How Whiteness is Preserved: The Racialization of Immigrants & Assimilation in Education

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SIT Graduate Institute

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How Whiteness is Preserved: The Racialization of Immigrants & Assimilation in Education

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PIM 75

Course-Linked Capstone in Youth Development and Leadership Design

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ASSIMILATION IN EDUCATION

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Student Name: Hadiel Mohamed

Date: 11/04/2017
To my parents, who sacrificed more than I’ll ever know just so their children can obtain the “American dream,” thank you for letting me be me in all my ways.

To my friends, who have been my motivational speakers, bad cops, self-care reminders, soundboards, editors, encouragers, and educators, thank you for withstanding my dormant and active volcanic stages.

To the youth who I have been honored to work with, thank you for constantly challenging me.

And to myself, fire under water…
# ASSIMILATION IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

This research aims to answer how educators can incorporate ethnic/racial identity development in the classroom for youth of color who are driven to pursue Whiteness. This quest begins by understanding Whiteness and its role within ethnic/racial identity and educational systems. The societal avoidance of discussing race furthers the perpetuation of Whiteness as the norm and removes the value of marginalized histories and voices. We can witness the preservation of Whiteness through immigration laws, the void of ethnic/racial identity exploration in schools, and the mono-cultured representation in classrooms. Therefore, this research explores assimilation and the racialization of immigrants through a macro-, micro-, and meso-level analysis.

This qualitative research incorporates interviews from five educators in an attempt to capture their experiences with assimilation, their insights for classroom environment, and their reflections on the ethnic/racial identity journey of youth. Findings from these educators are categorized into three themes: 1- Assimilation, Shame, and Validation, 2- Exploration & Inclusion of Ethnic/Racial Identity, 3- Educators’ Identities and Reflections. This research emphasizes that positive ethnic/racial identity is not grounded in the belittlement of others or superiority of oneself, but the celebration of all. Implication for future professional practice is intentional ethnic/racial identity exploration in adults and youth to further empowerment and empathy.

Keywords: assimilation, ethnic identity, racial identity, education, youth
Preface

Historical Background

There has been a deliberate attempt at preserving the White race within the United States by racializing our borders. Immigrants have commonly been accepted into the U.S. as cheap laborers for the country’s economic growth. There is a trend to grant U.S. visas to highly skilled and educated immigrants in an attempt to progress the country's technological and medical innovations. On the contrary, there is reluctance to accept refugees, a denial of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) youth, and the ban against Muslims. This section will highlight the political history surrounding immigration and education with the intention of highlighting the historical and political preservation of Whiteness.

The settling of this land marked the racial trajectory of the United States. Takaki (1993 as cited by Castañeda & Zúñiga, 2013, p. 59), poignantly highlights all that was involved in this process:

the colonization and attempted extermination of the Native people whose land was stolen by conquest, broken treaties, and deception; the enslavement first of Native Americans and then kidnapped Africans to provide coerced and unpaid labor to develop agricultural and capital wealth for the early European settlers; the displacement of Mexican and Native American people, appropriation of their land, and redefining them as “foreign,” as borders moved through war and conquest. It continued with the recruitment and then abuse and exploitation of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino laborers who worked the mines and built the railroads that enabled the expansion of US wealth and power to other parts of the globe.

These actions were supported by societal acceptance of Whiteness equating civilization and religious prestige. Throughout many of these immigration laws, many areas of support were through the eugenicist theories of genetic superiority. White interpretation of superiority within these policies shows a fear of national identity security and an exploitation of others. The
following are some of the many immigration and educational policies that were responsible for marginalizing people of color:

- **1790** – Naturalization Law, granted naturalization (permanent residency) to White immigrants who were “free white persons of good character;” during this time, Slave Codes restricted Black individuals any rights or recognition of human dignity (Haney-López as cited by Bell, Funk, Joshi, & Valdivívia, 2016; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2013)
- **1840s** – Europeans experienced very little restrictions when arriving via Ellis Island (Ngai as cited by Bell et al., 2016). On the contrary, restrictions and detention centers were imposed upon the arrival of Asian immigrants through New Orleans (Filipinos) and Angel Island (Chinese, Indian, Korean, and Japanese) (Lee & Yung as cited by Bell et al., 2016).
- **1848** – Annexed Mexican land to the U.S. through Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, granting Mexican Americans living in the Southwest citizenship (Bell et al., 2016).
- **1857** – *Dred Scott*, Supreme Court declares people of African descent, free or enslaved, are ineligible for citizenship (Bell et al., 2016).
- **1868** - 14th Amendment is ratified which grants anyone born in the United States citizenship; applies to Blacks, but restricts Native Americans citizenship (Bell et al., 2016).
- **1870** – Chinese immigrant laborers sent to break an Irish immigrant strike in Massachusetts (Takaki, 2013).
- **1879** – Carlisle Indian School, off-reservation boarding school, was established to forcibly assimilate Native American children (Tatum, 2017).
- **1882** – Chinese Exclusion Act, restricted Chinese laborers from entry, was the first time a national origin was specifically restricted (Lee & Yung as cited by Bell et al., 2016).
This act was partially repealed by the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act (1943) as an effort to secure China’s alliance against Japan (Spring as cited by Tatum, 2017; Wikipedia).

- 1888 – Scott Act, restricted Chinese nationals, lawfully living within the United States, reentry even with authorized reentry forms (Migration Policy Institute, 2013).
- 1903 – Mexicans and Japanese farm workers go on strike for fair wages in California (Takaki, 2013)
- 1906 – A separate school was created for Japanese, Korean, and Chinese children by San Francisco Board of Education (Bell et al., 2016).
- 1917 – Asiatic Barred Zone Act (or Literacy Act), immigrants from most of Asia were restricted from entering the United States, exempting Japan and the Philippines from the restriction (Bell et al., 2016). Law exempts high skilled professionals and their families, and literate students (Migration Policy Institute, 2013).
- 1921 – Emergency Quota Act, was the first attempt to regulate immigration by implementing immigration quotas, excluding Western Hemisphere countries from the quota system (Migration Policy Institute, 2013).
- 1922 – Takao Ozawa v United States, Ozawa, a Japanese immigrant, applied for citizenship after living in the U.S. for 20 years. Ozawa was rejected because he was not white (Haney López as cited in Bell et al., 2016).
- 1923 – United States v Bhagat Singh Thind – Previous Supreme Court rulings established Caucasians as white, therefore eligible for citizenship. Although Indians were descendants from the Caucasoid region, Thind, whom was Indian, was deemed ineligible for citizenship
because of his skin color and religion (Hinduism) (Bell et al., 2016; Spring as cited by Tatum, 2017). The court stated, “the intention of the Founding Fathers was to ‘confer the privilege of citizenship upon the class of persons they knew as white,’” (Spring as cited by Tatum, 2017).

- 1924 – Indian Citizenship Act, Native Americans were granted citizenship (Bell et al., 2016)
- 1924 – National Origins Quota Act (Asian Exclusion Act), regulated immigration from southern and eastern European countries, affecting non-Protestants (Bell et al., 2016). It was stated these immigrants would take too long to assimilate, President Coolidge was quoted saying, “America must be kept American” (Ngai 2004, as quoted by Bell et al., 2016, p. 142; Bartram, Poros, & Monforte, 2014). Tatum (2017) points out, Chinese and Japanese immigration was halted entirely while European immigrants received federal assistance to assure their “legal” status. However, it was also during this time the federal government established the Border Patrol to police Mexican immigrants (Tatum, 2017).
- 1942 – War Relocation Authority, Japanese Americans were forcibly placed in internment camps without access to a trial or hearing; two-thirds of whom were citizens by birth (Tatum, 2017).
- 1942 – Bracero Agreement allowed Mexican nationals to enter the US temporarily for agricultural work (Migration Policy Institute, 2013).
- 1952 – Naturalization Law (1790) was repealed with the Immigration and Nationality Act, this removed the racial restrictions on citizenship; though they still exist (Bell et al., 2016).
• 1953 – Refugee Relief Act, authorizes non-quota immigrants fleeing persecution in Europe entry.

• 1954 – Brown v Board of Education ends racial segregation in schools (Bell et al., 2016).

• 1962 – Migration & Refugee Assistance Act, authorized funds to assist Western Hemisphere nationals fleeing from persecution (Migration Policy Institute, 2013).

• 1965 – Immigration Act reinstated opportunities to enter the United States by voiding the quota system and providing family reunification access (Migration Policy Institute, 2013). Instead, caps were applied to restrict the total number allowed entry, Western Hemisphere nationals were exempt from the caps (Migration Policy Institute, 2013). This act resulted in the second wave of Asian immigration; however, priority was granted to high skilled professionals and those willing to invest in business upon arrival (Bell et al., 2016; Chang & Au, 2014).

• 1967 – Bilingual Education Act allows English language learners to learn academic material in their native language (see Appendix A: Bilingual Education; Tatum, 2017).

• 1975 – Indochina Migration & Refugee Assistance, allowed Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees entry (Migration Policy Institute, 2013).

• 1982 – Plyer v Doe granted undocumented children access to K-12 education and schools were required to keep their records confidential (Tatum, 2017).

• 1983 – In May, the Louisiana courts denied Susie Guillory Phipps’s case challenging the “one-drop” law. Phipps, a physically white woman, could not apply for a passport because her birth certificate stated she was Black (Davis as cited by Tatum, 2017).
1983 – In June, the Louisiana courts gave parents the right to designate their newborn’s race if they could prove their Whiteness with evidence (Davis as cited by Tatum, 2017). However, Phipps appeal was denied in 1986 (Davis as cited by Tatum, 2017).

- 1986 – Immigration Reform & Control Act, allows agricultural workers to apply for permanent resident status (Migration Policy Institute, 2013).
- 1998 – California’s Proposition 227 is approved, which outlawed bilingual education and introduces Structured English Immersion¹ (SEI) (Tatum, 2017; Salas, 2014).
- 2000 – Arizona’s Proposition 203 outlawed bilingual education, resorting to highly regulated waivers for bilingual access (Salas, 2014).
- 2002 – Massachusetts outlawed bilingual education, resorting to highly regulated waivers commonly accessible for middle and high school students (Salas, 2014).
- 2002 – No Child Left Behind (NCLB) passes, which focuses on high stakes testing and school accountability through standardized tests (Tatum, 2017). NCLB repealed the Bilingual Education Act (Tatum, 2017; see Appendix B: No Child Left Behind).
- 2006 – Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act, this increased punishment for undocumented immigrants and those knowingly assisting them (Picht-Trujillo & Suchsland, 2014)

¹ SEI places English language learners in a separate class to conduct English language and academic material in English only (Tatum, 2017).
• 2010 – Arizona SB 1070 (Support Our Law Enforcement & Safe Neighborhoods Act), which is essentially a “show me your papers” law (Archibold as cited by Bell et al., 2016). It allows police officers to racially profile individuals under the suspicion they are illegal immigrants.
  o 2012 US Supreme Court struck down three provisions

• 2010 – Arizona introduced HB 2281 banning ethnic studies courses, claiming that they are Anti-American and teaching students to violently overthrow the government (Rodreguez, 2014). This bill specifically targeted the Mexican American Studies (MAS) programs, offered for K-12th grade, which based its curriculum on indigenous history, values, and concepts (Rodreguez, 2014). This bill was not applied to African American or Native American studies (Rodreguez, 2014).
  o August 2017, a federal judge deemed the bill unconstitutional for its discrimination against MAS programs (Depenbrock, 2017).

• 2010 – Arizona Department of Education banned teachers for having a “heavy” or “ungrammatical” accent from teaching English classes (Rodreguez, 2014; Jordan, 2010)

• 2011 – Alabama HB 56 (Alabama Taxpayer & Citizen Protection Act), essentially “show me your papers” law, similar to Arizona’s SB 1070 (Archibold as cited by Bell et al., 2016).

• 2012 – Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) protects undocumented minors from deportation (Tatum, 2017).
  o 2017 – Movement to end DACA
• 2017 – Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry (Muslim Ban), banning immigrants from five majority Muslim countries, Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia (ACLU Staff, 2017).

Immigration Laws

The immigration laws above highlight how citizenship has been directly linked to race and class. These laws showcase the malleability of Whiteness yet the pursuit to preserve its purity. Accompanying these laws is the societal encouragement to adapt, conform, and assimilate to Whiteness, yet always being a stain to said purity. The Chinese and Irish came to the United States at around the same time, but the Irish had easier access to citizenship which was reserved for White immigrants until 1952 (Takaki, 2013). The Irish immigrants’ ease of assimilation was due in large part to their white features. Although Asian Americans have been in the United States for over 150 years, they are still projected as foreigners or strangers (Takaki, 2013). Other laws that impacted immigrants were similar to laws against Black peoples and Native Americans. Among these laws, were anti-miscegenation, special taxes, restriction on land ownership, segregation, and discrimination in housing (which impacts school eligibility) and employment (Tatum, 2017; Keyysar as cited in Bell et al., 2016). The compilation of these laws have perpetuated the vicious cycle of poverty which requires immigrant reliance on economic exploitation.

The idea of prosperous economic opportunity greatly shapes societal viewpoints of immigrants. As, Johnson (2013, p. 16) states, “racial classification has had little to do with objective characteristics and everything to do with preserving white power and wealth.” Societal sentiment towards Chinese laborer, hired as cheap labor in replacement of White workers, had a violent outcome. In 1871, more than 20 Chinese men were lynched in Los
Angeles (Spring as cited by Tatum, 2017). In an effort to preserve White wealth, US sent an estimated one million Mexican labor workers to Mexico during the Great Depression, many of whom were citizens and previously brought to the United States for cheap labor (Molina as cited by Tatum, 2017). Women were also greatly impacted by immigration laws for governmental economic gain. One prime example is the encouragement by Japanese and Korean government for their women to emigrate to the United States as “picture brides” for arranged marriages (Tatum, 2017). The economic trends of exploitation continue to this day with agriculture and dairy workers; although, the government controls the larger trends of economic exploitation.

The “protection” and “preservation” of our “great American neighborhood” has fed into the incarceration complex. A current and popular anti-immigrant sentiment targets Mexicans as “illegal” or “alien” and Muslims as “terrorists” (Bell et al., 2016). The economic boost around this has been called the, immigration industrial complex (Golash-Boza as cited in Bell et al., 2016 p. 157). Bell et al. (2016) continue to describe the complex as the private and public sector economic gain from the criminalization and policing of immigrants. The economic gain can be witnessed through Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) contracts with private prisons and Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) contracts with jails. One of the major private prison companies, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) earned 1.7 billion in revenue, a quarter of which came through contracts with Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Fang as cited by Bell et al., 2016). Leading lobbyists for Arizona’s SB 1070 (“show your papers”) bill were from three major private prison companies, one of which was CCA (Bell et al., 2016). DHS is set to pay 13 jails in Southern California about $57 million (National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, 2013). In addition to economic gain for public and private sector based upon the bodies incarcerated, the government has also utilized individuals for military gain.
The government strongly encourages immigrants and Native Americans to enlist in military service. This encouragement is still witnessed on some Native American reservations with mandated Army Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) training. The benefit package offered to Native American youth and immigrants are the same benefit package offered to Black slaves and recently-colonized Native Americans, freedom and economic gain.

The challenges explored above highlight the racialization of our US borders based on economic and military fulfillment. However, it should be noted that not all immigrants had to face these economic challenges. As explored above, immigrants who have the financial backing to support their endeavors within the United States received higher priority for entrance, preserving the class divide.

Introduction

When Europeans of the Old World first encountered the peoples and cultures of the New World in the 1400s, they put to themselves a great question: not “Are you not a son and a brother, are you not a daughter and a sister?” … but rather: “Are these true men? Do they belong to the same species as us? Or are they born of another creation?”

– Stuart Hall (2017, p. ix)

The othering of individuals leads us to justify the belief of superiority which has lead us to actions of harm, violence, and pain. Christian Picciolini, a former white supremacist (now founder of Life after Hate) is quoted as saying that people who join hate groups are “‘not motivated by ideology’ but rather ‘a search for identity, community, and purpose,’” (Tillet as cited in Marder, 2017, para. 12). A positive ethnic/racial identity, based on pride and respect rather than superiority, can build our self-love and empathy towards others. Marginalized identities are well versed in the dominant culture’s ways. Even if they are physically removed
from their lifestyle, they are inundated by it through television, music, media, books, and school lessons (Tatum, 2017). Societally we silence conversations around racism and race. Our avoidance of discussing race furthers the perpetuation of Whiteness as the norm and removes the value of marginalized lives. The preservation of Whiteness also rids White individuals the opportunity to learn about anti-racist movements and activists.

This trend of racial silence can be witnessed within schools. In classrooms, it is acceptable to point out discrepancies based upon gender imbalances such as having more boys in science courses than girls (Michael, 2014). However, rarely is race pointed out in these situations, rather our implicit bias justifies the situations. The silencing of race occurs when we tell our children not to point out differences in other children of color because “it is not nice” or within our classrooms when we claim we do not see color differences (Tatum, 2017). Children see these differences and they are beautiful differences which we must acknowledge. The topic of ethnicity and race should be an explored topic for youth² rather than treated like a forbidden topic.

As a child of Iraqi immigrant, I have first-hand experiences of assimilation in the United States. I have witnessed the process of assimilation personally and also with my parents and siblings. The challenges and complexities about my own Iraqi-American identity led me to conduct this research. I felt drawn to explore ways that schools can begin incorporating

² The term youth will be utilized to highlight the age range between 2-19 years old, distinguishing specifications will be made when necessary. Distinguishing terms used are children/prepubescent youth which will cover ages 2-10 years old and adolescents/pubescent youth which will cover ages 11-19.
ethnic/racial identity exploration in the classroom in an effort to break-away from the damage of assimilation; a curriculum I wish existed in my schooling. When educators interviewed shared their experiences of assimilation, I could hear their unhealed wounds from their attempt to assimilate into dominate society. Therefore, I approached this research with the hope that schools can begin to amplify the histories and voices of the marginalized rather than indoctrinate them.

A quote that drives my lens of justice for marginalized identities is by Ruby Sales, “We don’t want to build bridges, we want to have access to human and civil rights. The problem with building bridges is the hierarchy in our society, some people build the bridges while others are directing traffic” (emphasis added; On Being, 2016). This quote demonstrates that we need to move beyond building relationships between peoples and incorporate an examination of our institutions, policies, and complacency. During our fight for justice, youth voices are commonly unheard, belittled, or pushed aside, therefore this research looks past “building bridges” and addresses human rights through change.

This research is driven by addressing how practitioners can incorporate ethnic/racial identity development in the classroom to break the pursuit of Whiteness. In order to address this question, this paper begins with the quest of understanding what is Whiteness, ethnic/racial identity, and school practices. This paper accomplishes this by exploring the racialization of immigrants and assimilation through a macro-, micro-, and meso-level analysis. It explores the preservation of Whiteness through immigration laws, the importance of positive ethnic/racial identity for youth of color, and the encouragement of assimilation in educational systems. The
research involved interviewing educators\textsuperscript{3} who are/have actively created a classroom environment to explore youth’s ethnic/racial identity. This paper is calling for a shift and awareness of race and discrepancies of representation in schools and society, through a social justice lens.

The limiting scope of this paper called for the research to focus only on the ethnic/racial aspect of the youth’s identity. However, this exploration of a singular aspect of identity is not to diminish the importance of all identities (e.g. religion, gender, sexuality, ability, and class) and the impact of their intersectionality. In addition, ethnic/racial identity is explored through generalized theories, rather than specific ethnic or racial groups’ identity development theories (e.g. Asian American Identity Development Model or Latino Identity Development).

\textbf{Literature Review}

\textbf{Ethnic/Racial Identity Development}

Societally it is common to identify immigrants based on their ethnicity, but by following this practice, we eliminate their experiences of discrimination within the racialized environment of the United States. As Sáenz & Manges Douglas (2015, p. 177) state, “the failure of assimilationist ideology to recognize racial elements of immigration, naturalization, employment, housing, education, crime, and welfare policies guarantees a model in which racial minorities including immigrants can never succeed” (see Appendix C: Assimilation Theories). They suggest that we need to begin looking past the ethnicity lens and instead approach from a

\textsuperscript{3} The term \textit{educators} will be utilized interchangeably with \textit{teachers} to be inclusive of non-formal education environments.
racialization perspective to fully understand the challenges immigrants faced while establishing themselves in the United States.

Therefore, within this paper, I transition from using both ethnic and racial terminology, however both of these terms are referencing students and immigrants of color while still incorporating culture, value, language, etc. It is important to note their differences. For example, some may identify ethnically as Irish, however racially they would be considered White. This paper is focusing on individuals who would be considered racially non-White and ethnically potentially identify as Caribbean, Latinx, Chinese, or Arab, etc. This distinction is to highlight the racialization of immigrants.

Similar to race, ethnicity is also a social construct, however this does not make it any less pertinent in our identities and lived experiences. Erik Erikson distinguishes, that our identity is contextualized by social, cultural, and historical influences (Tatum, 2017). As youth are defining their world, society, and themselves, they may feel lost and unsure to find the connection between all of these identifiers. This theoretical approach of defining ethnic/racial identity will show one level of self-identity, eliminating gender, sexuality, religion, etc. It is important for individuals to have a sense of positive self-identity, especially ethnic/racial identity as the world has always been highly racialized. However, for youth of color it is incredibly important for them to have a positive ethnic/racial identity because this is a concept that is introduced to them early on in life. This section will explore the Ethnic/Racial Identity Development Theory and its relation to education.

Phinney’s Ethnic Identity Development builds upon Erikson’s Identity Development Theory, by focusing on values, heritage, language, and connection to one’s ethnic group (Tatum, 2017). Phinney’s Ethnic Identity Development theory is made up of three phases:
First, Unexamined Ethnic Identity, when race or ethnicity has little meaning to the individual.

Second, Ethnic Identity Search, when individuals are seeking to understand their group identity and the issues that impact them.

Third, Achieved Ethnic Identity, when individuals have positive sense of their group identity (Phinney as cited in Tatum, 2017)

A similarity among identity development theories is that they are all long cyclical processes. The first stage, Unexamined Ethnic Identity, relies on others guiding your knowledge such as informal conversations with parents (foreclosure), or not acknowledging your own differences from dominant society (disclosure) (Robinson, n.d.). In the second stage, Ethnic Identity Search, youth may begin to learn the language, take ethnic courses, read books, etc. (Tatum, 2017). This process is about absorbing knowledge to understand your group identity. In many situations, this stage is sparked when one has encountered a race-related interaction (Tatum, 2017). Finally, in the third stage, a positive sense of one’s cultural or racial identity, youth recognize dominant society’s impact on their self-identity, as well as more acceptance towards other identities. The achievement of positive ethnic/racial identity is not seamless, rather it is a long and exhausting process.

As mentioned above, identity development is a cyclical process, meaning that if one has reached Achieved Ethnic Identity, they will not concretely remain in that position. Throughout this process of Ethnic Identity Development, individuals have already acknowledged dominant society as the norm (Tatum, 2017). Therefore, self-examination of identity is based on how far removed one is from dominant society’s identities. Individuals who have reached Achieved
Ethnic Identity may have doubts and revisit their differences as “irregular” based on dominant society.

Berry’s Acculturation Model takes into consideration the challenges within the exchange of non-dominant and dominant racial/ethnic identities. Berry’s Process of Acculturation Model (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010; Tatum, 2017 referenced as Phinney’s model) discusses four possible coping mechanisms as one is attempting to find their place in society; assimilation, withdrawal, integration, and marginalization:

1. Assimilation – Attempt to blend into the dominant group
2. Withdrawal – Avoid dominant group entirely and submerge oneself in the ethnic group
3. Integration – Blend within the dominant and home culture
4. Marginalization – Reject association with one’s ethnic group and be rejected by dominant culture.

When individuals attempt to assimilate, they disassociate from their ethnic group and deliberately lose their cultural values. Their withdrawal challenges one’s ability to thrive in society as many institutions are managed by the dominant group. Obtaining integration status, although positive, can be difficult and runs the risk of alienation while attempting to find a balance (Tatum, 2017; Gonzalez, Eades, & Supple, 2014). Although integration may be desirable, I question who defines the level of “blending” one can obtain in society. Tatum (2017) points out, adolescents within the marginalization phase may join gangs to find a sense of acceptance. I would argue that marginalization is not a separate mechanism. Instead the component of rejection by dominant culture is an underlying connection between these potential
stages. We see marginalization of varying degrees through unforeseeable barriers created by institutional discrimination.

Phinney’s model simplifies the various stages one must go through for identity development. In addition, Berry’s model displays the alternative ways one may define their identity achievement. We must take into consideration that neither of these models incorporates the complexities of the stages or the deep emotional torment youth may be feeling as they are searching for belonging. However, we must highlight the positives of having a robust racial identity within youth’s lives.

Being equipped with a solid foundation of self-love, gives us the courage to be more self-reflective and invested in our personal destiny. A few beneficial outcomes from having a positive ethnic identity are: emotional and social adjustment, coping skills, self-esteem, and academic and school adjustment (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia; Kiang, Yip, Gonzalez-Backen, Witkow & Fuligni; Umana Taylor, Diversi, & Fine; Yasui, Dorham & Dishion as cited by Gonzalez et al., 2014). It has been shown that the correlation of positive ethnic identity with positive self-esteem, is potentially not a cause and effect (Negy, Shreve, Jensen, & Uddin, 2003). As Porter & Washington (1993) state, positive ethnic identity lead to greater abilities to deal with racial and ethnic discrimination; especially when one can focus on the strengths of their racial grouping (Tatum, 2017). However, there is a reality we must continue to address: societal and institutional discrimination still controls our self-worth, dignity, and self-acceptance. The negative experiences of racism and discrimination have long lasting impacts.

When adults were called upon to reflect on their earliest race related memory they shared stories of curiosity, fear, avoidance, terror, and active bigotry (Tatum, 2017). Tatum adds many of these individuals never shared these stories or emotions to seek support after the incidences.
Racial encounters bring on emotionally charged reactions, especially when youth do not understand what parts of themselves are being attacked. Tatum informs us, “individually racism stifles our own growth and development…It alienates us not only from others, but also from ourselves and our own experiences.” (2017, p. 337). There is an emotional component within our connection to ourselves and others.

Michael (2014), reinforces the concept that our racial identity is not just how we identify, but how we feel about our race and what we understand of it. Our racial identity needs to go further than just exposure and knowledge: it needs to encompass our emotional attachment to this identity. However, as true for most people, validation relies heavily on outside sources. These sources of White superiority come in the format of media, classmates, educators, friends, family, and strangers (even online). When these sources use racial slurs, microaggressions⁴, or ask the daunting question, “where are you from,” the internalization is damaging. These experiences of racial identity rejection can lead youth to depression (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes as cited by Tatum, 2017). As mentioned above, youth may not be aware of what part of themselves are being attacked in order to seek help.

The experiences of racism that people of color endure may lead them to remain quiet as a coping mechanism, however Tatum mentions this can lead to self-doubt, internalized oppression⁵, or self-hate (2017). An individual can consciously accept internalized oppression such as work encounters with a supervisor (Hardiman, Jackson, Griffin, 2013). Incidents of

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⁴ Microaggressions are small incidents of racially charged interactions (Cross as cited by Tatum, 2017).
⁵ Internalized oppression is when individuals accept domination (messages or actions) of their group, or try to remove themselves from their group (Hardiman et al., 2013).
conscious internalized oppression can be a form of survival and self-preservation. In addition, internalized oppression can manifest unconsciously through group- or self-blame (Hardiman, Jackson, Griffin, 2013). On the contrary, another coping mechanism can be internalized domination. Internalized domination is when you turn against your own group to claim you are superior than them (Hardiman et al., 2013). These experiences can remove one’s sense of belonging within themselves or their group. The consideration of emotional turmoil one may experience while defining their ethnic/racial identity leads me to incorporate a sense of empowerment to combat these feelings and assist youth to find their voice.

I find Phinney’s Ethnic Identity Development theory sufficient, yet simplified. Therefore, I will integrate another theory to address a missing component to ethnic/racial identity development. Adams’s generalized social identity theory breaks down and condenses the similarities between different social identity theories into this process (2016):

1- Acceptance and internalizing of the dominant ideology and values as being superior.
2- Questioning, rejecting, and resisting dominant ideology and the oppressive systems associated with it which have impacted the marginalized identity.
3- Exploring, redefining, and developing a new sense of social identity that is not rooted in the norms and values of superiority or inferiority.
4- Integrating and internalizing the new identity along with a commitment to social justice (emphasis added).

There are many similarities between this theory and Phinney’s. Both theories are non-linear and in both the second phase involves questioning the dominant ideology whereas the third phase explores and develops a new sense of identity. However, the significant difference I want to emphasize and incorporate for Phinney’s is phase four. Phase four states that the individual with
an acceptance of the new identity is likely to take action for social justice. I think this is a crucial step to incorporate because it expands from teaching youth about oppression and history to the incorporation of liberation and action with a focus on empowerment. Tatum supports this notion by stating that learning about liberation movements can be a tool for empowerment (2017).

Utilizing a critical consciousness\(^6\) approach to ethnic/racial identity exploration can give youth a greater sense of empowerment. Tatum (2017) considers critical consciousness within children a gift to themselves and society. Hardiman et al. (2013, p. 33) say, “empowered target group members reject the inferior status assigned to them,” they add this can result in a sense of community, belonging, and pride with their identity group, as well as the desire to fight against injustices. Youth will be more vocal when they have a greater sense of grounding within themselves. I believe a commitment to social justice and ethnic/racial identity development is a more substantial approach when working with youth.

**Education & Ethnic/Racial Identity**

“Deep emotions lead to deep learning” (Sokolower, 2014, p. 227)

The ethnic/racial identity for youth begins at different age ranges. It can begin in a small capacity as early as two years old (Ramsey as cited in Tatum, 2017). Umana-Taylor et al. refers to pre-pubescent\(^7\) youth’s understanding as *pre-awareness* and adolescents’\(^8\) as *shared destiny* (as cited by Tatum, 2017). They define the differences as; pre-awareness is an attentiveness of

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\(^6\) Critical consciousness is Paulo Freire’s idea of people’s ability to acknowledge oppression and unite to create change for justice (Beck & Purcell, 2010).

\(^7\) *Children/Pre-pubescent* youth refers to the age range of 2-10 years old.

\(^8\) *Adolescents/pubescent* youth refers to the age range of 11-19 years old.
differences and occurrence of racially charged interactions, whereas shared destiny is an association and examination of oneself within their ethnic/racial. These are situations we can witness throughout youth’s lives.

Although pre-pubescent youth in the pre-awareness phase do not begin to distance themselves from the dominant group, they begin to see societal interpretations of their differences. Segura-Mora (2014) emphasizes, they may not comprehend institutional impacts of these differences but they associate them with power. Sample scenarios in pre-pubescent youth that demonstrate the realizations of differences can be seen within conversations about skin color. Tatum (2017) shares, a White child commenting on a child of color’s skin being different than theirs can be interpreted as the White child knowing his skin color is the norm and brown is a variant away from normal. She continues, the same can be said for children of color wishing to have white skin color which may not necessarily be interpreted as negative self-identity but it can be seen as the child associating power, beauty, or privilege, with whiteness. Adolescents’ understanding of shared destiny comes from imagery of the accomplishments, threats, and experiences of individuals from their group in comparison to other groups (Umana-Taylor et al. as cited by Tatum, 2017). This can be the perception of one’s racial group’s accomplishments as a guide for one’s future. On the downside, this can also be the internalization of stereotypes or threats against one’s racial group as one’s destiny. These levels of awareness are shaped largely by societal forces of power.

Harro describes that as we learn cultural socialization we begin to see how society works in different realms such as school, church, business, etc. (2013). They state it is during this time that we begin to understand whose behavior is acceptable and rewarded. Hardiman et al. (2013) add that it is also during these experiences that we begin to normalize oppression. This
normalization forces youth of color to conceptualize ways they need to assimilate to belong within society. One’s positive sense of self-identity is fragile. There is a yearning to belong, feel connected to others and have a sense of community. This does not have to be a community that we are exact replicas of, but a community which celebrates us. As briefly described above, many of these institutional realms, specifically schools, do not welcome anything that veers from the norm.

Historically, our education system has been used as an oppressive tool for people of color. This trend continues today in different forms, but it still exists. The discredited history of oppression and racism, within schools and the United States, exacerbates the structures of racism (Bonilla-Silva as cited by Michael, 2014). Families and youth of color can struggle within school systems because of the lack of representation within adults, distance caused by one-sided material, denial of racial tensions or experiences, and implicit bias from educators, classmates, and administration. Their ethnic/racial differences are frequently under attack by insults targeting brown and black skin tones, accents, lunch food, cultural differences, parental upbringing and more (Tenorio, 2014). These differences must be recognized and acknowledged to create a community of celebration.

While educators are actively seeking the trust of the students and families they must be racially aware and skillfully equipped to respond to these realities. These oppressive acts are perpetuated by the denial of White people to engage, explore, or acknowledge racial disparities in conversation, which preserves the racist status quo and racial privilege (Michael, 2014). The denial of a fire does not put the fire out, nor should we claim that you created the fire for pointing it out. This is frequently how many people of color are treated when they point out racism, leaving them to stay quiet rather than as DuBois states, “be a problem” (as cited by
Ahmed, 2012, p. 152). Educators’ understanding of how implicit bias within our racist society impacts these children will allow time for intervention before the children begin to internalize a sense of inferiority, or otherness. This understanding can begin with their understanding of their ethnic/racial identity and the role it plays in society.

Educators’ Ethnic/Racial Identity

Currently the United States is made up of 84.3 million immigrants with over 12 widely spoken languages (Zong & Batalova, 2017). Within our school systems over 85% of teachers are White (NCFES 2014 as cited by Michael, 2014). The impact, control, and power educators have on students can take on many different forms. As Michael highlights, “teachers are simultaneously gatekeepers and advocates, reformers and maintainers of the system,” (2014, p 12). This power is applied to their interactions with the students, their parents, and the system. Therefore, their willingness and dedication to building their racial competency goes beyond themselves, towards the betterment of society. Creating an anti-racist space must venture further than the curriculum and begin with the educators and space. This section will explore educators’ ethnic/racial identity, specifically utilizing Helms’ antiracist model when discussing White identity (see Appendix D: Whiteness).

The hope is that the educators’ positive racial identity process began while they were youth, leading to a positive racial identity as an adult. Educators of color may have begun their positive racial identity journey early on in their life as they were confronted by this at a young age. For White educators, their journey may not have occurred until adulthood. Educators grounded in a positive racial identity will be better suited to support their students’ development of their positive racial identity. Within this development, students will be able to resist against the mainstream focus of assimilation and appreciate differences and experiences. Educators’
exposure to race and racism will give them a critical lens to examine their classroom, group
dynamics, curriculum, and biases. As educators have built their foundational knowledge outside
the classroom, they can be ready to utilize it as a skill to create positive messages and
representation, facilitate impactful lessons and discussions, and challenge stereotypes within the
classroom (Michael, 2014). When educators promote racial identity exploration with youth, the
youth feel a sense of empowerment, a greater sense of self-worth, and a desire for more
connection (Miller as cited by Tatum, 2017). In many situations, educators may be the leaders
and instigators of racial discussions.

As explored above, not all students have ethnic/racial identity exposure at the same time. However, educators should bring these topics into discussion, especially for the students who are racially conscious and looking for that support (Michael, 2014). It is also through the realization of delayed White identity development, that educators must be deliberate and intentional to promote White identity exploration for their White students in the classroom. Ignoring the presence of White identity perpetuates the association of ‘normal’ with White and what is ‘different’ as who veers from White. Michael discusses that leaving White identity unexamined highlights the centrality of their identity and reinforce a sense of entitlement (Michael, 2014). White students have just as much to gain from a racial identity journey as students of color. In addition, White educators can serve as anti-racist role models for White youth. Educators unwilling to do this work can cause debilitating damage to their students and the classroom.

When educators’ racial identities are less developed than their students, it causes a regressive relationship (Helms; Thompson & Carter as cited in Michael, 2014). A regressive relationship limits the educators’ ability to provide them with a productive dialogue and a sense of investment in their journey. Educators inability to understand their racial identity and what it
represents can cause the repetitive damage that the children are feeling outside the classroom walls. Our children need to feel included, respected, and safe within the classroom to encourage their voices in the spaces and to learn from others.

Spaces can designate safety, representation, and overall classroom temperature of acceptance. As educators have a stronger racial identity they can begin to shape their messages of inclusion and pride within the classroom. Segura-Mora (2014, p. 292) quotes the responsibility that comes with educators’ power:

…If teachers don’t question the culture and values being promoted in the classroom, they socialize their students to accept the uneven power relations of our society along lines of race, class, gender, and ability. Yet teachers can-and should—challenge the values of white privilege and instead promote values of self-love.

Classroom approaches

The dominant culture’s practices of reframing historical events override the voices of those who struggled within the dominant society. These actions of rewriting history project those who challenge them as “ungrateful,” “troublemakers,” or “complainers,” illegitimizing lived experiences. This biased narrative is perpetuated within our curriculum, classroom, and educational policy. The shift in narrative and the preservation of these practices limits student’s validation of identity, awareness, critical thinking skills, and hope for change. Anti-racist pedagogy will be explored in this section of how to incorporate students’ ethnic/racial identity, cultural, linguistic, and lived experiences into the classroom in an effort to shift the narrative.

Anti-racist pedagogy is an educational philosophy to examine the political and societal injustices enacted upon people of color within the United States and internationally (colonialism and globalization) (Miner, 2014). For the clarity of this section we will refer to anti-racist pedagogy as the above definition with the additional focus on *ethnic/racial identity exploration*,...
to focus on power, privilege, oppression, and identity. Lee, highlights a concise way to begin the process of creating an anti-racist pedagogy (Miner, 2014):

1- Surface stage – Examining representation within the curriculum. What sides of complexity are being shared? Whose truths are being read?

2- Integration of curriculum – Don’t treat the lessons of diversity as stand-alone units. Rather than having a specific month focused on one unit, such as Black History Month, interweave these lessons and voices into every level throughout the school year. Whose voices are being left out?

3- Structural change – Incorporate lessons of structural oppression, examine current realities within all lessons. Lee provides an example of examining statistics related to racial disparities within math classes rather than sports or weather. What is another way we can formulate these lessons to incorporate racially oppressive trends?

4- Social change – Similar to Adams’s generalized identity model, taking action to address these oppressions can bring a sense of empowerment and hope. Encourage the students to change these injustices. What can we do to change this?

Once again, the concept of social justice is incorporated to encourage students to understand their power to fight injustice. However, youth voices are rarely called upon. During a high school political action movement in Tucson, Arizona (see Arizona bill HB 2281), adults assumed educators were planting the ideas in the youth’s minds (Bigelow, 2014). This disbelief of youth’s possession of critical thinking skills or their desire for change is replicated within our curriculums. Michael (2014) discusses without changing the school’s system the students are a manifestation of the symptoms. As ethnic/racial pre-awareness begins at a young age, so can
youth activism (e.g. letter writing campaigns). Louise Derman-Sparks and her colleagues (as cited in Tatum, 2017, p. 129) discuss the long-term impacts of social change skills:

If we teach children to recognize injustice, then we must also teach them that people can create positive change by working together… Through activism activities children build the confidence and skills for becoming adults who assert, in the face of injustice, “I have the responsibility to deal with it, I know how to deal with it, I will deal with it.” This investment in youth is an investment in a just world.

These practices are not a one-step fix all; rather educators and schools must work together to incorporate this approach (see Appendix E for more resources). As school administration has power and oversight of the curriculum they must be supportive of this curricular and systematic shift. As this approach highlights, social change incorporates the minds, but one must also examine the school system and their anti-racist practices. As Lee (Miner, 2014) mentions, there needs to be representation of staff and parents in the schools and their voices heard in impactful decisions. Students of color and their families interact with the entire school personnel, meaning their feeling of inclusion and safety must expand from the classroom to all school personnel.

Parents

Parents may feel powerless to take on the role of advocate for their child within school systems; therefore, schools should be a collaborative involvement with parents. This requires us to create a flexible and dynamic school environment rather than encouraging assimilation (Michael, 2014). Michael (2014) discusses, school environments may be unfamiliar to families due to unwritten rules, lack of direct communication, or flexible rules that are socially accepted as “how things are done around here.” She continues to say that the lack of explicit boundaries further marginalizes those who are unaware of these unwritten rules. If parents lack the social
capital to navigate the school culture, they may not be aware of the possibilities to self-advocate for their child’s sake.

The parent’s distanced feeling in the school systems can model the child’s internalization of their acceptance in that structure. Tatum (2017) states, if adults are willing to do their own personal work to confront racism and develop their racial/ethnic identity, they can support their child’s sense of pride of their identities even within adulthood. However, parents attended these same type of schools, therefore they did not have access to unbiased education. This can be a partly larger challenge for immigrant parents to understand their child’s difficulties, especially if they have not been able to explore what their racial identity means within the United States context as many may have been the dominant identity within their own country.

The connection between parents and school is complex with varying outcomes. On one hand youth are looking to hear their parents’ and grandparents’ stories, “unwilling to remain… ashamed of their identity and past” (Takaki, 2013, p. 72). However, on the other hand youth do not want to look to their parents as role models instead relying on peer groups (Tatum, 2017). From the parent’s perspective, they wonder why their children are more willing to learn about their ancestral history in schools than at home, yet they are proud their children have access to this knowledge as they never did (Carberry, 2014). These mindsets may seem opposing, or complex, but there is no denial in the importance of families being an asset in the youth’s ethnic/racial identity. Sokolower (2014, p. 230) emphasizes the incorporation of families in classroom, “this is particularly true for immigrant students, who sometimes feel they must leave their family and culture behind to ‘make it’ in the US.” This is an important concept for schools, educators, parents, and youth to understand the cultural and familial roots.

Conclusion
Some students will have access to ethnic study courses once they enter university which will provide them with a deeper understanding about their group identity (Tatum, 2017). However, this opportunity is not granted for everyone as not all will have access to attend higher education. Nor should we require youth of color to wait until university to begin their ethnic/racial identity journey. In addition, as Tatum mentions above, youth are developmentally prepared to explore these topics early on in life (2017). We can see the positive impact ethnic/racial identity exposure has on youth through Ortega’s words. Ortega (2014, p. 112), a participant in the Mexican American Studies program shares the impact of learning about their identity:

“When we know our history, we no longer are lost souls, roaming and looking for our self-identity; we become confident individuals united for a cause. In class, I saw how my peers had grown spiritually because of [their ethnic studies classes]. This quote demonstrates how the identity journey is connected to our spiritual and soulful sense of belonging.

This literature review explored the stages ethnic/racial development and how it intertwines with schools. It did this through exploring ethnic/racial development theory and the importance of positive ethnic/racial identity, the need for educators’ positive ethnic/racial identity, and classroom approaches to create space and intention for this journey. The research methodology, data presentation, and analysis will explore educators’ experiences and reflections with assimilation, youth ethnic/racial identity exploration, and classroom approaches for celebration of differences. As much of this research emphasized personal reflection of identities and journeys, the educators interviewed were called upon to share their own stories and reflections.
Research Methodology

This research was conducted with a critical race lens to explore the perpetuation of assimilation or pursuit of whiteness through three levels, macro, micro, and meso. The macro lays out the racialization of immigration policies in the United States, the micro dissects youth’s ethnic/racial identity development, and the meso unfolds assimilation encouragement within the educational systems in the United States. Within this exploration the research focused on educators’ experiences and practices with youth’s Ethnic/Racial Identity Development and classroom environment.

This research was conducted through secondary and primary sources such as scholarly journals, textbooks, resource books, news articles, blog posts, and educator interviews. The educator interviews occurred one-on-one either through Skype or phone call, as no educators interviewed were in close proximity. All interviews were recorded for ease of transcription, were conducted in English, and focused on United States work experience.

These interviews were medium structured and the researcher referenced an interview guide to introduce themed questions, but interviews went in an organic direction allowing the practitioners to find a natural flow of insights and perspectives they deem most valuable to the research. These themed questions were grouped into three categories: Assimilation (A), Youth Identity (YI), and Classroom Approaches (CA). These themes were created to limit the time consumed of the interviewee and to allow flexibility and depth. The researcher selected the themes per interviewee. These themes were either picked by the educator, based upon their work experience, personal knowledge of educator, or published work. For example, if an educator published an article that concentrated on pedagogy, the researcher would pick a different theme. Most educators were asked questions from two different themes, however there were core
questions that overlapped within different themes. If educators focused on specific themes during the interview, the researcher asked follow-up questions to explore it further. The goal of interviewing educators was to understand their identity, their focus on youth identity, and tangible practices to create safe classrooms.

   Educators were inquired to participate in the research through a purposive and snowball approach. Educators were individuals known to the researcher or contacted online through their associated educational reform organization. Following the snowball approach, if educators recommended others to participate in the interviews, the researcher followed up and scheduled recommended educators when possible. After conducting the interviews, I found the educators had a critical lens to their presence in the classroom; although, all these educators were well versed in the material and provided excellent classroom and personal reflections.

   All five educators have worked within the US public school system; however, none are currently teaching at K-12 public schools. Three of the five are associated with education reform organizations, one of which is also professor for education courses. One is working at a supplementary education program for low-income youth of color. All educators have worked in different regions ranging from the East Coast, Southeast, West Coast, Southwest, Rocky Mountain, and Pacific Northwest. All educators have worked in low income and ethnically/racially mixed schools and anecdotes from higher income or mono-cultured schools will be noted as they deviate from this setting. A basic table highlighting other demographics of the educators is listed below:
Limitations

During the interviews, educators were asked to reflect on their experiences in the classroom. Many of the educators, however, had been removed from the setting of a classroom, and this distance could have limited their recall for anecdotes. In addition, I believe there is an authenticity a research can obtain when meeting with an interviewee face-to-face, therefore the phone interviews may have been limiting in my capacity to build a stronger bond with the interviewees. Lastly, the research would have been stronger to hear from the youth themselves to eliminate the educators’ projection of the youth’s identity journeys.

Data Presentation

Goals

All the educators were asked what their goals for their students and themselves were within the classroom. The goals mentioned went beyond content and curriculum goals. Educators shared their intention of ensuring that students feel love and safety, an awareness of the injustices of the world, and hope to combat these injustices. A previous kindergarten educator wanted the students to feel safe and happy in the schools and to make the schools a safe place for them and their families. This meant ensuring that parents of color and immigrant parents had a voice and impact on the school and the classroom. These levels of inclusion were furthered by educators.
promoting a critical consciousness and giving their youth the tools to fight against the issues that plague them in society.

Three of the strategies used by M. R. to help the students fight for their place in society are making them vocal, supporting them, and removing shame. He encourages his students to be very vocal, to get their message out, and to inspire others to create change. He supports his students by making sure they know he is in their corner because sometimes their parents cannot be there to support them. M. R. tries to remove the shame the students’ may feel towards their people and surroundings with education,

Looking at their communities without shame. I think it's so easy for all of them, myself included, to look at your community with shame. But if you're educated about why things look the way they do... [their mind can shift from] "why can't we get it together," [to] “oh wait, this is us surviving through you trying to kill us.

The goals that educators embraced for themselves were about how to better themselves for their students. This ranged from practicing self-care, being passionate, reaching the students, and being a good educator. They aimed to be better and more connected to the students’ and communities, whether that was through attending professional development trainings, staying up all night for a lesson plan, or establishing expectations to make a mark on the students’ lives.

One educator’s remarks of how they view themselves within classroom walls resonated with me:

I always see education as a political act and sort of as an act of organizing and activism in a way. The goal for myself is to be effective at doing that work, being able to engage students - pedagogically but also engage students in a way that helps move them…

**Assimilation**

The section covers the educators’ experiences of assimilation, assimilation within the United States and schools, and students’ awareness levels of assimilation.

*Educators’ Reflections*
This section begins with three educators’ experiences of assimilation to capture the deep resonance and multiple layers of impact. When the educators were asked about their personal experiences with assimilation the stories were powerful and flowed out in masses. Their stories encompassed components of personal appearance, beauty standards, physical presentation, and language.

M. R. recounted his mothers’ influence of making sure he and his siblings were presentable at work functions. She wanted the personal appearance of her children to be representative of someone that was acceptable by White professionals. This included combing his kinky hair and dressing in khakis without loud prints or extravagant style of fashion all to project an “acceptable” identity. These attempts were a form of battling the stereotypes associated with Black men. M. R. interpreted his experiences with assimilation as, “you need to look as white as possible without being white.” This expanded to the internalization of dark skin being bad. His family members also encouraged him to take precautions when in the sun so his skin would not darken.

N. J. shared her experiences of changing her tone of voice during work meetings to sound sweeter so people would not associate her as the angry Black woman. She also discussed the common responses directed towards White women when they are emotional versus when Black women are emotional, because of the “Black women being the beacon of strength” stereotype. As N. J. reflected on these moments she expressed, “…you just figure out how to work within those truths.” Her experience displays another layer of assimilation, the restraint of personal identity for workplace survival.

W. O. reflected on his personal journey of assimilation by reflecting on his father’s journey of assimilation. He highlighted his father’s desire of being economically successful,
never learning Chinese, mainly dating White women, etc. W.O. discussed his desire to preserve his Chinese culture and language, but having never been taught Chinese he struggles with his identities. This challenge persists in his attempts to find a balance of his half Chinese identity and half White identity. He poignantly pointed out the challenge many people of color struggle with in the United States, “makes me think through who am I relative to a White supremacist backdrop.”

Assimilation in the United States

Next, educators were asked how they think assimilation impacts our lives in the United States, both positively and negatively. None could think of positive impacts. Many were even quite shocked that there would be a positive. Educators mentioned ideas of shame, belonging, appropriation, and White supremacy.

M. R. talked about shame and the feeling of inadequacy by not fitting into a societally idealized version of “belonging.” Although M. R. was born in the United States, he has never felt like he truly belonged here. He discussed how these influences tear down your self-worth and your true self. He painted the idea of dissonance of not belonging, relating it to the disconnect between our mind and our soul. He explained, the soul wants to stay true and it’s fighting with you because it wants you to be your truest self, but society is tearing that down for you to be a different self in order to belong. Furthering this metaphor, he painted the quest to try to combine what your soul and heart feel within your physical self.

N. J. discussed the duality of the United States of assimilation and appropriation. The societal and political expectation for one to assimilate in order to fit in the country and strip away their differences, along with, the dominant culture’s ability to decide what is worthy in order to appropriate for economic gain. She staged the metaphor of appropriation, “[As people] come into
the US, [there are] gates and you go through them and we say, "We like that, we like that. Give it to us. You can't even do it, but we'll do it." This example displays the duplicitous economic control around culture and race.

W. O. made a strong case as to how assimilation cannot be seen as a positive:

…If we maintain assimilation, if we thought of it as a positive then we're basically trying to stand on the shoulders of white supremacy. Unless we can think of a common culture that is everybody in a way to balance all this sort of stuff, I'm not for those conversations around common culture. I think we need to have space for everybody to be who they are cause otherwise it's racism and white supremacy.

Assimilation in Schools

Educators continued to share ways they see these assimilation practices take place in their classrooms. In addition to the curriculum and sanitization of historical events (e.g. Christopher Columbus historical lessons eliminating Native American narratives), they shared historical presence of education, need for belonging, work place representation, high stakes examination, and professional pursuits.

N. J. discussed the historical presence of education as a tool for oppression and indoctrination, being at the core of its current presence. In addition, M.R. described the classroom experience as an ever-revolving door for students of color when they attended the predominantly White school he worked at, “One of the effects of assimilation, they just couldn't stick it out, they just had to leave. Not because they were weak, but because they wouldn't get hit anymore with, 'you suck' [and] 'you're different.'”

At another school in which M. R. worked, he describes the crafting of the school administration and faculty representation as a form of promoting assimilation. M. R. recounted the struggles he faced just to get a job at a school (with a predominantly Black male student population) that already promised him a position in which he relocated his family to the state. In
the long run, they never offered him the position although they had him work as an interim sub despite raising the classes’ test scores during his time there. At the end of his time at the school, the educator he was working along with him apologized for the turmoil he was dragged through telling him, “you were the first black male teacher [the principal’s] ever hired.’ She's been the school principal for 20 years.” N. J. further supported M. R.’s recount of assimilation in schools through the mentality of the educators in the classroom. She stated, “[Teachers] hold political and social views that deny the humanity of the students that they are given the tasks of enlightening and empowering. It’s horrible what our students are encountering.”

In addition to the overall school environment, W. O. added the high stakes testing that schools have implemented forcing educators to teach to these exams. Among other inefficiencies and discrepancies with the high stakes testing, W. O. spotlighted the erroneous evaluation. He declared, “…Students' whose first language isn't English, you're asking to measure their mathematics knowledge and their fluency in English on the test. Which are two measurements at once and that makes for a bad assessment.” He also believes this process of assimilation can follow students into university around their studies and careers pursued. Rather than students pursuing careers they are most interested in, they aim for economic success or high-status professions to obtain the ever-proclaimed American dream. He stated, “We must be clear there are racialized aspects of how that stereotype was constructed.”

Youth’s Awareness

When educators were asked about their students’ awareness levels of assimilation and racial issues they mentioned influences were current events, family, and curriculum.

M. R. discussed the events around a highly politicalized city in the South in which he currently works. The recent protests in the community after the shooting of an unarmed Black
man have been referred to as “riots” by the educators and students (at his predominantly White school). These events were emotionally and politically challenging to address in the classroom and with school administration. At his predominantly Latinx after-school program he discussed the impacts of the recent DACA hearings (to end the program) and the impact it would have on the students, creating a highly cautious feeling throughout the school environment. He also shared another local story of a student being kicked out of a class for speaking in Spanish. This story had a big impact as it hit close to home for the students in the after-school program. Some students, however, did not understand the significance of this altercation which created an opportunity to discuss power. The students were impacted by these realizations, being brought to tears for having their eyes open to the injustices. M. R. also pointed out in his classrooms that students of color are more aware of these injustices than their White counterparts.

N. J. supplemented the previous information by talking about the awareness level stemming from the parents and their ancestral background. She pointed out the dichotomy on the reservation of being very patriotic with an instituted mandatory JROTC program (military program for youth) for 9th graders which challenges their sense of Native identity and pride with their sense of patriotic duty to serve the United States. She discussed the impacts of Native parents being rooted in their cultural identity being able to pass that on to their children to have a foundational grounding and combat the misinformation engrained in their societal and educational influences.

W. O. discussed the impact of creating a curriculum to meet the students’ needs. He was given the opportunity to create his own curriculum while working at an alternative high school for drop-outs. This curriculum was crafted to the students’ lived realities. He added, the importance of making the distinction between race and racism and assimilation, “I'm not sure if
they were aware of assimilation as a process…We might understand race and racism in very clear ways, but we may not understand assimilation as a specific process that certain groups go through and experience…”

Identity

Three educators were asked questions about identity, however many of these questions overlapped with other themes. Their responses described the importance of identity exploration, moments of students’ journeys, challenges of dual identities, exploration of identities within the classroom, and reflections from the educators.

Importance of Identity Exploration

Educators’ ideology of the importance of racial/cultural identity exploration showcased empathy, connectedness, love and acceptance, activism, and pessimism.

L. A. painted the picture of our identities being the root of us understanding ourselves in order to understand others, building our skill of empathy, acceptance, and connectedness. She detailed how the celebration of our identity allows us to celebrate others’ identities, their differences and their similarities. She mentioned this can begin at a young age by embracing differences and allowing students to be proud of their differences, then progress to the complexities of the meanings of these differences in the larger context as youth get older.

W. O. discussed the exclusion that youth can feel when they do not see their identity being incorporated in the classroom, making it difficult to connect to the material. Another notion he added is the concept of students being activists, “attending to their identities and their development helps them have more agency and more power as they move through their lives.”

N. J. shared similar insight about students, specifically high school students, being powerful activists. She stated when our education institution lowers the standards it is because they are
scared of the power of students in a revolution, in reference to Noam Chomsky’s take on education as indoctrination. She continued with examples of high school led activism from Civil Rights Movement and South Africa Soweto Uprising. She also described the difficulty educators can have within this political act:

I'm telling you from the inside, the way that our stuff is set up there is no way - unless a teacher is going to work so much against the system that they're going to get fired, is there a way to really make our schools the bed for change or justice.

M. R. shared his pessimism and frustration too. His comes from the feeling that we are still fighting the same fight for justice and recognition. He told the story of Civil Rights activist John Lewis participating in the sit-in against violence against Black people after Dylan Roof (Charleston shooter of 9 Black church goers), M. R. pointed out, “So yea we could celebrate that Lewis is in Congress but he still has to sit on the floor and beg not to be shot.”

**Students’ Identity Journey**

When the educators were asked about moments they witnessed students’ journey of positive self-identity, they mentioned moments of classmates’ approval, overcoming challenges, sparking new interests, and furthering realizations of inter-connectedness.

Students who share new stylish looks and receive the classes’ approval and compliments make them feel a sense of pride to have these external displays accepted by their community. M. R. shared moments that the students would come back with a double hairline (hair style predominantly seen on Black men) and receive the students’ compliments in their classroom of predominantly students of color. In comparison, M. R. shared the moment the one Mexican-American student in a predominantly White school showed up to class in a retro sweatshirt with Biggie’s face on it and the White students did not understand why this would be cool. M. R. highlighted his observations of when people are experiencing moments of positive self-identity:
There's many accounts of people within their own communities feeling (display of positive self-identity) themselves. I don't know how much I've seen a white person coming into a brown area, or a brown person in a white area, I've seen them try though.

M. R. continued to tell the story of the Mexican-American student who started to feel alienated and alone when others could not share these moments of celebration with him. M. R. witnessed the student begin to emotionally and mentally check out of classroom socialization.

N. J.’s shared stories of students overcoming the negativity educators and society imposed on the students. She stated:

Be it sports, academic, or socially…I've seen that pride when it comes from “I'll show them.” I don't even think it's a very powerful/helpful thing because that shouldn't be what [they’re] using [their] energy for. It's almost like it's preparing them for the real world, because for the rest of their life they're going to have to prove to people, “no I actually am good enough, let me show you.” …I've had students who have surprised themselves for sure too. Like they started to believe the lie.

W. O. discussed the difficulty and rarity to see the impacts in the moment. He has seen these impacts of their journey through end of term or quarter school evaluations when students share their stories of their journey or their appreciations of seeing things in new ways. Previous students have reached out years later to inform him how his classes inspired them to study certain topics relatable to their ethnic identity and history in university. He also discussed an in the moment awareness when students understand how they are impacted by systems. He shared:

Having seen my students…make connections between ‘here's how institutionalized racism functions in the court system and precincts’ which is something a lot of my students were connected to or conditionally had in their lives as well…Coming to critical consciousness around how these systems functions and how they fit into those systems was probably the biggest way that I saw it.

*Youth’s Dual Identities*

Educators shared varying challenges they noticed in their students with their dual identities.
G. G., who taught at an immersion bilingual school, noticed that her younger students who were Spanish dominant denied their native Spanish speaking skills as they got older, pretending to forget words. G. G. stated students started to understand the power around English dominant ideology in the United States. She related her students’ feeling to a Mexican American co-worker sharing her story of always feeling like she had to choose which identity she had to be at any given moment because she wasn’t allowed to be both. She added to the complication of the choice by stating, “I have to choose and I never know which one I want.”

N. J. shared about her time teaching on the reservation and discusses the differences between the reservation culture and mainstream American culture, the yearning the students had to leave the reservation, and feeling torn that they will not be accepted on the reservation anymore. She talked about this struggle as a conflict, ‘‘how do I hold my identity tightly as a Native person while it is under attack.’ But then at the same time, ‘I need to get out of here and I need to go do something different.’”

W. O. pointed out the gap that students face around the amount of themselves and their home culture they can bring with them in school and the classroom. This gap broadens for many immigrant families as their home life is not replicated within dominant society. He talked about an educators’ ability to narrow that gap between their home life and school life by creating a space where they can coexist. He highlighted this as a potential reason to why White middle-class students do better in schools because so much of themselves are seen in that space and they struggle less with becoming acquainted with the environment as it reflects much of their home life.

Youth’s Identity in the Class
When educators were asked what identity exploration looked like in their classroom, they discussed bringing in the historical and statistical facts that can support the students’ lived experiences of systemic oppression and liberation. However, another educator shared the difficulty this presented. She discussed how there was no deliberate program in place for identity exploration. She noticed certain units incorporated identity exploration, but overall it was lacking in the classroom and curriculum environment. She also brought up the role of the parents and how the messaging that the student hear on a daily basis can undo much of the work that is done in the classroom.

When asked about actions students took to suppress their identity, many educators had stories re-emphasizing students’ assimilation to Eurocentric ideals. These stories included students’ changing their names, being ashamed of their kinky hair or dark skin color, denying their bilingual language ability, or denying their ethnicity and claiming American identity only. W. O. brought up outlier incidences of self-hate or internalized oppression noticed in his undergraduate course such as, “immigrants themselves speak out about undocumented immigrants...Like one set of immigrants is okay and another set needs to be taken care of.”

**Educators’ Reflections**

To gain a greater understanding of the educators’ visions of themselves in classroom they were asked about their personal identities within the classroom and the challenges they faced.

G. G. shared candidly about the challenges she had regarding her identity as a White educator teaching Spanish. Although she is a fluent Spanish speaker she would be honest with the students about her journey of learning language and the humbleness one needs to ask for help because they will not always have the complete vocabulary. She tried to model her value, passion, and pride for the Spanish language for the students.
G. G. also talked about White identity in the larger context, having never had to go through the racial experiences of educators of color. She added many White educators are unaware of the racial experiences educators of colors go through and reflected on her actions as an ally during these situations. She talked about White identity within the context of racialization:

White people are not ever forced to make that decision [of dual identity], your identity is very addictive, if you're a White person you can claim whatever ethnic heritage you want and people are like, ‘that's great’. You can learn another language and people are like, ‘that's wonderful.’ You can be like I'm 1/16th native American and people are like ‘that's fantastic’ because you have this privilege of being white.

W. O. on the contrary shared his experiences as a K-12 educator, more specifically his exchanges with his predominantly White colleagues. He recounted a time in his career that he was teaching a radical African American studies class. His colleagues in the History Department devalued his teaching of this course, attacking W. O. and requesting that the school stop offering it. He also shared White facility members tried to claim his research (concentrating on multicultural pedagogy) is invalid or unworthy. He emphasized this by stating these are frequent occurrences of faculty of color having to prove their competency.

When asking W. O. about his experiences teaching future educators in university and how this shapes his identity, he mentioned his own ethnic/racial identity exploration beginning in undergraduate when he took an Asian Americans studies course and how that helped him grow. He emphasized, “I feel like that's part of the nature of getting a good education is that it helps you discover yourself in deeper, more complicated ways.”

He continued to discuss the reason he believes educators should understand their ethnic/racial identity:
If you're going to be a public-school teacher you've got to teach everybody, you need to have a disposition that helps you understand everybody. If you can't go on a bit of a journey of discovery for yourself then you're not going to be as effective as you could be at reaching all these other people.

**Classroom Approaches**

Educators shared their ideology to establish their classroom space, practices to explore identity, support from school administration, and their reflections.

**Classroom Ideology**

The educators mentioned various components or ideologies that they took into consideration while creating their classroom and curriculum such as creating authentic spaces for children, integrating culturally responsive practices, and ensuring safe interactions with students.

Authentic spaces for children allow them to learn while using their skills rather than learning solely from worksheets. G. G. gave an example, “They learn to write by writing books. Kindergarteners can see themselves as writers and they can write in different genres and they can produce books...” L. A. encourages bringing the children’s cultural learning styles and hands on lessons into the classroom, with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. She also encourages educators to allow movement and noise in the classroom for students’ learning engagement and styles.

For classroom environments to be holistic in approach, educators’ interactions with students goes a long way. G. G. added the need to incorporate social justice topics even within her kindergarten classes to build an environment of respect and understanding. M. R. discussed

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9 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is an approach to go to the students’ cultural and linguistic experiences and bringing them into the class material (Hollie, n.d.)
his approach to interactions with the students on a personal level by avoiding the shaming of students in front each other, especially girls of color. He pointed out that these students do not need one more negative voice telling them they are not enough. M. R.’s reflection of his own learning style in the classroom inspires him to customize strategies for different students’ needs. An ideology he embraces in the classroom is to use a growth mindset approach, rather than labeling students as smart or incapable, inspiring them that they can accomplish it if they work towards it rather than restricting their potential.

*Practices Integrated*

Practices the educators took to create their classroom environment emphasized the need for the class to feel like a community. They mentioned parent involvement, family ideals, and representation.

Educators talked about the benefits and limitations of parental involvement. To some educators it was important to have the parents involved and welcomed into the space in order to bring their culture and lessons into the classroom. One educator clarified rather than making the families fit into your idea, allow them to create their own style in the space. These practices allow the students and their parents to learn from one another and explore culture on a familial level. One educator pointed out the need to find a balance with parent involvement. He notices that when parents take a step back, students feel they have more freedom to explore or experiment with music, food, books, or personalizing their learning style to their needs rather than projecting a certain image for their parents’ sake.

All the educators talked about establishing the classroom space as a family away from family. They strive to include practices that honored, accepted, and valued differences. One educator proposed sharing in a vulnerable way to build the sense of community. To clarify, this
does not have to be traumatic moments in their life, rather it can be writing personal narratives, or stories about the origin of their name. Another educator pushed the concept of classroom space to community space, encouraging educators to get outside the classroom with their students by eating with them in the cafeteria, going to football games, and other communal events. She emphasized the importance of students seeing educators in more capacities than the authoritative figure in the front of the class.

All the educators stressed the importance of utilizing literature that is representative of the student population. They mentioned it does not have to be their exact replica in the book, but it is important to have an identity they connect with and see a resemblance. Educators need to broaden their literature options from White characters and authors. One educator praised the incorporation of music in the classroom as a way to share a passion with the students and expose them to different musicians. Specifically, musicians of color or international, being cautious not to promote racism or appropriation of music, but to praise and admire the culture.

The educators all shared anecdotes of holding lessons either proactively or reactively about different discrimination incidences that happened in the classroom. As a result, from these lessons they witnessed an eagerness from the students to learn more about their differences. In one situation, a class that struggled with incidents of exclusion based on skin color and cultural differences, asked to hold a potluck so they could learn more about each other. Another student who was shy and removed from the class, started teaching his classmates about his language because of their new acceptance around differences.

Another educator mentioned the amazement within the students when they started to realize the differences between each of them. L. A. stated, “it's a really cool thing for them to find their own unique place in that.” She added the complexity for these realizations of the
expansive identities is when they get older they become more aware of the tensions of what it means to have these differences in this country.

*Schools’ Environment of Support*

Educators were asked to discuss the school environment and how it fostered or challenged an inclusive space. They brought up areas around the freedom of curriculum, principals, educators, accessibility and politics.

Educators talked openly about their experiences with schools that had restrictive versus flexible curriculum options. They mentioned the need for educators to have freedom and creativity with their curriculums, but also the reality that such a culture is not usually promoted by schools. G. G. emphasized, “it’s significant that those kinds of scripted programs [Open Court] only get adopted in urban public schools.” M. R. highlighted the cyclical forms of oppression with our curriculums and testing:

> The curriculums in public schools are just racist, because our foundations' racist. Whenever you try to do something counteractive they're like “no, don't do that return to your curriculum.” [You can’t] break off from that, because we set up these tests. Like we created a perfect system that you can't leave. If your kids don't perform well on these tests you don't have a job, you don't have a job you're just another statistic who can't provide for your family.

Educators shared stories about their experiences with supportive and non-supportive principals. They praised the principals that invested in relationships with the educators, students, and the parents. One educator correlated bad leadership with low morale among educators due to the principal’s lack of support and trust. M. R. also shared a story of a principal that overtly restricted classroom experiences of racial exploration. During Black History Month, the school principal of a predominantly White private school wanted to shut down a lesson surrounding a book about the largest slave auction in the United States. M. R. complied with the principal’s
requests and stopped reading the book. The students were angry and had their parents email him asking him if he would continue the book. The principal’s behavior and restrictions were clearly racially charged whether intentional or not, the impact was evident. He noticed many incidents of these situations such as when the entire school was decorated for St. Patrick’s Day but the principal denied representation of people of color in curricular lessons and hiring opportunities. The school’s celebration of St. Patrick’s Day can be seen as a form of expected assimilation to a widely accepted US holiday. Ironically enough, this school was located in a black church which was lending their space to the school.

Educators mentioned the difficulty of an inclusive school environment based on other educators, or their colleagues. L. A. mentioned the draw for many educators to certain schools. She separates this from educators flocking to areas of comfort to educators flocking to areas of “saving”. She stated educators may be looking for schools they are comfortable with because it is similar to their own experience as a student which can be a challenge because they may not be willing to take as many innovative risks in the classroom. In comparison, other educators may be drawn to certain schools because of a savior complex. She said when they fall into this category it can be full of pity, “they start to pity the children, pity the community, ‘the kids can't do as much because of this…’ and not really holding them to as high standards.”

In addition to the people in the schools, accessibility of content was mentioned. This can be specifically true for immigrant and refugee families to have access to material in their native language. One educator mentioned the need for translation at meetings and materials to make parents feel welcome and included. She added schools cannot be expected to provide for this without funding, which is where the school districts need to provide support and funding to prevent the further marginalization of non-native English speakers.
The expansion of district support was mentioned by two educators, in context of gentrification and political racialization of district zones. One educator stated they were informed the separation was supposedly a way to get more funding, but instead it just furthered them from everyone else without a funding increase. The school therefore relied on grants and donations for books and playgrounds but the school itself was falling apart with bullet holes and fifty-year-old desks covered in graffiti and dirt. The other educator described the visible line of poor and wealthy with brown and white. He mentioned the school district tried to address this problem by busing in students from the poor neighborhood to attend the wealthy school.

**Educators’ Reflections**

Educators vividly and intently recounted their own stories of their identity exploration during cultural exploration moments in the classroom.

G. G. shared her realizations when she worked at a bilingual immersion school. She noticed her behavior and comfort levels when discussing candid issues with parents at the school, but this comfort was only with White parents. G. G. realized she had not gained the trust of the parents of color nor was she engaging them to voice their concerns. After she realized and analyzed the situation she made deliberate actions to address it. One approach she took was changing her class assistants, previously three White women, who she had always relied heavily on to receive critical feedback about the school were now two women of color and one white woman. In addition to the classroom assistant relationships, she cultivated relationships with other families in the class. The principal, also noticing the disparities, started morning affinity group meetings to prioritize parents of colors’ voices.

She also mentioned even within this bilingual school which prioritized language and culture, that African American families were severely segregated within the school. As an
educator for the bilingual track, she did not get to hear their concerns until she participated in the affinity groups with the African American parents. This is an impactful example of the importance of lifting all marginalized voices, not just selected groups.

In addition to this institution realization, she discussed her personal reflection as a White woman teaching Spanish to the ever-daunting questions of “who am I, what is my place, and what does it mean for ME to do this?” These questions came up in many different interviews.

L. A. discussed the tension of what her Mexican American identity looks like in her life and the feeling of imperfection from not having the language or cultural influences in her upbringing. When she taught at a school with a large Mexican population, she realized there were certain expectations on her from the school administration, parents, and herself that she did not ask for, nor could she achieve. She wanted to be a bigger advocate for the parents but she did not have the language or cultural ability to assist. Yet, she stated that she hoped the families still felt represented in some capacity at the school.

When she taught at a school within the black community the students would say “you’re the White people,” or “don’t call the White people on me,” referencing White people as authoritative. She reflected on her process of breaking them away from that ideology that there are different ethnic/racial groups in the world. She praised the moment that the narrative started to change such as when the kids would see her as an ally, recalling how they would talk about her as, “oh no that’s Ms. L, she’s Brown, she’s not White.” She said, this shift in narrative from the students and the community empowered her to see herself in a new way, inspiring her to continue working for social justice to become a stronger ally.

M. R.’s reflections of himself in the classroom were more about what he saw as his strengths and desires as an educator. He mentioned his aversion to classroom teaching due to
restrictions such as common core and standardized testing. He believes that these structures prevent students from talking about real issues. These restrictions prevented him from having authentic interpersonal relationships with the students and being able to say “No, that was racist they shouldn't have done that to you” or “Hey, that's super ignorant you shouldn't say that” and then having conversations about these situations transfer to other realities in the world beyond the classroom. M. R. also admitted that he still has much to learn. He notices this especially when he is informally talking about historical events and students ask questions that he is not able to answer.

A deeper realization he shared was,

I learned that I'm outspoken to the children a lot, like a lot, especially this last school year. But if another teacher walked into the room I would [get nervous and] shut down. And I'm not proud of that, but I wanted to keep my job. But I shouldn't have been scared because I was the only one doing that work there.

**Data Analysis**

Although my aim with the interviews was to revolve around the education systems, the educators’ insights and experiences expanded further than expected. The interviewed showed how the forces of assimilation and appropriation have been utilized by the United States to cripple cultures while finding their own economic gain through exploitation. It was emphasized that the denial of identities and differing of cultures is a destructive force to promote racism and white supremacy. As one educator mentioned, even if one is able to assimilate, they will not be granted the same rights as a White individual.

The educators shared many insights with deep underlying notions to unpack. I choose three themes that resonated with me the most and are well connected to the literature review:

1. Assimilation, Shame, and Validation
2. Exploration and Inclusion of Ethnic/Racial Identities
3. Educators’ Identities and Reflections

Assimilation, Shame, & Validation

Connected to our definition of identity being shaped by how others view us, is the desire for outside validation. As M. R. shared the story of his students praising each other’s expression of identity in comparison to those who did not receive that same praise in their predominant school community, he mentioned the unsustainability of having to be the only person who believes in yourself. This is connected to Tatum’s statement above that silencing our identities can be damaging to growth and can further alienate us from others. This leads me to question in what ways we can instill sustainable forms of internal validation in youth, and how we can build a culture of external validation, especially within racially/ethnically mixed communities.

Within the stories the educators shared, the term shame came up in many different capacities, such as the feelings of shame from their upbringing, history, situation, or their representation. A portion of this captures the emotional angst that we do not see attached to the racial/ethnic identity theories. As the educators mentioned, as the students made the critical connection of how the oppressive tools have been utilized against them, they were able to look at themselves in a different light. They changed their internal narrative from stereotypes to survivors, fighters, and change makers. This further supports the need for pedagogical support of ethnic/racial identity and a critical consciousness.

Commonly shared mechanisms of assimilation that were shared were name changes and disconnect from language, in an attempt to separate themselves from their ethnic/racial group in order to project a White identity. Rather than connecting with their ethnic/racial group, students further distanced themselves through internalization oppression and domination. This leads me to
wonder, does this also stem from feelings of shame, or a desire to redirect the attention away from one’s differences?

The perpetuation of assimilation or White identity was upheld by colleagues’ mentality and the lack of representation of hiring educators of color. As mentioned within the literature review, the need for anti-racist pedagogy needs to extend past the curriculum and look within the school systems of those who the students come into contact with on a daily basis.

All the educators highlighted the damaging effect of assimilation. They mentioned the multiple ways that it is present within their classroom through curriculum, social encounters, personnel, and testing. However, the most powerful concept was the disconnect of oneself. The educators brought up the phenomenon of dual identities in different ways. One educator mentioned the disconnect between home and school while trying to balance their identities. Another educator discussed the restriction of students with dual identities who either feel a contradiction with being both or struggle with choosing which one feels more comfortable. Lastly, one educator painted the spiritual divide between one’s body and mind. These examples do not begin and end in the classroom but as one educator mentions, we can close the gap between home and school.

Burden

Another emotional component I do not believe was explored within the literature review was one of burden. As M. R. shared the story of the student’s reaction to seeing why it was wrong for the educator to kick the student out of the class for speaking Spanish he mentioned the student cried from having their eyes open which represents the emotional impact from being critically conscious. Although the research above discusses the importance of matching this with
hope by educating students about liberation movements, it may also be beneficial to begin the incorporation of self-care.

*Exploration & Inclusion of Ethnic/Racial Identities*

While reading over the educators’ goals of what they wanted their students to get out of their educational experience within the classroom, much of what they stated showed me their eagerness to prepare the students for the outside world. Words such as fighting, survival, and critical consciousness were mentioned. This ideology, powerful as it is, has me questioning how much we are fighting against the outside world when we have ignored our inside world. From this I am referencing the inside world as our schools and classrooms. I am not stating we should limit our ideas of creating change to only focus on one area, but our education system is already political, why are we not preparing our students to fight for their justice within the schools, or to change the conversations in their other classrooms?

Those interviewed were able to reflect on the subtle changes in students’ behavior about their ability to feel included and accepted in the classroom. Similar to warning signs mentioned above by Tatum, they also mentioned students being isolated or alienated when they did not feel accepted. They mentioned different strategies to note when students felt welcome in the space whether by opening up, connecting with others, sharing stories within evaluations, or reaching out after the class. Their stories of students feeling included and accepted showcased how students would be willing to bring more of themselves through into the class to share with others. As educators also stated, creating a community through vulnerability can allow the students to connect with others and bring more of themselves into the space.

The anecdotes shared from educators, who intervened when there were signs of discrimination in the classroom shows the students awareness of the differences between their
identities. This is similar to Phinney’s Ethnic Identity Development model, students’ willingness to ask more questions and suggest ideas of ways they can learn more. Maybe they do not see how these identities impact them in a larger context, but their desire to learn more about the differences are apparent.

Educators were very adamant that representation within curriculum and most importantly literature, were very important. Exploring books that incorporate differing identities brings that realness of their lives into the classroom and allows them to know they are not alone. I resonated with W. O.’s mention of students’ potentially sharing details about how they were able to learn more about their identity through his courses in the end of quarter/semester evaluations. This is an impactful tool to incorporate because as much as this research was to explore the necessity of ethnic/racial identity exploration in the classrooms, another component was how to deliberately converse with the students about their journey. This leads me to imagine evaluations that ask the students to relate the content material to their life and the impact (ideally this would include math and sciences, rather than only focusing on the language arts).

Parents
Another important component when establishing the classroom environment was the incorporation of parents. The educators talked about shaping the classroom around the parents’ expression of culture and identity rather than making them fit into the restraints of the school. As another educator mentioned at times having parents in the classroom can be very restricting for the students’ willingness to explore and experiment. It seems there needs to be a balance of parental incorporation and space for the students. Tatum mentions that adolescents do not look to their parents as role models, rather they resort to their peers (2017). I believe this supports the
need for a balance, giving the youth space to define their identity while acknowledging their roots.

N.J. raised another topic during her interview regarding the influence of home as the most stable influence in most children’s lives. N. J. promotes that though the schools are an option for identity exploration, it needs to be focused on at home. She says there needs to be a way to connect parents and the school systems. She adds, “Schools cannot do it all…and I personally think we'll heal more, if we start healing families and communities.” N. J. makes a great point about the urgency of healing communities and families. As she mentions, a part of the healing can be creating better and stronger connections between parents and schools. I would emphasize that schools are a big component of the damage that has been done to these individuals and they need to acknowledge their influence to make amends. As mentioned above, parents are also products of our school system therefore they have also had a tainted education. In addition, many immigrant families do not have the exposure to assist their children with the identity issues in the context of the US.

**Educators’ Identities & Reflection**

The educators that were interviewed shared deep reflections about their identity and the complexities they have faced. Many of these stories seemed almost parallel to the anecdotes that they shared about their students. When asked about their experiences with assimilation their stories detailed vivid moments their identities were restricted, the impact and pain was evident. These stories were similar to the desire for outside validation, the forced containment of their identities, and need for exploration.

Students’ desire for outside validation were similar to the educators in regard to their representation in the form students and parents’ perspective. They mentioned ways they wanted
to be accepted as allies for their students and how they wanted to be the ones that can build them up and be in their corner. However, one educator noticed his limitations when other staff members entered the space. These situations highlight the fact that our identity is a constant journey and we are still understanding our own complexities.

Stories of discrimination in the work place were shared and the conscious internalized oppression for survival. N. J. shared her story of altering her tone during meetings to be heard and not perceived as the angry Black woman. L. A. also mentioned people wanting her to take on roles that she may not have signed up for under the justification that her identity made her the best fit. Another example of this was M. R.’s experience of the school principal clearly restricting his work in the school by setting up barriers and later not offering him the job they had agreed upon. All of these stories shared show how deep and complex the school systems’ desire for assimilation is which even targets our educators to in effect set an example for youth.

Educators shared their professional experiences as educators of color in interactions with White colleagues or principals and the tools utilized to invalidate them. The exploration of White Identity as explored above calls for the need of White individuals to explore their identity in context of oppression and privilege, though this is a limiting identity framework as many White individuals will not choose to be anti-racist. However, when we are working within a school system with Black, Brown, and White students yearning to understand their place in the world, I believe this should be expected of educators to have a solid understanding of their complacency and messaging with our youth. The White educator interviewed shared her awareness of the power she harnesses as an educator. This realization and acknowledgement made her aware of her actions and the impacts they can have on the parents of color and her allyship. In another example, W. O. shared his story of teaching the radical African American History course and his
questioning of his place to teach that course; though he identifies as a person of color, he is not Black. The pause in our lives to ask the profound questions, of “Who am I? What is my place? What does it mean for ME to do this?” creates a self-reflective practice for educators to bring a consciousness within the classroom and interactions with youth.

**Discussion**

This paper explored different approaches to ensure youth feel grounded, proud, and celebrated based upon their ethnic/racial identity. There is a dire need to address the injustices and approach situations that have already impacted their lives in a deliberate manner, therefore we have to move past the sanitization of reality and towards the amplification of marginalized truths.

Within this research, we learned that youth are developmentally prepared early in life to learn about ethnic/racial identity and the realities of those lived lives. We discussed the ways schools have prevented a critical approach to curriculums and have further marginalized parents of color from school spaces. Educators provided their vivid and authentic experiences and insights about the underlying toxicity within schools and life around assimilation. They emphasized ways they created spaces to explore identity, diversify curriculums and lesson plans, and welcome parental participation.

I believe the most important take away from this research is that our positive ethnic/racial identity is not grounded in the belittlement of others, but the respect of others. At this current time, we are realizing just how important self-love is for youth of color, but also community love for White youth. Reflecting back to Picciolini’s quote in the beginning, without identity, community, and purpose we are educating youth towards a culture of hate. To be proud and secure in who you are as a person, means you will be able to celebrate the differences of others
and cherish them; their differences do not overshadow the value of yours. This is a valuable component for our educators as well as our youth.

My focus on immigrants of color was in no way to devalue or compare the challenges Black and Native individuals face, nor was it to diminish the practices of assimilation forced upon Native peoples. Rather my goal was to breakdown the pursuit of Whiteness to build the concept of a coalition to fight for justice for all by understanding our differences and similarities. In addition, this fight cannot continue without our anti-racist White allies. However, we are in desperate need of people to be willing to go on their identity journey to understand where they stand in the context of privilege and power. By building your own positive sense of ethnic/racial identity, you are moving beyond building relationships: you are changing systems. Here is a quote which highlights my underlying intentions with this research:

I am very proud of my Mexican American heritage, and I want to help foster that pride in my students. At the same time, I feel people of color need to unite to fight against the oppression and systemic racism in our society…It is easy for people of color to narrow their vision and “fight for scraps” instead of joining together to fight against common oppression. In fact, those in power in our society count on the divisions among the powerless to maintain their positions. (Espinosa, 2014, p. 308; emphasis added)

This quote beautifully reflects back to Phinney’s Ethnic Identity Development theory and Adam’s generalized social identity theory explored within the literature review. Phinney’s final stage of Ethnic Identity Development, Achieved Ethnic Identity, is the pride we feel towards our ethnic/racial identity, instituting an internalized pride in ourselves. The final stage within Adams’s theory incorporates the commitment to social justice. The blend of our pride in ourselves and the duty to work together creates a powerful sense of compassion, empathy, community, and social change.
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Appendix A

Bilingual Education

Language is an important connection to our identity; beyond its ability to assist with communication it also contains cultural values and history (Tatum, 2017). Language paints a story associated with every word and phrase and is the spiritual essence of a culture. As of 2011, public school population was made up of 52% White students and 21% of students in public schools speak a language other than English at home (NCFES, 2014 as cited by Michael, 2014). Our school populations are changing but our curriculum goes unchanged. From dominant pressures of “English Only”, one might lose or be ashamed of their bilingual ability in order to disassociate from what makes them different.

The denial of such a strong component of identity diminishes their sense of identity for the sake of White superiority. Sáenz & Manges Douglas (2015, p. 175) discuss that speaking Spanish in the United States can be perceived as an insult, therefore threatening the “white space and white control.” Educators must be cautious about their approach to youth speaking in different languages at school as this is a strong connection with their identity (Tatum, 2017). Not only are students getting kicked out of classes for speaking in Spanish, some schools do not allow Spanish speaking students to take Spanish classes. Instead these schools will require the students to fulfill their foreign language requirement by taking another language, such as German. (Christensen, 2014). This can be a presumptuous act, to deny a youth the right to study their language and unknowing of the ir literacy or fluency skills.

Bilingual Education is a pedagogical approach, educating the students in their native language to give them the foundational grasp of academic content before transitioning them to English language acquisition (Salas, 2014). This ensure students’ academical levels are not prevented based on language barriers. It has been proven this has had positive impacts on the student’s learning and advancement through academic levels (Nieto & Bode as cited in Tatum, 2017; Krashen, 2014). A common narrative from schools, is students should be able to learn English in a year or less (Gabaldón, 2014). However, academic knowledge will be diminished with intensive English classes only. In addition, research shows this is only true when the students have English language courses in their home country or a solid literate understanding in their native language (Krashen, 2014). Mandarin speakers average 3.4 years to become proficient in English, in comparison to Hmong speakers averaging 7.1 years (Gabaldón, 2014). However, the disregard of quantitative and qualitative research that supports these claims continues to be the leading narrative.

States have outlawed bilingual education, restricting funds, and requiring difficult-to-obtain vouchers for students to receive this education. In addition, to the outlaw of a proven pedagogical approach, there are also deficiencies in English Language Learner (ELLs) programs. ELLs are more prone to attend highly segregated and sufficiently underfunded schools with low skilled educators (Salas, 2014). Without the proper academic support students’ academic and literacy needs are less likely to be met, resulting in low advancement societally and educationally.
Appendix B
No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

The implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has limited the teaching flexibility for educators and the learning capability for students. The high stakes tests are instituted to create a system of accountability for teachers and to track the learning of students. However, standardized testing limits students’ critical thinking skills as they are required to answer highly loaded questions with a simple A, B, C, or D answer. These tests do not ask the students their thoughts on the impact of these events, the discrimination, or the alternative narratives, rather they perpetuate our Euro-centric bias. The students are expected to regurgitate answers based on the “standard level of education.” The standardized tests lack empathetic teaching and learning.

Many studies have shown how test questions are irrelevant to students of colors and indigenous populations’ contexts, promoting White students’ achievement. Another furthering exclusion from high achievement on these high stakes tests is based on the language barrier. NCLB does not indicate the required language for the test or to be taught in, exams offered in different languages are rarely purchased because of the cost (Salas, 2014). These exams are therefore, frequently conducted in English (even for English language learners) only providing minimal accommodations (Salas, 2014). The implementation and construction of these exams are limiting to educators’ and students’ capacity building and exploration.
Appendix C
Assimilation Theories

Acculturation

Common terms utilized in attempt to progress away from assimilation practices are acculturation and integration. Acculturation is defined by cultures changing when they come into contact with another, becoming less distinct (Bartram et. al, 2014). Integration is defined as immigrants building the capacity to participate in institutional functions (e.g. employment, voting, housing, education, etc.) (Bartram et. al, 2014). However, both of these terms do not take into consideration the institutions of power. Societally, it is expected of immigrants to change or denounce their culture in order to blend into the dominant society, barring White individuals from any expectation of changing their culture to create an inclusive one. Neither of these terms take into consideration discriminatory policies and societal prejudices that limit an immigrants’ ability to preserve their culture and or participate equally and freely in institutional functions. It is common, that we accept immigrants’ cultures, languages, values, if they are only practiced within their household, because we cringe when hearing Spanish on the streets.

Assimilation

Defining assimilation (or assimilate) seems to be a hard task because of the varying priorities. Commonly accepted definitions have promoted assimilation as a mode for survival. Jung points out the commonalities of assimilation definitions, “connote normative prescriptions, advocating and even forcing assimilation, and ethnocentrism, evoking Anglo-conformist images of complete conversion” (2009, p. 381). Multiple scholars have taken on the task of redefining assimilation through their definition, “[a] decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences (as cited by Jung, 2009).

However, I must add that assimilation is the pursuit of being absorbed into the dominant system – which in the United States is the White Protestant society (among other dominant identities). I would like to emphasize the “being absorbed” as a passive verb to show that it is the “dominant system” that must absorb one into it. In this manner, I am attempting to highlight the racial divide within the United States that visible distinctions, such as skin pigmentation and distinctive facial features, will have a harder time with this “absorption” process and may never feel fully absorbed, as the policies above demonstrate. This racial concept is important to apply when examining the assimilation theories and addressing the root problems of acceptance in the United States.

Straight-Line Assimilation

Straight-line theory was applied to examine the assimilation of the large population of European immigrants whom arrived between 1880 and 1930 (Jung, 2009). This theory showed immigrants ability to generationally become indistinguishable from their native settler counterparts (Boyd, 2002; Jung, 2009; Peguero & Bondy, 2015). Assimilation was encouraged and sought after to rid oneself of their “differing” customs and behaviors to blend into the new society to succeed. The assimilation factors one pursued included opportunities and adaption in four areas: socioeconomic, language, residential, and behavioral (Boyd, 2002; Jung, 2009; Peguero & Bondy, 2015). Peguero & Bondy (2015) claim that by following a straight-line assimilation immigrants are capable of upward mobility; therefore, these individual’s livelihoods
are comparable to the dominant citizens (see Alba & Nee, 2003; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Kasinitz et al., 2009; Park & Burgess, 1969). Many of these immigrants physically resembled the dominant society. This physical resemblance made it easier to “blend in” and achieve the four factors listed above, to obtain upward mobility though with great loss [of culture, language, and ethnic communities].

**Segmented Assimilation**

Noticing that the newer populations of immigrants were having a more difficult time assimilating into the dominant culture, theorists started to ponder the economic direction immigrants were headed. Segmented assimilation theory was created by Portes & Zhou in 1993 (Brown & Bean, 2006). This theory states immigrants can move upward or downward within society which seemed more applicable for the new wave of immigrants, majority being non-white.

This theory noticed not all immigrants were meeting the four factors of assimilation making them incomparable to the dominant society, this was called “downward mobility” (Jung, 2009; Peguero & Bondy, 2015; Saenez & Manges Douglas, 2015). Theorists noticed this downward assimilation in conjunction with the new immigration population, realizing the new immigrants had obvious distinctions that they were not White. Herbert Gans (1992, p. 173) emphasizes the racial component of the United States to affirm that “a significant number of the children of poor immigrants, especially dark-skinned ones [or distinctively non-white], might not obtain jobs in the mainstream economy,” (as cited in Jung, 2009).

Segmented assimilation gave theorists the lens to notice that not all immigrants were capable of assimilating into the dominant society as the White-European immigrants eventually did. Brown and black immigrants who successfully obtained “upward mobility” had multiple factors to assist the advancement such as social capital, education, language skills, diverse ethnic communities, family structure, and policies of protection and inclusion (Portes & Rumbaut 2001ab, as cited in Jung, 2009). Assimilation theorists did not examine the factors that hold non-white individuals back from obtaining such success.

To approach immigration with a critical race lens would break down the policies (such as those explored in the preface), behaviors, and actions within our systems resulting in “downward mobility”. The desire for success encourages immigrants to assimilate into the white dominant society, which they may never be accepted into. It should also be pointed out that neither of these assimilation theories include Black native born or Indigenous individuals into the comparison when they speak of the “dominant society,” once again saluting power to the White dominant society as the prestigious goal for all individuals in the United States.
Appendix D
Whiteness

In order to explore racial identity, we must also include the exploration of the other side of the spectrum, White identity. When society ignores the presence of White identity they perpetuate the concept of Whiteness as the norm. Its mere existence has been denied or equated to “normal” culture or identity. As quoted in Lipsitz (2013, p. 77) Richard Dyer proclaims, “[W]hite power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular.” This inability to pinpoint the exactness of white identity within society, suggests that it is everything in which we are surrounded by.

White racial groups believe it is sheer coincidence to have all White surroundings. Lewis informs us this there is nothing accidental about these groupings: White individuals marry Whites individuals, live in White neighborhoods, and attend White schools (as cited in Michael, 2014). When examining our friendship group and realizing the racial make-up of our surroundings we can clearly see the implicit bias. Morrison states, “Pressures that can make us cling manically to our own cultures, languages, while dismissing others’; make us rank evil according to the fashion of the day; make us legislate, expel, conform, purge, and pledge allegiance to ghosts and fantasy…Most of all, these pressures can make us deny the foreigner in ourselves and make us resist to the death the commonness of humanity” (2017, p.110). When White identity is explored these siloed environments can shift, allowing for empathy and acceptance of others.

Dr. Janet Helms’s White Identity Model (the stages will not be explored) is viewed through an Antiracist White Identity lens (Michael, 2014). Thus, achieving a positive White racial identity is understanding Whiteness within a racist system and society, how it connects to non-White identities, and confronting it outside and within us (Michael, 2014). Helms’ details a journey consisting of: learning the reality of historical and present racism in the United States, having positive anti-racist white role models, participating in productive conversations about racial biases, having diverse friendship groups, and belonging to anti-racist White affinity groups for challenging and supportive dialogue (Michael, 2014). These actions can support White educators to obtain positive anti-racist identities to support their students and the school.

When White people begin to understand their racialized identity, history, and complacency they can begin to take action to be a part of the solution (Michael, 2014). During this positive White identity journey, Whites may have moments of guilt, shame, or projection of anger towards other Whites who do not understand. As Hardiman et al. (2013) state, do not allow these feelings to debilitate you from taking action, embrace the discomfort and acknowledge the disservice of the educational systems. This is a process of unlearning and relearning, understanding that our education has not been a fair examination of events.

Although this model has been criticized for limiting the scope of racial identity for White individuals, for Whites to build empathy for people of color they must understand their complacency. This is particularly true for educators as positive ethnic/racial identity is important for all students.
Appendix E
Anti-racist & Ethnic/Racial Identity Classroom Practices

Practices to allow identity exploration and achievement can start as early as Pre-K, while youth are in the pre-awareness phase.

- Allow students to share their cultural history, practices, music, stories, dance, etc. (Negri-Pool, 2014).
  - When students cannot be the ones bringing in the knowledge, exploration can take place through the selecting diverse books, incorporating parents into the classroom, exploring race and culture within the curriculum, and diversifying representation.
  - Educators should be cautious of appropriation or exploitation of culture, music, stories, or tragedies.
- Be aware of subtle classroom behaviors. Michael reminds us, “if a student is the only one of their racial group, they may demand your attention even less – and need it even more” (2014, p. 42)
  - Free play can be limiting for children who are struggling with isolation (Michael, 2014).
    - Provide enough guidance to address classmates inherit bias (Michael, 2014)
    - Rather than associate silence with disinterest, examine cultural meaning (e.g. Asian Americans’ deem this as self-reliance) (Tateishi, 2014).
    - Create small groups, clear expectation, structure of participation, and regular debrief (Tateishi, 2014).
  - Reexamine purposes and interpretations around noise
    - Noise can be a sign of students feeling unheard, or disregarded. (Michael 2014)
    - Some students concentrate better in highly stimulated environments (Michael, 2014)
    - Silent disruptions are often ignored
      - Many of these subtle disruptions are caused by White students as a display of power and ownership over the classroom (Michael, 2014)
      - White students may interrupt educators more frequently, feeling entitled to their time (Michael, 2014). These interruptions make students of color feel invisible.
- Don’t encourage stereotypes, even “positive” stereotypes
  - This can lower youth’s self-esteem and belittle their complexities and challenges (e.g. Asian students being associated as high achievers solely based on generalizations) (Tatum, 2017; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2013).
- Growth Mindset ideology (coined by Howard Stevenson; Dweck as cited in Michael, 2014)
  - Encourage that everyone has the ability to grow their intelligence and ability by working on it
- Define safety and comfort within difficult conversations (Michael, 2014)
  - White students may feel unsafe, when in reality it is discomfort.