do not have to worry about any obstacles because whatever your gripe is with [the] color of my skin have nothing to do with me professionally.

Participant 4 reported:

I am very confident in myself, so I tend to not worry about those things. However, if it does impact my job performance, then a lot of times, I have had conversations with people saying, "Hey, wait a minute, let us clear this up." "Hey, let me ask you a question about this." If I was not being treated equally, I have voiced my opinion, asking, "Why was I not included in this? Is it because of this, that, or the other?" I do not tend to come out and say, "Is it because I am Black?" But the underlying issue is probably because I am Black. At the end of the day, I try to have those conversations with whatever situation it is. Just pulling the person to the side and just being the person that I am, I may send an email or have a scheduled conference time, but just making sure that my voice is being

heard. That is the most important thing. I used to not be that way. I used to let things just go underneath the rug. If I feel like something is wrong or feel like it is racially motivated, I do not let that slide. I basically go and say, “Hey, let us have a conversation.” If you feel uncomfortable, we can have somebody else in the room. But I have those conversations so that it is out in the open and everything is transparent.

Participant 5 responded:

I prayed a lot. I journal and write poetry. I called my mentor and my uncle. I prayed a lot. Unfortunately, it just numbs you. Because you get so used to it, you just expect it to happen. It is when it does not happen, that you are taken aback, and you do not know what to do with that because you have had to deal with it for so long. Later, there was meditation. There is a lot of meditation and having to learn how to forgive people when the apologies never come.

Participant 6 said:

Number one is God. My strength. I have my faith, my belief. Number two is my passion for my kids. It depends on the day. There are some days when I am straightforward and will tell the principal, “Look, this is my feeling.”

Participant 7 replied:

If I never tell you how I feel, I cannot fault you for making me feel small or for how your comment makes me feel. It is about having a courageous conversation but also providing the knowledge. “Let me explain to you why this is the way I am. Let me explain to you why our students are the way they are based on some similarities, based on our conversations I have with them, and why, although you are trying your best, these sorts of mannerisms are giving this perception, and we know that perception is reality.” Anytime

I have had to have those moments, it goes back to courageous conversations and giving that individual an opportunity to either make the necessary changes.

Participant 8 said:

I think just being vocal is what allows me to overcome the barriers, but I also know my value. At the end of the day, yes, my students need me, but also, I need myself at the end. I cannot be in an environment that is not conducive to the things that I feel are necessary for my life, whether that is health or mental awareness or whatever. I think just being vocal and then also taking account of, “Okay, am I going to be able to change necessarily?” There are a lot of things we cannot change within education. I cannot change the people up top. Can I put something within my students? Eventually, when they leave, they will start being able to speak out and they will start voicing their concerns. I think that is one of the things I always tell my students. What I like about this generation is that they question everything. If it does not feel right to them, they will question it. If they go from what people just say, they are like, “That does not make any sense, so why are we doing it?” That is how I pretty much try to overcome barriers, which is by instilling them in my students and taking account of how it is affecting me.

Participant 9 reported:

Well, any time I had an obstacle or barrier, I did tend to lean on some of the veteran teachers. If something occurred, I would try to talk to the person one-on-one because we are all here for the same common goal. But if there is something major that I know is going to be a constant impact, I would talk to some veteran teachers about it. I have relied on them for some advice. If it got to a point where it needed to be addressed by someone higher up because it is getting out of hand, I would bring it to them. I have had good

experiences with my administration where I could mention some things. I have had some barriers and obstacles, just like everybody else, but I think it has been handled. It was not anything that got extremely out of control, but I did have to get the administration involved with some things before.

Participant 10 commented, “I focus on being a professional one. It is not even worth it. I am not going to entertain it. I just move on.”

Participant 11 stated:

I felt like I was that advocate teaching others who did not know better or were just ignorant to the fact and not in a bad way. I just felt the need to let them know that there are people like myself and others who exist in this world.

