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Neutral Doesn't Work: The Importance of Educators' Active Engagement in Creating Racially Inclusive Spaces for Students of Color at Predominantly-White Independent Schools

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Asako Kurosaka-Jost

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Neutral Doesn't Work: The Importance of Educators' Active Engagement in Creating Racially Inclusive Spaces for Students of Color at Predominantly-White Independent Schools

by

Asako Kurosaka-Jost

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Pedro Noguera, Chair

This study examined the experiences of 30 alumni of color (AOCs) who attended predominantly-white independent secondary schools (PWISs) on their overall educational and socio-emotional experiences. Utilizing the lens of colorblind ideology (CBI) and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), this study analyzed participant experiences of teachers' instructional practices as related to students' racial or ethnic identity as well as sense of belonging and classroom engagement. The data comprises of in-depth interviews with 30 AOCs who represent Asian, Black, and Latinx perspectives. Of the participants, 15 self-identified within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer spectrum. The findings point to the "non-neutrality" of CBI exhibited by PWIS educators. Participants indicated significant cultural disconnect with their school in

three major areas: public versus independent school culture, socioeconomic differences, and feeling disconnected with white culture. Moreover, participants indicated experiencing colorblind or tokenized multicultural perspectives in their school curricula, feeling hyper-visible during race-related conversations and invisible otherwise, as well as frequent encounters with unaddressed racial microaggressions in the classroom. The colorblind culture of PWISs posed obstacles for AOCs in navigating the social hierarchy (race and wealth-based) in their school culture. All of this had a significantly negative socioemotional impact on the participants, with many indicating acute awareness of their race and some showing signs of internalized racism. The findings thus underscored the importance of educators' active engagement in creating a racially inclusive space for students of color at PWISs. The data revealed how teachers' non-verbal (or indirect) messages can exhibit powerful signs of caring or uncaring for students of color, particularly under the backdrop of CBI culture. As well, AOCs indicated a strong inclination for CRP, with many showing increased engagement or confidence when classroom discussions veered from white-centered perspectives. Successful classroom discussions were described as providing adequate class time to delve into deeper issues, connecting conversations to student experiences, and encouraging critical thinking. AOC interviews and recommendations also pointed to several effective facilitation skills, such as norm setting, encouraging student self-reflections through targeted questions, modeling vulnerability, or an emphasis on systemic (versus) individual racism at the initial point of conversation.

The dissertation of Asako Kurosaka-Jost is approved.

Mitchell Chang

Robert Cooper

Robert Teranishi

Pedro Noguera, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

DEDICATION

Everything I have ever learned in life, I learned from you, my original teacher and beloved mother. You taught me to believe in the goodness of life, even when the world seemed to bring unsurmountable obstacles and twists. You taught me to face all of life's complexities, from the good, the bad, and the ugly, and to persevere by keeping focus on the heart of the matter ("the neck and the tail," as you would say) as you encouraged me to move towards positive change. You also taught me the real meaning of love and compassion, as true strength and happiness is only achieved through a loving heart. I am forever grateful to be your daughter and for the many years we shared together. You passed from this earth while I was in the midst of my analysis, and it was the hardest lesson you have ever taught me. And in this, I felt your wisdom, love, and encouragement. Darker moments almost made it impossible to recognize the warmth of love and goodness, but life, and you, patiently delivered the messages I needed. Thank you for always seeing and believing in me. I lovingly dedicate this dissertation to my beloved mother, Yoko Ito-Watanabe.

I also dedicate this to my daughter, Arapaie Yaeko Kurosaka-Black. You have made me a proud mother, as you are one of the best human beings I know. You live a life of loving compassion and strength…the latter will allow you to persevere, and the former will guide you in all that you do.

Lastly, I dedicate this to my best friend and soul mate, Rob Jost. You are everything to me.

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VITA

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2011 – 2012	NAIS Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM) Coordinator for Brentwood School
2007 – 2011	Founding Chairperson, Brentwood School Diversity Council

Chapter 1

Background

Unlike many of their public school counterparts, students of color attending independent schools must navigate education in the context of white culture both in the student as well as the faculty and administrative body. In the fall of 2017, 62% of nonsectarian independent school students were white (NCES, 2019b) with 85.1% white faculty (NCES, 2019a). In contrast, 10%, 9%, and 10% of students were Black, Hispanic, and Asian students respectively (NCES, 2019b). Private and public school teachers tend to come from a middle class background (NCES, 2003) who themselves have had racially-isolated upbringing (Easter, Schultz, Neyhard, & Reck, 1999). Being a numerical minority in the school environment can provide significant stress on an adolescent as they navigate their identity development (Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). As well, interracial interactions, if not facilitated skillfully by the classroom teacher, can itself be a source of tension that impact an educational environment (Freidus & Noguera, 2017). Workshop titles from the 2019 National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) People of Color Conference (PoCC), such as "Surviving the 'Mammy Complex': Being 'The Only' in a Brave New World", "We Wear the Mask: Stories of the Black Girl Experience in Predominantly White Independent Schools", or "The Illusion of Inclusion" (PoCC Program, 2019), point to a need to address issues of race in the independent school world.

Indeed, students of color at independent schools report feelings of isolation and pressure as minority representatives at predominantly white institutions. A 2003 report from NAIS indicates negative experiences of students of color, with anecdotes such as "I feel excluded and

categorized," or "I've been leading two lives since I was 14" (NAIS, 2003). A 2015 report lists "social loneliness", "racial visibility and social invisibility", and "cultural discomfort", among others, as salient aspects of students of color experiences (NAIS, 2015). Following nation-wide protests prompted by the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, moreover, students of color objections to unaddressed racist incidents at predominantly-white schools have been amplified in recent months (Rochita, 2020; Lorenz & Rosman, 2020). Some of the experiences include being repeatedly mistaken for another Black student in a small class by a teacher, hearing the "n" word in a classroom setting, or comments that deny students of color legitimacy by suggesting their easy college admittance due to affirmative action.

The negative experiences of independent school students of color have been noted by filmmakers as well. A 2013 documentary entitled "American Promise" depicts marginalized experiences of students of color in independent schools, tracking the lives of two African American students at New York's exclusive Dalton School over a 13-year period (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013). In the film, Idris (one of the two boys) begins to feel the weight of his minority status as he reaches middle school age, stating to his parents with a forlorn face during one scene, "Isn't it better if I were white?" While the film gained widespread notice in the independent school community—it was aired during one of NAIS's People of Color Conference—the film echoes an earlier film (2012) with the same message: "Prep School Negro" by Andre Robert Lee.

To complicate the picture further, education scholars note a general tendency towards racial avoidance (colorblind culture) among predominantly-white students in teacher education programs (Matias & DiAngelo, 2013). The NAIS website indicates as much, with topics such as

the necessity to confront the oft-avoided topic of race in the school community or the importance of hiring culturally competent teachers (NAIS, n.d.).

Statement of the Problem

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is a promising equitable educational approach that helps to bridge the dissonance between white-centric school systems and students of color heritage. Since its early formation through seminal works from scholars such as Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a) and Gay (2000), literature on CRP—a student-centered approach that places culture and ethnicity at the forefront of classroom instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995ab; Gay, 2002)—has proliferated. In tandem, culturally responsive teaching practices have been tested by several studies with positive academic outcomes for students of color (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001, 2017; Tatum, 2000). CRP practices not only acknowledge the legitimacy of students' cultural heritage but utilize their cultural knowledge and perspectives as valuable resources within the classroom (Gay, 2010; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

Incorporating CRP into teacher practices, however, faces many obstacles. To begin with, an important perspective when dealing with CRP is to be cognizant of how education system in the US is, for the most part, culturally responsive towards white middle-class students (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Howard, 2010; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010; Gay, 2018), pro-assimilation of minority and immigrant students (Noguera, 1999), and often in conflict with non-white students' cultural perspectives from home (Howard, 2010). In other words, the predominantly-white private school teacher force must become aware of her or his own whiteness and cultural background. This can be difficult in a society in which whiteness is normalized and set as the standard by which all others are understood (Matias et al., 2016). However, awareness is

imperative, for as Mensah (2016) puts it, "If teachers are not aware and unable to read forms of race and racism in their own lives, they are not able to see it in their students" (p. 7).

However, diversity training is often precarious terrain because, if done adequately, it accesses participants' emotions (Bezrukova, Perry, & Jehn, 2016; Ohito, 2016; Matias et al., 2016; Siegel & Carter, 2014; Gushue & Carter, 2000). This has the potential to trigger defenses, particularly among white participants (O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008; Collins & Pieterse, 2007; Watt et al., 2009). Training often means working against trainees' prior socialization (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) which can partly emerge from a notion among white individuals in the US of a post-racial era in which discrimination no longer exists (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). This, together with racially-isolated neighborhoods and schools, can lend itself to what Matias and DiAngelo (2013) call "white fragility" among white participants engaging in conversations about race.[1] Other obstacles emerge from a persistent oversimplification and lack of understanding of CRP. Inadequate understanding of CRP has yielded tokenized representation of people of color perspectives, prompting Ladson-Billings (2014) to note a "distortion and corruption of the central ideas" in some iterations (p. 82).

Independent school equity initiatives that attempt to address the aforementioned issues must first reflect the realities of students of color specific to the private school context. As indicated in the National Association of Independent Schools reports in the previous section, the students of color are the ones to most poignantly experience white-centered standards that marginalize non-white cultural values. In this vein, scholars point to the importance of student perspectives when forming school policies and practices (Nieto, 1994; Cummings, 1994), as adding their perspectives can lead to further insights for interventions (Noguera, 2007).

[1] White fragility refers to white reactions of heightened discomfort and lowered tolerance of engaging in conversations about race (Matias & DiAngelo, 2013).

The primary purpose of this study was to gather information on alumni of color (AOC) overall educational and socio-emotional experiences as students of color at an independent school. This included understanding their experiences with teachers' instructional practices as related to AOCs' racial or ethnic identity and sense of belonging. Relatedly, students tend to learn better when they are excited to learn (Noguera, 2003); hence, understanding characteristics of inspiring learning conditions from AOC perspectives was also useful data to gather.

As well, another purpose of this study was to understand AOCs' interpretations of teacher traits and dispositions that link to culturally responsive practices, such as teacher caring. Guided by the writings of Ladson-Billings (1995a) and Gay (2010), a culturally responsive teacher is defined as a teacher who guides students to be academically successful in a student-centered and culturally inclusive manner. Additionally, caring, an important aspect of CRP (Garza, 2009; Gay, 2002; Nieto, 2004), is defined as a teacher who holds high academic expectations while maintaining a supportive attitude (Gay, 2000). Understanding AOC perspectives on what a caring teacher looks like will help to understand students' perspectives on their optimal learning conditions.

Independent school culture, further, can come with a culture of "niceness" that perpetuates race-avoidance, or colorblind tendencies (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003). Moreover, communities that exhibit colorblind tendencies can negatively affect white as well as non-white individuals, as it can lead to pro-white tendencies (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004) or decreased engagement of non-white members of the community (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009). In this regard, it was also helpful to look into colorblind ideology within predominantly-white independent school culture.

Research Questions

This project gathered independent school alumni of color (AOC) perceptions of teacher practices, as it related to culturally responsive pedagogy, on the following aspects of their educational lives:

- RQ1: How do alumni of color (AOCs) characterize their overall educational and socioemotional experiences as a student of color at an independent school?
    - How, if at all, were these experiences impacted by an AOC's racial or ethnic identity?
- RQ2: What types of instructional practices related to race or ethnicity exhibited by independent school teachers do AOCs recall as having a significant impact on their learning?
- RQ3: What types of teacher behavior and practices, if any, exhibited by independent school teachers do AOCs recall as having a significant impact on their sense of belonging?
    - According to AOCs, what teacher expressions of caring (verbal and nonverbal) do they remember as having a positive impact on their learning or sense of belonging?

The Research Site and Population

The target population for this interschool study was independent school alumni of color (AOCs). In order to collect data about AOC experiences that minimized differing variables, the following criteria was used. The population comprised of AOCs who have attended an independent high school for more than two consecutive years, have received a high school diploma within the past seven years (2012 – 2019 school year), and self-identify as non-white.

In addition, in order to achieve consistency of school type, data from independent schools that are predominantly-white was used, with predominantly-white defined as the predominance of white faculty, administrators, and peers as perceived by the alumnus.

I identified several organizations within the Los Angeles area as a way of accessing the target population. Firstly, the Southern California People of Color in Independent Schools provided access to their listserv, as this organization serves member schools and their diversity practitioners in the Southern California area. Other local organizations, such as the Independent School Alliance for Minority Affairs and KIPP Through College also provided helpful access. On a state-wide and national level, the California Association of Independent Schools, and the National Association of Independent Schools also was a resource for accessing alumni of color through their respective listservs.

Research Design

The purpose of this project was to collect perspectives from alumni of color (AOCs) on their experiences surrounding independent school teachers on their instructional practices as well as their traits and dispositions linked to culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Given the dearth of information on students of color perspectives at independent schools, a qualitative approach was helpful in developing theoretical explanations of teacher behavior that adequately connect to effective culturally responsive practices from the viewpoint of AOCs. In view of this, this study conducted in-depth interviews with AOCs who agreed to be interviewed.

The Significance of the Research

Howard (2017) points to inadequate teacher understanding of students' cultural knowledge as well as lack of know-how for application into classroom practices as possible reasons for the infrequent use of culturally responsive practices (CRP). This study's in-depth alumni of color (AOC) perspectives on the efficacy of teacher practices can provide concrete student-centered perspectives towards future teacher training initiatives as well as school-wide systemic changes in creating racially inclusive policies and practices. This is particularly so in light of studies that indicate that faculty inclusivity and diversity training have little impact on improving classroom practices (Howard, 2017; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Jupp, Berry, & Lensmire, 2016; Matias & DiAngelo, 2013; Smith & Bahr, 2014; O'Hara et al., 2009; Liang & Zhang, 2009). Indeed, whether and how training improves a student's educational experience itself is difficult to determine, as scant research has been done to adequately understand specific ways in which training can affect positive outcomes (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Watt et al., 2009; Worthington et al., 2007; Flores & Heppner, 1994). Fewer still are studies that yield information on effective practices suited to the unique context of independent school culture. Yielding information that directly connects to actual student-experiences of a culturally responsive teacher can be helpful in providing more specificity and guidance for designers of CRP training models.

Chapter 2

Introduction

Despite the fact that there has been over 30 years of research and literature on the efficacy of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 2018, 2016, 2014, 2011, 2006, 1995ab; Gay 2010; 2000, 1975; Howard, 2017, 2010, 2001), CRP seldom manifests itself in its fullness in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Howard, 2017; Prater, 2009). Indeed, discourse on the virtues of CRP still tends to remain on the theoretical (as opposed to applicative) level (Howard, 2017), and scholars are yet to agree upon training best practices (Marbley, Bonner, McKisick, Henfield, & Watts, 2007). Further, studies reveal that faculty inclusivity and diversity training have little impact on improving classroom practices (Howard, 2017; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Jupp, Berry, & Lensmire, 2016; Matias & DiAngelo, 2013; Smith & Bahr, 2014; O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008; Liang & Zhang, 2009).

All of this points to a troubling paucity of empirical data for developing effective CRP training models, with fewer still suited to the unique conditions of independent schools. This latter point can be significant, for some independent school educators have the added task of incorporating CRP practices within the context of a few students of color in predominantly white (62%) classrooms (NCES, 2019b). Gathering information from student of color perspectives can provide insight for school improvements (Noguera, 2003; Howard, 2001; Nieto, 1994; Cummings, 1994) and can thereby increase understanding of effective CRP practices. The purpose of this project was to gather alumni of color (AOC) data on their views of teacher practices as it related to their learning, sense of belonging, as well as effective communications related to both high academic expectations and belief in the student's academic capacity.

While many aspects of CRP will be threaded through all classroom contexts, effective application of the theory must be cognizant of specific dynamics that constitute a community. To this end, the first part of this chapter will discuss key aspects that contextualize independent school culture. I will explore literature that speaks specifically to issues faced by students of color, which will involve detailing independent school racial demographics of teachers, administrators, and students, as well as delineating the social isolation and marginalization experienced by students of color. I will also explore literature that addresses the larger social context of the culture of whiteness within which independent schools operate. This will involve an exploration of literature on adolescents and their racial identity development, particularly within the context of students of color growing up alongside white peers. I will next detail literature that sheds light on the frequent manifestations of the role of "niceness" that can serve to hinder conversations on racial equity, detailing widespread systemic biases extant among white individuals in the United States today, and its negative ramifications such as the stereotype threat syndrome (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Next, I will discuss the theoretical frameworks of this study: colorblind (race-avoidant) ideology (CBI) and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). As education scholar DiAngelo (2012) observes recurring themes of CBI tendencies among many of her pre-service student teachers, I will first explore literature that speaks to the effects of CBI on a community. Literature on independent school culture indicates a tendency for "niceness" in which less-frequented topics such as race and ethnicity fall outside of the realm of conversation (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003). In this regard, CBI was a useful framework with which to analyze the data from this study. I will then briefly describe the evolution of my second framework, CRP, and delineate the subtleties of the varying nomenclatures (i.e. relevant, responsive). This will be

followed by a review of literature that provides evidence for CRP practices that connect to positive academic student outcomes and increased sense of belonging.

Independent School Features

Demographics and Peer Culture

Students of color at independent schools continue to be numerical minorities at their school. Since 1989, in an effort to increase data on independent school statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has conducted a biannual survey called the Private School Universe Survey (PSS). Data from the most recent PSS survey (2017-2018) indicates that the student body of regular (not special emphasis or special education) nonsectarian independent schools, while having increased slightly in diversity over recent years, is predominantly white at 62%. In contrast, the students of color numbers remain consistently low for Black (10%), Hispanic (9%), and Asian (10%) students. Fewer still are Pacific Islander (1%) and American Indian/Alaska Native (1%) and multiracial (6%) students. While the PSS survey does not provide racial demographic information for teachers and administrators, a 2019 report by NCES showed similar numbers. The 2017-2018 school year indicated predominantly-white independent school teachers (85.1%) and principals (87%), with low numbers of Black (3.2%), Hispanic (7.2%), and Asian (2.7%) teachers (NCES, 2019ab).

These numbers can have a negative impact on a youth during her or his formative years, as the minority status in one's educational environment can affect youth identity development (Tatum, 2000). This can partly be due to the fact that white individuals who grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods and schools can often default to a worldview that situates white culture as the norm (Howard, 2017; Matias et al., 2016). In this context, students of color

must often navigate their education while simultaneously assimilating into white European American culture (Sleeter, 2012; Fordham, 1991) and abandoning their racial identity (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012).

Students of color at independent schools also frequently navigate their school experiences among peers from families with high socioeconomic status. Independent school families tend to come from the upper echelon of socioeconomic status (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007) who can thereby afford the price of tuition. The national average for nonsectarian school tuition is at $27,300 per year (NCES, 2016). Elite schools in the Los Angeles area have a much higher price tag, with one school's yearly tuition at $52,446 according to their website. Many of these schools enroll children of high profile figures, such as major actors, film makers, or political figures. Peer interactions and social life at these schools, consequently, can be markedly different from a typical high school experience. Blog posts depicting experiences at elite independent schools list the frequent visibility of students holding designer hand bags, driving luxury cars to school, or employing high-priced tutors (Kissinger, 2013). All of this points to independent school communities as not only predominantly-white in culture and racial demographic but also having the dynamics of social power, prestige, and economic privilege.

Students of Colors Experiences: Impact of Attending an Independent School

Some students of color at independent schools exhibit resilience through their academic achievement while experiencing marginalization. DeCuir-Gunby et al.'s (2007, 2012) study of African American student experiences at an elite independent school (the data was analyzed in two separate reports), revealed various coping methods to navigate school life. Through in-depth interviews, DeCuir-Gunby et al. found all six participants to indicate the importance of the role

of their parents in shaping their sense of racial identity. Moreover, three acknowledged increased inner strength that developed as a result of their experiences as a minority at their school. One expressed that she formed a stronger sense of her racial identity through her encounters with white culture, stating she "became stronger through negative situations at Wells because there were a lot of them" (p126), which further propelled her towards self-acceptance. Another student adjusted to the school by recognizing the common thread of humanity they shared with her predominantly-white peers, with statements like "I see how I'm different from people but how I'm also alike. I just build my own character and that makes me who I am" (p. 126). However, despite the efforts exerted by the students of color, empirical studies consistently point to their experiences of marginalization, peer isolation (Herr, 1999), and other negative experiences.

A 2003 study shows the complexity of students of colors feelings towards independent school communities (Arrington et al., 2003). The impetus for this study came from a group of inter-school independent school educators who were concerned about the disproportionate number of African American boys perceived to have academic and behavioral issues. This group eventually designed a research project, in collaboration with Howard Stevenson from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, to form the Success of African American Students (SAAS) project. This study was part of a larger mixed-methods study of longitudinal mental health adjustments of African American youth. Data was collected from 108 students in sixth through twelfth grade at four different independent schools.[2]

Through individual interviews and focus group discussions, SAAS student participants reported positive regard for their school in some aspects, such as high satisfaction with their

[2] Although participant details were not provided in the 2003 report, a 2009 report by Stevenson and Arrington provided the additional details which are listed above.

educational experiences (85%) as well as feeling liked by other students at their school (72%). At the same time, negative feelings emerged as well. Seventy-five percent reported having had to make a special effort to fit into the school culture and 70% felt that it was difficult for "people like them" to be accepted at their school" (Arrington et al., 2003, p. 2). The negative experiences seemed to be characterized by subtler, more covert forms of marginalization, as the students reported rarely experiencing overt hostility, like being called by a racial epithet or encountering physical altercations. Examples of what the students did encounter at their school include perceiving white community members' surprise when Black students showed intelligence (43%) or being viewed through race-based behavioral stereotypes (41%). Students also reported changing their speech style when in a predominantly white environment (40%).

Similar sentiments were echoed by DeCuir-Gunby et al.'s (2007; 2012) participants. While their study was small, Decuir-Gunby et al.'s study provides data on the under-researched arena of independent schools and can thereby provide useful perspectives. On the one hand, four of the six students expressed appreciation for the opportunities afforded by attending a prestigious school, both in terms of educational opportunities as well as forming important connections for future social mobility.[3] Yet on the other, five students recognized the social and emotional toll of daily experiences of marginalization. Unlike some of Arrington et al.'s (2003) students who had trouble articulating the racial undertones of covert racism, DeCuir-Gunby's participants expressed the dynamics of race and racism at their school. One participant recognized the non-verbal messages of white-centeredness exhibited through the school's board of trustees composition of wealthy white men, and noticed the powerful influences displayed by

[3] DeCuir-Gunby et al. do not provide specific numbers attached to their findings. Hence, it is unknown if part or all of the participants, for example, expressed appreciation at being enrolled at their school. The numbers I listed above (e.g., "four of the six students expressed appreciation…") were derived by counting the student names and subsequent transcripts provided in DeCuir-Gunby et al.'s findings section.

the wealthy white parents at their school. Another participant also observed the inconsistency in policy enforcements for children of wealthy white donors in contrast with Black students. These experiences led several of the participants to conclude that their school was created for the purpose of serving their wealthy white counterparts and not the minority students at their school.

Independent Schools within the Societal Context

Adolescence and Racial Identity Development

While all adolescents have the tendency to become hyper-conscious of their appearance as they navigate their identity development, adolescents of color are more likely to explore an added dimension of their racial or ethnic identity (Tatum, 1997). This rises out of their constant exposure to others' hyper-awareness of their racial identity, from white women who "hold their purses a little tighter" when passing a Black adolescent (Tatum, 1997, p. 54), or a bilingual Puerto Rican who is told that "(since) they don't speak 'the' language, they don't belong here" (p. 140), to Asian Americans' perpetual treatment as a foreigner in their own country of birth (Ong et al., 2013).

Further, adolescents in the US grow up with Eurocentric culture—a world in which beauty standards, lifestyles, and role models are represented by whiteness—as the norm (Tatum, 1994). In this context, it can be easy for an adolescent of color to develop a preference for whiteness. Indeed, seminal studies by Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1940, 1947) show how significant racial perceptions can be on adolescent identity development. In their famous "barbie doll" study (1947), the majority of their adolescent subjects, all of whom were African American, associated "whiteness" with positive statements and darker skin color with the reverse

(Farrell & Olson, 1983). This indicated the powerful impact of socialization that induces internalized inferiority on African American children.

Alice Walker (1983) provided a word to this phenomenon with the term "colorism", which refers to holding lighter skin color as superior in standards of beauty or social legitimacy. Colorism places primacy on outward appearances that align more closely with white, European appearances and can include other physical features, such as hair texture or the shape or size of the lips or the nose (Webb, 2019). As children enter adolescence and become increasingly aware of peer perceptions, the impact of colorism can heighten.

Tensions in navigating cross-race spaces can be seen in other dimensions as well, as Phelan, Davidson, and Cao's (1991) two-year longitudinal study found high school students to exhibit four distinctive patterns of behaviors as they navigate across home and school settings. Their study was conducted at four large, urban high schools (three of which are located in predominantly-white, middle class neighborhoods) and consisted of 54 students that represented an equal distribution of high and low achieving students. While the researchers did not directly provide a numerical racial breakdown of their participants, their "Appendix B" indicates that Black, Caucasian, Latino, Filipino, Hispanic, Palestinian, and Vietnamese students participated in the study.

Students who exhibited the first pattern, congruent worlds/smooth transitions, saw a congruence in values, beliefs, and expectations across their worlds as they transitioned from home to school. In other words, these students saw their family culture reflected in their schools and therefore encountered harmony between school socialization and home life. According to "Appendix B", all of the students in this category were Caucasian. Students of color participants, with a few Caucasian students in the mix, represented the other three patterns:

different worlds/border crossings managed, different worlds/border crossings difficult, and different worlds/border crossings resisted.

The second pattern—different worlds/border crossings managed–consisted of students who experienced differences in their home and school life but managed to develop strategies to navigate the two systems. Although students in this category managed to have a smooth transition from home to school life, many also indicated feeling that the adults at their school did not understand their pressures of navigating two disparate worlds. Students in the third category—different worlds/border crossings difficult—had not yet learned or were unwilling to adopt adjustment strategies and often had difficulty navigating the different worlds of home and school. These students might do well in one class but did not maintain the same standard across other classes. This category consisted of majority student of color participants, again according to "Appendix B". The last category—different worlds/border crossings resisted–comprised of students, as the title suggest, who either actively or passively resisted adopting coping strategies to adjust into school life.

Unsurprisingly, high achieving students of color frequently exhibited the second category of behavior, different worlds/border crossings managed. These students of color might most closely resemble, in terms of academic motivation and achievement, students of color who are frequently found at predominantly-white independent schools. Indeed, testimonials from students in this category echoed DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2007; 2012) and Arrington et al.'s (2003) studies in their complexity of feelings, such as admiring the cleanliness and niceness of the school environment on the one hand and having a poignant sense of their "otherness" on the other.

Cultural Miscommunications, Unconscious Biases, and Stereotype Threats

As Phelan, Davidson, and Cao's (1991) study detailed above, part of the landscape in which students of color (SOCs) navigate their education at predominantly-white independent schools (PWISs) can include cross-cultural differences. SOCs often spend their school days among predominantly-white teachers, administrators and peers, and conflict between white educators and students of color can sometimes rise out of misreading cultural cues (Milner, 2012). Further, perceptions of students' misbehavior can arise out of a "cultural mismatch" (Matias et al., 2016; Franco & Maass 1996).

One study has shown white teachers to perceive Black students as older and more likely to be troublesome than their white counterparts after they reach 9 years of age (Goff et al., 2014). In this study, Black students were seen as more culpable for their actions than white or Latino students, prompting researchers to consider troubling ramification this can have on teacher disciplinary actions. Other studies revealed white teachers' misreading of their students' cultural ques, leading them to believe their students of color to be less interested in education (Downey & Pribesh, 2004) or less academically qualified (Alesina, Carlana, Ferrara, & Pinotti, 2018). Teacher biases can serve to produce a self-fulfilling effect, leading students to eventually believe the negative stereotypes (Gershenson et al., 2017).

