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# Stories from North Carolina Teachers of Color: An Inquiry of Racialized Experiences in the Workplace.

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STORIES FROM NORTH CAROLINA TEACHERS OF COLOR: AN INQUIRY OF
RACIALIZED EXPERIENCES IN THE WORKPLACE.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the teachers who work tirelessly every day while enduring racism and injustice. Whether you are committed to community change, culturally relevant teaching, or simply making it through the day, this is for you. I hope that you feel seen and acknowledged through this work. This is also dedicated to the participants of this study who gave a great emotional sacrifice to pour into this research. Thank you for your willingness to participate and the hours of work and vulnerability to see this work through. You all are truly transformative and inspiring.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, my family, and my friends who are family for graciously allowing me to put my work first for the last three years. Your support has never gone unnoticed, and I will never forget the many words of encouragement everyone has given me to continue pushing through until the end. Thank you!

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ABSTRACT

Growing educational research shows that teachers of color are finding themselves working in racially hostile schools through experiencing racism from their White colleagues in explicit and inexplicit ways. There is a need to further categorize how North Carolina teachers of color are experiencing racism in the workplace and identify how they are affected by it through experiential knowledge and analysis underpinned by critical race theory. Through action research, this study's goals incorporated the implementation and evaluation of a collaborative book as a method of intervention on the effects of racial trauma. The collaborative book presents full counternarratives of teachers of color wishing to share their experiences with racism while working in NC public schools with the intention of contributing their personal chapter of experiences into a non-fiction novel. Participants of this study utilized this intervention to understand how the use of collaborative books might help them cope with racism in the workplace and improve their overall experience as a teacher of color. The findings of this study showed that NC teachers of color are experiencing racism from their White coworkers in numerous ways, such as isolation, microaggressions, undermining, and the denial of racialization from White coworkers. The intervention of collaborative books shows promise as a means of mitigating the problem of practice by providing a means to cope with racial trauma and improve NC teachers of color's overall experience.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Critical race theorists Delgado & Stefancic (2001) once explained the complexity of the word *racism*, with the predicament being that this loaded term is meant to singularly define the many ways in which it occurs in society. Whether intentional, covert, outright, systematic, or unconscious, this broad phenomenon seems incomplete when limited to the lone word *racism*. If someone were to mention they were experiencing racism in their workplace, this unaccompanied word might provide very little insight into how and in what ways they are experiencing this.

The occurrence of daily, racialized occupational stress has been defined as *racial battle fatigue* by critical race theorist William Smith, an experience comparable to the distressing physical and emotional conditions of combat fatigue faced by military personnel in battle (Smith, 2004). When advocating for social justice reform and equity in the United States' public-school systems, teachers are not left unscathed from the racial battle fatigue found in education. Pizarro & Kohli (2020) made concerted research efforts to bring attention towards K-12 teachers and the impacts of racism and hostile racial climates of schools, asserting that little priority has been afforded to teachers of color and the potential for psychological and physiological impacts due to the workplace. There exists a need for better provisions for teachers of color to have a safe work climate in education, largely due to the actions of their White coworkers.

In 2015, Ingersoll analyzed 25 years of quantitative national data from The U.S. Department of Education revealing that on average, teachers of color leave the profession

at higher rates than White teachers and experience less job stability (Ingersoll 2015). This study provided important empirical evidence suggesting a demand for retention initiatives for teachers of color but lacked qualitative data to elaborate on the experiences of teachers of color to provide information related to their careers and subsequent departure.

Ingersoll & May (2017) further analyzed the high attrition rates of teachers of color, determining one of the primary reasons as being job dissatisfaction specifically with negative working conditions. This was the most prominent issue for teachers of color, with issues such as teacher salaries and access to resources having low impact on leaving the profession. By connecting the quantitative findings from Ingersoll & May on teacher of color job dissatisfaction, underlying themes utilizing qualitative research methods could provide voice to this issue when situated in critical race theory (CRT). Exploring the careers of teachers of color with the purpose of gaining insight on their experiences with a critical race framework could provide new data from their lived experience.

This concept was studied by Kohli (2016), informing that "research has not yet connected racism to teacher of color attrition" (p. 312); thus, hypothesizing with a critical race lens that "…if teachers of color face incredible racialization in their preparation and teaching lives, racism could also serve as a barrier in their professional growth and retention…" (p. 312). Kohli discovered through the investigation of 218 teachers of color that hostile racial climate had a significant impact on the retention of teachers of color and is a key contributor to stress and job dissatisfaction. The study also found that teachers of color experienced high levels of isolation and undervalue, often "silenced

within color-blind school contexts and as objects of racial microaggressions that leave them feeling invisible, stereotyped, and disrespected" (Kohli, 2016, p. 325).

The findings in Kohli's 2016 study confirmed the connection of racism to attrition rates, declaring the current rationales for high teacher of color turnover as insufficient. This conclusion directly challenged the generalized data in the Ingersoll (2015) study that simply attributed high teacher of color turnover rates to job dissatisfaction, which accounted for 50% of the departing group. It can be interpreted that using CRT is of extreme value to studies that inquire how racism affects teachers of color's professional experiences, rejecting the White majoritarian experience as the standard.

CRT, summarized by Vaught & Castagno (2008), is centered around the concept that "racism is a vast system that structures our institutions and our relationships. Second, racism adapts to socio-cultural changes by altering its expression, but it never diminishes or disappears" (p. 96). If racism is posited as a permanent structure within our society's institutions, the proposition of teacher-experienced racism at the hands of White coworkers is a phenomenon based in theory, even when the expression of racism is altered into something such as microaggressions.

Emerging critical race research in education allows for a better interpretation of the experiences of teachers of color, affirming the effects of racial hostility in schools and its need to be addressed. Based on my personal experience as a teacher, and the experiences shared by multiple colleagues, I have discovered that the existence of hostile racial climates likely requires more examination within the schools in my state. Baumfield (2016), presented *teacher practitioner research* as a way "to uncover situated knowledge and test it in context within a wider community… the model is one of

replication rather than establishing proven outcomes" (p. 156). If there are multiple incidents that can be shared among a small cluster of teachers, there is potential for more incidents to exist across other school districts. I question how many racist incidents occur among teachers of color that go untold, especially incidents that feel very casual which may leave one questioning the perpetrator's intent.

In my experience, comments from other staff members began subtly, with casual remarks that would make me second guess myself, induce paranoia, and cause me to wonder if things were truly as offensive as they seemed. These casual, but racist, interactions were forms of *microaggressions*, "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). Comments that are subtle are difficult to analyze from a personal standpoint. "Hello, are you our new full-time custodian?" as I was approached out of nowhere by a new teacher in the hallway. "Does your mother clean houses for a living?" I was once asked during a staff meeting, again unprompted, by another staff member. Sue et al. (2007) warned, "These exchanges are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous" (p. 273). I decided the comments might be insignificant, though questionable, in my school of predominantly White faculty and staff until I was called a "half-breed" in a manner dismissed as a joke. My identity and the perception held by others became evident.

I reported this incident, which resulted in the promise of diversity training for the next school year. Once the training day came, a day I waited months for, I listened to my colleagues openly complain about the training and continue to make racist remarks and

microaggressions days and weeks after. They complained about feeling attacked for being White and stood firmly in their belief that there was no such thing as racism at their school. We never had diversity training again. Since then, I have fortunately confided in a few trusted colleagues who can relate, but I will likely not bother with reporting any future incidents. Still, these types of experiences need to be heard and shared, and I remained hopeful about that through this study.

### Statement of the Problem

Issues with racism among teachers in the workplace has created the need to investigate racially based offenses against teachers of color working in the state of North Carolina to determine how and in what ways they are experiencing racism from their coworkers and explore a new method of mitigating these issues. A confidential setting to share stories about teacher experiences in schools can provide insight into our state's workplace environment when it comes to racism and its effects. Through counter-storytelling, this study inquired about teachers of color's experiences with racism to acknowledge and analyze prevalence, sources of commonality, and the potential effects of racist experiences. There was a key interest in investigating any existence of underlying burden, stress, and job dissatisfaction directly caused by these experiences.

The decision to feature all teachers of color who identify as a person of color (POC) does not support a colorblind approach to erase or generalize the identities of participants, but to honor the diversity of our unique perspectives in which we engage with the majoritarian. Delgado & Stefancic (2001) warned against the entrapment of the Black-White binary as "each disfavored group in this country has been racialized in its own individual way and according to the needs of the majority group at particular times

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in its history" (p. 79), whereas the binary "weakens solidarity, reduces opportunities for coalition, deprives a group of the benefits of the others' experiences, makes it excessively dependent on the approval of the White establishment, and sets it up for ultimate disappointment" (pp. 80-81). We are united as a community by our experiences of this phenomenon occurring in our workplace and continue to learn from each other on how we maneuver in the same spaces. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) highlight the importance of bringing these experiences forward through counter-stories, as it "allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups" (p. 27).

In addition to investigating teacher experiences with racism in the workplace, this study also utilized an action research intervention which examined the impact of shared storytelling among participants. Delgado & Stefancic (2001) supported the psychological healing that storytelling can provide communities of color, along with the value that written narratives serve for sharing evidence to readers. Upon completion of the initial investigation, each narrative was compiled into a collection which read as a non-fiction novel, then shared with each participant for review. Once participants reviewed the book, they were asked to complete a post-survey on their perspective and reaction to the book. This component was vital to the use of narrative methods in action research as Toledano & Anderson (2020) stated that "the understanding that comes from the narrative process is found not within a person but in the interactions that people have with others" (p. 314). A collection of narratives would be incomplete without sharing them and generating a new level of collaboration and reflection among participants of this study.

Bringing this research forward may contribute to positive change through determining effective ways for educational leaders to uncover and manage incidents of racism in our schools. One form of successful change could be achieved by encouraging and promoting a safe and more effective means for every experience of workplace racism to be reported appropriately, addressed, and eliminated. Part of this requires a climate in which discussing racism and the experiences of teachers of color are normalized. Even when a teacher is not the direct subject of a racist exchange, simply "witnessing racism within the school [and] feeling ostracized for voicing antiracist beliefs . . . introduce psychological burden and stress for teachers of color" (Redding, 2019, p. 508). For some teachers, there may be an instilled fear in speaking out about racism that they witness or experience. Regardless, there still exists the daily burden of having to deal with these issues in the professional setting.

Unreported racist incidents are an issue that can be revealed by giving teachers of color the opportunity to record their experiences without judgment or retaliation, potentially unveiling a commonality among many teachers with how they have been affected by the racism in their workplace. Duncan (2019) conducted research that was not initially focused on studying racism experienced by Black teachers in the workplace; however, the study's outcomes highlighted that the Black teacher participants commonly cited that a considerably large obstacle in the workplace was the racism they were constantly subjected to by their White colleagues. This finding suggests a need for future research to better define the ways in which racism is affecting teachers of color by way of hurdling their day-to-day work experience, and to discuss its prevalence within the school setting.

Duncan's (2019) unintended outcome also supports the need for more stories by teachers of color facing the same obstacle to be brought forward, especially stories that include experiences that seem subtle or difficult to define. Solórzano & Yosso (2002) explained that within these told experiences, "Racist injuries are named, [and] victims of racism can find their voice" (p. 27). Ahmed (2012) supported these experiences that seem too intangible to explain, expressing that, "I am never sure when x happens, whether x is about racism or is a result of racism . . . Racism creates paranoia; that's what racism does" (pp. 155-156). Examining these experiences has the potential to be validating at a time when it feels difficult to describe why a comment created such an unforgettable question in one's own mind. Even when a situation feels concrete and tangible, there is still apprehension to come forward due to the possibility of being ignored, silenced, ostracized, or even retaliated against. Anytime a social situation is interrupted to declare that it appears racist in nature, "there is likely to be more at stake for the person who is the target of the assault" (Pearce, 2019), where the intervention should be taking place against the offender.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was heavily influenced by critical race theory (CRT), pulling important elements to guide decisions within this study that are justified and aligned with the problem of practice. When making connections between this study's problem of practice and major elements within CRT, it was imperative to seek theoretical guidance to better understand how racialized incidents could be happening to teachers of color. Derrick Bell, highly regarded as a foundational leader and creator of CRT, authored many critical pieces on racial reform in America, one of which

included the conception of *interest convergence*, which provided a rooted principle for the phenomenon occurring amongst teachers of color.

Historically, D. Bell theorized that the rights of Black people are "recognized and protected when and only so long as policymakers perceive that such advances will further interests that are their primary concern" (D. Bell, 2004, p. 50), thus coining *interest convergence* and the dilemma for reform. This concept was important when analyzing the state of teacher diversity. National data research conducted by Carver-Thomas (2018) affirmed the value of teachers of color and diversity as benefitting all students, with significant increases in social and emotional wellness of students, higher academic performance, and improved graduation rates.

The data also cited that in North Carolina, Black students who had at least one Black teacher just once between the 3rd through 5th grades reaped long term benefits, such as decreasing the likelihood of dropping out of high school and being more likely to have college aspirations. More specifically, "having at least one Black teacher in grades 3 to 5 cut the high school dropout rate in half for Black boys" (Carver-Thomas, 2018, p. 4). While the data supports the value in diversifying the teacher workforce, the attrition rates of teachers of color are not reflective of holding value, coupled with compelling questions about hostile racial climates.

D. Bell (2003) poignantly stated, "the benefit of recognizing the value of diversity rather than the need to remedy continuing discrimination in the business and employment fields comes at a substantial cost" (p. 1627). The cost in this case appears to be the protection of teachers of color in the workplace and their impact on students. This exemplified his dilemma of interest convergence, where it is now questioned if teachers

of color will have to rely on interest convergence of the majoritarian in education policy making to see change. Milner's (2020) study shared the experiences of Black women teachers and their position within the school being strictly contingent on their level of agreeability with their White coworkers, with consequences if they ever disagreed with the majoritarian agenda. Although Black teachers in the study were deemed valuable to their school, that value was solely determined by White colleagues if they continued to advance their own interests.

One of the primary goals of CRT, defined by Parker & Lynn (2002) is "to present storytelling and narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in the law and in society" (p. 10). While CRT guided this investigation in a comprehensive sense, methodologically it was also analyzed using Solórzano & Yosso's (2002) framework which utilized CRT's aspect of counter-storytelling for educational research, defining counter-storytelling "as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p.32). Mill & Unsworth (2018) also proposed that "an ultimate goal of critical race theory is social transformation, which begins by discussing race openly" (p. 313). Including teachers of color for discussing race openly can investigate the lengths and depths of racism within our institutions, initiating social transformation.

Establishing the existence of racialized interactions illuminates the existence of the hostile work environments that are within our schools, and "CRT is a useful analytical tool in understanding the hostile racial climates of schools" (Kohli, 2016, p. 310). Within CRT, utilizing counter-storytelling challenges the majoritarian colleague by "exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes"

(DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). Exposing the occurrence of racism perpetrated by White colleagues challenges the system of education, providing an avenue for teachers of color to examine their professional experiences in a different context.

Solórzano & Yosso's (2002) application of counter-storytelling for educational research was the basis for grounding this study in the collection of *experiential knowledge*. Experiential knowledge is one of the five elements Solórzano & Yosso outlined within CRT, which "recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination" (p. 26). Solórzano & Yosso (2002) elaborated on the importance of counter-storytelling:

> However, when the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries are named, victims of racism can find their voice. Furthermore, those injured by racism and other forms of oppression discover they are not alone in their marginality. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed, and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves. (p. 27)

This study aims to analyze racist experiences against teachers of color by their White colleagues. CRT's recognition of experiential knowledge held by people of color supports this study as an approach to acknowledge racism's prevalence, commonality, and emotional impact, and to feel empowered by having an opportunity to bring these experiences to light through personal narrative.

Solórzano & Yosso (2002) also found that commonality is especially important so that teachers of color can find others who share their feelings and experiences and reflect

more about the emotional toll of these encounters. Analyzing racist experiences against teachers of color might reveal the existence of underlying burden, stress, and dissatisfaction; an idea initiated by data related to the problem of practice.

The investigation of teacher-experienced racism utilizing key components of CRT not only provides teachers of color a voice for their stories but inspired the rationale for this inquiry research to also be aligned and grounded in this same theoretical framework. CRT elements also involves the "challenge to dominant ideology . . . critical race theory challenges the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity . . . colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). Counter-storytelling from teachers of color challenges the dominant perspective of education, which belongs to White teachers.

The White teacher norm is the dominant, accepted majority perspective in education as an institution and CRT proposes the challenge of this dominance, something that can be achieved by counter-storytelling from teachers of color. L. Bell (2003) reported that "Whites are, in fact, often taken by surprise when confronted with alternative scenarios and interpretations of racial experience" (p. 5). No matter the race of the audience receiving this study, CRT methodology justifies the notion that all teachers can be impacted by counter-storytelling, whether it be from the connectedness of identifying with a fellow teacher of color, or the confrontation found in reading about these racial experiences for White staff members.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate racially based offenses against teachers of color in the state of North Carolina to determine how and in what ways they

are experiencing racism from their white coworkers and inquired how shared storytelling impacted teachers of color in coping with this experience. Sharing stories about teachers of color's experiences in schools can provide impactful revelations about how racism occurs specifically from White colleagues and examine how it has affected their overall teaching experience.

This investigation employed practitioner-based narrative inquiry to collaborate with teachers of color interested in sharing their evidence of racism, validated by experiential knowledge in CRT. Miller et al. (2020) reiterated how "One important tenet of CRT is recognizing and valuing the experiences and voices of people of color" (p. 272). However, Miller et al. also challenged educational researchers to move beyond storytelling to better understand how using the voices of people of color "can be used as a research methodology for educational equity" (p. 270). Thus, the second goal of this study was to utilize counternarrative methods as an intervention to mitigate the problem of practice and investigate its outcomes.

These narratives were taken as truths, with the aim of revealing an existence of underlying burden, stress, and dissatisfaction because of racism. As a result, bringing stories to the public light will make ignoring them unavoidable, insisting new strategies be developed that will lead to positive changes within our schools. These narratives also attempted to create community building among participants and investigated how this collaborative study might impact their overall experience as a teacher of color in NC.

## Research Questions

The research questions below were curated to reflect the qualitative elements of critical race theory as it guided the investigation.

1. In what ways might NC teachers of color experience racism from their colleagues in the workplace?

    a. How, if at all, do these experiences with racism affect NC teachers of color?

2. How, if at all, does the sharing of narratives help teachers of color cope with racist experiences in the workplace and does this help with improving their overall experience?

    a. How might the sharing of narratives serve as an intervention for teachers of color?

These research questions were chosen to encourage counter-storytelling that reflect experiential knowledge from participants to better examine the impact of racialization at work and to investigate how the collaboration of these stories might initiate new understandings of their experience. One of the nine characteristics of educational action research, outlined by Lomax (1994), defines it as being "democratic, in that it evidences empowering relationships with others in the research process, enabling the 'other' to influence the research and speak for themselves" (Lomax, 1994, as cited in Hartog, 2018, p. 230). The research questions within this investigation intended to uphold this democratic process in which the power of influence was bound to the participant as they shared their knowledge and perspective in a way where they were in full control of their story and experiences.

## Limitations of the Study

There were identifiable limitations in conducting this study, which inherently served to denote the context of the research. The first limitation of this study was found

in the sampling plan for participants. With the decision to recruit a diverse sample of teachers who self-identify as being a person of color, we are only afforded a glimpse of each racialized experience. Promoting research validity informed the decision to use maximum variation of participants, with the intent of providing representation and diversity. This can become problematic if a reader takes on the assumption that these narratives can be generalized as all teachers of color's experiences. One single narrative does not reflect an entire experience in the context of race. The goal of this study was to inquire about specific racialized experiences situated in the workplace, but with this sampling plan precautions must be made to reduce the notion that the data is experientially synchronous to entire cultural groups.

Another methodological limitation was the exclusion of intersectionality to consider how various personal attributes such as sex, gender identity, or ability, influence a participant's experience. Intersectionality, coined by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, was introduced to cease the erasure of Black women's experiences with discrimination due to being limited to the generalizations of race, whereas "according to the dominant view, a discriminator treats all people within a race or sex category similarly" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 150). The broad assumption of the dominant view disregards sex and gender identity and decides there is no variation on racialized experiences. This is critical of the choice to use maximum variation solely based on race, ignoring how the intersect of sex and gender identities are crucial to acknowledging a situated experience, and are not mutually exclusive. Future research could redesign a sampling plan to focus on the diverse experiences of teachers who share the same race,

with the inclusion of multiple intersections to achieve maximum variation that does not overlook these overlaps.

Overall, the transferability of this study lies in the evidence that racist incidences are being experienced by teachers of color, and the insight in counter-stories provides findings that can be applied in multiple contexts. Although a reader may not completely identify with all the personal attributes of a participant, that does not limit their ability to search for commonality within their own lived experience or situate themselves within the perspective. Whether a reader feels congruent, adjacent, or juxtaposed to the narratives, there still exists a position which is unavoidable.

Regarding data collection, new limitations surfaced during the research process which were not present during the initial conception of this study. As the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged in March of 2020 and impacted the world in unforeseen ways, new considerations for the health and safety of the researcher and participants changed the course of this study as meeting participants in-person became less desirable. Although in-person interview was the preferred method to capture an uninterrupted experience, this was no longer a viable option. Even with social distancing measures and the use of personal protective equipment, the conditions of meeting in-person posed a threat to creating an environment that was conducive for this study.

This ultimately informed the decision to conduct interviews remotely, over virtual video conferencing applications, imposing new considerations for maintaining security over the data, building rapport, and encouraging narratives. Narratives were consequently limited to verbal dialogue via audio-recording, with less ability to detect body language or the potential for non-verbal data collection. Also, plans for technological issues were

set in the case of internet connection failure, which would affect the opportunity for an uninterrupted experience.

## Significance of the Study

Lomax (1994) characterized educational action research as being "authentic, in that it has resonance for other practitioners who can empathize with the values that underpin the research" (Lomax, 1994, as cited in Hartog, 2018, p. 230). Although this study aimed to uncover racist interactions from school staff against teachers of color, the information gleaned has the potential to resonate with multiple audiences who can find value in its discoveries. For the audience of teachers of color, learning about multiple, common shared experiences across NC might solidify a meaningful connection in knowing there are other teachers with experiences like them, and possibly inspire more teachers of color to speak out about their work environments. This study should also hold considerable value to all teacher practitioners who empathize with this research who might now hold colleagues accountable for their actions. Knowing stories exist explaining how educators are burdened by colleagues daily can create a new norm for identifying and intervening in racist situations.

This study might also impact administrative staff, implying the need for better equipped training to create a workplace that is inviting for everyone to speak out about inappropriate and offensive experiences without fear of retaliation or silence. If incidents are often going untold, then school administration should be held accountable for the state of their school's environment. District-wide leaders can also provide quality support for schools via professional development and training to begin creating healthier

environments for all employees. The transferability exists in how it can be recreated in any school district where this hardship occurs for teachers of color.

A separate lane of significance can also be sourced from this research's intervention through the use and study of collaborative books as a method for action. Miller et al. (2020) proposed that the primary limitation of counternarrative research is its ability to induce change in education due lacking a unified approach in how to initiate action with the data obtained. Upon discovering this gap in the literature, the intervention served to investigate how collaborative books might be utilized as an approach to changing current practices in teacher development or educational equity.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW
**Organization of the Chapter**

This literature review was organized to present a pattern of root cause and effect as it pertains to systemic racism in education and its succession of repercussions which influenced the experiences of teachers of color. The root cause of systemic racism in education will be analyzed within the framework of critical race theory (CRT) to detail the theoretical foundations of this problem. CRT was used as the lens to explore pivotal moments in history that contributed to the current state of teachers of color's experiences in the workplace. Upon building the historical context of systemic racism in theory, this literature review revealed compounding evidence of racialized experiences that originated at the start of teachers of color's educational journey, tracing back to their emergence as a student of color navigating a systemically racist institution. Following the educational journey of students of color through pre-service teaching will effectively situate our current teachers of color's experiences as a series of racialized encounters they endured within the institution of education over a lifetime. If teachers of color are experiencing racism within their schools at the hands of White colleagues who were also indoctrinated by this same institution, then it is of great importance to investigate in the literature how these are not isolated incidents, but all connected to a larger system of racism in praxis.

## Literature Review

This literature review included research studies, scholarly articles, and books that were primarily found using specific keywords in a Boolean online database provided through The University of South Carolina's library services. Literature was also discovered by following reference lists from relevant works to further investigate points of interest, author searches of prominent scholars in the field, as well as by recommendation from colleagues and professors. Selections for references which supported this study followed the following general criteria: (a) scholarly in nature, (b) situated in education, (c) clear relation to people of color, (d) clear connection to racism. These criteria were used when evaluating peer-reviewed research and scholarly articles, as well as research backed by established organizations and universities. Due to limitations on data, I expanded my search to include published organization reports that included a research design, methodology section, and relevant empirical evidence from qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research to vet for rigor and scholarship.

Sources also had to show a clear relation to people of color to be included in this review, ensuring teachers or students of color were studied ethically and in high regard for their experiential knowledge, or the data analysis was of clear benefit to the advancement of understanding racially marginalized experiences in education. This restriction was important because quantitative data, especially, tends to take an approach that erases racialized experiences as a prospective hypothesis for certain occurrences (Petchauer, 2015). Appropriate literature showed high regard for people of color and aimed to connect their experiences in education to systemic racism, which further boosted the claims in this literature review.

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical race theory (CRT) first surfaced in the emergent legal scholarship of law school students, "whose work challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii). In the Crenshaw et al. (1995) book on CRT, the foundational contributors to the theory co-created a collection of essential essays aimed to present the fundamentals of CRT and its methodologies tied by the interests of understanding White supremacy and the structures which maintain it in America, alongside the commitment to changing it.

CRT also named racism as systemic and ingrained in American society, and that legal scholarship cannot be objective when it comes to race and racial power considering that we are integrated members of society and unexcused from the systemic effects of racism (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii). Furthermore,

> With its explicit embrace of race-consciousness, Critical Race Theory aims to reexamine the terms by which race and racism have been negotiated in American consciousness, and to recover and revitalize the radical tradition of race-consciousness among African-Americans and other peoples of color – a tradition that was discarded when integration, assimilation and the ideal of colorblindness became the official norms of racial enlightenment. (p. xiv)

By utilizing CRT's embrace of race-consciousness, it urges people of color to revitalize the understanding of race as a transcendent, conspicuous component of American society to examine these forces and become an active participant in dismantling the system (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Racism is posited as a permanent structure within our society.