Participant 12 replied:

Unfortunately, I overcame them by leaving the campus. I wish more could have been done. I wanted to go to get a lawyer involved. I wanted to go to the new stations. I just wanted someone to hear my story because it felt like nothing was being done. It seemed to be an unspoken rule of, “Let us keep everything on the hush, hush at this school.” The students and the parents are in control, and the teachers are afraid of them. So, I felt helpless in that sense of how do I even go to about this? Now my principal was very much aware. She would send me emails about me being more professional and remembering that I am the adult in the room, but there was no sense of conflict resolution coming from them. So, I left.

Participant 13 shared:

Obstacles create opportunities. I packed away in it. Okay, I see this plan, I stopped asking, “Why is this happening to me?” I started to ask myself, “What lessons can I learn

from these people? How can I school them?” The best way that I learn how to school people when they come with microaggressions or whatnot, I stand on this one ... silence speaks volumes. I am not going to give you the reaction that you want. Because once I figure it out, it does not impact me to the core. It does not impact my money. I check my money, and it is good. Another thing that has helped me is that I keep a strong network of professional friends. Just family and a therapist ... You need one. I do not care what you are going through, you may not even be going through anything, but you always need those people to talk to. You just need those people in your corner to say, “You know what ... you are not intimidating, they are intimidated.” You are big and they want to keep playing you as small. That is how I handle it. Those are just reassurances that I need to move on.

Participant 14 commented:

I have a good relationship with the teachers on my campus. That is why it is easy for me to get through a situation that has come up. I have their respect and the respect of the administration on campus. I do not hesitate to talk to anyone, no matter what level they are.

Participant 15 said:

I had to leave the campus. When I left, it was sad in a way. For the kids ... I felt defeated in a way. Maybe I am supposed to be here, but I had to resign. I did not lose my certification because they were not sanctioning certification. That was a confirmation for me.

Theme 6: Political Divide

Teachers of color were asked to share how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their experiences on a predominately White campus. Based on their responses, they (a) have less tolerance for race-related comments due to the recent Black Lives Matter [BLM] protests, the election, and censorship of historical events (like slavery); they are (b) more isolated from nonteachers of color due to mask mandates and social distancing; and, (c) have encountered more insensitive comments regarding the behaviors and academic progress of students of color. A notable mention was that a few stated included the added stress of providing students with synchronous and asynchronous instruction during the pandemic.

Participant 1 shared:

People have less tolerance and patience. I see more evidence of it. Everybody is just so indifferent. I see more of our students getting written up. It is problematic for me. I have had a very difficult time navigating this space. Right now, where I am in my career, I am more focused on the students. I am less focused on the ins and outs of staff issues and stuff like that. I just see less tolerance, even for each other, I think the whole mask thing has allowed us to cover up and mask up to where we feel like we can safely say and do things behind the mask that we would not normally say and do. I kind of see that right now with my colleagues. I have a greater level of comfort with my African American peers. Because we feel like we deal with family issues differently. I am wearing a mask not just for me, but I am going to mask up for you. You are doing the same for me. But then we will hear some of the other ones who do not wear a mask at home but they must wear a mask at work. They treat us differently. They do not wear the mask correctly, and that is a huge issue that I have seen. That is what I have noticed. I also noticed that for

our open house, the comfort level of parents seems to be much better. Within my room, I always have parents lined up down the hallway just to meet me. But I noticed a couple of doors down it is not like that. Repeatedly, I have a rapport with parents who were just glad to know you care. This tells me that they went to someone else's room, they did not feel like the teacher cared.

Participant 2 responded:

So, it is interesting. There have been at least two or maybe three incidents prior to the pandemic. I was teaching over at the junior high during the Sandra Bland incident. I felt like the district did very little about it. But during that time, and granted, the climate at the time was still kind of heated because, you know, this was also not too long after Florida's issue with Trayvon Martin and, you know, a couple of other Black incidents were happening. Then, of course, later down the road, by the time I got to the high school, I remember something else that had occurred because we at least had a prayer circle like a lot of people who wanted to talk about it. Then, COVID hits and BLM protests start. When George Floyd was murdered, it felt like a progression ... a buildup. Then, the election happens. The first thing that hit me was that I just had time to process all this. Like there was no work at times and we were not going anywhere. We were not going to work. We were not going out places. So, all these things just sat with me a lot more than I think they usually had. When we came back, things felt tense. Like, you worried that this kid was going bring up this policy and that was going to make this person mad, and so there was a lot of that already. I was in the classroom feeling a little depressed, just from COVID and the protests. I was mad. My wife is White, and, at times, I am not going to hear her talk. That is how mad I was at the time. Not that she did

