Article

Behind School Doors: The Impact of Hostile Racial Climates on Urban Teachers of Color

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Abstract

Despite recruitment efforts, teachers of Color are underrepresented and leaving the teaching force at faster rates than their White counterparts. Using Critical Race Theory to analyze and present representative qualitative narratives from 218 racial justice–oriented, urban teachers of color, this article affirms that urban schools—despite serving majority students of Color—operate as hostile racial climates. Color blindness and racial microaggressions manifest as macro and micro forms of racism and take a toll on the professional growth and retention of teachers of Color. These findings suggest a need for institutionalized reform to better support a diverse K-12 teaching force.

Keywords

racism, social context of education, diversity, urban education, teacher experiences, critical race theory, teachers of color, racial microaggressions

When I interviewed her, Naomi[1] was an 8th-year urban elementary school teacher in a Northern California school that serves mostly students of Color.[2] As one of five Latina/os and nine total teachers of Color among a staff of 45

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(California Department of Education [CDE], 2013), Naomi was the only teacher who had been raised in the same neighborhood and community as her students. Naomi entered the profession because she wanted young people to have a teacher who reflected their community:

> I can relate more to the families and students who are coming because I'm not different from them. And that was my whole goal as a teacher . . . For those brown kids, I was a brown kid. When kids talk about places, I can relate. "Oh yeah, been there, done that. You guys know about this," and they say, "Teacher, we've been to that," or, "Teacher, we go there on the weekend." I bring those elements of the neighborhood into the discussions we have in our class.

Naomi and her students recognized that they were part of the same community. While Naomi's positionality and insights were assets in her teaching, she explained that administrators on campus often framed her use of cultural connections as a deficit:

> One day the principal came in my room and I was talking in Spanish to some students about their homework because they didn't understand. After the students sat down, he told me . . . "Why are you speaking in Spanish to these students? You're wasting time; I can't understand you."

As he centered his own needs instead of the students', the principal devalued Naomi's ability to engage students in their home language. By equating the use of Spanish to a "waste of time," he also constructed a linguistic hierarchy of English superiority (Valenzuela, 1999). Because of this and other experiences on campus—including feeling overscrutinized by leadership and isolated from her predominantly White, middle-class colleagues—Naomi began to question, "Am I even qualified to be in the classroom?" In the face of these experiences, she wondered if her cultural and community connections with students were actually limitations rather than strengths. The racialization and isolation that Naomi faced led her to contemplate ending her tenure as a teacher.

It is troubling that as a bilingual teacher of Color, Naomi's language and culture would be framed as a deficit in teaching students who share these aspects of identity and community. And it is problematic that the very qualities that drive her passion as a teacher are now at the core of her questions about her role in the profession. Unfortunately, Naomi's experiences are not unique. Nationally, students of Color make up almost 50% of the public school student population (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2015), yet only 18% of all public school teachers in the United States are racial minorities (NCES, 2015). Many teachers of Color work within institutions that despite serving majority students of Color, continue to operate as

sites of whiteness (Matias & Liou, 2015; Sleeter, 2001), which means they are staffed by mostly White teachers and administrators (Feistritzer, 2011; Lopez, Magdaleno, & Reis-Mendoza, 2006), the curriculum mandates typically reify Eurocentric frames (Calderon, 2014; Pérez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006), and the school culture espouses middle-class, White values (Olivos, 2006).

In this article, Critical Race Theory (CRT) frames an examination of the professional experiences of teachers of Color in urban schools, revealing the persistence of hostile racial climates—environments that are steeped with racial inequity and racism on both institutional and interpersonal levels (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009). Through the qualitative narratives of 218 self-selected, racial justice–oriented Black, Latina/o, Asian American, and mixed race teachers, participants repeatedly expressed an exposure to racism in two forms: (a) color blindness, which is the practice of ignoring race or racial difference (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), and (b) racial microaggressions, which are subtle racial insults/assaults (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Perez Huber, & Solórzano, 2015). Analysis also revealed that the racism teachers of Color were exposed to in schools took a toll on their well-being, growth, and retention. With these findings, this article calls for more attention to racial climate in schools and its impact on teachers of Color, particularly in discourse on diversifying the teaching force.

CRT

CRT is a framework that emerged out of critical legal studies in the 1970s. Disillusioned by the understatement of race in explanations of inequity within legal scholarship, key scholars such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Cheryl Harris, and Kimberlé Crenshaw point to institutional racism as an ever-present barrier in U.S. racial progress (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2000). An interdisciplinary theory, CRT challenges ideology, policy, and practice that use individualized explanations for racial inequality such as color blindness and meritocracy, and instead points to structural causes for U.S. racial hierarchies (Crenshaw, 1995). CRT acknowledges the intersectionality of race and class oppression—race and racism were created as tools of economic exploitation (Harris, 1993). In addition, it weaves its analysis with other factors of subordination such as sexism (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano, 1998), nativism (Perez Huber, 2010), and ableism (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). In the mid- to late-1990s, CRT was applied to the field of education to describe how schools, as institutions, functioned to affirm the racial status quo. Since its initial use within education discourse,

CRT has expanded to include empirical research that examines the nuances of racism within schools (Parker, 2015).