Students of color can not only be subjected to teacher biases but also have internalized reactions to their environment, as being a numerical minority in an academic setting can also increase the likelihood of stereotype threat reactions by students of color. While some students of color at independent schools exhibit resilience and persistence, as detailed in DeCuir-Gunby et al.'s (2007; 2012) studies, their testimonials also point to added levels of effort spent on adjustment. The use of their mental resources to maintain a positive sense of racial identity point

to the emotional as well as cognitive costs experienced by students of color in predominantly-white schools. These negative ramifications have been coined stereotype threats by researchers Steele and Aronson (1995).

According to the stereotype threat theory (ST), temporary cognitive impairment can occur when one is cognizant of negative stereotypes of one's racial, gender, or other group identity in situations in which performance is judged (such as during academic exams). Fear of confirming negative images of one's group—such as a stereotype that one's racial group has lower intellectual capacity—can consume mental energy away from more productive use towards task-fulfilment (Gershenson et al., 2017; Lyons, Simms, Begolli, & Richland, 2018). Experiences of negative stereotyping can be significant for students of color, as African American boys are more likely than any other racial group to receive negative treatment at schools (Noguera, 2003) or receive lower expectations from their teachers (Gershenson et al., 2017). Experiencing ST can greatly affect performances, even when the perceived prejudice is slight and regardless of a student's socioeconomic status (Steele, 1997). More recent studies have shown the threat to manifest much earlier in a student's learning process, impacting the knowledge formation stage (Lyons et al., 2018). As well, the same study found a correlation between a student's experience of ST and a reduction of the her or his enjoyment and interest in the stereotyped domain.

Theoretical Framework 1: Colorblind Ideology

"Niceness" and Independent School Culture

As seen earlier, Arrington et al. (2003) and DeCuir-Gunby et al.'s (2007; 2012) studies point to manifestations of subtle or covert forms of racism extant in independent school

communities. While race-avoidant behavior and veiled hostility can be seen in all racial and cultural groups, this mode of communication is particularly salient among white middle class individuals who encounter cross-racial conversations about what they consider to be uncomfortable topics (Kochman, 1981).

Indirect resistance was observed by Arrington et al.'s (2003) research group as they interacted with their selected independent school sites. They noted:

> (A)s opposed to our previous work in public schools where resistance was more overt, and therefore easier to identify, in independent schools it seemed that there was a systematic 'niceness' that masked the hesitancy of the schools to fully engage with the research (p. 8).

Recalling the predominantly-white (current and historical) status of independent school administrators, together with the frequency of covert forms of marginalization found in the studies of Arrington et al. (2003) and DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2007, 2012), it is useful here to note the communication style exhibited by these administrators that can be tricky for people of color to navigate.

Several scholars point to the role of "silence" as a tool that effectively inhibits and discourages marginalized perspectives. Ladson-Billings (1996) observed her white students' continued use of withdrawal and silence to effectively discourage an outspoken student's comments about racial and gender inequity. Ohito (2016) also observed the inhibiting role of "niceness" at the start of her course on race and social justice among her white preservice teachers.

Colorblind Ideology

"Niceness" as a reaction to race-related conversations stems from race-avoidant social upbringing experienced by many white individuals in the US (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, 2018). This outlook is referred to as colorblind ideology (CBI)—a view that denies the importance of racial categories and thereby discourages acknowledgment of race-related factors, in contrast with multiculturalism, a view that holds that differences should be acknowledged and celebrated.

Bonilla-Silva's Colorblind Racism Frames. Bonilla-Silva (2010, 2018) identified forms of racism that can rise out of CBI and coined the term colorblind racism. His four frames in which this can manifest are: "abstract liberalism", "naturalization", "cultural racism", and "minimization of racism".

Abstract Liberalism. The first frame, abstract liberalism, is the most important. It highlights the foundational view of liberalism that upholds European-centric values of individualism. Bonilla-Silva defines:

> Abstract liberalism involves using ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., "equal opportunity," the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters (p. 56).

This system, in essence, ignores structural inequalities extant within the US that places added obstacles for people of color (with added emphasis on Black, Latinx, and South Asian individuals).

While abstract liberalism is foundational to Bonilla-Silva's colorblind racism theory, it is also perhaps the most difficult to understand, as individualism is a concept that is deeply woven into European American culture. This is particularly so in light of individuals who tend to view

racism as singular acts of hatred that occur anomalously under the backdrop of a fair and neutral society (Lopez, 2003). The predominance of the latter view, moreover, can perpetuate colorblind ideology, as racism can be seen as something not necessarily connected to the distribution of power and privilege in the US.

Abstract liberalism, however, can obscure understanding of covert forms of racism that are faced by many people of color in predominantly-white settings. In this regard, Bonilla-Silva points to the frequent use of the "language of liberalism" that can present an attractive argument that enables proponents to "appear 'reasonable' and even 'moral,' while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de facto racial inequality" (p. 56).

Naturalization. This second colorblind racism frame points to the tendency to treat racially charged incidents as a natural (and sometimes inevitable) phenomenon within human nature. Bonilla-Silva's example is an individual who might use this frame to put forth a notion that "preferences for primary associations with members of one's race are rationalized as nonracial" (p. 56), as all social groups seem to have racially-isolating preferences. The negative ramification of this frame is its potential to perpetuate segregation or other discriminatory practices.

Cultural Racism. This frame pertains to denigrating views regarding another group's race or ethnicity and reveals an outlook that holds certain groups to be racially or ethnically inferior. While more salient examples of cultural racism can be easily recognizable (such as Jim Crow ideology), Bonilla-Silva highlights the less recognizable instances that are often couched under the tone of grit and hard work, such as the assertion: "I believe in morality (and) hard work…I don't believe in handouts" (p. 57). This view, in essence, characterizes certain racial or

ethnic groups as lacking in skills or effort and ignores structural inequality that places significant obstacles to success.

Minimization of Racism. This last frame identifies the tendency, particularly among those who are often not the target recipients of racism, to minimize the existence and impact of racism. Those who perpetuate this ideology might revert to statements such as "minorities make things look racial when they are not" (p. 71), and thereby minimize the salience of racism.

The Detrimental Effects of Colorblind Ideology. In addition to perpetuating obstacles to addressing systemic inequities, as seen above, several studies show colorblind outlook to produce other negative ramifications. This section will detail studies that detail the effects of colorblind ideology (CBI) on both non-white as well as white members of a community.

As colorblind perspectives tend to be frequent manifestations among teachers and administrators, Richeson and Nussbaum (2004) conducted a study on the impact of CBI on implicit inter-racial attitudes. Their subjects were 52 White undergraduate students at Dartmouth College and replicated a seminal research conducted in 2000 by Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink.

This study first asked students to participate in a series of activities that were designed to encourage either a multicultural or colorblind outlook through exposure to varying cues. Participants were then asked to take the Implicit Association Test (IAT). While the data revealed a strong pro-white tendency in both groups, the colorblind group indicated stronger pro-white bias. These results, consistent with Wolsko's earlier findings, suggest that CBI can be closely linked to racial biases. In other words, the study indicated a clear non-neutral outcome of the colorblind outlook, identifying a connection between silence on race-related topics and emerging unchecked biases.

As well, the impact of CBI and its ensuing forms of cultural racism indubitably has a stress impact on its recipients. In this regard, Salvatore and Shelton (2007) conducted a study that looked into depletion of cognitive capacity when individuals are confronted with racial prejudice. In order to determine the kinds of prejudice (ambiguous or blatant racism cues) that yield the greatest stress factor on an individual's cognitive capacity, Salvatore et al. examined Stroop (1935) color-word task performances of 237 Princeton University undergraduates under varying levels of duress.

The subjects were first assigned a series of activities that implicitly conveyed the experimenter's racial outlook in one of three behavioral categories: non-prejudiced, ambiguously prejudiced, or blatantly prejudiced hiring recommendations for an actual company. Then, under the guise of a misstep, experimenters left the room to retrieve a missing questionnaire and asked participants to do the Stroop task—a task that requires significant processing capacity—while she or he was away. Participants were thereby exposed to conditions hostile or benign to people of color, and then asked to undertake the Stroop task to determine the impact on cognitive functions.

As researchers expected, the study indicated greater cognitive impairment among Black participants than white participants in the ambiguous-prejudice condition. Consistent with prior research by Major, Quinton, and McCoy (2002) on the exhaustive impact of ambiguity on cognitive capacity (as cited in Salvatore et al., 2007, p. 811), the ambiguous-prejudice condition yielded greater impairments for Black participants than the blatant-prejudice condition. The ambiguous nature of prejudice experienced by Black participants, therefore, took up more cognitive space than blatant prejudice.

White participants had the opposite result in the study. While Black participants were impaired to a significantly larger extent under the ambiguous prejudice condition, whites were impaired more fully under the blatant prejudice condition. This indicated to researchers that white individuals were less-equipped to deal with blatant racism than Black individuals, and moreover, subtler forms of racism garnered little to no notice. Salvatore et al. connected these findings to contemporary manifestations of racism that can be characterized as subtle or ambiguous, and in this context, underscore the importance of interventions.

The impact of CBI was observed in a community setting as well. Plaut, Thomas, and Goren (2009) looked into the psychological impact that a dominant group's (white employees') outlook on diversity has on minority group members' sense of belonging and participation at a large health care organization in 17 different departments. Using an anonymous survey, Plaut et al. also used, as did Richeson and Nussbaum, an adaptation of Wolsko et al.'s research to first determine if a white employee held colorblind or multicultural perspectives on diversity. The psychological engagement or disengagement of minority employees was then determined by assessing said group's value of work-related issues ("Doing well in my job tasks and duties is very important to me"; I am proud to tell others that I work at (this organization)") (p. 444). The data from both sets were regressed to determine the impact of white employees' diversity outlook on minority employees' sense of belonging in the workplace (minority engagement).

The result yielded outcomes similar to prior research of both Wolsko et al. and Richeson & Nussbaum. White respondents' multicultural outlook—acknowledging and celebrating differences—contributed significantly to increased minority engagement, and in contrast, colorblind outlook linked significantly to decreased engagement. Plaut et al., hence, found a strong correlation between white coworkers' inter-racial outlook and negative or positive

minority engagement. They also found a correlation between the emphasis of sameness and the consequent continuation of majority-culture dominance; in other words, an emphasis on the "equality" of all employees had the paradoxical effect of solidifying non-equality in the form of prioritizing white culture over non-white culture. Connecting their study with related findings from research by Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton (2008), Plaut et al. underscore the possibility of "social distancing" that can result from colorblind ideology in the workplace (p. 445).

The above two studies are among other research that point to the negative impact of CBI and its detrimental effect on non-majority groups. The focus of the next section will be on the how this ideology specifically manifests in the academic world.

Colorblind Ideology in Action. Next, we bring the focus back to the education field. Using Bonilla-Silva's colorblind racism frames, McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, and Luedke (2015) examined white professors' mentorship of graduates of color at a historically Black college and university (HBCU) and at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in STEM disciplines. McCoy et al.'s data was derived from a larger research project and consisted of semi-structured interviews of eight white participants, five from a PWI and three from an HBCU.

McCoy et al. identified two salient themes in participant-attitudes towards graduates of color: colorblind ideology (CBI) and a view of non-White students as academically less prepared. The first theme emerged from recurring claims of treating students of color in the same way as white students, indicating participating professors' eagerness to be perceived as "open-minded" and "fair." Employment at an HBCU did not preclude this colorblind ideology, as one white female assistant professor was transcribed as saying, "I don't care if you are purple! I'm going to treat you the same way" (p. 232). Notwithstanding their comments, McCoy et al. found their participants to be cognizant of racial differences. For example, a white male HBCU

professor who expressed sentiments of sameness later remarked on shared characteristics he observed among his African American students.

The second salient theme identified by McCoy et al. was the professors' description of graduates of color as less academically qualified than their white counterparts. Using Bonilla-Silva framework, McCoy et al. found colorblind racism on multiple levels. Thomas, another white male professor in the study, exhibited cultural racism—attributing negative stereotypes to an ethnic or racial group—when he attributed the stagnant nature of his relationship with graduates of color to what he assumed to be their lack of interest in graduate studies. Thomas thereby revealed his assumption that people of color are less prone to being interested in scholarly work. Even Thomas's intentions at equity revealed cultural racism, as he recounted how he lowered his standards in order to hire two African American students as his lab assistants. This lowering of expectations for students of color normalized the view of non-white students as academically less qualified.

Other professors also exhibited elements of colorblind racism through their suggestions of a need to assimilate into white culture, essentially conveying the need to for graduates of color to abandon their cultural background in order to succeed academically. All of this indicated that the faculty do see race, despite their colorblind stance, and echoes Richeson et al.'s (2004) study that connected CBI and to pro-white ideology and racial biases.

The development of CBI can be seen at a much earlier stage of a student's life. In order to study a typical predominantly-white suburban school's relationship to racial construct, Lewis (2001) conducted a study at Foresthills Elementary School situated in a middle-to-upper-class county. Lewis collected the data both through explicit curriculum and through the implicit "hidden curriculum" among the adults and peers in the school community (p. 782). The study

spanned one school year, and twice-weekly observations occurred in fourth to fifth grade classrooms, during school yard free time, staff lunch room, and other parts of the school. Lewis also observed multiple meetings, including staff and parent teacher association meetings, and conducted formal and informal interviews with parents, students, and staff.

Throughout her time at the school, Lewis received messages that downplayed the importance of race in the community. One of her first encounters was with Mrs. Moch, a fourth-grade teacher, who described her one multi-racial student as frequently playing "the race card", cautioning Lewis not to give the student's claim too much weight. However, it was later discovered that this same student, Sylvie, had been called the "n" word prior to Lewis's arrival and, despite her mother's multiple calls to the principal's office, a satisfactory response had yet to occur. According to Sylvie's mother at a later interview, the school's response was to encourage Sylvie to confront the boy who used the slur, and no plan for an adult to step in was ever offered. This downplaying of racial considerations was also echoed by the school principal, who expressed hesitation regarding Lewis's research concerning racial dynamics at a predominantly-white school, and as well, by white parents who also felt that "because not a lot of Black people that go there… they don't have to address (multiculturalism) too much" (p. 786).

Lewis found limited multiculturalism in the school's curriculum. In accordance with a district mandate to engage in an activity relevant to Black History Month, Ms. Moch's class attempted to create classroom posters of famous African American figures. The school lacked adequate resources for this endeavor, however, so the school's reading specialist—the one Black staff member at the school—went to a bookstore to supply necessary books and materials. As soon as Black History Month ended, the posters came down, revealing to Lewis the community-wide dismissal of the importance of multiculturalism outside district mandates. This sentiment

was also indicated by the principal, with the isolated Black History Month and a random "count to ten in different languages" activities listed as the only examples of multiculturalism at the school. Additionally, it was evident that teachers, too, felt the non-necessity of a multiculturalism. One teacher, when asked about multiculturalism in her curriculum, responded by describing the lack of diversity in her classroom, implying that multiculturalism is only necessary in the presence of students of color but not otherwise.

Similar to McCoy et al.'s white professors earlier, Lewis's adults also exhibited contradictions of a self-reported colorblind outlook and a race-conscious conduct or statement. Mrs. Moch, when recounting Sylvie's over-emphasis of race (playing the "race card"), described herself getting the aid of the Black reading specialist to talk to Sylvie. In another conversation, a parent talked about the virtues of not noticing racial differences, then went on in the same conversation to exhibit race-consciousness when expressing the undesirability of living in a Black neighborhood.

Research thus indicated rampant CBI among white educators—in higher education as well as in elementary schools—and its detrimental link to racial biases. Lewis's teachers showed a strong tendency to deracialize incidents that are clearly racial in nature, while McCoy et al.'s study of two higher institutions revealed multiple instances of cultural racism among white teachers. In summary, studies pointed to negative effects of CBI that ranged from decreased minority engagement (Plaut et al., 2009) and pro-white tendencies (Richeson et al., 2004) to temporary cognitive impairment on students of color as a result of stereotype threat reactions (Steele et al., 1995). In contrast, culturally responsive pedagogy, the second framework of this study, can be seen as a promising antidote to race-avoidant behavior with its primacy on the racial or cultural experiences of students of color.

Theoretical Framework 2: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The previous section points to a need for increased cultural competency and awareness among educators. The lens with which teachers assess and interact with students can create a classroom environment in which students learn implicit lessons on cross-racial relationships (Freidus & Noguera, 2017). If teachers do not have the right mindset and skills to teach a classroom of diverse students, as seen in the previous section, their explicit and implicit ideologies can impact their students' ability to form healthy cross-racial relationships in an educational setting. Here, culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) can be a useful framework to guide teachers towards a better understanding of their students and their racial and cultural background that impact the way they approach their schooling. CRP—through its student-centered orientation, high expectations for all students, and a belief that all students can succeed (Gay, 2010, 2018)—is an empirically tested approach that has promising academic outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2018, 2016, 2014, 2011, 2006, 1995ab; Gay 2010; 2000, 1975; Howard, 2017, 2010, 2001). This section will delineate the evolution of CRP, its key aspects, and its relationship to positive academic outcomes.

Relevant? Responsive? A brief summary and thoughts on terminology. Pedagogical practices that can be categorized as culturally responsive practices can appear under varied terminology, such as culturally competent, culturally responsive, and even more recently, culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). While there is a rationale for the varied nomenclatures, some core tenets thread through all.

In the early 1970s, multicultural education (the incorporation of diverse cultural referents into the curriculum) originated as a response to academic inequities faced by racial and ethnic minorities (Gay, 2018). Gay (1975) recognized the benefits of providing frequent cultural referents in classroom activities as it allowed students to utilize their bicultural perspectives. Consequently, Gay promoted multicultural education when teaching basic skills, such as reading and mathematics. Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) proposed the practice of bringing in students' out-of-school knowledge into the classroom through a concept called culture practice theory. This concept holds that in-school knowledge is often narrow and insufficient in transferring classroom knowledge to out-of-school applications. Culture practice theory, however, while recognizing that learning occurs within the cultural context in which it is created, did not address the wider picture of societal dynamics (Tate, 1995). One decade later, Ladson-Billings (1994) noted the importance of addressing wider societal contexts, such as historical, social, or political contexts, and proposed a new pedagogical approach.

Ladson-Billings (1994) coined the term culturally relevant pedagogy as part of her effort to shift the lens from the then deficit-outlook towards African American students. Recognizing contemporary research that found African American students to sacrifice their socioemotional well-being in order to do well in school (Fine, 1986; Fordham, 1988), Ladson-Billings focused her research to identify pedagogical practices that centered on the strengths of students' cultural resources. Culturally relevant pedagogy, hence, frames teacher practices to center on students' cultural background as a resource, or a "vehicle for learning" (p. 161). For Ladson-Billings, although this was a necessary component of CRP, successful teaching did not end with a students' academic success. A student must also develop (or in some cases, maintain) a sense of

cultural proficiency as well as a sense of "critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the social order" (p. 160).

A slightly different but also commonly used term, culturally responsive pedagogy, is most commonly attributed to Gay (2010). She shifted her prior focus from the importance of including accurate cultural representations in curricular content (1975) to a focus on making the learning process relevant to students in the classroom, in terms of family culture and experiences. With culturally responsive pedagogy, Gay focused on teaching practices that stem from the understanding of the importance of student perspectives. Gay defines culturally responsive pedagogy as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2018, p. 36).

Although the two strands have the same goal of social justice education, their focus differ slightly in that Gay's terminology (responsive) focuses on teacher practices (methods and competency) whereas Ladson-Billings' wording (relevant) places focus on teacher dispositions (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Both veer away from reducing culturally relevant/responsive practices to a concrete list of activities and instead point to the importance of a practitioner's multicultural mindset that threads through all instructional practices. Recently, in response to oversimplified manifestations of CRP practices, other scholars offer additional terminology, such as culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012), or culturally revitalizing (McCarty & Lee, 2014) pedagogy.

Scholars have varying views on terminology. Some prefer the term responsive due to its etymological inference of responding to interests and perspectives of classroom students (Warren, 2018), while others find no essential difference in the terms (Howard, 2017; Gay,

2018). Whatever the term, the overarching premise of this practice is to focus on what works (versus what is deficient) with students of color learning endeavors (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

CRP-specific "caring" and high expectations. As caring—to be differentiated from sympathy or kindness (Howard, 2010; Rychly & Graves, 2012)—is a key component of effective teaching (Garza, 2009; Gay, 2002; Nieto, 2004), it is worth noting that scholars propose a specific concept of caring when integrated into CRP practices. CRP-specific caring holds students with high expectations and rigor (Gay, 2018; Howard, 2017) and was also echoed in Ladson-Billings' (1995a) seminal study of exemplary teachers of African American students. While cautioning that CRP ought not be reduced to "lists" of excellent teachers, Ladson-Billings did observe a common thread in teacher dispositions: a belief in students' ability to succeed as well as a commitment towards leading students towards success.

Gay (2018) noted the interrelated nature of high expectations and caring that stems out of the important role the latter has on a teacher's expectations (and thereby conduct) in the classroom. For example, caring can impact the quality of a teacher's instruction or influence students' ability to participate or receive feedback in class. Caring can also impact how much a teacher demands of a student, as exemplified by Gay's own positive experiences with a demanding teacher who expected high quality thinking from his students.

Additionally, culturally responsive caring is a practice that needs to be cultivated among teachers. Gay (2018) details important aspects in the third edition of her seminal book, "Culturally Responsive Teaching". Firstly, because CRP-specific caring requires a teacher to get to know and understand a student within her or his cultural context, it requires teachers to increase their knowledge-base about their students' cultural heritage. Secondly, CRP practice requires teachers to be aware of their own cultural lens with which they view the world. For this,

teachers should engage in self-reflections that help them better understand their own expectations and interactions with students. Finally, Gay advises teachers to engage in conversations about cultural diversity with key individuals in their community, such as ones who have knowledge or expertise in the field.

Student outcomes and CRP. Up to this point I described philosophical aspects that are important paradigms of CRP practices. This section will review studies that tie specific aspects of practice to academic outcomes or students' increased sense of belonging.

When Ladson-Billings (1995a) first proposed her theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, she noted earlier scholars who saw positive academic outcomes when classroom instruction incorporated student perspectives (e.g. Gay & Abrahamson, 1972; Au & Jordan, 1981; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981). For example, Au (1979) saw positive academic outcomes when teachers incorporated student perspectives through a sequence of what is called the "experience-text-relationship" (ETR) method. This method begins with a discussion that invites students to discuss prior experiences with the topic at hand (E), then engages in analysis of the text being studied (T), and ends by identifying the relationship between the students' prior experiences to the topic of the text (R). This instructional style, socratic in nature, prods students to find evidence for their analysis in a way that is anchored both in their personal experiences as well as the text. The ETR method yielded increased reading comprehension when Hawaiian students' cultural background was incorporated into the instruction.

Ladson-Billings' (1995a) seminal study looked into teacher practices that led to successful outcomes for African American students. Ladson-Billings makes an important distinction between effective teaching practice and curriculum, underscoring that teaching practice is foundational to how a student can receive curricular content. As such, Ladson-

Billings studied eight effective teachers of African American students (as identified by both school principals and parents) through classroom observations and interviews.

Through the three-year span of the study, Ladson-Billings was able to gather some insights into the teachers' self-concept as well as dispositional outlook towards effective teaching. She identified core teacher dispositions that thread through varying teacher personalities or pedagogical approaches, differences such as one teacher's belief in direct reading instruction contrasted with another's adherence to whole-language approach to literacy. As a result, six over-arching tenets were identified that continued to serve as foundational practices of culturally relevant pedagogy, such as making a concerted effort to help "at-risk" (for factors such as educational, economical, or political) students, legitimizing and incorporating students' "real life" experiences into the curriculum, or a teacher's awareness of her/himself as a political being (p. 127-128).

A contemporary study conducted by Tate (1995) of an exemplary teacher (as identified to Tate by a city council representative) at a predominantly-African American middle school also saw the efficacy of student-centered teaching. Through ethnographic interviews with the teacher, Sandra Mason, Tate learned about the efficacy of Mason's three step approach: having students pose a real problem that negatively impacts their community, engage in research that helps students understand the problem as well as develop an intervention plan, then actively engaging in the problem solving with the community. The problem-solving process, such as inquiring into local laws to create an incentive program for neighborhood improvements, naturally incorporated students' mathematical skills to achieve their goals. In this way, the process of Mason's classwork yielded many benefits, including students to deepen their understanding of mathematics in terms of actual consequences outside of the classroom.

A more recent study conducted by Hill (2012) looked into the effects of CRP practices in a predominantly African American middle school classroom in a large urban school district. The data was gathered through face-to-face interviews, classroom observations of two eighth grade teachers (as selected by the principal), and focus group discussions with 24 randomly selected eighth grade students. One of the teachers observed, Ms. Belle (a white teacher with over 25 years of experience), described her practice as incorporating classroom activities and texts that engages the students in real life activities, using information about students' families and other personal experiences as way of forming increased connections. The other teacher observed was Ms. Baker, a young African American teacher in her first year at the school. Ms. Baker emphasized the importance of authentic relationships and caring as a key aspect of her teaching practice. Informed by what she learned over the course of the school year about her students' family and community, Ms. Baker found ways to connect classroom learning to students' out-of-schol experiences.

The efficacy of the teachers' practices was noted in focus group discussions, consisting of 24 randomly selected students representing different performance levels. Students indicated increased engagement in their classroom experiences through having a choice in their project or activies. They also showed a motivation to learn, listing reasons such as that their opinion mattered, experiencing the teacher to care about their achievement, or that they had opportunities to make their own choices in class activities

Another study focused on understanding the mindset of successful teachers through the lens of CRP. Milner (2011) conducted his study at a middle school over two school years, gathering data through observations of a teacher's (selected by the school principal) classroom practice and through semi-structured interviews. Milner's observation of the teacher, Mr. Hall (a

white male science teacher), was framed by Ladson-Billings' (2006) focus on teacher dispositions, or mindset. Milner identified the following three aspects of Mr. Hall's mindset: developing meaningful and authentic relationships with students, understanding the complexity of a student's identity, and understanding the communal nature of teaching. In turn, Milner observed students' trust and respect towards Mr. Hall as they described him as a "cool" and "good teacher" who simultaneously held fun and yet challenging classes.

Chapter 3

Introduction

In order to fill the current dearth of research on culturally responsive pedagogy within the independent school context, this study looked into independent school alumni of color (AOC) perceptions of effective teaching practices, as connected to their racial or ethnic identity and sense of belonging. The study used a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with AOCs who have graduated within five years of this study, from 2012 to 2019.

This project gathered predominantly-white independent school AOC perceptions of teacher practices, under the lens of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and colorblind ideology (CBI), on the following aspects of their educational lives:

- RQ1: How do alumni of color (AOCs) characterize their overall educational and socioemotional experiences as a student of color at an independent school?
    - How, if at all, were these experiences impacted by an AOC's racial or ethnic identity?
- RQ2: What types of instructional practices related to race or ethnicity exhibited by independent school teachers do AOCs recall as having a significant impact on their learning?
- RQ3: What types of teacher behavior and practices, if any, exhibited by independent school teachers do AOCs recall as having a significant impact on their sense of belonging?

- According to AOCs, what teacher expressions of caring (verbal and nonverbal) do they remember as having a positive impact on their learning or sense of belonging?

Research Design and Rationale

Gathering information from students on their schooling experiences can be a useful tool towards school improvement initiatives (Noguera, 2003; Nieto, 1994; Cummings, 1994), and in this vein, understanding independent school students of color interpretations of teacher practices will provide much-needed information. This study used a qualitative approach to gather data through semi-structured interviews with alumni of color (AOCs). As the structure of interviews itself can be Anglo-American in nature (Briggs, 1986), the format of semi-structured interviews in their flexibility and responsiveness to the situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) served my purpose well in gathering data from a diverse body of participants in a culturally competent manner.

Since the goal of this project was to gain a better understanding of student perspectives on key tenets of culturally responsive practices, a qualitative approach served this purpose well. One of the strengths of a qualitative study is its capacity to accommodate the participants' perceptions of events, experiences, and situations (Maxwell, 2013). A qualitative study places focus "not only in the physical events and behavior that are taking place, but also in how the participants in (a) study make sense of these, and how their understanding influences their behavior" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 31). A qualitative approach hence enabled this project to better understand the nuances of being a numerical minority in a predominantly-white context, how it

affects students' interpretations of teacher practices, and how they view their teachers' cross-cultural dispositional outlook.