anything. She was just trying to get me to talk. I was just not in that space. At work, I felt shorter with people about everything. Then, my patience has been torn down quite a bit, and the stress of just being a teacher after COVID has been added to that. It just makes everything that much more noticeable. They say one more straw ... But every little thing is like, it is just sprinkling straws above, and that is what it feels like right now.

I work hard to always keep my composure. I wanted to let everybody have it for every little thing, but I cannot do that and keep my job. You know ... You have a family at home to take care of. Since COVID, I have been more jaded to some things.

Participant 3 commented:

So like I said earlier with facemasks, you really cannot see all the facial expressions. I know it is still there, but it is a little removed because of the facemasks. I can always use the excuse that we need to be six feet apart. I do not have to really interact with those that I see that are not willing to be a colleague of mine. When you are a coworker, you just want to be ugly or want to say things that are not going to help me in my day. I do not need to deal with that. I can just remove myself from that and do what I need to do.

Participant 6 reported:

I remember 2 years ago, it was spring break time for us, and they said, "Okay, we are going to teach online." So, the experience has been very hard because you must drop your mind, especially as a teacher who is all about relationships and that hands-on. For our students and I, how am I going to do that? Where am I going to have that connection? It was an adjustment because you had to change your teaching style. You would have to process. What is this going to look like when I am working with my students, and I want them to get it? You go through professional development, and you are looking at a

screen. You have taught all day, and you are tired because you are trying to perform more or show more to get the kids engaged. So, it has been really draining and then you notice with your kids, especially our kids of color, it looks like there is so much going on. They may be babysitting other brothers and sisters. Technology may not be there. The big debate is whether the screen needs to be on or does the screen not need to be on? Because you do not know what the family situation may be. If I got someone in the background and Uncle Johnny is up there hollering and so and so is doing this and you are telling me that I must have my screen on. It is all these things that impact the students. Then, you, as a teacher, say, "You should have this and you should be doing this, and you should be doing that." It is just draining. That is why [the] majority of the teachers say, "I am done, this is just too much."

Participant 7 said:

I think our talent level has drastically been impacted by the pandemic. Individuals are not as tolerable as they used to be. There is not as much empathy as it used to be, and often because we have mask mandates, a lot of our microaggressions are kind of hidden. When you look to the side and knowing no one will see and you can do so much in your facial features and form can come trickle down no one can see. Nowadays, we are kind of going through part of the pandemic phase, some people are moving masks, and they forget that they do not have [a] mask on anymore, and their facial features are visible for the world, and sometimes they say, "Oh my goodness, I forgot I did not have my mask on," and I say, "I know, I know you did."

Participant 8 replied:

COVID-19 is a doozy all around because it just affected us in every form of life. It just puts a strain on our mental capacity. It also puts a strain on relationships because we were at home for so long, and it was just a huge blanket of unknowingness. Then, because we were home, we were able to see these issues that people would normally just glaze over ... Things that people would normally just toss underneath the rug. I think when it comes to education, it has given people more time on their hands to not make complaints or blow things more out of proportion because it is a control thing. COVID-19 took control out of us. Now, people are trying to control things that they feel they can control, but they do not realize the damage that it is doing. For example, the banning of books. If you look at the banning book list, you will notice that 95% of the books that are being banned are written by people of color or written about people of color, has to do with gender, and just all sorts of origin, religion, and all things. It is because people lost that control. COVID-19 took it away and so now they are trying to put control in other places, and it is damaging relationships. It damages relationships between teachers and students, teachers and parents, teachers and administrators, and then just teachers in society. People want control of something. They are going after the things that they necessarily did not have control of before. I call people out on the carpet. There was one example with civil disobedience, Simple, simple subject. It is just that people have the right to protest and the right to question. They did not want to teach it because it was the fall of 2020 and because of everything that had occurred in the summer of 2020. How BLM was more rampant postsummer 2020 than anything else. I had a question like, "Why would we not want to teach students civil disobedience? Why would we not want to teach students to

not even just look at BLM, but look at all the movements that are just occurring?” It is every movement, especially now with everything that is being passed in Texas. Why would we not want that? It should not just be focused on one type of subject or one type of event, but civil disobedience affects the whole spectrum. It does not just affect one group or one organization. That was probably one of the major times that I was just like, “Hey, we should probably think about this.”

