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Torine Champion

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District

Linda Wilson-Jones

Fayetteville State University

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Cultural Advocacy and Teachers of Color

About the Author(s)

Torine Champion has over 20 years of experience in K-12 public education. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, earned a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and her doctorate is in Organizational Leadership. Her research interests include racial equity, diversity, inclusion, belongingness, adult learning, and transformational learning.

Keywords

cultural competency, racial microaggressions, teachers of color, racism, racial battle fatigue, White racial frame, teacher retention, job satisfaction, professional development, teacher preparation programs, race discussions

Cover Page Footnote

My research is in loving memory of my father, Charles Thomas, Sr., who gained his wings during this research study. I will love you always and forever, Daddy.



Cultural Advocacy and Teachers of Color

Torine Champion, *Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District*
Linda Wilson-Jones, *Fayetteville State University*

Abstract

Teachers of color face marginalization and microaggressions that their White counterparts do not have to face. African American teachers experience microaggressions pathologizing their cultural values and communication styles, cultural/ethnic insensitivity, an ascription of their intelligence, and being treated as second-class citizens) that are hurtful, undermining, and disparaging (Brown, 2019). Asian American teachers face gendered, racial, and sexualized expectations on their campuses (Endo, 2015). A study of Latina bilingual teachers revealed that they felt alienated from their colleagues, had larger workloads, and did not have access to support (Amos, 2016). Teachers of color experience inequalities, microaggressions, and marginalization that impact their experiences as teachers (Brown, 2019; Amos, 2016; Endo, 2015). The fifteen participants' responses generated cultural advocacy as the recurring theme. The findings revealed that the participants created networks with other teachers of color, engaged in self-advocacy and prayer, and chose to ignore microaggressions. Several stated that they decided to engage in race conversations to educate their White peers and foster understanding and empathy. While many felt they were often silenced and marginalized, they continued to maintain their professionalism while working in predominately White K–12 environments.

Keywords: racial microaggressions, teachers of color, Latino teachers, African American (and Black) teachers, Asian American teachers, racism, teacher retention, job satisfaction, professional development.

Introduction

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

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

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

Professional development is essential in fostering inclusive environments (Brooks & Watson, 2019). School districts should provide leaders with tools and strategies that promote a supportive and inclusive school culture. The steps to design meaningful professional development opportunities for leaders will equip them with the skillset needed to foster an equitable environment. As a result, teachers' job satisfaction and retention should improve (Brooks & Watson, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Swanson & Welton, 2019).

Literature Review

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

Theoretical Lens Discussion

Teachers of color face difficulties navigating within a White racial frame (WRF), an in-group superiority, and out-group inferiority (Amos, 2020). Feagin (2013) described this frame as a view that centralizes Whiteness as the dominant frame. This Eurocentric view creates inequalities between White people and people of color (Feagin, 2013). The WRF operates at the unconscious level in the minds of White people because it is ingrained in every facet of their lives. In addition, it is embedded in various structures and institutions and is connected to their privilege and power (Amos, 2020; Chubbuck, 2004). As a result, people of color struggle with navigating within this frame. They try to fit in but cannot because it is not aligned with their cultural experiences and backgrounds. This narrow and oppressive view perpetuates stereotypes and hinders progress toward inclusion.

Furthermore, it negatively impacts them and their white colleagues (Amos, 2020). Therefore, there must be antiracist counter-frames that people of color develop to combat racism

and racist views. Counter-framing allows them to share their stories and promote a multiracial work environment that values everyone (Feagin, 2013). Thus, it is crucial to decenter Whiteness and promote diversity and inclusion in all educational work environments (Toure & Thompson Dorsey, 2018). Amos (2020) used WRF to examine Latina teachers' relationship with their White counterparts. Moreover, this frame was used to analyze the study's findings.

Theories on the White Racial Frame

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

Diversifying the Teacher Workforce

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

Racism in Education

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

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

Recruitment Practices for Teachers of Color

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

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

Factors That Impact Teacher Retention

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

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

likely to stay at the school (Holmes et al., 2019). The lack of support that teachers of color endure negatively impacts them.

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

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

Racial Microaggressions. Microaggressions are subtle, verbal, and nonverbal insults directed at people of color (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Pierce et al., 1977; Turaga, 2020). They can be intentional or unintentional (Dalton & Villagran, 2018; Turaga, 2020). Microaggressions include targeting a person of color who looks different, ascribing intelligence, and overcriticizing (Turaga, 2020). Additionally, there are various types of microaggressions. Microassaults refer to intentional acts that are harmful to people of color. Microinsults are subtle but harmful

comments about marginalized people. Microinvalidations seek to invalidate the experiences of people of color (Dalton & Villagran, 2018; Turaga, 2020). Nonetheless, all microaggressions harm teachers of color (Brown, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Turaga, 2020). They contribute to hostile work environments, devalue social group identities, and lower work productivity (Dalton & Villagran, 2018).