Strategies of Inquiry

Population and Site

The target population for this study was independent school alumni who self-identify as non-white. This project endeavored to gather a wide range of perspectives from students of color from diverse backgrounds, as marginalization can look different across race and ethnicity. For example, Black students are more likely to be viewed as troublesome or as less intellectually qualified (Noguera, 2003; Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016), and both Black and Latino males are more likely to be identified as problematic and are less likely to be placed in advanced placement or honors classes (Rogers & Freelon, 2012). In contrast, Asian student experiences can include being treated as a perpetual foreigner, having their inter-ethnic differences invalidated, or being seen as a second class citizen (Ong et al., 2013). Hence, gathering perspectives that represent various races and ethnicity was helpful.

It was also important for my sample population to be graduates as opposed to current independent school students. Graduates are more likely to provide over-arching feedback on teacher practices that are not swayed by singular instances that might occur shortly before an interview session. On the other hand, graduates who are too far removed may no longer have an accurate recollection of their high school experiences. Hence, the sample of this study consisted of alumni of color who graduated from an independent school within a seven-year period, from 2012 to 2019.

In order to achieve consistency of school type, the criteria for selection included data from alumni of color who have attended an independent school that is predominantly white (defined as the predominance of white faculty, administrators, and peers). As well, the criteria included alumni of color who have attended an independent high school for more than two consecutive years and who self-identify as non-white.

As a way of accessing the target population, I enlisted the assistance of several local organizations. Firstly, the Southern California People of Color in Independent Schools (SoCal POCIS) provided access to AOCs, as this organization serves member schools and their diversity practitioners in the Southern California area and holds four well-attended events throughout the school year. Other local organizations, such as the Independent School Alliance for Minority Affairs and KIPP Through College were also helpful in the access of independent school alumni of color.

Data Collection Methods

The interviews were, when possible, conducted face-to-face; however, the majority of participants chose to participate through an online videoconferencing application (Zoom). This allowed access to AOCs from a greater geographic area and thereby widened my sample pool. The interviews were semi-structured and followed a protocol designed to dig deeply into AOCs' perceptions and interpretations of teacher practices and dispositions. The interview protocol was first pilot-tested with two groups: current students of color who are not enrolled (currently as well as in the future) in courses that I teach and alumni of color who were out of my target population graduation range. Gathering feedback and suggestions from both sets helped develop a focused interview protocol.

The desired AOC participant numbers before engaging in the study was 15 to 20 participants, but the study yielded 30 participants. The first stage of recruitment was through the aid of several organizations. Independent School Alliance for Minority Affairs remains in contact with their independent school alumni of color and was thereby helpful in allowing me access to AOCs. The same applied KIPP Through College programs, as this organization also continues to provide support to their students of color post high school graduation. Further, SoCal POCIS's widely-subscribed listserv service proved to be a valuable resource, as many diversity practitioners forwarded my recruitment email to AOCs with whom they remain in contact. Similarly, CAIS's listserv was also instrumental in recruiting practitioner assistance.

Many AOCs were eager to share their stories and knew of others who would also feel the same. Hence, after initial recruitment through the organizations, several participants volunteered to help recruit others, resulting in snowball sampling.

Data Analysis Methods

All interviewed recordings were reviewed, in full, at least once. The first round involved listening to recordings while editing transcriptions provided by Temi.com. This stage also included identifying initial themes and patterns through an open-coding system. Next, the codes were further sorted into a second round of categories, as patterns pertaining to colorblind ideology (CBI), culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), or other themes began to emerge. After the first two rounds of analysis, I re-analyzed the transcription document in its entirety to catch any themes that may have been overlooked previously. Some interview recordings were then re-visited to catch any nuances that may have been missed through the first round of review.

Trustworthiness

Role Management

As stated earlier, the sample for this study intentionally pulled from graduates of color who are no longer in attendance at an independent school. In this way, my role as a high school teacher hopefully had minimal effect on alumni of color (AOC) responses. My connections to other organizations listed in the previous section (Alliance and KIPP LA) was, however, a potential detriment in that many of these organizations endeavor to maintain connections with the student of color past high school graduation. At the initial contact with participants, therefore, I communicated my explicit intention to remove all identifying information in my report. Further, in order to place interviewees at ease, I briefly introduced myself as a doctoral student at University of California, Los Angeles as well as a teacher of color who teaches multiple subjects, such as Diversity Studies or American Sign Language, and who has served over ten years as advisor to my school's Gay-Straight Alliance. I also shared information about my own experiences as a former single parent who raised an independent school queer alumna of color. It was my hope that sharing information about my own experiences as a teacher, a mother, and a woman of color inspired respondents to delve into their own stories with fullness and authenticity.

Credibility and Ethical Issues

The biggest threat to the credibility of my research was my own role as a long-time diversity practitioner at an independent school. My years of experiences have shaped my understanding of teacher practices as it pertains to inclusivity and diversity. As a teacher of

color of 23+ years, as well as a proud mother of an LGBTQ alumna of color at an independent school, I have invariably formed my own opinions about effective teacher practices. To produce as much evidence as possible, I provided participant numbers next to each emerging theme as an effort to gain credibility for my findings.

Another significant obstacle was the potential for my study to yield few interviewees. Forty-five minutes is a long time for an individual, once removed from high school, to devote for an interview, and particularly to a stranger. In order to offset this potential, I provided an incentive to participate in the interview: a five-dollar gift card to a venue of their choice. Another incentive I hoped to produce was informing participants that the study is intended to the fill the gap of existing paucity of empirical studies on student of color perspectives at independent schools. My hope was that the alumni of color will thereby be desirous of sharing their unique and less understood perspective.

Finally, pseudonyms were used for all alumni of color. As well, all school names have been changed. Given the small number of students of color who attend most independent schools, it was vitally important to take extra measures to protect identifying characteristics. It is not uncommon for an independent school, for example, to have one female Asian student enrolled in a certain grade level. If such were the case, I changed any other identifying markers to protect the student's anonymity.

Chapter 4

Overview

Thirty alumni of color (AOCs), representing 11 self-identified Asian, seven Black, and 12 Latinx former students at predominantly-white independent schools (PWISs) participated in this study. Interviews spanned an average of 45 minutes, and with the exception of two face-to-face interviews, all were conducted via Zoom.

AOC interviews represent participants' experiences at 13 different PWISs and one predominantly-white public school located in a wealthy suburban neighborhood. According to the schools' website information, 11 schools indicate varying levels of commitment to inclusive practices, either through a diversity mission statement, the presence of a director of diversity and inclusion (or some iteration of an inclusion committee), or a statement about a school-wide inclusivity initiative. For example, one school's website lists a statement by their head of school that indicates efforts towards increasing multiculturalism in their school curricula. Despite this, however, similar to Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson's (2003) participants discussed in Chapter 2, all 30 AOCs in this study exhibited compex relationship with their predominantly-white schools. To illustrate, 24 AOCs said they would recommend their school to a loved one if given the opportunity, and yet among these, 22 AOCs indicated that their educational opportunities at PWISs came with significant socioemotional cost. Four additional participants stated that they would not recommend their school. Hence, a total of 26 participants felt that their PWISs either came with significant emotional cost or was not a place they would recommend altogether.[4]

[4] The remaining eight participants either wholeheartedly recommended their school or felt that their answer would depend on the family situation and personality of the student.

Further, even the participants who expressed whole-hearted endorsement of their school still recalled having to carefully navigate the political sphere of predominantly-white school culture as one of a few students of color at their school.

Findings 1: AOCs experience Inherent Marginalization due to PWIS School Culture

"Everybody knows each other…I was just a stranger to that community."

These words were uttered by Tiffany, who had joined her predominantly-white high school new to the community and as one of few students of color (SOCs) at the school. While Tiffany did not detail overt ways in which she felt excluded or marginalized at her school, she described experiencing significant levels of anxiety and stress nonetheless. This section will illustrate how school culture, even with the absence of discriminatory policies or practices, can itself create a foundational experience of marginalization for SOCs at predominantly-white independent schools (PWISs).

Background.

Despite school inclusivity initiatives listed at the start of this chapter, interview data pointed to an "outsider feeling" experienced by many alumni of color (AOCs) in this study. This first finding points to how school culture and traditions can feel exclusive and unwelcoming to a student of color (SOC) and how, even with the absence of discriminatory practices or policies, school culture can still feel marginalizing. Moreover, this backdrop can nullify inclusivity efforts initiated by PWISs in the best of circumstances, and conversely, can accentuate unfair or discriminatory policies in less favorable circumstances. Three salient categories emerged within

which AOCs experienced marginalization: 1.) school culture, 2.) curricula, and 3.) classroom environment.

The Cultural Disconnect experienced by AOCs.

While there are many facets to a community's "culture", alumni of color (AOC) interviews indicated three main categories in which they experienced disconnect: 1.) the stark difference between independent and public school cultures, 2.) cultural disconnect with high socioeconomic status, 3.) and disconnect with white culture itself.

Entering a PWIS from Public School. The first salient source of cultural disconnect came from experiencing public/independent school differences, as recounted by ten AOCs.

Three of these participants expressed feeling less academically capable as a result of their public school background. For example, Nancy recalled feeling ill-equipped from her public school training, stating "Because I came from public school [I felt] that I wasn't smart enough or at the same level as every kid." The same was echoed by Henry, who recalled feeling like he lacked basic skills required to excel in English classes. As well, Tiffany recounted how she experienced a drop in her academic confidence, stating, "I had always been a really good student in my other schools and this was the first time where I became kind of average." All three participants experienced added stress in encountering a new set of standards at their predominantly-white independent schools (PWIS), and moreover, as none had received adequate teacher support outside of class at the initial entry point, all three had some difficulty transitioning to their new school.

Tiffany also described feeling like an outsider to a close-knit community, as she recalled feeling keenly aware of the interconnectedness of her school's residential neighborhood, recounting:

> [The school neighborhood] is a pretty small, tight knit community. Everybody knows each other. Me coming in and being the only person of color with all these people that knew each other…the teachers had relationships with the students because their sisters had them or their brothers had them. I was just a stranger to that community.

Tiffany observed close relationships that had developed between her teachers and her peers because of family relations, and this added to her already heightened sense of being an "outsider" at her school.

Three AOCs also described an outsider feeling while at their PWIS. Beth, too, noticed the longstanding connection between her peers and teachers ("Everyone had known each other for five plus years, so it was weird coming into a school where everyone was already really close") and Nancy felt on the outside from the start of her years at school ("There's already just a certain level of relationship that they have that I'm obviously not a part of"). Finally, Cameron described feeling out of place at not having engaged in typical private school-related activities ("I didn't know people from summer camp, I didn't go to the same private schools that they had gone to for elementary and middle school").

Other participants expressed shock at finding themselves as one of a few students of color at their new school. For example, Kim expressed, "Walking on campus and seeing I was the only person of color…it was just stark," and Charlotte remarked, "I didn't know what diversity was at that age…but when I stepped foot on that campus, I just knew that diversity wasn't it."

Three others (Melanie, Nora, and Ben) commented on the overall noticeable difference between public and independent school culture.

Hence, the demographic and geographic structure of the school itself seemed to have produced a heightened sense of exclusivity and discomfort for the ten AOCs.

Wealth Culture of PWISs. A second source of cultural disconnect emerged from experiences of high socioeconomic status at PWISs. As detailed in Chapter 2, the wealth disparity between public schools and elite independent schools can create much stress for students outside of the wealth status. This was reflected in this study as well, as 14 participants expressed feeling disoriented with the various aspects of wealth displayed at their school. For example, Jake described an instance in which one of his friends took him and two other SOCs to a high-end sushi restaurant. The exorbitant nature of the meal shocked one of his friends. Jake recalled:

> I remember Bodie explicitly saying, "Wow, that's more than my mom makes in a whole year." We were definitely happy that we got the food, but we were definitely [struck] with feeling, "Dang, the difference in value in money for people who have that privilege versus the people who don't…"

Jake eventually became weary of requiring large amounts of money in order to spend time with his wealthy group of friends ("I sort of noticed I always have to pay to have fun with these people") and eventually became closer to peers of color.

The role of money in PWIS friendship groups was echoed by other participants. Nancy recalled the difficulty of seeing peers with access to high-end activities and possessions, and Jackie described an "every day feeling of not having as much money." Two participants indicated that socioeconomic status was the determining factor for creating social groups at their

school. For example, Barbara observed that money established social hierarchy among peer groups, as she recalled "It's hard to be friends with someone who likes to go to Coachella every year and get five-star resort hotel rooms." As well, Jake stated, "Friend groups are broken down by affluence level."

The remaining AOCs talked about the difficulty engaging in conversations with their peers on matters that came with socioeconomic ramifications or a general sense of disconnect with exposure to high socioeconomic status.

Disconnect with White Culture. The third source of discomfort for the AOCs came from feeling disconnected with white culture. Eight AOCs recalled difficulty participating in classroom discussions that had differing communication styles from their family culture. For example, Jake, who identifies as East Asian, described how classroom expectations that placed high value on argumentation had contrasted with his cultural heritage that "values harmony more than debate, even if it's in a safe academic setting." Consequently, Jake did not feel comfortable participating in class discussions and described himself more as an "active listener." Nevertheless, he received feedback from his teacher that encouraged him to participate more. As well, Cameron, who identifies as Latinx, also had difficulty participating in a mode unfamiliar to their (non-binary pronoun) cultural upbringing. They stated, "I don't have the confidence to say it out loud in a classroom because I'd never been taught to do that. It's never been what I do, and it's hard to break into that."

Two other sources of cultural disconnect stemmed from socialization that discouraged open communication. Melanie talked about a stigma she had felt in asking for help, as it was considered to be a sign of weakness in her own cultural heritage ("You have that kind of cultural stigma where asking for help can be a sign of weakness"). The second participant, Pam, felt that

her upbringing, as well as white-centered curricula (to be explored further in depth later this section), created obstacles to classroom participation because of her socialization as an Indian woman. To her, "Indian women who culturally have been silenced for a very long time at home" can experience additional obstacles speaking up in a white-centric setting.

A third participant (Caleb), who had begun his PWIS schooling as a junior and had transferred to a PWIS in Southern California from a public school in Louisiana, spoke about his upbringing that discouraged sharing personal information particularly with white individuals. He explained:

> You don't share nothing with nobody out of your family. And for some time, I had fully believed that too. And you don't cry and do anything…emotion is necessarily not something that you should show.

He did, however, eventually embrace his PWIS community and adapted his relationships along the way.

A pervasive sense of cultural disconnect was expressed by Nicole, who felt her white teachers lived naïve and unrelatable lives. She suggested drastic measures towards cultural competence:

> There really needs to be some rewiring because it's not happening. [The teachers] just live these perfect lives out here: they pull up to the parking lot in their perfect little cars and then they have their perfect little kids go to these same schools and they're perfect, [and their] partners are doing perfect things. It's just like, "Gosh, your life is so white!"

In this way, Nicole articulated the vast degree to which she had felt disconnect from the lives and concerns of her predominantly-white teachers.

Two additional participants described a general feeling of cultural disconnect ("It was an extreme culture shock" (Tiffany) or needing to navigate a "cultural shift" (Ethan).

To conclude, PWISs can often come with all three cultures listed in this section: independent school culture, wealth culture, and European American cultural communication and values. While these traits are not inherently problematic, to a student who joins as one of few SOCs at a school, they can serve to produce unintended negative messages to a student of color. This, together with the following three sections, can have a compounded effect of marginalization for SOCs.

"Business as usual" in the Curriculum can be "othering."

A second salient theme that marginalized alumni of color (AOCs) in this study involved tradition-based white-centric curricula: twenty-five participants described insufficient or an absence of multiculturalism in their core classes. Their perspectives ranged from 1.) observing that non-white perspectives were ignored or missing from the curriculum altogether, 2.) observing colorblind or race-avoidant behavior, 3.) and seeing various forms of tokenization of non-white perspectives.

Absence of Multiculturalism. Seventeen participants indicated dissatisfaction with multiculturalism in their core classes at their school. Of these, eight noted a complete absence of non-white perspectives, and nine recalled some discussions of non-white individuals that failed to adequately address the topic of race and ethnicity.

Absence of non-white perspectives in the curriculum was detailed by Beth who described learning about European history in her Ancient History course, and yet recalled no mention of non-European history, such as the Aztecs and Mayans. Similarly, Barbara noted that all of her

history classes were largely concerned with European or European American history, and Finn felt that multicultural perspectives were completely missing from all of their (non-binary pronoun) classes. Moreover, Kim noted a "dearth of culture and representation in the curriculum (despite the fact that) it's easy to do in English" and Carol described an absence of multiculturalism in all of her core classes. As well, three others (Ben, Ethan, and Opal) could not recall feeling connected to what they learned in their core classes.

Ben's perspective slightly differs in that he felt that multicultural perspectives did occasionally occur but were contingent upon the students of color in the classroom. Ben described class discussions and curriculum as usually white-centric, and would only include non-white perspectives if the students in the room seemed to desire these perspectives. He stated:

> The teachers themselves sometimes don't necessarily see a demand (for multiculturalism), so therefore they're kind of like, "Oh, well we'll just continue with the curriculum as it is." ...And it wasn't until when I was taking the class as a senior that they were like, "Oh, let's actually add a couple more chapters on other civilizations."

To him, the onus of diversifying the curriculum fell upon the students of color in the room. His experiences echoed sentiments found among Lewis's (2001) teacher participants, as discussed in Chapter 2, who expressed the non-necessity of incorporating multiculturalism in a predominantly-white classroom.

While some did recall learning about non-white historical figures, such as Frederick Douglass, nine AOCs did not consider this an instance of "multiculturalism" because of its lack of addressing issues surrounding race. For example, Lora could not recall an instance in which she engaged in a conversation about race ("I don't recall a time when we ever talked about race")

and Nicole describing her school's race-based affinity clubs as the only place in which race was addressed ("But in classrooms, no, that wasn't a thing").

Colorblind Ideology. All 17 AOCs from the previous section can perhaps be considered to have experienced colorblind ideology (CBI) in their core classes. This next section details AOC accounts that describe an additional layer of race-avoidant tendency in classroom discussions, as described by seven AOCs. These were instances in which multicultural perspectives were not only absent in the curricula but teacher practices were described to noticeably exhibit a denial of racial dynamics.

Perhaps one of the more extreme cases can be found in Michelle's story in which her 10th grade English class read Toni Morrison's book, "Beloved". She described how conversations surrounding the book never touched on the topic of race or even slavery, which she now understands to be a salient topic of the book. She recalled:

> I didn't know that about the book until I was in college and I rethought about it. I actually didn't know that because we never talked about it… I had no idea that the book was about slavery or race or power and privilege or oppression.

Michelle's case illustrates how teachers can avoid the topic of race to an unnatural degree.

Further, Henry described his core classes as "colorblind" and felt that his teachers had generally avoided engaging in conversations about race or ethnicity. In his assessment, this avoidance seemed to allow his predominantly-white teachers and peers to have a false sense of harmony. He stated, "If race was not brought up, then we can all work under the assumption that it's not a problem."

Three participants noted what DiAngelo (2018) referred to as "white fragility", as discussed in Chapter 2. Opal recognized the difficulty her community seemed to have around

the topic of race, noting, "No one will talk about [race]. Everyone gets guilty about it" and expressed feeling frustrated in many of her classes. As well, Jake recalled a strong sense of aversion exhibited by his peers, as he described, "a lot of students went through history class feeling white guilt." Noah simply stated, "People will do anything to avoid it."

Other AOCs described observing visible discomfort among white individuals during race conversations, thereby limiting the discussion to surface-level conversations. Carol observed:

> I can understand that they may feel uncomfortable in talking about race, so they want to make it relatable to them. In this way they no longer make it an issue about race.

While Carol appreciated the difficulty of her white teacher's engagement in race conversation, she noted the resulting shift in focus that effectively nullified racial dynamics in the conversation.

Finally, Kim described teachers and peers who would place emphasis on "sameness" as a way to foreclose conversations surrounding race and ethnicity ("[The school] often overlooks issues of racial insensitivity…covering it with a blanket, 'We're all Christian'").

Manifestations of "white fragility", as detailed above, seemed to be an obstacle for furthering conversations on a school-wide level for some AOCs. One participant (Michelle) described receiving pushback when attempting to initiate conversations about race and identity after having attended a national conference on diversity and student empowerment. She recounted approaching an administrator with whom she had a positive relationship, only to be countered with: "I think that [diversity] is already encompassed in our mission of care and respect for everyone. I don't know why we need to do anything different."

In summary, many AOCs in this study indicated colorblind tendencies among some PWISs that seemed to attempt to establish a sense of equilibrium and cross-racial harmony, albeit inauthentic, by not facilitating conversations surrounding race and ethnicity.

Tokenized People of Color Representation. The last salient theme of insufficient multiculturalism was found in the tokenization of non-white perspectives, as expressed by 12 participants.

Three AOCs felt that historical events that were oppressive in nature were twisted into a positive light. For example, Nora felt that the Asian diaspora was romanticized in classroom discussions, problematically leaving out important aspects of hardship experienced through oppression. She recalled, "The way we studied [internment camps] was part of a theme of journeys and packing belongings. And it just made me uncomfortable altogether because there's so many more layers to this." Similarly, Kim took issue with the unnatural positivity with which Chinese workers on the transcontinental railroad were described. She recalled her teacher's use of the word "help" to euphemize historical events: "Chinese immigrants who 'helped' and build [the railroad]." As well, a third participant, Ethan, recounted a discussion of Christopher Columbus as a positive figure, ignoring mass atrocities committed by the figure.

Two participants experienced tokenization to rise out of their teachers' misguided attempts at incorporating diversity into their curriculum. Katherine described a time when her class was encouraged to dress up like a historical figure for a debate activity. Consequently, a student appeared in class dressed up "wearing very stereotypical Halloween costumes (a mustache and a sombrero)" for Mexican clothing. Another instance of a botched teacher-endorsed project was detailed by Ben, who recalled "dancing to the words of Martin Luther King in, literally, African-based dance moves."

Other iterations of tokenization rose out of one-dimensional representation of people of color solely as victims of historical incidents. Jackie recalled feeling like her courses conveyed that slavery was the only thing one had to know about the entirety of African American identity. This left Jackie feeling discouraged, as she wished that her teachers had also included a "focus on the progression and the beauty that came out of the challenges." Similarly, Jake felt that representation of Asian figures utterly lacked positivity, and queried, "Was this the only role we have in society at the time or even today?" And finally, Sarah felt that historical figures who were of personal importance to her appeared in the curriculum as an obligatory quick read.

Additionally, five participants noted that people of color perspectives were presented from a Euro-centric vantage point. Cameron recalled with some amount of emotion the way in which their (non-binary pronoun) history teacher encouraged students to consider the institution of slavery from an empathetic vantage point towards the slave owners. They stated:

> The teacher would always say that students, and people in general, needed to have a very empathetic view towards slave owners because they were just upholding the status quo.

Another participant (Nathan) also felt white-centered representation, as he stated that his teachers were "apply[ing] Western theories to very not-Western people."

Participants also described learning about non-white people solely in terms of how their existence affected white individuals. For example, Sarah and Kim both felt that non-white groups only came up in relation to their interactions with European Americans, such as through trade or slave rebellions. Finally, Bo simply stated that they cannot recall a single class lesson that "centered any of the work of a person of color."

Finally, the last salient category of tokenized multiculturalism was found in insufficient time allotted to discussions. For example, Katherine observed that students were required to

memorize more terms and materials when it came to European history as opposed to non-white history. As well, Tamara described multiculturalism as "a sprinkle of color" in her school's curricula.

White-centered perspectives were found in school adults' attempts at student empowerment as well. Five AOCs indicated experiencing support for other aspects of their identity, such as sexuality or gender, from a white-centric standpoint. For example, Tamara expressed:

> A lot of the literature on coming out was very white-centric. Whereas coming out in a Chinese American family…that's a very different experience from coming out in a white WASP-y family. Because when you connect culture and religion, it's going to have a certain intersection that doesn't happen with other things.

Tamara reflected on how she did not have an Asian model for coming out while in high school, and how this partly contributed to her not coming out until later in college. Three others (Bo, Henry, and Cameron) also described experiencing classroom lessons or teacher support in terms of their LGBTQ identity while also encountering lack of race conversations in the classrooms.

Two additional participants described encountering conversations on female empowerment within a colorblind context, as stated by Jackie ("I would get more help in terms of being a girl and not necessarily an African American girl") and Lora ("I can't recall a time when we ever really talked about race. We talked a lot about gender being and female empowerment").

Noteworthy. One unexpected theme emerged out of eight AOC interviews. Five participants noted that their classroom discussions had some level of multiculturalism but was presented either exclusively as a Black-white binary or excluded their own identity. Three

additional AOCs expressed recalling some level of Black representation while an absence of their own identity from the school curricula.

The former view (multiculturalism as a Black-white binary) was expressed by five participants. Opal recalled an absence of her identity in important historical events, as she recalled, "Civil rights was presented as Black and white…there's very little conversation for Latinx people in there." As well, Henry noted a tendency for classroom conversations to omit Asian identity, stating, "As an Asian American person, I don't think we are really given that spotlight whenever race issues are talked about; it's generally on a Black and white binary." Similarly, Jake and Nora both felt that sufficient time and effort was spent discussing Black as well as white identity, but when it came to other identities, representation was rushed or scant. Jake stated, "I don't remember anything written by Latino Americans or Asian Americans or any other ethnic group beyond white American or Black American." A fifth participant, Carol, did not feel satisfied with Black representation in her school's curricula, as this only seemed to occur in elective (non-core) classes, and even then, was presented in terms of discussing the institution of slavery. However, she noted that other identities, Latinx and Asian, were missing from the curriculum altogether.

This does not suggest that PWISs are adequately including important aspects of Black identity into the curricula. What it might suggest is that some PWISs, in an effort to diversify perspectives, are focusing solely on Black identity while making inadequate efforts towards other identities. Three additional participants, while they did not point to binary multiculturalism, noted that their own identities were noticeably missing from their school curricula while some coverage of Black identity seemed to exist in discussions.

"Business as usual" in the class environment can be "othering."

The last salient category of marginalizing predominantly-white independent school (PWIS) culture pertained to classroom environment. While some alumni of color (AOCs) did encounter teachers who were active in supporting the success of students of color at their schools, they also recalled a general sense of personal vulnerability as a student of color in the classroom. Interview data pointed to two major themes: an unbalance in the way AOCs experienced class participation, and poor classroom management.

Unbalanced Call for Class Participation. Opportunities to participate in class discussion did not feel equal to many AOCs in this study: twelve AOCs reported a sense of unwanted hyper-visibility when the topic broached race or ethnicity, and yet 11 described feeling invisible during other times of discussion.

Hyper-visibility during Race Conversations. Twelve AOCs recalled frequently feeling pressure to speak on behalf of a non-white racial group. This came primarily by being asked to weigh in on a race-related issue or through non-verbal messaging, ("Everybody looks to you to answer a question," as stated by Nathan). With the exception of one, all AOCs felt negatively about these experiences.[5]

One AOC, Nora, described the difficulty she experienced in receiving these gestures, stating:

[5] The one AOC who felt positively about representing his race was Caleb, the transplant from Louisiana who joined his PWIS as a junior. He was one of the few AOCs who felt satisfied with the way multiculturalism was presented in his classrooms, as will be detailed later this chapter. Caleb was keenly aware of the fact that he was one of few Black students at his school, and he was often the only Black male in his classrooms. This provided Caleb with a sense of responsibility to have his ethnicity be properly understood, as he recalled, "It was very important for me to have something to say for the sake of my identity…I feel like I have a duty for my people."

> Every student who is a minority is aware that they are minority in their classroom. Probably more aware than the teacher realizes. And so when they call on them, it's just even more painful.

She described feeling exposed as the sole person in the room who was called to share personal aspects of her life and how she wished she was not the only person who received focus.

At times, AOCs were asked to represent not their own but another group's ethnicity. For example, Nancy recalled, "We had a section on Mexico. I'm not Mexican, but somehow I had to keep talking about the Mexican," or Ben, who identifies as Latinx, described being asked to play the part of a Black character in his school play because he was the only male student of color in the theater group.

Invisible at other times. Eleven AOCs described feeling invisible or ignored in the classroom while at their PWISs.