CRT is a useful analytical tool in understanding the hostile racial climates of schools. Harris (1993) argues that our nation and its laws were constructed to protect White property rights, including both the seizure of indigenous land and the appropriation of the bodies and labor of enslaved people. Thus, an inherent protection of material assets associated with whiteness is embedded in our current institutions and laws. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) apply Harris' framework to understanding racial disparities in education. Building on Harris' argument that the United States is built on property rights over human rights, they demonstrate that schools are designed to serve White economic interests through disparate educational opportunities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Viewed through the lens of whiteness as property, we must recognize that schools historically and currently have not been structured to serve communities of Color. From de jure segregation of the past to de facto segregation today, inequalities in school funding have consistently relegated students of Color to overcrowded, underresourced schools compared with their White peers (Anyon, 2005; Oakes, Rogers, & Silver, 2004). From the threat of lynching during integration (Beals, 1995), to overexpulsion, pushout, and criminalization in schools today (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010), students of Color consistently receive the message that they do not belong in schools. Textbooks have been equally noted to lack the history, perspectives, and values of marginalized communities throughout the trajectory of U.S. schools (Loewen, 2008; Woodson, 1933).

Although many communities of Color have organized resistance to these institutional injustices (Beals, 1995; Ferg-Cadima, 2004) and held schools accountable for more resources (CDE, 2013) and culturally responsive curriculum (Cammarota, 2008), schools are fundamentally structured through Eurocentric hierarchies that inadequately frame people of Color through deficits (Valencia, 1997, 2010; Yosso, 2005). Therefore, 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.

Hostile Racial Climate and Teachers of Color

In 1954, when the landmark Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* called for de jure desegregation, Black children left schools in their segregated communities for historically White schools. Because racist

ideologies remained intact and White families did not send their kids to historically Black schools at the same rate, an unintended consequence was that many Black teachers were forced out of the profession. By 1964, over 45% of African American teachers were fired (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). Today, teachers of Color are significantly underrepresented as compared with students of Color (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; NCES, 2015; Villegas & Jordan Irvine, 2010); in districts serving almost entirely students of Color, proportions are similarly disparate or worse than national averages (CDE, 2013; NCES, 2015).

Although a growing body of literature has emerged about the strengths of teachers of Color, they are continuously marginalized within the profession. Research has demonstrated that teachers of Color play a vital role in remedying racial disparities of achievement (Villegas & Jordan Irvine, 2010), due in part to their commitments and passions to teaching within urban schools (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011). Some have argued that teachers of Color are more likely to culturally match with students of Color (Sleeter, 2001; Weisman & Hansen, 2008), serve as cultural brokers with the community (Gomez & Rodriguez, 2011), and see students of Color as capable learners (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Eddy & Easton-Brooks, 2011). In addition, teachers of Color often have insight to the racialized experiences of students of Color and can support their effective navigation of structural barriers (Gomez & Rodriguez, 2011; Kohli, 2009; Mabokela & Madsen, 2007).

Based on the assets teachers of Color bring to the education of students of Color, recruiting diversity has become the goal of many teacher education programs and districts. From targeted recruitment sessions to pipeline programs in urban high schools, and undergraduate and graduate schools, there is a push to grow more teachers of Color (Irizarry, 2007; Lau, Dandy, & Hoffman, 2007; Toshalis, 2013). Even so, efforts to recruit teachers of Color are seldom accompanied by paradigm shifts to effectively train and support their specific needs.

In teacher education programs, the majority of teacher candidates and teacher educators are White, notably White women (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Matias & Liou, 2015). The curriculum often normalizes whiteness, neglecting the history, experiences, and perspectives of teachers of Color (Gorski, 2009; Ullucci & Battey, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). Content and dialogue, even in multicultural education classes, is limited to people of Color as objects of exploration (Montecinos, 2004) whose assets are overlooked within teacher education content (Kohli, 2009). Based on this lack of relevance or representation in teacher preparation, teacher candidates of Color are often silenced, invisibilized, and alienated from their education (Amos, 2010; Montecinos, 2004; Sheets & Chew, 2002).

In the field, moreover, teachers of Color expressed feeling equally alienated. Achinstein and Aguirre (2008) revealed that novice teachers of Color felt a lack of support negotiating sociocultural issues, with little regard to their racial identity. Similarly, Madsen and Mabokela (2000) found that Black teachers felt isolated and faced many burdens, such as repeatedly serving as the expert or in stereotypically defined roles (Mabokela & Madsen, 2007). Milner and Hoy (2003) argued that because they are underrepresented and racialized, African American teachers are susceptible to stereotype threat in their professional lives. As they feel a sense of responsibility to challenge stereotypes about Black students, this leads to an unattainable goal and threatens their self-efficacy as teachers. Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, and Mayfield (2012) pointed to racially biased definitions of teacher quality as a barrier for teachers of Color.

As the abovementioned literature paints a picture for the hostile racial climates for teachers of Color, it is not surprising that racial minority teachers leave the field each year at a rate 24% higher than their White counterparts (Easton-Brooks, 2013; Robinson, Paccione, & Rodrigue, 2003). However, research has not yet connected racism to teacher of Color attrition. In a comprehensive literature review of 70 studies regarding teacher of Color retention (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010), not one study explored the role of racism or racial climate as a possible factor in their attrition. Instead, individualized explanations abound—Attrition has typically been attributed to teachers of Color having high student loans and debt in a low-paying profession, and their overrepresentation in "harder to staff" schools with high turnover rates. By analyzing this literature with a critical race lens, though, a logical hypothesis is 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, particularly for teachers who are committed to challenging racial inequity. Guided by CRT, this study aimed to answer the question,

> **Research Question 1:** How does the racial climate of urban schools affect the professional experiences and retention of racial justice–oriented teachers of Color?