CRT is also interdisciplinary, applied to challenge the ideologies and practices that inform inequalities and highlight the structure of racial hierarchy (Crenshaw et al., 1995). One of the tenets of CRT, developed by Harris's *whiteness as property* within the Crenshaw et al., (1995) compilation, explains whiteness as an elevated resource, "deployable at the social, political, and institutional level to maintain control" (Harris, 1995, p. 282). Whiteness as property also includes "the absolute right to exclude" (p. 282), which heavily protected whiteness in society whether under law or by hidden practices of inequality.

Derrick Bell, a catalyst of CRT also featured in Crenshaw et al. (1995), authored many critical pieces on racial reform in America, including responses to 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown vs. Board of Education* and its subsequent effects on Black teachers and students, racial equality, and the desegregation plans of school systems. To recall D. Bell's concept of *interest convergence*, fulfilling *Brown vs. Board of Education* would also come with many contingencies' dependent on how the interests of improving Black educational opportunities and White policymaking would cross paths.

D. Bell was fundamental to CRT in recognizing the point of interest convergence post *Brown*, where "opposition to *Brown* was clearly increasing; its supporters were clearly on the defensive, as was the Supreme Court itself" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. 25). The longer this opposition was allowed to intensify, the greatest danger was to the federal system, not the affordance of equal education to Black students. D. Bell further commented on this by noting the frustration of the federal courts on the pace and plans for desegregating schools was sourced as a lack of respect for the system, not the actual success of Black students:

Yet the remedies set forth in the major school cases following *Brown* – balancing

the student and teacher populations by race in each school, eliminating single-race

schools, redrawing school attendance lines, and transporting students to achieve

racial balance – have not in themselves guaranteed black children better schooling

than they received in the pre-*Brown* era. (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. 25)

Instead, these remedies were to appease the system where the dignity of the courts

needed to be defended. Interests converged to push school desegregation with urgency

and punish evasion tactics without truly abolishing racial discrimination and harassment

or acknowledging it as a necessity.

K. Brown (2014) recognized these elements of CRT in education, stating that "the

goal of CRT in education is to excavate how race operates in society and in education, at

both the structural and local, everyday level" (p. 329), which is accomplished through

methods of counter-storytelling, recognizing whiteness as property, and interest

convergence. Kohli (2016) also articulated how CRT was further developed in the 1990s

as the application of CRT in educational research expanded to better clarify how schools

worked to affirm the status quo of racial hierarchy. Understanding the reality of racial

hierarchy, whiteness as property, and interest convergence as a crucial framework within

CRT recognizes how the institution of education has historically excluded service to

people of color and continues to maintain structural protection of it. Furthermore, this

exclusion is compounded to affect people of color throughout their institutional

experience. Kohli expanded this concept to assert,

…unless school leaders actively oppose institutional norms and practices of

whiteness, schools will continue to function as hostile racial climates not only to

students of Color but also to teachers of Color, particularly those who try to

disrupt the racial status quo. (Kohli, 2016, p. 310)

CRT in education examines how teachers of color are potentially limited by the

constructs of whiteness as property and interest convergence primarily by the

interpretation of their value. While teachers of color are often valued as necessary

representation for K-12 students of color, they are entrapped in that role which does not

transcend into being effective for all students (Achinstein et al., 2010; Brown, K., 2014;

Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Kohli, 2016; Rauscher & Wilson, 2016; Beard, 2020). The

notion of teachers of color serving as the savior (Popkewitz,1998) for K-12 students of

color exemplifies the privilege of White teachers who are absolved from this

generalization while also detaching the root effects of systemic racism on education

(Brown, K., 2014). This also isolates the education of K-12 students of color as being a

problem separate from the mainstream, and instead individualistic in nature.

Teachers of color also experience limitations as it aligns to the construct of

interest convergence and their value to White teachers and administrators. K. Brown

(2014) questioned the recruitment of teachers of color, with interest solely being in

exploiting their experiential knowledge to serve White teacher interests, as well as

generating a source for White teachers to experience diversity.

Another guiding principle of this literature review was based in the non-

mainstreamed way oppression is defined according to L. Bell (2016). L. Bell believed

dictionary definitions acknowledge the overt, but not the covert features that make it a

normalized aspect of daily life; oppression is a complex dynamic of interlocking and

interwoven components which work to mutually reinforce each other, and difficult to

itemize as singular aspects. It is also a social construct, difficult to expose due to its systematization which feeds its omnipotence and power to control without members of society being fully aware unless they are race-conscious.

L. Bell (2016) further defined oppression as an institution that is pervasive, rooted in history, law, societal norms, and education, all working to justify and preserve racial hierarchy and the dominant group. The outcome, according to L. Bell, over time produces members who are acculturated into this dynamic system, increasing its sustainability by internalizing it at the personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels; thus, the pervasive nature of racist oppression reaches beyond multiple institutions as a mutually supportive system in society and our overall way of life. L. Bell finds that the nature of racism as oppression is seen in the underpinning of all the institutions enlisted by society daily, fully saturated with practices which intend to marginalize non-White members and maintain White property rights to use and exclude members in these institutions as seen fit.

The notion that oppression is interlocking and interwoven can be seen in education through the ongoing experiences of teachers of color studied by Pizarro & Kohli (2020), also arguing that these experiences are layered and occur in overt and covert ways simultaneously. At the primary layer, "institutional racism is embedded into the structures, policies, and functions of schooling" (p. 971), while more layers top the primary level daily, weighing teachers of color down with multiple direct and indirect incidents. These multilayered experiences require teachers of color to invest a significant amount of energy and time toward confronting these incidents, coupled with feelings of isolation, anxiety, and physiological stress.

One of the most devious features of racism as an institution of oppression is its invisibility. L. Bell (2016) described how through hegemony, it is assumed that reproducing the statuses of those who are advantaged verses disadvantaged is seen as, "natural, normal, [and] 'business as usual,' even by those who are disempowered;" furthermore, "Power operates not simply through persons or groups unilaterally imposing their will on others, but through ongoing systems that are mediated by well-intentioned people … merely going about their daily lives," (p. 10). The ways in which racism is used as an oppressive tool in the institution of education are not simple, separated incidents. By way of hegemony, oppression as an institution allows education's deeply rooted racism to go unseen as a natural order of how things are, normalized and acceptable in practice.

This can be seen in practice through the connection between individual exhibitions of racism and institutional policies of racism. Bell et al. (2016), identified that individual racism and institutional racism can intersect, and thereby mutually reinforce each other, such as when racist behaviors are enacted by an individual and allowed to go unchallenged by the institution as a violation that necessitates consequences. These racist, individual behaviors become normalized as group culture; the group culture continues unchecked and influences the institution's practices; then, the racist practice of the institution permeates its members and affects individual attitudes, circling back to the unchallenged, individual exhibitor who is mutually reinforcing the institutional norms of racism.

The impact of this unchallenged and unchecked racialized culture can be detrimental on people of color, an experience coined by Smith (2004) as *racial battle*

*fatigue* (RBF) whereas the distressing physiological and emotional conditions of combat fatigue faced by military personnel in battle can also be synonymous with the daily hostile, racialized interactions faced by people of color (Smith, 2004). Furthermore, Smith stated that the effects of racism and battle fatigue amongst people of color can also be anticipatory, not solely limited to reactionary experiences, demonstrating how normalized racism has become in some of our institutions.

Smith is highly esteemed as a Critical Race theorist, using RBF as a theoretical framework in his own research of analyzing the effects of racism on Black students and faculty in predominantly White educational institutions (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Smith, 2004). Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano (2006) have further expanded the context of RBF in education:

> The stress of unavoidable front-line racial battles in historically white spaces leads to people of color feeling mentally, emotionally, and physically drained. The stress from racial microaggressions can become lethal when the accumulation of physiological symptoms of racial battle fatigue are untreated, unnoticed, misdiagnosed, or personally dismissed. (p. 301)

While Smith (2004) defined many of the psychological and physiological symptoms of RBF in education, he also cautioned that another layer of occupational stress is derived from the skepticism and dismissal of such symptoms by White colleagues. White colleagues, according to Smith, believe these experiences to be exaggerated, minor, and a result of their colleagues being overly sensitive or induced by paranoia. These attitudes towards RBF, brought to light by Smith, exemplify the notion of hegemony by L. Bell (2016), demonstrating how the individual dismissal of racialized experience can go

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unchecked by the institution and develop into a normalized attitude of repudiation towards the symptoms of RBF faced by people of color.

To dismantle the practice of hegemony and the normalization of the dominant group, the use of counter-storytelling has become a staple in CRT to uncover the hidden, historical experiences of those in the non-dominant group, which delegitimizes the majoritarian. The dominant, majoritarian perspective in education belongs to White educators, whereas "critical race theory challenges the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity . . . colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). In battling these traditional claims, exploring racism with experiential knowledge via counter-storytelling was validated as an element of CRT by Solórzano and Yosso, deeming it an authentic and critical component in analyzing racial inequality.

L. Bell (2016) noted that "People in dominant groups are socialized to accept their group's socially advantaged status as normal and deserved, rather than recognizing how it has been conferred through systems of inequality" (p. 9). The use of counter-storytelling can challenge this internalized dominance within the institution of education by exposing the occurrence of racism perpetrated by White teachers, providing a path for teachers of color to examine their contrasting professional experiences.

This challenge is important, as L. Bell (2003) reported that, "Whites are, in fact, often taken by surprise when confronted with alternative scenarios and interpretations of racial experience" (p. 5); which illuminates just how normalized White internalized dominance is as a facet of culture in society. "The stories People of Color tell over and

over to bear witness to their ongoing experiences of racism sometimes seem like screaming into a White void from which no reflection returns" (p. 24), which is troubling.

**Historical Context**

The institution of oppression was identified by L. Bell (2016) as being grounded in history, found in the accumulation of social patterns and its effects which amassed over time; moreover, "Historical context and detail can reveal the relationship between particular actions, practices, and polices from the past and their structural and cumulative outcomes of the present" (p. 6). The historical context of this literature review followed the landmark legal outcome of the 1954 Supreme Court Case *Brown vs. Board of Education* and its subsequent effects on teachers of color, and students of color en route to becoming a teacher of color in the present day. The historical context of *Brown v. Board of Education* showed how the institution of oppression can be found in education as an accumulation of interconnected outcomes over time.

*Effects of Brown v. Board of Education*

Theorist bell hooks (1994) provided her own counternarrative on the effects of *Brown v. Board of Education* from her experiential knowledge as a student before the ruling called for desegregation of public schools. Prior to the Supreme Court ruling, hooks described her educational experience as transformative and revolutionary:

> For black folks teaching – educating was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle. Indeed, my all-black grade schools became the location where I experienced learning as revolution … Almost all our teachers … were black women. They were committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers …We learned early that our

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devotion to learning … was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist

every strategy of white racist colonization … in theoretical terms, my teachers

were enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance… (hooks, 1994, p. 2)

However, upon racial integration, her counter-story shifted dramatically as she expressed

the loss of her love for school, as well as the changes she, her peers, and her former

teachers, witnessed and endured:

It [knowledge] was no longer connected to antiracist struggle. Bussed to white

schools, we soon learned that obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what

was expected of us. Too much eagerness to learn could easily be seen as a threat

to white authority. When we entered racist, desegregated, white schools … we

were mainly taught by white teachers whose lessons reinforced racist stereotypes.

For black children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom …

since we were always having to counter white racist assumptions that we were

genetically inferior … and education … merely strives to reinforce domination …

A few black teachers had joined us in the desegregation process. And, although it

was more difficult, they continued to nurture black students even as their efforts

were constrained by the suspicion they were favoring their own race. (hooks,

1994, pp. 3-4)

hooks (1994) recalled these experiences as being negative, political, and constantly in a

state of action against White people, even as a child. Education was no longer about

freedom, but obedience to dominance, whether in the position of being the student or the

teacher. Both were viewed under an eye of suspicion. hooks' counternarrative brings

value to challenging the dominant dialogue that *Brown v. Board of Education* was a liberatory moment of saviorhood in school desegregation.

Within the Crenshaw et al. (1995) book, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, Derrick Bell Jr. (1995) included an essay entitled "*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest Convergence Dilemma," which analyzed the effects of the landmark case and its empty promise of equal educational opportunity. It was proposed that implementing progress was nearly impossible, and that school desegregation had largely failed as black children are attending public schools that now position them as racially isolated and inferior. Furthermore, the issue of school desegregation lied in the fact that the various remedies to address *Brown* from school districts to achieve a balancing of their determination of a racial status quo, "have not in themselves guaranteed black children better schooling than they received in the pre-*Brown* era" (D. Bell, 1995, p. 25).

While schools might have visually appeased racial equality, the creation of a racial discrimination structure in education would have lasting and profound effects, such as resegregation from White families fleeing desegregated school zones, the loss of Black teachers and administrators, disproportionate suspension rates among students of color, and verbal and physical violence (D. Bell, 1995). Kohli (2016) provided further evidence that due to racist ideologies that remained unaddressed post-*Brown*, many Black teachers were consequently forced out of education as the intentions of *Brown* and the outcomes of *Brown* seldom aligned.

To recall the concept of whiteness as property, the institution of education became a battleground for protecting White interests with the post-*Brown* verdict under the veil

of morality to appease, but not truly change (D. Bell, 1995). This proposes its repercussions as being a connected chain of events over several decades that amounted to teachers of color facing racism in the workplace today as not simply an isolated incident, but a series of interactions in history because of normalized oppression drawn from the starting point of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

When researching the evidence of teachers of color's racialized experiences within education, history shows an accumulation dating back to their time as a student of color in the K-12 institution. Ladson-Billings (2016) highlighted an unbroken cycle where "White teacher educators prepare White teachers who teach children of color who fail to achieve success in schools and are unable to pursue postsecondary education where they might become teachers" (p. 230). Ladson-Billings also reflected on the long-term effects of the lack of diverse racial representation among teachers of color, a result of students of color being "systematically denied the educational opportunities that would lead to college and university admission" (p. 230), which also systematically blocked potential for more teachers of color to grow a steady presence in the profession. This is evidentiary of how the White teacher norm works to maintain and reinforce dominance whether White teachers are conscious of the phenomenon or not.

### *Cultural Conflicts of Students of Color in Education*

Teachers show no exemption to maintaining the structure of racism in the institution, which in turn upholds an institutional norm that the mainstream value is reflective of White member discourse and their practices. CRT theorists Delgado & Stefancic (2010) asserted that "in education, race neutrality and color-blindness are the reigning orthodoxy. Teachers believe that they treat their students equally," (p. 226).

However, funding, inadequate curriculum, tracking, and testing are among many of the educational outcomes that show this is not the case. In fact, these systems are actively operating against students of non-White cultural backgrounds. Delgado & Stefancic also expressed that CRT functions as a tool for educators to determine ways to address these issues and outcomes that are shown as detrimental.

B. Brown (2006) researched the cultural conflicts of students of color who must make a choice in their academic path. Brown's research found that students of color who maintained cultural acceptance within their marginalized sub-group had to do so by resisting the dominant discourse of the institution and becoming estranged to academic achievement by counter-hegemony; in contrast, students of color who chose to accept the academic achievement ideology of the dominant mainstream group did so at the expense of their cultural membership, making them an outsider to both their cultural group as well as in the dominant, academic realm.

The process of cultural erasure in students of color who opt to follow academic achievement in school is echoed professionally as those students become professionals who still must battle between cultural membership and academic membership. Ladson-Billings (2016) reflected that teachers of color also risk losing touch with their communities of color as so much of their lives in education have been "submerged in Whiteness," (p. 233). The occurrence of *collusion*, "going along with racism, participating, accepting it as a means of survival, conscious or unconscious, to maintain status of benefit of the dominant group" (L. Bell et al., 2016, p. 138), exemplified the phenomenon students and teachers of color experience as they debate their identity, particularly when necessitated as a means of survival. However, as noted in the B. Brown

(2006) study, accepting collusion as a means of survival does not mean people of color will be accepted into the mainstream fully, as they are still members of the marginalized sub-group.

*Pre-Service Teachers of Color and the Cohort Experience*

As pre-service teachers of color progress in teacher development programs, research by Sleeter (2001) showed a continued accumulation of racialized experiences. Sleeter (2001) researched pre-service teacher programs in universities and found that for many pre-service teachers of color, their vital experiential knowledge was often silenced or undervalued in courses that were not designed to facilitate multicultural pedagogy, ignoring the desire for pre-service teachers of color to extend their learning towards teaching multicultural students, as well as disadvantaging their White counterparts by avoiding exposure to multicultural pedagogy (p. 95). Predominantly White institutions can also create an "overwhelming presence of Whiteness" (p. 101), which can be silencing for students of color who are in these teacher development programs that do not aim to service their needs, or the needs of anyone desiring culturally relevant pedagogy.

Kohli (2016) provided an exceptional narrative on this experience from Bartolina, a Latina pre-service teacher who entered, "an elite and acclaimed teacher education program … and was struck by the overwhelming lack of diversity. The racial isolation she felt … brought her back to her own challenging K-12 experiences," (p. 976). Bartolina is quoted in reflection, "I don't know what it did to me, but it just hurt me on the daily" (p. 977), as she experienced repeated microaggressions and silencing, summarizing the program as,

…meant for White teachers. All of our readings were directed to White teachers

who want to get to know [how to] get along and be better able to teach students of

Color. My voice was not represented … just like my voice and my history …

were never represented in my K-12 schooling experience. (p. 977)

This narrative by Bartolina in the Kohli (2016) research demonstrated how racialized

experiences can compound over the duration a person of color's educational journey,

creating re-traumatization, and consistently reminding them of the racist undercurrent

within the institution that seems inescapable.

### *Historical Trends in Teacher of Color Retention Data*

In the Achinstein et al. (2010) study, data revealed that although an increasing

trend of teacher attrition began developing in 1988, the most alarming new finding is that

teachers of color are leaving the profession at higher rates than white teachers. The

Achinstein et al. research examined over 70 studies to inquire about the factors affecting

teacher of color attrition and retention to define what has led to the exit of teachers of

color from the profession in disproportionate numbers. One promising pattern showed

that teachers of color are more likely to stay in schools that serve low-income and racially

non-dominant communities than White teachers, and over 30 years of trends showed that

teachers of color are more likely to work in these schools, as well. Furthermore, data

from Achinstein (2009) found that of the teachers of color who exited their school, but

remained in the field, all transferred to a school that served low-income, racially non-

dominant communities.

This finding is corroborated by the Guarino et al. (2006) research, which found

that low-income, racially nondominant schools historically had consistent, high attrition

rates, primarily due to the exit of the White teacher majority who tended to leave for high-income, White majority schools, and Black teachers, specifically, exiting those schools in favor of the former (p. 190). The success of schools serving low-income, racially non-dominant communities in recruiting and retaining teachers of color was a differentiating point of focus for the Achinstein et al. (2010) study.

The Achinstein et al. (2010) analysis found no studies inquired about the means of cultural capital, or "cultural knowledge" (p. 88), employed by schools to influence retention. However, recent studies on newer teachers of color showed the lack of competent cultural capital, such as "low expectations or negative attitudes about students of color, lack of support for culturally relevant teaching, and limited dialogue about race and equity," (p. 90) as rationale for teachers of color to exit their schools, in favor of ones that instead retain more cultural capital. Additionally, the authors suggested that an incongruity of teachers of color's commitment to their students of color and a school's capacity for high cultural capital can create a deeply critical professional conflict.

Beard (2020) conducted a study on why teachers of color may remain in a school despite professional conflict from an institution low in cultural capital, concluding it was primarily due to their commitment to their students, not of contentment or acceptance of their professional climate. One participant in the study stated she had taught in multiple schools, still unable to find one she is entirely comfortable working in due to treatment of students and staff of color, poignantly reflecting how, "my experience as a teacher has mimicked my experience as a student … it's retraumatizing …They want to hire people of color that exist within White supremacy fluidly and comfortably" (pp. 65-66).

Even when teachers of color defy the odds of compounded racialized stress from their total educational experience, that stress only continues to grow within the profession as they navigate a system historically designed to exclude. According to Kohli (2016), more can be said about what the data of teacher attrition does not show, rather than what it does, attributing high attrition rates of teachers of color to be related to hostile racial climate, not things such as low pay, or lack of resources, which is the standing explanation. Both Pizarro & Kohli (2020) and Kohli (2016) hypothesized hostile racial climate to be a significant contributor to attrition rates, though very little data exists to further investigate this occurrence. Historical trends contextualized in the longstanding inequities placed upon people of color in American education lends itself to show the accumulated effects on lifetimes and generations.

**Related Research**

As this study inquired about racist offenses against teachers of color and their experiences within their schools, pertinent related research for this literature review consisted of studies which examined teachers of color's current racialized experiences and the ability to develop themes of commonality. Three studies were selected for further analysis due to having over 100 participants from across the nation. Each study noted having national participant recruitment to be a unique finding for qualitative research on a topic that all authors desired additional future research in, to unveil the building collection of experiences. Two additional studies were selected which examined the experiences of Black male teachers and their perceptions of social capital and socialization with White colleagues, and two final studies were included in a segment to incorporate the differing perspectives of White teachers on racism in the workplace.

### *How Teachers of Color Experience Hostile Racial Climates*

Griffin & Tackie (2016) published a report presenting their findings on a national qualitative research study of 150 Black teachers of all grades and experience levels using 90-minute focus groups. The authors evaluated the importance of their research as presenting new qualitative data findings on the experiences of Black teachers representative of the nation, arguing most related qualitative studies are limited to one state or school district. The purpose of the study was to (a) better recognize the unique experiences of Black teachers, (b) determine why they teach, (c) understand their perspective on the current state of education, (d) highlight what qualities they feel they bring to education, and (e) name their challenges in the workplace due to race.

The Griffin & Tackie (2016) research team used national data from 2012 to target regions with high numbers of teachers of color, recruiting participants through those local teacher organizations. Of the 150 participants who volunteered for the focus groups, 80% were women, about 30% had over 15 years of experience, and 90% taught in urban schools. Thematic data analysis was used in coding the transcripts based on commonly shared topics or expressions, determining the most recurrent themes to be teachers connecting with black students, enforcing discipline as a priority over educating students, constantly proving their worth, supporting the whole student, and the *othering* and devaluing of Black teachers.

Focusing specifically on the racialized experiences of teachers of color, the Griffin & Tackie (2016) data found that Black teachers were largely labeled as disciplinarians by colleagues, coerced into teaching the students their White colleagues deemed troublesome or low academically performing. This resulted in a lack of

professional opportunities for Black teachers to teach upper-level courses and advance

their skills as an expert in the field, being denied access to teach honors or Advanced

Placement classes (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). Reflecting on the historical context of this

literature review, Black teachers having inequitable access to this type of professional

opportunity seems reminiscent of their former experiences as Black students, having

inequitable access to the same upper-level educational opportunities (Achinstein et al.,

2010).

Directly tied to this overwhelming experience by Black teachers was the common

perception that they were less intelligent than their White colleagues, many times being

openly challenged on their qualifications to educate students (Griffin & Tackie, 2016).

The themes of *othering* and devaluation provided additional data on how the Black

teachers in the study shared similar experiences of being challenged by White colleagues

even in moments of professional success, instead being insulted and dismissed,

expressing how they work twice as hard to be deemed adequate yet receive little to no

praise. In addition to these themes, participants also shared common experiences of

having to constantly police their own behavior to appear professional and avoid racial

stereotypes and be silenced during moments when they wanted to share suggestions to

the team. Griffin & Tackie (2016) proposed school districts use these findings as a

discussion starter for reflecting on their own cultural climates and to evaluate their

working conditions for teachers of color, analyzing the current policies which might

uphold these issues.

As it relates to research goals of this study, the Griffin & Tackie (2016) data

provided insight towards the first research question, as it aimed to inquire how and in

what ways teachers of color experience racism in the workplace, as well as how these experiences may affect them. What had not been previously considered was how teachers of color may be overlooked for opportunities to advance in the field due to racial bias, as found in the Griffin & Tackie data. This would hinder their careers as they are boxed into teaching the students their White colleagues do not want, and forced to remain within that box, limiting them from further opportunities while routinely being challenged on their ability to educate higher achieving students.

The Kohli (2016) study was also a seminal work within the topic of racialized teacher of color experiences, recruiting 218 qualitative narratives from urban teachers of color who were specifically social justice oriented, affirming that even schools that serve communities of color function as hostile racial climates. Their research question aimed to investigate how the retention and professional experiences of teachers of color are affected by the racial climate of their urban schools. Kohli (2016) recruited participants through a nationwide professional development conference of 268 teachers of color, also arguing that the study was "a unique contribution in that it draws from a larger qualitative sample with an incredibly diverse pool of teachers of Color," (p. 313) similar to the Griffin & Tackie (2016) study in positing its unique value. The Kohli (2016) study also noted the inclusion of all teachers of color, an aspect which held value to the goals of this research study because as it also aimed to present diverse qualitative data from all teachers of color without limitations.

In the Kohli (2016) study, participants completed a qualitative, short-answer questionnaire to develop thematic patterns, and then 16 were selected for further inquiry about their experiences in a 60–120 minute interview. The findings in the data showed

how "the racism teachers of Color were exposed to in schools took a toll on their well-being, growth, and retention" (p. 309) with major themes found in the colorblindness of their colleagues and institutions, as well as the rooting the microaggressions enacted against them as the sources of hostile racial climates in the workplace. The colorblind approach often left teachers of color isolated, as the lone advocate of racialized issues, and silenced from the dismissal of any discussions of race due to the accepted institutional perspective that they are effectively providing equal opportunity for all students by ignoring race and avoiding any acknowledgement of it.

In turn, this often created more work for teachers of color to seemingly dismantle the system on their own, having to serve as the representative of their race and take on the responsibility of equity for all. This colorblind approach is resonant with the Achinstein et al. (2010) study, which introduced cultural capital in schools as an indicator of retention for teachers of color. The participants in the Kohli (2016) study showed how colorblindness is a manifestation of low cultural capital, suggesting these may be schools that could experience difficulty in retaining teachers of color.