Of note are five participants from the previous section who reported experiencing hyper-visibility on the topic of race or ethnicity. Jackie, who described herself as being the focus of attention when race or ethnicity was brought up, also described feeling a complete lack of acknowledgement from her teacher at other times. She recounted:

> The lack of acknowledgement sometimes would make me feel like I was less than. If I'm putting in all this effort and it goes unrecognized, but they'll call on little Johnny…that would make me [question], "What am I doing wrong where you can't see how hard I'm working?"

Jackie described feeling disengaged as a result of feeling passed over. This was impactful for Jackie, as elsewhere during the interview she also expressed, "Not being seen was the main cause of me feeling inferior."

Two additional AOCs felt hyper-visibility during race conversations but invisible otherwise. Nancy, who was described in the previous section as representing a Mexican perspective as a non-Mexican student, felt ignored or dismissed during other times in class. She reflected, "I don't know if that was because of race or anything, but they definitely had favorites." In addition, Kim recalled unwelcome hyper-visibility when discussions were race or ethnicity related, and yet felt persistent lack of acknowledgement at other times ("Not calling on me even though I raised my hand five different times and I definitely know the answer.")

Moreover, two participants directly addressed the discrepancy with which they received attention during race conversations but not during other conversations. Noah queried, "Do people only listen to your ideas when you're talking about something from Ta-Nehisi Coates's book, not when you're talking about something from Catcher in the Rye?" As well, Tamara reflected, "I just felt like my voice wasn't as valued there...I felt like I wasn't seen in the same way or heard in the same way compared to my white classmates."

In a slightly different manner, Tessa described feeling relevant when beneficial to others and discarded at other times. In her case, she felt relevant as an athlete at her school but felt rudely treated when her athleticism was not the focus. She described, "When it was beneficial to people [because I would do well] for the running team, I felt respect…the same people [would] disrespect me in another way."

Poor Classroom Management. Finally, marginalizing classroom environment was evidenced in teachers' poor classroom management, as 19 AOCs indicated that their generally well-meaning teachers had demonstrated lack of sufficient knowledge or skills needed to effectively address racially insensitive incidents and comments (henceforth referred to as "racial microaggressions") in the classroom.

Noah's comment provides insight into students of color experiences during these times. He described a class discussion in which a white classmate attempted to make a comparison between his Irish ancestors and the Triangle Trade. His recognized the problematic nature of the comparison, and recalled:

> I in that moment paused and looked at my teacher, and was like, "Are you going to call him out for this?" And I ended up having to call him out.

This, moreover, occurred in one of Noah's favorite teacher's class. However, because of the positive nature of their relationship already established prior to this incident, Noah was able to eventually express his disappointment to the teacher.

Other instances of inaction occurred during teacher-sponsored class activities. Katherine's example of tokenization of Mexican identity falls into this category. Katherine understood the inappropriateness of the situation at the time of the incident (when a classmate appeared in a sombrero), and yet the teacher did not acknowledge the situation. Instead, as Katherine recalled, "It was kind of just brushed over [and the class] just went along with it."

Two additional teacher-initiated incidents involved reading aloud a racial slur in an English class. Kim described a time when she was called upon to read a passage that contained the "n" word when another student articulated the word at her hesitation. The class paused and stared at her in reaction, and the teacher's only reaction was to release the class for a short break. Kim described her reaction: "And I just had to sit there and think, this is a really bad rule to begin with." Similarly, Sarah also recalled extreme discomfort surrounding the same racial slur. In this case, the class was taught to learn an archaic word that sounds almost identical to the slur when articulated, and this became fodder for many jokes for Sarah's peers. Sarah felt extreme discomfort during the unit, and yet the teacher did not make any attempt to mediate the situation.

Some participants felt that their teachers' inaction stemmed from a collective attempt to deny the existence of racial tension. Ben described his teachers' reaction as one of denial ("People just let it go and everyone would just pretend it didn't happen") and Caleb could not recall a single instance of a teacher holding students accountable ("I've never heard any teachers really address it").

These experiences, unsurprisingly, served to communicate negative messages to SOCs. Other than Noah, none of the AOCs in this section talked about having a follow-up conversation with their teacher and participants developed various interpretations of their teachers' motives. Melanie, for example, felt her teachers' inaction was because they either "just didn't hear it or they just let it slide because they didn't want to deal with whatever actions they would have to take." As well, Jackie interpreted the inaction of some of her teachers as stemming from their discomfort directly dealing racially charged issues, and Barbara felt that her teachers actually knew an infraction had taken place but "don't acknowledge or do anything about it" and expressed frustration. Finally, Tessa stated with notable sadness, "I feel like people in a sense got away with treating people a little more disrespectfully."

The Onus of Change Placed on Students of Color. Some teachers not only ignored racial microaggressions in the classroom, but also seemed to view racial conversations as the sole work of students of color (and not white transgressing students), as nine of the AOCs from the section above described feeling undue weight placed on them in dealing with racial microaggressions. Jackie described how some of her teachers would approach her after a racially charged incident to check in but not address the class itself. While Jackie expressed appreciation that the teacher showed some sign of caring, she noted its inadequacy:

> She doesn't have to just console me after class because I had injured my feelings. [A better practice is] shutting it down then and there and making a statement about it; taking a stand about something that is actually offensive.

Jackie's teacher failed to address the microaggressing student and instead addressed an innocent bystander, indicating an outlook that placed responsibility on the offended and not the offender.

Two participants felt their teachers to gauge involvement on the reactions of SOCs in the room. Gail described her teachers as usually ignoring offensive remarks unless a student expressly objects. This was problematic to Gail as she stated:

> Regardless if people are okay with what's being said, teachers need to set the tone…I wish there was more pioneering from teachers.

Gail felt that she and her peers of color had to bear the brunt of educating many of her white peers and described experiencing exhaustion as a result. The second AOC, Nancy, also described a time when she had to address a situation. She described:

> One of my classmates had said something offensive and racist towards Native Americans. I think I had said something, the kid responded, and then the teacher called the student out.

While Nancy was happy that the teacher stepped in to support her efforts to speak against an offensive remark, Nancy also reflected that a student ought not be the barometer for holding students accountable.

Three AOCs simply took it upon themselves to call out problematic behavior. Noah was described earlier looking to his teacher to say something to a student regarding the Triangle Trade. The teacher's subsequent inaction left him feeling an extra burden placed on himself, as he reflected, "I felt that if I wasn't here, this kind of stuff would be allowed." As well, Caleb

described a sense of duty he felt in speaking up for marginalized individuals ("It is from the school that I learned how to call out people being inconsiderate") and Charlotte also described herself stepping in ("I've had to step in and correct or kind of educate people").

Some participants, moreover, experienced not only inaction from their teachers but received messages to correct their own behavior to avoid further alienation. For example, Henry's teacher not only failed to take action for enforcing inclusive classroom behavior but actually placed some responsibility on the recipient of the offense. According to Henry, who was openly gay at his high school, a male student in his class used a homophobic slur during unstructured class time. In reaction, the teacher pulled Henry out of class to discuss the situation. He described:

> She was using it as a moment to say, "Maybe don't play this kind of music in class." Not to tone down your behavior but to remember where you are and try to reflect on that a little bit.

To Henry's knowledge, the teacher never addressed the offending student, and this incident stood out to him as a time of unfair teacherly conduct.

Similar sentiments were offered by other participants. Tiffany felt like she had to "watch [her] language and not sound too aggressive" or Kim, who recalled being "pulled aside by a teacher for being too disruptive or too aggressive" in responding to a student's microaggressive comment.

In conclusion, AOCs in this study experienced multiple forms of marginalization that largely resulted out of multi-layered cultural disconnect with their PWISs. As such, school culture, colorblind or tokenizing multiculturalism in school curricula, and inaction to protect SOCs from racially insensitive remarks or incidents were detailed by many AOCs in this study.

Findings 2: Silence Surrounding Microaggressions ≠ "It's Okay"

"There were times when all I want to do is not have a hard day tomorrow."

The second finding highlights the importance of understanding the nature of racial microaggressions, as the covert nature of these infractions can allow white members of a predominantly-white community to remain unaware of their existence. This propensity for white individual's unawareness, moreover, was detailed in Salvatore and Shelton's (2007) study that found their white participants' unawareness of covert forms of racism (as described in Chapter Two). Lack of awareness of racial microaggressions by white individuals was also perhaps aggravated by the tendency of many Alumni of Color (AOCs) who described themselves as not directly responding to the encounters. AOCs did, however, detail significant levels of emotional distress with these encounters, from a heightened sense of racial awareness, indications of internalized racism, and feelings of invisibility or lack of belonging. Hence, this finding underscores that, while instances of racially insensitive behavior or comments can remain largely unaddressed or unacknowledged by members of a PWIS community, it is not indicative of a healthy or racially harmonious community.

PWISs come with Widespread Racial Microaggressions

Twenty-three AOCs reported experiencing race-based microaggressions on several occasions, some of which were already detailed in the previous section, at their predominantly-white independent schools (PWISs). While the majority came from either teachers or from

peers, four instances were from athletic coaches. Below is a short summary of nine most salient categories that rose out of AOC interviews.

"Affirmative action" undertones discounting Students of Color Legitimacy: Thirteen AOCs indicated feeling tension concerning their legitimacy at their PWISs. For example, two (Gail and Kim) described comments from peers that suggested they will likely gain college admittance because of their racial identity; both instances happened either in school hallways or through social media. Of note are comments from college counselors, as detailed by Bo and Henry, that suggested scholarship or other forms of aid packets were provided because of the recipient's racial or ethnic identity. As both Bo and Henry recalled experiencing various other forms of microaggressions from peers as well as teachers, the counselor's comment, while possibly with reason, may have been ill-presented to the AOCs.

Model Minority Myth: Two participants, Jake and Tamara, both of whom identify as East Asian, recalled this form of microaggression. Tamara felt pressure to be "a perfect straight A student" who exhibited the typical interests and hobbies that aligned with East Asian stereotypes. Jake even found humor in this, describing moments in which he noticed peers looking over his shoulder during math assessments. He recalled, "I always thought that was hilarious because I wasn't good [at math]. I was like, 'All right, you could try and cheat off me, but you're going to get the wrong answer probably.'"

Downplaying Microaggressions: Twelve AOCs described experiencing microaggressions that were downplayed or trivialized by white individuals. For example, Kim encountered responses that she was being "paranoid," and Nora felt that her white friends utterly lacked interest in her experiences. In light of this, all 12 highly valued their friends of color from whom they received immediate support without needing an explanation.

"Lumped Together" with other Students of Color: Thirteen participants perceived themselves to be grouped together with other SOCs at their school. This came in the form of being mistaken for another student (or celebrity) of color, grouping large categories of ethnicities in umbrella terms (such as not distinguishing Guatemalan from Mexican identity), or thinking all students of color have the same political or social views. As well, six (Beth, Nicole, Ben, Tiffany, Pam, and Nathan) recalled white teachers or peers' inability to tell them apart, to the point that Pam recalled frequently receiving graded work that belonged to the other South Asian student in her class.

Cultural Appropriation: Three participants observed behaviors of cultural appropriation at their PWISs. Microaggressions in this category appeared in botched classroom activities. For example, Katherine recalled a problematic class activity that required students to dress up as a historical figure, one of whom was a Latin American figure. A student thereby appeared in class wearing a Halloween-like costume with a mustache and a sombrero. Other instances of cultural appropriation came from white peers' appropriation of Black clothing or hair styles.

Saying the "n" word: The severity of this form of microaggression perhaps warrants a category in itself. This form of aggression ranged from teacher-sanctioned classroom activities to white

students articulating the word as part of song. Three AOCs described microaggressions in the former category, all of which occurred in English classes. They described teachers encouraging students to fully articulate the "n" word as part of a literature lesson. Not one felt that their teacher adequately addressed or processed the activity before or afterwards. Moreover, one AOC (Kim) felt extra burden placed on her because of her Black identity, as she felt that she was picked specifically to read aloud a passage that contained the word.

Ignorant Comments: Other microaggressions came through various forms of ignorant comments from peers, coaches, and teachers. These comments ranged from being referred to as "the skinny Indian girl" (Tessa), ignorance around trans-racial adoption, or making fun of an AOC's cultural heritage.

Cultural Racism in Spanish Classes: Three participants felt that their cultural heritage as a Spanish-speaking Latinx student was disrespectfully treated by white Spanish teachers. For example, Katherine objected to her teacher taking liberties with her culture, praising a student's good Spanish pronunciation with, "Oh, look at our little Mexican girl!" The other two participants felt their Latinx roots denigrated, as their teachers touted Castilian Spanish as superior to Latinx Spanish. To illustrate, Opal stated, "[The teacher] kept saying these demeaning things about our Spanish because our Spanish is Mexican, saying that our Spanish was incorrect" and Bo recalled, "I felt sort of a bit like a failure because this was a language that I should know that I wasn't very good at."

Favoring the Wealthy: While this last category is not race-based, the frequency with which this occurred, particularly within the context of predominantly-white elite independent schools, warrants listing here. Most instances of wealth-based microaggressions manifested as normalizing high socioeconomic status activities and behavior.

Microaggressions can remain Largely Unnoticed by White Teachers and Students

Microaggressions, are often defined as "Everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults (Sue, 2010)." Moreover, these incidents can be difficult to identify and address. This, together with the culture of "niceness" of predominantly-white independent schools (PWISs), as detailed in Arrington et al. (2003) and DeCruir-Gunby's (2007; 2012) studies in Chapter 2, can make it even more difficult to navigate.

"Gray Area" Microaggressions at PWISs. Nine participants in this study pointed to the vagueness within which they felt marginalized. To illustrate, Ben spoke of "very little overt racism that happened at Sheffield Academy. Most of it seemed to be kind of between the lines."

To Ben, the vagueness of the infractions was a large part of the difficulty of addressing the situation.

Additional alumni of color (AOCs) also described marginalization manifesting in subtle as opposed to direct forms of exclusion. Jackie, who attended her PWIS from kindergarten through 12th grade, described feeling like her lack of belonging came from "a series of little moments throughout 13 years." Similarly, Noah described microaggressions as "small things that kind of built up." As well, Tiffany described her sense of "othering" as being "subconscious" and "automatic" in her school community.

Other examples came in the form of perceived marginalization from peers' inaction as opposed to direct statements of exclusion. For example, Cameron described, "They weren't going out of the way to include me, but they weren't going out of the way to exclude me," and as well, Katherine recalled, "They weren't going out of their way to be racist or aggressive or anything… but it was all really subtle things." To Nora, microaggressions came in the form of not engaging in conversations as offenses took place. Finally, Bo described microaggressions came in the form of "lack of support or silent approval of mistreatment."

Yet another participant, Sarah, described the covert ways in which her peers showed their hostility towards students of color. Inappropriate comments, according to Sarah, were often made beyond teachers' earshot, and when present in the classroom, "students weren't very open with their judgements or their inappropriate behavior."

Many Students of Color Choose not to say anything. Compounding the vagueness of microaggressions is the tendency of many AOCs to not directly address racial microaggressions as they occur. Thirteen participants described their reactions as either laughing along, saying nothing, or even making self-tokenizing jokes as a way of dealing with the repeated assaults.

Laughing or Saying Nothing. The first category of reactions (laughing along or saying nothing) was indicated by 11 participants. Two had felt unable to react because of the covert nature of the microaggressions, as they were unable to recognize the infractions as they took place. For example, Ben was described above as having difficulty with immediately recognizing microaggressions ("At least in that moment you don't really register that it's not appropriate"). As well, Bo reflected on how they (non-binary pronoun) had felt uncomfortable with comments although they had not yet understood why ("I didn't have the framework for understanding that that was the wrong thing to do. But I remember just being really uncomfortable").

Four additional participants did recognize the infractions as they took place and yet felt unable to speak up nonetheless. Kim described feeling intimidation and an inability to speak up, as she queried, "How am I supposed to deal with a teacher older than me, much more educated than I am, but typically a white male that was intimidating?" In addition, Sarah looked back with regret about being unable to speak out, stating, "There are definitely a lot of times where I think I should've called that person out. But then in the moment you just sometimes just shy away."

Opal experienced an overt instance of racial insensitivity from an adult and yet felt unable to adequately reply. The incident took place during a meeting with a teacher concerning a school-related event when the teacher began asking questions about her mother's English-speaking ability. Opal recalled feeling the irrelevance of the question even at the time, but as it was their first meeting, answered that her mother's English was limited. She articulated his words:

> That's embarrassing that your mom has been in this country for this long and hasn't been able to pick up English.

Needless to say, this remark created immediate reactions in Opal, but as it had occurred when she was a ninth grader new to the school, she described being unable to reply to the comment.

Charlotte also experienced overt racial insensitivity through a comment made by her athletic coach who was attempting to calm her shortly before a game. The coach's ill-attempted joke was for her to "just go make some African salads with the hyenas and giraffes," and while Charlotte now feels more capable of voicing her concerns, she reflected on the difficulty at the time:

> Looking back, I didn't defend myself as how I would at this age. At this age I would have stepped up like, "Excuse me, that's very disrespectful." But at that age, you're not at a school where I'm privileged to go there because they're paying for me to go there.

Charlotte's reaction was to chuckle and walk away.

Other participants' silence stemmed from feeling a pointlessness to speaking up, as they felt change was not likely to occur. Nicole recalled a time when one of her friends was called by the name of another student of color at the school, and when the friend corrected the coach, the latter replied with, "You guys all look the same." Her friend's reaction to this was finding solace from close friends but, as he felt no change would come about, he chose "not making a big deal about it." Similarly, Henry also noticed microaggressions occurring against his peers of color, in this case surrounding cultural appropriation. However, when Henry brought this up to his peers of color, their reply was: "Yeah, we're kind of just used to it at this point."

Self-Tokenization as Way of Coping. A second category of AOC reactions to microaggressions was to make self-tokenizing jokes, as reported by two participants. Both instances consisted of being mistaken for other same-race SOCs at their school, and both reactions were motivated by trying to find humor as way of coping. Pam recalled frequently

being mistaken for another South Asian student at her school, which occurred to such a degree that they conspired to trade names on their school identification card one year. The other instance was described by Nathan, who recalled the frequency with which peers and teachers were unable to distinguish Asian students at his school. His reaction, again, was humor. He and his Asian peers made jokes that mimicked and mocked the confusion of others, and Nathan recalled, "By the end of senior year we just call each other the wrong names…just as jokes."

All of the perspectives detailed in this section occurred under the backdrop of colorblind culture, as while AOCs did encounter teachers who were active in supporting the success of SOCs at their school, they also recalled a general climate of racial avoidance. For example, in the previous findings, many AOCs detailed their experiences with race-avoidant curricula (absence or tokenization of multicultural perspectives) and a classroom environment that ignored racially insensitive behavior or remarks. This, together with vastly differing cultural perspectives between the predominantly-white individuals at PWISs and the SOCs, can allow racial microaggressions to remain unnoticed by the community at large, as detailed in this section. Unsurprisingly, this can have a compounding negative effect on the experiences of SOCs at PWISs. The next two sections will detail the socioemotional effects on the students of color.

AOCs feel Acutely Aware of their Race at PWISs

Sixteen participants indicated feeling acutely aware of their race while at their predominantly-white school. These feelings rose out of being cognizant of the predominantly-white demographics, noticing their white peers' and teachers' heightened racial sensibility, or encountering microaggressions as detailed above. They described their experiences as "hyper-

visibility" (Noah) or being "acutely aware of [her] identity and racial tone" (Kim). Moreover, this hyper-awareness was likely to be pervasive among their peers of color as well, as Nora talked about how "every student who is a minority is aware that they are minority in their classroom…probably more aware than the teacher realizes."

One salient theme that seemed to connect to heightened racial awareness was experiencing the fewness of students of color enrolled in honors level or Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Four alumni of color (AOCs) recalled seeing predominantly-white peers in advanced courses. According to Ben, his classes tended to be small (about 15 students per class), and was "was dominated by a group of guys who sat together, were friends and were all in every other AP together."

These experiences, moreover, can communicate negative messages to SOCs, as detailed by several participants. For example, Kim internalized nonverbal messages that her advanced level course was not geared to meet the needs of students of color. Kim stated:

> It became very clear who those spaces were for—in a social sense, in an academic sense—being the singular personal person of color for three out of my four years in high school.

Kim later described herself working extra hard in order to prove her academic legitimacy.

A third participant, Henry, echoed almost identical statements, noting his experiences in honors level classes:

> That class was primarily taken by white students—there were two sections of this class, and there are only three or four students of color in both the sections—and so it was glaringly obvious that students of color in that space were kind of on the lower end of grades.

Both Kim and Henry received negative messages, intended or otherwise, embedded within their school structure regarding race and ethnicity. The last participant, Opal echoed similar sentiments by noting the fewness of students of color in honors level courses.

Moreover, this type of heightened awareness of one's racial or ethnic identity can have negative ramifications for youth of color. Indeed, eight exemplified memories that exhibit traits of internalized racism in this study. For example, two participants indicated feeling the negative effects of white-centric beauty standards, echoing Kenneth and Mamie Clark's (1940, 1947) study that found adolescents' preference for white beauty standards. Cameron reflected how, before attending their (non-binary pronoun) school, they had not put in much thought about their ethnicity and social class. However, after becoming immersed in the environment of their predominantly-white independent school (PWIS), they began to feel hyper-aware of their racial features. They recalled thinking, "Why am I imagining myself with lighter skin and different colored eyes?" Similarly, Jackie described her self-image as "an everyday feeling of not being pretty enough…just not feeling adequate."

Several participants described their efforts to minimize their non-whiteness as a result. Tessa talked about developing complexes about herself due to feeling perceived as a tokenized South Asian within her community. She stated, "I never really could connect with anyone about my race…[and that] turned into a lot of feeling ashamed, feeling like I needed to assimilate to survive." Another example is Tamara, who talked about how she used to be ashamed of being Chinese American. She described:

> I didn't want to speak the language, I didn't want to eat the food…My grandparents would pick me up [from school]; they speak mostly Cantonese with an accent and I was so ashamed that I didn't want the white kids to see me with my grandma.

Tamara contributes this to being a teenager who was surrounded by few same-race peers.

Other participants either intentionally rejected association with other peers of color (to be discussed further in depth in the next finding) or felt inferior because of their racial identity.

AOCs Experience Emotional Toll

Ladson-Billings (1994) was familiar with research by Fine (1986) and Fordham (1988) that found African American students to sacrifice their socioemotional well-being in order to do well in school. Similarly, participants in this study indicated pursuing educational opportunities at the expense of their socioemotional well-being. One example already appeared above, as the alumni of color (AOCs) who experienced race-based anxiety or even traits of internalized racism have experienced negative socioemotional ramifications. In addition to experiences with hyper-racial awareness or internalized racism, nine AOCs also talked about experiencing emotional difficulties while at their predominantly-white independent school (PWIS).

To illustrate, Ben reflected on how he had experienced a continued sense of struggle while at his school, as he reflected, "I probably could have used some counseling." Other participants also described an accumulating effect of feeling marginalized. Ethan stated, "It's easy to fall into a trap, getting yourself mentally down because you don't fit in" as he described having difficulty connecting with peers or even teachers during his years at his PWIS. Two participants described losing a sense of self, as Tiffany described how she "lost a lot of confidence in [herself]" and Beth stated, "I had never felt as insecure as I did in those four years at Sheffield Academy."

Another participant (Gail) expressed regularly feeling frustration with how her wealthy peers had the luxury of being care-free at school. She noted how "time" looked different

between her and her wealthy classmates, as the latter "goofed off" during class as they knew that a private tutor was on hand afterwards. In contrast, she and her peers of color would "stay up late after being exhausted from sports practice and taking two hours to get home."

Further, the emotional strain did not end with high school for some participants, as some indicated that they still feel the effects of marginalization today. These were expressed with statements such as, "There was a lot of weird interactions with peers about my race that definitely still stay with me" (Tessa) or "The part that I'll really never shake is that I kind of allowed that to continue in the space that I was in" (Sarah).

In conclusion, interview data indicates that racial insensitivity and microaggressions can have significantly negative impact on students of color experiences. Moreover, negative ramifications can be further compounded by the frequency with which microaggressions can remain unnoticed or denied by teachers and students at PWISs.

Findings 3: Students of Color Experience Significant Social Stress at PWISs.

"The stakes were a lot higher for us."

Data from the participants in this study indicated that many alumni of color (AOCs) experienced added layers of complexity in navigating their social life. This section will illustrate three salient categories in which this manifested: experiencing a binary of choosing peers of color or white friends, Asian AOCs indicating a tendency for less solidarity within and among peers of color groups, and an added layer of complexity for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ)-identified AOCs.

Mutual sense of Support and Solidarity among Students of Color.

The majority of participants described positive relationships with their peers of color. While their reasons varied for some—for example, Michelle expressed that she and her peers of color "didn't really bond over the fact that [they] were kids of color"; it was simply a natural progression of compatible personalities)—the majority stated shared social understanding in a predominantly-white setting as a reason for their closeness. The students of color solidarity was not described as an exclusive stance against their white peers, for although many described encountering racial tension at their school, none described a desire to distance themselves from their white peers.

Nine participants talked about the importance of having a group of friends that supported each other through coping with microaggressive encounters. For example, Jackie had attended a predominantly-white primary and middle schools and was thereby surrounded by predominantly-white peers prior to high school. Upon entering high school, however, she established close relationships with peers of color because they had a natural understanding of her experiences. She described her relationships as, "bond[ing] through having similar situations and feeling isolated, like being the only Latina or the only Black male."

Another participant illustrated the same. Cameron, who attended the same school as Jackie and also graduated the same year, stated:

> There was such a difference in experience that you, for the most part, fell back in some ways to being with other students of color. Because if something really emotional happened…we got support mostly from other students of color. The stakes were a lot higher for us.

Other participants echoed this with statements such as "We were tight and we were really there for each other" (Nicole) and "We were sort of ostracized in the same way and could come to each other and understand one another, and there was no having to explain" (Sarah).

Not all inter-cultural relationships were negative, and some students recalled developing positive relationships with non-white and white friend groups alike. However, despite these positive experiences, all 30 participants indicated some level of a lack of belonging during their school years. Henry's description of his relationships with white peers sheds some insight:

> I think there is a clear dichotomy between things that I could talk about and the things that were harder to talk about with white friends. I'd probably have to do a lot of explanation and work to try and convey to them. It was just so much more easy and effortless with other students of color.

To Henry, while he found value in friendships with all student groups, he perceived limitation to the level of closeness he and his white peers were able to develop.

Similarly, Caleb, the participant who transferred to his predominantly-white independent school (PWIS) from Louisiana, also provided insight into complex inter-racial peer relationships. To him, attending his PWIS was a childhood dream since middle school and he joined the community with the intention of forming positive relationships with a diverse set of friends. When asked about his relationships with peers of color, however, his response revealed some tension. He described his close relationship with a Latinx friend:

> We'd always be pushing each other up, encouraging each other to keep studying or to go to the library. Because one thing that was similar with the both of us is that we both always looked at the situation like we don't necessarily feel like we belong here but we're going to make it work.

Regardless of establishing a wide-range of friend groups, Caleb still experienced an "outsider" feeling at his school.

Of course, not all students of color naturally became close friends, as complexity exists within all group dynamics, and as well, not all AOC experienced inter or intra-racial harmony. This phenomenon will be explored in the next section.

POC or White Friends? The AOCs Experienced an Unnatural Binary

Some AOCs avoided Peers of Color. Beth, one of the participants who experienced being "lumped together" with other students of color in Finding 2, described how it felt: "It was just hard because I don't think anyone understood that I just needed to be my own person. I didn't want to be grouped in with everyone else." Perhaps relatedly, four participants recalled distancing themselves from other peers of color and aligning themselves with people who held more power in their community: white individuals at their school.

Tiffany, for example, described how she was taken in with her wealthy and white new community members when first entering her school. In reaction, she pulled away from her family to assimilate. She stated:

> Throughout high school I ended up making friends with the lot of the white people…I was trying to make a white identity for myself. I stopped hanging out with [students of color].

Tiffany perceived the social scene at her school to be a dichotomy between peers of color or white friends, and this, together with her attempts at assimilation, had wedged a wall with peers of color at her school.