Method

Participants were recruited through a national professional development (PD) conference for teachers of Color with a self-identified commitment to racial justice. They applied and were selected to attend based on their advanced racial literacy (Sealey-Ruiz, 2011), which we defined as a structural analysis

of schooling, an asset framing of communities of Color, and an applied critical theoretical approach to challenging inequality. Among 268 total attendees, 218 teachers of Color self-selected to participate—48% were Latina/o, 20% were Black, 20% were Asian American or Pacific Islander, and 12% of the participants identified as mixed race. To note, 68% of participants were novice teachers, having taught less than 5 years, and 14% were veteran teachers who had taught more than 10 years. They ranged in age from early 20s to late 50s and represented the spectrum of elementary through high school. Women were 78% of participants, a proportion that reflects the overall profession, and 22% identified as men.

While there is a body of qualitative studies that critically examine the experiences of teachers of Color, many are deeper case studies with fewer than 10 participants (Carrillo, 2010; Dingus, 2008; Fránquiz, Salazar, & DeNicolo, 2011; Kambutu, Rios, & Castañeda, 2009; Philip, 2011). This study is a unique contribution in that it draws from a larger qualitative sample with an incredibly diverse pool of teachers of Color from across the United States. And although the racial justice lens of participants and the conference selection process may make the data less representative of teachers of Color generally, participants in this study had the ability to articulate issues that perhaps a more general population could not. Because of their strongly developed critical analysis of racial inequity in schooling, participants had a heightened awareness and a language to articulate racialization.

Although the guiding research question of this study focused on the impact of racial climate on professional experiences and retention, data were initially collected within a broader study on teachers of Color. Data were collected in two main ways: (a) through a qualitative, short answer questionnaire with all 218 participants to seek thematic patterns from a broad pool of participants and (b) 1- to 2-hr in-depth interviews with 16 self-selected participants of the broader pool to provide deeper experiential understanding (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). As a method, qualitative inquiry provided depth to understanding multifaceted experiences with racism for this study (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Parker 2015).

The questionnaire asked three key questions: What are your commitments to working for racial justice? How is race and racial inequality framed at your school site? What do you struggle with as a teacher of Color in urban public schools? These data were collected as part of their application process to the conference. The interviews elaborated on the questionnaire to provide depth, probing for specific narrative accounts of their professional experiences with racial injustice and inequity.

After all interviews were transcribed, the questionnaires and interview transcripts were pooled. Using CRT concepts and inductive coding (Charmaz,

2006) through Atlas.ti software, the data were collectively sorted and coded to identify emergent patterns and themes related to the research question (Saldaña, 2012), and then analyzed comprehensively to see breadth and depth to specific themes. Findings were selected based on their frequency and meaning to the purpose of the study, and were triangulated with participants to ensure validity. I do not share data from all 218 participants; instead, I excerpted quotes that best represent the thematic patterns in complex, nuanced, and diverse ways (Yosso, 2005).

The questionnaire data were collected before participants attended the PD, and the interviews were facilitated within several months after the PD. While teachers of Color self-selected to participate in the questionnaire before the conference, they volunteered for interviews after they spent 3 days working with me as one of the conference co-facilitators. Participants were able to develop trust around sensitive issues of marginalization and oppression before choosing to articulate their experiences within a research study (Kohli, 2014; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Because they were familiar with my beliefs about injustice and my approach to research, they were more open and shared more personally. Due to the sensitivity and personal nature of the data, an ethical approach undergirds how I represent their narratives and for what purpose.

Findings

Although many findings emerged from the collective data, for this article's purpose of examining how the hostile racial climate of urban schools affects the professional experiences and retention of racial justice–oriented teachers of Color, I frame the findings into two key sections. In the first section, I argue that urban schools are fraught with institutional and individual racism that either indirectly or directly targets teachers of Color. In the second section, I then note the cumulative impact of these intersecting forms of racism on the well-being, growth, and retention of teachers of Color.

Teachers of Color Experience Racism

As explained above, schools are institutions that historically and currently have been designed to create and maintain racial inequality. The racism that exists occurs on structural, macro levels, which include policies, infrastructures, and schoolwide practices that maintain the racial status quo, as well as on individual, micro levels such as personal and peer interactions that are racially charged. Together, the macro and micro manifestations of racism form a climate that is racially hostile to teachers of Color, particularly those

who advocate for racial justice. In the following section, the voices of racial justice–oriented teachers of Color articulate racism they personally experience in schools in the form of color blindness and racial microaggressions.

Color blindness. Critical race theorists have defined color blindness (color-blind racism) as when institutions and individuals claim to uphold justice by ignoring race or racial difference (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefanic, 2000). This practice affirms and exacerbates racial inequity by discounting racism as a real barrier in the lives of people of Color (Bell, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Color blindness does not only function in relation to "color," which is often read as race, it also ignores intersecting realities of oppression for students of Color including language, culture, or immigration status. Participants repeatedly shared examples of how their schools were shaped by this oppressive stance. Teachers of Color committed to racial justice often found themselves isolated, left alone to raise racialized issues within schools that continued to silence them in the name of race neutrality.