The Kohli (2016) study revealed how teachers of color are experiencing racism in their schools from microaggressions, as the very same qualities many teachers were recruited for, such as being bilingual or having cultural connections with students and their families, were frequently used against them by White colleagues. Teachers of color expressed their mistreatment from White colleagues as undermining their success and having disdain for their ability to teach students of color, something also seen in the Griffin & Tackie (2016) data findings, and even fear and mistrust, with one participant being called an enabler and another even being accused of having a gang affiliation with

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their students. An interesting point in the Kohli (2016) findings was that teachers of color deeply internalized the microaggressions directed towards their students of color by White colleagues, suggesting that the ways teachers of color experience racism in their schools may not always be directed towards them, first-hand. This was important to this study's research questions, illuminating how racism may appear interpersonally, a point not previously considered.

Kohli (2016) concluded that teachers of color are desired for their usefulness and material value but devalued once that characteristic is no longer aligned as a worthy resource for the institution and interpreted as a threat. The ways in which Kohli found racism to take a toll on teachers of color is nearly identical to the experiences of Black teachers in the Griffin & Tackie (2016) data, citing overwhelming responsibility to tackle social justice alone, being overlooked for professional advancement opportunities, and policing their own behaviors as to not be perceived stereotypically as all mentally taxing on participants immersed in hostile racial climates. These findings were important to the development of how teachers of color experience racism and in what ways they were affected or impacted.

A secondary study by Pizarro & Kohli (2020), sourced from the same professional development as the Kohli (2016) study, spanned six years with 441 participants to employ counter-storytelling methods under the frameworks of critical race theory (CRT) and racial battle fatigue (RBF). RBF research was important to this literature review as a scholarly means to define significant psychosocial and emotional impacts on teachers of color. Pizarro & Kohli (2020) found the impact of racism to be a challenge which extended throughout the participant's professional journey, baggage to

be carried as participants recalled years of racialized incidents which they endured, not confined to a specific moment in time but accrued over time.

The findings of the Pizarro & Kohli (2020) study similarly contributed to the findings of both Griffin & Tackie (2016) and Kohli (2016), whereas teachers of color were being overworked by the lone responsibility to their students of color, and experiencing isolation, dehumanization, interpersonal impact from the poor treatment of students of color by their White colleagues and being dismissed and silenced among staff. One uniquely relevant finding in the Pizarro & Kohli (2020) research was the theme of teachers of color "feeling on high alert for the next racist encounter with a colleague or supervisor, and pressure to be hypervigilant … to protect both themselves from unwarranted critique and their students from psychic assaults," (p. 985). This finding suggests another way teachers of color may be affected by racist experiences is the induction of paranoia, to protect both themselves and their students.

Similar experiences were also drawn from Milner (2020), finding a common theme among Black women teachers emerged surrounding the assumption and expectation that they be the expert on all Black topics and issues, to include mediating Black student and family conflicts and generating expertise on Black subject content with no assistance and little support. The Milner study also determined that many White teachers often did not attempt to develop any skills towards understanding Black students, expecting Black teachers to be responsible for them. White teachers were found to control these spaces by determining what Black teachers were useful for and specifically organizing "work and related labor for Black women to carry out business that they masked in a discourse of 'not knowing what to do'" (Milner, 2020, p. 406). This

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denial supported the concept of refusal by White teachers to confront their own limitations and maintain their control over predominantly White spaces, thus maintaining whiteness as property via social dominance over school decisions.

Research by Cormier (2022) related socializing with White colleagues to social capital, finding that for the Black male teacher participants, the small opportunities to engage with colleagues was not worth the risk, fully understanding the cost would result in isolation, as well as "lack of support and [perception of] an unwillingness to collaborate" (p 87). Cormier offered the idea that social capital could be used as a means of teacher retention, referencing the Bristol (2018) research suggesting White teachers are likely to have the most social capital to influence policies in education. However, Bristol's research on Black male teachers also found that they were not convinced socializing with White colleagues would benefit them or provide gains in social capital.

Participants from the Milner (2020) study acknowledged that Black teacher presence was only celebrated in predominantly White schools if they maintained and encouraged the existing status quo; however, any time they opposed the White majority or critiqued the existing system, they were reduced to no longer serving as a team player and thus having little value to the White majority. This echoes Cormier's (2022) finding that lack of engagement with White colleagues resulted in the perception of not being supportive or collaborative.

### *How White Teachers Perceive Race in the Workplace: Tools of Whiteness*

The final studies in this review were selected for the purpose of inquiring about racism in the workplace by connecting the perspectives of White teachers. These studies presented different outcomes than that of this research, yet they further contextualized the

experiences of teachers of color against the backdrop of whiteness in schools. Through hegemony and *tools of whiteness* (Picower, 2009), Daniels (2018) added that "Whiteness protects itself and therefore shields White teachers from perspectives that might reshape their understandings of racism and oppression" (p. 158). When considering the ways in which White teachers maintain control over predominantly White educational spaces, Daniels (2018) explained tools of whiteness as being "strategies and tactics that White teachers employ to protect and maintain the ideologies and perspectives that Whiteness affords," (p. 158). When White teachers are challenged by race and how they justify racist ideology against people of color, Picower (2009) found that tools of whiteness were often called upon to deny or avoid these issues and preserve hegemonic perceptions.

Rauscher & Wilson (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 high school teachers in Georgia and Texas to identify occupational stressors and the implication of racialized stressors across Black, White, and Mexican-American women teachers. The findings were congruent with previous studies on the ways teachers of color were experiencing racialized stressors in their schools; however, the inclusion of White women teachers determined race was not a source of occupational stress for them, contrasting very different experiences than the teachers of color and calling upon tools of whiteness to explain and protect their perspectives. As the teachers of color in the study expressed the commonality of more difficult workloads and lack of access to advanced courses, their White colleagues shared aloofness to this issue, believing that they always received classes they wanted, noted by a teacher of color to be all the advanced courses.

One teacher of color in the Rauscher & Wilson (2016) study expressed their working conditions as requiring superhuman powers, while one White teacher stated they

were simply very lucky to get the classes they wanted with the "nicest kids in school," (p. 224). Furthermore, a White teacher with an AP course load retorted that while it might seem that "you have better kids when you have an AP class" (p. 224), that is misleading because it requires more work to educate them since they work at a higher academic level. The perception from teachers of color in the study were that AP students are primarily self-taught in smaller class sizes, versus their own lower-level course loads which were maxed out to the highest capacity with students who needed much more attention, instruction, and discipline.

These studies demonstrated an opposing perspective on race in schools, echoing unconsciousness or indifference towards the experiences of teachers of color as well as showing ways in which hegemony and tools of whiteness were often used to deny racialized issues. These findings further bolstered the decision to exclude White participants from this study, to avoid erasure of teachers of color's experiences and eliminate any opportunity for debate on experiential knowledge. This study aimed to serve teachers of color while also protecting their stories.

**Utilizing Narrative as Intervention**

Rosenthal (2003) argued that biographical narrative interviews are a tool of intervention on its own, as most researchers neglect to acknowledge the triggering effects which can occur during the act of recalling life experiences. This act of recollection through storytelling can be burdensome on research participants, but also might have the potential for healing. The act of narrative therapy, according to Gu (2018), provides an approach to engage in healing by making sense of life experiences and analyzing oppression to find freedom. While both Rosenthal (2003) and Gu (2018) had the

underpinnings of social psychology as the root of their research, the utilization of personal narrative in a critical sense can be seen in other areas of research, as well.

Friskie (2020) implemented Indigenous storytelling as a research method of healing, proposing that for participants "sharing their own experiences in the form of personal narrative or story can bring new awareness and a sense of clarity to painful memories" (p. 19), while also supporting community healing and identity through the passing of knowledge. Storytelling is a sacred act utilized for thousands of years by Indigenous Peoples to pass knowledge and ancestral history, and regenerate cultural teachings (Friskie, 2020; Corntassel et al., 2009).

Friskie (2020) acknowledged the impact of "mutual communication and harmonious storytelling" (p. 24) among Indigenous healing groups as a means of building relationships and adversity against tragedy, allowing participants to feel connected to each other and harbor less anxiety towards the impact these stories can hold over one's life journey. Corntassel et al. (2009) also utilized the power of Indigenous storytelling, better known by participants as *haa-huu-pah*, to "convey community narratives ... or sacred living histories" (p. 137). *Haa-huu-pah* is also critical in sharing experiential knowledge, as the authors used it as a method to express lived truths of not only the events Indigenous participants lived through, but the communal stance and perception towards those shared experiences.

Hill (2009) studied the impact of storytelling by applying the practice of *wounded healing* as culturally relevant pedagogy. Hill conducted research on high school students taking an English course centered around hip-hop music and the sharing of personal narratives by participants. Hill explained that "By *wounded healing*, I refer not only to

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the therapeutic dimensions of personal and collective storytelling but also to a critical engagement with majoritarian narratives that exposes and produces new possibilities" (p. 249). An important component to Hill's wounded healing process is found in how "Students formed a storytelling community in which membership was predicated upon individuals' ability and willingness to 'expose their wounds' (share their stories) to the rest of the group" (p. 249). The sharing of personal narrative is vital to obtaining membership in the community where understanding experiential knowledge is a goal. Furthermore, Hill found that interruption by outsiders silenced the community, even when the interruption was merely presence or observation.

Hill's (2009) study also showed the intricate relationships within the newfound storytelling community, where the demonstration of storytelling by the students encouraged and enabled the other students to feel safe enough to also share more frequently and at greater personal depth. Even in the case where a student shared a personal story that other students could not relate to, Hill noted that it still aided in the development of community affirmation. Hill also discovered that the healing process was not exactly found in community response, but the "act of personal disclosure" (p. 274), as participants expressed the importance of simply sharing stories out loud for healing, with the community's role being safety and not cosign. Overall, this study provided contributions to the understanding of community storytelling and its impact on high school students, as well as the value of culturally relevant pedagogy.

The impact of storytelling was also the center of Grey & Williams-Farrier's (2017) work on Black female literacy scholars in higher education. Grey & Williams-Farrier described the "continuing struggle to secure safe spaces that allow Black women

to tell and validate their stories to and for each other" (p. 507), explaining how Black oral traditions are incompatible with White majoritarian discourse, and consequently rejected. However, "Black women literacy scholars have a rich tradition of utilizing storytelling effectively in ways that are highly productive, empowering, and impactful" (p. 510). Grey & Williams-Farrier demonstrated this rich tradition by performing live dialogic storytelling on their anti-racist pedagogical approaches as literacy scholars and teachers at a professional conference, along with the emotional barriers and challenges they have experienced. At the conclusion of their storytelling performance, the researchers noted how what started as a healing space for them had transcended to the audience with participants who wanted to further affirm these narratives with their own.

While educational research aligned with CRT has supported the value of counternarratives, Miller et al., (2020) questioned if current studies have halted at storytelling. Implications of the Miller at al. thematic analysis of counternarratives in educational research urged the movement towards action by "using counter-narrative to implement the methodology" (p. 293), rather than seeking stories as data and concluding. The authors urged educators to refocus the utilization of counternarratives on critical reflection and outcomes, or "helping the participants develop their agency as well as their voices and encouraging them to come up with alternative solutions and further take actions to implement them" (p. 293). The utilization of counternarrative to focus on the emancipatory and transformational aspects of educational research has proven to be a gap in the literature in which this research study aimed to generate new knowledge on.

**Summary**

As this study aimed to uncover the current state of how and in what ways teachers might experience racism in the workplace, that data must be contextualized within the greater scope of how people of color have been underserved by institutions for generations leading up to this point. The review of the literature positions current experiences of racism as a manifestation of the system, much larger than the offensives from White colleagues but of the institution their actions uphold, which continuously marginalize teachers of color much like they have experienced in school throughout their lives.

Under the framework of critical race theory, the research and literature within this chapter was presented to depict the potential journey of a teacher of color and their experiences with racism endured as a student, pre-service teacher, and their current state as a professional in education. The historical context of *Brown v. Board of Education* and its effects on students of color is situated as a root cause of the systemically racist nature of education as an institution, effects which carried on and accumulated with people of color at all stages in which they are situated within it.

Following the educational lifespan of teachers of color's experiences as a series of racialized encounters endured within the institution of education is the foundation of analyzing impact and effect. The current data on the racialized, hostile climates of schools and its effects on teachers of color necessitate the importance of more data reflective of these experiences and the role for this study to contribute to understanding the larger system of racism in education. While examining the impact of storytelling in

Black and Indigenous narrative research, it became evident how these important methods are often neglected.

Additionally, the need for more public K-12 educator experiences is necessary to analyze the effect storytelling has in a communal aspect, rather than on the individual. The critical aspect of sharing within storytelling communities for teachers of color is missing in much of the aforementioned research on teacher experiences with racism, where the focus is mostly limited to reporting and the examination of incidents.

When considering educational research based in critical race theory, Solórzano & Yosso (2002) have cited the importance of sourcing commonality when utilizing storytelling for participants. This supported the desire to examine how teachers of color might experience a storytelling community, rather than a singular moment of telling one's story with no reciprocity. Examining the uses of shared storytelling also fills the gap in the literature discovered surrounding the implementation of counternarratives as an intervention and its potential outcomes beyond providing a voice to participant experiences.

All related research served to enlighten the research questions of this study in perspective and effectiveness. Efficacy of this study was found in this chapter's advocacy to contextualize the current experiences of teachers of color as compounded, in which the ways teachers of color navigate racism in the workplace is evidenced as cyclical and transcendent, based on the literature.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

To investigate teacher experiences within this study, I utilized action research methods based in narrative inquiry. Pine (2008) described action research as something which "takes place in a context of discovery and invention as opposed to a context of verification" (p. 236). Furthermore, teacher action research is an approach which allows teachers to agent their own reform, as it "empowers teachers to own professional knowledge ... [and] through the process of action inquiry – conceptualize and create knowledge, interact around knowledge, transform knowledge, and apply knowledge" (Pine, 2008, p. 30). The concept of empowerment for self-initiated reformation as a practitioner in the field among colleagues was a valuable tool and asset for this research. This also reflected the process within this study of discovering the narratives held by teachers of color and creating a collaborative book centered around the interaction and application of knowledge.

Incorporating the creation of a collaborative book as a component of action research intervention was vital in understanding how narrative method, according to Toledano & Anderson (2020), involves "both the narrative making and narrative telling process" (p. 305), a dualled method in which the communication process generates discourse. The use of narrative methods in action research requires making meaning of experiences, and the co-creation and re-creation of meanings as both a form and

function of research inquiry and intervention. "Social experience studied through narrative becomes shared experience" (p. 308), which reflected one of the purposes of this study, where teachers of color may find each other within these stories and see themselves in the shared experiences of others around the state.

Narrative methods are not limited to inquiry but can also be found in practice, showing that "we are never alone in the narrative process or in any process of action research ... if we want to make full use of narrative as a method of inquiry in action research, we should also attend to the relationships that we maintain with ourselves and others" (p. 314). An intervention which relies on the creation and sharing of discourse shows how narrative methods aligns with the action research process.

### Research Design

Within educational action research, practitioner inquiry has emerged as a means of allowing teachers to investigate their own environments (Efron & Ravid, 2013). To investigate teacher experiences, I used practitioner inquiry to uncover situated, experiential knowledge held by colleagues who are teachers of color within the state of NC to enhance and generate knowledge of practice. This approach supported the need for a qualitative narrative inquiry research design as an appropriate method to deliver counter-storytelling, as well as its role as a means of analysis in critical race methodology.

The knowledge-practice relationships identified by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2004) advocate for "knowledge in practice, knowledge of practice, and knowledge for practice" as type indicators of quality within practitioner inquiries (p. 605). Whereas, knowledge in practice aims to uncover the experiences of teachers of color with racism in

their school; knowledge of practice asks teachers of color to examine the impact of these experiences; and, knowledge for practice places experiential knowledge from teachers of color as an outcome which strategizes the dissemination of information to create reflection and change. All these quality indicators were embedded within this study's research questions to justify alignment and the use of this study's practitioner inquiry research as having incorporated "sound and appropriate research methodology" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 67).

Validated by experiential knowledge in critical race theory (CRT), this investigation worked to collaborate with teachers of color interested in sharing their incidents with racism in the workplace which can enhance and create new knowledge. "The concept of knowledge creation underpinning practitioner research is to establish a 'warrant for action' that will permit the testing of ideas in new contexts," (Baumfield, 2016, p. 156); whereas the compilation of stories by teachers of color was the product of investigation and a call for intervention. Furthermore, L. Bell (2016) stated that this emergence of new counter-stories "build on, challenge, and reinvent older counter-stories" (p. 18). There exists a clear space for learning more about the experiences of teachers of color within the system of education.

Recording visible emotions and behaviors during the data collecting process depicted an experience beyond what words can vocally express; things that are felt are a vital part of the narrative as well. To capture these experiences, "in-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored" (Mack et al., 2005, p. 2). This study used semi-structured interviews to record experiential knowledge from

teachers of color's experiences with racism within their school, an optimal method of data collection for revealing sensitive personal topics. It utilized audiovisual recordings, as well as notation of body-language and physical expression as the conversations unfolded. All components were contextualized in a complete, unbroken narrative.

Transforming the qualitative data elements of narrative research to reflect the theoretical framework of CRT required further specification to fully develop a critical race methodology. Solórzano & Yosso's (2002) guidance for using counter-storytelling was the basis for transforming the elements of narrative research into a theoretically grounded critical race methodology that aligned with the conceptual framework of this study. "Critical race methodology in education challenges biological and cultural deficit stories through counter-storytelling" (p. 37), therefore allowing teachers of color's experiential knowledge to be organized and analyzed in the same context as its collection.

Critical race methodology also "strategically uses multiple methods, often unconventional and creative, to draw on the knowledge of people of color who are traditionally excluded as an official part of the academy" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37). The participants' role in this study was to share their truths, as the validity of the voices of people of color has already been confirmed by CRT and critical race methodology as "appropriate and necessary forms of data" (p. 37). This investigation employed practitioner inquiry to collaborate with teachers of color interested in sharing their counter-story of racism in the workplace, a narrative design which allowed ownership and maintenance of their perspective against the majoritarian.

**Rationale for Research Design**

Practitioner-based narrative inquiry was the best means to approach this study to allow the benefit of constant change, reflection, revision, and adjustment to cultivate a meaningful research experience. It was also the best approach for producing and implementing the intervention of this study, the collaborative book. Narrative methods within action research are an on-going process of constant reciprocity between the researcher and the participants, which is also a form of intervention in and of itself, where new understandings of an experience can be generated in the co-creation of narratives (Toledano & Anderson, 2020). The co-creation of narratives was not only a primary goal of the study, but a valuable source of data for the intervention which asked how these narratives might best be used for teachers of color and in what capacity.

Herr & Anderson (2015) stated that action research should incorporate "the achievement of action-oriented outcomes," as well as, "the generation of new knowledge" (p. 67). This study presented a question of how teachers of color are experiencing racism in their schools, and action research allowed the generation of new knowledge on how it occurs to form a new approach which better understands how sharing this knowledge might impact others. The intervention was tested, and the cycle of action research continued with each new outcome. It would be an injustice if vulnerable experiences were shared by participants without involving the counteraction of resolution.

The decision to use qualitative narrative research materialized early within the development of this study, initiated by my choice to recall my experiences with different forms of racism within the school setting through autobiographical reflection (Solórzano

& Yosso, 2002). Developing autobiographical reflection is also a valuable tool for participatory practitioners as personal growth is a sought-after component of action research (Somekh, 2006), and understanding self-reflection and how to engage in the reflective cycle affects positionality and influence over the narrative process (Toledano & Anderson, 2020). The reflection of my own counter-storytelling validated my emotions of being a holder of experiential knowledge, solidifying qualitative data through narrative inquiry research as the only plausible way to effectively and appropriately approach the research methodology for this study's participants. Mack et al., (2005) asserted:

> The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the "human" side of an issue – that is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. (p. 2)

Given the complex and often intangible nature of racially charged interactions teachers of color may have with White colleagues (Ahmed, 2012), qualitative research's strong suit of providing the full spectrum of experiential knowledge in its true form was extremely valuable to this study.

Utilizing the approach of practitioner inquiry supported the need for a qualitative narrative inquiry design as an appropriate method to deliver counter-storytelling by participants, aligned with CRT. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that, "…the narrative study tells the story of individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social, and historical context, and including the important themes in those lived experiences" (p. 75). These qualities were reflective of this study's research

questions, as I explored the personal and social context of teacher's lived experiences with racism, in the context of their workplace.

Qualitative narrative inquiry research was chosen to facilitate collaboration with teachers of color interested in constructing their counternarrative of racism in the workplace to detail the circumstances of their experience and share it with others. This design was also used to ensure stories were kept intact, so that participants can retain ownership of their stories and identify them as being a full representation of themselves when placed in a collaborative book among the stories of other teachers of color. A strength of narrative inquiry is its provision of support for the participant. Creswell & Poth (2018) explained how "as researchers collect stories, they negotiate relationships, smooth transitions, and provide ways to be useful to the participants" (p. 75). This was the basis for conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers of color, with the objective of guiding narration to support full, information-rich stories from the participant's perspective.

Rauscher & Wilson (2017) used narrative inquiry research to elucidate how Black, Mexican-American, and White women, who are teachers within the same school, experienced the context of their workplace stress differently. The narratives revealed how the teachers' perceptions of racial discrimination and White privilege in the workplace were "influencing their experience of stressors in two ways: (a) through racially specific stressors at work and (b) through racially specific interpretations they attribute to the stressors they experience" (p. 223). Rauscher & Wilson's research utilized methods to achieve similar outcomes to this study, exploring the associations between racial discrimination and occupational stress among teachers, in the context of their school.

Although the study did not present intact stories, the narratives of 22 teachers demonstrated how using semi-structured interviews in narrative inquiry could provide rich insight into the racialized workplace of schools. It also provided evidence of the workplace as being a source of stress for teachers of color, who were able to cite specific racialized incidents and interactions that contributed to their stress, and how racism influenced their interpretations of these stressors.

## Positionality

Herr & Anderson (2015) simplified researcher positionality by questioning, "Who am I in relation to my participants and my setting?" (p. 37). Discovering where we as researchers fit within our action research can be both a help and a hurdle to overcome. Although we may feel like an insider of our school or school district, a position of power such as being a superior over school staff members may skew results and negatively impact findings if it is not adequately addressed. Fortunately for this study, I was not superior to colleagues in my setting; if this were the case, the delicate nature of this study could be compromised by a position of authority posing as a threat, possibly creating apprehension by teachers of color in speaking out about racism.

My role in this investigation was primarily that of an insider in collaboration with other insiders, though that still arrived with many challenges and shifts of its own. I approached this study as a teacher, and the key stakeholders are fellow teachers, but this investigation was not limited to teachers who work within my school or school district. I was an insider professionally, but this investigation analyzed the experiences of multiple teachers within North Carolina, which could cause a shift from insider to outsider as the setting of the research changed. As an outsider to other schools and regions, I have

relinquished what Herr & Anderson (2015) described as, "direct access to the 'truth' of the setting. Theirs [and mine] is merely one truth among many" (p.41). Though I am initially positioned as a colleague insider with shared experiences of racism in the workplace, I am an outsider when it came to interviewing teachers at different schools and regions with unique environments of their own.

This barrier was addressed to reduce any apprehension by participants to share to an outsider by providing appropriate personal information and experiences to establish safety, alliance, and prove my status as an insider collaborating with other insiders. Interviewing teachers at schools throughout NC served as a great benefit to widen the scope of this study while still allowing confidentiality for teachers who want to confide in an insider who is relatable, but not necessarily part of their local workplace.

One incident that informed my position as an insider collaborating with other insiders occurred when, in front of an entire third grade elementary school class, I was jokingly called a racially insensitive term out loud by another teacher. I was frozen, and the teacher laughed it off while I had to maintain composure in front of several young faces. Mentally, I was unable to fully recover from the moment for several days as I went back and forth over what happened, and if I could have done anything differently. I reflected on all my experiences and wondered, was this how everyone in the school saw me? It had been affirmed that I was not like everyone else, that those microaggressions might not have been as innocent as I excused them as after all.

In the moment, I immediately wanted to quit teaching at my school, although those feelings eventually subsided. The interactions were normalized like all the others I had experienced, a burden I felt complicit in. What did not subside, however, was my

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paranoia and stress while having to interact with the other teachers from that day forward. I was very embarrassed to share these stories and constantly questioned whether they were valid enough to create so much concern. However, I learned that the more I revealed about these experiences, the more I bonded with others who shared those experiences where we learned we were not alone. The reflection and retelling of these stories were a form of metacognition. According to Toledano & Anderson (2020):

> This highlights a key strength of the narrative method: it shows how the importance of an experience may lie not only in the experience itself but also in the way that we think and talk to others about it ... events may take on significance only as they are talked about and analyzed among partners. (p. 313)

Another possible barrier in my position which had to be acknowledged was interviewing teachers of a different race, because being an insider based on shared experiences is not the same as being an insider who also shares the same race or ethnic background. Although as participants we shared a common experience, I am not an insider to every specific marginalized population. My experiences as a biracial woman sets my perspective of the world in a specific lens, and we all have different perspectives of life and how we maneuver it based on race and various identities. While my goal was diverse teacher representation, it was important to be cognizant of my own identities, presentation, and privileges.

Addressing this barrier can be achieved by entwining our experiences with the collaborative aspect of action research. Herr & Anderson (2015) described this type of action research inquiry as being inclusive, "done *by* or *with* insiders . . . but never *to* or *on* them" (p.3). The participants of this study were active collaborators and integral parts of

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our success, each providing unique information with the same common underpinning. Although this investigation brought similar stories together, constantly reiterating the importance of multiple perspectives served to remind us how much value lies within our differences. The catalytic nature of action research requires reorienting our own perspectives, as "all involved in the research should deepen their understanding of the social reality under study" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 69). I am not immune to deepening my own perceived understanding of offensive racist interactions among teachers. If the counter-stories from this study are catalysts, then all collaborators, including myself, can experience impactful change from learning through multiple perspectives.

By sharing my personal perspective or those of collaborators, I was able to ease barriers and guide participants in sharing qualitative data for this study and thus transition to the role of collaborator. With our shared experiences, we were able to tell stories and acknowledge racism as it exists in full spectrum. It is vital for readers who are people of color to connect to this study not only by experience, but by identifying with collaborators in which they can see themselves and share cultural identity. Throughout this study, participants were revered as collaborators, acknowledging that participants achieved status as a collaborator upon their contribution to the research.