Participant 9 shared:

You see students one way but having an eye into their home life is different. There were certain things that you were not able to see. Some people have had opportunities to build a relationship with a parent that they never were able to talk to because now you may have had that parent there to make sure that they are getting online. You see things a little bit differently regarding racism and stuff like that or microaggressions. I know there are probably some comments here and there because you can see inside peoples’ homes, and the opportunity for judgment is there. That can have an impact on how some students are treated. Some teachers are just like, “Oh, well. I do not ever see such and such on, or they are playing the game.” No one is there, so it leaves even more of a judgment, and I think that can be a bad thing. Even though you can say that you can try not to, you are human, and you have eyes.

Participant 10 commented:

I felt, and a couple of other people of color felt, that our school did not let the election show ... Like we could not watch it at school. I know other school districts were allowed to watch it. We were like, “This is huge. For what reason would we not be able to show the president in history class?” We all gather, people of color, gather, and we talked about

it amongst ourselves. We never addressed it, but it was just obviously a concern. We know that we can come to each other and talk to each other about it because it hurts us. We were just like, this is national, this is the United States, and this is our president. No response was given over the announcements. They were like, “No, we are not showing it, we are not airing it, we are not talking about it, just go on with your regular day.”

Teaching ELAR [English Language Arts and Reading], it is like we are supposed to gravitate to everything that is going on in the world and include it within our lesson.

Regarding COVID, I think a lot of the students coming are not coming in with the right mindset, I hear a lot of feedback with teachers saying specifically that Hispanic or African American students do not know how to act. I feel like it has gotten worse.

Teachers just constantly gravitate to talking about that culture of students and ignoring the fact that Caucasian students can act the same way, but they are not addressing it because they do not see it the same. If you are Hispanic or African American, you are more of a standout, so they do not see it. I feel like it is getting worse with the students.

But at the same time, they are all students, just different colors. We put more emphasis on their academics and behaviors being low. What are we going to do about this? We are starting to see low percentage scores with Caucasian students. Their scores are not as high as they used to be. It is on both ends, but we just see it more towards students of color.

Participant 13 said:

COVID-19 exposed everyone. I mean, their truths came out. A person can present this way but be a different person. COVID-19 has just brought out the ugly in some people. When I say fragility ... My complexion is my protection. All of that is how they feel

about these little children that we have been teaching. I said to my principal once, “If the White ladies in here are treating me as they are, how are they treating your Black children? Go check that.” Do not worry about me, I ended by telling her that you are swimming hard for certain people while they are watching you drown. I do not watch people drown. At least I will throw you a rafter. I will go tell somebody. If I know the water is not too deep, I will get in the water and pull you out and be moving on. COVID-19 exposed a bunch of the undercurrent, the underbelly, the ugly, and brought it all out.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 summarized the questions and responses from each of the 15 participants’ interviews. Based on the responses from the participants, I intended to provide a better understanding of the lived experiences of teachers of color working in predominately White K–12 schools. As an expansion of the responses, this research is important because it seeks to help leaders foster a more inclusive work environment for teachers of color. Upon completing the coding procedure, it was found that teachers of color experienced racism and racial microaggressions that impacted their experiences in predominately White K–12 environments.

In Chapter 5, a summary of the findings will be discussed, along with the implications for practice and recommendations to foster a more inclusive and equitable work environment for teachers of color working in predominately White K–12 environments. Also, Chapter 5 will discuss the study’s purpose and recommendations for K–12 work environments and further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Teachers of color employed in predominately White K–12 schools experience marginalization and microaggressions. It has been revealed that these experiences can impact teachers' job satisfaction and teacher retention (Brooks & Watson, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Swanson & Welton, 2019). Because these barriers exist, teachers of color have various coping mechanisms like self-advocacy, talking to their mentors, and prayer to manage their experiences.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the lived experiences of teachers of color employed in predominately White K–12 schools to gain insights into their unique experiences, feelings, and thoughts about being a teacher of color. The results from this study will benefit the development and implementation of a professional development framework that can enhance leadership development curricula. In addition, it can equip district and school leaders with tools to foster more inclusive and equitable practices.

