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Not the Anti-Racist Meeting Feeling Racist:  
Black Educators' Racial Battle Fatigue in  
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Professional Development

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Daniel Alejandro Helena

2023



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Not the Anti-Racist Meeting Feeling Racist:  
Black Educators' Racial Battle Fatigue in  
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Professional Development

by

Daniel Alejandro Helena

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Diane Durkin, Co-Chair

Professor Kimberley Gomez, Co-Chair

This study explored the experiences of Black educators when participating in anti-racist Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) professional development (PD). The sample population of twelve Black educators—a mix of teachers, counselors, directors, assistant principals, and principals—all represented professionals who worked at various school sites within one Los Angeles charter management organization. My research design applied a qualitative and phenomenological method in order to identify the racial battle fatigue reactions participants experienced during DEI PD and how these reactions manifested within the participants, e.g. emotionally, behaviorally, physiologically. The study also sought to identify recommendations the participants—all of whom were interviewed individually—offered in order to reduce racial

battle fatigue during DEI PD. Three main findings emerged from the analysis. First, the current implementation and experience of anti-racist DEI PD in a Los Angeles secondary charter school network creates negative emotions for participants. The most common and intense of emotions among participants were exhaustion, anxiety, and frustration. Second, Black educators in a Los Angeles charter network repeatedly experienced racial battle fatigue in primarily unobservable ways during anti-racist DEI PD, each in their own way. Participants primarily reported withdrawing psychologically and/or emotionally, e.g. choosing not to actively share their thoughts, in order to cope with the racial battle fatigue they experienced during DEI sessions. Third, the findings indicated that the twelve participants' recommendations included changing the leadership of DEI PD to involve more expert-led facilitation. The participants also recommended including more time to process the DEI experiences and communication, as well as creating a more personalized DEI PD experience for participants.

The dissertation of Daniel Alejandro Helena is approved.

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2023

## DEDICATION PAGE

I dedicate this work to the study's participants and other Black educators who face racism and racial battle fatigue in the workplace or otherwise, yet still show up in service of our students. My hope is that this research will honor your experiences and push the equity work forward.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION .....	II
DEDICATION PAGE .....	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	VI
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	VIII
VITA.....	IX
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	2
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	3
Existing Gaps in the Research.....	6
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	8
Research Design .....	8
Site and Participants .....	9
STUDY SIGNIFICANCE.....	9
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	11
CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND RACIAL BATTLE FATIGUE .....	11
Political and Social Context for the Study .....	13
America’s Schools Are Racist.....	13
Students Experience Racism .....	14
Educators Experience Racism .....	15
Brazil: A Case Study of Anti-Racism Hope.....	16
The Challenges of DEI PD .....	18
Race Dialogues: A Key Tenet of DEI Work .....	18
Benefits of Race Dialogues .....	19
Challenges in Race Dialogues .....	20
Professional Development: A Tool for Change in Schools.....	26
Charter Schools Offer a Unique Context of Study .....	27
The Black Experience is not a Monolith .....	28
Black Americans and Black Immigrants .....	28
The Intersectionality of Black Women.....	29
Summary: Anti-Racist DEI Professional Development .....	30
CHAPTER 3: METHODS .....	32
RESEARCH DESIGN .....	33
METHODS .....	34
Site and Sample Selection .....	34
Access.....	35
Role Management.....	36
Data Collection.....	37
Data Analysis.....	39
Positionality and Ethical Issues .....	40
Credibility & Trustworthiness .....	41

Study Limitations .....	42
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS .....	43
Principal Findings.....	44
DEI PD Fosters Negative Emotions for Participants .....	45
Weariness .....	45
Frustration/Anger .....	56
Stereotype Threat.....	59
Summary.....	62
Participants Withdraw to Cope.....	63
Participants cope by not actively participating.....	64
Participants' bodies carry the stress .....	65
Summary.....	66
Recommendations for DEI PD.....	67
DEI PD needs to be led by experts .....	67
DEI PD needs to include more processing time .....	69
DEI PD needs to be more personalized .....	70
DEI PD needs to clarify key terminology .....	73
Summary.....	75
Conclusion .....	76
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION .....	78
Implications for Researchers .....	79
Implications for School-Based Practitioners .....	81
Recommendations for Researchers .....	83
Recommendations for School-Based Practitioners .....	85
Personal Reflection.....	86

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study examines Black middle and high school educators' experiences during anti-racist professional development within one Los Angeles charter management organization. Beginning in the summer of 2020, in response to the killing of George Floyd and other members of the African American community, school districts across the country began implementing DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) professional development (PD) for staff. While DEI has no firm definition and no standardized implementation method, a key tenet of DEI training is rooted in anti-racism work, and, more specifically, a commitment to being pro-Black.

The inherent race dialogue involved in anti-racist DEI PD raises problems because, in general, Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) experience race dialogue more negatively than white people (Sue, 2013; Trawalther & Richeson, 2008). In a series of focus group interviews across multiple studies, BIPOC undergraduate students and faculty unanimously reported experiencing racial microaggressions during racial dialogues with white people (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Sue, Rivera, Watkins, Kim, R., Kim, S., & Williams, 2011). Smith, Hung, and Franklin's (2011) work connects the disproportionate exposure to racial microaggressions that BIPOC experience to the concept of *racial battle fatigue*, defined as: "an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that considers the increased levels of psychosocial stressors and subsequent psychological (e.g., frustration, shock, anger, disappointment, resentment, hopelessness), physiological (e.g., headache, backache, "butterflies," teeth grinding, high blood pressure, insomnia), and behavioral responses (e.g., stereotype threat, John Henryism, social withdrawal, self-doubt, and a dramatic change in diet) of fighting racial microaggressions" (p. 68). Smith et al. (2011) examined the experiences of 661 Black men and found that their efforts to continually combat racial microaggressions led to

increased stress and racial battle fatigue and a decrease in their hopeful outlook toward social justice. Such data form the context for this study.

This study is informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT). It is a qualitative study that explores Black educators' experiences when participating in anti-racist DEI PD at one Los Angeles charter school network. Through interviews, participants shared to what extent, if at all, they perceived that their DEI PD caused racial battle fatigue, what aspects of the PD they perceived most contributed to their racial battle fatigue, and what recommendations, if any, they had that would reduce racial battle fatigue. Although it investigated experiences in only one charter network, the study could inform other schools and school systems in their rollout of anti-racist DEI PD.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Like many workplaces in the United States (Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Nkomo, 1992; Offermann et al., 2014), American schools already function as hostile racial climates to BIPOC educators (Kohli, 2016; Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016). It is critical for educators to engage in race dialogue; it benefits students' school experiences and also supports teachers of color (Coles-Ritchie & Smith, 2016). Despite its benefits, race dialogue among people of different races tends to replicate an imbalance in power that skews against Black people and other socially devalued groups (Sue, 2013). In particular, our society discourages race dialogue because it violates the politeness protocol, wherein people avoid impolite and potentially controversial topics, thereby maintaining the illusion that racism is a relic of the past (Sue, 2013). Because anti-racist DEI PD heavily features race dialogue, it also risks perpetuating the same racialization it espouses to fight against (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018): It discourages people from expressing emotions, and, instead, maintains an objectivity associated with the academic context (Sue, 2013). Race

dialogue, even when it does occur, is prone to being void of discussions that lead to meaningful understanding among people of different races and backgrounds.

BIPOC teachers regularly experience racism in schools—racism that often takes the shape of microaggressions and negatively affects their well-being, growth, and retention (Kohli, 2016; Brown, 2019; Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016). Whether in classroom spaces between teachers and students or in educational activities and materials, racial microaggressions involve questioning BIPOC’s intelligence and criminality and denying of racial reality (Sue, 2013). To confront these microaggressions would trigger difficult dialogues on race and racism, thereby making anti-racist DEI PD likely to cause harm to BIPOC (Sue et al., 2009).

Schools’ overall preparedness to effectively lead anti-racist work is a concern for some administrators. For instance, in response to his district resolving to become an anti-racist district, one California public school principal stated that his district “profoundly lacked the ability to achieve this elusive, anti-racist goal. Cultivating an anti-racist school would require staff training on bias, evaluation of inequitable systems, and the capacity to engage in an honest dialogue on race. We were not there” (Richardson, 2021, para. 1). If the rollout of anti-racist DEI PD is not sufficiently reviewed, then these spaces could perpetuate the racism BIPOC teachers already experience in schools. Early research shows that teachers have unsatisfactory experiences with the rollout of anti-racist DEI PD in American public schools. A doctoral level unpublished pilot study of 14 Black educators (Helena, Madda, and Onyejiji, 2021) indicates that K-12 school systems may be rapidly committing to anti-racist work without first ensuring that their approach to DEI sessions is centering on BIPOC.

This pilot doctoral study (Helena, Madda, and Onyejiji, 2021) demonstrated that facilitating or participating in DEI PD can lead to increased stress or *racial battle fatigue* for

BIPOC. *Racial battle fatigue* is the “psychological, emotional, physiological energy and time-related cost of fighting against racism” (Smith, 2009, p. 298). BIPOC experience racial battle fatigue when they exert physical and/or emotional energy in order to cope with racial microaggressions and racism (Smith, Allen, and Danley, 2007). Smith et al.’s (2007) qualitative study showed unanimous psychological responses (e.g., frustration, shock, avoidance or withdrawal, disbelief, anger, aggressiveness, uncertainty or confusion, resentment, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, and fear) among 36 Black male undergraduate students at elite, predominantly white institutions when they reported being “placed under increased surveillance and control by community policing tactics on and off campus” (p. 562).

Although BIPOC educators experience racism in school settings (Kohli, 2016; Brown, 2019; Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016), not all ethno-racial groups experience racism to the same extent. Nationwide, research suggests that Black and African American students and staff members have inequitable experiences when compared to that of members of other races/ethnicities (Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Kohli, 2016). Although a majority of teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) self-identify as BIPOC—with nearly half identifying as Hispanic/Latinx (LAUSD, 2021)—Black teachers are especially vulnerable to racism, particularly in a city like Los Angeles where its largest ethnic group is Latinx.

Research underscores the uniqueness of the Black experience among other ethno-racial groups. Rhetoric and practices of anti-Blackness within the Latinx community are deep-seated and ingrained (Cruz-Janzen, 2003; Haywood, 2017). In a survey aimed to inform a Los Angeles charter management organization’s vision on DEI, nearly half of the Black and African American students at a charter high school described their charter management organization’s role in negative terms or as a source of race-related barriers; however, a majority of Latinx

students from the same school shared positive responses (XYZ Charter, 2020). This stark difference in opinion shows the need to analyze Black people's experiences, rather than just all BIPOC. This study targeted Black educators' unique experiences of stressors. It explored the connection between Black and African American educators' formal engagement in and experience of DEI PD and their possible experience of racial battle fatigue.

### **Existing Gaps in the Research**

There is scant research that centers on K-12 Black educators who engage in race dialogues. Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto's (2015) research speaks to racial microaggressions that Black people experience in corporate America, but little research exists on the dynamics of racial dialogues that take place in the field of education, particularly in the K-12 sector. While race dialogues have become a prevalent response to combating racism in higher education over the past 30 years (Dorman, 2018), K-12 systems often face constraints that render such dialogue virtually impossible. These include a workforce that is less racially diverse and more prone to turnover. Further, even in the higher education setting, any existing research on race in professional development heavily focuses on the views of white educators (Trawalther & Richeson, 2008; Cooper, 2008; Sue, Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera, & Lin, 2009; Marcy, 2010), with minimal research focusing on Black educators' experiences of anti-racist DEI PD. Further, none of the research investigates the mental health toll such training takes on individuals, whether facilitator or participant. Significantly, the existing research on Black educators' experiences of anti-racism training focuses on typically white facilitators of the training, not its participants (Sánchez, Anderson, Weiston-Serdan, & Catlett, 2021). Additionally, current research does not narrow to particular environments where facilitators are being asked to serve a hybrid facilitator/participant role, such as with K-12 charter schools. Finally, little research

focuses on race dialogue among BIPOC, e.g. Black and Latinx people. Most racial dialogue research centers white people, wherein people are categorized as either 1) Black or white or 2) BIPOC or white.

This study fills another gap of research: racial literacy in the K-12 sector. Researchers have studied racial literacy among K-12 students and teacher education students. However, we do not know much about how practicing educators can cultivate racial literacy through professional development (Nyachae, 2018). Marcy (2010) conducted a qualitative study of how white teachers experience and think about race in professional development and found that teachers' thinking about race is full of racial double standards. For example, participants' thinking displayed a double standard because they said it was not appropriate for a Black teacher to stereotype, yet later used stereotypical terms to describe their own thoughts about whiteness, hence allowing for white stereotyping. Additionally, many white teachers stereotyped Blackness. A contradiction like this one functions to "take back the center" of a race dialogue, further marginalizing BIPOC voices and maintaining white privilege (Marcy, 2010, p. 69). Marcy's (2010) research suggests that race dialogues are counterproductive because, when held among white teachers, they perpetuate ideas of inequity.

Marcy's study, however, focused solely on white teachers' perspectives. Indeed, this study and others pay little attention to the psychological and physiological impacts of long-term exposure to racism among BIPOC within education, and in particular in K-12 schooling (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). Marcy's (2010) research speaks for the need to include counterstories—counterstories that challenge the perspectives of white teachers who engage in DEI PD.

This study fills the research gap by exploring racial battle fatigue experienced by Black teachers within anti-racist DEI PD at one Los Angeles charter network and seeks to answer the following research questions:

### **Research Questions**

R1. To what extent, if at all, do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?

R2. In what ways, if any, do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?

R3. What recommendations do Black charter school educators who participate in anti-racist DEI professional development have for reducing racial battle fatigue?

### **Research Design**

This is a qualitative, phenomenological study. Qualitative, phenomenological studies are an inquiry design that combines philosophy and psychology; they are appropriate when the researcher seeks to describe “the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). The study employs one data gathering method: individual interviews. Twelve participants took part in individual interviews, the purpose of which was to allow participants to describe in what ways, if at all, they experienced racial battle fatigue during anti-racist DEI PD. Participants were also asked which elements of racial battle fatigue, e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, if any, they experienced during DEI PD. Furthermore, in the hope of adding to the research and practice literature, participants were asked to provide recommendations, that

they, given their experiences, would offer to reduce racial battle fatigue in anti-racist DEI PD (see Appendix B for interview protocols).

### **Site and Participants**

The site for the study, XYZ Charter Schools network (pseudonym), is representative of many charter school networks nationwide because of its recent commitment to being pro-Black and anti-racist and its relatively low percentage of Black/African American principals. Schools that operate within a singular charter management organization provide a unique context to study multiple campuses that develop their own version of professional development. This autonomy increases the likelihood of variance among Black teachers' experiences in anti-racist DEI PD.

The qualifications for participating in the study were two-fold: a) Identify as Black or African American and b) Prior engagement in a DEI training at XYZ Charter Schools (XYZ). I recruited participants by attending Black affinity spaces that I had already been a part of and following up with a personal email.

### **Study Significance**

The findings from this study show how frequently, and to what extent, Black educators experience racial battle fatigue during anti-racist DEI professional development. Additionally, the findings suggest recommendations for mitigating adverse effects, such as racial battle fatigue and racial microaggressions, during such professional development. The implementation of DEI work in urban charter schools is particularly pressing because the rate that teachers leave the profession and move between schools is significantly higher in charter schools than in traditional public schools (Stuit & Smith, 2010). Furthermore, educators of color leave the field at a rate 25% higher than their white counterparts (Grooms, Mahatmya, and Johnson, 2021). My research could uncover ways that anti-racist DEI work serves to retain educators of color, particularly

when these educators are being asked to roll out the DEI work itself and likely experience further tensions. Furthermore, charter schools in Los Angeles provide a particularly data rich context to study because of the city's historical racial tension and the autonomy that charter schools wield—autonomy that affords schools to develop their own strand of professional development for its staff.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Schools nationwide are engaging in anti-racist DEI work without assuring its effectiveness among the people, namely Black/African American teachers, who currently and historically have experienced racism within the institution of American education. In this literature review, I first examine Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework for this study because it provides a critical lens to analyze how systemic racism plays out in society. I then explore the racial inequity present in America's K-12 schools in order to provide the context in which Black educators and students alike operate and the need for anti-racist DEI work. I discuss successful case studies of another country that has found success with strategic and broad implementation of race dialogues, a main component of anti-racist DEI work. I follow with an explanation of the benefits and challenges of race dialogues in order to better understand the dynamic between race dialogues and two inextricable phenomena: racial battle fatigue and racial microaggressions. After detailing various common manifestations of racial microaggressions in race dialogues, I use the framework of CRT in order to understand Black people's mental health experiences and how engaging in race dialogues as part of anti-racist DEI PD might impact Black teachers. I conclude by explaining the structure of professional development—particularly in charter schools—to better understand the implementation of DEI PD in Los Angeles charter schools.