## Sampling Plan and Participants

Purposeful sampling was defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as being, "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 96). I chose purposeful sampling to utilize criterion-based selection of participants who best fit the

purpose of this study. Criterion-based selection established specific attributes that were deemed essential to pinpointing information-rich stories that were explicitly related to this study's goals and ensured the best understanding of the research problem.

*Sampling Plan*

I followed two sampling plans to generate the participant pool of this study, first, by recruiting those who are members of the NC Association of Educators (NCAE). NCAE is a direct affiliate of the National Educators Association and is currently the largest organization in NC which advocates for public school employees at the statewide, legislative level (North Carolina Association of Educators, 2022). By starting recruitment with members of NCAE, public school teachers are afforded more independence in research participation from the perspective of being a member of this advocacy organization instead of representing a specific school district. If this study were to use a more generalized sampling plan instead of utilizing NCAE, there would be numerous hurdles in seeking permission from each participants' school district to conduct a study on its employees.

Another positive aspect of using the NCAE membership network was its frequent use of email communication within the organization. Recruitment of participants occurred by emailing letters of interest to members with full access to the NCAE email listing. Interested participants who met the criteria were prompted to complete a participant survey which served to gain demographical data as well as scheduling for interviews (see Appendix C). Utilizing the NCAE membership network also aided in minimizing the risks and barriers involved with revealing the potentially sensitive stories desired by the study. Having the study introduced to teachers through an organization

they have familiarity with might encourage willingness to participate. This can also build

rapport between the researcher and participant, identifying a mutual party which has

examined the data process and deemed it safe. This concept was also used in my second

sampling plan for participants.

To further recruit participants and avoid limiting participation to NCAE members,

a network sampling plan was also established. *Network sampling* is a form of purposeful

sampling that, "…involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria

you have established for participation in the study. As you interview these early key

participants, you ask each one to refer you to other participants" (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016, p. 98). A network sampling plan also fit this study for several reasons; the first due

to the presence of key participants previously recognized as meeting the criteria for

participation. The second benefit of network sampling for this study was the referral

system for locating criteria-based participants, which was particularly useful because this

study inquired about experiences from any teacher of color, statewide.

As a result, this study produced a statewide group of participants who were

related and empowered by this collaboration, as each member held a considerable role of

ownership over the research. Point of saturation for this study intended to be

accomplished by collecting data from about 4-5 participants. My role as the researcher

was to protect the participants, be useful to participants as they constructed their counter-

stories and deliver the data from their perspective.

### Participant Criteria

This study required four criteria for participant selection. Selecting participants

based on these four criteria was justified by the purpose of this study and was required to collect relevant data that captured the essence of this phenomenon.

The first criterion was that participants be teachers who self-identify as being a teacher of color. Encouragement of all teachers of color for sampling was warranted to exemplify a variety of racialized experiences, as they could manifest in different ways depending on the participant. L. Bell (2016) explained the rationale for interviewing diverse teachers of color as growing from the need to collaborate across the multiple intersections of those who are positioned differently in society, and to build collective strength for justice. Furthermore, there was a considerable amount of value to learning about the experiences of oppression to both broaden the scope of the experience and analyze specific positions within the system as they differentiate or possibly reinforce each other (L. Bell, 2016). The decision to represent all teachers of color may diversify the data, providing new avenues for analysis. This notion was derived from the first research question, which inquired about teachers of color and their experiences with racism in the workplace.

The second criterion required participants to have currently, or formerly, taught within the research setting, which was any public school within the state of North Carolina. There was no restriction on duration of employment, and participants were not limited to specific grade levels or content areas.

The third criterion was that participants had experiences with either overt racism, covert racism, or incidents of racialized discrimination due to interactions with White colleagues. Interactions are broadly identified as, but not limited to, dialogue,

commentary, treatment, workload, or exclusion. Interactions are also not limited to verbal expression.

The fourth criterion was that these experiences be specifically connected to the context of their workplace, and solely focused on interactions with White colleagues. The intent to focus on interactions with White colleagues stemmed from CRT and the desire to develop counter-stories against whiteness as a construct.

*Participant Workplace Environment*

The NC public schools system operates under the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI, 2022) which oversees the implementation of NC's laws regarding public schools under the leadership of the state superintendent and board of education. According to NCDPI, there are 115 school districts which operate under the state's jurisdiction. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018), which is housed under the U.S. Department of Education, last collected statistics on NC teacher racial demographics during the 2017-2018 school year; at that time, a reported 77% of teachers were White. The primary focus of this study was to allow participants to reflect on their experiences with racism from White teachers that occurred during their employment as a teacher within NC public schools.

**Data Collection Methods**

This study relied on semi-structured interview to record experiential knowledge from teachers of color who had incidents with racism within their school, as well as post-survey analysis from the results of the intervention. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing, followed by saving the full audiovisual recording and transcription of the interview, and notating significant body language and physical expressions as the

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conversation unfolded to record the context in its entirety. Written documentation was used to track concurrent analysis during the interview process, as well as journal keeping by the researcher to summarize personal thoughts as the research evolved.

Upon conclusion of participant interviews, all data was compiled as a collection of narratives with multiple chapters intended to read as a single book. This digital book was distributed to all participants for review along with a post-survey of additional questions to analyze participant experiences with the book using an open-ended questionnaire via Google Forms (see Appendix E). In accordance with federal and South Carolina research regulations, all data related to this research must be retained at least three years before permissible destruction.

*Action Research Validity*

Research validity and reliability was incorporated within the methodology by utilizing reflexivity, data triangulation, post survey, member checks, and thick, rich description. Creswell & Miller (2000) stated that validity procedures should be governed by two main perspectives, that of the researcher's lens and their paradigm assumptions. Identifying the personal lens of the participant also served a significant role, as "the qualitative paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed, and it is what participants perceive it to be" (p. 125). Disclosing positionality through autobiographical reflection had the potential to increase authenticity, while also including an evaluation of personal beliefs or barriers related to my lens of perspective and critical assumptions towards the study. This form of researcher reflexivity was not only revealed early in the study, but within each participant's introductory interaction, the use of private commentary during interview and observation collection, and journaling.

Data triangulation is, "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). This inquiry collected evidence from participant interview, narrative, observation, and post-survey to generate themes within the data analysis. To ensure this evidence was accurate, the use of member checks was utilized to certify the participant's recorded reality was an accurate reflection of their perspective. This process of collaboration between researcher and participant continued until a final narrative was constructed, described by Creswell & Miller (200) as an exchange to verify that, "themes or categories make sense … developed with sufficient evidence, and whether the overall account is realistic and accurate," (p. 127). After the initial participant interview, observation, and narrative process was completed, participants reviewed the collaborative book produced from the research and completed a post-survey about their reflection and perspective of the book.

The construction of a final book of narratives was the ultimate product of the study, viewed as the best representation of each participant and their role as a collaborator within the process of this inquiry. The narrative itself further established credibility by being described as a thick, rich description, and its purpose, according to Creswell & Miller (2000), was to describe the participant's experience in such detail that the reader feels connected to the situation. Denzin (1989) defined this form of narrative where, "thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts … Thin descriptions, by contrast, lack detail, and simply recall facts" (p. 83). Using thick, rich description through narrative engages the readers' lens, gaining situational context and enabling them to, "make decisions about the applicability of the findings to other settings or similar

contexts" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). This was doubly important as another purpose of using these narratives was to provide readers an opportunity to potentially connect to this study by relating to the stories shared or better understanding the perspectives of their colleagues.

### Semi-Structured Interview

To record counter-stories for this narrative inquiry study, the use of semi-structured interview was the optimal method for capturing a story in its entirety. Semi-structured interview allowed for flexibility in how stories materialized, "guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined a head of time" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp.110-111). This process took place one-on-one with the participant, accompanied by an audiovisual recording the dialogue. The setting of the interview was in a closed-off, non-distracting location that was conducive for interviews and at a reasonable time, agreed upon by both the participant and the researcher.

The setting of the interview was not encouraged to occur in the workplace to maintain confidentiality but was at the discretion of any participant who was in full understanding of the potential risks of being identified. If the interview were to occur in the participant's workplace, ideal locations would be a classroom or conference room that is not shared, with the ability to block entry from outside intrusions. To protect confidentiality, the volume of the participant's normal speaking voice should also be tested from outside the entryway, to determine the possibility of eavesdropping from outsiders.

The structure of the interview consisted of a few over-arching questions which initiated the participant storytelling (see Appendix D). This served as a reminder of key information this study desired, confirming data-rich stories were being developed. These questions also served as guidance for probing during the story-telling process, with an attempt to be as minimally obtrusive as possible while seeking clarity or elaboration. It should be emphasized that this method was selected to maintain the researcher's role of being useful to the participant, collaborating by providing support and guidance; furthermore, this method served to keep stories intact for developing a full body of work.

Provisions for resources were also prepared for participants in the case they required emotional assistance. There existed potential for participants to experience residual effects from sharing stories that recall traumatic moments, especially if they were being articulated for the first time in a more serious tone (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 262). These resources included referrals to accessible therapists in NC.

### Documentation During the Interview

During the semi-structured interview, points from the dialogue related to the over-arching questions, topics of importance, or opportunities for probing were recorded on a document designed to facilitate simultaneous data analysis during collection (see Appendix D). Non-verbal dialogue was also tracked on the document to mark significant changes in body language or expression. This method ensured all components of the story were recorded.

The format of the document also contained space for open coding for data organization as it arose, utilizing shorthand designations related to this study's research questions. Shorthand designations were especially important due to the potentially

sensitive nature of the storytelling process, requiring discreet and unobtrusive tools for collecting data. Full attention was given to the participant as consistently as possible. Potential coding designations included topics from the participant's story such as the emergence of microaggressions, overt racism, actions or reactions, questions of doubt, along with a timestamp of each occurrence. There was also ample room for commentary to be written and to record personal reactions or ideas related to the developing narrative.

### Construction of the Narrative

After data transcription and analysis took place, the construction of the narrative began to smooth transitions in the raw data and present each story as a full and complete narrative that represented the participant. According to Saldaña (2021), "the write-up requires rich descriptive detail and a three-dimensional rendering of the participant's life, with emphasis on how participant transformation progresses through time" (p. 199). The narrative was not pulled apart for coding but served as an independent and whole representation of the data.

To certify internal validity, after a narrative had been completed member checks were used to ensure the opportunity to provide feedback and editing until it met the participant's required approval. It was important that participant ownership was maintained over the narrative, making it a recognizable capture of their experience. Member checks also allowed for further collaboration, to reconduct parts of the interview for clarification on certain aspects of the story, or to inquire about new elements as they emerged throughout the research. This process continued for several rounds until a final product was produced for presentation.

*Data Collection of the Intervention*

After the participant narratives were constructed, participants were contacted with a digital book representing the narratives of all contributors of the research. Participants were asked to read the book within a set timeframe and complete a post-survey inquiring about their perspective and reaction to the collaborative book. Documentation of this event occurred in the format of a Google Form post-survey (see Appendix E), which examined the outcome of the intervention according to the open-ended question responses. The Google Form data was kept in a secured cloud database which was only accessible by the researcher. The entire post-survey would likely take participants between 5-20 minutes to complete and was collected anonymously to ensure participants felt they could be honest about their experience with the study.

*Journaling*

Throughout the study, a journal was used to record personal reflections that developed throughout the duration of this research process, especially to summarize thoughts after interviews were conducted. This outlet provided space to analyze my own growth and hurdles as the study progressed, tending to the reflexivity needed while conducting critical research. The theoretical framework of this study was grounded in critical race theory, necessitating an additional method that addressed the "…examination of power relations in the research act itself" (p. 62); furthermore, "it is incumbent upon the critical researcher to … consider issues such as positionality and insider/outsider stances … to try to own their effects in the process" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 64 – 65). Using a journal was imperative for addressing the intersections of positionality as they shifted with each new participant, keeping the role of the researcher under constant

examination. Journaling was not a primary data collection tool for this study, but a valuable resource that intertwined with the methodology and conceptual framework.

### *Data Collection and COVID-19*

As the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) impacted the world and challenged our daily lives in unforeseen ways, new limitations emerged regarding the health and safety of the researcher and participants. COVID-19 emerged after the conception of this research study, adding new limitations that were not considered pre-COVID-19. These limitations affected data collection in this study as meeting people in-person was less optimal. Although in-person interview is the often the preferred method to capture the entire uninterrupted experience, this was not always an option in the midst of a pandemic. Even with social distancing measures and the use of personal protective equipment, the conditions of meeting in-person posed a threat to creating an environment that was conducive for this study. This informed the decision to move all interviews to fully remote, using virtual video conferencing applications. Plans for technological issues were set in the case of internet failure, which would affect the opportunity for an uninterrupted experience.

<div align="center"><b>Data Analysis Methods</b></div>

Once data was collected during the interview, the process of transcription and analysis occurred within 72 hours. All data was kept electronically and stored on a password protected cloud storage site. The researcher's journal was also kept in a separate digital folder within the same cloud storage. Data from the interview was entered into the Quirkos software package, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), to facilitate coding organization, which was also password protected. The

objective of data analysis was to focus on identifying answers to the research questions, drawing connections within the interview data timelines, and presenting commonalities across the data as they emerged.

*Analysis of the Interview*

Coding methods for the interview data in this study utilized a blend of initial coding and structural coding. Initial coding was described by Saldaña (2021) as being a starting point and opportunity for reflection over data, open-ended, and appropriate for interview transcripts. Initial coding also aligned with the style of narrative inquiry and storytelling used in this research study, where Saldaña acknowledged the acceptance of full paragraphs being used for coding, rather than short lines. Narrative analysis calls for full context, as Mcallum et. al (2019) stated:

> the data is not pulled apart and decontextualized, but considered as a whole, as a text … this means that researchers using narrative methods typically insist on preserving the integrity of the text being used as data. (p. 9)

Initial coding allows for the full context of data to be recognized "in search for *processes* – participant actions that have antecedents, causes, consequences ... and *dimensions* of categories – conceptual ideas" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 151). This coding approach was completed through line-by-line and paragraph-by-paragraph analysis where deemed appropriate within the data as a means to fully immerse in the data and exercise reflexivity through journaling.

Structural coding was also essential to utilize in the analysis of the interview data, a method best suited for semi-structured interview transcripts involving multiple participants that are exploratory and investigative in nature (Saldaña, 2021). This study's

purpose was to investigate the existence of racialized experiences among teachers of color in NC and explore how and in what ways these incidents occurred and affected the participants. It is question-based, and "both codes and initially categorizes the data corpus to examine comparable segments' commonalities, differences, and relationships" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 130). This method of coding, blended with the discovery phase of initial coding, allowed for continuous focus towards answering the research questions of this study and the consistent realignment of its purpose.

Although this study utilized narrative inquiry through participant storytelling, it was determined that narrative coding would not be the most ideal method due to the desire to analyze raw interview data directly from the participants, and not the collaborative narratives found in the intervention. The raw interview data was the direct voice of the participant without intervention of collaborative voices, which best aligned with the investigative nature of the first research question of this study. Analysis of the interview data will be positioned in a chapter dedicated to interpretation of the findings. Within each interview, coding was used to discover and categorize experiences with racism that were meaningful to answering the questions of this study.

The interpretation of the data first identified the ways teachers of color might have experienced racism in their workplace. This followed the protocols of both initial and structural coding to identify stories and events from participants as they occurred in the interview and coded them with descriptive words or phrases. Examples of these codes were microaggressions, White denial, and isolation. After the first cycle of coding, the codes were analyzed again to draw connections and develop concepts and categorical codes which better synthesized the data. These steps directly aided in the final thematic

analysis of the data. "A theme is an *extended phrase* or *sentence* that identifies what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it *means*" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 258), whereas this study employed categorical themes to describe the outcome of the first research question. All categorizations were organized using Quirkos CAQDAS to manage codes and themes and were interpreted in this study's discussion of the findings.

### *Analysis of the Intervention*

The second research question of this study was analyzed separately as part of an intervention involving the reading of the collaborative book created by the participants. Data was gathered in a post-survey (See Appendix E) related to the experience participants had with the book. The data from the open-response questions were analyzed with structural coding methods and presented to determine the outcome of the intervention on participants and draw conclusions pertaining to its potential impact. This was an ideal method for comparing the responses of multiple participants, and is further investigated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4:

RESEARCH FINDINGS
**Introduction**
The purpose of this study was to investigate racially based offenses against

teachers of color working in the state of North Carolina and provide an intervention to

participants for coping with their experiences. The research design sought to analyze how

and in what ways teachers of color experience racism from White coworkers and

collaborate with participants to determine the impact and potential of utilizing shared

storytelling as a coping method. This investigation employed practitioner-based narrative

inquiry to collaborate with teachers of color interested in sharing experiential knowledge

on racism in the workplace as a form of intervention to mitigate the problem of practice

and investigate its outcomes. The research questions of this study asked:

1. In what ways might NC teachers of color experience racism from their

   colleagues in the workplace?

   a. How, if at all, do these experiences with racism affect NC teachers of

      color?

2. How, if at all, does the sharing of narratives help teachers of color cope with

   racist experiences in the workplace and does this help with improving their

   overall experience?

   a. How might the sharing of narratives serve as an intervention for teachers

      of color?

The findings from this research are aligned with its research questions, reflecting an investigation of teacher of color racialization at work, and the analysis of community storytelling outcomes.

The findings are separated into two parts, first the exploration of data from participants' semi-structured interviews, followed by the outcomes of the intervention from the post-survey data inquiring about the collaborative book. Analysis of the interview data was underpinned by the theoretical framework of critical race theory, informing the development of themes and codes across all participant data within storytelling.

These findings presented the themes which emerged from the categorical interpretations of the ways in which NC teachers of color have experienced racism from colleagues while in the workplace, and themes from the exploration of community storytelling as a method of intervention for teachers of color participating in this study.

**Overview of the Participants**

Upon completion of the initial four interviews the data appeared sufficient to mark the point of saturation. Guest et al. (2020) defined *saturation* as "the point during data analysis at which incoming data points (interviews) produce little or no new useful information relative to the study objectives" (p. 5). This was determined in the third interview which had a significant drop in new, relevant data compared to the first two interviews.

Data collection for this study produced an overwhelming amount of data in each interview, utilizing rich, thick description in detailing participant experiences, along with the frequency of repeated incidents across the data. The average length of the four

interviews was 61 minutes long, not including approximately 15 minutes of introduction and 15 minutes for closure and communication for the participant's next steps in the study. Once transcribed, the average interview transcription totaled 19.25 pages in length, and upon completion of the counternarratives, the collaborative book of participant experiences totaled 70 pages.

Four participants were selected to participate in this study, all of whom met the criteria for recruitment as NC teachers who identify as a person of color with an expressed desire to share stories about their experiences with racialization at the hands of White colleagues. All participants agreed to the interview, collaborative process for the narrative, and the reading of the collaborative book which included the narratives of all other participants in the study. Participants utilized the collaborative book intervention to better understand their coping with racism in the workplace and agreed to complete a post-survey seeking answers to how the intervention might have aided in coping with racism and impacted their overall experience.

Two participants were recruited directly by the researcher to join the study, one participant was an NCAE member recruited via referral, and one participant initiated interest for recruitment after hearing about the goals of the study. All interested participants were provided a link to a Google Form (see Appendix C) which requested preliminary demographical data, opportune times to conduct the interview, and participant acknowledgement of the requirements of the study. Each participant chose their own pseudonym to protect their identity and are referenced by the order of their interview in the study.

Table 1.1 Participant Demographics

| Participant Name | Sex | Race | Years of Teaching Experience | School Level Taught | School District Classification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Terrance | Male | Black | 10+ | High School (9-12) | Urban |
| Rebecca | Female | Black | 9 | Elementary School (K-5) | Urban |
| Sarah | Female | Native American | 1 | High School (9-12) | Rural |
| Ida B. Wells | Female | Black | 4 | High School (9-12) | Urban and Rural Experiences |

Participants' school district classification was determined as being either Urban or Rural based on data from the NC Department of Health and Human Services Office of Rural Health (2019). Geographically, the participants were spread across the state from mid-Western NC to Eastern NC, and no participants lived or taught in the same county. County and school district names were omitted to protect the identity of participants.

Experiences shared by Terrance, Sarah, and Ida B. Wells occurred within the high school setting, and Rebecca was the only participant working in an elementary school. Terrance had the most years of experience with over 10 years in the classroom, followed by Rebecca with nine years, Ida with four, and Sarah who completed her first year of teaching at the time of the interview. Terrance, Rebecca, and Ida identify as Black, and Sarah is Native American. The name of Sarah's tribe was omitted from the study to protect her identity; however, her tribal members are primarily located in NC. Terrance is

male, and Rebecca, Sarah, and Ida are female. All names of people, schools, and locations have been changed to protect the identities of the participants.

*Participant 1 – Terrance*

Terrance identifies as a Black male with over 10 years of teaching experience in music education. He has experience teaching both middle and high school in a variety of chorus and band ensembles. He attended a NC public high school and is a graduate of a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Terrance shared his experiences with racism while employed at Patriot High School located within an urban NC school district, nationally ranked in the top 20 largest school districts. As a veteran teacher with many accolades prior to arriving at Patriot High School, Terrance often referenced his belief that his work ethic and results were enough to protect him from hate or mistreatment by others.

Terrance immediately began experiencing racism during the interview process at Patriot High School, and those experiences continued to escalate throughout his employment there. Of the candidates he met on day one of the interview process, he was the only Black candidate. On the second day of interviews, he was asked to teach a lesson with no preparation or materials to unfamiliar students during the regular school day; later, it was learned that he was the only one who had to prove himself as a worthy candidate for the teaching position. The runner up to this position was not required to interview or teach in front of the hiring team.

Terrance had frequent run ins with White parents and his administrators were complicit in permitting these racially motivated offenses to occur against him. Parents of Patriot informed Terrance that he was not qualified to teach their children because he

attended an HBCU, and administrators allowed parents to have a personal set of keys to his classroom so that they could access the school at any time. On every occasion that parents complained to administrators, Terrance was admonished for not complying with parent requests. This went as far as administrators overriding his gradebook to appease a White parent who wanted a higher grade for his child despite documented evidence showing why they did not earn a high grade in Terrance's class. During football games, things were thrown at him and his students in the marching band, along with verbal abuse. Eventually, the principal admitted that Terrance was hired because he was Black, and they were experimenting with diversifying the staff.

Terrance also experienced isolation from other teachers in the school and was the only Black teacher in his department. On one occasion, when he felt mistreated by the theater teacher, he informed them that he would not allow it to happen again. In response, the arts department complained to the principal that he was not workable and not a team player, demanding the principal force him to do something against his will. The principal sided with the department that he must do whatever they ask of him without complaint.

Terrance experienced numerous incidents at Patriot which compounded over the two years he taught there, eventually bringing him to a breaking point with a major depressive episode and suicidal ideations. Despite the trauma from his coworkers, he still worked hard to develop his students into musicians and increased the number of collegebound students through his band program. He identified his students as the only ones who saw his struggles and had total understanding that what he was going through was racially motivated. His competitive marching band earned the title of grand

champion, and he cherished his students as being the underdogs who rose to the top after the majority of the members quit upon his hiring simply for being Black.

After leaving Patriot High School Terrance underwent therapy for his racial trauma but he still struggles with remembering all the incidents and has a difficult time recalling them without feeling emotional distress. He expressed the desire to capture his story in a narrative and has tried several times on his own but failed. He is enthusiastic about sharing these experiences with other aspiring teachers of color as a cautionary tale; however, it took him seven years to get to that point and it is still difficult for him to recall many of these experiences. After the interview, Terrance stated that the experience was very cathartic and he felt like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders, despite being seven years removed. It was the first time he sat down and explained the entire timeline of his employment at Patriot High School and personally reflected on the magnitude of that experience in its entirety.

### Participant 2 – Rebecca

Rebecca is a Black female teacher with nine years of teaching experience in the elementary school setting in an urban NC school district. Rebecca is a NC public high school graduate and an HBCU graduate. During the interview, she reflected on her seven years at Green Acres Elementary School as a fourth-grade teacher. Green Acres is a federally funded Title I school with a highly diverse student population and high percentage of English language learners. Rebecca noted how the teacher demographics did not reflect the student body, being completely White when she arrived as the only Black teacher out of the 40 teachers on staff. Rebecca later joined the hiring committee, and six additional Black teachers joined the staff over the years, before her departure.

Rebecca recalled many microaggressions during her time, as well as the explicit use of racial slurs. Rebecca often referenced her appearance and the amount of work she put towards presenting herself in a certain way as a form of protection from experiencing racism in the workplace. She straightened her natural hair for the first three years that she worked at Green Acres to avoid comments from teachers and referenced herself as articulate to the point that a White teacher told her she "was not like the others." Her many efforts towards presenting herself in an acceptable manner for White coworkers came with unintended consequences, such as being approached many times to solve racism and fix societal issues that were outside of her control.

Rebecca commented on how civil unrest following the murders of unarmed Black people were the heaviest moments during her teaching career because she could not avoid being *the* Black person at work, the spokesperson and expert for her White colleagues during an already traumatizing time. She also described how her overly cautious choices in appearance and presentation to her coworkers affected how they perceived all the Black teachers who eventually joined the school. When the White teachers learned that not all Black teachers were like Rebecca, there was an added element of confusion and discrediting towards them as a whole. In regard to racism in the workplace, Rebecca rated the stress as being an 8 out of 10 every day, with two moments being a 10 out of 10 during those times of civil unrest constantly on the news and social media.

When it came to working relations with White coworkers, Rebecca was once perceived as being uncollaborative during a simple misunderstanding, which resulted in the White teachers complaining to the principal about her refusing to be a team player. She was told she expects too much of other people and that she should be willing to give

her resources away without expecting anything in return. Many White teachers also came to Rebecca solely to be the expert on race, absolving them from learning or teaching anything related to race on their own.

As a result of racialization in the workplace, by Rebecca's second year she began restructuring herself into social justice and anti-racist teaching practices and dedicating her work towards empowering her students and affirming their identities. Instead of focusing on the burden of racism from her coworkers, Rebecca put all her energy towards strengthening her students and making sure they felt validated, could stand up for what they believed in, and advocated for themselves in ways she wished she could for herself. She reflected on how much she froze in the moments of racism from her White coworkers and hoped that her students would not do the same. Despite it all, she dedicated herself to her students and working at the district level to push social justice initiatives at a larger level, beyond Green Acres Elementary.