Finn also sensed a tricky terrain in which to navigate their (non-binary pronoun) high school experiences. They explained:

> I think for me...I knew that if I had befriended white people at Sheffield Academy that I think that I was going to be better suited to navigate because I know what it's like to feel "othered" because I do it all the time in my brain. Looking back, it's kind of shitty but it's true. I didn't want to be seen as "less than" in comparison to other people.

Finn had majority-white friends prior to high school due to their isolated upbringing, and it is likely that their difficulty connecting with Latinx peers, as reported by Finn, somewhat contributed to their reaction. In either case, Finn's case exemplifies a youth who found themselves navigating school culture that came with a power structure in which non-white people were marginalized by virtue of their race.

A third participant, Noah, also had a predominantly-white upbringing that impacted an early desire to avoid his racial identity. Similar to Tiffany, Noah, too, tried to suppress his race in order to minimize marginalization ("In such a white environment, I felt like I had to push away from my being Black and avoid mentioning [it] in order to fit in"). However, upon encountering increased Black students in high school, he described a growing sense of pride with his Black identity. However, he also encountered a complex relationship with money, race, and identity:

> There were definitely moments where people assumed I was less wealthy because I was Black. That one doesn't really bother me as much because I want to be more Black. Especially in the first two years where, on one hand I don't want to be seen as Black to avoid racism, but then also, I want to seem more Black to fit within my community and not be an outlier within the Black community.

Noah described his family background as of high socioeconomic status and, once his racial awareness had developed, described feeling a sense of shame with his wealthy background. His case thus underscores the difficulty of navigating multi-layered intersectionality during adolescence.

Finally, Bo described distancing themselves from other marginalized students because that "would compound the social effect of othering." In their case, this also included avoiding other students who were on financial aid, as Bo described a school culture that consisted of many wealthy families.

All four participant behaviors resulted from perceiving socioeconomic and race-based power dynamics that tipped against embracing full aspects of their identity, and their conscious suppression of their cultural background underscores the significant impact this can have on an adolescent youth.

The Tricky Terrain of Friendships. Unsurprisingly, the distancing behavior of alumni of color (AOCs) in the previous section was noticed by some of their peers of color. Tiffany perceived unfriendliness from students of color at her school that seemed to rise out of her friendships with majority white peers. She stated:

> I just felt like in class [students of color] weren't really too friendly to me. …I don't know if that's because they saw this relationship that I had with white people. Basically, most students of color hung out with students of color…so I feel like to them, maybe they just felt a certain type of way.

Tiffany described the students of color at her school as generally hanging out with one another, and her departure from this tendency noticed by her peers of color. In this way, Tiffany felt both a pressure to assimilate into white culture as well as disapproval from peers of color in so doing.

Choosing friendships with predominantly-white peers came at a cost for two other AOCs as well. Another participant, Pam, described having predominantly-white friends as a natural outcome of her upbringing. However, similar to the participants above, she also recalled being viewed with unfriendliness from her peers of color. She felt that her Black peers saw "whitewashedness" in her and resented her privileged circumstances. She described her circumstances:

> My parents placed me in a lot of majority-white spaces. I would get sent on all of the ski trips, and we had some very wealthy family friends who would take me and my sister on trips. So the space that I grew up in being comfortable was white spaces. If you put Black on one side of the room, white on [the other] side of the room and I had to choose where I fit in the most, other people might put me in Black but I would put myself in white.

The quote indicates a level of self-consciousness regarding Pam's access to what she called "white spaces" and luxurious lifestyles as well as her preference for white culture. Whether perceived or actual, she consequently sensed resentment from her peers of color. Further, navigating non-white and white culture may have been a theme in Pam's life, as she later recounted comments from her extended family members: "All my cousins call me a coconut because I'm brown on the outside but white on the inside."

Another participant, Nora, also attended predominantly-white primary and middle schools, and as a result, grew up with predominantly-white friends prior to high school. However, in contrast to Pam, Nora embraced the increased diversity that came with entering secondary school. She recalled:

> High school was my first time having a bigger community of other kids of color. I was naturally drawn to them, not intentionally making more friends, but it just happened out of comfort and excitement and being able to share stories that no one else understands. It was super exciting to me.

Notwithstanding, Nora recalled tension coming from both sides of her friend groups, with her white friends downplaying racial microaggressions and her friends of color questioning why she chose to remain friends with white peers.

In summary, the various perspectives from the participants in this section point to the tricky terrain of social relationships. The social climate within which AOCs found themselves seemed to include a peer power structure that came with the combined dynamics of wealth, race, and unaddressed racial microaggressions at PWISs.

Asian AOCs indicated decreased Inter- and Intra- Racial Solidarity

An unexpected theme that emerged was an additional sense of discord indicated by some Asian-identified participants in this study.

Inter-Racial Disunity of Asian Students. Of the 11 participants who identified as Asian in this study, seven identified as East Asian, three identified as South Asian, and one identified as Southeast Asian. While lack of solidarity with peers of color was not exclusive to Asian participants in this study (as seen in the previous section) it is worth noting that the Asian student body was the only group identified by Asian *as well as* non-Asian participants as lacking solidarity, as indicated by eight alumni of color (AOCs).

Asian Perspective. I will first detail accounts of the Asian perspectives, consisting of three participants. Tamara described a divided atmosphere between the East Asian and Black

students at her predominantly-white independent school (PWIS) which she contributed to inter-racial tension. She described:

> Because of the anti-Blackness that is so prevalent in East Asian communities, Black people are [viewed as] competition. You need to be better than other people of color because you're all vying for white supremacy.

Similar to the AOCs in the previous section who described their alignment with whiteness in order navigate their school's racial power dynamics, Tamara also was cognizant of unequal balance of power. In her case, she aligned with her Asian peers and maligned Black peers.

The two additional Asian AOCs were Pam and Ethan. Pam was detailed in the previous section in which she described having tension with her Black peers. Ethan, who self-identified South Asian, described not fitting in with any peer group, non-white and white alike. This was not always the case, as he described being good friends with Black peers during pre-high school years. And yet, he described, "But then when we got up to high school, we ended up being a little bit further apart as time went on." Ethan experienced much isolation while in high school, as will be detailed later this chapter.

Non-Asian Perspectives. Five non-Asian participants also described Asians groups as outside of their peers of color friend group. For example, Gail could not recall a meaningful relationship with an Asian peers while at her school, stating:

> With Asians or South Asians, I did not feel that sense of solidarity at all. I mostly felt it from my Black and Latino counterparts.

Gail did, however, highly value her friendships with other peers of color that included Black and Latinx friends.

The remaining four AOCs had similar views. Carol felt that Latinx student did not get along with Asian students and described frequently getting into arguments with Asian students; she attributed this to what she called "class dynamics." Additionally, Nicole felt that her Asian peers had closer associations with white students. Two participants, Noah and Sarah, just did not recall Asian students as part of their peers of color friend groups.

Intra-Racial Disunity of Asian Students. In addition to inter-racial discord indicated between Asian groups with other students of color, intra-racial discord was also seen among this racial group. This was described by five AOCs.

Two participants (Jake and Ethan) described experiencing disharmony within their racial group. Jake experienced competitiveness among his East Asian peers, noting a relationship in which each aspired to do better than the other. He described:

> We always wanted to be this smart Asian kid. We always wanted to be the better one than the other…Always looking over your shoulder, like they wanted to get into a better college than you.

This played out even in student support groups, such as their school's Asian student club, as Jake described experiencing competition in this realm for club positions that could be included in college resumes. In reaction, he described feeling more solidarity with Black and Latinx students and less with Asian peers. In Ethan's case, he experienced being an "outlier" to all student groups, students of color and white students alike.

The three remaining participants who experienced disunity with their Asian peers are Pam, Taylor, and Henry. Pam, who described receiving resentment from her Black peers in the previous section, also felt a discord with her Asian peers. In this case, she felt disappointment with her school's Asia club when she discovered that club activities had an exclusive focus on

East (and non-South) Asian perspectives. Taylor also expressed, "I don't think I really felt that I was a part of that community, I guess like [Asian Student Association] or anything…because I think I was still figuring out what that meant for me." Henry described feeling disconnected with Asian peers while at his school.

Further Trickiness for LGBTQ Students of Color.

Fifteen participants in this study self-identified in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) spectrum, with four identifying as gender queer (non-binary or no gender). Unsurprisingly, the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity provided an added layer of a sociopolitical trickiness for these participants to navigate.

Tension within Family Culture. Three participants reported feeling tension from their family culture regarding their LGBTQ identity.

For example, Henry described his predominantly-white independent school (PWIS) friend group as predominantly Black and Latinx students and deliberately distancing himself with his Asian peers. This resulted, according to him, from a discord he experienced between his ethnicity, family religion, and gay identity. Consequently, he tried to compartmentalize aspects of his identity. He stated:

> Especially coming from a Filipino family that's super religious, not only is [being gay] not talked about but it's not something that my parents were super excited about…From both identities, this intersection was so undesirable that I played into that hand. So I wanted to keep that as separate as possible.

Henry experienced tension from two directions: Asian American men as less desired members of the LGBTQ community, and LGBTQ individuals as looked upon with disdain from his Filipino community. In other words, one side of his identity (queer identity) rejected the other

(Filipino), and vice versa. For these reasons, Henry chose to embrace his LGBTQ identity while at his school and create a distance with the Asian community.

Ben, who identifies as Latinx, and Nicole, who identifies as Black, also recalled separating their LGBTQ identity from their family culture. Nicole described her tension:

> I can't explain to my parents like, "Hey, today we were talking about the LGBTQ community and the representation of them in government." First of all, I have immigrant parents who are homophobic. I'm an LGBTQ person. I can't bring up all of that. It's just too much to unpack, translate and put all together.

Ben had similar experiences, and in light of this, both described avoiding the topic of their sexuality at home.

Perhaps relatedly, Henry and two additional Asian and LGBTQ-identified participants did not identify as a person of color while at their PWIS. These participants were, however, active student leaders of their school's LGBTQ affinity groups. Two served as a president of their school's Gay Straight Alliance (Taylor and Henry), and the third (Pam) served on multiple school panels on behalf of the LGBTQ community. This, in view of the earlier finding in which AOCs encountered white-centric LGBTQ or gender identity support, might suggest lack of adequate support and guidance for LGBTQ-identified students of color in embracing the fullness of their identity.

Microaggressions from Gay White Men. Of note were three LGBTQ-identified participants who reported experiencing microaggressions from gay white men, with all three instances occurring in the form of misguided humor. Two cases were described earlier this chapter in the microaggressions section: Katherine's Spanish teacher who praised a student's good pronunciation with, "Oh look at our little Mexican" and Ben's choir teacher's comment to

his Black friend, saying, "Come on girl, there's more Black woman in me than in you." The third instance came from Henry's college counselor, who cracked a joke about Henry's college application essay with the comment, "It's the season where the gays have to tell their tell-alls."

Ben offered an explanation, as he had experienced similar types of microaggressions since his high school encounter. He stated:

> There's a lot of criticism on the queer community for assuming that, because they are queer, that they get a pass for certain things…a pass for saying something like that because they also have perspective on another form of oppression.

Ben took issue with the liberty that his teacher took as he underscored the racial dynamics of the situation: a non-Black teacher telling a Black student that she was not "Black enough."

In summary, peer relations at PWISs occur within the backdrop of colorblind culture, rampant instances of unaddressed racial microaggressions, and significant levels of wealth disparity. Within this context, participants in this study indicated having difficulty navigating the tricky terrain of establishing healthy racial identity development during their high school years.

Findings 4: Non-Verbal Messages can Exhibit Powerful Signs of Caring/Uncaring

"It was one of the moments where a white teacher saw me for who I was."

Background: The Importance of Teacher Relationships

When asked to describe a salient moment during his years at his school, Henry described a casual hallway encounter with a teacher who said to him, "I'm so glad you came [to this school]." Henry went on to explain that that moment was memorable to him for two reasons: he had never felt center-stage in his life, and as well, because the teacher was white. He explained:

> That stood out to me because I had always felt just on the sides almost, just skating by, and for him to put me in the spotlight and really seeing me was really positive…It was one of the moments where a white teacher saw me for who I was.

The incident is perhaps forgotten by the teacher, as Henry emphasized the casualness of the encounter. Nonetheless, he recalled, "It had such a lasting impact on me." Henry's story captures how small gestures of welcome, and conversely, marginalizing behavior, can be impactful to a student of color at predominantly-white independent schools (PWISs).

Nine participants highlighted teacher relationships as a significant part of their positive experiences at their PWISs. For example, Opal reflected on the importance of feeling seen by a teacher, as she said, "[It] means so much to me that someone knows [and] believes in me for who I personally am," and Gail attributed teacher relationships as a major part of what provided her with a sense of belonging at her school.

Important to point out perhaps is that many of these were white teachers. Henry's hallway conversation was with a white teacher who had remained friendly throughout his years at his PWIS, and Tessa, who had felt isolated most of the time at her PWIS, spoke about a young white teacher who had reached out to her and provided some comfort. As well, Opal described the importance of her relationships with many white teachers: "I had so many white teachers who are privileged, who also were very, very important in my experiences at Sheffield Academy."

Whatever the ethnicity of the teacher, alumni of color (AOC) interviews indicated that students of color, who can experience marginalization by virtue of school structure and culture, exhibited hyper-awareness of their teachers' demeanor. Some sought teachers to "have their back" while others seemed keenly aware of their teachers' body language or other nonverbal

messages. This section will first detail teacher behavior that signaled uncaring, as described by the AOCs. Next it will detail signs that communicated caring for the AOCs.

Signs of Uncaring

Nine alumni of color (AOCs) shed some insight on traits that seemed to detract from teacher-student relationships. The first part of this section will provide some insight on the poignancy of teachers' non-verbal behavior from AOC perspectives, and the second will describe the non-verbal signs exhibited by teachers that conveyed uncaring to AOCs.

AOC Interpretations of Teacher Behavior. Five AOCs recounted experiences of intimidation, not through teachers' direct expressions of unfriendliness but from a general feeling of unwelcome. They indicated that, without teachers' active efforts towards creating a welcoming relationship, their behavior that might otherwise seem neutral (or at least non-threatening), can nonetheless seem unapproachable.

Henry recalled feeling intimidated when he first joined his new predominantly-white independent school (PWIS), particularly noting its college-preparatory atmosphere:

> I felt like I couldn't ask for help my junior year in an English class…It was an AP level course and going into that rigorous academic space comes with a certain amount of, "You should know how to write a paper." And because of the lack of training I got before that moment, and because that class was primarily taken by white students, it was glaringly obvious that students of color in that space were kind of on the lower end of grades.

Henry's teacher's expressed expectations of students' prior knowledge, together with the predominant whiteness of the classroom demographics, set him up to feel some level of intimidation. As such, he recalled hesitating from asking for help despite his newness at the

school. Similarly, Kim, who was described earlier feeling acutely aware of her race as one of the few Black students in AP or honors classes, described, "There's the mental component of just walking in with heightened anxiety every day in the classroom…especially in honors spaces."

Advanced Placement-level teachers in secondary schools often attempt to set a tone of rigor in order to encourage high performance from their students. However, while setting high expectations is vital to all students and an important tenet of culturally responsive pedagogy, having a healthy relationship with the classroom teacher is also of vital importance. Henry and Kim's case point to the importance of ensuring both high expectations as well as signs of support that counteracts PWIS culture detailed in the previous section.

Similarly, Finn recalled hardline classroom expectations held by their math teacher that felt like a personal affront. This teacher had exhibited the same strict demeanor towards all of his students, and yet nevertheless, Finn took the teacher's strictness personally and attributed this to how the teacher had never commented on Finn's identity. Finn reflected:

> It felt more personal even though I knew it was not as such, but I think just that inherent difference that he and I never talked about really "othered" me in the classroom…There was a barrier and then more barriers started being built on top of that barrier.

Finn's teacher, by their own acknowledgement, appears to have been a teacher who held firm classroom expectations equally towards all of his students. However, this was ill-received by Finn, as silence surrounding their differences compounded into further alienation for Finn. As a result, they described being uncomfortable asking for any help from the teacher throughout the year. An additional student, Ben, encountered the same difficulty with the same teacher.[6] He, too, recalled avoiding this teacher despite the fact that he was struggling in his class.

[6] Ben attended the same school as Finn and graduated two years earlier.

Noah also described feeling like his teachers had a personal vendetta against him while at his PWIS. While Noah no longer believes this is true, he reflected on what had made him have this impression:

> I did have this long-lasting feeling where I was like, "Oh my goodness, this person has it out for me." And I mean in hindsight obviously not, but it was difficult to see that when you're in the class and you're getting a bad grade and you're working so hard.

Tying this together with Noah's statements of feeling pressure to prove his academic legitimacy as one of few students of color at his school (as described in the microaggressions section), Noah's interpretation of teachers' motives may be indicative of the negative light in which teacher behavior might be observed by students of color with the backdrop of marginalizing school culture.

Showing Interest vs. Not Showing Interest. None of the AOCs above described their teachers as showing an interest in them beyond class conversations. While this seemed to be their usual mode of interaction with most of their students, the teachers' demeanor was negatively received by the AOCs at the time. Four AOCs shed some light on the experiential difference between interacting with a teacher who showed an interest as opposed to those who did not.

Beth talked about how some of her favorite classes at her PWIS were discussion-based classes in which students shared various perspectives. She particularly enjoyed classes in which teachers seemed to care about their students and encouraged deep discussions. Because of this, humanities classes gave her an increased sense of belonging. Beth contrasted her experiences with non-discussion-based classes. She described:

I definitely felt more seen in more opinion-based classes like history and English, whereas in science or math I think I definitely felt more reserved and invisible.

To Beth, a teacher's apparent lack of interest in her thoughts and opinions, albeit equally directed towards all students and absent direct signs of unfriendliness, was itself conducive towards an intimidating class atmosphere. Indeed, she stated, "I don't think I would have raised my hand to answer questions, even though I probably knew the answers."

Other participants indicated decreased engagement with teachers who strictly adhered to their course materials without showing interest in student perspectives. For example, Opal described feeling discounted by a teacher when her perspective veered from the textbook ("He mainly shut me down and was like, 'No, you're wrong. The history textbook is right.'") and Barbara described unapproachable teachers as ones who showed lack of interest beyond course materials ("If you have a teacher who's just like, 'Okay kids, this is what happened in 1920 and this is what happened in 1925,' that's less friendly"). Tessa also described unapproachable teachers in a similar manner, in her case regarding college professors. She described, "A lot of teachers felt like that maybe [getting to know students] isn't the most important thing, you're here to learn the curriculum and no, I'm not here to get to know you as people."

In this way, AOC interviews indicated the importance of some level of interest or caring exhibited by teachers towards students as helping to provide a sense of engagement and belonging for students of color at predominantly-white schools.

Body language. "I suck at math…there is no one worse at math. And for some reason I was the top of that class." These are words by Nicole, who then went on to attribute her academic success to her math teacher who showed non-verbal signs of believing in her ability to perform. She described him thus:

> He wasn't a guy that was much about emotions or giving a lot of feedback or anything, but it's just a feeling.

Nicole's story points to the power of non-verbal messages teachers can exude.

One salient sign of uncaring, as detailed by AOCs, was already discussed in Finding 1 pertaining to unbalanced opportunities for classroom participation. Summarizing briefly, 11 AOCs reported feeling "passed over" or invisible in comparison to their white peers. In addition, five AOCs shed some light on how they view and interpret nonverbal communications of uncaring.

Kim and recalled feeling a general sense of dismissiveness coming her way. She described:

> Something I saw consistently was just the lack of engagement. If I went and approached the teacher asking for questions during lunch, it was just very closed off, nonverbal, body language, like crossed arms, facing away or talking over the shoulder. Very dismissive, I felt.

Kim interpreted her teachers' body language to signal uncaring. She also contrasted the treatment she received with generosity that she perceived her white peers to receive, compelling her to keenly feel the disparity in affection or friendliness from teachers.

Another participant, Tiffany, also observed differences in the way she felt treated in comparison with her white peers. She, too, felt that her teachers acted more favorably towards white students, indicated by teachers' nonverbal messages, such as "change of tone, body language, just their expression, [and] an expression of doubt [and] instantly questioning [students of color]." Tiffany reflected that this, in part, contributed to her feelings of shame at being a person of color during her PWIS years.

Both Kim and Tiffany indicated acute awareness of teachers' treatment of students of color in contrast with white students. As well, Nancy also picked up on dismissive nonverbal behavior that contrasted with how her white counterparts seemed to be treated. Nancy described a time when a teacher noticed written comments on the margin of her book, only to praise the white student sitting next to her for the cleverness of the comment. Nancy described how she felt in that instance: "I feel like he in his head couldn't fathom that that was my book and I had said that."

The subtle nature of this example is useful, as it is quite possible that the teacher had simply made a mistake. What is important is that this interaction was understood by Nancy as an instance of prejudice. Nancy was detailed in Finding 1 as feeling cultural and socioeconomic disconnect with her PWIS. Perceived or actual, it is within this backdrop that Nancy interpreted her teacher's behavior. Indeed, Nancy recounted other instances that seem more distinctly dismissive, such as her teacher not acknowledging comments made by her while acknowledging a comment by a white peer who voiced a similar view worded slightly differently.

The remaining two AOCs focused on their teachers' facial expressions. Beth took note of her teachers' eye contact (or lack thereof) as indicative of their interest in what she had to say. She explained:

> Basic eye contact…I feel like there's a difference between a supportive look and kind of a nonchalant, "whatever" look. Certain teachers [showed interest] when they would call and look at you very intensely and look like they're getting every single word…whereas other teachers will kind of be like, "Okay, who else has something to say?"

To her, a teacher who focused eye contact signaled engagement and interest, whereas other teachers indicated less interest with wandering eyes.

Finally, Henry's account was described earlier in the microaggressions section when he understood a teacher's look of shock at his college admittance to signal a racialized moment of lowered expectations for a student of color.

In closing, while all students, non-white and white alike, invariably observe their teachers closely, as their academic success is closely connected to teachers, AOCs this study indicated an added level of heightened awareness students of color, as a numerical minority at their school, might have towards their teachers. Moreover, awareness seemed particularly poignant when it came to observing differences in treatment non-white and white students seemed to receive.

Noteworthy: Marginalization of Spanish Speakers. Of note are three participants who felt that their Spanish speaking background created an added layer of obstacles at their PWIS. All three identified as Latinx and have a bilingual (Spanish and English) background. As well, all three attended the same PWIS, graduating either in the same year or one year apart.

Cameron, who now attends an Ivy League school, recalled feeling discouraged in an English class because their (non-binary pronoun) teacher had a narrow view of academic excellence. Cameron described:

> The curriculum caters to being able to speak with certain words and to form words with specific syntax, to form sentences with specific syntax, [and] to have the confidence to raise your hand and say something.

Cameron's teacher provided a narrow window within which they and their peers were to demonstrate their intelligence, and this narrowness thereby discouraged Cameron from full participation. Nancy echoed this sentiment, saying, "We may have the same ideas but because we don't speak the 'appropriate' English, the essay English, it's like our opinions are nonexistent and we're not heard."

Finally, Opal also felt inhibited by the narrow standards of her English class, recalling, "I didn't perform as well academically because my essay writing just wasn't up to par with the other students who had this more academic way of phrasing what they had to say."

Signs of Caring.

Conversely, a teacher did not seem to have to exert much effort in order to show their caring attitude to many alumni of color (AOCs), as many underscored the importance of small gestures. For example, Katherine described caring teachers as not someone who had to go out of their way to seek her outside of class. Instead, caring was signaled in "the way that they acknowledged [her] in class." Additionally, Bo described a caring sign as "just saying hello to students" as they walked into the classroom, and as well, Jake appreciated the way his teachers would sporadically check in on him to make sure he was okay.

In addition, seven AOCs described teachers who showed interest in them beyond classroom affairs, such as following up on the outcome of a sports game or asking about their weekend activities. For example, Charlotte, who attributes much of her success at her predominantly-white independent school (PWIS) to positive relationships with many of her teachers, described thus:

> [Teachers] actually checking in and knowing that I'm not just a name on the roster. I'm an actual human being with experiences with ambitions in life.

Charlotte's perspective points to the importance a student feeling seen in the fullness of (and not tokenized) humanity by a teacher.

Similarly, Jackie, who was described in Finding 2 as feeling invisible in some of her classes, expressed appreciation for teachers who made her feel seen in full. She described:

> I had some really good experiences with certain teachers who really made me want to try harder academically because of the fact that they're so sensitive of my wellbeing…When teachers see the students as more than just a student but as a person just trying to navigate life, that makes you want to come back even more.

To Jackie, teachers that understood the full scope of a student's life created more incentive to remain engaged.

Positive teacher-student connections also seemed mutually beneficial for both the student of color as well as the classroom teacher. For example, the positive relationship Opal had with a teacher enabled her to provide authentic cultural information that was seemingly lacking in her teacher. Opal described:

> In my Spanish classroom, anytime we were unsure about something, I would raise my hand and say, "This is how I do it in my family." It's very easy for me when teachers set up respect for other people and don't set up tokenization; I think it's very easy for students to proudly be themselves.

Opal described many moments in which she and her peers of color remained after class to chat with this teacher about non-classroom related topics. The subsequent trust and closeness that was established helped Opal feel comfortable offering her cultural perspectives to a non-Hispanic white Spanish language teacher.

Similarly, a positive teacher-student relationship helped a teacher remain informed as racial microaggressions emerged within her classroom. Noah described feeling frustrated with race-avoidant tendencies in one of his classrooms, and yet the close bond he had already developed with the teacher allowed him to feel comfortable letting her know about his frustrations afterwards. The positive relationship thus helped the teacher stay abreast of

microaggressions that might otherwise have gone unobserved, and as well, Noah was able to feel comfortable communicating experiences with racial microaggressions.

In a slightly different manner, Nathan also experienced racial discomfort in one of his classes through encounters with tokenized non-white perspectives. However, he had already formed a positive relationship with the teacher, and while he did not let her know of his discomfort, Nathan recalled feeling engaged in classroom activities nonetheless. Teachers' forming positive connections with students of color, hence, seemed to help sustain students of color engagement.

It Wasn't About Personality. It is perhaps important to point out that Finn's encounter with a hardline teacher does not suggest that a certain personality type (warm and fuzzy) was inherently appealing to AOCs, as participants indicated appreciation for teachers with various personality types. This aligns with Ladson-Billings (1995ab)'s assertion that a culturally responsive caring teachers is not dependent upon certain personality types. It does seem to indicate that some teachers, particularly those who teach non discussion-based classes or hold hardline views on classroom behavior, may need to make an effort to individually connect with a student of color in order to counter-act a naturally marginalizing and intimidating PWIS atmosphere.

For example, Barbara initially felt that teachers who strictly adhered to course materials appeared unapproachable. However, she eventually developed a close relationship with one such teacher. The impetus came during a school play in which both she and the teacher were involved. Barbara described:

> I would vent to him about things that I felt I could…It's supposed to come off as funny and he showed genuine concern. It kind of broke down that barrier where he seemed unapproachable.

The conversation changed their relationship, as Barbara described realizing that the teacher actually cared about her well-being. Incidentally, as their relationship progressed, the teacher became an ally to Barbara in many important ways throughout her time at her PWIS.

Additionally, Gail also described one of her favorite teachers as someone who was known for holding firm boundaries in the classroom. She described him thus:

> He would look around the whole room and he would see a lot of things that would normally go under the radar…And he would make the decision [to address a student] depending on the emotional state of that student.

Unlike Finn and Ben's teacher detailed in the "Signs of Uncaring" section, Gail's teacher, who also held a hardline view on classroom behavior, was perceived as caring and approachable. The difference, it seemed, was the flexibility that Gail's teacher showed to his students. Gail described:

> I probably felt the safest because he was very attuned to mental health issues with adolescents and very accompanying of it…If it was something more serious, like my Latino girlfriend was breaking down because she had a bad phone call from her dad, he would go after class and make sure she was okay.

The teacher, through holding high standards while also showing flexibility and empathy, had earned the trust of many SOCs at the school, as detailed by Gail. She described what it felt like to be in his class: "We were all equals."

Added to this is Nicole's description detailed earlier this section regarding a teacher who communicated belief in her math abilities without being "about emotions or giving a lot of feedback."