### **Critical Race Theory and Racial Battle Fatigue**

This study aimed to utilize CRT to understand how engaging in anti-racist DEI work affects Black educators' mental, physical, and emotional health. This study is grounded in CRT because several of CRT's tenets help ground the experience of the study's participants during DEI PD. The construction of DEI PD is regarded as a progressive approach. Instead of ignoring

issues of inequity and the lack of diversity in education, the DEI PD structure serves to prioritize these issues so that schools can be more inclusive and equitable. Rather than blindly trusting that these DEI spaces are themselves equitable and inclusive, CRT recognizes that white supremacy is also likely to be an actor in a liberal ideology such as DEI PD (Crenshaw, 1988).

Beyond recognizing that racism, particularly for BIPOC in the United States, is commonplace and not aberrational (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), CRT works to critique the concept of *white as normal*, which privileges dominant white cultural values, lived experiences, and history (Coles-Ritchie & Smith, 2016). A CRT framework acknowledges and challenges the white dominant discourse and helps create space to value other peoples' narratives and counterstories. A CRT framework works to privilege BIPOC storytelling and counterstories, which are usually disregarded in educational contexts in favor of quantitative measures, objectivity in research, color-blindness, deficit perspectives, and meritocracy (Coles-Ritchie & Smith, 2016). This study counters *white as normal* by elevating the voices and experiences of the study's participants. This study uses the lens of CRT to give credibility to Black teachers' lived experiences and funds of knowledge, particularly when they highlight racial injustices and other forms of oppression.

This study implements the conceptual framework of racial battle fatigue to better understand Black teachers' stress responses (e.g., frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, nonverbally, or physically fighting back; and coping strategies) when participating in or facilitating anti-racist DEI PD, much like Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) did in their research of African American male college students on predominantly white institutions. Smith et al. state that "racial battle fatigue addresses the physiological and psychological strain

exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism” (p. 555).

### **Political and Social Context for the Study**

The summer of 2020, rife in racial tension catalyzed by the infamous killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and other Black Americans, motivated more and more schools to talk about race and racial inequity in order to address their anti-racist culture (Hedges, 2020; Long, 2020). These racial dialogues fall under the umbrella of DEI PD and largely assert to be not only anti-racist, but, more notably, pro-Black. This study sought to explore Black charter school educators’ experiences when participating in anti-racist DEI professional development at their school site. This study gathered from its participants what causes racial battle fatigue in DEI training and what might reduce racial battle fatigue in these spaces.

### **America’s Schools Are Racist**

Historically, U.S. schools have functioned as racist institutions. Pizarro and Kohli (2018) define racism as “the creation or maintenance of a racial hierarchy, supported through institutional power” (p. 970). America’s schools have maintained a pro-white racial hierarchy throughout their various iterations, including American Indian boarding schools that pushed assimilation at the expense of students’ culture, racially segregated schools that sported an imbalance of resources, and today’s schools which are mired in low expectations and limited opportunities for students who are BIPOC (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). A lack of government effort is not to blame for the racism: The education system has a history of pushing many initiatives in the name of equity, e.g. No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, school vouchers and choice. However, their efforts maintain the marginalization of BIPOC. Because American education is

built upon racist principles, nearly all systems and practices, if unchecked, will skew anti-Black, for students and educators alike.

### ***Students Experience Racism***

The impact of racism in U.S. schools has affected students in obvious ways, such as the white/BIPOC opportunity achievement gap, to more subtle ways that include microaggressions which can have a lasting impact on students' development. The achievement gap among K-12 students is divided along racial lines: Black and Brown students perform significantly lower on standardized tests, graduate high school at a lower level, and are less likely to enroll in college than their white and Asian classmates (Condrón, 2019; Logan, Mincia, and Adar, 2012). While the demographics of the United States has changed significantly over the past century, its education system has not adapted to meet all of its students' needs. BIPOC students have less access to advanced coursework (Patrick, 2020); BIPOC students are overpoliced and disproportionately subject to punitive and exclusionary discipline (Howard, 2016); and BIPOC students are regular victims of microaggressions that go unaddressed (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). The inability to support students who are BIPOC means that the education system is failing to adequately prepare the majority of our future workforce and political leadership (Mordechay & Orfield, 2017). Although the racial and opportunity gap is not a new phenomenon (Noguera, 2009), schools are outwardly putting more effort to address the inequity the gap produces.

Racism, upheld by long-established systems and policies, causes real, daily effects on students. Kohli and Solórzano (2012) explored one of the more subtle forms that racism manifests itself in American classrooms: mispronunciation of names. Kohli and Solórzano's (2012) findings show how overlooked moments that communicate a racial and a cultural hierarchy of minority inferiority can have a lasting impact on BIPOC students. Nitin, a South

Asian man, shared an experience that occurred during his middle school years but lasted far beyond:

When I was in the seventh grade, I missed my first day of class. One of my teachers was calling roll and couldn't pronounce my name – Nitin. As a joke, he crossed my name out of the gradebook and told the class he was renaming me '[Frank]' . . . after himself.

Everyone thought it was pretty funny and the next day at school, everyone kept calling me '[Frank].' I soon grew used to the name and within a few months, I was introducing myself as '[Frank].' . . . By the time I graduated, I firmly thought of myself as '[Frank],' so much so that at college, I introduced myself as '[Frank]' to everyone, including other South Asians.

Nitin's teacher's seemingly innocuous decision proved to have a lasting impact on Nitin's identity formation. Student experiences like this one, unfortunately, are all too commonplace.

### ***Educators Experience Racism***

The racial opportunity gap, however, is not limited to students; teachers and other educators, too, experience a discrepancy in access and representation. About 80% of teachers identified as non-Hispanic white during the 2017-2018 school year, the latest year that the National Center for Education Statistics has published demographic data (Schaeffer, 2021). Further, Black teachers are still only 7% of the teacher force nationwide, and Black males comprise only 2% of the teaching force nationwide (NCES, 2018). Black teachers are disproportionately underrepresented in our schools: 15% of America's public school students are Black (NCES, 2018).

School districts are known to lack effective recruitment and retention strategies for Black teachers. Yet, evidence indicates that all students benefit from having BIPOC teachers. Research

that studied about 100,000 Black students showed that having just one Black teacher between 3rd and 5th grade makes a significant difference in the lives of BIPOC students: having even one Black teacher in third through fifth grades reduced a Black student's chance of dropping out of school by 39% (Gershenson, Hart, and Lindsay, 2017). The lack of representation creates challenges for racially minoritized teachers.

For instance, Coles-Ritchie and Smith (2016) explored how elementary teachers navigated race dialogue with their colleagues and what they risked by doing so. All of their participants had experiences with racism at their school. Some teachers acknowledged moments when they upheld a racist dynamic: One white teacher, for instance, admitted to “putting her foot in her mouth” when she said that we live in a post-racial society (Coles-Ritchie & Smith, 2016, p. 178). She continued, “That was big. I thought we were. I’m learning that we are not” (p. 178). Alternatively, other teachers described being on the receiving end of racist actions: One Black teacher, for example, described the emotional toll she would take in moments where white teachers would evade race by overlooking racial and ethnic differences:

(big sigh) they have thin skin (laughs). White teachers want us teachers of color to believe they don't see color and you know that's not true. I feel we protect them to keep them in the group so we can work through the issues of racism. We need to coddle them until they feel less threatened. I guess we have to do it if we want to make progress. You hear that frustration coming out (p. 179)?

### **Brazil: A Case Study of Anti-Racism Hope**

Although racism is rife throughout American society, other countries with complex race relations offer a potential roadmap for racial equality in United States' schools. Brazil, for instance, boasts the largest Afro-descendant population in the Americas (Paschel, 2016). In the

past 30 years, Brazilian Black movement organizations have led the charge in rebuking the idea of a racial democracy, or a society that has managed to escape racism and racial discrimination (Telles, 2004). Rather than avoiding racial dynamics, many Brazilian sectors have recognized racism and “put pressure on the state to extend real democratic citizenship and human rights to its Black population” (p. 53). One such example in the field of education includes law 10.639/03, which mandated that all primary and secondary schools throughout the country teach African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture (Klein, 2019). The United States and various Latin American countries like Brazil parallel in their race evasive outlooks, with many Americans considering themselves citizens of a post-racial society and many Latin American countries priding themselves in being an egalitarian *mestizaje*, or mixture of races (Paschel, 2016; Klein, 2019).

Klein (2019) conducted a 12-month ethnographic study on a group of teachers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The study found that, through race dialogue, people are able to become conscious of their racial identities and understand their place within a differentiated racial society that places white people at an advantage over Black people. Klein’s participants shed some light on the micro-level work necessary for racial equity work, even in a country like Brazil, which has passed numerous anti-racist laws. All of Klein’s (2019) participants “independent of the colour of their skin, disclosed . . . that they had not learned about or understood institutional and systemic racism until they were adults” (p. 132). Consider Julio’s experience, a man in his late forties:

It wasn’t easy, I also started this process of becoming *enegrecer* [Black] very late in my life. You have to find it very weird how in a country full of Black people these people have to become Black. It is a tense process. I discovered myself as Black when I was an

adult. My mother had several children and called none of us Black, and we didn't either (p. 135).

Klein's (2019) findings emphasize the need for safe spaces for race dialogue, particularly in educational spaces for teachers—spaces like anti-racist DEI trainings.

### **The Challenges of DEI PD**

The amorphous and all-encompassing nature of DEI PD in part explains its increasingly pervasive presence in American offices and schools. DEI PD can take many shapes, depending on its focus; some DEI PD homes in on elevating equity and inclusion of people of marginalized communities through the lens of gender or sexual orientation, for instance. Other types of DEI PD focus on providing equitable support for students who are specially abled or analyzing if curricula represents a variety of cultures or points-of-view. Awareness of racial achievement and opportunity gaps has pushed policymakers and educational leaders in the K-12 sector to create schools that are more equitable for racially minoritized student groups. DEI work, or race, ethnicity, and culture-focused PD, for educators has been an increasingly common response to make K-12 schools more equitable (Hedges, 2020).

### ***Race Dialogues: A Key Tenet of DEI Work***

Race-centered DEI work, particularly anti-racist DEI PD, inherently involves participants to engage in race dialogues, or conversations that touch upon topics like race, racism, and white privilege. The purpose of race dialogues is to bring people of different social, cultural, and racial identities together so that they can learn from one another and work toward “collectively and individually [promoting] greater diversity, equality, and justice” (Nagda & Maxell, 2011, p.1). Also referred to as race talks or intergroup dialogues, race dialogues, at their best, are a “form of democratic engagement that foster critical understanding, communication, and collaborative

action across race and other social group boundaries about contentious issues in educational and community settings” (Zúñiga, Lopez, and Ford, 2014, p. 1-2). Understanding of the other, not necessarily agreement, is the central aim of race dialogues (Maddison, 2015).

Because each student and teacher have a diverse background and lived experiences, they all enter race dialogues from pronouncedly different and uneven places (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). Race dialogue is problematic because it places BIPOC at a disadvantage from the onset of the conversation (Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Sue, 2013; Trawalther & Richeson, 2008). Leonardo and Porter (2010) contend that to pretend that race dialogue is a safe space is a fallacy because for BIPOC, there is no safe space: “mainstream race dialogue in education is arguably already hostile and unsafe for many [BIPOC] whose perspectives and experiences are consistently minimized. Violence is already there” (p. 139). Any presumed safety in race dialogue is from the perspective of white people (Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Sue, 2013; Trawalther & Richeson, 2008).

### ***Benefits of Race Dialogues***

Race dialogues, when facilitated well, can benefit people from all walks of life. American society, in particular, stands to gain from racial dialogues that aim to unite diverse people, especially after the divisive summer of 2020. American schools, which limit what teachers can teach about race (Steinberg, 2022), would also benefit from varied opinions. Greene and Jaquith (2020) argue that educators need to examine their racial and cultural biases, ensuring that their instructional practices meet every student’s needs.

Race dialogues that engage teachers in critical self-reflection can lead to them having more positive relationships with their students. Noguera and Wing’s (2006) multi-year qualitative study underscores that race dialogues help strengthen teacher-student relationships,

specifically by fostering empathy and understanding among teachers and students. Furthermore, race dialogues encourage teacher reflection in battling the racial and achievement opportunity gap created by institutional racism.

### ***Challenges in Race Dialogues***

The many benefits that race dialogues offer, while well supported by research, are not easily attainable. Administrators' and teachers' focus to meet the needs of their students as schools become more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse is a well-informed response; however, DEI trainings are often unsuccessful because they oversimplify the concept of diversity along with the experiences of BIPOC teachers and students (Hedges, 2020). For instance, jumping to the conclusion that a student's recent academic success is credited solely to the racial identity marker they share with their teacher constitutes an oversimplification of experiences. Indeed, institutional engagement in DEI PD does not guarantee internalization of DEI practices (Ahmed, 2012). Race dialogue challenges are many: they involve *racial battle fatigue*, *racial microaggressions*, and *facilitator knowledge*.

#### **Racial Battle Fatigue.**

*Racial battle fatigue* is a framework that helps explain the physiological and psychological strain exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy spent dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism (Smith, Allen, and Danley, 2007). Racial battle fatigue exists outside of educational spaces, but the racialization and racism that have upheld and centered whiteness in American public schooling make racial battle fatigue particularly prevalent for BIPOC in schools (Dumas, 2016). Research on racial battle fatigue is helpful in understanding the stress that BIPOC experience in education (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). Grooms et. al. (2021) found mixed results when studying the connection between racial battle

fatigue and teachers of color. Racial battle fatigue, which Grooms et. al. refer to as *racial activism stress*, reflects the level of stress that Black, indigenous, and teachers of color feel while raising diversity issues in their school. According to Grooms et. al. (2021), racial battle fatigue is tied to higher teacher satisfaction but a negative sense of school membership.

Teachers can experience racial battle fatigue in many ways. Although any caring and committed teacher can be hurt by witnessing racism, racial battle fatigue can be particularly prevalent in BIPOC teachers who have themselves suffered parallel experiences with racism, and/or feel a racial or cultural connection and commitment to their students (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Hesse, 2002). Race dialogues are a prime environment for BIPOC to experience racial battle fatigue because it requires them to (a) determine how to address racism when white people avoid acknowledging it; (b) manage the denial, defensiveness, and anxiety that emanates from their white counterparts; (c) control their intense anger at the continual denial; and (d) continuously determine how much to open up, given the differential power dynamics that often exist between the majority group and the minority group (Sue, 2013). Racial battle fatigue can be difficult to combat because of the small, cumulative effect of its main contributor—racial microaggressions.

### **Racial Microaggressions.**

*Racial microaggressions* are brief, daily, and commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental affronts—intentional or otherwise—that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, and Nadal, 2007). Whether labeled *modern racism* (McConahay, 1986), *symbolic racism* (Sears, 1988), or *aversive racism* (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, and Hodson, 2002), racial microaggressions reflect a post-civil rights era transformation that has made American racism more subtle: Racism is now

more likely than ever to be disguised, covert, and ambiguous compared to the overt and publicly displayed racial hatred and bigotry that was once more commonplace (Sue et al., 2007; DeAngelis, 2009). This nebulous form of racism is more difficult to identify and acknowledge but not less harmful. In fact, research shows that everyday racial microaggressions may have significantly more influence on racial anger, frustration, and self-esteem than traditional overt forms of racism (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000).