*Participant 3 – Sarah*

Sarah is a high school science teacher who at the time of the interview had just completed her first year teaching in a rural NC school district. Sarah identifies as Native American with affiliation to a tribe primarily located in NC. She is a graduate of a NC public high school and a NC public university described as a predominantly White institution (PWI). Being a first-year teacher, Sarah often compared her professional experience to her PWI college experience and reflected on how that, plus her challenges with how others perceived her identity, created a unique perspective in which she experienced life.

Sarah explained the effect growing up in another state away from her tribe had on her as a child. She reflected on times she had to explain to her peers who her people are and defend why she looks different in their eyes. She recalls not understanding why her peers did not believe she was Native, and did not have the language, at that age, to explain why they had never heard of her tribe. Based on Sarah's physical appearance many people assume she is Black, or at least part Black, and during her childhood she was accused of claiming to be Native "to sound interesting" instead of admitting she was Black. Despite these negative childhood experiences, Sarah stated that it helped her in the long run to be more prepared at an earlier age to handle how other people would inevitably interact with her. If she would have remained amongst her tribe until she left for college, she claims she would have struggled to adjust a lot more.

During Sarah's college years, she took on the role of being an educator to her peers on campus and created her own space to inform others on Native people and NC tribes. She learned that many of the other Native students did not want to join her in educating others, and she wished she could have spent more time simply being a college student focused on her coursework than having to educate people and professors. She educated numerous people on all social justice issues and confronted many about the problematic things they said, which took a lot of time and courage often being the only person of color present, and the only person who showed passion for anti-racist teaching. Sarah made the decision to create a space and time on campus to educate others because she was tired of people asking questions or making comments at inappropriate times where she did not have the energy to consistently respond. This was a form of

redirection, where she desired control over how she engaged with others on the topics of race, social justice, and Native people.

After recalling racial hostility from peers and teachers during her pre-service teaching experience, Sarah was very afraid to enter education, fearing she would have to teach with the same types of people she interned with. She was hired at her current school, which was much more diverse than she anticipated, after her interview with an all-White science department. There was also another Native teacher at the school, which helped Sarah feel she did not have to take on too much additional work in educating others about Native people, unlike her college experience.

Within the science department, Sarah, and another first-year teacher of color, Makaylah, began hearing racist remarks from their department leader, Lisa. Sarah and Makaylah were the only two teachers of color in the department, and although Lisa would primarily make these comments about students, she stated that it always felt directed towards them. The environment became so hostile that Makaylah and the department leader stopped speaking, and she eventually quit at the end of the year.

The hostility included microaggressions and racial slurs from the department leader, which Sarah reported to administrators during an investigation that Makaylah initiated against Lisa. Sarah became very anxious about Lisa finding out since she and Makaylah were the only teachers of color, and it would seem obvious that the reports would have come from them. Eventually, she buried this anxiety, and nothing came of the report because the administrators never confronted Lisa about her actions.

Sarah is still unsure if her administrators understand that Makaylah quit because of racism, which is alarming to her. She was also surprised at herself that she buried her

experiences so deeply that she forgot they happened until she discovered this study. She chose to distance herself from Lisa and rely less on her for instructional resources, although that was difficult because Lisa had all the resources as the department leader. Sarah channeled her experiences towards educating her students with more culturally relevant teaching practices and ensuring they knew how to advocate for themselves.

Sarah also expressed fears about leaving her school, even though she does not want to work there long term and wishes to move closer to her friends and family. This is because the diversity and support from the staff outside her department is very valuable to her. One racist teacher was something she could handle, and not worth the risk of moving away into an unknown work environment.

### Participant 4 – Ida B. Wells

Ida B. Wells identifies as a Black female English teacher who graduated from a NC public high school and attended a PWI for undergraduate and graduate studies. She received her bachelor's degree from a NC public university and went to an Ivy League school for her master's degree. Ida reflected on two different schools over the span of four years where she taught English, the first being Spartan High School, which is located in an urban NC school district and nationally ranked in the top 20 largest school districts. The second school, Gladiator High School, is a federally funded Title I school located in a rural NC school district which was also described as having 100% free and reduced lunch. Spartan High School was especially traumatic for Ida, where she had many issues with her White coworkers; however, she also reflected on how at the predominantly Black Gladiator High School, in both student and teacher demographics, racism still permeated in the community.

During Ida's time at Spartan High School, she experienced the compounded effects of racial trauma which resulted in mental and physical hardship, such as recurring panic attacks, extreme stress, medical issues with her multiple sclerosis, and night terrors. She also became overly concerned about her appearance, which followed her for years after leaving Spartan. Spartan is a large, predominantly White school, with a record of underlying racial issues such as the separation of White and non-White students under the disguise of a special academic program. The majority of the White student population was housed within this academic program, with unique courses and pathways only accessible to them. All other students were on general education pathways with limited access to advanced courses. The overall teacher demographics of the school consisted of a White teacher majority, with only a few Black teachers which Ida did not see often.

Ida experienced the death of her father while at Spartan, which went unacknowledged by her principal and other coworkers at her school. Though she was not expecting much, she at least thought she would receive a short note or some type of compassion during her bereavement. Later in the year, a story related to racism in Spartan's student government was aired on ABC news involving the organization's advisor, a White male teacher. In this situation, the White teacher got an outpouring of support from the principal during the media coverage who also dismissed the news story and the allegations. Ida was upset to learn the principal had the capacity to provide public sympathy for her White coworker accused of racism, but not even privately for her, and did not speak to her much throughout her time at Spartan.

When it came to Ida's experiences with the White teachers at her school, she experienced many challenges against her teaching ability, undermining of authority, and

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the expectation that she be the spokesperson for Black people. She was told by a White teacher to stop teaching Civil Rights literature because it was making students uncomfortable, and they also challenged her choice to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird* despite it being a key part of the curriculum. When Ida's students' test scores came back from their end of course exams it was evident that they performed very well, and her colleagues were shocked that she was effectively teaching her students, showing disbelief instead of praise.

On another occasion, Ida was physically assaulted by a student in her classroom, and when her White teacher mentor discovered what had happened, she informed Ida that she could not write a disciplinary referral for the student to be punished. She also went into the referral system and deleted Ida's referral. What hurt Ida even more was that later a White teacher wrote a disciplinary referral for that same student for talking out of turn, and she was permitted to do so.

In response to Ida's trials with her White coworkers at Spartan, she worked harder to utilize all the resources she had to teach her Black and Latino students a multicultural curriculum and expose them to rigorous text that they could see themselves in. She also advocated for a Black student who was not even in her English class, fighting for that student's teachers to support her when they had already dismissed her as unable to learn. She struggled with the fact that there were teachers who outright did not want to support their own students.

After two years Ida left Spartan High School, and at her next school, Gladiator High School, she experienced a completely different environment. Gladiator was a predominantly Black high school in both student and staff demographics, and despite the

challenges of being in a poor, rural community, Ida had less stress due to more support from her administrative team. One thing that Ida was unprepared for, though, was the high amount of internalized racism among those in her own community and how that trickled down to the treatment of students, such as having a deficit mindset towards Black students' ability to learn. Even though White students and parents were the minority in the school community, they had more social capital and administrators consistently appeased them at the expense of Black students. The comparison of both experiences was equally eye-opening for Ida.

While at Gladiator, Ida also pushed her students beyond what other teachers and administrators believed the students could achieve and challenged their deficit mindset towards their students. She taught them how to advocate for themselves and worked to get students to believe in themselves and their power. Although she expressed issues with not being able to hold White students accountable, she reflected on how everyone could have benefitted from that, as racism is an issue that costs everyone in the end.

Overall, Ida was most upset over how much things had not changed over time in regard to racism, expecting that things would have improved by now. She also struggled with reliving her trauma and made several references to how difficult the data collection process was for her, as she had blocked out numerous memories. She felt that no one wanted to hear about her experiences as a teacher. Ida's mother was a former teacher who found it comical when Ida asked if she had experienced racism in the workplace, too. She learned that her mother taught when they were desegregating schools and had never asked her in detail about her experiences prior to this research.

**Analysis of the Interviews**

All participants completed the semi-structured interview which was analyzed to investigate and answer the first research questions of this study:

1. In what ways might NC teachers of color experience racism from their colleagues in the workplace?

    a. How, if at all, do these experiences with racism affect NC teachers of color?

Codes were generated to discover the ways NC teachers of color might experience racism from their colleagues in the workplace and how they might have been affected by those experiences personally and professionally. Codes and sub-codes were used to classify experiences, which were then arranged into categorical themes upon analysis to better develop connections and similar concepts which emerged across the participants.

The four themes established from the data included manifestations of racism, overlapping and contributing issues, internalization, and responses to racism. All themes, codes, and sub-codes are displayed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Categorical Themes, Codes, and Sub-codes

| Theme | Code | Sub-code |
|---|---|---|
| Manifestations of racism | Being the only person of color | Expert on race |
| | Mistreatment | Negative perception |
| | | Different standards/requirements |
| | | Undermining or dismissal |
| | White denial | |
| | Indirect racism | |
| | Explicit use of slurs | |
| | Microaggressions | |
| Overlapping and contributing issues | White students | |
| | White parents | |
| | Community/Society beyond school | |
| Internalization | Perception of self | |
| | Stress and Anxiety | |
| Reactions to racism | Confronting or reporting racism | |
| | Silence/Freezing | |
| | Triumph | Impactful teaching |
| | | Hope for the future |

**Manifestations of Racism**

As participants revealed their stories during the interview, the need to categorize

how and in what ways racism was manifesting emerged. Manifestations of racism include

the incidence of racism from White coworker interactions or the existences of a hostile

racial climate in the workplace as a direct result of the actions of White coworkers.

Analysis of this theme also found it aligns with research findings by Kohli (2016) which

determined teachers of color as experiencing high levels of isolation, undervalue,

silencing, microaggressions, and racial stereotypes in their workplace. Within this theme,

many codes and subcodes exemplified how and in what ways teachers of color

experience racism in the workplace.

### *Being the Only Person of Color*

All four participants commented on their experience being one of the only people of color in their workplace and how that influenced their interactions with White coworkers. Terrance was the only Black teacher in his department, Rebecca was the only Black teacher at her school for many years, Sarah was one of two Native people in the school and one of two teachers of color in her department, and Ida B. Wells was one of a few Black teachers in a large school with little opportunity to interact with them. All four participants identified with this experience:

- "It's the elephant in the room, out of all the arts teachers, I was the only Black one ... With teachers and the community, I was very isolated." (Terrance)

- "I think it was interesting because if I was the first Black full-time teacher they dealt with, and I have my hair straight and I dress professionally every day even though they were in leggings and T-shirts and khaki cut offs and whatever, when there were more of us, you get to see that we are not monolithic." (Rebecca)

- "Me and one of the other new teachers brought the little bit of ethnic diversity." (Sarah)

- "I'd been selected to meet with the accreditation service. I saw the other Black teachers there and we all had the same look. They would ask us different questions about like, do you feel like this school is supporting of different students? Is this a positive, diverse school? and all this other stuff. So, we would look at each other, but we didn't say anything. I was scared. I was scared I would lose my job." (Ida B. Wells)

Terrance commented on how his isolation occurred beyond the workplace with White teachers, it was also in the community where he lived. Rebecca mentioned the affects her appearance likely had on her White coworkers. Being the only Black teacher they knew and worked with for the first few years she was there, they believed all Black teachers would be like her. Once more Black teachers were hired, the White teachers struggled with the diversity among them.

Sarah also experienced isolation as the only Native person in her department and only having one other non-White coworker in the department; furthermore, that coworker's classroom was on a different floor where their interactions were limited. Ida was in a similar situation where there were very few Black teachers in her large high school, so she had little opportunity to interact with them during the day and often found herself being the only Black teacher on her hallway and during breaks. Ida was asked to meet with an accreditation team with many of the other Black teachers in the school, and she noted how they all shared "the look" between each other, even though they did not work with each other closely. All of them expressed silence and fear to speak about what was occurring in their school.

### Expert on Race.

One byproduct of being the only teacher of color was the expectation of being the expert on race by White coworkers. For Rebecca, she identified three different occasions where she was expected to be the expert. Ida also explained her understanding and experience for why this occurs.

- "I couldn't not be *the* Black person at work where they were all going to run to with their questions and their thoughts, and they wanted to hash it out and know what they should put on their picket sign." (Rebecca)

- "I had a coworker walk alongside me as we left our cars. She said, 'Hey Rebecca, I've got a question and I've been wanting to talk to you for months. I'm so glad we're back!' and I'm just bracing myself like, okay, where is this going, and she said, 'So I know you know the answer, how do we end racism?' And I just thought to myself, well by golly if I knew don't you think I'd try already, like don't you think I'd have it solved? And I was like, 'You know, I really just don't know.'" (Rebecca)

- "She came to me and said, 'Hey Rebecca, I really want you to sit down with my students and teach them how to end racism.'" (Rebecca)

- "I think that naturally happens when you are ... in an environment where you may be the only minority, people think that now you're the new spokesperson for all minorities." (Ida B. Wells)

Sarah utilized specific tactics to avoid these interactions. In her experience, she chose to be more forward with her peers and coworkers in order to control how people interacted with her, avoiding the spokesperson identity. This began as a pre-service teacher, where she took on the role of educating others:

I knew that people had questions and I was tired of people asking me questions in a space that wasn't appropriate, or in ways that they just didn't have the language to ask me about it. So, I felt more comfortable just kind of opening that up and being like, just come to this and ask me here when I have time and the energy to

answer these questions. I feel like eventually that felt like more like a duty.

(Sarah)

These experiences later informed her choices as a teacher,

So, to help with this I put my tribal affiliation next to my name in my email bio

and typically I've had some staff come up to me and look at my last name and

wonder, or just ask me if I am Native because they know someone who is and

they recognize my name and I guess how I look ... it made it easier if I just kind of

told people about it because then I allowed them to ask questions. (Sarah)

In Sarah's case, it was easier for her to be forward with her tribal affiliation to gain a

sense of control.

*Mistreatment*

Mistreatment refers to experiences where a noticeable change or difference in

treatment of the participants occurred due to racism or racial hostility from White

coworkers. Previous studies have shown teachers of color experience mistreatment from

White colleagues by undermining their success and showing fear and distrust towards

teachers of color (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Kohli, 2016). Within this code emerged three

additional sub-codes: negative perception, undermining or dismissal, and different

standards/requirements.

**Negative Perception.**

The negative perception sub-code defines moments where participants

experienced hardships from their White coworkers due to being perceived in a negative

manner that was racially motivated. This occurred to both Terrance and Rebecca, where

they each recalled times when they were perceived as being stereotypically angry and uncooperative. Their White coworkers actively engaged in weaponizing racial tropes:

- "They're saying I'm not able to cooperate with my colleagues because they've labeled me angry Black man when, in reality, I just stood up for myself ... 'He's not workable, he's not a team player.'" (Terrance)

- "I was told I expect too much in return, and that I should be willing to give my resources without expecting anything in return. And I was just like, what? and I told her no. I said I don't accept that. I probably shouldn't have said this, but I told her that kind of sounds like slavery you know, working for nothing. My ancestors did enough of doing that and I'm not about to do that. All I'm asking for you to do is pull your weight. They go to the principal, and they say that I'm not trying to be collaborative ... I was just asked to be nice ... I was perceived as the angry, aggressive, non-collaborative person for about a year and a half." (Rebecca)

Both Terrance and Rebecca have the shared experience of their White coworkers labeling them as angry and uncooperative in moments where they found themselves in disagreement them. Towards the end of Rebecca's employment at this school, she decided to mask her feelings about her coworkers and the conditions of her workplace because she knew she was preparing to leave and needed a letter of recommendation for her next school. She stated, "I put on a cheery face, and I just did what people thought I should do." She described the working dynamic as "absolutely terrible."

### Different Standards/Requirements.

This sub-code refers to instances participants were held to different standards or requirements that their White coworkers were noticeably excused from. This was

experienced by Terrance and Rebecca at different points in their careers. For Terrance, this occurred during his interview process where he underwent two days of interviewing that another White candidate did not have to participate in. Rebecca also shared an experience where she confronted her Black assistant principal for trying to assign her a difficult student simply because she was Black, an idea the White teachers had convinced the assistant principal would be a good idea and which effectively absolved them from the difficult student. The assistant principal told Rebecca the student needed "a strong Black role model" despite the student having cultural differences immigrating from Nigeria. Rebecca responded, "You're only putting her in my room because I'm Black and she has black skin like me," which led to the assistant principal admitting she knew this was wrong. Their White coworkers had attempted to force this responsibility on Rebecca solely because she is Black to excuse themselves from teaching this student.

**Undermining or Dismissal.**

The sub-code of undermining or dismissal refers to times participants recalled feeling their authority was undermined by White coworkers or when White coworkers dismissed them in a manner that was racially insensitive or hostile. Terrance and Ida experienced challenges where they were undermined, while Rebecca expressed moments of feeling dismissed by her White principal when it came to issues on race.

Terrance explained an incident caused by his principal in response to his decision to pull his band students from a school performance:

> One student even stood up one time to the principal when he told all the band
>
> students to come to the cafeteria after I told them we would not do that
>
> performance. He thought that he could get them to do it himself and my student is

famously quoted as saying, "Why are you trying to undermine the authority of our

band director?" She said that to him and it caught him off guard, and he did not

respond ... It felt good to know that this student was speaking up using her words

and saying no, we're not going to do something because you said to do it when

our leader has already told us that we're not doing it, and it's very disrespectful for

you to undermine the authority of your own teachers. (Terrance)

Rebecca also described times she consistently felt dismissed due to her principal avoiding

saying or supporting Black Lives Matter:

My principal, my White male principal who could not bring himself to say Black

Lives Matter even when the district created an initiative to celebrate Black Lives

Matter Week of Action, he wouldn't say the words. He was just like, "So the

district is doing a celebration of African American people, umm, and they

matter." Why is it so hard? (Rebecca)

Ida's experience with her White coworker dismissing her safety and undermining her

authority by deleting her disciplinary referral after a student pushed her was also coded

under this theme.

### *White Denial*

White denial refers to stories shared by participants where White coworkers

refused to acknowledge racism or denied their role in the racialization of others. This also

included times White coworkers showed willful ignorance, negligence, or indifference to

the experiences of the participants when it came to racism or social justice. This was

experienced by all four participants.

Terrance recalled a time where a meeting was called over the grade of one of his White students. The meeting included the principal, an assistant principal, the parent, the student, and Terrance, where they wanted to bargain with Terrance over the student's low grade in hopes that it would be improved to a B. Terrance provided evidence of low performance and an explanation of why the student's grade was so low, but it was dismissed as not being good enough to cause the student's grades to drop. Terrance became angry that not only were they trying to haggle this students grade, but that so much time and resources were being used on one student who did not even enjoy playing an instrument. When Terrance called out the White privilege occurring, the principal said that White privilege did not exist, and they overrode the student's grade in his gradebook without his consent.

For Rebecca, she shared nine separate occasions where acts of denial were committed by White coworkers, explaining that for the vast majority of her coworkers, any confrontation pertaining to racism would be met with immediate denial. In one situation of willful ignorance and denial, Rebecca described a conversation with a White teacher:

> I've had the same teacher tell me every year, "Oh, be careful of this one, her mom thinks I'm racist," and I was like well, are you doing something that might be misconstrued as possibly biased, based on race? She was like, "No, I don't even know why she thinks I'm racist." I'm like okay ... but every year for three years she gave me that same speech and I'm like well, if year after year different people's parents think you're racist and we're not doing any self-reflection then I don't really know where to go from there. (Rebecca)

In this conversation, Rebecca's White coworker complained every year for three years that another student's parent had accused her of showing racist behaviors. It was also perplexing that the coworker warned Rebecca as if she is not a Black woman. In a different situation, Rebecca experienced a microaggression from another White coworker describing her as "not like the others."

Sarah identified White denial in her coworker who frequently used microaggressions against students and staff at school. Sarah had many issues with this coworker who was also her department leader, making working closely together unavoidable. Sarah explained:

> She knows what she's doing. She just won't ever say that, and I think it doesn't help that she's taught at this specific school for so long, so I think she feels like she knows what it's like to be Black ... I feel like she thinks that she knows a little bit more about Black people or Hispanic people to where she can like, say stuff about them like she gets it, and that's not true at all. (Sarah)

Sarah made it clear that this teacher knew that she was being racist but would never admit it because she feels a sense of entitlement to say derogatory comments about Black and Hispanic people due to the demographics of their school.

In Ida's experience, White denial often came in the form of challenges from White teachers when it came to her choice to use culturally relevant text and her ability to teach her students. Ida was challenged on her choice to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird* using the literal text, whereas the White teachers suggested they use a scripted adaptation, denying the cultural capital of the book. Ida also taught a unit on Civil Rights text, which resulted in a White teacher suggesting she stop teaching "Black Rights stuff because it's

making other students feel uncomfortable," showing that ignorance to the literature would be preferred, similar to the case of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Ida did not only teach Black Rights literature, but also incorporated the work of Caesar Chavez to show representation in the curriculum to her Latino students at their request. It was unknown how the White coworker came to her conclusion.

White denial was also exhibited in the form of negligence, such as the incident where Ida was physically pushed by a student but disallowed from submitting a disciplinary referral by her White mentor teacher; however, a White teacher was allowed to write the same student a referral for speaking out of turn in class. In this case, the White mentor teacher was negligent in supporting Ida's authority and indifferent to her safety yet showed support for their White colleague and protected her in a less serious offense.

### Indirect Racism

Indirect racism as a manifestation of the ways in the which racism emerged in the workplace explained times where the participants did not experience racist acts directed towards them but felt the effects of them indirectly when it was aimed towards other people of color such as students or the community. Related research findings revealed that teachers of color in the Kohli (2016) study deeply internalized the microaggressions directed towards their students of color by White colleagues. These inadvertent effects of racism still contributed to a racially hostile work climate due to White coworkers and was experienced by three out of the four participants, Rebecca, Sarah, and Ida. All three instances involved racist comments towards students of color by White teachers, and

Sarah had an additional story about her White coworker's racism towards another teacher of color and how that also affected her.

Rebecca reflected on how she felt she had to go beyond her traditional duties to support Black boys in the first-grade, even though she was a fourth-grade teacher:

> I went out of my way to speak to little Black boys in first-grade because the first-grade teaching group was notorious for being racist towards little Black boys. I eventually got some of those first-grade boys in my fourth-grade class after a few years, and it was really exciting because a lot of the first-grade boys, at the end of the year, their light was snuffed out of their eyes for education and so, then it just became hard. They became hardened, it became harder to deal with them, but I think by having that connection with them outside of the academic space and letting them know I see you, and you're smart, and you're beautiful, and tell me all the things you've been learning, despite someone saying these ones won't learn, I think it helped them be successful, even after that really harsh first-grade year.
>
> (Rebecca)

Rebecca was affected by the many times she heard White coworkers say disparaging remarks towards Black students, reflecting their deficit mindsets towards Black students and their racist attitudes towards their ability to learn. Rebecca worked even harder to try to let Black students know that they were smart and valued in their school, feeling the indirect effects of the racism they were facing from their teachers.

Sarah also felt the effects of a hostile work climate when White teachers complained about student names being unpronounceable to them and blaming their parents for naming their child "something ridiculous like this," or saying, "this is just a

crazy name." One White teacher also complained to Sarah about their colleagues name, a teacher of color, claiming it was difficult to spell. In both cases Sarah confronted the teacher about their racist complaints, but she was dismissed.

Sarah also heard numerous reports from students about other teachers being racist in their classrooms, putting additional stress on Sarah to constantly report other teachers and empathized with students being afraid to advocate for themselves in these situations. In reflection, Sarah expressed her frustration:

> I know that with some of these teachers, there's definitely probably worse at my school that these kids are experiencing. I'm sure there's more that I haven't heard of that kids are experiencing, they just have to sit in the room and deal with it or, I don't know, I just-it's hard for me to imagine being a student and not having as much power in that situation. (Sarah)

Sarah showed visible stress during this part of the interview through deep sighs and placing her hand on her forehead as she thought about what her students have to endure when they are in the classroom with some of her White coworkers.

Ida also had a frustrating experience with a student being powerless and needing someone to help advocate for them. Ida was assigned a special credit recovery group in addition to her expected course load where she worked after school with students needing to retake a course for graduation. She recalled working with a Black student who was struggling with her math course, which was also difficult for Ida being an English teacher. In this experience, Ida explained:

> She was really trying her best, she just learned more slowly ... I sent out an email to the other math teachers and I said, can anybody out there please help out this

student? and they was like, "Oh, well, Ms. Wells, we can't-" you know, just

putting on, saying it doesn't matter, that they can't learn all this other stuff. And

I'm just like, no. This student, she's really trying her best, she didn't have access to

Internet at home, she would go to the library on her own time, she would stay

after with me, but I knew that she needed somebody else to help her and I guess

that was really challenging for me. (Ida)

Ida expected all teachers to want to help all students, but when this was not happening it was very challenging to accept and believe. Ida also reflected on the difficulty witnessing the power dynamic between White and Black students and their consequences for misbehavior:

There was a power dynamic where some White kids knew that they could get

away with stuff, they knew they could. Since the Black kid's parents, maybe they

didn't have this big presence in the school board or even if they were just working

and didn't have time to come in, they knew that they didn't have the freedom to

get away with different things. So, I think it held back both races. If I would have

been able to correct the White students and help them to grow stronger as

students, then they could have done better later on, on their educational journeys.

And then also it's not great on the psyche of a Black student seeing White students

getting away with stuff just because of their skin color, and it makes you feel like

you're less than a person. (Ida)

Ida understood firsthand how damaging it was for Black students to witness White students get away with things, knowing they were not afforded the same privileges. In all three cases when participants witnessed indirect racism, they took action to attempt to

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overcome these hurdles for their students and found ways to support them, even when these were not students in their traditional classroom setting.

*Explicit Use of Slurs*

Explicit use of slurs refers to times White coworkers used racial slurs in the presence of the participants. Rebecca and Sarah both shared experiences with their White coworkers explicitly using racial slurs. Rebecca shared an experience with a White coworker where they were both assigned to facilitate a training on microaggressions to their staff:

> She took it upon herself to create her own scenario, which used the N word with a strong "ER" almost 10 times! It was more than excessive and unnecessary. I couldn't even believe my eyes as I read what she typed for us to present.
>
> (Rebecca)

The White coworker Rebecca had to work with was not asked to create any scenarios for the training, as it was scripted by the district ahead of the presentation. Rebecca reported the incident to her Black assistant principal and the training was called off.