For example, Selina was a Latina high school teacher who worked at a racially integrated school. With great disparities in academic success between White students and students of Color, however, she was frustrated that her school took no action to resolve this problem, which she described in an interview:

> Our students of Color are not doing as well as they should be. Although this is recognized, there is still a silence that consumes the campus with regard to effective solutions. Only a few faculty members have ever engaged in a conversation such as this with me. They insist that all students are the same and should be treated the same, but this does not reflect the social reality where our students of Color and their respective communities are not treated the same.

There is a well-documented disparity in the success of Black and Latina/o students and their White counterparts (Oakes et al., 2004). Commonly referred to as the achievement gap, this framework assumes the cause and resolution to this discrepancy of achievement is in the hands of struggling students and their families. Many critical scholars have challenged this notion as racist by pointing out that the difference in achievement is actually a reflection of a structural problem, renaming this an opportunity gap (Flores, 2007; Noguera & Akom, 2000) or an educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). With glaring differences in academic success between White and students of Color at Selina's school, the staff believed that treating all students the same—a color-blind stance—could simply resolve academic disparities. Selina's insight to the experiences of her students of Color, however, caused

her to understand that color blindness was doing little to intervene on racial inequality; yet her perspective was constantly marginalized and overlooked by her peers.

Bernice was a veteran Latina teacher who worked in juvenile hall. She grew up in a working-class community and because of her own educational experiences, was personally motivated to provide critical learning opportunities for disenfranchised youth. Although teaching within a highly racialized context of incarcerated students, most of whom were Black and Latino, her school also took a color-blind stance, according to Bernice:

> There is a large [district] push to focus on our ELL population, but rather than being open to exploring language and cultural differences, the staff prefers to look at our student population and issues from the lens of "cultural blindness," stating that our youth are all the same regardless of background, ethnicity, home life, and language. I believe this stems from a need to be "politically correct" but also from a desire to avoid uncomfortable situations and conversations. Refusing to acknowledge a person's life experiences is, in my opinion, robbing them of their humanity and individuality.

Similar to Selina's struggles with her school's color-blind approach to inequality, Bernice was frustrated that adults in her school operated with a "color blindness" to the race and culture of students. Whatever the reason for being color-blind—because the school believed it was providing an equal playing field, or because it was uncomfortable acknowledging differences—silencing the discussion of race also denied the discussion of racism, stifling any movement toward justice.

A color-blind attitude toward urban schooling is an ineffective approach to addressing inequity or injustice and many times results in increased responsibilities for teachers of Color. Participants described that a neglect for racial discourse in schools often forced teachers of Color to be lone advocates for racial justice. For example, Jeff taught at a high school with a majority Black student population. The only African American teacher on staff, he felt he was the only one to advocate for the issues of African American students:

> Our leadership team is mostly White, with some Asian, Southeast Asian . . . [As the only African American] I'm the only one who speaks on African American issues and pushes the focus to serving African American students. I definitely feel that because of that, I have to represent even more and support every initiative because it would go unsaid and unnoticed if I don't say it.

While it can be difficult to raise issues that no one else is raising, it evokes even more pressure to do so as the only teacher of a particular race on staff.

The extra responsibilities Jeff endures are consequence of a hostile racial climate—He is the only Black teacher at a school where others do not advocate for racial justice. Today, Black teachers make up just 6% of educators nationally (Feistritzer, 2011), and many Black teachers find themselves alone at their school sites (CDE, 2013). Because of the pervasive climate of color blindness, not only did Jeff feel the need to be the representative for his race at meetings, but he also felt responsible to continually contribute to school initiatives that added significantly to his professional responsibilities. In addition to being time-consuming, this overburden of racial equity work was also "exhausting" and put Jeff on a path to possibly burning out.

Furthermore, Marta was a Latina high school teacher who grew up in a similar community to her school and had deep understandings of her students, many of whom were gang-affected. While there were gang-related tensions on campus, her principal and much of the staff lacked the knowledge to address it, so like Jeff, Marta felt a responsibility to contribute her insights. However, in a topic similarly described by many participants in the study, school leadership ignored her contributions and instead pushed for color blindness. Marta explained,

> At my site there is an issue about our school being a *Norteño*[3] school. Some of the *Sureño* students who go to our school have left out of fear or have been threatened and continue to be threatened on a daily basis. My administrator doesn't seem equipped to deal with this problem at all. Her solution is to force integration, and to not allow the *Sureño* students to sit on the bench in front of the office anymore. She has not offered any other solutions. She's asked for help, but won't take my advice or help.

Marta worked in a school where she had insight to the realities of students that her principal and staff did not. A well-intentioned school rule, like forced integration, is driven by an ideal that differences can be overcome by just being together. (Color)blindness to the realities of gang-affected youth can have life or death consequences when it comes to relations between rival gangs. And although she was positioned to offer more culturally responsive solutions, Marta was overlooked and ignored in the face of color-blind attitudes.

Teachers' experiences with their racialized and gendered identities were also mentioned prominently in interviews. Michelle, an African American first-year teacher on a mostly White staff, worked in a school that served mostly Black students and entirely students of Color. Because of her intersectional positionality as a novice teacher and a woman of Color, she explained that her perspective was devalued at the expense of students and their education:

> There are the low expectations that I notice among our mostly White teaching staff. It is assumed that the students, none of whom are White, have attained a major victory by just sitting through the California Standards Test (CST) without being disruptive. I think the kids can do better than that, but as a new teacher, my views are not taken seriously.