Two research studies suggest the need for diversity professional development trainings to specifically address racial microaggressions in the school setting: Brown (2019) conducted qualitative, open-ended interviews with 29 K-12 African American educators; Decuir-Gunby & Gunby (2016) analyzed quantitative data from 75 African American educators (22 who were K-12 teachers). Both Brown (2019) and Decuir-Gunby & Gunby (2016) found that Black educators regularly experience racial microaggressions and tended to cope by detaching and not discussing racial issues. Decuir-Gunby & Gunby (2016) accounted for participants' personal characteristics such as age, gender, and marital status and found that even when BIPOC increase their level of education and income, they are still likely to experience racial microaggressions. Many of the participants in Brown's (2019) study reported self-isolating as a way to cope with their peers' cultural ignorance and insensitivity. Both studies found a positive correlation between participants' frequency of experiencing racial microaggressions and the percentage of nonminority members within their institution (Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016; Brown, 2019).

The research of Sue et al. (2009) further categorizes racial microaggressions. Sue et al. interviewed 14 self-identified BIPOC education graduate students in two separate focus groups and found that all participants stated or agreed that difficult dialogues on race and racism are often triggered by racial microaggressions. Participants reported that racial microaggressions

frequently came across as *ascriptions of intelligence or assumptions of criminality*. *Ascription of intelligence* incidents describe racial microaggressions in which “white people attribute a particular degree of intelligence to students of color” (p. 186). Stereotypically, Black and dark-skinned people are ascribed a lower level of intelligence. Black participants described situations of white classmates avoiding them and becoming extra vigilant with their personal belongings when they approached. Participants expressed that white students would communicate a fear of them or that they might steal; “they don’t trust us, we’re criminals, dope pushers, and thieves” (Sue et al., 2009, p. 186).

### ***Race Evasiveness.***

Research shows that the challenges in race dialogues are significantly different among BIPOC and white people (Sue, 2013). One common challenge for many white people is their tendency to not want to acknowledge systemic racism or how their actions uphold racist systems (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Lawrence & Tatum, 1998). Diangelo (2008) contends that white people’s uncertainty and discomfort in race dialogues should not be all too surprising because many white people are unaccustomed to talking about such topics. People typically have good intentions for not racializing social dynamics, namely they do not want to come across as racist; however, race evasiveness among educators can prevent deeper engagement with many root causes of educational inequity and further exacerbate opportunity gaps for BIPOC students (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Chapman, 2014). The study conducted by Sue et al. (2009) gives voice to how race evasiveness actions and comments look and sound like. One participant described how they were often greeted with rolling of eyeballs from others after bringing up topics of race, culture, or ethnicity in the classroom—eyeballs that “scream at you, here we go again” (Sue et al., 2009, p. 186). Another participant stated, “When I share personal experiences of discrimination in class,

they always want to find another reason for the behavior” (Sue et al., 2009, p. 186). These statements highlight how race evasiveness manifests for some people and hint at how discouraging it can be for BIPOC to fully engage in such a space.

### ***Racial Microaggressions and Mental Health.***

Public health researchers’ findings underscore the qualitative findings of the research above (Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016; Brown, 2019): Racism and racial microaggressions have tangible effects on mental and emotional health (Ryff, Keyes, and Hughes, 2003; Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006; Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2012), as well as physical health (Brondolo et al., 2009; Paradies, 2006). Adverse mental health effects for Black teachers and students in particular, can manifest into a diminished sense of racial heritage and identity (Brown, 2019) and reduced academic confidence and mental efficacy.

Franklin et al. (2006) provide a case study of a social worker named Pamela who was the only BIPOC at her agency. Over the course of several years, the cumulative effects of daily microaggressions and everyday racism traumatized Pamela to the point that she began to feel depressed and eventually left the agency. While Pamela’s experiences are tragically common for BIPOC in America, research indicates that BIPOC can experience similar adverse effects even if they only perceive to be racially discriminated against. Pieterse et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis that reviewed a total sample size of 18,140 across 66 studies and found a positive association between perceived racism and psychological distress.

### **Facilitator Knowledge.**

Given this potential for distress, the facilitator of race dialogues needs careful training, psychological resilience, and careful planning. The efficacy of DEI training sessions can depend greatly on the person or persons facilitating the dialogue. A facilitator’s main goal is to

encourage authentic engagement from the participants by creating well-planned exercises and commenting on participants' responses to questions and one another (Dorman, 2018). A facilitator of a race dialogue must balance a tightrope walk in which they "share their experiences and perspectives . . . but do not become advocates for particular positions" (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013, p. 52). A challenge that race dialogue facilitators face is their "knowledge, experience, and attitudes about their own or other racial groups" (Dorman, 2018, p. 120) because they, like the participants themselves, come from a variety of backgrounds and have varied lived experiences. This study aims to better understand how a facilitator's experience, or lack thereof, factors into race dialogue participants to experiencing racial battle fatigue.

A skilled race dialogue facilitator must develop various competencies, including an understanding of self and others. Maxwell, Chesler and Nagda (2011) point out that it would be very difficult to facilitate the consciousness-raising, knowledge development, and relationship-building activities that typically occur in a race dialogue without having a well-established understanding of one's own identity, of the identities present in the group, and the dynamics of how various identities play out in society. A study at a four-year university shows that many faculty training to be facilitators felt fearful and incapable of facilitating difficult dialogues because of their lack of experience, uncertainties about managing others' emotions, and managing their own emotions (Placier, Kroner, Burgoyne, & Worthington, 2012). Ironically, facilitators from privileged and oppressed backgrounds alike can face these types of challenges (Dorman, 2018). For instance, white facilitators' ability to empathize and manage productive conflict may be stifled by their inability to support authentic engagement of participants because of knowledge gaps or emotional avoidance. Meanwhile, BIPOC facilitators' internalized

oppression can impede the effectiveness of African American facilitators who may be dislocated due to their acceptance of stereotypical or inferiorized roles of their own racial group (Dorman, 2018).

### **Professional Development: A Tool for Change in Schools**

Despite its many potential challenges, schools can curtail race dialogue's ill effects through implementation of careful professional development. Many K-12 schools adopt a PD program in order to address a myriad of issues, including economics, academics, and parental involvement (Coles-Ritchie, 2016). The most common form of PD—the workshop model—however, is the most criticized (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and Yoon, 2001). The workshop model positions teachers to learn outside of their classroom from a more experienced colleague (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998). An expansive study that surveyed over 100,000 teachers in 32 countries showed that PD programs that take an inquiry-oriented, practice-focused, and collaborative approach are prone to enhance teachers' efficacy for teaching (Liu & Liao, 2019). The literature suggests that few schools meet such criteria (Sandholtz, 2002).

DEI requires schools to employ an innovative approach to professional development. DEI PD does not squarely fit into the traditional workshop model because the facilitator, as previously mentioned, does not position themselves as an 'expert.' If anything, DEI PD demands a rejection of traditional practices for the sake of BIPOC's wellbeing: "Unless school leaders actively oppose institutional norms and practices of whiteness, schools will continue to function as hostile racial climates not only to [students of color] but also to [educators of color], particularly those who try to disrupt the racial status quo" (Kohli, 2016, p. 4). Kohli's claim points to the need for educators to study how schools are facilitating DEI work, especially when several states continue to adopt or advance bills that aim to ban the teaching of Critical Race

Theory, a key tenet of DEI work (Florido, 2021). This study addresses this need by better understanding which factors of anti-racist DEI PD augment or lessen educators' racial battle fatigue.

### ***Charter Schools Offer a Unique Context of Study***

**Professional Development in Charter Schools is Varied.** Charter schools are more free to explore professional development than traditional public schools because, to a greater extent, they govern themselves. Professional development in all schools can vary in content, scope, and sequence but even more so in charter schools; it is unclear how this variance impacts the efficacy of charter schools' professional development. Charter schools are generally given more latitude to be innovative in areas like curriculum and organizational structure in exchange for greater accountability (Hanson-Harding, 2000). Oftentimes, professional development initiatives are implemented in a standardized manner: district-wide, all schools facilitate the same curriculum, adhering to a similar andragogy. However, charter schools tend to wield more autonomy than traditional public schools; thus, charter schools are prone, by definition, to produce different outcomes than their counterparts (Gelbart, 2013; Hanson-Harding, 2000; Oliver, 2019; Paisner, 2011). Currently, however, the manner in which educational leaders are planning and implementing DEI PD at the K-12 level is unclear, particularly at the charter school setting.

**Charter School Movement Shaped by Whiteness.** The impetus to found a charter school hinges largely in its vision, e.g. more teacher autonomy and voice; an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); more personalized support for students. Data show that the American charter school movement has shifted from a community-based, grassroots approach to more of a capitalistic, corporate-based business model (White, 2014). White (2020) conducted a two-year qualitative study where she interviewed school managers,

leaders, and teachers in an urban New York City community. White's findings confirmed the trend of charter schools being increasingly founded and operated by charter management organizations (CMO), compared to the community organizations and youth development groups that led the charter movement throughout the state in the late 1990s (White, 2014). The emphasis on franchising and expanding CMO-run charter schools in predominantly BIPOC communities prioritizes student achievement through the valuing of white, middle-class norms (Scott, 2009; Scott & DiMartino, 2010; White, 2020). In this venture capital expansion system, charter schools seek to improve BIPOC students' academic outcomes by targeting their cultural norms, languages, and traditions (White, 2020).

### **The Black Experience is not a Monolith**

The African American and Black culture and experience are neither unidirectional, static, homogenous, nor monolingual (Alex-Assensoh & Hanks, 2000; Denton & Massey, 1989; Johnson, 2016; Lorand Matory, 1993; Seda Bonilla, 1970; Watson, 2015). Black culture, in large part, stems from a common ancestry rooted in the African diaspora, which reaches to the Americas and the Caribbean (Alex-Assensoh & Hanks, 2000). Given the realities of race and racism in America, Black people, despite varying identifying markers and characteristics, are likely to encounter prejudice and discrimination from some sections of the majority population (Foner, 2016). There are many differences, though, that function to distinguish the experience of Black people both in Black and non-Black spaces (Okonofua, 2013).

### ***Black Americans and Black Immigrants***

One condition that influences the experiences of Black people in America is whether or not they were born in the United States. Studies show that native-born Black people, or Black Americans, are more likely to endure generational trauma that stems from slavery compared to

people who are first- or second-generation Black Americans (DeGruy, 2005). The lack of collective memory, and, therefore, trauma, can serve as an advantage for Black immigrants (Assare, 2022). Contrarily, the conflict and tension that exists among Black Americans and Black immigrants can work against Black immigrants because they are minorities in both the United States and the at-large Black community (Okonofua, 2013). Many Afro-Latino immigrants, for instance, are discriminated against within their Latinx community for their Black phenotypes, yet struggle to be accepted as Black by Black Americans - even as they assimilate into society as Black (Lorand Matory, 1993; Seda Bonilla, 1970).

### ***The Intersectionality of Black Women***

Gender and sex are also key characteristics when considering the differences in the Black experience. Lorde describes the need to acknowledge the unique experiences that Black women face: “Sexual hostility against Black women is practiced not only by the white racist society, but implemented within our Black communities as well” (1984, p. 120-121). Lorde’s account describes the phenomenon of intersectionality, which is well-documented and has become part of lexicons outside of those who study gender and race relations (Crenshaw, 1989). Yet, the negative outcomes that many Black women experience are still a reality. In the workplace, Black women face unfair expectations, unique challenges, and biased assumptions about where they fit – perceptions that differ from those held about women from other racial and ethnic groups, as well as those held about men (Frye, 2019). Black women also receive inequitable medical treatment when it comes to both physical and mental health (Chinn, Martin, & Redmond, 2021). An exploratory study involving 40 African American women confirms data that show the ill effects of racism can have on birth outcomes and the need for more support and measures in this area (Nuru-Jeter, Dominguez, Hammond, Leu, Skaff, Egerter, Jones, & Braveman, 2009).

### **Summary: Anti-Racist DEI Professional Development**

More K-12 schools are engaging in anti-racist DEI PD in order to help ameliorate some of the ubiquitous and long-standing racial inequities in the American education system. Ideally, the cornerstone racial dialogue component of anti-racist DEI PD would help build understanding and appreciation among people from different backgrounds that otherwise would not exist (Noguera & Wing, 2006; Leonardo & Porter, 2010). In a school setting, such understanding can have numerous benefits, perhaps none greater than the consistent implementation of equitable teaching practices that help all students—regardless of their ethno-racial identity markers—feel a high sense of wellness and belonging. The United States can look to other countries, like Brazil, as examples of how race dialogues can bring about more anti-racism practices and awareness.

The flawed and racist ecology of American public schools, however, positions anti-racist DEI training sessions as spaces that further entrench BIPOC in an environment replete with racial microaggressions (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). It takes an experienced, critically self-reflective facilitator to be able to engage a diverse group of people and appropriately respond to any racial microaggressions that manifest during race dialogue (Dorman, 2018). Black teachers are particularly vulnerable to adverse effects of poorly facilitated DEI professional development, in large part because race dialogues are inherently skewed against Black/African American people (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). Los Angeles charter schools are a context where no research regarding Black teachers' experiences in anti-racist DEI PD has yet to be done. It is also a context that necessitates understanding Black teachers' experiences for at least two reasons: 1) charter schools' greater level of autonomy when designing professional development versus traditional public schools and 2) Black peoples' contention against anti-Blackness not only among white people but also within the predominant Latinx community.

The personal narratives of Black teachers' experiences at charter schools can help uncover which race dialogue practices are conducive to improving educators' social and racial consciousness and, which, alternatively tend to reproduce racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue. Charter networks, in particular, need to be studied because little is known about how the variance in professional development rollout among individual charter schools will impact Black teachers. The findings of this study can help increase Black teachers' sense of belonging at their schools, thereby improving retention rates among Black teachers, and, ultimately, further close the racial opportunity gap.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODS

School districts across the country began implementing DEI PD for staff during the 2020-2021 school year. More specifically, school districts began rolling out anti-racist DEI professional development as a response to the racial unrest made public by the murders of African American people, namely George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, during the summer of 2020. For teachers, students, and their families, a commitment to being pro-Black might result in a higher sense of belonging within their school communities and gains in academic achievement. This type of DEI training is coupled with a commitment to being pro-Black. Race dialogue in anti-racist DEI professional development can be problematic for BIPOC, who, research suggests, experience race dialogue much differently than white people (Sue, 2013; Trawalther & Richeson, 2008). The research that I conducted attempted to identify and analyze these differing perceptions and disparate experiences of race dialogues for Black charter school teachers. The following central research question underlies the study:

How do Black teachers at a Los Angeles charter network report experiencing racial battle fatigue, if at all, while participating in anti-racist DEI PD? The following research questions will guide this inquiry:

- R1. To what extent, if at all, do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?
- R2. In what ways, if any, do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?

R3. What recommendations do Black charter school educators who participate in anti-racist DEI professional development have for reducing racial battle fatigue?

### **Research Design**

The study uses a qualitative, phenomenological research design to explore the extent and nature of racial battle fatigue among Black teachers when they participate in or facilitate anti-racist DEI PD. A qualitative phenomenological design combines philosophy and psychology. It is an appropriate design when the researcher seeks to describe “the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13).

The main research method is individual interviews. Individual interviews allowed me to take a more holistic approach in deeply understanding teachers’ experiences, thoughts, and feelings towards anti-racist DEI PD. Survey data, on the other hand, would not have provided a comprehensive understanding of teachers’ experiences, stories, and reflections. Participants needed a space to be able to explain their encounters with racial microaggressions in an open-ended way that surveys do not provide.

The study’s focal unit of study, racial battle fatigue, can manifest in various ways. The study sought to better understand the manifestations of racial battle fatigue and its root causes in anti-racist DEI spaces. The symptoms, experiences, and causes of racial battle fatigue vary from person to person. Individual interviews can provide such a space where participants can provide nuanced and in-depth explanations to their experiences. Thus, this study required a semi-structured interview method that allowed participants to share their perspectives freely.