Sarah experienced a White coworker's explicit use of racial slurs during her school's spirit week. On a decades themed spirit day, the students selected the 1990s as their inspiration for dressing up. This led a White coworker to make inappropriate and racially motivated comments about the students, saying that they interpreted it as "dress up like a thug day." Sarah recalled the teacher's fussing:

> She was saying that she was frustrated because the kids were dressing up like "thugs" and walking down the hallways saying the N-word, but she just said it. And I was kind of like umm ... Okay ... first of all, you don't have to repeat it. If

you have a problem with the kids saying it, you don't have to say it ... why are you

saying it? ... I don't understand. Like, it's one thing to be upset if the kids are

yelling and screaming down the hallway, but it's kind of weird for you to choose

that word specifically to police from them. (Sarah)

Sarah then explained that she thought the students outfits appeared to be normal and on

theme for spirit week, and she did not understand what that teacher thought and why she

was so mad.

*Microaggressions*

The final code developed under the theme of manifestations of racism was

microaggressions. Sue et al. (2007) described microaggressions as offenses against

people of color that occur in brief conversations that are invalidating, insulting, and

degrading. Microaggressions can also occur environmentally through "social media,

educational curriculum, TV programs, mascots, monuments, and other offensive

symbols" (Sue et al., 2019). Microaggressions can be subtle and initially difficult to

decipher due to its brevity in daily interactions, which was a point of contemplation for

both Ida and Rebecca when they first began recalling their experiences with racism in the

workplace.

Rebecca stated that she experienced microaggressions in the workplace, but at

first she did not know if she was just perceiving it that way or if her White coworkers

were truly engaging in that language with her. Ida also expressed uncertainty in why she

was undergoing so many struggles until a friend told her that her coworkers were being

racist. All four participants experienced microaggressions in the workplace on at least 20

separate occasions. These experiences ranged from comments on Black women's

hairstyles, degrading assumptions of intelligence towards Black teachers, to a White

coworker telling Sarah, a Native woman, that they would have a powwow.

**Overlapping and Contributing Issues**

The second theme that emerged in the data categorized the ways in which racism

affected the participants through instances not directly caused by White coworkers. The

decision to include this theme as relevant data was made as participants began revealing

how racism was permeating at multiple levels that intertwined with their role as a teacher.

Overlapping and contributing issues were coded as involving either *White students*, *White*

*parents*, or *community/society*. These issues directly contributed to racism in the

workplace by maintaining a racialized environment that was, in most cases, reinforced by

White coworkers. All four participants recalled moments where racism from other

entities overlapped within the workplace.

Data coded as involving *White students* exemplified times where participants had

interactions with their White students that contributed to an adverse, racialized climate in

the workplace. These issues often worked in tandem with *White parents*, which added an

additional layer of racialization that heightened other experiences in the workplace. The

third code of *community/society* detailed moments where racism occurring outside of the

workplace merged into the racialization in the workplace. These three data codes were

developed together in a single category due to the ways they overlapped each other, and

muddled issues related to racism in the participants lives beyond definitive boundaries.

Terrance experienced issues with White students, White parents, and community/society,

Ida experienced issues with White students and White parents, and Sarah and Rebecca

experienced issues with community/society.

In Terrance's interview, it was revealed in the code *White denial* that an issue arose with a White student and parent that resulted in a meeting with his administrators who then chose to override Terrance's gradebook to give the White student the grade they felt he should have, despite giving little effort to earn that grade. This event involved White administrators denying the existence of White privilege and showed them upholding the wishes of White students and parents in an unethical way. During this exchange, Terrance also asked his White administrators "Who is advocating for the young Black and brown students over their grades?" which intensified the meeting.

Terrance also experienced many other exchanges with White students and parents that contributed to a hostile workplace. Immediately upon Terrance's hiring, a White parent sent him an email representing the parents of the marching band stating, "we're just not convinced that your HBCU education is going to be good enough to teach our students." This attitude was carried by students as well, with the entire percussion section quitting the band upon news of his hiring, along with many other White students. One White student quit after informing Terrance that his teaching would not prepare him for his audition at The Julliard School, an assumption grown out of racism and the perception of HBCUs. The student felt he would be better off working alone than enrolled in the band program with Terrance as his instructor. Unbeknownst to him, Terrance's college professor earned his master's degree from The Julliard School, but due to racism that student declined an opportunity to learn. He was not admitted to The Julliard School.

In addition to White students and parents, Terrance experienced many hardships due to his race in the community. Terrance recalled people throwing things at him and his students during football games and parades and shouting threats from their cars. During

one community parade, the officials placed him and his predominantly Black marching band behind a mock Confederate army with over 40 people in costume. Once the marching band season ended, the principal came to Terrance admitting, "This was a bit of an experiment, but we had no idea that it was going to play out like this, that they were going to treat you like this." Terrance learned that his hiring was an experiment to test having more Black teachers and leaders in the school. He was hired because he is Black, and the administrators felt "he still has enough polish on him that he's not going to be too much of a rough end to scare the White people away." Administrators were complicit in the mistreatment of Terrance by White students, parents, and the community.

In Ida's interview, it was revealed that she struggled with both White students and White parents, first in the case of *indirect racism* when she detailed the power dynamics that existed between White and Black students at her second school and the control White parents had over the school. She later explained that this occurred even though White people were in the minority at this school. This school served a majority Black student population, which was also reflected in the teachers, administrators, and community. Ida explained, "Even the Black people who are in charge knew that they had to oblige towards the whims of White parents. I guess they had more political power or social capital within the community." This community control overlapped into the workplace and destabilized power in Black administrators and teachers, even when White people did not have a large presence in the staffing and students.

White students were aware of this, as seen in the struggle with disciplinary equity and also during a specific interaction Ida had with a White student in her class. This

student, Erica, was struggling academically, and Ida detailed what occurred in a moment of frustration for her:

> One day when she was overwhelmed she said, "Ms. Wells, I'm White. Things are not supposed to be this hard for me." My majority Black class went into an uproar. One of my Black female students was especially mad ... I quieted Erica down and calmed down the class ... but I felt guilty because I knew that my Black students had a right to be upset. (Ida B. Wells)

Although this incident did not involve White coworkers, the overlap of White beliefs and attitudes of the community were still able to be maintained in predominantly Black spaces where Black staff members were left in a precarious position.

For Sarah, she was most affected by *community/society* as she expressed fear over the decision to one day leave her current school. Although she has friends and family in different parts of the state, she is hesitant to leave because she remembers how rampant racism was during her pre-service teaching experience from White teachers. This has caused her to accept the racism which occurs in her current school instead of risking more racism from White coworkers in a new school. This risk of the unknown is keeping Sarah in a school she has stated she does not want to remain in long term, several hours away from her family. Sarah also expressed anxiety about teachers leaving her school to pursue other position, because that also opens the unknown with new hires.

Rebecca shared moments of extreme hardship over *community/society* impacting her work environment, specifically during the years of 2015 – 2016 and 2020. During these times, there was heightened awareness in American media over the murders of

unarmed Black people by police officers, which overlapped into Rebecca's workplace. As she recalled:

> The two heaviest moments were around 2015 – 2016, and that was Mike Brown, and I feel like Trayvon was still in the news, and it was Philando Castile … Garner, like all of that was in a concentrated couple of years, that was a hard moment. And then 2020, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, all of that, those were the hardest days to walk in the building with coworkers because I knew that I couldn't not be Black. And I couldn't not be *the* Black person at work where they were all going to run with their questions and their thoughts, and they wanted to hash it out and know what they should put on their picket sign, and it was just ... If I could just not come to work, you know, and then even if I took off a day it wasn't going to work because the next day, I was still going to be the Black coworker at work who could answer their questions about the Black stuff they saw on the news. So that was the burden I think, when real world stuff was in everybody's face and then for me to walk in and now it's all on me. Those were the hardest days to get out of the car ... Back in 2020 everything got shut down because of COVID and then that spring there were a lot of killings of unarmed Black people and people of color, and it was really rough on me emotionally, and I was glad that we were not in school with children. It was also nice to not be in a building with my White coworkers and I actually prayed and thanked God for that time to be away while those things were happening in the world, because I could only imagine what it would have been like if I was in the school and having to walk past my coworkers everyday dealing with that. (Rebecca)

Rebecca explained how when these events were occurring, it left her as the sole consultant for all her White coworkers who were now maintaining racial trauma in the workplace. She was expected to have the answers and serve as the expert while simultaneously trying to cope with the racial trauma being witnessed in the media. This was so overwhelming that she was grateful COVID-19 led to the shutting down of schools so that she could be away from her coworkers to avoid the overlap of racism from society in school.

Overall, the categorical theme of overlapping and contributing issues demonstrates how racism is multilayered and interwoven, making it difficult to separate racism from White coworkers as a stand-alone issue. At certain times, White coworkers facilitated, complied with, or even protected racialization from other entities in the workplace, exemplifying hegemony and how whiteness works at the systemic level to protect itself and maintain the existing ideologies (Daniels, 2018). It also demonstrated the compounding effects of racism and its ability to grow in depth over time.

**Internalization**

The third theme, internalization, categorized the ways participants were affected by racism in the workplace by how they internalized beliefs or concepts related to race and racism. Internalization presented as two main codes in the data, *perception of self*, and *stress and anxiety*. *Perception of self* refers to times the participants revealed how they perceived themselves as a person of color, whether through appearance, presentation, or having merit-based beliefs. *Stress and anxiety* exhibits moments where participants experienced internal stress or anxiety over racialization in the workplace. All four participants shared stories exemplifying these issues.

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### Perception of Self

All four participants exhibited struggles with perception of self in various ways. For Terrance, this occurred primarily by internalizing the *myth of meritocracy*. As defined by Liu (2011), the concept of meritocracy relies on the impression that upward social status is earned through merits such as talent, knowledge, and ability; however, it generalizes this pathway without consideration for social inequality which contributes to this myth that success is solely based on effort. In Terrance's perception of self, he held strong beliefs that meritocracy would work in his favor and was hurt when this came to be untrue. During his interview, Terrance expressed that he could overcome being the only Black candidate by proving himself. In his words, "I sold myself. I came in, had my portfolio, all my results, and it was undeniable, so I really converted a lot of people who had their minds made up through my personality, through my work ethic, and showing that proof." He acknowledged feeling disadvantaged due to his race but felt confident in himself and his evidence that he was the best candidate.

Once Terrance was hired and began experiencing racism and discrediting, he reflected on the hate he was receiving: "I thought as a child that you would grow out of that once you earned your stripes, right? Once you worked hard and did the right thing and you've done everything, that it should work out." Terrance grew up following his parents' motto of having to be "10 times better than our White counterparts," and internalized that as a merit of achievement to equal success. The realization of the myth altered Terrance's perception of self:

It greatly affected me and my confidence and ability to just support and stand up and believe in myself. It shook me a little bit because I don't think I had ever faced that level of disapproval, hatred, or disgust. (Terrance)

Overall, this experience cast doubt in Terrance's mind over the value of his achievements and his ability to produce great work. This realization also contributed to his declining mental health. Ida shared similar sentiments towards meritocracy when she expressed confusion over why her colleagues were shocked that her students did well on their exams, reiterating that she attended an Ivy League school for her master's degree.

Rebecca and Ida also struggled with perception of self, which was evidenced in concerns over their physical appearance and presentation. Rebecca and Ida were the only Black female participants, and they both shared internal struggles about their hair. In Rebecca's experience:

When I started my job at that school, I wore my hair straight. I'm fully natural, I'd been natural for three years at that point, so my hair's really curly, like, Afro texture, and I pressed my hair, and I wore it in ponytails and buns. For the first three full years that I worked at this school, for whatever reason, I felt like that's just what I had to do because if I didn't wear my hair that way, I felt like there would be comments. (Rebecca)

Rebecca reflected many times on how hard she worked to present herself in a way which might prevent microaggressions or racist comments in the workplace, but she still had those experiences anyway.

In Ida's interview, she spoke on how much she internalized her experiences with racism in the workplace that it stuck with her for many years and even began wearing

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wigs out of concern over her natural hair, even at other jobs outside of teaching. Also, when she first started teaching, she rarely wore makeup, but over time she found herself wearing a lot of makeup almost every day. In reflection, Ida expressed that these things not only bothered her, but followed her in life, feeling that she had to change herself to be accepted in the workplace. This was another example of how racism compounded over time, as this became yet another layer of racialization Ida experienced.

Sarah also internalized issues related to racism in the workplace through her perception of self, demonstrated by her choice to be very forward about being Native American. Sarah explained how many of the struggles she had with how others perceived her changed how she approached meeting new people. She stated that people were so often "confused by the way I looked," to the point she began announcing her tribal affiliation to all students on the first day of school and putting it in her email signature for staff to be aware as a means of controlling her own narrative over identity. Sarah exhibited hypervigilance towards getting ahead of any opportunity for others to make comments or ask questions inappropriately. Both Sarah and Rebecca shared this experience of working hard to avoid racialization in the workplace. When Sarah reflected on the racial trauma which occurred during her pre-service teaching years, she stated that her greatest fear in becoming a teacher would be her coworkers and racism in the workplace.

### Stress and Anxiety

Another way that participants internalized racism in the workplace was seen in the presence of stress and anxiety. All four participants experienced stress and anxiety as a direct effect of racism in the workplace. During the interviews, these were the most

difficult parts for participants to recall, noted through the length of pauses between thoughts, lack of eye contact, and an overall change in mood and tone from each participant. These stories are best explained through the participant's narrative.

**Terrance's Stress and Anxiety.**

Terrance reflected on the effects racism in the workplace had on him not only in the moment, but for several years:

> I don't know, it's really hard for me to talk about this because the racial tension is very traumatic ... It affected me and let me know that you've really got to have tough skin, you've got to love yourself, regardless of what you produce. Love yourself as if you're enough. But that took years, it's now 2022. For me to arrive to that point, that's seven years down the line, and initially it really broke me, I had a huge depressive break ... No matter how hard you try, life just kept punching, knocking me down, and I think a year of that, being told you're not good enough or people not working with you does that. It made me snap ... When you get the dream don't expect it to come easy, I guess that's just what it is. You know, it would be nice if it came easy, it would be nice if it came without all of the racial trauma but that's what it was. (Terrance)

Terrance's experiences caused stress, anxiety, self-doubt, severe depressive episodes, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Terrance also shared that he required therapy and medication to begin recovery from his trauma.

**Rebecca's Stress and Anxiety.**

Having endured racism in the workplace for several years, Rebecca also reflected on the toll that took on her mental health:

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If I had to describe it on a scale of 1 to 10, every day was usually an 8 on the

"racism is annoying scale" and during those two periods [2015-2016 and 2020] it

was a 10! I think I got used to operating on an 8 that it became my normal that at

any moment someone might say something stupid to me. I didn't really feel like it

was a burden because I had become accustomed to their stupidity. (Rebecca)

Rebecca described the extent of her chronic stress and anxiety being directly caused by

her White coworkers. She consistently remained at a heightened stress level as her

version of normal.

**Sarah's Stress and Anxiety.**

As discovered in previous themes and codes in the data, Sarah went into her first

year of teaching with a heightened level of stress and anxiety specifically over racism in

the workplace. This was stated as a great concern of hers prior to her hiring and

continued to be an underlying factor of stress as seen in her decisions to avoid any risks

that could potentially introduce her to coworkers who exhibit racism. In addition to this,

Sarah expressed other signs of stress and anxiety towards racism that occurred at her

school:

There are certain days where some of the stuff they say I can kind of just address

with them right then and there not even use it as a teaching moment, just be like

that's weird, this is why you shouldn't say that, and kind of move on. And then

there are some days where I do take it very personally. And I'm just like, I don't

like being around this. And I wish I was around people who understood not to do

this kind of thing ... I just wish ... I could just focus on just teaching, and just

learning how to be a new teacher. (Sarah)

This echoed Sarah's pre-service teacher experience, where she also shared her struggles of wishing she could just be a student and focus on learning how to become a teacher, and not have to constantly address or educate the students and professors in her college.

Sarah was also involved in the reporting of racist comments by her department leader, which caused her stress as well:

> I always was nervous that if they talked to her then she would come back to me because obviously me and other first-year teacher are the only people who would go tell them [administration] about it, we were the only two non-White teachers in our department so it would probably make sense that we'd be the ones to talk about her ... I was honestly very nervous about it for a long time, and I feel like I forgot ... I just stopped thinking about it because I realized like okay, I guess they never decided to talk to her. (Sarah)

Although Sarah felt a lot of anxiety over the department leader finding out that she and another teacher reported her to administration, she was also upset when she realized nothing came from this report. This was the same teacher who used explicit racial slurs and microaggressions towards Sarah and the other teacher of color. The other teacher of color eventually quit due to the department leader's racism, and she also shared a hallway with her, while Sarah taught on a different floor in the building.

After asking Sarah how it would have felt had it been her sharing the hallway with the department leader instead of her coworker, she reflected:

> I know it could have just as easily been me down there next to her ... I would have struggled .. I guess for her it just felt like she was watching over her or taking control, or being like, she doesn't know what she's doing kind of stuff. I couldn't

have handled that, I feel like I needed to be allowed to make mistakes and just be, and not feel like someone was always there and watching me. Even though I like everyone else at the school and my department a lot, and got a lot of support from them, I feel like that would have kind of overshadowed that support. (Sarah)

Sarah was fully aware of the struggles her coworker was going through and knew that she was only somewhat protected due to her distance from the department leader's classroom. It was also telling that in a scenario where Sarah was placed in that classroom instead of her coworker, the constant issues with their department leader would have overshadowed any support she was receiving from the rest of the school. Even hypothetical situations had the potential to cause stress.

**Ida's Stress and Anxiety.**

Ida experienced physical expressions of stress and anxiety while teaching due to a hostile workplace in her school of majority White staff and students. Ida shared the pain she endured while teaching:

It was hard at that school, and I went through a lot, and I know during my last days of teaching, as soon as I got to my house, I just, I broke down crying and I made a noise, it didn't even sound like a human being noise. It was like an animal that had been wounded, and it scared me ... I was depressed and slept in bed with my mother. I think I screamed in my sleep. I remember hearing my sister asking my mom "what did they do to her?" ... I had so much anxiety. I would wake up with anxiety attacks. It was crazy, like I would have to call people and ask please pray for me, or text please pray for me, because I had so many anxiety attacks. I

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even called EMS once because I thought that I was having a heart attack. (Ida B. Wells)

Ida's anxiety was overwhelming and caused physical distress from anxiety attacks, night terrors, depression, and severe chest pain to the point of calling emergency medical services.

**Responses to Racism**

The final theme, *Responses to Racism*, was needed to categorize how and in what ways the participants responded to their experiences with racism in the workplace. This theme aligned with this study's inquiry of how teachers of color are effected by racism from their coworkers. Specifically, this category brought together the ways participants reacted in direct effect to the racism they encountered such as the choice to confront it, freezing in the moment, or channeling the burden of racism towards finding success. The data in this category was coded as *confronting or reporting racism*, *silence/freezing*, and *triumph* which includes the sub-codes *impactful teaching* and *hope for the future*.

*Confronting or Reporting Racism*

Terrance, Rebecca, and Sarah all recalled moments when they specifically confronted racism, although this was not consistent. Terrance confronted racism once during the school year and reported his experience to his school district's human resources department. Rebecca confronted racism once towards a White coworker, and reported it twice to administrators, but never made a formal report to human resources. Sarah confronted racism on many occasions to White teachers and administrators, but never to human resources. Ida never recalled confronting or reporting her experiences.

In Terrance's narrative, he explained how he confronted racism on one occasion, which was the meeting with his administrators, a White student, and the student's father over the student's grade detailed in the code *White denial*. Later in his storytelling, Terrance explains how he came to the decision to report his overall experience to human resources:

> My parents were a big, big push behind that. My dad was really adamant about leaving a paper trail and hoping that these things would stick. I think, personally, I was just so overwhelmed and exhausted with trying to fight with these people, I was over it. I really just wanted to get out because it was a negative environment, and I knew that I did not have to subject myself to that. (Terrance)

Terrance never heard back from human resources, but he was glad he overcame his exhaustion caused by the hostile work environment to report his incidents. Terrance was the only participant who reported his experiences with racism to human resources.

When Rebecca was asked if she ever reported her experiences to human resources, she explained why she chose not to:

> No, I never reported it to HR, and I never specifically said this person said this to me about a particular thing ... I think, maybe to some degree, I felt like it was tattling. But also, I knew that my principal didn't know what to do, like if you can't even say the word Black, where is this conversation going. (Rebecca)

Although Rebecca confronted racism in certain situations at the school level, she did not take an additional step towards reporting racism to human resources as it was perceived negatively as "tattling." Rebecca once confronted a White coworker over her use of a

microaggression and reported another White coworker's use of racial slurs, as seen in the data from *explicit use of slurs*.

Rebecca also confronted her principal once about the racial climate at their school. This was a heated moment in the principal's office which occurred after he denied her request to have a Black History Month program:

> I asked him, he said no, and that's what led to the conversation, and I told him this school has an issue with race. I said, I don't even know if you know this, but for the first three years that I worked here I wore my hair straight because I was scared of what people would say if they saw my hair curly, I don't even know if you noticed I started wearing my hair curly my fourth year. He's like, "Oh really?" I was like yeah, people have said things to me that have been very harsh, and very alarming, and very racist, and he was just like, "Oh." I started to tear up and I was crying but still talking and he's like, "Oh, I can just come back whenever you're better," and I was like no. I need you to hear me through my tears. I need you to hear what I'm saying and not get put off because you see emotion. (Rebecca)

Overall, these were the only moments Rebecca confronted racism directly or through reporting it to an administrator; more often she froze in the presence of racialization by coworkers.

Sarah also never reported racism to human resources, but almost always reported coworkers to administrators and confronted coworkers when they were making racist comments. She did this so often that her coworkers and students quickly expected her to be the person who would most often speak up about those issues at work. When asked if

she felt this altered the working dynamic, she stated that she did not feel it was negative, and if it was, she did not care.

### Silence/Freezing

In the moments where participants did not confront or report racism, they chose silence/freezing as their primary response to racism. Silence/freezing was verbalized by Rebecca, although this response can also be interpreted in Terrance and Ida's narrative. Terrance responded to racism far less than the number of times he experienced it, and Ida never mentioned any moments where she confronted racism in the workplace despite the number of incidents she shared. Based on the data it was inferred that these three participants experienced silence/freezing most often. Rebecca reflected on this recurring reaction, stating "I think I did so much freezing that I never in the moment verbalized like, 'Oh my God!' 'What kind of question is that?' or responded. I was just always so shocked, and I don't know why after so many times." Despite the numerous times Rebecca experienced microaggressions or racist language in the workplace, each time was equally shocking for her.

### Triumph

The final trend in the data for all four participants was that of triumph and success, where despite the hardships and racial trauma, each participant discovered a way to overcome their environment and divert negativity into something positive through *impactful teaching* and/or *hope for the future*. Although there were many challenging, negative effects of racism in the workplace, all participants evidenced ways in which the effects transformed them in some manner to grow and become even greater teachers and people.

- "When you come up against adversity or you come up against things, or things are coming up against you for no reason, no apparent reason but to just challenge you, yes, we know that this is how life works, and these are the forces, but that doesn't make it any easier. It's just really difficult when you really care because I love my students, I love pushing them and working them and they love the push ... We still succeeded because that grand champion that we spoke on day one was achieved in year two and those kids forever will remember themselves as underdogs rising up as winners, as hard-working people, and that's what I'm most proud about ... There's hope for the future. Once these boomers finally leave, you know we can really get some things done. But until then it's just, I mean, you're just going to have to continue." (Terrance)

- "I've maybe been a little bit more intentional about how I talk about race in my classroom ... Like, I have pictures of non-White scientists in my classroom on purpose. Our department, we would pre-make lessons for Black history month ... we did the same for all the months, but it was still kind of like, that was it. And I feel like it wasn't very clear like, this is why we're doing this now, and I also want to make sure my students don't think that we only talk about those scientists then. So, I feel like this year I'm going to be more comfortable talking about it with my kids in terms of my teaching." (Sarah)

- "I'm the type of person where I do correct myself, and I learn, and I don't stay stagnant, so all the mistakes I made at the first school I corrected, and everything that people tried to teach me, anything I learned at all that people

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tried to teach me, I retained that. So, I brought those lessons to the next

school. I do believe that I was a better teacher at the next school just because I

had that life experience, and I did learn how to change things around and

make the environment a better place for the kids. So, it was good and bad ... I

think all of this has just made me more brave and able to speak up for

myself." (Ida B. Wells)

- "I think I really jumped feet first after that second year into social justice and

    anti-racist, anti-bias teaching ... We talked about the Flint water crisis in my

    class. We did privilege walks in our class ... I think I was more intentional

    about teaching in a way that affirms all identities, not just Black kids ... I

    guess in a sad way I'm kind of like, I have more hope for the future for the

    kids and what they can turn our world into than I did my coworkers in where I

    felt like they will be able to get in the future, or the near future." (Rebecca)

During Rebecca's interview, I probed deeper into her motivation for immersing herself

into anti-racist teaching, in which she responded:

I don't know if I would consider it a burden as much as I would consider it like a

duty of mine. It was for the students I've taught, to make sure they were seen,

they were validated, they were supported, they were taught in a way that opened

their mind to form opinions for themselves with all the facts, to be able to stand

up for themselves and to advocate for themselves. That was my goal, and so I feel

like the things that I experienced with my colleagues made me channel that into

how do I support my kids who are going in this same environment and might not

even be aware of the way these things are falling. The comments that people are

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saying, I don't know how they're processing it or if it's even falling and sticking as much as it's sticking for me, and so I think I channeled all of what they were giving me into making sure my kids were good, whether they were with me or not ... Their actions and comments motivated me to be more of the teacher that I am for my kids and hopefully, one day, they won't freeze like I did. (Rebecca)

Although each participant revealed consistent issues with racism in the workplace, the way all four found ways to transform their environment and students through teaching was a profound conclusion to each narrative.