Students of Color frequently face a culture of low expectations, an insidious form of racism with detrimental impact on student's academic trajectories (hooks, 2001; Perry & Delpit, 1998). It has also been found that Black teachers tend to have higher expectations of Black students, often resulting in their academic success (Brown, 2009; Jordan Irvine, 2002). Michelle observed her mostly White peers minimize the capacity and potential of students, a racist sentiment commonly referred to as deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997, 2010). Even as Michelle attempted to equate low expectations with racialized stereotypes embedded in the culture of the school, as a first-year teacher of Color, her voice was dismissed, and racism continued to impede the educational opportunities of students of Color.

While racial justice should be a universal issue of concern, people of Color are often left with the responsibility of identifying and addressing racism. All of the quotes above reiterate examples of teachers of Color who, within schools fraught with color-blind racism, felt alone in their advocacy for students of Color and the struggle for racial justice. However, not only are they often the only ones to raise consciousness around racial inequity, but they are also not always heard. Working among colleagues who take a color-blind stance, being the lone advocate for students' needs, and being overlooked in their insights can make schools racially hostile places for teachers of Color.

Racial microaggressions. In addition to feeling alone and silenced in their advocacy within color-blind schools, data also revealed that teachers of Color experienced racial insults in their professional contexts, often referred to as racial microaggressions. Racial microagressions are defined as everyday assaults directed at people of Color and rooted in factors associated with race, such as language and culture (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). Chester Pierce (1970, 1974) first coined racial microaggressions to describe racial offenses and/or put-downs that are "done in automatic, preconscious, or unconscious fashion" (Pierce, 1974, p. 515). Davis (1989) built upon Pierce's work to highlight that, from the lens of the victim, microaggressions are not just personal slights, but instances of racialized harm. More recently, CRT scholars of education have borrowed this term to discuss the covert forms of systemic racism that exist in educational institutions (Allen & Solórzano, 2001; Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll,

2002). CRT scholars define racial microaggressions in three ways: (a) *subtle verbal and non-verbal insults/assaults* directed toward People of Color, often carried out automatically or unconsciously; (b) *layered insults/assaults*, based on one's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or name; and (c) *cumulative insults/assaults* that take their toll on People of Color. In isolation, racial microaggressions may not have much meaning or impact; however, as repeated slights, the effects can be profound (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Because of their elusiveness, it can be hard to pinpoint racial microaggressions as racism, though they have very real manifestations and consequences for people of Color (Smith et al., 2007), and in this case, teachers of Color (Carrillo, 2010).

In the study, schools often utilized teachers of Color for their abilities with students of Color—they shared a language, connected well with families, or related to students in meaningful ways. At the same time, participants repeatedly shared that they experienced microaggressions where they were barely visible to their colleagues, and/or were treated with disdain or mistrust. Rudolfo was a veteran Latino teacher, and one of two Latino teachers on campus. While fellow teachers often relied on Rudolfo for his relationships with Latina/o students and families, these same teachers repeatedly called him by the wrong Spanish surname. Perhaps one mistaken name may have left Rudolfo wondering if it was a simple misunderstanding, but the cumulative, unapologetic nature of this experience solidified the racialized message of his invisibility (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Often framed as an innocent mistake, this recurring, albeit subtle, racial microaggression caused Rudolfo to feel invisible to his peers and isolated.

James was one of the only Black male teachers on his elementary school campus, and the only teacher from a working-class community. Like Rudolfo, his mostly White colleagues often relied on him to connect to students, particularly when they were struggling. James confided, "Other teachers always feel as if I can relate to all students of Color just because I'm an African American male from a low-income community." By assuming this connection, James felt his colleagues had essentialized his experiences and those of their students, seemingly confirming the myth that all working-class people of Color relate to each other. This overreliance on James was a racial microagression that stemmed from stereotypes about the community and a limited knowledge of him and his life.

One of a few Spanish-speaking teachers on campus, Bernice advocated for Spanish-speaking students and their families. Her administrators were often frustrated by her vocalism and began to question her. For example, one day, Bernice and her White colleague both arrived at school wearing clothing with a baseball team logo. While nothing was said to the White teacher,

Bernice experienced racial microaggression when she was asked to change her clothes because they felt that she was representing her connection to a local gang. She explained, "My relationships with parents and with the community, my ability to work well and be successful with gang-affiliated youth, has led to my leadership questioning my ethics and my ties to different gangs." Bernice was one of just a few teachers on campus with the cultural and language abilities to understand and support the needs of many students and their families. The school was happy Bernice took on this role, as they benefited from her relationships to students. However, they did not appreciate her vocalism, and even feared her connection to gang-affiliated youth. Her success as a teacher was undermined and devalued because of the administration's racist beliefs about Latina/os and gangs.

Like Bernice, Marisa was successful with students. Even so, Marisa felt put down by colleagues and questioned in her pedagogy, which was culturally responsive:

> My students produce excellent work, meeting benchmarks and passing their CAHSEE English exam. I have been trained to engage the population of students that I now work with by starting with empathy and getting them to share their stories. I've been gawked at for using this method; I've had several teachers tell me that we're not here to listen to our students' problems. I am called an "enabler" at times when I stand up for students at staff meetings. I feel put down by many colleagues for the way in which I engage students, which is with respect, honor, and gratitude.