This chapter summarizes the findings, implications, and future research recommendations related to this topic. The research findings will be aligned with the literature review by acknowledging the use of WRF and how it connects with this study. The topics to be discussed in this chapter are (a) study overview, (b) summary of findings, (c) interpretation of participant responses, (d) conclusion, (e) implications for change, and (f) recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

White Racial Frame

Based on the interviews conducted with 15 participants, six reoccurring themes were presented. The themes were consistent with Feagin's (2013) WRF, which is described as a view that centralizes whiteness as the dominant frame. This Eurocentric view creates inequalities

between White people and people of color (Feagin, 2013). The WRF operates at a nonconscious level in the minds of White people because it is ingrained in every facet of their lives. In addition, it is embedded in various structures and institutions and is connected to their privilege and power (Amos, 2020; Chubbuck, 2004). Amos (2020) contended that WRF operates with an in-group superiority and out-group inferiority. This notion creates inequalities for people of color.

Teachers of color experience racism and microaggressions because of the WRF (Amos, 2020). White people are viewed as more superior to other races, while teachers of color are stereotyped and marginalized (Amos, 2020). The findings of this study indicate that teachers of color experience racism and racial microaggressions as they work in predominately White K–12 environments. Additionally, these experiences can impact their job satisfaction. Participants' responses revealed that WRF is displayed in these work settings. Teachers felt like they were in the out-group. Toure and Thompson Dorsey (2018) asserted that it is crucial to decenter whiteness and promote diversity and inclusion in all educational work environments.

This study's final chapter discusses the experiences of teachers of color that work in predominately White K–12 environments. Teachers of color have different experiences when compared to their White counterparts. They may be alienated, marginalized, and stereotyped when they work in White settings. This study's findings will help leaders cultivate a more inclusive environment for teachers of color. The data collected from this study will benefit the development and implementation of a professional development framework that can enhance leadership development curricula. In addition, the information gleaned from the study can assist human resource leaders with retaining a diverse staff of educators. Moreover, students and

parents will benefit from having role models of various cultural backgrounds and experiences as classroom teachers.

Interpretation of Participant Responses

Teachers of color that currently or previously work in predominately White K–12 environments and are or were members of the Facebook groups National Alliance of Black School Educators or Houston Area Alliance of Black School Educators shared their lived experiences. Some of the participants were identified based on their experiences as well. Based on their responses to the interview questions, reoccurring themes emerged, which answered the study's research question. The following themes were discussed throughout this section: (a) cultural advocacy, (b) congregating and derogatory comments, (c) lack of academic freedom, (d) lack of professional connectivity and microaggressions, (e) coping strategies while maintaining professionalism, and (f) political divide.

Cultural Advocacy. Participants' responses indicated the inherent need to be an advocate for students of color. They want to create a safe space for students of color. Teachers of color seek to build authentic relationships with students and foster cultural pride (Duncan, 2019). Teachers of color can help foster empathy for cultural differences and facilitate race discussions. One participant shared that they tried to help students of color make sense of recent events like the murder of Trayvon Martin and the events leading to Sandra Bland's death. Some participants discussed how they willingly take on roles that allow them to advocate for students of color, like sponsoring clubs and organizing Black History Month programs. They have heard White teachers make racist comments about or toward students of color, and they want to ensure their students feel affirmed and valued. Several participants revealed that they have observed their White peers give harsher behavioral consequences to students of color. Often, teachers of color

would be asked to let the student in their classroom. This results in a larger workload for them, but they feel a sense of responsibility to students of color.