### Analysis of the Collaborative Book Post-Survey

Upon conclusion of the participant interviews, each interview was edited and reconstructed into a full-length counternarrative and placed within a non-fiction collaborative book. The book contained four chapters representative of the four participants in the study. Each participant received a digital copy of the book, in which they were asked to read the book in its entirety and complete a post-survey asking open-ended questions about their engagement with the book (see Appendix E). The purpose of the post-survey was to answer the second research questions of this study:

2. How, if at all, does the sharing of narratives help teachers of color cope with racist experiences in the workplace and does this help with improving their overall experience?

   a. How might the sharing of narratives serve as an intervention for teachers of color?

The post-survey data was collected using an anonymous Google Form to encourage participants to be honest about their experience with the collaborative book.

Names, pseudonyms, and email addresses were not requested in the survey, and any identifiable information was offered at the liberty of the participant. Direct quotes extracted from the post-survey are cited as *P* followed by a participant number assigned in the order the data was received. This includes P1, P2, P3, and P4.

Three out of the four participants indicated that they had never read or listened to stories from teachers of color on their experiences with racism in the workplace prior to this study. Three out of four participants also indicated that they were interested in reading stories from teachers of color prior to this study, and one stated that they were not interested in reading stories. Overall, the data received in response to the collaborative book was very informative in seeking answers to the second research questions and generating new knowledge on the potential impact of this intervention.

## Results of the Intervention

In seeking answers to the question of how the sharing of narratives might help teachers of color cope with racist experiences in the workplace, the post-survey asked participants open-ended questions pre-coded by the researcher. These pre-codes were used to organize the responses into two categories for analysis. The first data category was created to analyze the direct impact of the intervention on participants as a tool for coping with their experiences with racism in the workplace. The second category was created to further inquire about the potential of sharing narratives as an intervention for teachers of color and in what setting it might be most beneficial. These two categories are labeled as *personal impact* and *potential impact*.

*Personal impact* data includes post-intervention participant reflection on how and in what ways the use of a collaborative book might have helped participants cope with

their experiences with racism in the workplace. *Potential impact* identifies ways the participants provided insight on who might benefit most from collaborative books and in what setting. This data was used as a means to collaborate with participants once again during the intervention phase to offer recommendations for future research or study replication.

### *Personal Impact of Collaborative Books*

Overall, the use of collaborative books had a positive personal impact on the participants, and all expressed the value in sharing these experiences, finding there was something to gain from participating in the intervention. Three participants explicitly stated that the experience was cathartic, P2, P3, and P4; and P1, P3, and P4 found the collaborative book to be healing in nature. These two outcomes demonstrated positive personal impact in that many participants found commonality in how the book made them feel differently about their experiences with racism in the workplace.

Despite using a common tool, coping looked and meant different things to the participants. For instance, P2 expressed that the book "was a nice release and cathartic," but healing did not occur, stating that healing is a personal journey that one has to take on their own to truly find healing. Although P2 felt positive personal impact and coped with their experiences to a certain extent, they suggested the path to healing can only occur when taking independent steps. This was an outlier compared P1, P3, and P4 who indicated that the intervention was able to generate a healing space. P1 elaborated, "We can't heal if we don't talk about what is happening. Nothing will get better if we don't talk about issues like these with each other." P4 similarly stated that healing can be created with the power of shared experience.

Upon reaction to the collaborative book, participants expressed different attitudes towards impact when it came to how they perceived the entire book rather than how they felt towards their own narrative experience. When considering how the participants experienced the book and were effected by it, P1, P2, and P3 shared fewer positive expressions:

- "At the end of the day, every single one of these teachers are trying to work a job. It is not a surprise to me that this job can cause a lot of added stress and anxiety, but these people don't even get to have the regular stresses and anxieties of teaching. Each chapter describes what happens when you teach while not being White - there is always something extra. Extra stress, extra duties (planning PD, plays, and dealing with the students of color), and just extra labor in general. This will never be a surprise to me, but it will never be easily digestible. It's sad, and it worries me." (P1)

- "I was surprised. I really hoped that we as a society had moved beyond this level of racism. I'm also disappointed by this level of racism taking place in schools." (P2)

- "I feel like this is a very pervasive issue in NC schools and that although we have come far we aren't quite as far as society likes to think that we are." (P3)

The experiences of P2 and P3 with the intervention shared an interesting perspective where they both specifically expressed the state of racial issues in society. P2 hoped that society had moved on from these levels of racism and found the collaborative book to be very disappointing; P3, however, readily acknowledged the pervasive issue of race in society and how society likes to believe we have come farther than reality. P1

expressed frustration after engaging with the collaborative book, with each story being unsurprising, sad, worrying, and difficult to digest. P4 shared a much different outlook about the collaborative book, "My initial reaction was pride. I was happy to see something of this importance and magnitude exist and satisfied to have been a part." When analyzing the impact of the collaborative book on the participant as a reader engaging with the material, there were varying levels of satisfaction or beliefs.

These statements by the participants did not denote an overall negative experience in reading the stories of other teachers of color, though. Despite the initial outlook of the book being concerning or frustrating for three of the participants, all four expressed common ways in which it helped them cope with their experiences, as P1 described it as reading "the uncensored truth" and an opportunity to learn from the other participants. The most common instance of coping found in the participants was lessening feelings of being alone, which directly connected with the interview data that revealed all four participants felt isolated or alone as one of, if not the only, teacher of color in their school's staff. Each participant shared very similar statements:

- "It made me feel less alone in my experiences, but it also made me feel incredibly frustrated." (P1)

- "Reading the experiences of others helped me to realize that I was not alone. I am not crazy. Other teachers have experienced racism too." (P2)

- "I think it's helpful to know that we aren't isolated in our experiences" (P3)

- "It helped me to see that I was not alone in my experiences. The collaborative book also showed me how similar scenarios can be viewed differently through various lenses." (P4)

This was the most profound outcome of the intervention, showing a direct connection and change in all the participants experiences with racism in the workplace. P1 stated that despite feeling frustrated by the collaborative book, it also gave them a source of motivation to return to work on Monday and continue teaching knowing they are not alone. "I know I am not the first and I won't be the last teacher to deal with this. I needed the reminder that I can do this" (P1).

One intention of this intervention was to attempt community building as a means of improving the experience of participants using this method of shared storytelling in a collaborative book. This came with mixed reviews, with two participants feeling that community was developed and the other two feeling this was lacking. The differences in opinions from participants was striking:

- "There is definitely a sense of community! You can hear similar frustrations in each chapter. The stories have different people but very similar messages." (P1)

- "Collaborative books alone cannot do this. I can't build a community with people that I have not met yet." (P2)

- "I could see being in community with them, but we haven't connected." (P3)

- "It absolutely created a sense of community. The participants getting to read each other's stories was an incredible idea of networking and giving voices to the often unheard." (P4)

These two varying reactions to the ability of collaborative books to create a sense of community might be contributed to the study's design to complete participant interviews digitally and separately without an event where they were able to meet each other. For P2 and P3, the intervention lacked an interpersonal aspect where they could better judge

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whether community had the capacity to occur, with P2 further concluding that collaborative books are not enough. In contrast, P3 and P4 identified feeling a sense of community through connecting the similarities between each chapter and heard the voices of each other. For them, the impact of shared experience was enough to build community.

Based on the data, the findings of the intervention demonstrated that collaborative books can provide a range of impact and coping opportunities for participants when they construct a narrative and read the narratives of others. Engaging with the collaborative book might produce disappointment in participants after reading how often such similar situations are reoccurring and its ability to create community. However, all expressed how they were impacted in a positive way, whether it was eliminating feelings of isolation, creating community, or cathartic emotional release.

### *Potential Impact of Collaborative Books*

The secondary research question seeking how sharing narratives of teachers of color might best serve as an intervention yielded interesting ideas on how using a collaborative book might be most beneficial. This question was particularly important in advancing the Miller et al. (2020) call to move beyond storytelling when utilizing counternarrative in research. P2 and P3 continued to echo each other in their ideas on what would need to be accomplished to make the utilization of collaborative books beneficial for teachers of color. P2 stated that collaborative books "can only help if they force a positive change to be made in the actions of others," placing more responsibility on White coworkers. P3 also explained, "My hope would be that this book could be used with schools where racism is pervasive to help shine a light and hold up a mirror to those

who are harming others." Both responses resolve that the best way to benefit teachers of color may be to turn the focus to those who are enacting the harm, instead of simply focusing on storytelling within a community.

P4 expressed that the use of collaborative books was an incredible idea to generate a network and reveal stories from voices who often go unheard. In this participant's opinion, collaborative books would benefit teachers of color the most, "especially teachers who want to teach in the deep South" (P4). The participant further explained that these issues are not taught in teacher education programs or discussed in detail, "they're glazed over or not perceived as a problem when they really are" (P4).

Collaborative books would benefit teachers of color by amplifying more voices, according to P4, as an intervention for the missed opportunity of learning about racism in the workplace while in teacher education programs. According to Solórzano & Yosso's (2002) elements of CRT research, amplifying the voices of teachers of color aligns with the basis of experiential knowledge being critical and necessary in analyzing racialization, allowing participants to hear themselves in their own stories and learn from others in an empowering way.

P4 felt that this collaborative method accomplished their own personal goals for storytelling, which they had wanted to do in the past but was unable to complete on their own. The participant noted feeling they greatly benefitted from having their voice put into narrative format and was thankful for the process involved within this study to bring their story forward. The intervention also inspired P4 in their own research, stating "I had not heard of a collaborative book in this manner until this project, but now I am intrigued and wondering how I can implement them in my own research and field" (P4). Taking

action through replication of collaborative book interventions further demonstrates the potential to continue impacting more teachers of color through this type of research.

Another idea for utilizing the collaborative book was introduced by P1, as they reflected on how significant reading a book like this would have been as a pre-service teacher to better prepare them for the reality of racism in the workplace. P1 described how unprepared pre-service teachers of color in their cohort felt when faced with the possibility of having to confront racialization in public schools, wishing that someone had been truthful about the challenges ahead. Furthermore, P1 stated "It is a disservice to not explicitly tell incoming teachers why people, specifically POC, end up having to leave teaching." Using collaborative books might help bridge the gap in understanding teacher of color attrition and retention data, while also better preparing pre-service teachers about the racial climates which exist in certain NC public schools. During the participant interviews, Terrance, Sarah, and Ida B. Wells all expressed concern over the lack of preparedness their teacher education programs had in educating them about the challenges teachers of color might face due to racism in the workplace.

For P1, the intervention would best serve pre-service teachers where they could engage with the product of this intervention as a means of learning how and in what ways teachers of color experience racism in the workplace. Even when one is not a participant in the study, there is still potential to learn from this collaborative process and feel impacted by reading the book. P1 expressed that they would have felt better in college because they began feeling isolation during their pre-service teaching experience, before becoming a full time professional in the career. P1 explained:

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I specifically wish I could have read something like this and discussed it with fellow pre-service teachers so we could talk about how we would handle these things when they happen. Towards the end of my college experience my school started holding an affinity space for pre-service teachers of color. It felt like we had so much to discuss about what we were presently facing (internships, classmates, professors, etc.), but none of the leaders (professors) talked about their time in public education as a POC. I always wanted and needed someone to be brutally honest with me about what it was going to be like so I could be prepared. I know that reading something like this might turn away some pre-service teachers, but it honestly broke my heart to see people I went to college with quit teaching early into their first year or during their first year. A lot of them said stuff like "no one told me it was going to be like this." (P1)

Both P1 and P4 emphasized the lack of awareness teacher preparation programs had towards deeply discussing the issues of racialization in the workplace and within their own colleges. P1's lack of preparation also mirrored research from Sleeter (2001) on pre-service teacher of color experiences where it was found that teacher education programs ignored their desires to develop their needs as students of color in overwhelmingly White spaces and as future teachers who already felt silenced and ill-prepared to enter the workforce. Research from Kohli (2016) also determined how pre-service teachers of color can feel racial isolation in teacher preparation programs.

In conclusion, the post-survey data generated valuable implications for this study by answering questions on how teachers of color might be impacted by sharing narratives of their experiences with racism in the workplace, and the ways collaborative books

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might be most useful when utilized as an intervention. All participants expressed a sense of relief after having shared their experiences; however, several new avenues still exist in what should or could be done with this data to best support teachers of color through intervention within this study and beyond this study.

## Conclusion

In the conception of this study, what began as a personal discovery of issues with racism in the workplace grew into an investigation of racism against teachers of color across the state of NC. The incidence of racism in the workplace as a problem of practice was supported in both localized experiences and scholarly research, and the first research question surfaced to identify and categorize the ways racism was occurring and effecting NC teachers of color.

This initial inquiry was guided by the theoretical framework of critical race theory in educational research, specifically using experiential knowledge and counternarratives. However, the foundational work of this study still lacked aspects of action research as Herr & Anderson (2015) stated that action research should incorporate "the achievement of action-oriented outcomes" (p. 67), as well as "the generation of new knowledge" (p. 67), such as through the implementation and evaluation of an intervention in the research.

Initially, creating an authentic intervention that could be applied in a statewide study proved difficult. First draft interventions seemed to lack meaningful experiences for both the participants and me until deeper consideration was taken for what I was desiring to do with the data I was going to collect. This was a critical moment of researcher reflexivity in the process of understanding what this study could produce that would be of value to all stakeholders involved. Literature utilizing CRT in educational research

showed that counter-storytelling has the capacity to better understand racial climates in schools, expose racist dialogue, and empower participants (Kohli, 2017; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). However, I was still left with the lingering question of what to do with that information, which led to the idea of creating a collaborative book as an intervention to add new outcomes to the study and generate new knowledge on how sharing stories might have an effect on participants.

Discovering a gap in the existing literature reaffirmed this idea, employing the Miller et al. (2020) analysis on the use of counternarratives in educational research. The authors asserted that inquiry-based counternarratives have contributed greatly to acquiring knowledge about racialization in education, but the work has stopped there, with research lacking "a framework to guide the sharing and using of counter-narratives" (Miller et al., 2020, p. 283). To seek better information on the utilization of counternarratives, the intervention of the collaborative book introduced the second research questions of the study. It served to inquire how sharing stories might impact participants in the study with understanding their experiences and determine how a collaborative book method might best serve other teachers of color as an intervention.

In seeking answers for the ways in which teachers of color are experiencing racism in the workplace, participant interviews proved to be information rich data reflective of the multi-dimensional aspects of racism. This connected to Delgado & Stefancic's (2001) expressed complexity with the term *racism* being a loaded word, struggling to singularly define how it occurs in society. This study revealed 20 codes and subcodes for racism and its effects in the workplace, categorized into four themes. The themes included the literal manifestations of racism, overlapping and contributing issues

of racism, the internalization of racism by participants, and how participants responded to the racism they endured.

This aspect of the data suggested that there was no singular way that racism occurred, but instead emerged as multiple consistent and compounded issues that came from many entities in sometimes tangled and undecipherable ways. All the participants exhibited signs of racial battle fatigue through the mental, emotional, and physical stress of constant racial conflict (Smith et al., 2006) in the workplace. Overall, the participants experienced racism in the workplace first and foremost by finding themselves to be one of if not the only teacher of color, creating feelings of isolation. Many of the participants also noted being treated in obviously different ways than their White coworkers due to them holding negative and stereotypical perceptions of them, holding them to higher standards than White teachers, undermining their authority, or outright negligence in supporting teachers of color.

All participants in this study also experienced hardships due to blatant interference with their ability to teach through discrediting or power dynamics by White coworkers. Participant Ida B. Wells summarized this as being surprising, not expecting all the constant pushback to her simply trying to make a difference in her students' lives. She continued, "I wasn't expecting all this negativity and just trying to sabotage." Terrance and Rebecca also shared similar events of sabotage from White coworkers, while Sarah suffered the most from stressful power dynamics.

Participants experienced stress and anxiety from not only their White coworkers, but multidimensionally from White students, parents, and society, especially in the hegemonic ways these layers worked to protect each other. Issues due to racism from

White students and parents often spilled into the workplace where White coworkers upheld them against the participants. Societal issues also overlapped with the workplace, burdening participants with having to be the expert on race and having the expectation that they solve racism on their own with no accountability from White coworkers. The White coworkers mentioned by participants in this study often utilized tools of whiteness to maintain a sense of innocence in racism (Picower, 2009; Daniels, 2018) through denial tactics or relying on people of color to solve the problems they did not create.

Rebecca commented on these tools of whiteness, stating that "as long as they're searching for someone Black or someone else to teach them" then they will not have the capacity to change. Much of that, according to her, also depends on her White coworkers' ability to realize they are, in fact, racist. As long as White coworkers absolve themselves from their inadequacies in understanding the constructs of racism, they will continue to maintain whiteness as property, where teachers of color are expected to take up the issues of race, exclusively, as their own problem. This act by White coworkers was exhibited in the interview data from all four participants.

In conclusion of the inquiry on how and in what ways teachers of color experience racism and are affected by it, the data largely mirrored the known discoveries in current educational research on teachers of color and the hostile racial climates of schools. The generation of new and supporting knowledge came from the action research intervention and the second research questions of this study aiming to discover the impact of collaborative books and how they might be utilized best as the next step in counternarrative research.

After further analysis of the intervention outcomes, participants acknowledged the positive aspects of utilizing a collaborative book for coping with racism in the workplace, such as catharsis, realization that they are not alone, and an opportunity to learn from other teachers of color's experiences. However, there were also instances where the participants disagreed on the potential impact of the intervention beyond a personal level. Two out of the four participants identified clear limitations to using this as an intervention method. This barrier was due to the lack of creating an in-person community where the participants could have met each other and determined for themselves if community could be built based off sharing stories. For the other two participants, reading and sharing similar stories was enough to generate feelings of community.

There were also three lines of thought as to who might have the most potential impact from utilizing a collaborative book. The first thought came from two participants who felt that the collaborative book should be given to White coworkers to put the learning responsibility on the people who are actually enacting harm. Both desired a new direction for action which involved more work from White coworkers who need to better analyze themselves. This was also seen in the interview data where Rebecca expressed strong feelings towards no longer wanting to be the intervention for her White coworkers to teach them everything and essentially serve as an everlasting data source and fixer of racism.

P4 determined that the collaborative book served teachers of color as intended in the study, with great impact and potential for replication as an intervention on current experiences with racism in the workplace. The sharing of experiential knowledge among teachers of color at this stage in the profession would best benefit current practitioners

and even intervene for the missed opportunities to learn about racialization during their teacher education program, which P4 identified as lacking in preparing them for the reality of school climates.

This intervention also allowed P4 to cope with their experiences by finally providing a way to give their story a voice; something they explicitly desired but could not complete on their own without this collaborative process. Although the other participants did not explicitly state this, their interview data revealed similar situations where this study was the first time they had ever recalled the entirety of their experiences with racism and had never read their story to themselves and internalized it. During the narrative construction, participant Ida B. Wells stated that the editing and revision process was emotionally difficult because they were having to revisit their incidents over and over again.

The third thread of potential impact came from P1, wishing that a collaborative book was provided as a pre-service teacher as a means of early intervention. Their desires echoed similar research findings in other studies that determined feelings of racial isolation do not begin as a teacher, as they are evident in the experiences of pre-service teachers of color as well. Utilizing the collaborative book as a tool for discussion amongst pre-service teachers of color could provide significant support in preparing them for confronting racism in the future. All concepts of potential impact of utilizing collaborative books and the implications of these findings will be further discussed in Chapter Five of this study.

CHAPTER 5:

IMPLICATIONS
**Overview of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate racially based offenses against teachers of color working in the state of North Carolina and evaluate how shared storytelling might generate new knowledge using collaborative books as a method of intervention for participants. This study's problem of practice introduced how issues with racism among teachers in the workplace has created a need to investigate how and in what ways teachers of color experience racism from White coworkers. Using storytelling and counternarrative, this study first inquired about teachers of color's experiences with racism to acknowledge and analyze incidences, draw sources of commonality, and determine the potential effects of racist experiences. Second to the inquiry, an action research intervention employing the use of a collaborative book was implemented to analyze potential impact and possibilities for future use.

This investigation employed practitioner-based narrative inquiry to collaborate with NC teachers of color interested in sharing experiential knowledge on racism in the workplace as a form of intervention to both substantiate the problem of practice and investigate the outcomes of community storytelling. The research questions of this study asked:

1. In what ways might NC teachers of color experience racism from their colleagues in the workplace?

a. How, if at all, do these experiences with racism affect NC teachers of color?

2. How, if at all, does the sharing of narratives help teachers of color cope with racist experiences in the workplace and does this help with improving their overall experience?

a. How might the sharing of narratives serve as an intervention for teachers of color?

To best answer the research questions, this study applied action research methods in practitioner-based narrative inquiry. This research was approached from the position of being a practitioner in the field among colleagues with a shared experience, which proved to be an asset in reflexivity and positionality. This also supported the collaborative process required of this study. Incorporating the creation and use of a collaborative book as a component of action research intervention was vital in transitioning this study from storytelling to generating action-oriented outcomes. Counternarrative as an intervention served to evolve the general format of interviews as data, instead seeking ways to utilize them to initiate change. In using counternarrative in research, Miller et al. (2020) urged studies to restructure its focus towards transformation rather than simply inquiry. The authors also charged educational researchers to do more than collect stories.

Miller et al., (2020) proposed that one of the limitations of using counternarrative in research was its ability to support change due to lacking a unified approach in how to use data as more than presenting the counter-stories of people of color. This assertion provided the rationale for the research intervention of utilizing collaborative books to

generate new knowledge on how it might be used to initiate change in educational

practices. This was completed through examining its impact on the participants, as well

as inquiring about the implications it might have as a learning tool.

<center>**Discussion of Findings**</center>

**Discussion of the Interview Findings**

Analysis of the interview data offered many answers to the first research

questions of how NC teachers of color experience racism in the workplace and what are

its effects. As incidences of racism emerged in the stories from participants, finding ways

to categorize these experiences took many cycles of coding and inquiry. Upon final

synthesis of the data, 20 codes and subcodes for racism and its effects in the workplace

were developed and further categorized into four themes. These themes generated four

determinants for how teachers of color experience and are effected by racism in the

workplace: (1) racism manifests in a variety of complex ways; (2) issues with racism

from non-coworkers or society as a whole can overlap and contribute to issues with

White coworkers the workplace; (3) racism is internalized by teachers of color; and (4)

racism in the workplace incites action-oriented outcomes.

The first theme, manifestations of racism, organized the codes and subcodes

which referenced parts of participants' stories that describe how racist interactions with

their White coworkers were occurring. This aspect of the data determined that racism

occurs in a variety of complex ways. There is no singular way that racism occurs, but it

instead emerges as compounded issues that are both overt and covert. All participants

shared several incidents with White coworkers, showing how these are not one-off events

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but an experience of continuous subjectivity to racialization and a hostile work environment.

These findings are congruent with the current research on teacher experiences with racism, such as Milner's (2020) study on Black women teacher experiences and their role within the school being strictly contingent on their level of agreeability with their White coworkers, and clear consequences for disagreement with the majoritarian. Although the participants in the Milner study felt valued, that value was solely determined by White colleagues and their ability advance their interests. This was witnessed in Rebecca's story, as racism manifested in negative treatment and perception during times she spoke against her White coworkers, being labelled angry and uncollaborative.

This was also reflected in Cormier's (2022) study on Black male teachers, finding that lack of engagement with White colleagues resulted in the perception of not being supportive or collaborative. Terrance experienced these same issues with White coworkers which resulted in him also being labelled uncollaborative and not a team player. This experience was similarly mentioned by a participant in Beard's (2020) research on teachers of color, reflecting that "my experience as a teacher has mimicked my experience as a student … it's retraumatizing …They want to hire people of color that exist within White supremacy fluidly and comfortably" (pp. 65-66). This is also relevant to Terrance's discovery that he was hired as an experiment by administrators to test having more Black teachers and leaders in their school, picking Terrance because they believed he would be most palatable for White parents and students

Each participant experienced racism in the workplace by finding themselves to be one of, if not the only, teacher of color, which created feelings of isolation and directly contributed to other issues with White coworkers such as having to be the expert on race or the spokesperson for their race. K. Brown (2014) questioned the recruitment of teachers of color, hypothesizing the desire by White teachers to exploit their experiential knowledge to serve their own interests, as well as allowing White teachers to experience diversity on their own terms through the hiring of Black teachers. This form of CRT's interest convergence appears evident in the motivation for Terrance's hiring and connects to all participants' experiences on having to be the spokesperson and expert on their race.

Various participants also expressed having issues with racism in the workplace such as being treated in obviously different ways than their White coworkers due to negative and stereotypical perceptions of them, being held to higher standards than White teachers, the undermining of authority, or outright negligence and lack of care. Participants also experienced hardships due to blatant interference with their ability to teach through discrediting or unequal power dynamics by White coworkers.

Terrance shared experiences with White coworkers, White parents, and White students where his ability was challenged and discredited due to his race and having attended an HBCU. Terrance had to unfairly prove his ability to teach in front of the hiring team during his interview, White parents stated his HBCU education was not good enough to teach their children, and a White student stated Terrance would not be good enough to prepare him for his college audition as soon as he was hired. These manifestations of racism were also aligned with the research findings by Griffin & Tackie (2016), where a common experience for the Black teacher participants was the perception

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that they were less intelligent than their White colleagues, many times being openly challenged on their qualifications to educate students.

Participant Ida B. Wells also experienced discrediting and open challenges to her ability to teach her students despite having a master's degree in education and positive data results from student testing. The Griffin & Tackie (2016) data also revealed a theme of Black teachers being challenged by White colleagues even in moments of professional success, which echoes Ida's experience with her students' high test scores and her White colleagues being shocked instead of congratulatory. This experience likely heightened Ida's feelings of isolation as one of the only Black teachers by also being denied healthy interpersonal relationships with coworkers who have the capacity to show joy for accomplishments rather than skepticism.

All participants shared several experiences with microaggressions in the workplace, ranging from offensive language, comments about hair texture and styles, to dress and appearance. Participants Rebecca, Sarah, and Ida B. Wells also expressed anguish over indirect racism from White coworkers, with Sarah further explaining times where a White coworker spoke in harsh, racist ways about students that still felt directed towards her. The effects of indirect racism as a manifestation of racism in the workplace was similarly found in the Kohli (2016) research findings where it was revealed that the teachers of color in the study deeply internalized the microaggressions directed towards their students of color by White colleagues, suggesting that the ways teachers of color experience racism in their schools may not always be from direct assaults.