In the current culture of accountability, many teachers find it difficult to bridge test preparation to a curriculum relevant to students' lives. This was something Marisa was skilled at doing, approaching it through a pedagogy of love that she learned over years of critical PD with a local Latina/o teacher activist group. However, because her pedagogy was so starkly different than her predominantly White teaching staff, they questioned the credibility of her methods. Teachers of Color repeatedly shared an array of such racial microaggressions, such as a lack of trust for the perspectives, frameworks, or cultural actions of people of Color. If you understand Marisa's pedagogy through her positionality as a teacher of Color, as she does, the disrespect to her methods as a successful teacher was also a racial slight.

In addition to the racial microaggressions of being invisible, stereotyped, and questioned, in some cases teachers of Color were "othered" by peers because they held stereotypical beliefs about communities of Color. Although on the surface, it could seem positive that teachers of Color were spared the deficit frameworks applied to students of Color, but because many teachers

of Color felt profound respect for students and connections to their communities, microaggressions directed at students were also felt deeply by teachers of Color. For instance, Ramon actually taught at the high school he attended as a student. Although the school had a predominantly Latino student population, he was one of few Latina/os on staff and the only teacher of Color in his social studies department. Ramon heard his colleagues make many racist comments about students, their families, and the local Latina/o community. Although this racism was not intended for him, the impact for Ramon was real and significant:

> The chair of my department was trying to sell his truck—an old beat up clunker. At a department meeting, he was laughing "All these Hispanics are trying to get my truck. It's a piece of crap, but they all want to buy it. It's so funny." I'm usually someone who's vocal about racism, but as one of the younger teachers on staff, I felt like, "Do I really want to call this out?"

The department chair carried stereotypes about Latina/os that were so normalized he felt comfortable laughing with his peers about them in a professional context. When the chair so callously shared his racist views, this racial assault shaped the racial climate of a required staff meeting, thus affecting Ramon's professional environment.

Ramon explained that experiences like these lead him to disconnect from his peers. "One of the teachers sent out an email, 'Hey, let's get together for happy hour after school.' But a part of me doesn't want to go. Because of these racial experiences, I don't feel comfortable building with my peers," reflected Ramon. For new teachers, networks and support are needed for both growth and retention (Borman & Dowling, 2008). The isolation that Ramon felt because of racial microaggressions is a factor that can ultimately affect his sustainability in the field.

Teachers of Color are being recruited into schools for particular assets, such as their language abilities and positive student relationships. However, teachers of Color are far more complex than just these qualities. The participants in this study were committed to racial justice and, as empowered people, brought many strengths into the classroom with them—they brought history, knowledge of self, advocacy, and love, to name but a few. But they were not valued for these powerful and transformational tools. Instead, the teachers of Color were often invisiblized, stereotyped, questioned or even "othered" from their community. These interpersonal experiences with racism, reflective of institutional structures of racial inequity and racism, were indicative of the hostile racial climates in which teachers of Color work.

Racism Takes a Toll on Teachers of Color

Racism lasts beyond the moment it is enacted, and has a cumulative impact when experienced frequently (Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano et al., 2002). Working in a school context fraught with both institutional and individual manifestations of racism have an impact on those who are objects of this type of relentless oppression. Emerging from the data was also the toll racism in urban schools took on the well-being, growth, and retention of teachers of Color.

For example, on an institutional level, the limited presence of teachers of Color creates a climate of intense isolation and racialization. Teachers of Color, as typically the only or one of few racial minority teachers, often assume positions of great responsibility and constant advocacy, a burden White teachers do not have to carry. This duty, though, is not just a professional burden. It also can take form as a personal and ethical responsibility that is overwhelming to teachers of Color at times, particularly new teachers. Darnell, a Black male math teacher, expressed pressures based on his identity:

> I get a lot of pressure as an African American male math teacher. Parents say things like, "my kid doesn't have a strong father figure, so I need you to be that man in his life and tell him what he needs to do because I can't do it." . . . When I was trying to find a job, there was an overwhelming, "We really need you here to help our boys." I heard it from so many people that for me, it was like, "What if I'm not good at this? What if I'm not good at teaching math?" I don't want to be just a Black teacher, I want to be a good teacher. It was a big burden for me because I feel like "I'm 25, I can't save all Black boys!" but I feel like I have that on me a lot and it's a lot pressure.

White women as teachers is so normalized that we rarely react when we hear they make up 71% of the teaching force (Feistritzer, 2011). However, when coupled with the fact that Black men are the least represented demographic in teaching, making up just 0.6% of teachers (Feistritzer, 2011), it reminds us of how urgently we must foster a climate where a diverse teaching force can thrive. For Darnell, his role as one of the 0.6% did not allow him the common struggles of a new teacher alone. Before he could develop his skills as a math educator, he was already given the jobs of counselor, role model, and father figure. Trying to balance all of these responsibilities in addition to learning how to teach is a pressure that Black male teachers like Darnell feel because of the limited presence of peers. If there were a critical mass of Black male teachers, Darnell may have been afforded the privilege that many new White female teachers have—of just being seen as a novice teacher.