Recent events like the Black Lives Matter protests and the 2020 presidential election created opportunities for teachers of color. The events from the summer of 2020 caused many students to be confused and angered. Participants shared that students sought them out to discuss their feelings. Often, students of color did not feel comfortable speaking to their White teachers. Instead, they voiced their feelings to their teachers of color. Students shared their anger, rage, feelings of alienation, and being unheard with teachers of color. Students identified with these teachers, so they felt comfortable processing their emotions with them. One participant shared that a White teacher made a racist comment about an African American singer's involvement in the 2016 inauguration. The student was shocked and offended by the teacher's remarks and sought out his African American teacher for comfort.

While teachers of color want to be an advocate for students of color, they are often expected to be the expert on all things African American or Hispanic. Some participants disclosed that it is assumed that they know everything that is related to their ethnicity. One African American participant shared that she felt like she must represent all Blackness, which is not a "monolith." A Hispanic participant shared that her White coworkers assumed she could speak Spanish because of her race and asked her to translate for them. Several participants indicated that they are often given students of color that are deemed "challenging" because it is assumed that the teachers of color can relate to them. One participant shared that she was told that she has a "Black mentality" and can connect with African American students. Nonetheless, teachers of color find ways to build genuine relationships with students to help them feel appreciated, valued, and heard.

Congregating and Derogatory Comments. Participants have heard comments about interacting with a group of people who share their ethnicity. One African American participant shared that when she had discussions with other African American teachers in the hallway, they were referred to as the “Black Caucus.” Another participant stated that when they grouped with other African American teachers, White teachers thought they were “plotting” against them. Her assumptions were based on the looks that she had received. This causes participants to be aware of the perceptions and to mute their interactions with other same-race teachers. Participants shared how they tried to avoid being called “aggressive.” Instead, they wanted to be perceived as approachable and were conscious of their actions. They feel that they are held to a higher standard, so they work hard to avoid any stereotypical behavior (Brown, 2019).

Many of the study participants are African American teachers with natural hair. They shared negative comments made by their White peers. O’Brien-Richardson (2019) asserted that hair harassment is unwanted and unwelcomed comments made toward women of African descent based on the texture or look of their hair. Several participants commented about their White counterparts making unwarranted comments about their hair. Some participants shared that White teachers would ask if it was all of their hair. Also, their peers mentioned that they were not sure about their recent hairstyle. These comments were unsolicited and unnecessary. Participants in this study deemed the comments disrespectful.

Lack of Academic Freedom. The study participants disclosed that they felt it was their responsibility to provide students with culturally responsive instruction. Ladson-Billings (1994) described culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes” (p. 13). One of the participants is a

choir teacher and mentioned the absence of African songs at a contest. Some of the participants shared how government leaders are censoring history, which impacts assigned readings in language arts and history classes. A participant mentioned that she wanted her students to read books that included characters reflecting their cultural or ethnic background. The participant mentioned how she would like to discuss positive Black stories as opposed to stories about Black trauma. Teachers of color want their students to see themselves in the content they encounter.

Students of color should have opportunities to connect with content that is meaningful to them (Tanase, 2020, 2021). A participant revealed that she wanted to plan culturally inclusive lessons, but her school leaders did not encourage it. She was unable to discuss the elections or plan Black History Month activities. The participant was told that they were planning to teach a specific standard and did not see the importance of using culturally inclusive content to teach it. Teachers of color understand the importance of exposing all students to CRT. They understand that exposure to culturally relevant instruction could foster empathy through race discussions (Tanase, 2020). However, they often feel unsupported or ignored in their efforts. One participant shared how her staff was engaged in an icebreaker activity that asked them to share the origin of their last names. The facilitators of the activity did not consider the origin of African American teachers' names, which is rooted in slavery. Consequently, teachers of color did not feel that their cultural and ethnic backgrounds were considered in the planning of the activity. Thus, planning culturally inclusive and relevant lessons is crucial for various audiences.

Lack of Professional Connectivity and Microaggressions. Participants discussed how microaggressions and a lack of collegiality impacted their job satisfaction. Most of the participants shared specific instances of racial microaggressions. Teachers of color experience inequalities, microaggressions, and marginalization that impact their experiences as teachers

(Amos, 2016; Brown, 2019; Endo, 2015). A participant recalled an incident when she was referred to as “articulate.” It was meant as a compliment, but the teacher was offended by the remark. Also, participants shared that they have been excluded from the decision-making process. This caused feelings of unappreciation. One of the participants has earned her doctorate degree; however, her assistant principal does not address her by her title, ignores her in the hallway, and only communicates with her by email.