Another covert way teachers of color in this study felt racism was through White denial, which refers to times White coworkers refused to acknowledge racism or denied

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their role in the racialization of others. This also included times White coworkers showed willful ignorance, negligence, or indifference to the experiences of the participants when it came to racism or social justice. This was seen in Terrance's story of his principal denying the existence of White privilege, a White teacher at Rebecca's school denying they are racist even after repeated complaints from parents about their behaviors, a White teacher at Sarah's school feeling entitled to use racist language and microaggressions, and White teachers at Ida's school challenging the importance of literature related to race and social justice.

One discovery in the research that was unique in comparison to current literature was the explicit use of racial slurs by White teachers. Rebecca and Sarah shared distressing moments of when their White coworkers used racial slurs in their presence and described their reactions to the incident. Most current literature only reveals the use of microaggressions against teachers and students of color.

The second major finding of the interview data determined that issues with racism from non-coworkers or society can overlap and contribute to issues with White coworkers the workplace. Not only do these issues overlap and contribute to racism in the workplace, but White coworkers are also found complicit in maintaining and protecting these issues. Terrance experienced racism from White parents, students, and his community in which his administrators actively defended or dismissed. For Rebecca, the trauma of witnessing the murders of unarmed Black people over social media and the heightened awareness of police brutality found its way into the workplace after numerous White coworkers began asking her how to solve racism, as if White people have no responsibility to this problem. In Ida's case, the social capital of White people in the

community were noted as permeating into the school's power dynamics and racial equity, and Sarah explained how the fear of the unknown regarding racism in other schools is what is keeping her in her role at her current school despite not wanting to remain long term.

The third major finding from the interview data established that racism was internalized by teachers of color. This was first seen through participants' perception of themselves and their internalization of racism through the myth of meritocracy, the great desire for professionalism in appearance and perception, and forced identity acceptance. Second, the effects of internalization were seen in the constant stress and anxiety found in all four participants.

Based on the ways participants internalized racism, they all inadvertently upheld racism and White supremacy. This was seen in the beliefs and actions the participants took in hopes of avoiding racialization. Terrance and Ida both internalized the myth of meritocracy and leaned on their success or work ethic as a safeguard. Terrance, Ida, and Rebecca mentioned how they worked hard to dress professionally in comparison to what their White coworkers wore, also serving as a safeguard against racialization through over-policing of appearance. In each of the participants' stories, there was little explanation, apart from Ida, over their choice to dress professionally other than pointing out that they appeared more professional than their White coworkers. Ida explained that she felt she constantly had to change her appearance due to her White coworkers.

Ida and Rebecca shared stress over their hair, with Rebecca explaining the internal conflict of ritualizing the straightening of her natural hair for three years. Rebecca stated, "I felt like that's just what I had to do" regarding her hair, changing

herself to avoid racist comments. Sarah explained how the forced identity from other people has caused her to introduce herself as Native American in almost every event that she meets new people, including interviews and the first day of school. Although she stated this was a means of allowing people to ask questions on her terms, she subsequently internalized racial misidentification and utilized this as a method to assuage uncomfortable microaggressions about her identity. Overall, the internalization of racism by participants was sometimes unconsciously enacted on, and often used as a barrier or guard against racism as a form of self-protection and preservation.

The participants of this study also experienced a great amount of stress and anxiety directly caused by internalizing racism from White coworkers. This came in the form of racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004) and the compounded effects of repeated acts of racism over several years for three participants, and months for one participant who was a first-year teacher. Pizarro & Kohli's (2020) study also found the impact of racism as something that extends throughout teachers of color's professional journeys, not confined to a specific moment in time but accrued and packed up into emotional and psychological baggage. Terrance and Ida experienced depression and severe stress and anxiety. Ida recalled a time she let out a painful cry after coming home, night terrors, and anxiety attacks which led her to call emergency medical services believing she was having a heart attack.

Sarah and Rebecca also recounted high levels of stress. Sarah expressed how emotionally difficult it was being around racist teachers, and Rebecca explained her stress levels as constantly being at a heightened level on an everyday basis explicitly due to racism from her White coworkers. Pizarro & Kohli's (2020) research discovered a

theme of teachers of color, "feeling on high alert for the next racist encounter with a colleague or supervisor, and pressure to be hypervigilant" (p. 985). Rebecca matched this theme as well, recounting times she physically braced herself when White coworkers came to her with questions, knowing it would somehow involve race or racism.

The final finding from the interview data discovered that for the participants, racism in the workplace incited action-oriented outcomes. All four participants found triumph and success, where despite the hardships and racial trauma, each participant discovered a way to overcome their environment and divert negativity into something positive by acting and transforming their approach to teaching. It was evidenced in each interview that the participants found success in how they taught their students and worked towards changing and supporting them. All were intentional about culturally relevant teaching and instilling positive behaviors such as advocacy in their students as a direct response to the adversity they faced as teachers of color.

Teachers of color experience racism in the workplace and are affected by it in numerous ways, such as a hostile work environment which has also shown to be a hazard to health and wellness. The data from the interviews supported the creation of the four determinants of this study for how teachers of color experience and are affected by racism in the workplace. First, racism manifests in a variety of complex ways that are both explicit and subtle and can compound over time. Racism can also overlap in several areas of teachers of color's lives, where experiences with racism outside of the workplace can easily overflow into the workplace. These experiences are almost impossible to untangle because they belong to larger structures of society and are upheld and defended by White coworkers. It was also determined that racism was internalized by teachers of

color, challenging how they perceive themselves and the development of sometimes severe mental health issues related to stress and anxiety. Finally, racism in the workplace has shown to incite action-oriented outcomes in teachers of color, finding self-validation in improving their teaching practice, supporting and affirming students of color, and embracing new ideas for change.

**Discussion of the Intervention Findings**

Analysis of the intervention data on how narratives might help teachers of color cope with racist experiences in the workplace originated from the collaborative book post-survey which asked participants open-ended questions. This led to the development of two main categories, both developed from post-intervention participant reflections. The first category, *personal impact*, analyzed the direct impact of the intervention on participants as a tool for coping with their experiences with racism in the workplace. The second category *potential impact* further inquired about the potential impact of utilizing narratives as an intervention for teachers of color and in what setting it might be most beneficial.

The findings determined that the use of collaborative books had an overall positive personal impact on the participants, and all participants believed they had something to gain from participating in the study and sharing their narratives. This expressed value in the intervention shows that collaborative books can help with improving the overall experience of teachers of color dealing with racism in the workplace through providing catharsis or creating a healing space for participants. All participants identified commonality in how the book made them feel differently about their experiences with racism in the workplace, such as relieving feelings of isolation.

Developing sources of commonality among participants was one of the aims of this research study and aligns with critical race theory educational research, as Solórzano & Yosso (2002) have emphasized the importance of sourcing commonality specifically when utilizing storytelling methods.

However, findings in the intervention data suggests that the use of collaborative books are not completely optimistic, as the majority of participants also found commonality in having less desirable attitudes towards engaging with the whole book verses the impact of their own narrative experience. When considering how the participants experienced the sharing aspect of storytelling as they engaged with the other chapters of the book, three out of the four participants found the repetitious acts of racism in each story frustrating and disappointing as they came to terms with the fact that society has not grown beyond racism as far as people would like to believe.

Although the participants found commonality in no longer feeling isolated and alone with their experiences, that affirmation also came with distress because of the realization that they were not alone. Two participants shared similar sentiments of having issues with the fact that similar narratives from more participants could be added over and over. The impact of the intervention on participants as a reader engaging with the material produced varying attitudes, but it was not reflective of an overall negative perception towards the outcome. All participants expressed commonality in the ways in which it helped them cope with their experiences through the opportunity to learn from the other participants. This shared commonality was the most critical outcome of the intervention, showing a direct connection and change in all the participants' experiences with racism in the workplace due to the use of a collaborative book.

Another goal of this research intervention was to attempt to build community as a means of improving the experience of participants through the sharing of stories. This goal was partially achieved, with two participants feeling community aspects and two feeling this was lacking. This suggests future research might focus primarily on community building goals of a collaborative book intervention. This revision to the research would alter the research design to include a focus group discussion or a means for participants to bond on a more significant level.

The findings of the intervention's ability to generate personal impact on participants demonstrates that collaborative books can provide a wide range of effects and coping opportunities for participants. Better developing the research goals towards engaging with the collaborative book and the stories of other participants might produce clarity to the outcomes of this intervention and its potential to create community in more consistent ways. Greater impact could have been achieved if all participants identified community within the intervention; however, all expressed how they were impacted in a positive way, whether it was eliminating feelings of isolation, learning from the experiences of others, or emotional relief.

Secondary to determining the direct impact of the intervention for participants, evaluation of the findings also determined the potential impact of the intervention by better defining who collaborative books might be most beneficial for. These findings are critical to advancing the Miller et al. (2020) call to move beyond storytelling when utilizing counternarrative in research. Three potential lines of impact grew from the intervention involving pre-service teachers, teachers of color, and White teachers. Based

on current literature in the field, all three potential target groups could benefit from intervention support.

One participant introduced the concept of utilizing this intervention on pre-service teachers in education preparation programs. Not only did the participant explain their own lack of preparation in dealing with racism in the workplace, but they also contributed this to their teacher education program's lack of addressing the reality of racism among teachers. Three out of four participants also noted their lack of preparedness due to their teacher education programs during the interviews. This issue was supported in pre-service teacher of color research, finding that programs are silencing pre-service teachers, maintaining spaces that are not inclusive and overwhelmingly White, and initiating feelings of isolation which only continue to accumulate over time in the profession (Sleeter, 2001; Kohli, 2016). Providing an opportunity for pre-service teachers to engage with a collaborative book created by current teachers of color could serve as learning tool and starting point for developing the preparedness of teacher education programs to discuss and analyze racism in the workplace.

Another participant identified current teachers of color as being the best fit for collaborative book interventions to have high impact, specifically because of their missed opportunity to learn about the racial climates of schools during their teacher education program. Research and the findings of this study revealed that isolation and silencing can begin before teachers of color enter the field, so an intervention which promotes amplifying the voices of teachers of color to achieve goals similar to that of this study would be most ideal. This participant also felt that the collaborative book process was an

important aid in organizing and expressing their story, something they were unable to complete independently. By connecting current teachers of color and pre-service teachers of color, this intervention could easily impact both populations by working together and developing this study into a larger setting.

The third line of thinking for potential impact was created by the other two participants in this study, both feeling that collaborative books need to place more responsibility on impacting White coworkers for change. The participants felt teachers of color would most benefit from the intervention of White coworkers who are the perpetrators of racism in the workplace, and the ones directly causing harm. This concept also aligns with the voices of the participants during the interview, where White teachers were found constantly relying on participants to teach them about social justice and solve the issues of racism in and out of the classroom, serving as the spokesperson and host of experiential knowledge to White people who are, in turn, excusing themselves from independent, critical learning without relying on people of color to do the work.

The interview data supports the existence of White denial and evidences the refusal of White teachers to confront their own racism. As long as White coworkers absolve themselves from their inadequacies in understanding the constructs of racism, they will continue to maintain whiteness as property and ignore their role in upholding systemic racism. These experiences are not unique to this research, as literature in this study also points to teachers of color having to fill these multiple roles which absolve White teachers from responsibility. The use of collaborative books as a product for White teachers to utilize for transformation has potential impact on deconstructing racism and relieving teachers of color who are often expected to take on the responsibility of racism

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and student of color advocacy on their own (Kohli, 2016; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Milner, 2020; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020).

When considering the product of the intervention, the collaborative book created by teachers of color might serve as a learning tool for White teachers similar to the concept of pre-service teachers of color. The Miller et al. (2020) call to action charged educational researchers to be more attentive to change, developing studies to work beyond the stage of collecting stories from people of color as data and ceasing at narrative analysis. The process of recalling racial trauma and working to construct a narrative which accurately reflects evidence of racism and experiential knowledge is a tremendous undertaking for teachers of color and I agree that this is more than enough work for a problem of practice that is not created by teachers of color. While this intervention provides positive personal impact for the participants, the work does not cease after the counternarrative.

All three ideas for implementing the intervention in potentially impactful settings hold significance for future research and reflection of this study. The use of collaborative books can impact not only teachers of color but is a befitting tool for pre-service teachers of color and anti-racist education for White teachers. I also propose an additional population of pre-service White teachers based on connecting the data from the participants of this study and the findings of other studies. Matias & Grosland (2016) reiterate the overwhelming whiteness of teacher education programs, which "if not explicitly interrogated indefinitely recycles hegemonic whiteness" (p.152). The researchers utilized storytelling as a pedagogical intervention to deconstruct whiteness,

and this concept can also be implemented as an extension of the intervention of this study.

## Limitations

Upon conclusion of the research, two new limitations emerged that were not previously identified in Chapter 1. These limitations involved the sample size and lack of racial diversity among participants. Although four participants reached the point of saturation for data, a larger sample size was initially desired. However, the addition of more participants would have been overwhelming due to the consistently large amounts of data each interview provided. Also, while recruitment was intentionally open to all teachers of color, this study only incorporated the voices of Black and Native American teachers, missing many critical stories from teachers of other races. Suggestions to eliminate these limitations will be further discussed in recommendations for future research.

## Recommendations for Future Research

When examining process validity of action research, Herr & Anderson (2015) asked "Are the 'findings' a result of a series of reflective cycles that include the ongoing problematization of the practices under study?" (p. 68). The cyclical nature of action research easily became burdensome as even the smallest milestones generated new knowledge which I wished to study in different ways. These reflections throughout the research process even stalled the study after deciding to change the intervention to something more authentic and beneficial to the participants and me. Analysis of the data birthed many new concepts to extend this research and make several recommendations for future research.

First, addressing the limitations of this study sparked new ideas to strengthen the replication of this research. Reiterating initial limitations from Chapter 1, this study excluded intersectionality to consider how various personal attributes such as sex, gender identity, or ability, might influence a participant's experience. This approach was taken to utilize maximum variation of participants solely based on race to promote research validity. Future research could redesign a sampling plan to focus on the diverse experiences of teachers who share the same race, with the inclusion of multiple intersections to achieve maximum variation.

In addition to the acknowledgement of intersectionality, I also recommend separating this study into a series of studies which focuses on one race of teachers per study, with a final analysis which connects them all. This includes producing a series of collaborative books to be used in the intervention. This recommendation would allow a more specialized approach to recruitment of participants, better ability to support a larger group of participants, and to become more intentional about the purpose of the study. This would also allow for a more culturally relevant literature review and would strengthen the differentiated understandings of manifestations of racism as it emerges.

The findings from the intervention also created new potential avenues for future research. While implementing the intervention, a new question emerged of whether including new participants at this point in the study would bring a fresh and valuable perspective. In addition to the four primary collaborators, I contemplated on the effects of sharing the collaborative book with three or four more teachers of color and having them complete a post-survey as a "non-collaborator." Future research might investigate an intervention which includes both collaborators and non-collaborators to evaluate impact

and discover more ways for practical use. An additional research question for non-collaborators could inquire about the effects of reading about racialized experiences in the workplace utilizing a focus-group approach.

Findings from this research intervention's post-survey also generated new ideas from the participants on how this study could best be used in practice. Two participants raised similar issues on how this study did not generate a community in which they could meet the other participants. Collaborating on a shared book did not translate into building community for them, although one participant mentioned that the potential was there. Future research might include a step in the collaborative process where participants are able to meet with each other, in which I recommend taking a focus group approach as part of the intervention. After participants read the collaborative book, the researcher should arrange a date where all the participants are able to meet each other and answer questions following a round table discussion format.

Two additional thoughts emerged from the intervention on who might benefit the most from collaborative books. Two participants expressed desire for collaborative books to be used in educating the teachers who are enacting racism and place more emphasis on changing their behaviors, rather than keeping it among teachers of color who have experiences with racism. Another thought came from one participant's idea to use the collaborative book as a tool for pre-service teachers, and especially pre-service teachers of color. Future research might involve developing the collaborative book method into pre-service teacher education or anti-racist professional development for teachers and examining the potential for impact.

There are many recommendations for altering or furthering this research which could contribute greatly to the generation of new knowledge. In each of the opportunities for future research, I continue to encourage moving beyond storytelling and into the action phase by utilizing and evaluating counternarrative methods for the advancement of educational research and anti-racism.

**Conclusion**

Rigorous action research should result in not only a greater understanding of the problem of practice, but also more refined questions (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This research study has contributed to the current literature on the experiences of teachers of color with racism in the workplace by identifying and analyzing the numerous ways racism occurs and its effects. It has also provided greater insight on how using a collaborative book might be used as an intervention method for mitigating the problem of practice for teachers of color. The findings have supported the need to utilize storytelling and counternarrative as a starting point, as more complex questions emerged surrounding who might benefit most from these methods, and how. Extending this study to anti-racist professional development, community building among teachers of color, and pre-service teacher education are all new avenues of research to investigate these emergent questions.

This research study has shown how the systemic nature of racism has affected NC teachers of color in a compounding, long term manner. The participants all came from different schools and different regions of NC, including urban and rural, and have revealed stories that echoed each other almost verbatim. The similarities among these experiences are alarming and reflective of hostile and truly hazardous working conditions in NC public schools. There exists a need for teachers of color to process their

experiences while also providing them agency to use their voices for transformation. White teachers and administrators must take an active role in new education and transformation initiatives to better understand how they are creating and maintaining racialization in the workplace and how to put an end to it. This does not stop at reading the stories of teachers of color in hopes of growing empathy, as the data showed White coworkers often absolve themselves from racist behavior through denial tactics or passing the responsibility to people of color to solve for themselves.

The use of collaborative books as both a method of critical counternarrative and intervention has great potential to advance storytelling as a tool for change in education and improve the overall practice. However, storytelling is the catalyst, not the solution. Recommendations for future research utilizing collaborative books as a means of action are promising and transferable to multiple settings. When considering the need to better protect teachers of color and ensure positive retention, addressing the racial hostility in the workplace must be a top priority. Not only is this a duty owed to teachers of color, but our students as well.

In searching for solution-oriented change in policy and practice, using collaborative books as a means of professional development should be approached with caution. Educational leaders have a great responsibility to field their faculty and staff appropriately, with the understanding of how using collaborative books could potentially have the opposite of the intended outcome. In a school where there are few teachers of color, utilizing a collaborative book such as the product of this research could increase feelings of isolation or racial hostility. This could further place teachers of color in a position to be the spokesperson on race to their white coworkers who may turn to them to

be the expert, as seen in the participants' data of this research. This continues a cycle of white teachers absolving themselves from internal reflection and forcing additional, emotionally taxing duties on teachers of color.

If utilizing a collaborative book as a tool for teacher development similar to a book study, great attention should be taken to the setting of this work, which I recommend be conducted by a team of leaders who are trained in delivering social justice education in a separate setting than the workplace. Ideally, creating the book should be done at the district level with full confidentiality following the research design of this study. Once the book has been created to reflect stories from teachers of color within the district, the book can be reproduced for workshops and professional learning sessions. Initial learning sessions should be completed by volunteer basis, to filter educators who desire to learn more about social justice work and are coming prepared with an open mind for change.

After this initial work has been completed, district leaders can begin a plan to deliver the collaborative book study as a program for faculty and staff in the district in the most appropriate manner. This frame for utilizing collaborative books as a catalyst to strengthen professional development is one I intend to follow as a means of extending my own research and work in the profession. I believe that it is important to bring the truth in these stories forward to provide real life experiences to professional learning, rather than scripted scenarios with fictitious identities. Teachers of color have significant power in their experiential knowledge to inform and change others, and creating a collaborative book to use as a tool and reference for the reality of our schools can elevate professional

learning and development and is a worthwhile investment for school districts across the country.

National research shows how the presence of teachers of color in our schools benefits all students, having significant increases in the social and emotional wellness of students, higher academic performance, and improved graduation rates (Carver-Thomas, 2018). However, data trends show that teachers of color are consistently leaving the profession at alarming rates, higher than that of White teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2017). Overall, this research study contributed to the understanding of why this might be occurring, showing racism in the profession to be rampant and dangerous to the lives of teachers of color, while also analyzing how we can utilize critical counternarratives as a tool for change. We must take action in transforming the climate of NC schools and dismantling racism.

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APPENDIX A

IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH
APPROVAL LETTER for EXEMPT REVIEW

Deborah Harrison
820 Main St
Columbia, SC 29208

Re: **Pro00118238**

Dear Ms. Deborah Harrison:

This is to certify that the research study ***Stories from North Carolina Teachers of Color: An Inquiry of Racialized Experiences in the Workplace.*** was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2) and 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7), the study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on **6/3/2022**. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the study remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research study could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB. Because this study was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.
All research related records are to be retained for at least three (3) years after termination of the study.
The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). If you have questions, contact Lisa Johnson at lisaj@mailbox.sc.edu or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson
ORC Assistant Director and IRB Manager

APPENDIX B

INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPATE

**<u>Invitation Letter (Email):</u>**

Greetings North Carolina Teachers,

My name is Deborah Harrison, and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying the occurrence of racist offenses against teachers of color working in the state of North Carolina due to interactions with white coworkers. I am conducting this study due to personal experiences with racism in the workplace as a fellow teacher and am interested in sharing the stories of other teachers who may have experienced similar stressors at work. These stories will be shared without tying your identity and additional measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality within the study. All stories collected from this research will be compiled into a book in which you will be asked to read with the purpose of examining the experiences of teachers of color and your perspective. Your participation may aid in understanding why, or if this method is effective.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to arrange a virtual interview inquiring about your experiences with racialization while at work, as well as correspond with me at least once after the interview to ensure the data collected is an accurate reflection of your experiences. Post-interview, you will also be asked to read the book produced by this study with the intent to share your experiences after reading the book and reporting your thoughts back to me in a post-survey.

In this study, you will be asked questions about experiences with coworkers you felt were racist, racially motivated, or racially hostile in nature. These topics will provide you with the opportunity to tell intact stories about these experiences in the workplace. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The meeting will take place during a mutually agreed upon time using a password protected Zoom video conference that should last about 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The digital recordings will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in secure data files that are password protected and only accessible by the primary researcher. The results of the study will be published and presented for professional and educational purposes, such as a dissertation, but your identity will not be revealed.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may also contact the University of South Carolina's Office of Research Compliance (803) 777-6670 if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject.
Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please respond to this email, or contact me via phone at the number listed below to discuss participating.

With kind regards,

Deborah Harrison

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPANT FORM

**(GOOGLE FORM)**
**Voluntary Participant Information Form**

Thank you for choosing to participate in this study! The purpose of this voluntary participant information form is to collect participant data and show intent to participate in the study entitled "Stories from North Carolina Teachers of Color: An Inquiry of Racialized Experiences in the Workplace." All information provided on this form is strictly for the researcher's use only, on secured and encrypted networks. All information will be stored confidentially, and any personally identifiable information will not be shared.

Email:

Name (First and Last):

When is the best time to contact you for a Zoom video conference call? Please select ALL which apply:
__Early Morning: 7:00AM – 9:00AM
__Late Morning: 9:00AM – 12:00PM
__Mid Afternoon: 12:00PM – 3:00PM
__Late Afternoon: 3:00PM – 6:00PM
__Evening: 6:00PM – 9:00PM

When, typically, is the best day to conduct a Zoom video conference call? Please select ALL which apply:
__Monday
__Tuesday
__Wednesday
__Thursday
__Friday
__Saturday
__Sunday

What is your gender? Please select all which apply:
__Female
__Male
__Transgender
__Non-binary

__Prefer not to say
__Let me type...

Which race(s) and/or ethnicity do you identify as? Please feel welcome to use "other" to provide what you think best represents you. Please select all which apply:
__Native American, First Nations, Indigenous American
__Asian
__Middle Eastern
__Black or African-American
__Latino
__Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

__White
__Other:_____

How many years have you been working in education?

In which school level do you **currently** teach? You may also select the level in which you taught the most, overall.
__Pre-Kindergarten/Pre-School
__Elementary School (K-5)
__Middle School (6-8)
__High School (9-12)
__K-8 School
__8-12 School
__Other: ____

At which NC school do you currently teach? You may also list multiple schools.

What NC county is your school located in? You may also list multiple counties.

**Statement of Understanding for Voluntary Participation**

I understand that my participation in this research study is strictly voluntary.

__ Yes      __No

I understand that my participation in this research study is confidential and secured

__ Yes      __No

I understand that my video conference call will be recorded and stored securely to allow the researcher to analyze the data required for this study.

__ Yes      __No

I understand that after our video conference call, my interview will be reconstructed into a story in which I will be asked to review and edit as needed.
__ Yes      __No

I understand that after approving my story, it will be compiled into a book in collaboration with other participants in which I will be asked to read and then complete a post-survey to evaluate the book.
__ Yes      __No

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Stories from North Carolina Teachers of Color: An Inquiry of Racialized Experiences in the Workplace.**

1. How might you describe your experiences with racism in your workplace?

2. Do you have specific incidents or experiences with white coworkers you would like to share?

    a. How did this story go? (Probe)

    b. Can you describe this incident from start to finish? (Probe)

3. How and in what ways, if at all, were you affected by racist experiences in your workplace?

    a. How long do you think you have felt the effects of this experience? (Probe)

4. How might this have impacted your teaching, if at all?

5. Did you report any of these experiences to administration or human resources? If so, which ones?

    a. Why did you choose to report? (Probe)

    b. Why did you choose not to report? (Probe)

6. Do you have any additional, closing remarks about your experiences?

APPENDIX E

COLLABORATIVE BOOK: POST-SURVEY

**(GOOGLE FORM)**

This is the collaborative book post-survey for participants of "Stories from North Carolina Teachers of Color: An Inquiry of Racialized Experiences in the Workplace." All information provided on this form is strictly for the researcher's use only, on secured and encrypted networks. All information will be stored confidentially, and any personally identifiable information will not be shared.

Have you ever read or listened to stories from teachers of color on their experiences with racism in the workplace prior to this study?                                        YES          NO

Were you interested in reading the narratives of other teachers of color on their experiences with racism in the workplace prior to this study?
                                                                                                YES          NO

*Open-Ended Response*
*Please respond to the following open-ended questions*

1.  After reading the collaborative book, how would you describe your initial reaction?

2.  After reading the collaborative book, do you feel a space for healing might have been created? Please explain.

3.  How did the collaborative book help, if at all, in understanding your own experiences or perspectives on racism in the workplace? Please explain.

4.  Do you feel that the collaborative book created a sense of community among the participants through storytelling? Why or why not? If not, what could have changed to allow this?

5.  Do you think that the concept of using collaborative books could benefit other teachers of color beyond this study? Why or why not?

6.  Please use three words to describe this book.