Despite the extra work that they must engage in because of the responsibility and pressure they feel, teachers of Color are also often overlooked for leadership opportunities. Many teachers in the study shared stories of being discouraged from pursuing leadership degrees or being asked to take on informal work with little recognition, while white peers were asked to take on formal leadership roles. Deepa is a veteran South Asian teacher who was extremely committed to the success of students at her school. Like many other participants who expressed spending their lunch with students, translating for families, assisting kids with academics, or counseling social struggles, Deepa worked far more hours a week supporting students than her job described:

> As a teacher of Color, I have had to juggle many hats, aside from just my teaching—I'm the faculty advisor to many clubs, the teacher that writes most students letters of recommendation, the one that stays late to help students, the one who drives them places. I'm a personal advisor, a mentor, etc. Many students call me mom, something common to several women of Color teachers on campus.

Despite her involvement in the school, Deepa also lamented that she is not given formal leadership roles on campus:

> The most pressing concern for many of us veteran teachers of Color is the lack of leadership opportunities . . . JHS does not have a transparent process to access these opportunities . . . Almost all the teacher leaders of departments, the teachers on special assignments and those on the PD team are White and are close friends. It's blatant nepotism and no one is comfortable addressing this . . . It is often these special assignments or release periods that help retain teachers and make them feel valued.

Educational leadership features even more racial homogeneity as teaching. Nationally, just 17% of administrators are cultural and linguistic minorities (Lopez et al., 2006). As a reflection of national trends, at Deepa's school, the formal leadership roles are overwhelmingly White. However, when veteran teachers of Color are not afforded encouragement or opportunities to shape the culture of the campus, in the end, a group of White teachers makes decisions for the education of students of Color. While this form of institutional racism has grave implications for the experiences of students of Color, it takes an additional toll on racial minority teachers. If teachers of Color take on overwhelming amounts of work, they will less likely gain professional opportunities for advancement and be encouraged to develop their talents in the field, ultimately leading to a de-professionalization and attrition of teachers of Color. Deepa cautions, "Combining extra work with the working

conditions, the systematic inequities among staff, and the unusual isolation of teachers of Color, it is cause for leaving the profession." Deepa also confided that she feels uncomfortable addressing this inequality on campus, as it results in her being labeled "not a team player," or "for bringing down the group," and for being the "angry person of Color."

Noelle is a biracial African and Korean American urban high school teacher who feels extremely committed to the success of her students and the school. She is vocal and actively participates in meetings and volunteer roles on campus. Even so, like Deepa, she feels overlooked and undervalued compared with her White peers:

> I've watched as my White colleagues, who have the same amount of teaching experience and have also completed the same graduate programs as myself, be offered countless leadership roles. Furthermore, I have watched as the same White colleagues get offered extensive training, coaching, and development to their craft.

Noelle continued,

> There is no one on my campus that is committed to my development or my retention. Furthermore, there is no one concerned with keeping teachers of Color on my campus . . . I feel that I am constantly being pushed out of my school and, ultimately, the profession.

Over the years, critical scholars have used the term *pushout* to challenge the idea that students of Color choose to drop out of schools (Fine, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999**)**. Building upon this analysis, Noelle's comment advances our thinking by reframing the decision of teachers of Color to leave the field as actually a structural *pushout* from teaching. Anjali, a South Asian teacher who felt isolated and unsupported as one of few teachers of Color on staff, reiterated a feeling similar to Noelle's:

> Sometimes, I consider not teaching anymore. Not having any mentorship or support has made me question myself and why I became a teacher . . . I'm just not able to see my strengths, and feel I wasn't meant to do this. I feel like I am operating in complete isolation and I'm exhausted.

Anjali had contemplated leaving the profession of teaching. She identified similar factors to Noelle, such as a lack of mentorship or support, which caused her to question her place in the field and further isolated and exhausted her. Participants throughout the study described feeling alone, drained, experienced breakdowns, and contemplated leaving the field. While many of them

internalized these feelings as personal weakness, what they describe is the toll that a hostile racial climate takes on teachers of Color.

Discussion and Recommendations

Increasing the dismal number of teachers of Color is essential. However, without any effort to reframe the culture of whiteness in schools, the labor of teachers of Color is often understood only in terms of its material value to schools (i.e., the ability to raise student of Color test scores), rather than its humanistic value (their pedagogy and advocacy). In this way, teachers of Color are no longer treated as people with intrinsic worth and the ability to challenge and transform education, but instead as commodities that are useful to the academic success of students of Color (Lapayese, 2007; Marx, 1867). Being alienated from their purpose, passion, and political goals, teachers of Color often begin to feel like they do not belong in the profession.

Silenced within color-blind school contexts and as objects of racial microaggressions that leave them feeling invisible, stereotyped, and disrespected teachers, this study reveals that teachers of Color feel incredibly isolated and undervalued within urban schools. Collectively, these experiences often serve as hostile racial climates, systematically pushing teachers of Color out of the profession. To address this pushout, the findings call for several recommendations including (a) increasing teachers of Color, (b) strengthening networks and leadership development, and (c) raising awareness of racism in schools.