Several participants indicated a lack of professional relationships in the workplace (Brooks & Watson, 2019; Mayfield, 2020). A participant shared that she speaks to White teachers during her morning duty, but they do not respond to her. Several participants shared that they must mute themselves so as not to offend their colleagues or be perceived as “aggressive.” This leads to feeling voiceless and can hinder professional relationships. Another participant noticed that a White coworker continuously watched her to be sure she was at her assigned locations on campus. Participants felt they had to be “on guard” when they were around their peers. A participant mentioned that a co-teacher came to her room and reported her actions to another teacher. The teacher felt a lack of trust from her coworkers, and, in turn, she did not trust them. Some participants mentioned that their White peers would not discuss an issue with them directly. Instead, they would speak to their school leaders about it, which resulted in a one-on-one conference with the teacher and leader.

Coping Strategies While Maintaining Professionalism. Teachers of color handle racism and racial microaggressions in a variety of ways. Participants shared that they discuss the issue with the offender directly. Another participant mentioned how not coping with microaggressions can affect teachers’ health. She asserted that it could lower a person’s immune system and take the “fun out of what you do,” which could also have unintended effects on

students. Participants indicated that they have courageous conversations with White teachers to provide them with insights. They explain to them some of the cultural and historical experiences that continue to impact people of color. A participant indicated that she let her peers know that people like herself exist in this world. The participants want these individuals to have an opportunity to reflect, understand, and change their behavior.

Several participants indicated they ignore these comments and continue to focus on their role as a teacher and on students. Some participants try to focus on their students instead of the microaggressions. They feel that they have a larger calling to be role models for students of color and prepare them for the world beyond the walls of their campus. A participant shared that she wants her students to “speak out” and “[voice] their concerns.” Many participants revealed that they have a strong network of friends and would process various instances with them. In addition, participants shared they relied on prayer to combat experiences with racism. Two participants left their campus due to continued occurrences of racism. They felt that they did not have another choice.

Political Divide. Participants in the study revealed how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their experience on a predominately White campus. Black Lives Matter protests, the pandemic, and the election occurred in 2020. As a result, participants shared that they had less patience and were less tolerant of racist comments. One comment indicated the stress of the time. The participant described each incident that occurred over the summer as “sprinkling straws.” He felt that it was difficult to remain calm during those times because emotions were so heightened. Another participant indicated that the pandemic resulted in a loss of control. As a result, “people are trying to control things that they feel they can control [and] they do not realize the damage that it is doing.” Books are being banned and laws are being passed that have detrimental effects

on the community. Some participants revealed that they felt that people of color were being silenced as a method of control. One participant shared that “COVID-19 exposed a bunch of the undercurrent, the underbelly, the ugly, and brought it all out.”

Circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in increased isolation for teachers of color. Participants shared how social distancing has affected collegiality among staff. One person commented that “the whole mask thing has allowed us to cover up and mask up to where we feel like we can safely say and do things behind the mask that we would not normally say and do.” Another participant mentioned that masks hide half of a person’s face, so it is easier to hide expressions. So much of our communication is nonverbal, so the mask made it more difficult to connect with peers. As the pandemic levels change, mask mandates have also changed. This has caused many people to stop wearing masks. One participant shared that “they forget that they do not have a mask on anymore and their facial features are visible for the world.”

Some teachers of color have noticed that White teachers are more vocal about the missteps of students of color. The pandemic forced teachers and students to move to online learning opportunities. Participants shared that some White teachers made judgments about students’ homes, which could have an impact on how students were treated. Another participant revealed that she has heard teachers commenting “specifically that Hispanic or African American students do not know how to act.” All students were impacted by online learning, but comments were only made about students of color.