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

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

African American teachers encounter microaggressions as well. African American men try to conform to White masculine norms for self-preservation and protection (Turaga, 2020). African American male and female teachers work twice as hard as their nonminority counterparts while ignoring microaggressions (Brown, 2019; Pitcan et al., 2018). They believe

their performance must be exemplary to maintain positive representations for all African Americans (Brown, 2019; Pitcan et al., 2018). African American men often face isolation because they are feared. Consequently, they decide to leave their campus because of the racial tension (Bristol, 2018). African American females feel invisible as women and African Americans (Pitcan et al., 2018). These events impact their job satisfaction and campus experiences (Brown, 2019; Pitcan et al., 2018).

Teachers of color have encountered microaggressions regarding their intelligence, competence, and capabilities (Bristol, 2018; Brown, 2019; Endo, 2015). They feel trapped in these negative stereotypes and are unsure how to address them. These microaggressions can occur thrice daily (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Often, the perpetrators of microaggressions are unaware of their acts, which adds to their frustration (Brown, 2019). They are not cognizant of how they perpetuate Whiteness, which seeks to uphold and center practices that reinforce White dominance over society (Swanson & Welton, 2019). The complacency of White school leaders was harmful, and these incidents can harm teachers of color (Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2006).

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

Teachers have reported varying experiences with racial battle fatigue. They shared that they were always on high alert for the subsequent racist encounter (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). This leads to feelings of hopelessness and depression. Teachers revealed that they experienced hypertension and problems eating and sleeping (Acuff, 2018; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Pizarro and Kohli (2020) shared that one teacher of color experienced a nervous breakdown due to the constant battles. Acuff (2018) shared that she was depressed, irrational, and had migraines and

anxiety. She began to dread the career that she once loved. The ongoing stress of racism and racial microaggressions impact their well-being.

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

Method

This qualitative study explored the experiences of teachers of color employed in predominantly White K–12 schools. It examined their experiences as teachers of color and how those experiences in predominately White environments impacted their job satisfaction and retention. This research study examined teachers' experiences using personal interviews, which allowed a better understanding of their unique experiences, feelings, and thoughts about being a teacher of color. The findings from this study can be utilized to develop a framework that can enhance leadership development curricula, which can equip district and school leaders with information that will help them implement more inclusive and equitable practices. The following research question guided this study: How do teachers of color describe their experiences working in predominately White K–12 environments?

This qualitative research study utilized interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), a research method used to understand individuals' experiences through detailed accounts (Smith et al., 2009). This approach allowed for examining how teachers make meaning of various campus encounters. Moreover, it provided a detailed account and understanding of their day-to-day experiences (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Purposive sampling was used to identify participants. Smith

and Nizza (2022) asserted that small sample sizes should be utilized to allow for comparisons and identify themes. IPA focuses on participants' detailed accounts of their lived experiences. The participants were teachers of color currently or previously employed in K–12 predominantly White environments. They were either members of the Facebook groups National Alliance of Black School Educators or Houston Area Alliance of Black School Educators. These groups allowed me access to teachers of color who fit the description needed. In addition, snowball sampling was used to locate other participants based on their role, ethnicity, and experience.

Smith and Nizza (2022) shared that verbatim transcripts should be generated following each interview. The transcript included the participants' responses. Additionally, participants reviewed their interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. IPA requires researchers to utilize an idiographic and inductive approach, which includes analyzing each participant's data independently (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Results

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of teachers of color employed in predominately White K–12 schools. Also, this study sought to identify commonalities among participants. This research is necessary because it seeks to help leaders foster a more inclusive work environment for teachers of color. I provided the emergent theme from the data revealed based on the interviews presented in the words of the participants with a summary paragraph and introductory quotes. Previous studies revealed that teachers of color experience microaggressions that can impact job satisfaction and other effects previously mentioned in the literature review. During the interview, each participant was transparent and honest about their experiences. A few participants shared experiences with racial microaggressions that recently occurred prior to the interview. Two participants disclosed that they left their campuses due to racism and racial microaggressions they experienced.

Data Analysis and Themes

Themes were developed based on participants' responses during the interviews. Participants shared their experiences as teachers working in a predominantly white K-12 environment. The information obtained from the interviews was used to answer the research question previously discussed.

Cultural Advocacy

The participants described their experiences being teachers of color on a predominately White campus. Based on their responses, the following were revealed as recurring themes. Participants shared that they are often given students of color and students of low socioeconomic status because it is assumed they can easily relate to them. This often leads to a more significant workload. Some participants took on roles that allowed them to advocate for students of color. They sponsored clubs and wanted a safe space for students of color. Many participants shared that they have observed their peers give harsher behavioral consequences to students of color. Thus, teachers of color fostered authentic connections with students and gave them a sense of cultural pride. A notable mention was that a few participants focused on building authentic relationships with students and parents. They want them to feel comfortable asking questions and being involved in their child's education.

Participant 1 shared:

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

Participant 2 commented:

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

Participant 10 responded:

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

Participant 14 replied:

I am the only Black teacher on my campus right now. There are only about four of us in the entire district. I am the Black Student Union Advisor. I was not going to let anyone else do that. Honestly, now that I have had my kids, it is just different. I look at the Black students like, "What if there were my kids?" I try to ensure that when decisions are made, at least I know of, they consider Black students. Do not make life easy; do not let them have it more accessible. Just consider them so they can be adequately educated and ready to be released from high school and into the real world. I ensure that on my campus, the Black experience is thought of or introduced to open people's eyes and make them think outside their box.

Discussion and Conclusions

Teachers of color employed in predominately White K–12 schools experience marginalization and microaggressions. It has been revealed that these experiences can impact teachers' job satisfaction and teacher retention (Brooks & Watson, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Swanson & Welton, 2019). This qualitative study aimed to describe the lived experiences of teachers of color employed in predominately White K–12 schools to gain insights into their unique experiences, feelings, and thoughts about being a teacher of color. The results from this study will benefit the development and implementation of a professional development

framework that can enhance leadership development curricula. In addition, it can equip district and school leaders with tools to foster more inclusive and equitable practices.

Discussion on Findings of Past Literature

White Racial Frame

A reoccurring theme was identified based on the interviews conducted with 15 participants. The theme was consistent with Feagin's (2013) WRF, which is described as a view that centralizes Whiteness as the dominant frame. This Eurocentric view creates inequalities between White people and people of color (Feagin, 2013). The WRF operates at a nonconscious level in the minds of White people because it is ingrained in every facet of their lives. In addition, it is embedded in various structures and institutions and is connected to their privilege and power (Amos, 2020; Chubbuck, 2004). Amos (2020) contended that WRF operates with in-group superiority and out-group inferiority. This notion creates inequalities for people of color. Teachers of color experience racism and microaggressions because of the WRF (Amos, 2020). White people are considered superior to other races, while teachers of color are stereotyped and marginalized (Amos, 2020). The findings of this study indicate that teachers of color experience racism and racial microaggressions as they work in predominately White K–12 environments.

Additionally, these experiences can impact their job satisfaction. Participants' responses revealed that WRF is displayed in these work settings. Teachers felt like they were in the out-group. Toure and Thompson Dorsey (2018) asserted that it is crucial to decenter Whiteness and promote diversity and inclusion in all educational work environments.

Cultural Advocacy. Participants' responses indicated the inherent need to advocate for students of color. They wanted to create a safe space for students of color. Teachers of color seek to build authentic relationships with students and foster cultural pride (Duncan, 2019). Some participants discussed how they willingly took on roles that allowed them to advocate for students of color, like sponsoring clubs and organizing Black History Month programs. They have heard White teachers make racist comments about or toward students of color, and they wanted to ensure their students felt affirmed and valued. Several revealed that they have observed their White peers give harsher behavioral consequences to students of color.

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

While teachers of color want to be advocates for students of color, they are often expected to be the experts on all ethnic issues. Many disclosed that it is assumed they know everything related to their ethnicity. Several indicated that they are often given to students of color who are deemed "challenging" because it is assumed that they can relate to them. One participant shared that she was told that she has a "Black mentality" and can connect with African American students. Nonetheless, they continue to find ways to build genuine relationships with students to help them feel appreciated, valued and heard.

Most revealed feelings of alienation, marginalization, and racism that impacted their teaching experiences. While these barriers existed, they found ways to navigate and cope with racism and racial microaggressions. The findings revealed that teachers of color tended to build networks among themselves, engaged in self-advocacy and prayers, and chose to ignore microaggressions. Some decided to engage in race conversation to educate White peers and foster understanding and empathy. Each participant's experience was significant. Regardless of their experience on campus, they felt obligated to affirm, advocate, and value students of color. While they were silenced and marginalized, they continued to maintain their professionalism in predominately White K–12 environments.

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