Increasing Teachers of Color

Many of the racialized experiences of teachers of Color occurred because of a lack of critical mass of racial minority teachers. While many districts have committed to recruitment efforts, the teacher education pipeline urgently needs more teachers of Color. As teacher preparation programs attempt to recruit teachers of Color, they must also shift paradigms to retain teachers of Color. Teacher education programs dedicated to increasing diversity can engage in practices that serve the needs of teacher candidates of Color, such as removing the Graduate Record Exam as a program requirement, providing scholarships for minority students, and including a curriculum and faculty who reflect the experiences of diverse students.

In addition, research studies have highlighted “homegrown” programs as a model for increasing diversity in the teaching force in which students from urban communities are recruited to teach in the same or similar school districts (Irizarry, 2007; Lau et al., 2007). Within these models, some

programs provide financial support to local or minority teacher candidates, such as *Hawaii Island Growing Our Own Teachers* (Growing our Own Teachers on Kauai, 2015) and the *Future Teachers Project* (FTP) at Santa Clara University. Similarly, *Call Me Mister* is a teacher leadership program adopted by multiple universities to identify and recruit Black men into the elementary teaching profession (Call Me Mister, 2015). *Grow Your Own Teachers: An Illinois Initiative* (Chicago, IL) and *Teach Tomorrow Oakland* (Oakland, CA) are programs that partner with school districts to support the transition of community members and paraprofessionals from local, low-income communities into classroom teachers. Some programs start recruitment even earlier, partnering with local urban high schools to teach a college-level course about teaching (Pathways to Teaching, 2015). All of these programs do significant work to change the demographics of their local teaching force. Unfortunately, homegrown models are not widespread, often depend on fluctuating financial support through grants or university funding, and do not address racial inequity on a structural or systemic level. To ensure an institutionalized support of diversity in the teaching force, moreover, we must also move toward statewide or federal initiatives that provide incentives, scholarships, or grants to racial minorities across the teacher development pipeline.

Strengthening Networks and Leadership Development

Once teachers of Color are recruited, because of their limited presence in the field, we also need to create structures to support and sustain their work, particularly for those committed to working toward educational equity. In addition, social justice ideology is named in the mission of many teacher education programs, but very little training is actually dedicated to navigate racial disparities or racism (Gorski, 2009). Faced with hostile racial climates that plague both the experiences of racial minority students and teachers, teachers of Color need skills to effectively navigate schools and enact change. Teachers of Color who are committed to racial justice must receive PD and leadership training that is specifically focused on alleviating racial discrimination and inequity in schools.

Several teacher activist groups, including *The New York Collective of Radical Educators* (NYCoRE), *Teachers 4 Social Justice* in San Francisco, and *The People's Education Movement* in Los Angeles, as well as conferences such as *Free Minds Free People* and the *Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice*, have dedicated time and space for teachers of Color to meet and connect around their needs and goals. Even so, there must be more localized and widespread attempts to develop support networks and

leadership skills for teachers of Color to counterbalance the structural push-out they experience from K-12 schools.

Improving the Racial Climate of Schools

Finally, in addition to shifting demographics and offering structural support for teachers of Color, schools and districts must consider a systematic evaluation of macro and micro forms of racism and how they shape the school racial climate. If districts, school leaders, and teacher leaders were pushed to consider racial equity on campus as it relates to students, families, *and* staff, they may more effectively address racial inequity at school sites and support the success and retention of teachers of Color. Some of the practices that district and school leaders should consider include (a) a racial analysis of recruitment and hiring practices (i.e., Are districts overhiring through predominantly White colleges and universities, and alternative credential programs such as Teach for America that are notoriously underrepresented in racial diversity?), (b) considering the demographics of where teachers are placed (i.e., Are Black novice teachers placed at schools with Black veteran teachers? What incentives are offered for mentorship?), (c) evaluating the racial composition of leadership teams, (d) listening to the ideas and insights of teachers of Color, and (e) improving PD to better reflect the needs and goals of their increasingly diverse teaching staff.

Conclusion

The current explanations of low pay, limited resources, and high teacher turnover within urban schools do not sufficiently explain the high rates of teacher of Color attrition. In this study, teachers of Color who commit to racial justice have demonstrated a strong dedication to working in urban school contexts with underserved youth. Aware of the limitations of "hard to staff" schools, teachers of Color go above and beyond to mentor, advocate, and provide a rigorous education for marginalized students of Color. Using a critical race analysis, this study helps us to understand that it is not just an individual choice to leave the field, but in actuality, a hostile racial climate that significantly contributes to the stress and dissatisfaction that teachers of Color face in their professional lives.

If we do not begin to shift the paradigm of schooling from one of performance and achievement to a humanizing space that acknowledges the histories, strengths, and struggles of those in the building, we are setting up both our students of Color and teachers of Color for failure. Teachers of Color are not a quick fix to improve test scores or prove a school's cultural

responsiveness. Rather, they are people, and the hostile racial climates that we have recruited them into have taken a toll on their well-being, growth, and retention in the field. With a commitment to social and racial justice, we must begin to imagine schools that not only provide critical and rigorous educational opportunities for students of Color but also are school environments that are inclusive and supportive to everyone in the school community.

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Notes

1. All names used within this article are pseudonyms.
2. The term *of Color* is used to collectively reference people of African, Asian American, indigenous, Latina/o, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander descent. These broad racial parameters are drawn to synthesize the discussion of communities with racialized colonial histories and/or who experience racial marginalization in the United States today.
3. *Norteños* (northerners) and *Sureños* (southerners) are rival California gangs.

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