Limitations

This IPA study targeted all teachers of color, but all the participants were African American except for one Hispanic participant. I recommend that future studies include a more

racially diverse group of teachers. Moreover, one male teacher participated in this study. It would be interesting to see if additional male participants would result in different findings. This will allow district leaders to gain better insights into the experiences of teachers of color that work in predominately White K–12 environments. Moreover, identifying specific ethnicities and gaining additional demographic information about their culture could result in additional insights. Additionally, utilizing a narrative approach could broaden the research and determine if the findings can be replicated. Moreover, this study was limited to teachers of color working in predominately White environments. A future study could examine different environments to see if the findings would be replicated. Lastly, future research should examine the intersectionality of marginalized groups like gender and sexual orientation, which could provide more data for ensuring inclusive and equitable work environments.

Recommendations

The Black Lives Matter movement put a spotlight on the inequities that plague people of color. However, more systems like mentoring, safe spaces, and professional development should be put into place to foster environments that are inclusive, diverse, and equitable. The study's findings indicated that teachers of color continue to experience racism and racial microaggressions that impact their experience in predominately White K–12 environments. Their experiences on their campus are harmful and can affect their job satisfaction. Unfortunately, the impact of these racist encounters has caused some teachers to leave their campus, which can impact the teacher, students, and the school community.

I recommend the following implications for change. School districts should develop intentional and ongoing systems to ensure equitable and inclusive work environments. Professional development opportunities should focus on providing people of color with

emotionally safe work environments. In addition, cultural competency training should be provided to help increase awareness and build capacity on campuses. Campuses should provide teachers of color with safe spaces to engage in race conversations, which can facilitate understanding. School districts should offer mental health services to teachers to help them process their feelings, share their thoughts, and focus on their mental wellness.

Campuses must be more deliberate about providing teachers and students of color with safe environments that are void of stereotyping and inequalities. School leaders should ensure that professional learning communities are utilized to discuss ways to ensure that all students are successful, especially students of color. Leaders should engage in discussions to provide students of color with the support that will impact their academic, behavior, and emotional well-being. Students of color on predominately white campuses should have access to mentors, tutoring, and mental health resources.

Teacher preparation programs should include coursework on cultural competence, racism in education, microaggressions, and how to foster equitable environments for students, their peers, and parents. Programs should provide student teachers with opportunities to student teach at various campuses where they will be exposed to diverse student populations. Moreover, teacher preparation programs should equip teachers to interrupt racism on their campuses and become an advocate for their students.

Conclusions

Participants in this study shared their lived experiences as they worked in predominately White K–12 environments. Each participant revealed different events, which included some similarities with other teachers of color. Most participants revealed feelings of alienation,

marginalization, and racism that impacted their teaching experience. While these barriers existed, they found ways to navigate and cope with racism and racial microaggressions.

The findings revealed that teachers of color built networks with other teachers of color, engaged in self-advocacy and prayers, and chose to ignore microaggressions. Some participants decided to engage in race conversation to educate their White peers as a way of fostering understanding and empathy. Each participant's experience was significant. Regardless of their experience on campus, they felt an obligation to affirm, advocate, and value students of color. While they were silenced and marginalized, they continued to maintain their professionalism in predominately White K–12 environments.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Demographic Information

1. How long have you been or were you a teacher?
2. What grade level do you or did you teach?
3. What is your gender identity?
4. What is your racial/ethnic identity?
5. What is the racial/ethnic makeup of the professional staff at your campus?
6. Do you work in a rural, suburban, or urban school district?

Interview Questions

1. What are some of your experiences being a teacher of color on your campus?
2. What types of comments, looks, or attitudes have you encountered as a teacher of color?
3. How do your experiences in schools differ from White teachers?
4. How have your experiences with microaggressions impacted your job satisfaction?
5. How did you handle experiencing racism or racial microaggressions in your school setting?
6. Discuss how you were able to overcome the obstacles and barriers you experienced on your campus.
7. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted these experiences?

Appendix B: IRB Acceptance Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

January 28, 2022

Torine Champion
Department of Education
ACU Box 79699
Abilene Christian University



Dear Torine,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "A Qualitative Study Exploring the Lived Experiences of Teachers of Color in Predominately White K-12 Environments",

(IRB# 22-004) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs