
Experiences of Preservice Teachers of Color at a Predominantly White Institution

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ABSTRACT: This phenomenological study explores the experiences of preservice teachers of color in a teacher education program at a predominantly white institution. Participants experienced feelings of isolation, being targeted because of their race, lack of multicultural education in the program, and feelings of tension in wanting to speak out and fearing the consequences of speaking out. Recommendations are given for improving teacher education programs to better meet the needs of preservice teachers of color.

KEYWORDS: Teacher education, Black preservice teachers, racism, predominantly white institutions

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In 2021, white students were a numerical minority in public schools in the United States. They made up about 45% of all public school students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). However, as of 2017, white teachers were still in the majority, making up 74% of the teaching force nationally (NCES, 2020). In places like Ohio, the numbers were even higher at 94% white teachers (Mitchell & Weir, 2021). This demographic mismatch, long present in education (Banks, 2006), needs to be addressed. Yet teacher education programs continue to attract and graduate mostly white teachers. While many predominantly white institutions (PWIs) with teacher education programs have focused on recruiting a more diverse student population, retention continues to be a challenge (Faison & McArthur, 2020). Many scholars have called on researchers to investigate the experiences of preservice teachers (PSTs) of color to determine what systemic racism needs to be addressed (Haddix, 2017).

It is important to note the historical roots of this disconnect between the teachers and students in US classrooms. Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* (Warren & Supreme Court of The United States, 1954), there was a thriving community of Black educators. However, with school desegregation, many white communities deemed Black teachers “unfit” to teach white students. These communities refused to hire these teachers for the integrated schools causing Black teachers to lose their jobs (Roberts & Carter Andrews, 2013). Some states adopted more stringent licensing and hiring demands that did not recognize the credentials of most Black teachers. Since *Brown v. Board*, other policies, including standardized entrance exams, high costs, and licensing exams have pushed out many students of color who have tried to join the teaching force (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). In addition to these structural and cost barriers, the overwhelming presence of whiteness (Bell & Busey, 2021; Sleeter, 2001, 2017) within many teacher education programs has further pushed out students of color. This research project adds to the extant literature on how teacher education programs at PWIs continue to do harm to PSTs of color, making it more challenging for them to become teachers.

As a Black student, Robyn, the first author of this paper, grew up with only a few teachers who looked like her. As a Black preservice teacher, Robyn did not see anyone who looked like her in her classes. Through her experience, Robyn identified a strong need for more teachers of color; her experiences aligned with what others have found, that many PSTs of color face daily challenges and experience racial microaggressions within their programs that can prevent them from successfully completing their programs. As a white middle class woman, Elizabeth, the second author, grew up with teachers who did look like her. However, through many lived experiences and critical reflection, she has come to a place where she strongly agrees with what both Robyn and other researchers have found, that a more diverse teacher workforce is needed and that there are significant challenges for PSTs of color. As a teacher educator who regularly witnesses or hears about the challenges faced by PSTs of color, Elizabeth wants to focus her research on creating space for the voices of these PSTs to be heard.

The original purpose of this research was to explore how diverse students, regardless of race, experience conversations about racism in teacher education classrooms. However, a larger than anticipated number of students of color volunteered for the study and their data warranted its own analysis. As we began to examine the interviews from PSTs of color, we noticed that the participants of color shared much more than their experiences of discussing racism; they also shared their experiences of being outed, racially targeted, isolated, and uncomfortable within their classes and their clinical teaching placements. As we analyzed the data, we realized that we had to change our research question to: What are the experiences of students of color in a teacher education program at a PWI in the Midwest United States?

As a co-researcher and participant in the research, Robyn was upset yet relieved that an opportunity was presented for her to share her story and highlight the alienating experiences she had endured as a preservice teacher of color. At

the institution where this study took place, PSTs of color did not have a supportive community, which discouraged them from sharing their opinions, thoughts, and experiences.¹ As Robyn experienced, her teacher education program was not building teachers of color to be confident community leaders. Robyn questioned: Where do students of color go to feel supported when they are unable to have tough conversations with their peers and professors because they are worried about being targeted? She believed they often felt alienated and forced to stay silent. The goal of this research is to inform a reframing of teacher education programs to be a space where PSTs of color can thrive.

Throughout this article, we use the idea of racism in multiple ways. These include institutional racism and interpersonal racism (Scheurich & Young, 1997). While very different from each other, these forms of racism are still interconnected. Interpersonal or individual racism is when an individual holds and expresses in either overt or covert ways intentional or unintentional racial bias. Institutional racism is when the structures and practices of an institution result in inequitable experiences and outcomes for people based on their skin color. These are both couched within the broader aspects of structural racism, which include the ways that, historically and into the present, society and its institutions have been structured to uphold white supremacy (Kendi, 2019). While there is an important distinction between these and other forms of racism, institutions are impacted by the individual racism of those who are a part of the institution.

While this research echoes many of the studies that have gone before, it re-emphasizes previous findings and reveals new findings. Furthermore, it continues to highlight the stressors and tensions that navigating teacher education programs in PWIs can create for PSTs of color. Finally, it highlights that, while some people have been researching this topic and working to address these challenges for decades, the overwhelming whiteness of teacher education programs persists, creating hostile environments for PSTs of color (Banks, 2006; Brown, 2014; Chang-Bacon, 2022).

Literature Review

As Ladson-Billings (2009) highlights in her chapter on critical race theory and education, the history, founding, norms, curriculum, assessment, and disciplinary practices of the United States education system support white supremacy and harm those who are not white. Throughout the history of education in the United States, this advantaging of white people and harming of Black people has been reinforced many times through incidents of white backlash to progress made by Black people (Neal-Stanley et al., 2024). These backlashes started with outright bans on literacy for enslaved and free African Americans and shifted overtime to segregation, school closures, defunding of education, and curriculum standardization and restrictions (Neal-Stanley et al., 2024). This has resulted in a

¹ In part prompted by discussions from this research, the institution now has a support group for women of color.

public school system with both norms and curricula that persist in being saturated in whiteness, making staying in education difficult for many teachers of color (Marx et al., 2023).

As a component of the broader field of education, teacher education has long been dominated by white professional expectations (Marom, 2019) and other aspects of whiteness. Much of the research on whiteness in teacher education focuses on the racial identity development of white PSTs, finding that these students tend to evade critical discussions of race through silence and resistance (Jupp et al., 2019). Zembylas and Matias (2023) argue that a major contributing factor to the whiteness in teacher education is white emotionality, and the ways in which it makes engaging with critical race theory or critical whiteness studies more difficult in a teacher education classroom. In the literature review leading to his study on the persistence of whiteness in teacher education programs, Chang-Bacon (2022) found most research on racism in teacher education programs focuses on one or two instructors who are trying to be anti-racist but ignores the majority of instructors who are not explicitly working on anti-racism. Through his study of 33 teacher educators, Chang-Bacon found that most teacher educators described evasiveness when talking about their courses and racism, meaning they did not directly address racism. The race intentional practices teacher educators described sometimes perpetuated racism within the program instead of disrupting it when instructors relied on Latine students to explain Latine culture and experiences, for example. Many studies prior have focused on the persistent whiteness of teacher education programs (Bell & Busey, 2021; Brown, 2014; Sleeter, 2017). In addition, there have been a few studies that have reviewed attempts at addressing this whiteness and instilling programs with anti-racist and culturally sustaining practices (Cheruvu & Martinez, 2023; Kaka et al., 2022; Paris & Alim, 2014).

In response to both the persistent whiteness in education and in teacher education, efforts have been made to diversify the teacher workforce. However, it is extremely hard to recruit PSTs of color for several reasons including cost, biased tests that must be passed, and the overall reputation of teaching as an undesirable profession due to low pay and low levels of respect (Neal et al., 2015). Once recruited, many students struggle to complete their programs (Faison & McArthur, 2020). As a result, much research has been done on the experiences of PSTs who are marginalized because of their race or ethnicity (Amos, 2016; Bell & Busey, 2021; Faison & McArthur, 2020; Marom, 2019; Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020; Tolbert & Eichelberger, 2016), although more is needed (Haddix, 2017).

In reviewing more recent literature on the experiences of PSTs of color in teacher education programs, we found many of the same trends that Brown (2014) identified in his review of the literature prior to 2014. These include PSTs having a sense of isolation, feeling like there is a cultural mismatch, having no opportunity to see themselves in the curriculum, finding little to no support for navigating their identity in clinical experiences, and experiencing incidents of racism and prejudice in their program. The more recent studies we reviewed found that many students of color experience an abundance of challenges throughout their respective

teacher preparation programs, which causes them to feel invisible, uncomfortable, and silenced (Amos, 2016). Faison and McArthur (2020), for example, found that white professors often make derogatory comments about students of color. As course instructors, they have the platform and power that allows them to put down students of color with impunity. In PWIs, class time and curriculum are generally white spaces focused on white students, and the needs of students of color are often overlooked (Amos, 2016; Bell & Busey, 2021; Faison & McArthur, 2020). In these spaces, marginalized students often experience hostile responses when they speak up, resulting in a powerful silencing (Amos, 2016; Bell & Busey, 2021). In addition, the Teacher Thought Collective and Souto-Manning (2022) assert that students of color experience epistemic violence² and stereotyping. As a result, they often feel invisibilized and discredited. All these concerns extend to their clinical experiences, where students sometimes feel unwelcome, witness racist behavior, and are deterred from engaging in anti-racist or social justice teaching (Marom, 2019; Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020).

The findings in the literature are alarming because students of color often do not feel welcomed and seen within their teacher education programs. They often do not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions because they do not want to be the representatives for their entire race. When students of color do share their opinions, they are often told that they are making their white peers uncomfortable (Tolbert & Eichelberger, 2016). This is problematic because students of color do not feel safe speaking amongst their classmates, often causing them to become mute during class (Amos, 2016; Bell & Busey, 2021). Although they want to be advocates, they do not want to be responsible for educating their white peers. They want their white peers and professors to address multicultural issues and topics without expecting them to be the main facilitators of the discussions. They want their white peers and professors to take on a greater portion of the risk involved (Leonardo & Porter, 2010).

Methods

This was a qualitative interpretive study that employed phenomenological approaches (Van Manen, 1990) to the research. Participants were recruited from an early childhood teacher education program at a mid-sized regional state university in the Midwest United States. The university is a predominantly white institution (PWI) and the program that students were recruited from is overwhelmingly white and female. Interestingly, despite this predominance, an equal number of students of color volunteered for the research as white students. This study focuses on the data collected from the students of color in the study, including Robyn who led this research as a part of a summer undergraduate

² Epistemic violence is when both an absence of knowledge and false assertions, or mis-education, combine to do harm to a marginalized group. Epistemic violence can also include narrow and exclusionary ideas about how knowledge is generated and validated.

research program. It is important to note that this program has had a long commitment to both social justice and global education.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting an hour to an hour and a half.³ Modeled on Seidman's (2019) recommendations for phenomenological interviews, these interviews included questions about the participants' backgrounds, the communities where they grew up, and conversations they had experienced about racism with friends and family. Then the interviews focused on experiences in the teacher education program and the meanings that participants had since drawn from those experiences. A total of four students of color (three identifying as Black and one identifying as both Black and Mexican) participated in the research and the research presented here is drawn from their interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and then sent to participants to member check and correct as they desired. All data is presented using pseudonyms.

It is important to note that all interviews were conducted by Elizabeth, who is a white middle class faculty member. She served as the instructor for all four of the participants. However, she did not recruit participants or conduct interviews until after students had completed her course and received their grade. Due to the structure of the program, there was no chance of the students having Elizabeth as their instructor again. While many efforts were made to mitigate the power relationships within the interviews, they still existed. There were also barriers created by the fact that Elizabeth is white. As someone positioned as an oppressor/colonist, Elizabeth's role in the research is rife with contradictions and limitations that must be acknowledged (Cary, 2004). Conversely, Elizabeth had a rapport with participants and participants knew of her commitment to anti-racist education.

Robyn led the data analysis process with support from Elizabeth. This was important as Robyn had the perspective of a student of color in the program herself. First, we identified stories and experiences and looked across these experiences for themes and patterns that emerged. From there, we gathered the stories by theme and looked across them to better understand the essence of the experiences (Van Manen, 1990). Furthermore, Robyn took the experiences and considered what changes could be made in the teacher education program the participants were a part of and in teacher education programs more broadly to improve the experiences of PSTs of color. At this point, Elizabeth, who works within these programs, was able to add important context to the programs themselves and the challenges they face.

Results/Findings

The stories shared by participants showed four larger themes: (1) isolation; (2) experiences of racism from white faculty and peers resulting in a sense of both

³ Study was approved by the university IRB.

targeting and being abandoned; (3) a lack of multicultural content in the program; and (4) a fear of speaking out about issues of race combined with a sense of responsibility to speak out. It is important to note that the findings are deeply connected to each other. Indeed, the themes were difficult to tease out as feelings of isolation often resulted in a certain fear of speaking out. This fear was reinforced by racist comments from participants' white peers. These racist comments and the clear lack of knowledge from the absence of multicultural content fostered a sense of responsibility in PSTs of color to address the misconceptions of their white peers. The participants all shared concerns about their white colleagues in the program becoming teachers. We will share extensively from the participant interviews in the findings as a way to amplify and preserve the voices of the participants.

Theme 1: Isolation

All four participants were either the only student of color in their education courses or one of two (two study participants were in a cohort section together). They all spoke of the impact of this isolation. Speaking more broadly about the challenges of being in such an overwhelmingly white program, Felicia shared,

[G]oing through the education program, it's honestly as soon as you walk in the room you know you're the only one. And, you know, having Cynthia there was nice and stuff, but it was just us.... If something was ever said in class, you know, we'd look to each other, we'd be like, alright... and we can talk about it later.... We had our own support systems back home and stuff but... you go through it and it just gets harder.

Here Felicia shares the burden of knowing that no one else (or only one other person) understands and that being one of two makes it hard to push back in the moment or bring another perspective because there is little or no support there to back you up. The lack of shared understanding in the room furthers the sense of isolation. This experience contrasted with Felicia's high school experience in a racially diverse high school where she always had a group of Black female friends to discuss what was going on and to support each other when engaging with white students on topics of race.

Another participant shared how discussions of racism were almost always uncomfortable:

Cynthia: It's just like uncomfortable sometimes when you're one of few, one of two, and you're like, oh my goodness, I don't really want to hear what someone else is going to have to say if it's going to, like, it's just going to make you uncomfortable. Like, I don't really want hear what you have to say because I'm scared that it might be offensive, even if they're not meaning to.

Elizabeth: So, were you more worried in those conversations about what a fellow white student might say that would be offensive or how the faculty would respond to what the white student said?

C: I would say both, because if a white student were to say something a little offensive and a professor agrees with it then you're like, eehhh ok, I won't share what I was going to say.

Cynthia was aware of and worried about her colleagues' potential racism and their discomfort in talking about racism. She was both concerned that faculty would just confirm that racism and, as she shared later, she was also worried about the discomfort caused if faculty challenged the racism. Cynthia felt as though she became the unspoken center of these conversations. As she shared later, she felt everyone would be looking at her to see how she was responding to conversations about racism since she was one of the only students of color in class. Cynthia's experiences align with the isolation and silencing that Bell and Busey (2021) found, as well as the mental and epistemic harm caused by overwhelmingly white programs as identified by the Teacher Thought Collective and Souto-Manning (2022).

Finally, participants all spoke of times when they were asked to speak about their experience as the sole representative of their race, sometimes by instructors and sometimes by their peers. This heightened focus made them more visible, while the inability to share due to their small numbers made them invisible. While they themselves were hyper visible, their experiences were not. The isolation often made the Black PSTs feel like the center of a conversation they did not want to be a part of with no one to go to who would understand their experiences.

Theme 2: White Peers and Faculty and Their Racism - Targeting and Abandonment

This sense of isolation was made more extreme, as noted in the previous quotations, by various levels of racism from participants' white peers and faculty. Sometimes, it resulted in feeling targeted by faculty, as in the story shared below when Rose, who was preparing for a Black student organization fundraiser where she was going to perform a dance, shared that the instructor kept insisting she come up and show her dance.

I told her – I was like, no. I don't think I want to dance in front of the class.... I thought it was inappropriate. And then I kept trying to figure out, like, why does she want me to dance so bad? And the [other students] told me... she probably thought you were going to do an African dance and... I was really upset cause I was like, what? I don't even know any African dances.... Then she [the instructor] goes on to tell a story about how, when she was younger, the Black people would just be in the kitchen. And then she started talking about how, one time, she went to the mall "with her friend and then a worker who was Black", and she looked at me when she said that "she was really nice to me and she helped me find the shoe." ...I remember her, like, really

interrogating me.... So, I got up... walked out, and went to the bathroom cause I was like – I can't believe that this just happened. Like, I was really upset, I felt like it was inappropriate, and I was really mad at my classmates because nobody said a single word.... because it didn't directly affect them.

Rose felt targeted in this situation. She felt targeted when the instructor focused so much on her dance, looked at her so intently while sharing stories about her own experiences with Black people, and interrogated Rose about her activities. As Chang-Bacon (2022) notes, sometimes instructors' attempts to address race result in exacerbating the racism within a program as opposed to disrupting it. That being said, this instructor was clearly putting Rose in a very uncomfortable position, asking her to perform for her and her peers in deeply inappropriate ways.

In addition to feeling targeted by the instructor, Rose felt abandoned by her white peers' failure to come to her defense. Rose reached out to her peers that night via a group text that she shared with Elizabeth, who then asked her how she felt about her peers when she sent the text,

Oh, I was mad. I was mad that nobody said anything. I was in a room with at least 20 other people, 23, and nobody said anything while she was going on her rant that had nothing to do anything with what we were talking about, but it was directly targeting me the entire time and I had to get up and go walk to the bathroom.

Silence in the face of racism expressed by faculty or peers becomes a way that white bystanders passively uphold the status quo (DiAngelo, 2012). Silence also communicated a lack of care or understanding and fostered a sense of abandonment amongst participants.

At other times, racism was coded, as in this comment students made about one of the communities (a low-income Black community) that they had to drive through:

They were one of the groups that said they did not want to go to Citytown and... one of the girls shared in that group, she shared that "when we were placed in Citytown, there was this really weird guy and he was walking around and you know OF COURSE it was in Citytown, OF COURSE you know THAT COMMUNITY..."

When hearing this, Cynthia felt like the students were targeting her and people who looked like her. She felt both offended and invisible. Cynthia was not able to have the same ease of belonging and connection that many of her white colleagues had in the program because she was frequently confronted with moments like this.

Other times, racism showed up as resistance, such as when white students chose not to believe articles with statistics related to white privilege, for example, or when they openly complained about having to talk about racism so much, stating it was "not a big deal" since they were not going to be racist in their classrooms. This active and passive racism amplified the sense of isolation, gave PSTs of color a strong sense of the extent of racism some of their peers had, and also created fear that sometimes silenced PSTs of color as we will see in the fourth theme.

Furthermore, the coded racism about certain communities and the resistance to learning about racism created feelings of implicit targeting and abandonment, respectively. Participants not only felt harmed by the racism in the program, they also felt that no one was there to protect or support them.

Theme 3: Lack of Multicultural Education in the Program

In some ways, this racism was evidence of insufficient content on racism and multicultural education within the program. This reflected, as Bell and Busey (2021) found, that the curriculum was geared toward the white students, making the multicultural education that did exist shallow and tentative and clearly not designed for the PSTs of color in the program (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). There were no required courses exploring issues of race or oppression in the program. The educational foundations course sometimes included these topics; however, it was instructor dependent. This quality, combined with the often-whitewashed history and learning students experienced in K-12 schools, resulted in students being unfamiliar with both content about Black and Brown communities, as well as ways of knowing within Black and Brown communities (Banks, 2006).

One participant highlighted how, when the class learned about the Carlisle Industrial School – the first boarding school for Indigenous people in the United States – some of the white PSTs did not understand why the Carlisle students did not leave if they did not like it there.

What makes you think he chose to go there? You think every child there *chose* to go to that boarding school and be brought away from their families to be around kids who don't speak their language and be around people who are hurting them?!?! I mean, they didn't CHOOSE that!

Had all students been required to take courses that explicitly introduced them to the experiences of many marginalized groups in this country, as well as the systemic oppression that impacted those groups, they would likely have had a better understanding of how racism manifests both in the past and in the present. This could mitigate the racism that PSTs of color experienced from their peers.

Another way the insufficient amount of multicultural education manifested in the data was how foundational a Black Experience course was to three of the four participants (the fourth participant had not taken the course). This was not a required course for the program but was incredibly important for the students who took it. All three mentioned how they learned so much in this course that they had not known before. Furthermore, what they learned supported them in understanding themselves and their own experiences. This speaks to the need for courses focused on the challenges, histories, and strengths of marginalized communities that are created for students of color primarily but are available for white students as well. Students of color bring knowledge of discrimination and racism from their own lived experience and may have learned more from their families and communities. However, most went through the whitewashed education of public schools, and may have had their own gaps in knowledge about

the history of groups to which they were connected. Too often, courses on diversity or multicultural education are targeted towards white students who need to be convinced of the continued existence of racism before they can focus on a more in depth understanding (Bell & Busey, 2021). These courses typically ignore the needs of students of color.

Finally, three of the four participants wanted to learn more about marginalized groups other than African Americans.

I feel, like, we always focused on people of color, specifically African Americans. And I'm just like okaaaay, cause it's kind of like, I'm over it a little bit, because why are we pushing so much for – Like, I understand why we have to push so much for people to understand the Black culture and that's definitely what I want more of but, for me, I have to explore other cultures. So, I need you to foster that for me as well.

While the participants understood deeply the need for their white peers to have a better understanding of the experiences of Black people and of the continued existence of racism, they themselves wanted more: both a deeper understanding of the Black experience and the opportunity to learn more about other marginalized groups. One participant who identified as Black and Mexican said she did not feel that there was space for, or acknowledgment of, her Mexican identity in the program.

Theme 4: Feeling the Responsibility to Speak Up with the Fear of Being Targeted - The Rock and the Hard Place

The three previous themes all culminated, for all four participants, in a tension between wanting to speak up to address the racism they saw in their white PST colleagues, but also being fearful of speaking up due to the sense of isolation and discomfort. This was exacerbated by a fear that they would become a target of the racism of their classmates. Ida, who had to switch cohorts at one point, really struggled with this tension. Initially, she spoke out quite a bit, but then experienced open hostility from her classmates. When she went to program faculty about it, the following happened:

And I had lots of discussions [with program faculty]. I was just given the advice that I needed to not come as hard, or to lighten my experiences and the way I shared things because I had to give them [white students] the space and chance for them to be open and come to be more understanding and open-minded. I said, "I can't tone down my experiences, like, my experiences are what they are. Ah we can't lighten what happened to George Floyd, we can't lighten what happened to Tamir Rice. So no, I can't lighten my experiences to give you the chance and privilege to be open-minded. That's your choice."

Later in the semester, Ida called Elizabeth, still struggling with this dynamic. She had tried to not speak up as much, but that also hurt. She felt completely trapped

in a sense of responsibility to speak up, an inability to not speak up, and the consequences she experienced from racism both in her peers and in the program.

Felicia went to a trusted mentor in the college's diversity and outreach office to talk about this challenge:

I was like, I just have to say something. She was like, "why" and I was like, "Well, I have to." And she was, like, "Why? Why do you have to say something?" And she made me realize you don't have to say anything. She said, "Yes, that's your experience. Yes, that's wrong," she said, "but you're not going to change them...." I realize they're not. This is just who they are, and if I can't change that, you know. It's more so, too, that I can't feel bad for not changing them because this is who they are, and they don't feel bad about being that.... It's also not my job as a Black woman as a Black student to change everyone, to make sure that they're going into society in order to teach children like that.

Every participant asked, at some point, how their white colleagues were going to be able to teach, and to teach about race/racism in their future classrooms, if they were not able to have these conversations with each other. They were all frustrated by the racism they witnessed, the resistance to talking about racism they witnessed, and the knowledge that their colleagues would soon be in classrooms teaching students with marginalized racial identities. They all felt trapped, as well, between the desire to try to speak up and change their peers and the frustration and sometimes resistance they encountered when they did speak up.

Discussion

These findings indicate that students struggled with the low numbers of PSTs of color in the program and the sense of isolation that created, especially in classrooms filled with students who were still working through their racism. As courses tried to bring in more attention to racism, microaggressions and explicit racism sometimes manifested more as white students resisted or argued against the content they were being taught. Furthermore, the content on diversity and multiculturalism continued to be catered to white students, with what sometimes felt to PSTs of color like an over-emphasis on anti-Black racism and in a way that did not meet their needs. Finally, these experiences all combined to create a situation in which PSTs of color wanted to speak up to address misinformation or problematic statements. However, they experienced backlash from their classmates when they did, which then created a fear of speaking up. Silence is challenging, though, because there is a sense of concern and responsibility for how the white PSTs would treat and teach their future students of color. As noted in the introduction, these findings continue to highlight the experiences of PSTs of color, and, in this case, women in particular.

Need to Recruit More Faculty of Color

These findings very much align with those of other studies highlighted in the literature review. In analyzing the data and the findings, it is clear that much could be done to improve the teacher education program at the institution the participants attended, as well as other teacher education programs at PWIs. First, it would help to have more faculty of color at these institutions (Brown, 2014; Teacher Thought Collective & Souto-Manning, 2022). This would help alleviate the sense of isolation and potentially give PSTs of color a person to go to who can better understand their experience, although it is important to note that there are no guarantees here. PSTs of color have many identities that they may or may not share with other students of color or faculty of color. Also, just as with the challenge to retain students of color once they are recruited, faculty of color must also be retained.

In addition to more faculty of color, we also need more cooperating teachers who are committed to anti-racism in their classrooms and who will at the very least not do further harm to PSTs of color. This task takes intentional investment and commitment by the university and must include better compensation for cooperating teachers (Bell & Busey, 2021; Cheruvu & Martinez, 2023; Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020; Teacher Thought Collective & Souto-Manning, 2022).

Need for Accountability

Another clear recommendation from the findings is a need for more accountability. Instructors need to be held accountable for ensuring that they are practicing cultural humility and always working to improve their culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014). This involves a program culture with a commitment to continued learning and work on issues of racism. In the case where Rose felt targeted by the instructor, Rose went to a faculty member to share her experience and the faculty member just offered to move her to another section. Instead of relying on a faculty member to have an appropriate response, teacher education programs need policies to address such situations. Rose did not want to move sections after having built a relationship with her current cohort. Similarly, Ida's instructors did not engage in culturally sustaining pedagogy when they asked her to "lighten her experience." Furthermore, as far as we know, Ida's classmates were not held accountable for their comments or the hostile environment they created for Ida.

One major challenge for accountability within programs is that, as programs try to address issues of racism and social justice, they are often focused on the white students and better preparing them for racially and ethnically diverse classrooms. However, faculty and instructors are not always sufficiently prepared to do this: They do not consider the experiences of students of color and they are not always sufficiently aware of their own racism or racism more broadly. This challenge is exacerbated when programs are large and depend on a lot of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty to instruct courses, resulting in a lot of turn-

over and difficulty with maintaining a cohesive and strong program and ensuring that all who are involved are a part of continued learning on culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Need for Better and More Multicultural Education

The findings also clearly showed that there is a need for more content that makes all students' understanding of the world around them more complete. While this finding in many ways aligns with other studies that found the need for more education about racism, the problem participants identified in this study were twofold. One, all students needed a better understanding of the history of racism in the United States and a history that includes the experiences of African Americans. The participants recognized, as others have (Amos, 2016; Bell & Busey, 2021), that programs centering white students all too often stop at surface level critiques and histories, assuming that students have little to no knowledge beyond the white master narrative. What is needed are courses that go in depth on the experiences and contributions of all marginalized groups. Something distinctive to this study is, not only did the four participants want to learn more and benefit from learning about African American history, but they also wanted to learn more about other groups that are excluded from the master narrative. They sometimes felt that there was an over emphasis on anti-Black racism and an under emphasis on learning about other marginalized groups. As noted, one participant of both African and Mexican descent felt like there was nothing in the program that included her Mexican heritage, let alone the challenges of her intersectional identity. All participants wanted to learn more about LGBTQ+ folks.

Need for Race Conscious Places of Support

Finally, we need places specifically designed for preservice teachers from marginalized backgrounds to gather and share their experiences, get support on navigating racism in both university spaces and clinical teaching, and to have their voices heard. This recommendation aligns closely with the work of Teacher Thought Collective and Souto-Manning (2022) and Cheruvu and Martinez (2023), that these spaces should be for support, joy, relief, and respite. One participant talked at length about how she strategized to ensure friendship with the one other Black student in her cohort. Other participants felt that the program had insufficiently prepared or supported them in being a Black PST in primarily white clinical teaching placements where they faced questions about their hair from students or thinly veiled racism from mentor teachers. Furthermore, this would help PSTs of color feel less isolated, or at least more supported in dealing with a sense of isolation in classes. It would also signal an understanding by the program that marginalized PSTs need support.

Conclusion

Perhaps what is most troubling is that this research is still needed and relevant. Despite decades of work exploring the experiences of PSTs of color (Amos, 2016; Bower-Phipps et al., 2013; Brown, 2014; Faison & McArthur, 2020; Haddix, 2017; Maron, 2019; Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020; Teacher Thought Collective & Souto-Manning, 2022; Tolbert & Eichelberger, 2016; Wilkins & Lall, 2011), many programs have not changed significantly (Chang-Bacon, 2022). One thing that is interesting to this research is that the participants are in a program that has long embraced the importance of multiculturalism and social justice and, yet, still has much room to grow. For Elizabeth, it raises questions of how, in a large program that includes many graduate assistants and adjunct instructors, do we move toward incorporating curriculum that acknowledges racism and includes, recognizes, and celebrates the rich cultures, knowledges, and more of the many diverse people who are a part of this country and world without doing more harm? When instructors who are still learning themselves attempt to approach these topics, they often do so in sloppy ways; they are often working through their own racism and may not even realize it (Chang-Bacon, 2022). While this is not an excuse for what PSTs of color experience, it is a reality with which teacher education programs must contend. As noted in the findings, mechanisms of accountability need to be established and yet they are a part of the very whiteness that pervades teacher education programs and gets in the way of this kind of accountability (Galman et. al., 2010; Zembylas & Matias, 2023). We need to continue to hear and understand the experiences of PSTs of color and develop new means and mechanisms for effecting change in our overwhelmingly white teacher education programs.

Furthermore, we must research the broader contexts in which these teacher education programs exist. Elizabeth is anecdotally familiar with the challenges of state-mandated content, as well as state-mandated caps on required credit hours. This makes adding courses that would incorporate rich multicultural education content difficult. There are also the real challenges of teacher education programs, particularly early or elementary programs, funding other programs in the college or university through their large enrollments. This leaves program faculty and staff unable to take the time to do the necessary work of fighting the inertia of white norms and structures to make the radical changes that are needed. To truly make education a place where Black teachers and students thrive would, in many ways, require a complete overhaul of teacher education programs in PWIs. In the midst of these challenges, Elizabeth was also struck by the resilience, grace, and passion of the participants in this study.

As a researcher and participant in the research, Robyn is proud yet anxious about the findings. It is exciting to know that more awareness is being brought to this issue, but the spotlight will not matter if there are not any systematic changes. PWIs must continue to rebuild a framework that will help and support PSTs of color. PSTs of color must continue to be strong and hold everyone around them accountable for their actions. This research project is important to Robyn because

she wants everyone to know how passionate and committed one must be to even work with children. Teaching is not a profession suited for everyone. With that said, institutions must build all of their PSTs to be leaders in their respected classrooms. However, no learning will be able to take place for PSTs of color if they are being forced to adapt in environments that are not supportive of their academic and emotional needs.

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