## Methods

### Site and Sample Selection

The site for the study, XYZ Charter Schools network (pseudonym), is representative of many charter school networks nationwide for a few reasons: a) It is comprised of more than 10 school sites; b) It affords its schools autonomy when it comes to delivering staff-facing professional development; c) It made a network-wide commitment to be anti-racist and pro-Black<sup>1</sup> during the summer of 2020; d) It encouraged its schools to roll out anti-racist DEI training during the 2020-2021 school year; e) It has relatively few (< 25%) Black/African American principals. Because these criteria help create an environment where educators are receiving anti-racist DEI training that varies based on their school site within the overall network, this site allowed me to capture data from multiple school sites and analyze any differences among educators' experiences from school site to school site. The focus on charter over public schools helped this study better understand how variance among PD implementation affects teachers' experience during anti-racist DEI PD.

*Participants.* I limited participants to Black/African American charter school educators, with the entire number of participants equaling twelve. All interview participants self-identified as Black or African American and participated in anti-racist DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools. Despite being part of the same school district, participants worked at separate, individual Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), which increased the likelihood of variance among Black educators' experiences in anti-racist DEI trainings. I aimed to interview participants who represented a range of backgrounds<sup>2</sup>. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Black experience is not

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<sup>1</sup> At its core, pro-Blackness involves understanding what power means for Black people, building power for Black people (Suarez, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, two interviewees could be African American women with Caribbean roots who have taught for more than 10 years. Another two interviewees could be African American men with Los Angeles roots who have taught for fewer than 5 years.

monolithic; several conditions—many of which are multi-layered themselves—impact Black people’s experiences and their perceptions of society in different ways. Identifying characteristics for interviewees included: gender, region of origin, teaching experience, and self-reported commitment to DEI initiatives.

***Recruitment.*** I incentivized participants’ engagement in a few ways. First, I communicated to potential participants the value of their input: *Your unique experiential knowledge matters.* Also, I communicated the value of the study: *Other Black or African American educators stand to benefit from future anti-racist DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools.* Additionally, I made use of some of my personal connections. Furthermore, all participants received a gift card as a gesture of appreciation for their time and thoughts.

#### ***Access***

At the time of the study, I was in my sixth year of working at XYZ Charter Schools. It was my second full year serving in a full-time administrative position; I was a teacher for the previous four years. During my time at XYZ Charter Schools, I had actively participated in several network-wide initiatives, including a council that focused on how to improve the efficacy of DEI-related content throughout the network. Participating in these network-level initiatives allowed me to connect with educators from multiple school sites. I had also built rapport with several personnel at XYZ Charter’s home office level, including its current CEO, whom I interviewed as part of an assignment for my doctoral work. I had worked to make evident to my colleagues my commitment to contributing to educational equity at XYZ Charter Schools through my involvement in various councils, committees, and working groups. I leaned on this history and my efforts to demonstrate good faith when proposing my study to network leaders.

I reached out to a few key network leaders, including an Instructional Superintendent and the Vice President of Employee Relations and Engagement, about my research proposal and received encouraging feedback. I leveraged my established relationship with my Superintendent to make a positive connection to the person who was ultimately responsible for approving my research proposal: the network's Chief of Staff. In my communication with the Chief of Staff, I aimed to take a humble stance and ask for permission to conduct research, rather than presuming that it would automatically be approved. I pitched my research study to XYZ's Chief of Staff as an opportunity for the network to learn from its anti-racist efforts and to progress monitor their network-wide commitment to be pro-Black. I recruited participants by attending Black affinity spaces that I had already been a part of and followed up with a personal email. Participants' job titles in XYZ Charter Schools in DEI PD varied and included teacher, counselor, director, assistant principal and principal. I offered participants compensation for being part of the study.

### ***Role Management***

I saw great value in my duality of roles as both an employee of the research site and a researcher. As a researcher, framing my proposal in a way that showed how the network would benefit from my study helped me gain approval to conduct my research. Furthermore, positioning myself as a researcher from an outside organization gave participants a sense of assuredness that their opinions and thoughts would be taken seriously – my study was not aiming to simply check a box, which, unfortunately, could have been a sentiment among educators at XYZ Charter Schools when it comes to anti-racist work.

As an employee, I expected that elevating my overlap in experiences with potential participants would help build trust with them. I shared some of the same concerns that my participants had: I, too, a Black educator, have participated and led anti-racist DEI PD at XYZ

Charter Schools. Additionally, my position as an employee afforded me an advantage because of the familiarity that participants have with me. My active participation in activities across the network over the years helped people feel comfortable enough with me to want to participate in my study. Furthermore, I had been included in several network-wide publications; I hoped that name recognition encouraged people to participate.

### **Data Collection**

The study employed one primary data collection method: individual interviews. I individually interviewed twelve participants. Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. I utilized a purposeful sampling approach for the interview in order to emphasize in-depth understanding of information-rich cases. Purposeful sampling allowed me to “discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore . . . select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriem & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). This approach allowed my study to explore a more comprehensive view of the Black experience, as well as many societal and cultural contexts in the Los Angeles area, such as anti-Blackness among the Latinx community discussed in Chapter 2.

Interviews allowed me to explore participants’ experiences in an in-depth manner that a survey or focus group interview does not afford. The individual interviews informed Research Questions 1, 2 and 3. Thematically, the interviews explored participants’ educational experiences and what they enjoy and find challenging about being an educator; general questions about the DEI PD at their school site and how they have experienced anti-racist DEI PD at their school; negative effects they experience when participating in anti-racist DEI PD. More specifically, I asked participants how much stress and fatigue they experience when engaging in DEI work.

Thematically, the interviews also explored how racial battle fatigue manifested for them personally, whether that be in the form of a physical, behavioral, or social-emotional response.

To continue, the interviews thematically explored factors that participants perceived as having an impact on their level of participation during DEI PD; recommendations they might offer in order to mitigate racial battle fatigue and racial microaggressions in DEI spaces; elements participants thought they would need to be added to anti-racist DEI PD curricula, facilitation, or implementation to alleviate their racial battle fatigue; and finally, I explored the extent to which participants perceived XYZ Charter School's DEI initiatives match the organization's overall goal of being pro-Black.

The interviews allowed me to better understand, according to Black educators, what factors of professional development, such as the ethno-racial makeup of the participants and facilitators, the curriculum, and the level of participant engagement, contributed to racial battle fatigue. Further, I anticipated that participants would offer recommendations on what would reduce racial battle fatigue in anti-racist DEI trainings.

All interviews were held online on Zoom. Individual interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. I utilized Zoom's recording options to capture participants' words and body language. I took notes during the interviews. The interviews provided data that helped inform Research Questions 1 and 2 by encapsulating what tasks and experiences produce particular signs of racial battle fatigue and collecting Black educators' narratives behind the self-reported indicators of racial battle fatigue and how those indicators impact them emotionally, behaviorally, socially, or otherwise. Further, the interviews helped inform Research Question 3 because they aimed to gather data that speak to what educators recommend in order to reduce

racial battle fatigue in anti-racist DEI professional development. See Appendix B for interview questions.

### **Data Analysis**

I used an inductive, comparative, and phenomenological approach to analyze the interview data. The codes, informed by RQs 1 and 2, that emerged reflected issues of racial battle fatigue, recommendations for anti-racist DEI PD, and related issues regarding participation in these activities. I analyzed the interviews for qualitative data that answered Research Questions 1, 2 and 3:

R1. To what extent, if at all, do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?

R2. In what ways, if any, do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?

R3. What recommendations do Black charter school educators who participate in anti-racist DEI professional development have for reducing racial battle fatigue?

I used open coding to analyze interviews for data that provided a more holistic understanding of what racial battle fatigue feels like when participating in anti-racist DEI PD. I created categories that developed from emergent codes and illustrated the ways in which participants experienced racial battle fatigue in anti-racist DEI PD, e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc. Additionally, I created codes for any recommendations participants offer for reducing racial battle fatigue in anti-racist DEI PD.

I reviewed the video recordings of the interviews and added to the notes that I took while facilitating the interview. I noted body language and speech patterns, e.g. intonation, inflection, etc. that I might have missed during the interview. These observations provided more detail that was unavailable from a transcript alone. Additionally, body language and speech pattern notes helped me understand if participants who had experienced particular elements of racial battle fatigue spoke about their experiences in a similar manner. I used Rev.com to transcribe the audio recording of each interview. I also downloaded the interview transcripts that Zoom provides and cross-reference it with Rev.com's transcription. I utilized the micro-interlocutor qualitative framework to analyze chronemic, kinesic, and paralinguistic information (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran, 2009). Furthermore, I created an analytic memo for each of the research questions in order to help me gather initial thoughts on how my study's findings confirmed, contradicted, or extended existing literature. Finally, I used the MaxQDA software to help me annotate the transcripts and organize the excerpts of the transcript by the codes I had already created.

### **Positionality and Ethical Issues**

My study faced at least two ethical considerations. One such consideration was the potential for participants' emotional harm. Racial battle fatigue, my study's unit of analysis, can lead to numerous adverse effects, including shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, recurring negative thoughts (Smith, Hung, and Franklin, 2011). Discussing racial battle fatigue could have triggered such negative symptoms among participants.

I used interviews to mitigate any propensity that participants might have to mental health issues. I was also sensitive to participants' experiences and did not probe any deeper if participants seemed visibly uncomfortable. Of course, using a standardized interview protocol

helped me not ask any extemporaneous questions that might unintentionally elicit stressful behaviors. I also provided a list of mental health resources that participants in the interviews can utilize, should they experience negative effects of participating in the interview.

Another ethical consideration was protecting participants' privacy/confidentiality. Approximately less than 20% of XYZ Charter School teachers identify as Black. Some school sites have three or fewer Black teachers. Being visible minorities may make participants prone to being identified. I sought to guarantee participants' anonymity by not reporting or aggregating data by individual school sites within the XYZ Charter network so that participants would not experience any adverse effects to their employment conditions because of their involvement in my study. I stored transcripts and interview recordings online in a cloud storage site. Additionally, files were labeled only with pseudonyms. I did not include participants' names in writing. I also made sure to not link participants to their job titles. Though I could not guarantee anonymity, I took great care to protect participants' identities.

Furthermore, I recognized that potential participants may feel pressure to be part of the study because I am an administrator. I did not include anyone in the study who directly reports to me. That helped ensure that no one felt coerced into participating in my study.

### **Credibility & Trustworthiness**

My study was prone to credibility issues, but I take thoughtful steps to mitigate their potential threats. Perhaps my biggest threat to credibility and trustworthiness was my bias. As previously mentioned, I have my personal experiences as a Black educator and opinions on racial battle fatigue. I also have had conversations with colleagues about their experiences in anti-racist DEI spaces. I have conducted a pilot study on the subject. So far, all of the above leads to the idea that Black teachers indeed experience racial battle fatigue in anti-racist DEI settings.

I took strategic steps in order to reduce any perception that my study is confirming a pre-established conclusion. First, I allowed the data to speak for itself by elevating direct quotes from rich data transcripts. Furthermore, although several of my participants were current teachers, I also include educators in other roles, e.g. administrators and operation employees, in my study.

### **Study Limitations**

The scope of my study was limited: as a qualitative study of only 12 educators, my study is not generalizable. I did, however, work toward establishing internal validity. My use of standardized protocols, specifically the use of an interview protocol, audio and video recordings, and consistent coding procedures, help establish credibility within the XYZ Charter School sites, even if another researcher were to have conducted the research.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter reports the findings of a qualitative research study that focuses on twelve Black/African American educators at a secondary (6th-12th grades) Los Angeles charter network and their experiences when participating in anti-racist Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) professional development (PD). As a reminder, in this inquiry, I explored three concerns – Black charter school educators’ descriptions of the extent to which they experienced racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development; Black charter school educators' descriptions of the felt-experience of racial battle fatigue, and the Black charter school educators' professional development recommendations for reducing racial battle fatigue in DEI PD.

I interviewed all of the study's participants between November 16 and December 15, 2022. We used a private space (Zoom) to meet one another because I had a sense that discussing this topic might be sensitive and emotionally triggering for some of the participants. For the most part, all of the participants shared that this topic was difficult to discuss, however, the participants felt that it was necessary to open up and share their story. A central finding was that the overwhelming majority of the participants described experiencing negative physical and emotional responses in relation to participating in anti-racist DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools (pseudonym). In what follows, I first identify and provide evidence of the prominent racial battle fatigue reactions participants reported when participating in DEI PD. I then discuss, in more detail, how participants described and characterized these reactions, e.g. mentally, behaviorally, physically. I conclude with participants' recommendations to reduce racial battle fatigue in DEI PD.

All twelve of the study's participants identify as Black/African American and all 12 have participated in or facilitated anti-racist DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools. In this study, participants represented a range of professional roles at XYZ Charter Schools, including teacher, counselor, assistant principal, principal, and director-across various middle schools, high schools, and the network/district-level office.

The purpose of this study is to document, describe, and give voice to Black educators who have participated in or facilitated anti-racist DEI PD at a secondary Los Angeles charter network.

This study sought to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent, if at all, do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?
2. In what ways, if any, do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?
3. What recommendations do Black charter school educators who participate in anti-racist DEI professional development have for reducing racial battle fatigue?

### **Principal Findings**

Results of my analytic treatment of the interviews provided by the twelve study participants provided evidence of the impact of participation in race dialogues during DEI PD on Black educators' emotional, mental, and physical well-being. Three main findings emerged from the analysis. First, my study revealed that the current implementation and experience of anti-racist DEI PD in a Los Angeles secondary charter school network creates negative emotions for

participants. The most common and intense of emotions among participants were exhaustion, anxiety, and frustration. Second, my study showed that Black educators in a Los Angeles charter network repeatedly experienced racial battle fatigue in ways that are mostly unobservable to others during anti-racist DEI PD, each in their own way. Participants primarily reported withdrawing psychologically and/or emotionally, e.g. choosing not to actively share their thoughts, in order to cope with the racial battle fatigue they would experience during DEI sessions. Third, my findings indicate that twelve participants provided similar recommendations for revising the pedagogy, structure, and length of DEI sessions. In the following sections, I discuss my findings in greater depth.

### **DEI PD Fosters Negative Emotions for Participants**

When sharing the experiences they had during DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools, participants overwhelmingly reported enduring adverse effects. Overall, my analysis suggests that the experience of participating in the current approach to anti-racist DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools leads to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and frustration for Black educators.

#### ***Weariness***

A recurring trend among participants who participated in DEI PD was the emotional exhaustion, or weariness, that they experienced. This fatigue is of a complex nature. Nine of twelve participants, for instance, reported experiencing weariness during DEI PD. Of these nine participants, five reported feeling weary both during DEI PD, as well as at the end of DEI sessions. Furthermore, two of these five participants detailed feeling weariness even before beginning DEI PD—lingering effects from previous sessions. Additionally, participants reported having various root causes of their weariness. Five participants reported feeling fatigued when actively sharing their life experiences, while others felt emotionally exhausted when having to

consider whether or not they would respond to others' comments. Uncertainty - due to either active participation during DEI PD or having to react to colleagues' remarks - seemed to activate participants' weariness.

Consider one of the study's participants, Kayla: It is her first year working at XYZ Charter Schools. She sits at a table with five other co-workers during a DEI session. She doesn't know any of the people sitting at her table-they all work in other departments. The group is tasked by the session's facilitator with discussing the question, "As a child, what were you taught about Black people?" Kayla braces herself for what others - all people who are not Black/African American - will say.

After the session, Kayla will cry once she gets to her car as a way to emotionally exhale. Kayla reported not enjoying participating in DEI PD because it is such an emotional experience for her. The three words she used to describe how she would feel after a DEI session were *exhausted*, *curious*, and *frustrated*. Kayla shared:

There's significant fatigue because our people are devalued in a way that I don't think any other group of people is. And so it's hard to sit and listen to people speak their truth or speak their reality, but not realize how hurtful it is. There's just a lot of emotion attached to those sessions.

Kayla's weariness stems from having to continually expect disparaging comments about Black people, such as, *I was taught that Black people are dangerous. I was raised not to trust them*. When Kayla hears negative and threatening comments about Black people in a DEI session, all she can do is absorb them and nod along because the other participants are simply following the facilitator's instructions to speak freely. For Kayla, DEI PD serves to remind her

about the discouraging reality of what it can be like to be Black in America without any recourse to improve it.

Like Kayla, nearly all of the study's participants reported experiencing similar weariness when participating in anti-racist DEI PD. Prior research connects race dialogues to being emotionally draining for BIPOC (Miller, Jones, Reddick, Lowe, Flounder, Hogan, & Rosal, 2017; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). The DEI PD experiences of Mary, another participant, echo the literature: "Talking about race or any type of diversity is tiring. If I'm quiet, I'm not tired. But if I am trying to get a point across, or if I'm trying to share, it can be tiring." Whereas Kayla's weariness was rooted in hearing others' comments about race, here Mary indicates how tiring it can be for her to actively engage in race-related discussions. During DEI PD, Mary has to weigh whether or not to share her thoughts and ideas-perhaps counterviews to someone else's points or alternative illustrations to others' experiences-are worth the emotional energy it would take to explain them. With each decision comes unpleasant, triggering memories that require the participant to balance additional thoughts and emotions in addition to what is being discussed during the action DEI session.

Kayla and Mary's comments underscore the irony that nine of the participants reported experiencing. When participating in DEI PD, exhaustion is inevitable because participants are likely to experience it whether they participate actively or passively. Indeed, most participants shared experiences like the one Kayla underwent - being emotionally drained after having to listen to near-strangers talk about their understanding of racial issues. Yet, like Mary, five participants also reported that sharing their own viewpoints was taxing, as well. Lamar, for instance, shared, "If you're not exhausted, you probably aren't digging deep enough, and you're not creating safe, brave spaces for people." Here, Lamar alludes to the idea that in order to make

DEI PD worthwhile, participants have to push themselves to emotional and mental exhaustion—not only for their own sake, but also for the sake of other participants. Lamar realizes that his vulnerability and risk-taking during race dialogues help create a more inclusive and welcoming space for others. Yet, Lamar internalizes this realization as a responsibility that functions to exhaust him even further.

Aside from the inherently emotionally taxing nature of participating in race dialogues, a common contributing factor for weariness among four participants was the trivial manner in which non-Black people would discuss race-related topics - topics that seemed new and fascinating to others but were a regular, negative aspect that weighed heavily in participants' lives. At one point, Lamar's school was conducting anti-racist DEI PD twice a week. Unlike many of his colleagues who do not identify as Black/African American, he found much of the sessions' content to be heavy and taxing:

For [non-Black] people who are doing DEI work--if they're delusional about the role that they play or their own privileges--they're not stressed out about this because it's like, 'Oh, this is the one time this week I have to think about this.' But for me, I'm thinking about it every day.

Here, Lamar stresses the imbalanced experience and impact of race dialogues in DEI PD. For people like him who are more aware of racism and other systemic inequities' effect on daily experiences, race dialogues are not novel or nuanced; they are a reminder of routine struggles and challenges. On the other hand, race-related topics are extraordinary and not as stressful for people who have yet to more fully understand how their identity markers offer them various privileges.

The purpose of most of these DEI PDs is to help individual school sites or the organization at-large to be more equitable in practice, not just theory. The lack of observable progress, such as more culturally relevant curricula, dedicated efforts to increase Black student enrollment, and follow-up conversations with staff members who habitually commit racial microaggressions, however, also served to tire out many participants. Consider Terri, who feels valued by fellow staff members and her students and has received numerous accolades for her work; yet, the slow-going nature of the equity work is pushing her to leave XYZ Charter Schools:

There's me and another Black teacher, and we're kind of looking for a way out. Having to go into an environment where you experience anti-Blackness almost daily is tiring and makes me wanna leave. So I wish they were doing more with the DEI or at least--God--at least pretending and making an effort. They kind of mentioned something in the beginning of the year like, 'Oh, we're going to do this.' It's December, and they still haven't done anything.

Terri's comments speak to the fact that her school's merely hosting DEI PD is not enough--the content discussed in these sessions matters greatly. Participants reported that, despite their school having held numerous DEI sessions, oftentimes the conversations did not move past a superficial level. Several participants attributed their fatigue during DEI PD to not directly addressing issues, but instead talking around the real issues. Avoided issues might include the proliferation of the use of the n-word by students and the discomfort that some staff members feel about appropriately addressing its usage with students.

A few participants did not report being affected by the PD sessions. They did not indicate that they felt weary when participating in anti-racist DEI PD credited a dulling, normalizing, or

acceptance from their past experiences as the main reasons for why they were not fatigued. For instance, Brenda shared:

These types of conversations are always easy for me to have. I don't really get stressed about it; I guess being Black in America is just the norm. You're always trying to explain . . . so it's in my circle of comfort. Past trauma has made me not hang on to things that I probably should be mad about for longer. I'm the kind of person where if I'm mad at someone-once that feeling of anger is gone, I'm over it. And I think to myself, "That's a trauma response." I think that's just how I respond to not get myself all worked up.

Brenda speaks to how her experiences as a Black person in America have created somewhat of a coping mechanism that allow her to participate in anti-racist DEI PD without becoming overwhelmed or overly emotional. Additionally, Brenda has learned how to respond to instances of discrimination or injustice in ways that allow her not to hold on to anger or frustration.

Similarly, Lorraine added:

I have been in personal counseling for about 20 years. And so the issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion are both my personal trauma and just processing what has happened in my life over the last 20 years. I feel that I have had decades to process a lot of the things that some folks are grappling with for the first time. So I feel like I am able to engage in this now, and it's fine.

Lorraine's unique and extensive experience with personal counseling has given her tools and coping mechanisms to engage in anti-racist DEI PD in a way that feels manageable and safe. She recognizes, though, that not everyone has had the same opportunities to process their own experiences and trauma, which makes DEI PD a more challenging space.

Brenda and Lorraine do not feel overly exerted because they readily lean on their therapy/counseling or lived experiences to help them engage with the possibly traumatic or triggering topics that arise in anti-racist DEI PD. Brenda and Lorraine's experiences, however, are the exception. Most participants, as detailed above, experienced weariness and exhaustion when participating in anti-racist DEI PD. Participants reported feeling this fatigue whether they engaged in race dialogues actively or passively. Ongoing and repeated experiences of weariness among participants may help explain another common negative response that participants had during DEI PD: anxiety.

### *Anxiety*

In addition to weariness, eight of the study's twelve participants reported experiencing a related, yet distinct feeling: anxiety. Like participants' reported weariness, much of participants' anxiety, stress, and nervousness was also rooted in uncertainty. Some participants reported feeling stressed during DEI PD because they felt as if their life experiences were being exploited for others' benefit. Uncertainty about what parts of themselves would be devalued put participants on edge. Similarly, participants shared feeling anxious when anticipating co-workers' disconcerting comments. Even participants who reported enjoying DEI PD, reported feeling anxiety as collateral damage.

Consider Jamal, who first began participating in DEI PD with XYZ Charter Schools in 2020. He was one of the participants who reported experiencing the type of weariness detailed in the above section. Like many participants, the source of Jamal's weariness-uncertainty-also resulted in him experiencing a great deal of anxiety when participating in anti-racist DEI PD. He reported feeling very stressed leading up to the sessions and would often think about finding a way to get out of the sessions. In fact, Jamal's department chairperson would check in with him

and his team before DEI sessions and tell them that they would cover for them if they chose not to attend the upcoming session. The three words Jamal used to describe how he would feel after a DEI session were drained, irritated, and upset.

A great deal of Jamal's anxiety is rooted in how personal the conversations are in anti-racist DEI PD. It is not in Jamal's nature to share private aspects of his life, especially with those he does not know very well. Yet, as a Black person, Jamal felt as if he were constantly being asked to go out of his comfort zone for others' benefit:

For the sake of the company, we're unearthing trauma . . . I felt like the overall goal was to educate white people, and to do that, you need experiences from people of color to educate them. So, I'm curriculum. We are curriculum.

Jamal's comments indicate that he felt devalued as a DEI PD participant, with his worth more tied to being a resource that would facilitate his white colleagues' understanding of race dynamics. Jamal's past experiences with discrimination and microaggressions had merit, but his personhood did not. Having to recount and relive traumatic experiences in DEI PD contributed to a space that was anxiety-inducing.

Like Jamal, nearly all participants reported experiencing anxiety when participating in anti-racist DEI PD. Some participants shared that they were anxious because of their nervousness about what others might say. Similar to when participants experienced weariness, oftentimes the preamble of the impact of what might be said-and not the actual responses-was enough to create anxiety amongst participants. During DEI PD, Christine, for instance, would ask herself, "Are people going to be honest? Are people going to say what they think is the appropriate response? Are we going to do it, or are we going to continue to beat around the bush?" Christine's internal dialogue is replete with uncertainty-uncertainty if others will be honest in their responses and

uncertainty regarding the conversation's level of authenticity. This uncertainty further feeds participants' anxiety during DEI PD.

Eight participants, like Jamal and Christine, reported feeling anxiety during DEI sessions. Additionally, some participants, particularly those in leadership positions at the school or network level, shared that they felt anxiety and stress at the conclusion of DEI PD because they felt that the stated objectives were not met or the session was not effective. Participants reported feeling that although they might not have felt stressed themselves, they would feel anxious when considering the ramifications that some DEI PD would have on their school staff. Lorraine, for example, stated:

The stress that I feel is when I feel like the people who are leading the conversation don't get it. And, thus, I feel they are actually perpetuating the very thing that they're saying that they're not. And that becomes very stressful, especially when they're in very large groups.

Lorraine, a school leader, finds it stressful when those who facilitate DEI PD fail to fully understand the bigger picture and the potential positive impact that DEI work can have. Instead, she notices that the facilitators are unwittingly committing the same racial microaggressions that their session is intended to help eradicate, as when whiteness is centered in a conversation about the importance of Blackness. Lorraine's anxiety is even more pronounced when these moments occur in large groups, such as her school staff, because it means that her campus is no closer (and perhaps further away) from being truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

Nearly all participants shared experiences like those of Christine and Lorraine - experiences that illustrated moments of anxiety when engaging in DEI PD. Janay was among the few participants who reported mostly enjoying anti-racist DEI PD. The three words she used to

describe how she would feel after a DEI session were challenged, emboldened, and seeking. Despite her positive experiences, Janay shared that she still felt anxiety during sessions. The genesis of Janay's anxiety, however, had different sources than that of other participants. Janay's anxiety was an offspring of her worries about how DEI PD would affect her staff's team dynamics; she worried how others would receive certain discomforting topics.

At Janay's school, DEI PD included staff members self-selecting into race-based groups. The purpose of these race-based Affinity groups was to allow staff members to speak more freely about some of the sensitive topics that people might dance around when in the company of people with different ethno-racial backgrounds. Janay enjoys participating in her Black Affinity space; however, her anxiety stems from others' perceptions of these groups' formation. Janay recounted how a weekly tradition with one of her coworkers, John (pseudonym), has turned sour once membership in her school's Affinity spaces was established:

I was worried. We had previously had a good relationship. Well, we still do, I think. Every Friday, for example, [John] orders mariscos for the staff . . . And I think after [Affinity groups were formed], it felt like when I would see him or talk to him, our conversations felt a lot lighter. Since I've joined the group, I think he's gotten a lot more quiet toward me. So now when we do the mariscos (seafood) on Friday, I feel like it doesn't have the same feel to it. I mean there's something that's changed; I can't put my finger on it. And it makes me feel sad because I don't want him to think that I'm secretly in a group that's trying to create tension or create division. I still wanna have mariscos [with him]-that's like my homeboy.

Janay enjoys her school's rendition of DEI PD. Yet, she still feels anxiety because her Black Affinity group is the minoritized racial group. Even though the charge of DEI work at XYZ

Charter Schools is to be pro-Black, she feels that she is part of a group that is being vilified because its founding has drawn racial lines and created uncertainty among staff members. The irony in Janay's bittersweet experience-she enjoys DEI PD but not its effect on her relationship with her colleague-also exists in another major emotion participants reported: frustration.

Not all DEI PD spaces caused participants anxiety. Five of the study's twelve participants, unprompted, discussed the positive effects of being part of a Black affinity space. A racial affinity space is a separate place for those who share a racial identity to gather, share experiences, and explore how racism affects them in their workplace. Some XYZ Charter School sites offered a Black affinity group as part of the DEI PD program for their Black/African American staff members. All of the participants who were part of an affinity group spoke positively about their experiences. Rhonda, for instance, shared:

A lot of the people that are in [the Black affinity space] are further along in their DEI journey and understand the importance of the work. So it just seems like there doesn't need to be as much teaching or explaining, and we're on the same kind of mission together. It's like we're energized to move this work and progress it forward. I don't have to bring that emotional side of explaining trauma or explaining why my existence matters, which I think in larger spaces where people may not be as far along in their DEI journey, that's required to bring in, which can be very depleting.

Here, Rhonda explains how she is more at ease and more calm in the Black affinity space, compared to a mixed-race group. It was one of the few positive aspects of DEI work for her and other participants.

### ***Frustration/Anger***

When asked to provide three words about how they felt after DEI PD, half of all participants said frustrated-the most common response. Overall, ten of the study's twelve participants reported feeling frustrated or angry during DEI PD. While participants shared various reasons for feeling weary or anxious, participants' experiences with feeling frustration or anger were more aligned with one another. Participants repeatedly cited DEI PD's performative nature as their main source of frustration. Participants' frustration was grounded in the irony that while participants valued the importance of DEI work, their school site's iteration of DEI PD left them with unmet needs. They were hopeful entering DEI sessions, but were routinely let down.

Consider Terri, whose school site's DEI PD took place mostly online. Initially, she was excited that the sessions were going to address important issues; she joined a planning committee so she could influence the direction of her school's DEI PD. Her enthusiasm for the DEI work, however, was short-lived. She shared that she felt ignored in the planning committee meetings, and her experiences in the actual DEI sessions were also discouraging. The three words she used to describe how she would feel after a DEI session were frustrated, unheard, and rushed.

Like many participants, a great deal of Terri's frustrations stemmed from the sessions not addressing meaningful issues. Instead, for many participants like Rhonda, DEI sessions felt as if they were largely meeting a compliance task and simply checking a box:

It just felt like George Floyd happened and Target was responding. So then [XYZ Charter Schools] was like, "Oh, well, we better respond too." And it was more of a bandwagon thing than it feeling very genuine. It also felt very haphazardly put together and not intentional.

Rhonda's frustration comes from the insincere and uncoordinated response that XYZ Charter Schools to an infamously racist event. The lack of thoughtfulness on the network's behalf is

frustrating because it communicates that the activism is more performative and about the optics- what garners value is appearing to care about DEI, rather than taking substantive steps to address it.

While Rhonda's comments are pointed to a singular moment in time, Kayla shared feeling similar frustrations to XYZ Charter Schools' overall approach to DEI work. Kayla was a participant who reported finding it frustrating to hear the charter network use pro-Black rhetoric, but not see any tangible outcomes-let alone viable plans-tied to the intentions:

One of our network priorities is to be pro-Black. And so that comes up pretty frequently [in DEI PD], but the frustrating part is that it kind of feels like it was an idea that somebody had to just say, "Let's support Black people more," but there's no strategy or anything behind it. It was just kind of an afterthought.

Here, Kayla describes the frustration she feels when the responsibility of taking a pro-Black stance is not acted upon. The cycle of pro-Black rhetoric followed by limited meaningful actions grows tired on Kayla and other participants. It is an unactualized promise. Worse, though, is the frequency of the unfulfilled promise. Time and time again Kayla and other participants are reminded of the lack of genuine investment that XYZ Charter Schools has made in improving Black people's experiences.

Although DEI PD's characterization as performative activism was the leading cause of frustration among participants, other factors that contributed to participants feeling frustrated or angry during DEI PD included: having to address some of the racist comments made by their co-workers; not seeing enough racial diversity or representation within the sessions; and feeling as if their voice or point-of-view was not valued or heard.

Lamar, for instance, is no stranger to racism-he experiences it in various settings. He points out, though, how having to manage racial microaggressions during an anti-racist DEI PD is a nuanced situation:

It's even worse because I can't leave that situation. So in the real world, if I'm out shopping and somebody is super racist to me at a store, you know what? I'm not buying this. I'm going to just go ahead and I'm going to go. At work, if a student says something racist or condescending or whatever, I use it as a teachable moment. I get it cuz you're a kid-I love you because you're a kid. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. But now you're an adult and this is an obligatory meeting that I have to take part in and I have to stay there because if I walk out, you're going to write a defamatory email saying something along the lines of, "I don't wanna engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion work," which is odd because of course I do. Of course I wanna make the world a better place. But you're going to frame it so that I'm refusing to do my job and I'm refusing to make the world a better place, which is so ridiculous to me.

Here, Lamar contrasts his ability to opt-out in public without any major consequences with the tension he feels when wanting to withdraw at his school site. He describes a frustration that comes from not feeling as if he can take care of himself during DEI PD; he fears that his self-removal from a space wherein racist comments that were just made would result in a formal reprimand. The workplace power dynamic adds to Lamar's frustration because it restricts him in ways that he does not experience in public settings. DEI PD is intended for people to share freely, but, ironically, Lamar is only afforded a discounted version of freedom. The no-win aspect of Lamar's scenario is also present in another of participants' reported racial battle fatigue experiences: stereotype threat.

### ***Stereotype Threat***

*Stereotype threat* is the phenomenon wherein people who belong to a group for which there is a negative stereotype are at-risk of underperforming in the domain to which the stereotype exists (Fischer, 2010). An individual's perception of the stereotype, not necessarily the individual's belief in the stereotype, drives the stereotype threat. For some participants, stereotype threat was the culmination of the racial battle fatigue responses detailed in the above sections: weariness, anxiety, and frustration/anger. Four of the study's participants reported experiencing a form of stereotype threat during DEI PD.

Consider Christine, who participated in DEI PD that would often take place online. The facilitators would introduce a topic, provide some background, and then the staff would break off into smaller groups so staff members could share their thoughts on the topic with one another. The three words she used to describe how she would feel after a DEI session were *frustrated*, *annoyed*, and *angry*. Christine was one of the participants who reported experiencing frustration or anger detailed in the above section; she also experienced stereotype threat when participating in anti-racist DEI PD.

Christine reported having the stereotype of the angry, Black woman pop into her mind during DEI sessions in moments when she would start noticing herself become emotional. She shared that, in these moments, she would shut down to avoid manifesting the stereotype because she was not sure if it would be a safe place for her if she were to exhibit how she felt. Christine described having to find additional time and spaces outside of the DEI PD in order to process the emotions that arise within the DEI PD:

I feel like it would be almost satisfying if I provided them with a reaction that they were looking for, so I'm always consciously trying to not reach that level. And if I do reach that level, I will excuse myself-whether I excuse myself to the restroom, excuse myself to

my office. I've sat under my desk sometimes because I just had to get the emotion out in order to be able to be present and move forward with my day.

Here, Christine describes the weariness that comes with having to constantly regulate her emotions in order to avoid a negative stereotype. Similar to Lamar's no-win scenario outlined in the previous section, Christine only has less-than-ideal options: scrutiny from her colleagues during DEI PD or an unhealthy processing of her emotions at the conclusion of the session. Christine is in a frustration-filled double bind: She finds that participation would risk being the very stereotype she wants to dispel.

The angry, Black woman stereotype threat, while commonly experienced by other participants, was not the sole stereotype threat reported. Jamal, for instance, echoed this sentiment of having to prove oneself by pointing out the complex social dynamic of a DEI PD: He feels that he has to be sharp and present himself in a professional manner, even though he's being asked to be honest and relaxed. Jamal feels this pressure because he recognizes what others can assume about him and other Black people, even during the relatively short amount of time of a DEI session. Namely, Jamal feels the stereotype threat of the violent, brutish Black man. Whether consciously or not, he is incessantly managing his outward appearance, demeanor, tone of voice, and body language. For instance, Jamal goes out of his way to come across as friendly. In an effort to disarm himself to others who might see him as threatening or dangerous (Jamal is taller than 6 feet), he seizes opportunities to inject humor into conversations, so that others can feel more comfortable around him. Jamal is working overtime; he has to process others' sensitivities in addition to the content of the DEI session. The stereotype threat gathers its power from the weariness, anxiety, and frustration/anger previously detailed. It is racial battle fatigue at its optimum level of performance.

Additionally, participants reported questioning whether or not they could be authentic and speak their truth in DEI sessions. During DEI PD, they were reminded that in other instances, while at XYZ Charter Schools, their voice had previously been quieted. Rhonda shared:

There was a lot of burden of onus on people of color and especially Black people and Black women, to bring this work forward, to champion it, to keep talking about it, and then have to bring our stories forward in order for people to care. And that's pretty exhausting and frustrating.

Here, Rhonda explains the irony of Black women experiencing stereotype threat, yet also feeling pressure to lead and be at the forefront of the charter network's racial equity work. The stereotype threat functions to create a striking imbalance of responsibility in DEI PD: Black people are expected to do the work of educating and advocating for their own inclusion, which oftentimes necessitates revisiting traumatic and emotionally charged topics. Meanwhile, others are able to remain passive or disengaged. Stereotype threat, in this regard, adds a layer of loneliness and isolation on Black people to what is already challenging and emotional work.

Lorraine echoed Rhonda's frustrations surrounding the inequity of responsibility placed on Black women and added that Black women add the most value to DEI work:

The best [DEI sessions] have been led by Black women, and I honestly can't tell if I feel that way because I am also a Black woman, or if the highest quality has happened to have been delivered by Black women. That said, I don't think it's fair that Black women carry the burden of educating the network.

Indeed, the DEI network leaders of XYZ Charter Schools are predominantly Black women, which makes the stereotype threat that Christine experiences even more puzzling. The stereotype

threat serves as a double-edged sword: It handicaps Black women from showing up as their authentic selves in a space that unreasonably demands a type of performance that elevates others.

Another element to the stereotype threat that participants feel is the idea of being the spokesperson for all. Several participants reported having to be careful of what they would share during DEI PD, realizing that others may take their words to represent the views of all Black people.

Relatedly, participants shared that they noticed instances in which the views of one Black person or experience were projected as being true for all Black people. For instance, Lamar shared how during one DEI PD, his school staff was posed with the question, "When is it appropriate to say the n-word?" The session included a video of a Black woman saying, "It's okay to say the n-word if you're referring to literature." Lamar, however, did not share this view:

She doesn't represent every single Black person in the world. You found one person who is a little bit of a clown and supports a very stupid and problematic viewpoint. And you decided, "Okay, so this makes it a good conversation for a group." No, it absolutely does not. It means you're really insensitive in finding this topic.

Lamar, angry at such a projection, worries that this type of depiction would give other staff members the idea that perhaps it is okay for the n-word to be used at school—an idea that he disagrees with. Lamar does not want to be associated with the problematic point-of-view, yet the insensitive generalization places him in an uncomfortable situation of having to publicly disagree with the curriculum provided by the DEI PD's facilitator.

### ***Summary***

In the examples given, educators identify a plethora of reactions related to racial battle fatigue when participating in or facilitating anti-racist DEI PD. Anxiety, psychological or

emotional withdrawal, frustration or anger, weariness, stereotype threat, discouragement, and various physiological symptoms were among the educators' most common racial battle fatigue reactions. Their responses suggested that DEI PD participants experience multiple racial battle fatigue reactions simultaneously—reactions that make it challenging for educators to fully engage in the DEI PD. Repeated racial microaggressions ironically make DEI sessions for Black educators a space where the very issues that the PD is aimed at mitigating are actually accentuated and further entrenched. In the data offered here, participants expressed that, during DEI PD, they contend with their own mental, emotional, and physical effects, while also balancing how their engagement will impact other participants' experiences. Black educators are having to carry an inequitable amount of stress when participating in DEI PD. Lastly, responses suggest that participants feel the aforementioned racial battle fatigue reactions before, during, and after DEI PD. The next section will explore findings connected to R2:

In what ways do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue reactions when they lead or participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?

### **Participants Withdraw to Cope**

While various studies have found that BIPOC experience racial battle fatigue during race dialogues, little research explores the intricacies of how those reactions manifest. The previous section named the various racial battle fatigue responses participants experienced during anti-racist DEI PD; this section will explore in more detail how the most impactful responses discussed above—weariness, anxiety, frustration/anger, and stereotype threat—manifested in participants. Overall, the main finding for this section is: Black educators in a Los Angeles charter network experience racial battle fatigue in a multitude of ways during anti-racist DEI PD—

most of which are rooted in psychological or emotional withdrawal and anxiety and almost all of which are unobservable to others.

***Participants cope by not actively participating***

Rhonda is passionate about DEI work. She serves on several committees and sub-groups that drive equity work. She describes herself as a "squeaky wheel" when it comes to raising DEI-related issues to the forefront. Rhonda has participated in and facilitated many DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools. Yet, Rhonda feels exhaustion and frustration in DEI PD because of the burden put on BIPOC--particularly Black women--to speak up and lead the work. During DEI PD, this exhaustion and frustration force her to have to balance a flurry of thoughts as she decides to what extent she will respond to others' off-putting comments, if at all:

Am I going to say something? Do I say something? Do I need to bring up my trauma to justify that what they said maybe is not correct? Do I just let it go and think that somebody else will handle it? And then I'm also thinking, "How am I going to get myself out of this space after this?" Because now that I'm at this heightened stress level, what am I going to do to take care of myself to bring that back down? Am I going to phone a friend after and talk through this situation with them? How am I going to self-care to come back from that?

Here, Rhonda reveals the dizzying flow of questions she asks herself when someone makes an inappropriate comment during DEI PD. Rhonda faces a dilemma: Does she allow a hurtful comment to go unaddressed, or does she resurface personal trauma to refute the point? The former allows others a false construction; the latter forces her to share a personal experience that she might not have yet healed from. Regardless, she is aware that she will need to take care of herself afterward because the DEI PD is not structured to give her the processing time.

Other participants reported experiencing similar quandaries. The most common response from participants when faced with racial battle fatigue in DEI PD was to psychologically or emotionally withdraw from the session. Six of the study's participants noted that they would withdraw in order to cope with the stressors of DEI PD. Terri, for instance, shared:

I think once I realized that a conversation wasn't going where I felt it should go, I would just shut down. Just kind of distance myself. Sometimes I log out of the meeting early and turn off my camera cuz I knew the drill at that point.

Participants shared that they, too, would shut down and distance themselves from the conversation, as a way to avoid any further stress. Consider Kayla, who reported that she would, after some time, notice patterns and recognize when DEI sessions were no longer helpful: "It's not a safe space to respond. I feel like the sessions themselves are not set up for you to respond. I just suck it up and push through it till the end of the session."

Withdrawing was the most common coping mechanism among participants. Oftentimes, withdrawing meant that participants were simply trying to survive the rest of the DEI PD. Other participants in the DEI PD would likely not be aware of the internal struggles that Rhonda described above or the lack of comfort that Terri and Kayla experienced. These are struggles that happened below the surface, much like the physiological symptoms participants experienced.

### ***Participants' bodies carry the stress***

Lamar is a participant who reported experiencing several responses tied to racial battle fatigue, including weariness, frustration/anger, anxiety, and stereotype threat. Lamar would not necessarily have all of these responses simultaneously, yet, over time, Lamar's adverse mental and emotional responses began manifesting in his body:

I'm getting physically sick before coming into work because I know we're going to do these 'anti-racist' meetings. And what it really just seems to be is a playground for people who have racist, undeveloped, immature thoughts to say whatever comes out of their mouth. And I'm supposed to just sit there and listen to it.

Here, Lamar shares how his anticipation of DEI PD drips with dread and distress. Lamar's distress is more than emotional or mental--he feels it in his body. He juxtaposes his unnerving and sickening reality with the blissfully ignorant, carefree, and risk-free opportunities that his non-Black co-workers are afforded. They do not face any consequences for their remarks, even if they are racist or offensive. To make matters worse, Lamar experiences a sense of powerlessness and frustration because he is not allowed to honestly respond to or address their comments.

These adverse mental and emotional DEI PD experiences resulted in various physiological effects, including sweaty palms; increased heart rate; tightness in the chest; crying; body tensing, e.g. clenching of fists; headaches; and stomachaches. Overall, four participants reported experiencing physiological effects because of DEI PD. Participants who reported crying because of DEI PD, said they cried after the sessions, not during. The physiological symptoms participants experienced during DEI PD were mostly imperceptible to others.

### ***Summary***

In the examples given, educators identify a myriad of ways in which they experience racial battle fatigue, including directly addressing racism, filtering their responses, controlling their anger, having uncontrollable physiological responses, and feeling unsafe. Their responses suggested that the most common response to racial battle fatigue during DEI PD for participants was to not actively participate. The most common underlying root causes for participants' responses were psychological or emotional withdrawal and anxiety. In the data offered here,

participants expressed that almost all of their responses to racial microaggressions were not observable and occurred without others' realization. The overarching finding in this section serves to answer R2. The next section will explore findings connected to R3:

What recommendations do Black charter school teachers who participate in or facilitate anti-racist DEI professional development have for reducing racial battle fatigue?

### **Recommendations for DEI PD**

The study's twelve participants offered many recommendations-nearly 20-that would reduce racial battle fatigue when participating in DEI PD. No singular recommendation, however, was made by more than three participants. The most significant recommendation was to ensure that DEI PD is led by experts. It is the most significant recommendation because it serves as an overarching guidance that would address many of participants' other recommendations, namely: DEI PD should include more processing time so that participants can adequately deal with some of the painful topics discussed; DEI PD needs be more personalized so as to increase its relevance and effectiveness; and DEI sessions should focus on clarifying key terminology, such as pro-Black and anti-racism, to build consensus on the vision and purpose of DEI work.

#### ***DEI PD needs to be led by experts***

Two participants called for DEI PD to be led by people who have dedicated a significant amount of time to understanding the complexities of DEI work. As mentioned above, this recommendation connects to many of the participants' other recommendations, which are detailed later in this chapter. In addition to these tangential connections, this recommendation is valuable for reasons not explicitly mentioned by participants. For instance, DEI experts are able to skillfully introduce and facilitate conversations about personal and potentially triggering

topics in ways that mitigate the physical and emotional hurt participants might feel, e.g. pausing the conversation to address when someone has committed racial microaggression or deftly addressing awkward silences and uncomfortable body language. Also, DEI experts are more capable of fostering spaces wherein diverse viewpoints are represented, e.g. carefully asking participants who are dominating the conversation to take a step back and allow others to share their thoughts.

Currently, DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools is facilitated by school leaders or teacher leaders who understand the importance of the work and are passionate about leading equity work; however, participants pointed out that not all of these facilitators have the knowledge or skills to navigate such intricate work. Consider Desmond's rationale for prioritizing placing experts at the forefront of this work:

In most DEI experiences that I've attended that I've felt really were directly developing me in personal practice, the [facilitators] presented themselves as researchers--leaders and researchers in the field of DEI. And they very explicitly named that this has been their lifelong work-not just a narrative of theirs as minority people for the most part-but this is work that they've engaged and invested time and resources into learning how to really understand how to support individuals and organizations to really achieve equity for all staff, all stakeholders.

Desmond recognizes the layered nature of DEI work, as well as the skill set and knowledge required to effectively facilitate DEI PD. He expects DEI PD to develop him as an educator and, based on previous experiences, believes that DEI PD will not be effective without a credible, experienced facilitator. Desmond's anxiety and frustration that he might otherwise feel if a person with limited DEI experience were facilitating fade when the DEI PD is led by someone

who has shown commitment to researching and studying DEI practices. His affective filter reduces significantly, and he can now trust the content and process of a DEI PD.

Two participants recommended that DEI PD be research-based and led by a group of experts from an outside organization. Effective DEI work requires a deep understanding of the historical, cultural, and social contexts that shape individuals' experiences. An outside organization with specialized expertise and training in DEI work can provide a broader perspective on best practices and help participants gain a deeper understanding of the complexities involved. Additionally, a third party's point-of-view can expose XYZ Charter Schools to a range of perspectives and experiences, which can help develop new strategies and approaches that might have otherwise not been actualized. More experienced facilitators would address another participants' recommendation: DEI PD should give its participants ample time to process the topics and themes discussed and questioned.

***DEI PD needs to include more processing time***

Part of a DEI expert's abilities is the capacity to guide participants through conversations and talking points that are often uncomfortable and perhaps even painful. Three participants reported the need for more processing time before, during, and after DEI PD. Heavy experiences and memories, tied to trauma, racism, and discrimination, tend to surface during DEI sessions; participants advocated that they should have more time and space to process their emotions connected with these types of memories. Rhonda, for instance, shared:

It's very important to either bake in time or spaces for people to debrief and then say ahead of time that this work is difficult and it may bring up feelings and it may trigger people being honest about the human aspect and that it can be a very emotive process that people may not be used to at work. I think being very transparent about that and then

taking care of people afterward and not being like, "Great, we just did this really, really difficult work. People are crying or might be feeling one way or the other inside-we can't tell-but see you all tomorrow." I don't think that's the best way to do it.

Here, Rhonda recommends that DEI PD facilitators intentionally implement processing techniques for participants' thoughts and emotions. Rhonda uses humor to underscore how ironic and inconsiderate it feels for a DEI PD to simply march on when its participants are likely experiencing emotional distress. The lack of thoughtful facilitation, then, adds to the stress.

A more grounded and thoughtful approach, however, would serve to humanize the DEI PD experience. Two other participants echoed Rhonda in this regard and offered strategies to this end, including: previewing potentially sensitive topics with participants before sessions; offering extended breaks during sessions; debriefing with participants after the session concludes; and allowing participants to dig deeper when heavy topics come up, rather than just naming them and moving on. Providing participants with more individual processing time would allow them to feel that their experience during DEI PD is more personalized, another one of participants' recommendations.

### ***DEI PD needs to be more personalized***

Three participants recommended that DEI sessions take on a more personal, intimate approach in order to reduce racial battle fatigue during DEI PD. These three participants each named at least one way in which DEI PD could be more personalized. First, DEI PD should cater to individual school sites' contexts and needs. Second, DEI conversations should take place in small groups. Third, DEI sessions need to be face-to-face meetings.

**DEI PD Needs to Be Differentiated by School Site.** One participant reported the need to personalize the DEI experience by school site. XYZ Charter Schools is comprised of many

different school sites, yet the DEI PD offered by the network is of the one-size-fits-all variety. Rhonda recommended that the network take into account the demographics and realities of each school. Consider her perspective:

That's part of the DEI work that we should do: assess where each of the schools are at and not provide a [network] wide packet. A blanket or an umbrella of DEI PD or DEI lessons aren't going to work for each school cuz it's going to be different [depending on] where they are.

Here, Rhonda speaks to the shortcomings of uniform DEI sessions across all XYZ Charter Schools. She sees more value in first taking stock of where each campus resides on the DEI continuum. For instance, some schools may need to prioritize securing campus buy-in on the value of DEI initiatives, whereas other schools might be ready to define their goals, create strategies, and move into action. If a school, however, were to simply copy and paste an approach that does not match their current DEI development, staff members may not see the benefit of their school's DEI PD.

In fact, seven of the study's twelve participants attributed their frustration with DEI PD to the lack of intentionality given to the DEI sessions-the leading cause of participants' frustrations. These seven participants used terms like disingenuous, compliance-based, and performative to characterize their school's DEI PD. Vanessa, one of these seven participants, shared this assessment of her co-workers:

Now, people are fakes. They put on a smile and stuff. "Okay, yeah, I did it." But then they go on back to doing what they were doing and acting the way they were acting prior to the compliance training.

The DEI PD at Vanessa's school was simply a check-the-box activity that did not result in meaningful change, in large part because the PD itself was generic. Vanessa's school purchased a series of online DEI modules and asked staff members to complete the modules on their own. The staff would then convene as an entire school to debrief the modules. These debrief sessions, however, were not very impactful because there was little to no buy-in regarding the actual DEI curriculum. If DEI sessions were to put their focus on issues and topics that mattered to Black educators, then Vanessa's and others' frustration and fatigue surrounding DEI PD could reduce.

**DEI PD Needs to Take Place in Small Groups.** Three participants advocated for DEI PD to be structured in small groups, with all conversations and activities taking place with no more than five people. Participants named several potential benefits of smaller groupings, including the ability to have more in-depth conversations with others and building more familiarity and understanding with one another. Additionally, DEI work, particularly anti-racist DEI work, asks people to be vulnerable and honest about their biases or prejudices. People are more likely to open up when they feel they can trust those with whom they are sharing their thoughts and experiences. Small groups help foster this sense of trust among participants-trust that simultaneously works to reduce anxiety and fatigue. Furthermore, compared to larger settings, small groups lend themselves more to accountability. If someone were to commit a racial microaggression, for instance, others may not feel comfortable addressing it in front of a large group; however, they are more likely to speak up in a more personal space. A similar accountability dynamic exists when DEI conversations are held in-person.

**DEI PD Needs to Be In-Person.** Two participants reported that in-person sessions were more effective than online meetings. Desmond, for instance, reflected on the difference between an online versus a face-to-face experience:

I was drawn into actively participating because it was an in-person professional experience instead of a virtual experience. So that definitely added more. I feel like if you are attending a PD via Zoom, you have many distractions. You can turn off your camera, all of that. Whereas if it's a session in person, you really are forced to limit distractions and be fully present. So I think that definitely encouraged me to be fully present in engaging the experience as a whole.

Here, Desmond speaks to how being in-person during DEI PD helped him to engage more fully and mitigate distractions. Participants also reported that hosting DEI sessions in-person, as opposed to online, would help their co-workers be more present, as well.

Brenda recalls her experience during one DEI PD held online by XYZ Charter Schools: [There were] a lot of stimuli-the chat being on fire with people's comments and opinions, but then also listening to things people were saying, and it was just a lot. And then it was very obvious microaggressions or white privilege or male privilege in the comments. It was just a lot at once . . . because the comments in the chat were live, it was volatile.

Brenda's experience shows how the chat feature of online meetings can work as a vehicle of anxiety and stress. The chat functionality likely encouraged people to make comments that they otherwise would not have made had the conversation been held face-to-face. Although online meetings are more common than ever, the nature of DEI PD is best suited for an in-person setting.

### ***DEI PD needs to clarify key terminology***

Three participants recommended that core ideas to DEI work be more clearly defined and appropriately applied. Namely, participants shared that the three foundational tenets of XYZ Charter Schools' DEI PD-diversity, anti-racism, and pro-Black-be more distinguished from one

another. Participants reported that these three terms are presently being conflated with one another, which detracts from the multi-faceted and layered work involved in DEI. Lorraine spoke to the confusion surrounding these terms:

[XYZ Charter Schools] has DEI work--DEI professional development that I think it needs to do for folks. And then there's this anti-racist, pro-Black mission. They're not the same thing. And I do think that DEI work in PD aligns well with anti-racism, but [XYZ Charter Schools] is still trying to figure out what it means to be pro-Black. And so I think we need to clearly make distinctions between the two and/or talk about how they synergize. But sometimes these conversations that seem to be about diversity and inclusion end up being conversations about Black people.

Here, Lorraine highlights the nuance of DEI work: although anti-racism is a critical component of DEI work, there are other branches of DEI work. Similarly, pro-Black initiatives are key aspects of diversity and inclusion work; however, some DEI work is not just about Black people. DEI work is broader than that.

Relatedly, participants reported a principal issue with commonly used language by XYZ Charter Schools: the term pro-Black can be divisive. Participants shared that some of their co-workers are actually not pro-Black, and, so, having a pro-Black mission intertwined with DEI work can drive people away from all DEI PD. Janay speaks to some of the ambiguity surrounding the term *pro-Black*:

What do we mean when we say pro-Black? Like, what is that? How is that defined?

Where does that live? How does this puzzle fit together? I was also very curious about the history of this shift to saying that we are a pro-Black organization because I wanted to know what inspired that language.

Here, Janay underscores the lack of context that XYZ Charter Schools provided when rolling out a pro-Black mission. She acknowledges the polarizing effect that such a mission could have on people who do not identify as Black. Other participants also shared that pro-Black tends to put people in a defensive stance because they feel the organization is choosing sides, and that their experiences and perspectives are being ignored.

The term *pro-Black* serves as a biting reminder to Lorraine and Janay that their workplace still has much progress to make. Effectively, pro-Black is more of an aspirational promise, rather than a statement of reality. Currently, fewer than five percent of XYZ Charter Schools' students identify as Black/African American, about twenty percent of its school leaders are Black, and Black/African American staff members report a lower sense of belonging compared to all staff members in the network. As Black representation and experiences in the network increase and improve, pro-Black is more likely to be coupled with pride and joy. For now, it is confusing, hurtful, and isolating to some. Untangling diversity, anti-racism, and pro-Black could help ease the pain.

### ***Summary***

The study's twelve participants offered many recommendations that would help reduce racial battle fatigue during DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools, the most impactful being to ensure that DEI PD is facilitated by DEI experts. DEI experts would help reduce anxiety, stress, and fatigue associated with DEI PD because they are more equipped to navigate the traumatic and painful content that arises with DEI work. A DEI expert would also be more capable of implementing three other significant recommendations made by participants.

First, DEI PD needs to include more processing time. Second, DEI PD needs to be more personalized. Participants suggested three practical ways to personalize DEI sessions: tailoring

PD so that individual school sites' DEI reality and trajectory are taken into account; structuring activities in small groups; and hosting in-person sessions, rather than online ones. Third, DEI PD should clarify key terminology, namely diversity, anti-racism, and pro-Black. Presently, these terms are incorrectly used interchangeably, which serves to cause confusion and even resentment toward DEI work. These three recommendations would serve to make Black educators more present, more engaged, less stressed, and less fatigued during DEI PD. A DEI expert, compared to a facilitator who has been informally trained (or not trained at all), is more knowledgeable and better equipped to carry out these changes.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter shares the key findings of twelve Black educators' experiences of participating in anti-racist DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools, a charter network in Los Angeles. All participants engaged in semi-structured individual interviews, wherein they were asked which racial battle fatigue reactions they experience when participating in DEI PD; in what ways they experienced their reported racial battle fatigue reactions; and what recommendations they have to reduce racial battle fatigue during these sessions. Participants' reported racial battle fatigue reactions were consistent with previous research. Participants' most commonly reported experiencing anxiety, frustration/anger, and stereotype threat during DEI PD. Participants' responses to these reactions were also aligned to previous research. Participants mostly withdrew, either emotionally or psychologically, in order to cope with the stresses they would experience during anti-racist DEI PD. Additionally, participants reported experiencing a myriad of physiological symptoms that would go unnoticed to others. Of the various recommendations made by participants, the most significant one is to prioritize that DEI PD is facilitated by someone who is an expert in the field of DEI. A DEI expert would be able to implement other

participants' recommendations, such as providing DEI PD that includes more processing time, is more personalized, and is more clear in its content and key terminology.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Most families have an uncomfortable conversation point that they would rather not discuss. Perhaps it is small—an annoying quirk of a singular family member. Maybe it is larger—a scintillating scandal that implicates multiple people. Regardless, most families have an insecurity from which they have yet to fully heal from, and the American education system is no exception. The idea for this study came to me shortly after schools across the country decided to dive into one conversation point that is ever-present, yet rarely named and seldom discussed: race dialogues.

I was a 6th grade English teacher in 2020 when school systems across the country began to respond to the palpable racial tension resurfaced by the infamous police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and other members of the Black/African American community. My school asked for volunteers to facilitate anti-racist Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) professional development (PD). The time had come to explicitly address the intersection of racism and education, and I eagerly volunteered. The hope was that these types of DEI sessions, through reflection and honest dialogue, would make our schools more equitable and culturally affirming, particularly for the people whose pain and trauma inspired these PDs: Black/African American people.

Facilitating the DEI sessions was stressful and awkward for me. I was a bit confused by some of my colleagues' lack of understanding when it came to the racial opportunity and achievement gap. I realized I lacked the language and vocabulary for experiences and feelings that I intimately knew. I found myself tip-toeing around people's sensitivities. There were times when I wanted to directly call out comments or describe behaviors as racist, yet I knew that such an approach would alienate me from my co-workers. Professionally, I would leave most sessions

unsure if they had been effective. Personally, I felt anxious because I had been carrying my insecurities as a facilitator, along with others' heavy thoughts and emotions about race. I began to wonder about others' experiences in DEI PD, particularly other Black/African American educators.

In this study, I engaged in an inquiry into three issues. First, I sought to identify and characterize the racial battle fatigue reactions, if any, that Black charter school educators said they experienced when they participated in anti-racist DEI professional development. Second, I explored the types and characteristics of racial battle fatigue reactions when they participated in anti-racist DEI professional development. Finally, I sought to identify the recommendations that Black charter school educators who participated in or facilitated anti-racist DEI PD offered for reducing racial battle fatigue during DEI sessions.

In this chapter, I reflect on the significance of the findings to these questions, disaggregated by research and practical purposes. I consider the contribution of these findings to the prior empirical literature. I then offer recommendations based on my study's findings, both for other researchers and school-based practitioners, while considering certain limitations inherent in the study. I conclude by reflecting on how this study has impacted me.

### **Implications for Researchers**

The significance of this study is found in its extension of existing research: DEI PD, while well-intentioned, is entrenching Black K-12 educators in racial battle fatigue. Existing studies tell us that Black, indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC) have more adverse and unique experiences when engaging in racial dialogues—a key component of anti-racist DEI PD—compared to white people (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Sue, Rivera, Watkins, Kim, R., Kim, S., & Williams, 2011; Coles-Ritchie and Smith, 2016; Kohli, 2016). Sue (2013) in

particular outlines some of the ways in which BIPOC respond during race dialogues, which includes: (a) determining how to address racism when white people avoid acknowledging it; (b) managing the denial, defensiveness, and anxiety that emanates from their white counterparts; (c) controlling their intense anger at the continual denial; and (d) continuously determining how much to open up, given the differential power dynamics that often exist between the majority group and the minority group. Most of this research discusses BIPOC experiences with racial dialogues broadly, mostly at the higher education level or professional settings. Little research, however, focuses on the intricacies that Black K-12 educators' experience during actual DEI sessions, in large part because anti-racist DEI PD is relatively new to the K-12 sector. All of the twelve participants in this study reported experiencing racial battle fatigue when participating in DEI sessions, with nine of the participants reporting a great deal of racial battle fatigue. The pervasive presence of racism that this study's participants reported confirms the key Critical Race Theory tenet that racism, particularly for BIPOC in the United States, is commonplace and not aberrational (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

This study's findings extend existing literature in a second way that also creates an additional bridge it creates between the higher ed. and K-12 sectors. The study shows how the current iteration of anti-racist DEI PD at XYZ Charter Schools embodies *interest convergence*, a concept that explores how advances for people of color are tolerated only when these advances benefit white people (Bell, 1980). Harris, Barone, and Patton (2015) explore how race-based inclusion initiatives are co-opted to uphold white supremacy at institutions of higher learning. The current study illustrates how DEI PD, although designed to be *pro-Black* and *anti-racist*, is unintentionally harming Black educators at the K-12 level by perpetuating racist notions that it aims at countering.

In addition to extending the aforementioned existing work, this study also confirms a catalogue of existing research that documents the ill effects that racism and racial microaggressions can have on mental and emotional health (Ryff, Keyes, and Hughes, 2003; Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006; Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2012), as well as physical health (Brondolo et al., 2009; Paradies, 2006). To varying extents, a majority of this study's participants connected the racial microaggressions they experienced in DEI PD to adverse effects to their mental or emotional health, e.g. frustration/anger, weariness, anxiety, psychological or emotional withdrawal, and/or physiological health.

### **Implications for School-Based Practitioners**

The study's most practical significance is rooted in its confirmation of existing literature that shows that charter schools, compared to traditional public schools, are more likely to have varied results in the effectiveness of their PD (Gelbart, 2013; Hanson-Harding, 2000; Oliver, 2019; Paisner, 2011). The most consequential recommendation participants offered in order to reduce racial battle fatigue during DEI PD was that DEI sessions should be led by an outside, third-party expert. Participants named several benefits of expert-led DEI sessions, including more processing time for participants, more personalized sessions, and sessions that are clear on key terminology. Also, leaning on experts to run DEI sessions would reduce any stress felt by school staff who are designated as DEI PD facilitators. In addition to these benefits, this recommendation is valuable for reasons not explicitly mentioned by participants. For instance, DEI experts are able to skillfully introduce and facilitate conversations about personal and potentially triggering topics in ways that mitigate the physical and emotional hurt participants might feel, e.g. pausing the conversation to address when someone has committed racial microaggression or deftly addressing awkward silences and uncomfortable body language. Also,

DEI experts are more capable of fostering spaces wherein diverse viewpoints are represented, e.g. carefully asking participants who are dominating the conversation to take a step back and allow others to share their thoughts. This recommendation by participants stems largely from them wanting DEI PD to be more objective and impartial, which is at odds with how their school sites facilitated PD, e.g. leaning on school staff members to lead PD. This study's findings suggest that a more centralized approach to DEI PD by XYZ Charter Schools would lead to more effective and consistent results.

The study's findings are also significant because they extend the dynamic of burnout among Black charter school teachers. The findings emphasize the need to focus on systems that improve the retention of Black charter school teachers. Participants overwhelmingly reported having a negative experience when taking part in DEI PD. Specifically, all of the study's participants described feeling a sense of discouragement, and nine of the twelve participants reported feeling weariness when participating in DEI PD. This study suggests that DEI PD, in its current form, is pushing Black educators to burnout and either transfer to another school or leave the field of education entirely.

I did not identify research that connects DEI PD and Black educators' burnout outside of this study; several studies, however, suggest that BIPOC are more prone to burnout when engaging in social justice education activism, compared to white people (Gorski & Erakat, 2019; Davenport et al., 2011). Additionally, other research indicates that the rate at which teachers leave the profession and move between schools is significantly higher in charter schools than in traditional public schools (Stuit & Smith, 2010), so these findings are particularly pertinent to this setting. From a larger context, existing research tells us that educators of color leave the field

at a rate 25% higher than their white counterparts (Grooms et al., 2021). For these reasons, the implementation of DEI work at network like XYZ Charter Schools is particularly pressing.

### **Recommendations for Researchers**

Based on the findings from this study, and in consideration of the findings' contribution to the literature, I offer researchers five recommendations for future studies. First, I recommend that researchers engage in additional studies that focus on the intersectionality of race and gender, particularly the subgroup of Black women. A majority of participants—nine of twelve—in this study were Black women. Two of the participants, both women, spoke to their perception of DEI work being inequitably placed on the shoulders of Black women. One of the participants stated that the best DEI PD has been led by Black women. Researchers stand to learn more about Black women's experiences when participating in DEI work.

Second, I recommend that researchers hone in on the dynamic that exists between the Black and Latinx community, as well as the permeation of whiteness among BIPOC. There is ample literature that speaks to the racial strife among Black and white people, yet less research that features racial divisions within BIPOC subgroups, particularly in educational spaces (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Brody et al., 2006; Brondolo et al., 2009; Chapman, 2014; Condrón, 2009; Dovidio et al., 2002; Offermann et al., 2014; Trawalter & Richeson, 2008). This study featured Black/African Americans who worked at a predominantly Latinx charter network in Los Angeles. The findings show that, even in the absence of a white majority, racism and anti-Blackness persist. When asked if they had seen or experienced any anti-Blackness from the Latinx community, the results were evenly split: A third of participants said, "Yes"; a third of participants said, "No"; and a third of participants said they were not sure. In the words of one

participant: “White people don’t have to be racist anymore because we pit ourselves against each other.”

Third, I recommend that researchers study individual school sites. Nearly every participant for this study described a unique DEI PD program. Some XYZ Charter School sites, for instance, conducted their DEI PD online, while others met in-person. Furthermore, some school sites prioritized having a small group component in their sessions; meanwhile, other sites only met in large groups. Studying specific DEI PD structures would yield more personalized recommendations for individual schools.

Fourth, I recommend that researchers explore the impact professional counseling can have on educators’ mental health. In particular, I suggest researchers delve into the strategies and benefits professional counseling offers to Black educators for coping with work-based racism. Two of the three participants who did not report experiencing a great deal of racial battle fatigue expressly credited their personal experiences and therapy as factors that mitigated many of the racial battle fatigue responses that other participants reported. The two participants acknowledged many of the tensions that others described, yet they were less affected by some of the stressors present in DEI PD because of the coping strategies that they developed in counseling sessions.

Fifth, I recommend that researchers dedicate more time interviewing participants about their experiences when participating in DEI PD. Multiple interviews with the same participant may be beneficial. Individual interviews for this study typically lasted 45 to 60 minutes. I used a semi-structured approach to guide me through the interviews, which focused on primarily two areas: 1) the structure/design of participants’ school’s DEI PD program and 2) the emotions participants experienced during DEI sessions. Although I did ask follow-up questions during the

interviews, there are a few instances in which a follow-up interview would have allowed me to seek further clarity on these open-ended topics.

Aside from a lack of time, my study faced at least three additional limitations. First, I did not have an opportunity to personally attend the DEI PD that the participants referenced. My understanding of the DEI PD was based solely on their reports and reflections. Relatedly, some DEI PD occurred just long ago that participants struggled to recall some of their specificities. Second, conducting interviews online has its constraints. Conducting the interviews in-person would have better positioned me to observe participants' non-verbal gestures and cues, which could have informed their commentary and also allowed me to better connect with them. Third, it would have been advantageous to include more educators in the research process. It would have been particularly insightful to compare and contrast experiences of participants who work at the same school site.

### **Recommendations for School-Based Practitioners**

This study offers two points of recommendations for school leaders. First, schools need to establish Black affinity spaces, or groups wherein all members identify as Black or African American. Oftentimes, these affinity spaces preview or debrief the topics covered in the schoolwide DEI PD. Five of the study's twelve participants reported having notably more positive experiences when meeting with their affinity group. The five participants discussed how, overall, their school's affinity space was an affirming space and a much more positive DEI experience, compared to mixed-race spaces. A major gap in DEI work is the limited ways to capture its effectiveness. Schools can use affinity groups as a space to get a pulse on how their Black staff members, in particular, are experiencing DEI PD.

Second, schools need to make sure to follow through on stated goals and actions. This study suggests that a lack of meaningful response and action breeds a distrust in school and network leadership, resentment in DEI work, a feeling of isolation, and a lower sense of belonging among Black educators. In fact, seven of the study's twelve participants attributed their frustration with DEI PD to the lack of intentionality given to the DEI sessions—the leading cause of participants' frustrations—with five participants expressing a mistrust in XYZ Charter Schools' DEI initiatives.

### **Personal Reflection**

My study's participants shared at length about how unsafe and destructive their DEI PD experiences were. These unpleasant, microaggression-filled experiences need not be the norm. The answer, however, is not to ban or eliminate DEI initiatives, as a few states have already done<sup>3</sup>. Rather than avoiding race dialogues—a key tenet of anti-racist DEI PD—schools should strategically and directly address the inherent challenges of DEI training. DEI training is sorely needed, and while complex, it has proven to make schools more equitable places.

Following the recommendations of my study's participants, DEI PD needs to be facilitated by third-party experts. From my personal experience as both a participant and facilitator of DEI PD, a skilled DEI facilitator would be more likely to mitigate racial microaggressions because such a person would have a better understanding of the power dynamic present in the DEI sessions, and, thus, be more capable of addressing power imbalances. For instance, an expert facilitator would know when to pause someone's comments because of the potential harm they could bring upon BIPOC. Additionally, they would be better equipped at carefully making space for or checking in on participants who are showing signs of

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mollybohannon/2023/05/29/texas-lawmakers-pass-ban-on-diversity-programs-at-public-colleges-possibly-joining-florida/?sh=539d04865918>

withdrawal—participants’ most common coping mechanism during DEI PD. Redirecting conversations, stopping problematic trains of thought in their tracks, and making space for those who are showing signs of emotional or psychological withdrawal are critical facilitator moves that I suspect are not happening nearly enough in most DEI PD due to facilitators’ lack of knowledge base, experience, and skill set.

As is too often the case in education settings, the rollout of DEI PD was reactive and occurred without the proper preparation of DEI PD design. School leaders had, I presume, the best of intentions when deciding that DEI PD should take place on their campus; however, this study’s data show that, as currently designed, mixed race DEI PD is not a safe space for Black people. Although the catalyst for DEI PD was the hurt and trauma of the Black community, these spaces are retriggering and retraumatizing Black people, rather than serving as ones of healing, understanding, and community-building. Currently, DEI PD is not designed for Black people. The deep entrenchment of America’s racist roots necessitates schools to apply a significant amount of thoughtful intentionality to their equity practices. Until schools can offer DEI PD that are safe for Black people, DEI sessions with participants of mixed races should be optional for Black educators.

This study was very personal to me. It came from my experience, my stress, my hurt. As eager as I may have been to connect with others about similar experiences, it was difficult to hear about others’ encounters with racial microaggressions and ways that racial battle fatigue manifested for them. During several interviews, I held back tears. It was saddening and infuriating to hear about many of the participants’ experiences, both during DEI PD, as well as their overall experiences as their day-to-day experiences as Black/African American educators.

As someone who grew up in the South and is used to more overt expressions of racism, I have become more familiar with racism in its more insidious form in the time that I have spent in Los Angeles. I may not see a Confederate flag on my drive to work, but I do regularly interact with people who know how to talk about racism and its ill effects, yet still hold problematic views of BIPOC students and families. I tend to have a visceral reaction when an educator uses the phrase “these students” when making a negative comment about a group of students who are diverse in a multitude of ways. I equate the DEI PD referenced in this study as a subtler version of racism that is perhaps more harmful than the in-your-face brand because it is carried out in the name of equity and under the banner of wokeness. For instance, part of what has kept some schools from actualizing their DEI initiatives is the fear of saying the wrong thing or offending others, e.g. not having the ‘correct’ definition of *pro-Blackness*. Countless conversations of equity and anti-racism are had, but no policy change comes of it.

Back in 2020, many companies and organizations aligned with the Black Lives Matter movement and posted their statements of diversity, equity, and inclusion in order to show their solidarity with the Black/African American community. Three years later and the task at hand is a bit more complicated than sending an email that includes all the right words. It is (beyond past) time for action. My hope is that DEI work happens in ways that take into account the voices of this study’s participants. I also hope that we continue to listen and truly believe Black people’s experiences.

Hurt and pain aside, this was also a cathartic and affirming process for me. I am simultaneously inspired by the participants’ continual presence and effort in the light of challenges and pain, and angered that many of these adversities and distressing moments can be avoided. This study served as a reminder about the power of a check-in. People carry so much

and are willing to open up, if given the time and space. There were countless instances wherein I had to temper my nods in agreement and swallow a, “Yup yup!” when a participant would share an episode that deeply resonated with me. It is extraordinary that, despite the hurt and the trauma, the interviews also included moments of joy, smiles, and even laughter. I credit this to many of the participants’ resilience and authentic commitments to their craft, their students, and their school community. They and other Black educators should not have to be so resilient; education work (not to mention existence) is difficult in and of itself.

## APPENDIX A

### Unit of Measurement

Research Questions	Units of Observation	Data Collection Methods
<p><b>RQ1:</b>  <i>To what extent, if at all, do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?</i></p>	<p>Black educators' self-reported experiences that contribute to racial battle fatigue when participating in or facilitating anti-racist DEI training include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When there's a lot of talk but little or no action to back up the talk</li> <li>• When I am asked probing questions about my experiences but when others, especially non-BIPOC, mostly only provide superficial answers</li> <li>• When we discuss definitions of various DEI-based terms but don't talk about how we can actually make a change with our school and students</li> <li>• When the facilitator does not have much in common with my background and experiences</li> <li>• When people don't say the thing! There's so much tip-toeing around issues. We're all thinking it, but there's a lot of artificial harmony in our conversations. The disingenuousness is disheartening and tiring.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Participant Interviews</b>            (one-on-one interviews)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When it feels like a checklist. I mean, we only have these meetings once a semester. It feels like we mostly just count down the time in these sessions.</li> <li>• When people aren't held accountable for the microaggressions that they say <i>during</i> the sessions!</li> </ul>	
<p><b>RQ2:</b>  <i>In what ways, if any, do Black charter school educators say they experience racial battle fatigue (e.g. shock, disappointment, discouragement, denial, reoccurring negative thoughts, etc.) when they participate in anti-racist DEI professional development?</i></p>	<p>Black educators' self-reported experiences that contribute to racial battle fatigue when participating in or facilitating anti-racist DEI training include:</p>	<p><b>Participant Interviews</b>  (one-on-one interviews)</p>
<p><b>RQ3:</b>  <i>What recommendations do Black charter school educators who participate in anti-racist DEI professional development have for reducing racial battle fatigue?</i></p>	<p>Black educators' recommendations for how to reduce racial battle fatigue in anti-racist DEI professional development include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include Black teachers in the planning phases of the professional development.</li> <li>• Name the elephant in the room! Acknowledge to all participants that racial dialogue, because of systemic racism, tends to favor white people.</li> <li>• Allow BIPOC to opt-out if they are feeling any type of stress.</li> <li>• Hold people accountable for what they say.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Participant Interviews</b>  (one-on-one interviews)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have facilitators call out racial microaggressions during professional development sessions.</li><li>• Make the sessions meaningful. I'm tired of hearing the definitions of terms. DEI should be action-oriented, for students' sake.</li></ul>	
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## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol

#### Interview

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. As you might know, I'm currently in a graduate school program. This interview is to help me collect data for my doctoral dissertation. My goal is to learn about your experiences in anti-racist DEI professional development during your time at XYZ Charter Schools. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Everything you discuss during this interview is strictly confidential so please feel free to speak openly. As a reminder, I will not include any identifiable demographic information, such as your school site or the grade or content area that you teach, in my final report.

In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. Do I have your permission to record? If there are points during the interview where you would like the recorder to be turned off, please feel free to let me know. Do you have any questions before we get started?

#### *Opening*

*I have one personal question and then a couple of job-related questions.*

1. How do you self-identify, ethno-racially?
2. Tell me about the roles you've had at XYZ Charter Schools and how long you've had them.
3. What do you love and also find challenging about [participant's current role]?

#### *General*

*Thank you for that. I'm now going to ask you about your involvement with DEI PD.*

4. Tell me about the DEI professional development that occurs at your school.
5. Tell me about the role or roles that you have filled during anti-racist DEI professional development at XYZ Charter Schools?
  - a. Optional: How did you become involved in anti-racist DEI professional development?

*Take a moment to place yourself in the DEI spaces you've been a part of.*

6. As a participant, what are three words you would use to describe how you feel after a DEI professional development session?
  - a. Optional, depending on if participants have also facilitated DEI professional development: As a facilitator, what are three words you would use to describe how you feel after a DEI professional development session?
  - b. Follow-up: Talk a little bit about why you selected those three words.

### ***Negative Effects***

7. Overall, how much stress do you experience in your role/participation in DEI work?
  1. Optional: What factors contribute to your stress levels?
  2. Follow-up: How do you experience the stress?
  3. Follow-up: How do you respond to the stress?
  
8. Overall, how much fatigue do you experience in your role/participation in DEI work?
  1. Optional: What factors contribute to your fatigue?
  2. Follow-up: How do you experience the fatigue?
  3. Follow-up: How do you respond to the fatigue?
  
9. Do you experience any other negative effects in your role/participation in DEI work?
  1. Optional follow-up: How do you experience [participant's state negative effect]?
  2. Optional follow-up: How do you respond to [participant's state negative effect]?
  
10. As a participant, do you find any parts of DEI work discouraging? If so, what are they?
  - a. Optional, depending on if participants have also facilitated DEI professional development: As a leader or facilitator do you find any parts of DEI work discouraging? If so, what are they?

### ***Positive Effects***

11. As a participant, do you find any parts of DEI work affirming or encouraging? If so, what are they?
  1. Optional, depending on if participants have also facilitated DEI professional development: As a facilitator, do you find any parts of DEI work affirming or encouraging? If so, what are they?
  
12. Overall, how affirming or encouraging do you find your role/participation in DEI work?

### ***Participation***

13. What factors impact your level of participation during DEI professional development?

### ***Recommendations***

14. What recommendations would you want to make to your school site's DEI training?

*Our final series of questions are specific to XYZ Charter Schools.*

***Network-Specific***

15. To what extent are the XYZ Charter School's DEI initiatives matching the organization's overall goal of being pro-Black?
16. Have you seen or experienced any anti-Blackness from the Latinx community in Alliance? If so, can you please share your thoughts and experiences?

***Closing***

17. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences with anti-racist DEI professional development?

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