In closing, many AOCs exhibited a level of awareness of their teachers' non-verbal behavior, particularly as it contrasted with behavior towards white peers, that was impactful towards teacher-student relationships. In this regard, more instances of teachers' nonverbal signs of uncaring were actually detailed than verbal communications in AOC interviews, as participants seemed to exhibit heightened awareness of the former. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the culture of "niceness" extant at many PWISs (DeCuir-Gunby, et al., 2007, 2012; Arrington, et al., 2003) combined with the covert nature of microaggressions detailed earlier in this chapter. Hence, data from this study underscores the importance of teacher awareness as it relates to nonverbal messages directed towards SOCs at PWISs.

Findings 5: Neutral Doesn't Work: The Importance of Creating an Inclusive Curricula and Class Environment

"Teachers were trying to stay neutral in this not-so-neutral situation."

Alumni of color (AOCs) in this study indicated a strong desire to learn, explore, and meaningfully discuss racial and ethnic identity. They reported feeling disengaged with white-centric or colorblind conversations, and described increased excitement when the topic expanded its focus to include non-white identities. Interview data also pointed to the significant role of teachers in supporting students of color to engage in classroom activities. This includes teachers' active engagement in creating an inclusive classroom learning environment that counteracts marginalization experienced by students of color.

Teachers need to Incorporate Multiculturalism in the Curriculum.

Nora described how it felt when her teacher incorporated multicultural perspectives in the curriculum at her predominantly-white independent school (PWIS):

> That made me and some other people feel like we do have a place in this…we do have a place in the curriculum [and] we do have a place in this classroom.

Her words underscore the importance of representation that can increase a sense of belonging for a student of color. This sentiment was expressed directly by Cameron, as they reflected on how they never felt a personal connection with any of their classes. They stated, "A lot of my sense of not belonging came from just feeling that the curriculum wasn't telling my experience." These perspectives point to the importance of inclusive curricula.

Race isn't "Optional" for SOCs. Sixteen AOCs indicated that race was a constant part of their consciousness as they went about their school days, as described in Finding 2. To illustrate, Noah described what it felt like to be a Black male the US. He stated:

> A few other people of color, we all shared this idea that race isn't really optional…it's not something you can avoid as a person of color. For me, I always knew that race was a thing because there are things that happened to me throughout my life because of my race.

In light of this, Noah expressed frustration towards his white peers who seemed to perpetually avoid engaging in the topic of race. He contrasted his life with theirs, stating, "They would talk about something that happened with their friends or with their parents and they avoided it being about them."

Three other AOCs also expressed frustration with their white peers who seemed to view race conversations as irrelevant to their lives. For example, Nora described her white friends' dismissal of accounts of racial microaggressions and how they just moved on to a new topic. Consequently, their reaction discouraged Nora from being fully engaged with her white peers. As well, Ben talked about his white peers denying the existence of racial tension at his school

with comments such as, “I just don’t see color” or “It’s not my problem.” Finally, Melanie expressed frustration when her white peers would miss school-wide diversity events with comments like, “It doesn’t affect me.”

Racial microaggressions, moreover, were often more than irritations to the AOCs. Three participants described feeling unable to attend classes because they felt too upset to go about their day after a racially charged incident. Opal described an incident in which a white male student posed a racially insensitive question to her peers of color. She described:

> It was just very frustrating. So many kids and I skipped classes for the rest of the day. I was so mad and had so many feelings…I couldn’t stand to be in these classrooms with anyone else after that because I just wanted to unpack.

For Opal, the classroom no longer provided a safe environment in which to process her distress, and as a result, she missed a significant portion of her day.

Similarly, Tiffany also described feeling too disturbed to remain in the classroom after encountering racial offense. In her case, her class was engaged in a discussion on cultural appropriation when a white peer got into an argument with another student of color in the room. Tiffany described her reaction:

> I remember snapping and telling him, “You’ll never understand because you’re white.” …It just came out [and] the whole class just got really quiet. After that, I just got really uncomfortable so I just asked her if I could leave.

While the teacher tried to placate the situation, as described by Tiffany, the discussion aggravated Tiffany to the point of leaving school for the rest of the day.

Nancy noted the differences in reality she and her peers of color had in comparison with her white peers. Nancy reflected:

> And the thing is they could just leave the conversation and be like "whatever" and go on about their day. But I see the way it affected my friends, how it affected me…there were times where I would skip class and we would just go to [a teacher's] office.

All three participants described experiencing a high level of stress that was prompted by insensitive remarks from white peers. As a result, they chose to skip attending their classes in which they no longer felt safe while their white peers were described as "going about their day."

Many AOCs wanted to talk about Race and Ethnicity. Twenty alumni of color (AOCs) indicated that they had desired to engage in meaningful conversations on race or ethnicity while at their predominantly-white independent school (PWIS).[7] These sentiments ranged from increased engagement in the classroom, sense of belonging, to academic confidence.

For example, Pam described feeling excited when her teacher had her class read a book that reflected her South Asian identity. She stated, "I fell in love with this book and I was really engaged in the class." Another participant (Tessa) also responded positively when her teacher assigned a book that reflected her identity. Tessa described feeling increased confidence, stating:

> I felt a little more confident [in that class], as opposed in another class where maybe that perspective might not have even crossed the teacher's mind.

Incidentally, Tessa was one of the 11 participants described in Finding 1 as showing traits of internalized racism while at her PWIS, and her teacher, who Tessa described as a young white teacher, was one of the few teachers with whom she resonated.

[7] Worth noting are the ten remaining AOCs who all expressed varying levels of discomfort due to a lack of adequate understanding of multicultural perspectives among their teachers at their PWISs. This was indicated either through white-centric or inadequate multiculturalism in the curricula, colorblind tendencies, or marginalization due to being a numerical minority at their school.

Other AOCs took to multicultural perspectives even when their own identity was not reflected. For example, Tamara talked about a book she enjoyed in class because of its non-white perspective:

> The first book that I read that I really resonated with, even though I'm not a Black woman, was "Their Eyes Were Watching God." And for some reason I resonated a lot with that book. I think it's because the story of being "othered" in that narrative, I could relate to that.

The book came for Tamara in the backdrop of what she felt was white-centric curricula at her school, and was her first instance of encountering characters with whom she could relate.

Similarly, Bo, who also described a dearth of multiculturalism in their (non-binary pronoun) school curricula, was excited to encounter non-white perspectives when they occurred. They stated, "I remember being really excited when we read that because it felt very different from most of the books that we read." As well, Kim, who identifies as Black, talked about enjoying a book that provided perspectives on a culture outside of her own family culture.

Still others expressed a wish for multicultural perspectives that were absent in their high school courses. For example, Michelle ended her interview with a recommendation for teachers to increase multicultural perspectives in the classroom ("Give students the opportunity to connect what you're reading") and Nathan, who talked about how non-white perspectives appeared in terms of whiteness, expressed a wish to learn other humanizing aspects about non-white culture ("It would have been nice to learn about [Chinese people] for their own sake").

Hungry for More: Some AOCs did Extra Research on their Identity. Another indication of the AOCs' desire to engage in race conversations was seen in four AOCs who described doing work outside of class to supplement their thirst for multicultural literature (the fourth one did the

extra work in college). Gail, who described "zero representation" in her English classes, recounted doing outside research as way of supplementing:

> A lot of my [people of color] friends, if we were motivated we would look for the literature on our own time but it was never presented to us in class…I wish I felt like I wasn't on my own when I did that research [and that] there was more diversity, especially in the English courses.

Gail expressed frustration that she and her peers of color had to do extra work outside of class to supplement their identity development.

Nora's teacher, on the other hand, did encourage her class to think beyond traditional white-centric curricula. Nora responded positively to this and it propelled her curiosity to research more about her heritage. She described:

> That made me want to push further. And so when we had the chance to do independent research, I wanted to look more into Chinese American history, which wasn't taught as part of the main curriculum.

Nora described receiving her teacher's guidance throughout the process, as the latter supplied her with books and relevant resources to support.

On the other hand, Noah was at first excited when his teacher included a book by a Black author in his English class. However, his enthusiasm waned when he began to feel that his white peers and teacher were not willing to address racial issues in depth during class discussions. As a result, he began reading independently and explored other books by Black authors.

A fourth participant, Bo, described doing extra research on their (non-binary pronoun) identity while in college. Realizing their total lack of interest in books by white authors, they made a personal commitment to read books solely by authors of color for one year. Moreover,

this year-long trial turned out to be indefinite, as Bo said they still only read books by non-white authors. They attributed this to their unceasing desire to learn more, as they stated: "There's so much that I want to absorb and it feels so much more healing for me."

A Closer Look: What Made Some Teachers Successful? Participants described positive encounters with multiculturalism in several ways. This section will identify teacher practices that seemed to connect positively for the AOCs.

Depth and Time to Ponder. Several AOCs expressed appreciation for teachers who provided adequate class time to explore multiculturalism in depth. For example, Caleb talked about a teacher who allowed time for questions or for ideas to fully develop during class discussions. He described how his class "would go on pause and students would get into in-depth discussions about their personal views." As well, Pam spoke positively about depth provided by a teacher who pushed her class to understand historical events and perspectives from multiple viewpoints:

> Everything she would approach with this kind of holistic perspective of, "We need to look at it in a lot of angles and you need to engage with the material in more than just one static way."

Pam's teacher integrated this approach into student assignments as well, as students were encouraged to demonstrate their understanding from non-verbal expressions to supplement their written essays.[8]

The same participant also described collaboration between her school's English and history departments. Pam described her history classes that covered important historical events

[8] For example, students were encouraged to find four visuals that represented their understanding of a given essay topic. Students had to be able to explain how these four nonverbal representations connected back to the topic at hand.

that were enhanced by her English class readings that provided the human story behind the time period. This provided her with a deep sense of understanding, as she described:

> Delving into this piece that is all about the emotional and very humane side of something that's underrepresented allowed us to view in our history classes different cultural groups besides the American cultural groups with more humanity.

To Pam, one class enhanced the other, and this allowed her peers to develop a fuller understanding of non-majority perspectives.

Connection to "Lived Experiences." Ten AOCs expressed appreciation for conversations that related to their personal experiences and/or to current events. For example, Beth was excited to see clips from telenovela shows—something that her parents watch at home—integrated into her English class. Beth felt her teacher was well researched in class topics, as she showed understanding of the connection between magical realism and telenovelas. As a result, Beth recalled feeling increased interest in the reading materials, stating, "It felt personal and I could relate to the characters more."

As well, Taylor described an elective that they (non-binary pronoun) took that made connections between historical instances of racism to students' current experiences. They elaborated on why that particular class felt meaningful while other courses did not:

> People being able to share and relate to the experiences was the missing link, I guess, from other instances where there might've been attempts at representation but didn't really connect.

To Taylor, the important difference was the connection back to students' personal experiences that encouraged a deeper understanding of racial dynamics in the US.

Other AOCs experienced meaningful conversations that connected with their lives during co-curricular activities, such as racial affinity student groups. Some did, however, wish they had been able to experience within the classroom context, as Jackie expressed:

> I definitely would have liked to have some kind of look at today, looking at what's going on in society now, both culturally and in terms of social economics.

To Jackie, connecting racial issues specifically to students' lives in a thoughtful manner could have potentially affected her peers to broaden their perspectives.

Critical Thinking. Seven AOCs also appreciated teachers who pushed their students to think critically about materials. Part of this seemed to stem from how critical engagement can naturally open discussions to non-traditional, non-white perspectives. To illustrate, Gail appreciated her teacher's encouragement of independent thinking. She described:

> Students had the ability to have their own thoughts that are not strictly within the curriculum [which thereby allowed them to] bring in things that they can identify with more.

Gail also enjoyed the opportunity this provided for students to make connections with pop culture.

For Henry, his teacher's facilitation skills during class discussions encouraged his class to think critically. He described his teacher thus:

> He was really great at asking us broad questions that let us think about these things. He never approached class with a singular answer for anything. He didn't really take one student's perspective as the end all be all, which not only made us evidence our answers but it also let us think creatively alongside him.

Henry was one of the participants who expressed that multicultural perspectives appeared in a Black-white binary, as discussed in Findings 1. He did, however, talk about being able to make connections to his Asian heritage through this teacher's facilitation skills.

Other iterations of critical thinking came in the form of teachers who highlighted the importance of moving beyond traditional curricula. Pam appreciated a teacher who pushed her class to critically engage in their education. She described her class:

> A big part of our curriculum was looking at different textbooks and saying what lens [we] think it is pushing. We compared from different years throughout history…literally the table of contents, and then the sections and how many pages each section took up.

This style of teaching resonated well with Pam, as she was discussed earlier this chapter as having trouble navigating her multiple identities as a South Asian brought up in a predominantly-white setting. She richly described: "Encouraging that culture of questioning really helps a student become at peace with the liminality of everything about how you're existing in this space between."

Another participant, Nora, also described a teacher who pushed her class to identify the narrowness of representation offered in core curricula. She described how her teacher encouraged the class "to be very critical and to know that what [they] were learning wasn't always the whole picture."

AOCs in this study, hence, indicated eagerness to engage in conversations about race, identity, and culture. Moreover, this was contingent upon a teachers' willingness to provide time and resources to facilitate discussions with depth and understanding.

Teachers need to Actively Create a Safe Classroom Environment.

This section will focus on classroom environment that can provide the right condition to allow students to engage in conversations about race and ethnicity, as detailed by the alumni of color (AOCs) in this study. It will be presented in two parts: 1.) the important role of teachers, and 2.) effective classroom management skills.

The Important Role of a Classroom Teacher. AOC interviews illuminated the key role teachers had in creating an inclusive predominantly-white independent school (PWIS) classroom.

Role-Modeling Inclusive Behavior. As seen in Finding 1, PWISs can come with a cultural background that results in isolation or marginalization of many students of color. Moreover, the white-centric upbringing of many students at PWISs, as detailed in Chapter 2, coupled with colorblind tendencies and ignorance surrounding race and ethnicity detailed earlier this chapter, can create added obstacles for students of color participation. In light of this, AOCs indicated a crucial role of teachers in moving the classroom environment towards a more inclusive condition.

One impact teachers had was their classroom conduct that impacted white students' treatment of students of color, as described by five participants. Pam's example illustrates this well, as she described a student at her PWIS who seemed to be ostracized by many of her peers. This student was known to persistently analyze various topics in English classes through the same lens, and this repetitive behavior was not well received by her peers. Pam described:

> There was this one person who would always write every English paper about the gay lens…It was almost like a joke. People in their classroom would kind of get sick of them talking about it. They were like, "Arg, there they go again."

To Pam, who identifies in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) spectrum, her classmate was simply trying to assert an important aspect of their (non-binary pronoun) identity, and yet they became an object of ridicule to their peers. The student, it seemed, attempted to bring in a non-dominant lens to a hetero-centric conversation, and as this came without teacher-initiated conversations about hetero-normativity, was not well received by the other students in the room.

This contrasted with Pam's own experiences in another class when she, too, felt initially discounted by her peers. Pam was actually quite informed about the topic, as it pertained to her cultural heritage, and yet she felt dismissed by her classmates. However, this changed when the teacher stepped in. Pam described:

> As soon as [the teacher] asked me a question on what something meant or on how to pronounce something, there was a level of respect and listening restored to the things I had to say…It was genuinely just that I had more information to share with the class and therefore my perspective was valuable. The teacher really affirmed that and gave value to my perspective, [so] I felt even better about sharing.

The teacher's endorsement of Pam's statements elevated the respect afforded to her by her classmates. In contrast, Pam's classmate from the first scenario was viewed with irritation by their classmates. In other words, the teacher's express acknowledgement of the validity of Pam's input had allotted her with classroom validity, whereas the same was not afforded to Pam's classmate who did not have the same support.

Another AOC had a similar experience. Kim recalled frequently having differing perspectives from her majority-white classmates in her English class. However, she felt that her teacher—with whom she had a close relationship—recognized and validated her views in

support. This, in turn, encouraged her classmates to consider the validity of her views. Kim contrasted this experience with her other classes and described feeling misunderstood and dismissed. She described, "Versus another class where we tried to make some of these references and some of them would just say, 'Oh, that's wrong.'"

Another participant, Jackie, spoke directly about how she wished teachers had made a public stance as an ally to students of color at her school. She reflected:

> If you show other students that our voices matter and that [we] have as equal validity as every other student in the classroom, that not only sends a message to the students but it sends a message to the specific student of color who is maybe in a situation where they don't see any of the teachers who look like them. But to see someone who doesn't look like them still standing up for them makes that whole environment much more safe.

Teachers' public intolerance for racially offensive behavior was paramount to Jackie, as she felt that this could have had a strong impact on increasing safe conditions at her PWIS. Moreover, Jackie pointed to the importance of non-same race teachers, presumably white teachers, stepping up in support.

This sentiment was also echoed by Nathan, a participant described earlier as seeing little to no multicultural perspectives in his school's core curricula. It was in the same class in which he earlier described experiencing tokenized non-white perspectives that the following experience occurred. He stated:

> [The teacher] complemented a proposal I had for an app…And then everybody agreed. It felt good to have an idea that I came up with affirmed. I ended up liking the class.

Nathan described a positive memory in which he received public acknowledgement from a teacher for his work, and this seemed to subsequently encourage his peers to follow suit. In his own words, he "ended up liking the class" and had positive comments about his teacher.

The same theme emerged in the converse as well. Katherine described a teacher who seemed to "pick on" certain students, and as a result, these students were also ostracized by the other students in the class. Katherine did not specify the ethnicity of the victimized students, but in her assessment the reason for the teacher's hostility was the students' apparent difficulty in the course subject. In this situation, the teacher modeled negative behavior that led other students in the classroom to also treat the students negatively.

These accounts point to the impactful role of a teacher in promoting inclusive behavior towards students of color in the classroom.

Initiating Conversations about Race and Ethnicity. Detailed earlier in this Finding were several AOCs who expressed appreciation for teachers who broached the oft-avoided topic of race, creating increased access for students of color voices. In contrast, 12 AOCs described discomfort as they were called on to speak on behalf of a racial group (described in Findings 1), while others described situations in which student-initiated non-majority perspectives were not well received by their peers (earlier this findings). Interview data thus pointed to the importance of teachers' active (and not colorblind) initiative, as AOCs responded well to teachers who broke through the frequent silence surrounding race and ethnicity and also actively guided class discussions.

Henry underscored the importance of teachers' express expectations of addressing race and ethnicity, as he felt that it ought to be a formalized part of a teacher's curriculum. He explained, "If that's already built into the conversation, then that's one way it feels less of

dormant versus this is part of the dialogue." Opal used almost the same language to echo the same sentiment, stating:

> Race is not an easy thing to talk about for whatever reason because no one wants to talk about it. [But when] that's encouraged and built in the framework in the classroom, it's very easy for you to be open about it. And it doesn't even matter the identity of the teacher—I had so many white teachers who are privileged who also were very important in my experiences at [my school]…It's very important for the way the teacher sets up the conversation.

To Opal, conversations about race and ethnicity did not have to be facilitated by a teacher of color. Instead, it was the teacher's initiation of the topic (as opposed to something that is inserted by the student of color in the room) that provided an optimal situation in which to engage. Similarly, Charlotte felt that her teacher's open disagreement with traditional curricula helped paved the way for students of color voices. She described, "Her vocal-ness impacted us as students and we felt comfortable explaining why we thought it was wrong."

Noah provided further insight into this. He described occasional encounters with fruitful conversations on race as the result of a teacher's initiative. He stated:

> People will do anything to avoid it. …I think when we have had good discussions in class, often it's because the teacher makes us. The teacher will find a paragraph that's about race and be like, "Okay, we're going to discuss this paragraph."

Noah's comment here falls within the context of frustration he usually had in the same class, as his peers persistently tried to dodge race issues most other times. Frequently, it seemed, teacher-initiated race conversations did not occur and Noah described a keen sense of disappointment:

> That was kind of frustrating because this is clearly some sort of class where these people can still avoid the subject of racism and connecting racism with their lives and not be called out for it. And it felt like, what's the point?

Noah described feeling frequent pressure during these conversations to teach his classmates about race and identity, an onus that felt heavy and unwelcome as the sole person exposing his thoughts.

In contrast, Ben described a teacher who did not allow her students to skirt the issue. Similar to Noah's case above, Ben's community also had the tendency to avoid engaging in race conversations. Notwithstanding, Ben's teacher pressed for more:

> She was particularly good at staying on the question and almost grilling students a little bit about their perspective. Sometimes she would ask them specifically by name to chime in and they would kind of dance around it, trying to find how to give as minimal information as possible, which everyone does. I think she was better at being like, "No, come on. I want more than that."

The teacher's style was not something that Ben or his peers were accustomed to at the school. Nevertheless, her approach helped deepen class discussions.

In a slightly different manner, four AOCs felt that their teacher's passion and enthusiasm helped encourage student engagement. Bo described a teacher who was visibly excited about reading a book by Junot Diaz which consequently affected the class's excitement. They (non-binary pronoun) described the success of the class:

> [The success] was a product of her enthusiasm about having her students engage with literature that they might not otherwise…wanting us to fully engage with it.

Similarly, Beth attributed her teacher's enthusiasm to partly enacting peer engagement. Beth's teacher, in fact, exhibited such eagerness to fully explore a book by a Latin American author that she openly disregarded curricular time constraints to ponder the book in depth. Beth reflected: "She really wanted to understand it, which made me really want to understand it."

The remaining two AOCs, Barbara and Kim, both expressed appreciation for their teachers who showed excitement and enthusiasm for engaging in conversations about race and ethnicity.

In closing, AOC interviews detailed in this section underscore the importance of a teacher's role in engaging in race conversations. Teachers, arguably, are the ones with the most power in the classroom while the students of color are often numerical minorities who experience high levels of marginalization. Within this power dynamic, the onus of responsibility naturally ought to fall upon the former.

Good Facilitation Skills. Several teacher practices emerged as particularly effective in navigating conversations in a PWIS classroom, as seen by the AOCs.[9] While this may pertain largely to discussion-based classes, such as English and history courses, AOCs also encountered race conversations in non-discussion-based courses as well. The majority of these conversations, moreover, took place after a racial charged incident either at their school or in the media (for example, discussing cultural appropriation shortly before Halloween). The varying levels of facilitation skills exhibited by the teachers point to the importance of all classroom teachers' ability to skillfully guide conversations around race and ethnicity.

[9] While "effective conversations" is a subjective term and can mean different things, the AOCs in this study included the following as criteria: race, racism, and/or ethnicity are directly addressed, SOCs are not the only ones asked to talk about personal aspects of their lives, and finally, increased understanding of race and racism was apparent among peers as a result of the conversation (or a cessation of insensitive comments).

Norm Setting. Three AOCs felt that setting norms before the start of dialogue was effective. For example, Nora described many of her teachers establishing clear boundaries for all classroom discussions, describing:

> That was just guidelines of basically respecting opinions: not "yucking" each other's "yum", speaking from the "I" perspective, not generalizing, getting reminders of how powerful the words are.

Moreover, these community norms were given additional emphasis when Nora's class was about to engage in a discussion about a sensitive topic.

Two additional AOCs described similar styles of norm setting. Nicole described a teacher who set clear boundaries against ablest or racist sentiments during discussions, and Kim described how her teacher would guide students to critique ideas rather than individuals while speaking directly on their own experiences instead of from a place of blame.

Skillful Navigation of Conversations. In addition to setting up discussion parameters, several AOCs identified three approaches their teachers utilized that seemed particularly effective.

The first theme that emerged was the efficacy of using questions to prod students' self-reflection. Three AOCs described how teachers would encourage deeper reflections by asking students to identify the basis for each opinion stated during class discussions, thereby encouraging them to assess the validity of their perspectives. For example, Kim described:

> My English teacher sometimes operationalized equity by making them aware of what they were thinking. He often asked, "Why do you think that? Can you expand on that?" …He didn't necessarily [call them] a racist; the student came to the realization that it was problematic.

By asking specific clarifying questions, Kim's teacher had led students to consider the underlying values that formed the basis of their opinions. Of course, not everyone would actually change their mind through this exercise, but the important point for Kim was that her peers were pressed to think and speak carefully before voicing their opinions.

Additionally, Nora's teacher also encouraged students to explain their opinions. Nora described:

> No one perspective was held up above any other. She just made that a space where everyone needed to have evidence to defend your perspective. No one was going to be assumed to be having the right view.

The teacher encouraged her students to give equal consideration to every view expressed in class, as long as it was supplied with a rationale. To Nora, this was highly effective, as she described consequently feeling safe to engage in the conversations.

Finally, a third AOC, Beth, described a teacher who encouraged students to carefully consider the implications of their views before voicing in class. In this way, students were led to consider possible negative ramifications that can emerge from voicing unprocessed thoughts.

A second theme that emerged was placing emphasis on systems (as opposed to individuals) when engaging in conversations about racial inequity. Barbara felt that this approach helped diminish potential defensiveness in her white peers, as a focus on systems seemed to provide a guilt-free entry point. She described her teacher's messaging:

> This is not about you guys specifically because obviously you yourselves have not done this. But as a general pattern in our society, this is something that's happening that should not be happening.

This was highly effective for Barbara, as she felt that defensiveness was the main obstacle to engaging in meaningful conversations about race or ethnicity at her school.

The conversation did not remain there, as Barbara's teacher also guided his students to consider further ramifications after initially quelling any anxiety in the room. Again, Barbara described:

> [The teacher] also spoke his mind, but it was more of like, "I understand what you're saying, but what if you think about it like this? What if you try to incorporate this into your idealism about this?"

In this way, Barbara's teacher seemed to first create a safe environment in which students can fully engage in race conversations, and within this environment, prompted students to expand their views.

Similarly, Charlotte also recalled her teacher's focus on a wider systemic issue. In her case, her teacher's facilitation skills helped shield her from unwanted focus from her peers as one of few students of color in the room. She described:

> When slavery's talked about, you could feel eyes around you. But I felt like the teacher guided the conversation in a way that wasn't focused on the only Black girl in class. …It was more so of, "Society was set up that way. It's not right, and it's not right how there's injustices right now." And the conversation is held from there.

The teacher kept a focus on the systemic injustices, and this, perceived Charlotte, allowed her to not be the focus of the class's attention.

Finally, the third participant, Pam, credited her teacher's regular encouragement of critical thinking as the reason why classroom discussions were able to retain a level of integrity. She described:

> We certainly encountered texts that were inherently uncomfortable. What we did to make them not uncomfortable was to question what is wrong with [it]…She really encouraged questioning.

In this case, placing emphasis on systemic wrongs under a critical lens helped Pam's class remain engaged in the discussion without devolving into awkward avoidance or tokenization.

The last salient theme that emerged was the efficacy of teachers sharing personal aspects of themselves at some point during conversations, as this seemed to encourage other students in the room to also engage in a more personal and authentic way. To illustrate, Ben talked about a teacher who demonstrated vulnerability by addressing his own biases at the start of the conversation. Ben described:

> I was always aware that [the teacher] is trying to be impartial in the conversation. He would open that up by telling us a little bit more about what his biases actually are. He'd then be able to say, "Now I'm going to try to distance myself from that and I'm going to play a little bit of devil's advocate here."

This approach worked well for Ben, as he subsequently felt more comfortable engaging in the discussion, and as well, the teacher's openness seemed to allow more authentic engagement from other students in the room.

Noah shed further insight into the importance of others (teachers or students) sharing personal aspects of their lives. He was described earlier as frequently feeling a pressure to teach and explain personal aspects of his life during conversations that touched on issues of race. Instead of this, he felt, others also ought to have done the same. He stated:

> What really helps me talk about my experiences, especially as a person of color, is when I see other people, especially white people, talk about experiences with their lives with

> racism…Why should I make myself vulnerable if the teacher isn't going to call people out and isn't going to make themselves vulnerable?

Noah reflected on the irony of being asked to make himself vulnerable as one of few persons of color in the room when those around him who held more power or privilege were not doing the same.

Another participant, Kim, expressed appreciation for her teacher who would begin the class by saying, "Yep, I'm a white guy and we're going to read this book because I think it's important." To Kim, teachers who exemplified openness and self-reflection helped model inclusive behavior to other students, as she explained:

> The more an educator internalizes this practice of just reflecting and opening up to their interactions, they model that for the culture of the classroom and the culture of the school.

Kim's teacher addressed positionality by acknowledging his own whiteness and thereby encouraged others to also acknowledge their respective identities.

Positionality, incidentally, was also addressed by two additional AOCs. Both Tamara and Nora expressed appreciation for their white teachers who showed sensitivity in not speaking over the voices of people of color in the room. To illustrate, Tamara described a teacher: "She really understood how to take up space, when to guide the conversation and when the conversation is not for her."

In summary, AOCs described in this section underscored the crucial role of a teacher in initiating, facilitating, and guiding conversations on race and ethnicity in the classroom. While this may most frequently pertain to discussion-based classes, AOC interviews revealed impactful conversations (positive and negative) also took place in non-discussion classes as well. Further,

in light of high levels of marginalization frequently experienced by AOCs at their PWISs, it behooves the classroom teacher to adequately address and facilitate conversations as they arise. This, moreover, should move away from current practices of placing the onus of representation upon the students of color in the room.

Effectively Addressing Racial Microaggressions in the Classroom. Earlier this chapter, Noah described a time during class when he looked to his teacher to call out a student who had likened his Irish ancestry to the Triangle Trade, and when the teacher said nothing, Noah himself called out the student.[10] Noah was not the only one who wished for a teacher to step in, as 19 AOCs indicated a desire for their teachers to have directly addressed racial microaggressions as they occurred in the classroom. Among these, eight felt that teachers simply calling out students was not enough. These AOCs desired more from their teachers: educate their peers on the reason why the given offense was problematic.

To illustrate, Barbara described a teacher that she felt was particularly skillful at addressing the issue. In this instance, a student blurted out a racially charged chant ("ching chong, ching chong") in class in which Barbara was one of few students of color in the room. Her teacher immediately responded: he first calmly asked the student to stop, then proceeded to explain the reason for the offense. This was effective to Barbara because it allowed the student to grow in understanding. She explained:

> It doesn't do any good to just jump on someone because obviously they're just going to get defensive about that and there's no learning there. You're just getting called out in

[10] Interestingly, Noah used one of the facilitation methods describe in the previous section by simply repeating the students question back to him. The student, recalled Noah, quickly realized the inappropriateness of his comment and rescinded his statement.

> front of your classroom. …What made [this instance] okay is that he fully explained why it was not okay and how it's actually really hurtful to say that.

Barbara felt that most of her peers offended not out of ill-intent but out of ignorance, and helping them understand the underlying reason for an offense was effective. She explained that that teacher's approach, in comparison to others who reprimand and then immediately moving on with the lesson, was more effective as it did not incite their defensiveness.

This sentiment was echoed by Henry. He described his teacher as openly addressing a problematic statement in a non-accusatory manner, then including the offender in an ensuing conversation about civility. This approach worked well to Henry, as he stated:

> That strategy is attractive to me because the conversation and the dialogue doesn't end. It's often important, especially in dealing with problematic students, you don't just let it sit there but you also don't just say, "Oh that was wrong"…full stop. It's the dialogue around why it is problematic, what you can do the next time, or even unpacking deeper issues of why that thought would even pop into someone's head, that could be unpacked in that conversation.

To Henry, teachers' approach that reprimanded without discussion created a sense of finality that excluded ongoing dialogue and understanding. What was more valuable to him was for his peers to grow in their understanding.

To some, simply asking the student to stop the offending behavior without addressing the issue was equivalent to doing nothing. For example, Ben described a time in which a student made a racially insensitive remark, which the teacher addressed, and yet immediately moved on with her class lesson. To Ben, this was not enough:

> It's about making people realize that that moment is just the symptom of something bigger. Not being like, "Oh you're a terrible person because you microaggressioned me today." That's not the idea. The idea is that next time they'll be more aware.

Similar to the AOCs above, Ben also underscored the importance of helping students change their behavior. As it is, explained Ben, the only thing that happened was temporary discomfort for all in the class with no learning taking place.

Gail also expressed frustration with teachers. She pointed to the elementary skills of most of her teachers who were able to address and stop offending behavior but were unable to facilitate a deeper understanding of racial dynamics. She reflected:

> I felt that all of my teachers were trained to deal with tiny instances of immaturity…but none of them took it that step further to address the implications of what that means from a privilege stance.

To Gail, racial microaggressions were almost an inevitable part of being a teenager at a predominantly-white school. She did not look to her white peers to improve the situation and instead identified the role of the teacher in effectively educating students about privilege and power.

The remaining four participants echoed similar sentiments, such as wishing for a teacher to guide the dialogue past potential defensiveness (as Cameron remarked, "It's important for our teacher to not express judgments and not alienate the student because [this could] make the student want to be stubborn") or to help students better understand racial dynamics (as Nathan remarked, "Not schooling the kid like, 'Oh I just owned you with facts' but maybe explaining for the kid and the rest of the class"). Nora appreciated teachers who first diffused the situation and then engaged the class in conversation ("First they deescalate a little bit if necessary, then also

bringing the equal but opposite view back into the conversation") and Ethan pointed to the inefficacy of "shutting down the conversation."

In closing, many AOCs in this section indicated the non-finality of racial dynamics. In other words, a teacher's prevention of offensive behavior in the classroom did not preclude future offenses from appearing either beyond the teacher's earshot or in other instances. In this light, the data in this section underscores the importance of leading students to understand the underlying reason behind certain offensive behavior.

Actively Engage Students of Color at PWISs.

"Not engaging [students of color] is ten times worse than engaging them," was Ethan's response when asked to recommend inclusivity practices for teachers at predominantly-white independent schools (PWISs).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Phelan, Davidson, and Cao's (1991) study found some students, particularly students of color in predominantly-white settings, to have difficulty with home to school transitions, resulting in a disconnect with some school adults. Some felt pressure to adopt new strategies to navigate a bicultural world, while others had difficulty adjusting. Similarly, alumni of color (AOCs) in this study also exhibited difficulty navigating the world of independent schools. For example, Ethan's quote illustrates the extent to which feeling ignored in the eyes of a teacher can negatively impact a student of color. Ethan, who was detailed in Finding 2 as feeling the negative effects of "not fitting in," also described feeling disconnected from many of his teachers. He stated:

> If the student is extroverted and comfortable talking to the teacher, I think the teacher's just more likely to like them. But I was just never that kid; I was just always quiet in the corner in the back.

Ethan felt he did not get along with many of the teachers at his school, the reason of which he attributed to not having the right personality type to curry their favor. He did eventually find ways to connect with professors in college, but expressed a wish that his high school teachers had made more of an effort.

His recommendation to teachers were to be more proactive in supporting students who might feel isolated at the school, as he felt that would have positively impacted a student's sense of belonging. He stated:

> Maybe go against the grain. If your first intention is to call on somebody, call on that person last because maybe your first intention is to call the person you're most familiar with or most comfortable with. [Instead], go through everybody else first.

To Ethan, the ability to form connections with a teacher was an important part of helping a student of color navigate PWIS culture, and for this to happen, teacher initiative was key. He reflected, "Just engaging people rather than having them to engage you is going to be a big part of the comfortability as [students of color] get through this cultural shift."

This section will detail salient themes, as detailed by AOCs, on ways in which some teachers effectively engaged student-teacher relationships.

High Expectations with Teacher Guidance. Unsurprisingly, 13 AOCs indicated responding well to teachers' demands of high quality work, aligning with an important tenet of culturally responsive pedagogy detailed in Chapter 2. Barbara's quote illustrated this point well as she described:

> If the teacher is a hard grader, I think that's a sign that they believe in you…It takes more effort to actually look at a paper and really grade it as opposed to just being like, "It looks okay."

One of Barbara's favorite teacher was a white female teacher who demanded high quality work through detailed guidance and instruction.

Several others echoed this sentiment. Michelle described a demanding teacher who pushed her to become a better writer ("She gave really thorough comments…and that definitely challenged me and helped me grow as a writer and as a person") and Tessa described a demanding teacher who helped her develop her thoughts ("She was someone who would push me and wouldn't give me the best grades, but would do it in a way that was like drawing it out of me").

In addition, several AOCs also appreciated teachers who made themselves available outside of class for extra guidance. Jackie described a time when she received a low grade on a writing assignment, but when she consulted her teacher, the teacher made her belief in Jackie's capacity explicit. Jackie described:

> I went and saw her and she was like, "I know your writing. I know you can do it and we can meet up with each other." And that meant a lot to me. Yeah, it sucked to get the initial grades, but she really did care about my performance. I'm a pretty good writer now.

The teacher's express belief in her, together with individual guidance, was of more value to Jackie than the initial grade.

Similarly, Pam described a teacher who exemplified "tough love" and also who guided through a difficult writing assignment. The teacher, in this case, demonstrated good understanding of Pam's learning style and identified her need for "deep thinking" while writing. Consequently, the teacher created a plan. Pam described her teacher's words:

> Do your non-writing homework during the in-class time we're given to write this essay, and then on the weekend give yourself a two-hour chunk of time to just write on this. This is your responsibility to follow through on this.

This writing method was highly effective for Pam, as she reflected still using the same method in all of her writing assignments today.

Six other AOCs also described responding well to tough grading that was accompanied by teacher guidance, like Beth's teacher who set up out-of-class time to go over an essay or Katherine's teacher who provided detailed comments on an essay that specified specific strategies for improvement.

Some AOCs needed an "Extra Push" to Engage in School Activities. "It took me years to really take it to heart, they do want to hear what I have to say," was uttered by Nora when she described a teacher who encouraged her to participate in class discussions. Indeed, 11 AOCs indicated responding well to teacher encouragements to engage in school activities, whether to participate more during classroom discussions or seeing a teacher outside of class to receive one-on-one help.

Four AOCs described initially hesitating from full participation in their classes for various reasons. In Nora's case, she described feelings of inadequacy that initially prompted her to remain silent:

> My classmates know so much more about this, and I don't want to say something that doesn't meet the standards or add to the conversation enough.

Her teachers did, however, seem to value Nora's engagement, and she recalled receiving words of encouragement from multiple teachers.

One of Nora's teachers seemed particularly successful. This teacher helped Nora set concrete goals of engagement in an incremental way. Nora described:

> One teacher set a measurable goal at the beginning of the trimester. I literally wrote on a post-it note, "Raise your hand three times, every class." And I stuck it on the inside of my binder, so every time I was in class and I opened my binder, I'd see it.

Although Nora described initial discomfort at her attempt to participate, she made a firm commitment to keep up with her goals. She remarked, "That was a good first step that helped me a lot."

Another participant, Taylor, also described how it took encouragement from multiple teachers to gradually come to understand that they (non-binary pronoun), too, had something valuable to say. In their case, while at first the comments had felt a little critical in nature, they eventually came to view the comments from coming from the standpoint of valuing their voice and input ("It felt a little critical…but I think it came from wanting me to share what I had to say").

As well, Beth, who was described earlier this chapter as refraining from participating even in classes in which she had excelled, responded well to her history teacher who provided short class activities as way of encouraging all of his students to participate. These were one-minute short speeches in which students were challenged to speak on a given topic without pause, and while Beth felt discomfort at the time, she reflected how it actually helped her develop her speaking skills. She stated, "I didn't like that he would randomly pick on us to answer questions back then, but I think it really helped me get out of my comfort zone."

Kim's teacher also provided her with a scaffold approach to increasing participation. Kim describes herself as an introvert, and as such, had difficulty voicing her thoughts in class.

Her teacher seemed to recognize her difficulty, as she accepted other forms of participation. Kim described:

> She differentiated the modus of participation for me…I would scribble my notes in the margin, hand them in at the end of the day like I'm participating.

Gradually, the teacher worked towards engaging Kim's verbal participation in class, as she would prod her specifically to express her thoughts.

Two additional AOCs noted the importance of providing support for all students of color and not just for the outgoing or approachable students. Tessa, for example, described feelings of isolation with many of her teachers as well as peers. Regarding this, Tessa recommended, "Although 'x' amount of students of color may open up to you, even look at those that don't open up to you and figure out what is that barrier between you and them." Similarly, Charlotte, who herself experienced close relationships with many individuals at her PWIS, observed that many of her peers of color did not have the same level of connection, and as a result, seemed to feel a keen sense of marginalization.

Intercultural Aspect of Participation. Two AOCs expressed a wish that their teachers had better understood inter-cultural communication dynamics of classroom participation. Jake was one of the AOCs in Finding 1 who had felt a cultural disconnect with his school, particularly in classrooms that encourage argumentation, and consequently was more of an "active listener" than a participant. He described receiving comments in report cards as needing to participate more in class. He suggested the following for teachers:

> Recognize a strength that [students are] doing so it's not just negative feedback but a one-for-one: giving them a suggestion, but also appreciating something that they're doing.

To him, starting from the standpoint of a students' strength that was followed by constructive feedback would have been more encouraging to a student who is accustomed to different cultural communication styles.

The second AOC described a level of difficulty to exist among some South Asian women to fully participate in a PWIS classroom setting. Pam described:

> If you go to a school that doesn't encourage you and they don't think that you have something special to say because whatever topic you're talking about isn't pertained to you, then you're going to stay silent.

Pam described many South Asian women to have experienced a culturally environment that discouraged outspoken behavior. As such, the usual communication styles that manifested in PWIS classrooms were not inherently encouraging. This, compounded by school curricula that "very seldom have Indian American literature," can affect South Asian women to remain non-participatory.

Three AOCs expressed appreciation for teachers who encouraged them to see them outside of class for individual help. Katherine, for example, indicated feeling supported through this process, stating:

> I did really appreciate when teachers really encouraged students to email them to find one-on-one spots for one-on-one communication…When you get a one-on-one moment with the teacher, it really makes you feel like, "Wow, I'm actually a student that's being seen and focused on."

Katherine placed high value on teachers' individualized attention which seemed to have provided her with a sense of feeling valued and seen.

Caleb and Ethan also described appreciation for teachers or administrators who made efforts to connect with them outside of class. Caleb at first resisted his teacher's attempt to provide additional support when he was struggling with the course work, but eventually he came to appreciate his teacher's repeated efforts. He described:

> We'd talk and he'd give me just a hard lesson and I'd do better for a couple of weeks, and then I started falling into another situation. But, you know, he always had confidence in me.

The teacher's constant support throughout Caleb's struggles eventually helped Caleb understand the importance of their relationship.

Ethan had a similar encounter, in his case with a school administrator. He, too, did not want to see anyone for help, as he described being "forced to talk" to the individual. However, upon getting to know the administrator, Ethan came to realize the value of their relationship ("He ended up just being a really nice, sweet guy…just full of wisdom").

Some AOCs, such as Charlotte, took it upon themselves to actively seek a connection with teachers outside of the classroom. Charlotte, however, did observe many of her peers of color to lack connection with their teachers and noted disparities in school experiences as a result. To this end, she recommended that teachers make efforts to connect with all students of color (and not only the outgoing ones). Similarly, Tessa also expressed a need for teachers to be more inclusive towards students who may be experiencing isolation at a PWIS.

You Wouldn't Have Known it…but it Helped. The above AOCs articulated their appreciation (or wish) for teachers' extra encouragement to participate in class. However, AOC interviews indicated a possibility that teachers might not necessarily be aware of the efficacy of their practice. This comes to light from some AOCs' initial reactions of anger or resentment

during the time of interaction, with appreciation for the teachers' efforts as developing some time afterwards.

For example, Ethan was described in the previous section as feeling "forced" to talk to an adult and how he had initially resented this push. At the initial stage of interaction, hence, it was likely unclear to adults at Ethan's school if he would have benefitted from someone reaching out. As it turned out, however, Ethan came to appreciate the connection, as the adult became one of the few teachers with whom Ethan was able to form a connection.

Another AOC, Caleb, was also initially frustrated with a teacher's attention. In his case, this came at a low point in Caleb's academic career, and in an effort to help, the teacher reached out to Caleb uncle. Caleb described:

> I was mad, I didn't like it. But because he brought him into it, my uncle started to understand what I was doing in the classroom, as far as my emotion, as far as everything. He talked to my uncle and in a way that is of concern less than a threat.

Caleb gradually realized the positive effects of this teacher's involvement, and the two went on to develop a close relationship that extends beyond Caleb's PWIS years.

Jake, on the other hand, did not take up his teacher's offer for extra help outside of class, and hence it is unclear if he would have benefitted from the encounter. He did, however, express appreciation:

> For the most part I wouldn't take them up on that offer because I just felt like I didn't need to or it may have been uncomfortable. But the fact that they did means a lot, especially after high school.

Again, it is likely that Jake's teachers do not know the positive effect of their outreach to Jake, and yet their caring behavior did not go unnoticed.

Finally, Noah, who described himself as rather suspicious of teachers' intent at the start of his high school career, described a valuable lesson of learning how to ask for help during the course of his years. He described, "What I really got from my class was learning to say, 'Hey, I need help, this is too difficult for me.'"

Noteworthy. Some AOCs provided insight into ways in which educators can connect with students of color. Moreover, consistent with this study that found teacher "signs of caring" to comprise of simple acts of caring, connecting with students of color did not involve elaborate schemes. In this regard, Charlotte provided some useful advice. She recommended:

> Find what the students are doing in their free time because that's a little window to who they are. Some students do sports or art or anything and that can be their way of coping with what's going on at home or overcoming their own personal barriers.

She suggested using this information as a springboard to create further connections. To Charlotte, this was what her peers of color needed:

> For example, my friend that didn't feel as welcome, she loved basketball. No matter who you were, if you connected with her with basketball, she opened up immediately. You got to see who she was and where she came from.

While Charlotte felt like she was able to form close connections with many of her teachers, she recognized the large gap between experiences of the majority of teachers and students at her PWIS in comparison with many of her peers of color, and without a teacher's intentional effort to form a connection, some SOCs were likely to remain isolated from their schools.

Tessa also provided useful insight into forming connections with students of color. Like Ethan, she, too, described feeling isolated at her school in which many of her teachers seemed uninterested in engaging with students beyond class-oriented conversations. She recommended:

> If [teachers] do find that maybe a student is sticking out and struggling, giving them some sort of indirect form of attention and caring makes that student feel like at least they have someone looking out for them. It doesn't even have to be in a way that targets them for what their identity is…They can be on the lookout for students who sit towards the back of the class or don't participate, and reach out to them.

Tessa, who was described in Chapter 4 as feeling shame in connection with her racial identity, illuminated on the fact that not all students of color will be ready to engage in conversations about race and identity during high school years. To her, a more effective way of forming connection would be for teachers to scaffold their approach. When asked what would have been helpful to her, she responded:

> Those little touches of checking in on someone and not even making it about their identity yet, but more just being kind and extra caring. And then who knows, maybe they will open up to you about that eventually. But just opening that door would have been huge.

Consistent with sentiments echoed by many other AOCs in this study, Tessa indicated a strong desire to feel visible and valuable in the eyes of her teacher. Her scaffold approach to forming connections with teachers, moreover, is a practice that can be utilized for all students at PWISs.

Conclusion

The findings in this chapter resulted from emerging patterns and themes from 30 alumni of color (AOC) interviews from 14 different schools. Participants willingly shared their personal

stories, as they had much to say about their experiences at a predominantly-white independent school (PWIS). While many indicated frequently encountering obstacles, from alienating school culture, white-centric curricula, and colorblind classroom environment, they also expressed much appreciation and fondness towards many of their teachers. Moreover, the majority of participants also highly valued their educational opportunities afforded by their PWISs. Hence, the findings in this study have many implications on ways in which PWIS teachers can impact positive changes for the experiences of students of color. This will be explored in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

About the Participants

This study represents perspectives from 30 alumni of color (AOCs) who attended a predominantly-white independent school (PWIS). Consistent with prior studies that detailed students of color going through their education while assimilating into white European American culture (Sleeter, 2012; Fordham, 1991), AOCs in this study also described similar experiences.

This was an emotional process for many of the participants, as sharing stories on their experiences touched on positive as well as painful encounters at their school. Some told stories of internalized shame and confusion as they found themselves as one of few students of color for the first time at their predominantly-white schools. Some recounted through tears their recollections of distancing themselves from their family members and peers of color or experiencing lack of confidence during their PWIS years.

The AOCs also exhibited inner strength and resourcefulness, as many described feelings of purpose as they navigated their school life. For example, Caleb expressed:

> Me moving out here wasn't necessarily just for me. I want to be able to build up a lifestyle for myself so I can bring my people out here, that I can raise my family up in this environment and I can teach them what I've learned.

To Caleb, exposure to independent school students and their families brought upon valuable lessons that were unavailable to him prior to his PWIS connection. Others exhibited resilience as they valued even their negative encounters as important lessons that increased their understanding of the world. For example, Opal, who encountered many racially insensitive incidents at her school, reflected on what she gained through these experiences:

> I think the negatives also have informed me so much and have been probably much more instrumental in my growth than the positives have… I wouldn't take any of it back.

Opal expressed appreciation for the entirety of her PWIS experiences, as they allowed her a better understanding of how to navigate predominantly-white communities. This, in turn, allowed her to form intercultural communication skills that were valuable in other spheres of her life.

Many also expressed both appreciation and affection for their teachers, as several described forming important connections that lasted beyond high school years. Moreover, many of the AOCs demonstrated generosity and fairness as they carefully considered their teachers' need to balance a classroom full of multiple perspectives and backgrounds. This generosity, further, was extended not only to their favorite teachers but also to teachers from whom AOCs experienced racially insensitive behavior. For example, after describing a particularly disappointing class, Noah paused and reflected:

> There was kind of a hair trigger like, "This person said the 'n' word while reading a book…fire them!" I think that definitely freaks people out about speaking candidly about race.

Although Noah himself felt frustrated with white-centered conversations that were typical at his school, he also reflected on the fears a white teacher may have had in engaging in conversations about race and ethnicity.

In this way, participants thoughtfully engaged in the interview process, often recounting their experiences with raw honesty and emotions while also attempting to be balanced and fair in their reflections. All of this was received by me, the researcher, with a desire to carefully

understand and analyze AOC perspectives with the fullness of respect they deserve. It was a tremendous honor and a privilege to be entrusted with their stories.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to gather information on alumni of color (AOC) overall educational and socio-emotional experiences as students of color at an independent school. This included understanding their experiences with teachers' instructional practices as related to AOCs' racial or ethnic identity and sense of belonging. As well, another purpose of this study was to understand AOCs' interpretations of teacher traits and dispositions that link to culturally responsive practices, such as teacher caring.

The large number yielded much information, as it provided perspectives that spanned Asian, Black, and Latinx identities as well as from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. In this way, a wide range of viewpoints from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds were represented in this study.

Two theories framed the focus of this study: understanding the impact of colorblind ideology (CBI) as recalled by AOCs who attended predominantly-white independent schools (PWISs), and as well, understanding AOC interpretations of teacher traits and dispositions as connected to culturally responsive practices (CRP). The following discussion will analyze the findings under the two frameworks.

The Impact of Colorblind Ideology on the Alumni of Color.

Bonilla-Silva (2010, 2018) identified race-avoidant tendencies among many white individuals who have been socialized to skirt the issue of race. This phenomenon is commonly

referred to as colorblind ideology (CBI)—a view that denies the importance of racial categories and thereby discourages acknowledgment of race-related factors. This ideology, further, tends to be prevalent among white educators in the US (McCoy et al., 2015).

Research indicates negative ramifications of CBI on multiple levels. One study by Lewis (2001) found CBI culture to contribute to school adults' tendency to downplay racial microaggressions, failure to adequately provide support to students of color, and tokenize or limit multiculturalism in the curricula. Another study by Richeson and Nussbaum (2004) found negative impact of CBI on a school community, as participants exhibited a pro-white tendency when prompted with colorblind cues. These results suggest that colorblind ideology can be closely linked to racial biases.

Studies also indicate CBI to negatively affect non-white individuals as well. Salvatore and Shelton's (2007) study found their Black participants to be more negatively impacted by covert, rather than overt, forms of racism. This was evidenced by increased temporary cognitive impairment exhibited by Black participants when subjected to covert racism cues. Conversely, white participants indicated greater impairment with overt, rather than covert, racism cues. This suggested the latter group's inability to recognize covert forms of racism, as well as their unfamiliarity with racial dynamics that thereby prompted greater distress through encounters with overt racism cues. As well CBI contributed to non-white individuals' disengagement, as researchers Plaut, Thomas, and Goren (2009) found non-white participants' lack of engagement in communities exhibiting CBI outlook.

CBI in PWIS Classrooms. Findings in this study correlated with the aforementioned studies in multiple ways. One major theme that emerged was the marginalization experienced by AOCs by virtue of school culture. While "school culture" comes with many variables, three

aspects of predominantly-white independent school (PWIS) culture emerged as pertaining to marginalization: independent school culture as it differs from public school culture, wealth culture, and white culture.

Alienating school culture was further heightened by AOC experiences of school curricula that had either an absence of or poorly executed multicultural perspectives. AOCs described their teachers' race-avoidant tendencies, encountering tokenized non-white perspectives or the reduction of important non-white figures into one class period discussion. Teachers were also described as presenting white-centric depictions of non-white figures or skirting the issue of race in clearly race-based subjects. AOCs recalled feeling deflated when encountering deficit perspectives (such as the reduction of Black identity conversations as solely in terms of the institution of slavery) and expressed a desire for more positive encounters.

As well, colorblind tendency was detailed in teachers' classroom management styles, as several AOCs felt their teachers either ignored or poorly handled racial microaggressions in the classroom. One AOC recounted a time in which her teacher, instead of addressing the aggressor in class, approached the AOC afterwards as a way of checking in, while another described a teacher who made suggestions to the AOC for changes he can make to prevent receiving further offenses. Several others described having to take it upon themselves to call out the aggressor. In this way, teachers' demeanor indicated complicity or a diminishment of racial dynamics within classroom culture and resulted in placing the burden on the AOCs, the recipient of the offense, and not the offender. As a result, consistent with Plaut et al.'s (2009) study, many AOCs described feeling less engaged in classes that exhibited such CBI tendencies.

Many AOCs, moreover, expressed their dissatisfaction with teachers who simply reprimanded without adequately educating students on the underlying reason for the offense.

This, according to Henry, brought on a false sense of finality. To him, ending the conversation there gave the illusion of resolution when, in actuality, students are likely to make similar offenses from continued ignorance. In other words, an oversimplified response to racial tension, such as simple statements to stop the offensive behavior, had the potential to produce an oversimplified conception of racial issues (that it can easily be "fixed" and the class can quickly move on to "business as usual"). This notion came within the backdrop of the colorblind culture of PWIS schools, and the lack of effective conversation on inclusive classroom behavior only served to perpetuate ignorance surrounding racial dynamics.

Moreover, colorblind climate perhaps helped to perpetuate the frequent occurrences of racial microaggressions at PWISs, as other AOCs described themselves feeling unable to respond as they occurred. Their silence was partly due to the covert nature of microaggressions, as several AOCs described having difficulty recognizing them in the moment of occurrence. Conversely, some AOCs were keenly aware of the microaggressive incidents as they occurred but chose not to address them. This decision rose either out of a desire to avoid confrontation with an adult or from a resignation that no change would result from speaking up. Many AOCs described a school culture in which race was not an easy topic to broach, and this, coupled with the culture of "niceness" of independent schools (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003), provided extra layers of obstacles for effective communication.

Traits of Teacher Uncaring. Several AOCs indicated heightened sensitivity towards their teachers' communication styles, particularly in terms of teachers' nonverbal behaviors. These included various forms of body language (such as crossed arms or facial expressions), not calling on students of color during class discussions, or other nonverbal classroom behaviors. As well, AOCs also exhibited heightened awareness of cross-racial differences in the treatment of

students, as they observed teacher behavior towards students of color as compared to their white peers.

Analyzing AOC perspectives under the lens of colorblind ideology (CBI), it becomes apparent that teacher dispositions, as they appear in the context of their school community, can default to appearing unapproachable or unfriendly to a student of color. Indeed, many AOC comments aligned with this analysis, as Finn described alienation with a white teacher due to the latter's colorblind approach, despite the fact that the teacher seemed to treat all students with equal sternness: "Just that inherent difference that he and I never talked about really 'othered' me in the classroom."

As well, non-verbal messages seemed to be a significant part of how AOCs viewed their teachers, as, with the exception of a few rare cases of overt forms of hostility or racism described by AOCs, most participants' description of "unfriendly" teachers centered on nonverbal rather than direct communications.

Negative Ramifications in AOC Peer Interactions. Colorblind culture also seemed to contribute to a socially stressful environment for students of color at their PWISs. Although many of the AOCs expressed a strong kinship with other peers of color at their schools, many of which were due to natural affinity that rose out of shared experiences of marginalization, several AOCs described experiencing pressure to choose having either non-white or white friends. Some described deliberately distancing themselves from their peers of color or attempting to assume a white identity for themselves.

Indications were strong that these behaviors rose largely in reaction to AOCs' perception of an implicit racial hierarchy at their schools. Some AOCs were explicit in this regard as they described being taken in by the wealth and privilege of their white peers and intentionally

aligning themselves with whiteness. For example, Bo commented, "I wasn't given things easily…I knew that if I had befriended white people I was going to be better suited to navigate [the school]." Elsewhere in the interview they (non-binary pronoun) also talked about how PWIS culture can be overwhelming for a youth, and it is within this context that Bo described themselves aligning with white school individuals.

This, in turn, seemed to be noticed by peers of color. For example, Tiffany, who described a strong desire to assimilate into white culture during her PWIS years, sensed alienation from her peers of color as a result. As well, Pam described sensing resentment from peers of color because of her predominantly-white friend group. Both participants perceived a general division between non-white and white friend groups at their school, and their decision to choose a predominantly-white friend group, in their observation, was unfavorably received by non-white peers. This indicated a level of tension exhibited by peers of color groups regarding students of color who choose close associations with white students.

One unexpected finding was the disunity found among Asian students of color at PWISs. This took place intra-racially among Asian student groups through a competitive atmosphere to outperform each other academically or tension in representations of East versus South Asian cultures in student racial affinity groups. Inter-racially, several Asian and non-Asian participants in this study described Asian students as generally not part of peers of color friend groups.

This lack of inter and intra-racial unity exhibited by Asian students can perhaps be indicative of the differing levels within which Asian students find themselves in the social hierarchy of PWISs. In this vein, two non-Asian participants shed some light on how Asians were perceived at their school: Nicole described that "Asians hung out with white people" and Carol attributed "class dynamics" as reason for tension between Asian and Latinx students at her

school. Asian participants also addressed their positionality, as Michelle stated, "My proximity to whiteness and my comfort in that space gave me the privilege of being able to navigate independent schools with relative ease." Another participant, Tessa, discussed the intersection of her socioeconomic class and race. She described:

> Maybe I'm a good example because I racially didn't fit in but I…never really had to worry about money. I think that came with its own mindset that made me better socialized with people who came from a similar socioeconomic background.

Both Michelle and Tessa alluded to their privileged socioeconomic background that helped them gain access to white social spheres even while having difficulty navigating their racial or ethnic identity. Referring to her upbringing in predominantly-white neighborhoods and schools, Tessa reflected on her white-socialization as "something, at least, I could fall back on."

Additionally, this study shed light on a lack of intersectional support several AOCs received at their PWIS. For example, several participants (LGBTQ-identified as well as non-LGBTQ-identified participants) recalled teachers addressing gender or sexuality issues in the classroom while race and ethnicity remained unaddressed, perhaps indicating the teachers' comfort with the former and not the latter. This white-centric LGBTQ support climate perhaps contributed to some AOCs' development of LGBTQ identity while having trouble reconciling their intersectional identity as a student of color. In this regard, three AOCs described having tension with their family culture and LGBTQ identity, and as a result, described their efforts to separate the two worlds. All three were active leaders in their school's LGBTQ student groups while indicating less comfort with their ethnic identity.

All of this pointed to negative socioemotional ramifications for the AOCs. Adolescents who are immersed in white-centered standards—in terms of beauty standards, lifestyles, and role

models—can develop a preference for whiteness (Tatum, 1994), and adolescents of color, in particular, can develop a negative self-image (Kenneth & Mamie Clark, 1940, 1947). Indeed, AOCs in this study exhibited having difficulty with their racial identity development. Sixteen AOCs described feeling acutely aware of their racial identity at their PWISs, and few exhibited traits of internalized racism as a result. All of this was due to subtle cues within CBI culture, such as the experience of being a numerical minority in an honors or advanced placement level course or feeling the eyes of others during class conversation on race and ethnicity.

In summary, the findings pointed to the failure of "neutrality" and the prevalence of colorblind culture that created marginalizing experiences on multiple levels for students of color at PWISs.

Evidence for Culturally Responsive Practices.

The term culturally relevant pedagogy was coined by Ladson-Billings (1994) as part of a shift from viewing African American students from a deficit perspective to a focus on pedagogical practices that build from the standpoint of students' cultural resources. To Ladson-Billings, it was important to focus on what she called "the art and craft of teacher" rather than identifying practices that rely on teachers' individual idiosyncrasies, or what she called "cult-of-personality" (p. 14).

Similarly, Gay (2010) offered a slightly different terminology, culturally responsive pedagogy, to emphasize teaching practices that respond to perspectives, interests, and cultural background of the students in the classroom. As well, Gay recognized the important role of practices that are centered on teacher caring towards their students. In alignment with Ladson-Billings, Gay's concept of caring includes a teacher's belief in a student's ability as well as

holding high expectations and rigor and does not preclude specific personality types (Gay, 2018; Howard, 2017).

The main difference between the two concepts lies in the focus of their study: Ladson-Billings places focus on teacher dispositions whereas Gay places focus on teacher practices, such as methods and competency (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). For the purpose of this study, culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy pulls from both researchers' concepts and will be defined as a student-centered orientation that includes teacher caring, high expectations, and a belief that all students can succeed. For brevity, the term will be referred to as culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP).

AOCs Wanted to Talk about Race. One goal of this study was to understand what types of instructional practices related to race or ethnicity exhibited by predominantly-white independent school (PWIS) teachers were recalled by alumni of color (AOCs) as having a significant impact on their learning or sense of belonging. AOC interviews indicated a strong inclination towards engaging in class curricula that incorporated multicultural perspectives, the converse of colorblind ideology.

The extent to which AOCs desired to explore their racial identity was illustrated by some who recalled enjoying multicultural perspectives simply because it was not yet another white-centered classroom unit, as well as others who described doing extra readings outside of class to supplement their otherwise white-centric education. This underscored the importance of curricula that mirrors the fullness of students of color identities and experiences. Indeed, to many of the AOCs, incorporating diverse perspectives in a thoughtful manner added to a sense of belonging at their school.

Several AOCs described optimal conditions for engaging in race conversations, the salient categories of which were: connecting multicultural perspectives to the students in the classroom, utilizing sufficient class time to delve into deeper discussions about the fullness of identity and racial dynamics, and as well, providing ongoing encouragement of critical thinking within all classroom discussions and activities.

The Importance of Teachers' Engagement with Students of Color. This study also pointed to the important role of classroom teachers, specifically, in facilitating race conversations in the classroom. Consistent with other researchers who connected teacher behavior to students' implicit understanding of cross-racial relationships (Freidus & Noguera, 2017), AOC interviews indicated that teachers' positive role-modeling helped AOCs gain legitimacy and respect from their white peers. For example, several AOCs described feeling dismissed by peers when they offered perspectives that were outside of white-centric or heteronormative viewpoints in some classes, and yet felt an increased level of respect from their peers during teacher-initiated race conversations. This pointed to the gravity of a teacher's role in setting the right condition for a safe classroom environment.

Traits of Teacher Caring. While AOCs indicated frequent observation of teacher signs of uncaring, as detailed earlier, teachers did not seem to require a lot in order to show their signs of caring. AOCs expressed appreciation for simple signs of acknowledgement, such as greeting them outside of class or engaging them in conversations beyond course topics. Further, consistent to Ladson-Billings's (1994) definition of a "caring" teacher, AOCs' description of teacher caring did not need to fit within one specific personality type (namely, the warm and nurturing type). For example, one participant highly valued a teacher who held strict standards

with all of his students but who also exhibited flexibility in accommodating student needs as they rose.

Also consistent with Ladson-Billings's (1995a) and Gay's (2010) tenets of CRP, AOCs in this study responded well to teachers' expectation of high academic standards. One participant commented on the increased amount of work it takes for a teacher to provide critical feedback and connected this to signal a caring disposition, stating, "If the teacher is a hard grader, I think that's a sign that they believe in you." Others appreciated teachers who demanded high quality work while also providing guidance and support in and out of the classroom.

Some AOCs also expressed appreciation for teachers who understood their need for an extra nudge to participate in class discussions, as AOCs described feeling hesitant to voice their opinions during class discussions. This was often due to a lack of belonging, as one participant, Nora, described, "My classmates know so much more about this, and I don't want to say something that doesn't add to the conversation enough." A teacher's extra nudge, thus, helped encourage some participants to increase their participation and gain confidence engaging in class activities.

Relatedly, several AOCs also indicated appreciation for teachers who seemed to go out of their way to form a connection outside of class. As seen earlier, many AOCs experienced a cultural disconnect with their independent school culture, and relatedly, difficulty navigating the cultural communication styles outside of their own cultural upbringing. Within this context, some found difficulty connecting with their teachers. As Ethan put it, "If the student is extroverted and comfortable talking to the teacher, I think the teacher's just more likely to like them." To him, his teachers seemed to gravitate towards students with an outgoing personality, and as he had had some difficulty adapting to the culture of his PWIS, he recalled having

difficulty connecting with his teachers. In this regard, he expressed a wish that more effort was made on the part of the teachers to connect with any "outliers" at his school.

Important to note here is the potential that many teachers might not be aware of the efficacy of their practice to provide their students of color with an extra nudge. Several AOCs described disliking the practice at the time of occurrence, as it pushed them outside of their comfort zone, and described themselves understanding the positive effects only later upon reflection.

Addressing and Educating Microaggressing Behavior. At the baseline, all AOCs desired their teachers to stop their peers from racially microaggressive behavior. However, several AOCs felt that simply reprimanding a microaggressing student was insufficient towards creating a safe classroom atmosphere, as this tended to yield defensive reactions from offending peers and perpetuate their ignorance. Instead, AOCs desired their teachers to educate their peers by addressing the underlying reason for the offense.

Some AOCs described the efficacy of a calm, non-judgmental approach. Barbara, for example, appreciated her teacher who first calmly asked his student to cease chanting a racially charged phrase and then proceeded to explain the negative ramifications of said phrase. Another participant, Henry, described a teacher who also addressed the situation in a non-accusatory manner by first asking the offender to stop his behavior, then engaging the student in a conversation about relevant racial issues. To Henry, "the dialogue around why [the behavior] is problematic, what you can do the next time, or even unpacking deeper issues" were more important than punishing the offending student.

AOCs indicated responding well to the following facilitation skills exhibited by their teachers: setting clear classroom boundaries and norms at the start of each conversation, asking

focused questions that prompted students' self-reflection, modeling vulnerability and recognizing racial positionality, and an emphasis on systems (as opposed to individuals) at the initial stage of engaging in race conversations.

Significance of Findings

This study represents perspectives from a wide range of alumni of color (AOCs) who attended a predominantly-white independent school (PWIS): 12 Latinx, 11 Asian, and seven Black AOCs, 15 of whom identified in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) spectrum.

Previous studies pointed to educational opportunities that came at a socioemotional cost for many students of color at independent schools (DeCuir-Gunby, Martin, & Cooper, 2007, 2012; Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003). This study builds upon previous studies by expanding students of color perspectives with the addition of Asian and Latinx participants. Further, added intersectionality of LGBTQ perspectives also allowed further analysis into the full scope of a student's identity.

This study found marginalized experiences due to racial differences to cut across racial or ethnicity differences; in other words, all AOCs encountered marginalizing experiences by virtue of their non-whiteness. In addition, it shed light on subtle nuances across intersectional differences. For example, Asian participants were found to exhibit less inter and intra racial solidarity with their peer groups, as AOCs spoke to factors such as peer competition or socioeconomic differences that created tension. As well, LGBTQ-identified participants described encountering additional layers of complexity, navigating family culture and LGBTQ identity in some cases while encountering racial microaggressions from gay white men.

This study also builds on prior research through its design of gathering perspectives from alumni (as opposed to current) students of color. Gathering perspectives thus allowed participants to retrospectively analyze their overall experiences with the clarity of temporal distance. For example, several expressed their appreciation for teacher practices (such as providing an "extra push" to engage in class activities) that they had not felt during their high school years. As well, many AOCs indicated feeling confusion surrounding encounters with racial microaggressions or having yet undeveloped racial or ethnic identity during their high school years, while they now have a greater sense of clarity. In this regard, the perspective of hindsight provided rich additional reflection on the AOCs' socioemotional experiences.

Finally, study delineated independent school culture that goes beyond visible representations as intentionally created by schools through mission statements, websites, various manifestations of diversity statements, and the like. Systemic documentation and analysis of 30 alumni of color perspectives gave shape and form to less documented non-majority perspectives of students of color at PWISs.

Limitations and Future Research

The rich data derived from this study can further be explored with specific focus on the various themes that have emerged. Hence, the limitations of this study will lead towards recommendations for future study.

One unexpected finding of this study indicated disunity among Asian students at predominantly-white independent schools (PWISs), as several Asian-identified participants detailed competitiveness intra-racially and discord inter-racially. Others Asian participants reported experiencing social isolation at their school as they described themselves as not being

part of any student friend groups at their PWIS. However, this study did not include Asian-specific questions in the interview protocol. In this regard, future studies that place specific focus on Asian student experiences can be helpful. For example, further exploration of academic competitiveness within a predominantly-white background can shed light into potential coping methods exhibited by Asian students of color. Additionally, it will also be useful to explore how Asian students compare their own experiences with non-Asian peer experiences.

As well, a few participants expressed feeling disconnected with their school's race or ethnicity-based student groups. For example, one South Asian participant described an East Asian-centric student affinity group that excluded her cultural heritage, and two Latinx participants felt their school's empowerment initiatives centered on Mexican identity while ignoring other Latinx identities. Future studies that explore inter-group dynamics within large categories of racial and ethnic student groups can be helpful. This study, further can compare the efficacy of other schools that provide more specific forms of student support, such as South Asian student groups that exist in conjunction with East Asian groups.

Recommendations

The following section will address three levels of recommendations: racially inclusive practices at the individual level (Recommendations 1 and 2), institutionalizing racially inclusive policies at the school level (Recommendation 3), and institutionalizing racially inclusive policies at the state-wide level (Recommendation 4).

Recommendation 1: Cross-Cultural Training for All School Adults

The underlying implications of this study point to the importance of teachers' active engagement in creating inclusive curricula and classroom environment. Without this, school

culture can perpetuate negative experiences of students of color in terms of white-centric curricula, unacknowledged or badly addressed racial microaggressions in the classroom, as well as general feelings of exclusion and lack of belonging due to marginalizing school culture. Consistent with studies that found colorblind ideology (CBI) among white educators in the US (McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, & Luedke, 2015; Ohito, 2016; Matias & DiAngelo, 2013; Lewis, 2001), the alumni of color (AOCs) in this study described race-avoidant teacher tendencies, not only by classroom teachers but by administrators as well as coaches. Hence my first recommendation addresses fears and anxiety individuals can have when engaging in race conversations by way of an antidote: training that addresses cross-cultural understanding and communication skills.

This type of training can provide increased awareness and understanding of racial and ethnic differences and thereby help to counteract a colorblind environment. Regarding the many teachers who were described by AOCs as exhibiting silence surrounding racial microaggressions in the classrooms, it is likely they did not recognize the microaggressions or, alternatively, did not have the necessary skills to effectively engage in fruitful conversations. This was noted by AOCs as well. For example, Ethan commented:

> I feel like some teachers are almost a little bit more scared to reach out, just because they're a little bit more uncomfortable with the culture or family or whatever it may be. People have stigmas…People need to get over that fear [because] not engaging them is ten times worse than engaging them.

To Ethan, his teachers seemed hesitant to engage with students of color, and this lack of engagement added to his sense of isolation and invisibility at his school. Other participants

echoed similar sentiments, with statements such as "[Be] sensitive but not scared to engage with students of color in a meaningful way" (Nathan).

On a practical side, however, connecting with students of color, particularly with those who might already feel alienated at their school, might not be an easy task. In this regard, understanding cross cultural communication styles and differences can allow educators greater access to connect and form relationships with students of color at their schools.

Recommendation 2: Anti-Racism Training for All School Adults

Cultural competence, while important and useful, will not necessarily address blind spots individuals may have, particularly when in predominantly-white settings that can yield pro-white tendencies (Richeson et al., 2004). My second recommendation is anti-racism training for all adults who are employed at a predominantly-white independent school (PWIS). While the specific contents will vary according to a school's level of prior work on racially inclusive practices, at the baseline, training should include addressing pro-white ideologies as well as enhanced awareness of personal patterns of behavior during cross racial interactions. For teachers, training should also address their ability to hold both high academic expectations for students of color as well as sensitivity towards racial equity and educational access.

The importance of anti-racism training is echoed by alumni of color (AOC) interviews. For example, when asked to make a recommendation to teachers at the end of their interview, many AOCs in this study called for increased teachers' self-reflecting practices regarding their biases. An insightful comment was offered by Kim, as she recommended:

> Checking assumptions at the door and thinking, what am I assuming? Why am I assuming that? Because once you have examined your assumptions, you can examine the person and just learn and absorb without those barriers sifting through.

To Kim, this was an essential part of teacher practices that could have helped improve her time at her PWIS.

Another indication of a need for training was also offered through Ethan's recommendation. Ethan, who was described in Chapter 4 as not connecting with most of his teachers and peers, recommended:

> Maybe go against the grain. If your first intention is to call on somebody, call on that person last because maybe your first intention is to call the person you're most familiar with or most comfortable with. [Instead], go through everybody else first.

Jackie offered a similar sentiment, recommending teachers to "not only calling on one student but by encouraging others to speak, specifically those who haven't spoken already." Recalling several AOCs who perceived their teachers' favoritism towards white peers over students of color, Jackie and Ethan's recommendations point to AOCs' desire for increased fairness and visibility within the classroom setting.

Recommendation 3: Independent School Accountability

The previous two recommendations concerned interpersonal communications at the individual level. However, change must also address policies and practices at the institutional level in order to ensure sustainable change beyond singular entities in an organization. After all, individuals can come and go within any organization, and in order to withstand the change of times, efforts will need to be embedded within the institution itself. My school-level recommendations are threefold: requiring at least one alumni of color (AOC) board member (a representative of a larger AOC satellite committee) to reside at every board meeting, increasing non-white board members to at least 30% of the entire body, and requiring all members of the board to engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training at least once a year.

This recommendation rests on the notion that school boards have an important role in determining school policies and practices. Independent school heads often need to work closely with their board of trustees in order to ensure the success of their schools, and as well, it is often the role of the board to keep schools accountable in fulfilling mission-aligned tasks (Baker, 2016). To this end, a board that is comprised of members who are knowledgeable of students of color experiences can be helpful. Moreover, these individuals will need to understand the urgency of ensuring school improvements, as other pressing and yet unrelated school concerns can often detract from focused attention on increasing racial and ethnic inclusivity. Placing at least one alumna/us of color board member at the seat of the table can help provide both valuable perspectives on students of color experiences as well as an understanding of the urgency of ensuring improved racial inclusivity practices.

Another benefit to having an AOC on the board of trustees is its potential for creating the right metrics for increasing racial inclusivity. It is presumable that many independent schools genuinely want a racially inclusive school culture and yet are unsure of how to get there. Many schools can be unresponsive to or unaware of to racial tension within their community, as evidenced by AOCs in this study. This consideration is further augmented by the recent increase of outcries by many students of color at elite, predominantly-white institutions, prompted by nation-wide protests following the death of George Floyd (Moore, 2020). An AOC who intimately understands the culture of the school, from curricula, school policies, to social climate, can perhaps provide valuable perspectives towards increasing racially inclusive practices and policies.

However, placing the onus of responsibility on a single alumna/us of color board member can produce considerable weight upon one individual. After all, most independent school boards

are comprised of current school parents from high socioeconomic status and are predominantly-white. As well, one AOC will not necessarily represent the varied perspectives of AOC experiences. In order to counteract this imbalance, I further propose the creation of a separate AOC committee that regularly assesses the racial inclusivity climate of the school. The make-up of this satellite committee will provide valuable insight into AOC perspectives that frequently remain under-utilized by predominantly-white independent schools (PWISs), and as well, an alumna/us chosen from this group can reside at every board of trustees meeting. In this way, the latter alumna/us of color will serve as a representative of the collective voices of the alumni of color group.

Further, the remaining board of trustees membership should also be reviewed for racial and ethnic inclusivity. After all, a predominantly-white board is problematic by nature on multiple levels, most notably of which is its racially exclusive make-up. Moreover, a racially diverse board of trustees aligns with recommendations from National Association of Independent School (NAIS), one of the largest associations of independent schools in the US. Listed in NAIS's "Principles of Good Practice" (2017) is a recommendation that board composition meet the needs of "strategic expertise, resources, and perspectives (past, present, and future)" necessary to achieve the mission of the school (p. 5). And as NAIS also recommends the promotion of diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice, the expertise needed to ensure meaningful racial inclusivity will require racially diverse board member perspectives. Hence, my second recommendation is to ensure that board members are represented by at least 30% non-white individuals.

My last school-level recommendation is to provide annual training on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for all board members. Without adequate understanding of racial dynamics

and cross-cultural differences among the board members, racial inclusivity initiatives are likely to remain at the surface level and thereby ineffective. Training details will likely vary due to different school mission statements, but at a minimum, racial inclusivity training will need to address race-based privileges, cultural competency, and anti-racism training.

These three school-level recommendations build upon NAIS's philosophy. A list of "Principles of Good Practice" proposed by NAIS has a section on equity and justice. In it is stated:

> The board of trustees and the head of school articulate strategic goals and objectives that promote diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice in the life of the school (p. 13).

The same section also recommends that schools develop "meaningful requirements for cross-cultural competency" through training of all school adults, and as well, inclusive curricula and school culture.

However, these recommendations can result as more aspirational than actual in light of independent school leaders' frequently used measures of success. One typical measure is parent satisfaction, determined by admissions statistics, family reenrollment (as independent schools have annual contracts) (Baker, 2016), and occasional parent surveys (Gulla & Jorgenson, 2014). While helpful for gaining overall constituent satisfaction, these traditional measures will not necessarily yield useful information on students of color experiences. Other common measures are equally unhelpful, such as standardized testing or accreditation, neither of which have a specific lens on students of color experiences. Hence, typical barometers of school success can remain unhelpful towards ensuring positive students of color experiences. In order for schools to create meaningful change towards racial inclusivity, a more targeted approach, such as measures recommended in this section, is necessary.

Recommendation 4: State-wide Independent School Accountability.

My final recommendation addresses external school accountability that can help ensure systemic changes at a state-wide level. This recommendation is two-tiered: revamping the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) implementation process and revising the CAIS WASC document itself.

First a little bit about CAIS WASC. Many independent schools in California seek accreditation from organizations, the most prominent of which is CAIS WASC. Accreditation is optional, but in order to remain competitive, most independent schools seek this process to gain legitimacy. This is because approval from Accrediting Commission for Schools (ACS) WASC, a larger organization that works in conjunction with CAIS WASC, ensures that a school is trustworthy, provides programs and operations centered on student learning, and validates student transcripts (ACS WASC, n.d.). However, as it currently stands, CAIS WASC does not ensure a thorough adoption of racial inclusivity standards in all aspects of a school's operation. Hence, it can be beneficial to revise the accreditation process to provide increased focus on racial and ethnic inclusivity.

Revamping the CAIS WASC Implementation Process. My first recommendation is a call for a change of the CAIS WASC implementation process itself. Currently, the accreditation process is conducted by a "visiting team", comprised of two to eight educators, and often include heads and top tier administrators from other independent schools. In this way, CAIS WASC is run primarily as a peer-reviewed process (Bassett, 2004), with the visiting team comprised of employees from peer NAIS membership schools.

However, there are obvious problems with this procedure, as educators in the NAIS system tend to be heavily connected. For example, many senior administrators engage with one

another at yearly CAIS or NAIS conferences, a large portion of which is spent networking by heads and senior administrators. Further, the quality of CAIS WASC accreditation is dependent upon the value of the visiting team and school reports (Gulla et al., 2014), and a peer-reviewed accreditation system among well-connected NAIS administrators is perhaps problematic. Indeed, some critics of independent schools point to a lack of public accountability extant within its operations (Basset, 2004).

In light of this, the position of a non-NAIS affiliated chairperson who oversees the CAIS WASC process can provide greater credibility to the process. Hence, my recommendation is to change the CAIS WASC process by requiring an outside educational consultant, independent to the insular world of NAIS, to serve as a chairperson of the visiting team. Moreover, as the education system itself tends to promote cultural knowledge and experiences that place white culture at the forefront (Howard, 2010), this newly created non-NAIS position should be occupied by someone well-versed in the work of equity and inclusion. In this way, the outside consultant can ensure the quality of review and recommendations without compromising her or his relationships to peer administrators within the NAIS system, with a particular lens on equity and racial inclusivity.

CAIS WASC Revisions. The next set of recommendations pertain to revising the CAIS WASC manual to provide increased focus on racial equity and inclusivity. All of the revisions I propose build upon language already extant within the 2019 CAIS WASC document. In the "Climate and Community" section of the manual it states:

> The climate manifests a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and it is evident in the engagement of the school community (p. 25).

This statement points to the importance of racially inclusive practices that are evident and make up the culture and climate of a school, and as well, aligns with NAIS's "Principles of Good Practice" detailed earlier. Further along in the same section, the "Baseline Requirements Checklist" also prompts the evaluating school to assess how it has "made progress in addressing diversity through the curriculum and life of the school (p. 26)."

The emphasis on diversity and equity ends there, however, as besides two additional statements on a school's nondiscrimination practices in school admissions and employment, there is little mention of diversity or race/ethnicity elsewhere in the manual. In this way, the manual's reference to the value of diversity and inclusion seems to remain generalized and not with sufficient specificity that can lead towards meaningful implementation. To this end, I propose the following revisions that provide more focused attention on racial inclusivity in the following CAIS WASC sections.

Racial Diversity at the Board and Administrative Level. According to the 2019 CAIS WASC manual, the school in review is to provide a self-study report that provides information on the school's profile (CAIS WASC, 2019). This includes a description of the "racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic mix" of students and faculty (p. 13). It does not, however, require the same level of specificity for school administrators or board of trustees (pertaining to the latter group, the manual recommends a description of the board's "structure and composition"). However, private school principals are predominantly-white (NCES, 2019a), and as this process is designed in part to "promote institutional self-reflection" (p. 26), expanding the category to also include the racial and ethnic composition of a school's board of trustees and administration will be of value. My first CAIS WASC revision recommendation is to add racial and cultural

descriptions of "school administrators" and "board of trustees" in this portion of the self-study report.

Student Learning. As it currently reads, this important section on student learning has only a peripheral acknowledgement of the dynamics of race and ethnicity. In the "The Student Learning Experience" section, the words appear at the end of a sentence that first highlights the importance of recognizing learning styles and abilities:

> The faculty and administration are attuned to and recognize differences in learning styles, abilities, and approaches among students, including those that may be influenced by such considerations as previous preparation, developed competence, neuropsychological factors, socioeconomic situation, gender, culture, race, and ethnicity (p. 20).

Race and ethnicity are only mentioned in this capacity, and no other reference or consideration is offered in this section on student learning. This is problematic, as this study has indicated many students of color as experiencing widespread colorblind ideology and race-avoidant tendencies among their predominantly-white teachers.

Moreover, the CAIS WASC document itself places value on multiculturalism in the curriculum. In a section entitled "Climate and Community", it underscores the importance of educating students on the value of understanding "the range of human differences" (p. 25). As well, the same section encourages schools to assess its progress in addressing diversity "through the curriculum and life of the school" (p. 26). Recalling the large number of alumni of color (AOCs) in this study who indicated a desire to engage in race-based conversations, as well as indications of many predominantly-white independent school (PWIS) teachers who exhibit colorblind ideology in classroom curricula, it is problematic that "The Student Learning Experience" section, an important section that can guide curriculum development, contains no

mention of multiculturalism or any iteration of culturally responsive pedagogy. Hence, my second CAIS WASC revision recommendation is to add additional language in "The Student Learning Experience" section that underscores the importance of race-based inclusivity and multicultural perspectives in the curriculum, with a particular lens on culturally responsive pedagogy.

Faculty and Pedagogy. The "Faculty and Pedagogy" section can essentially be described as colorblind, as there is no mention of race, ethnicity, diversity, cross-cultural competence, or any other language that denotes understanding of racial differences. While the section does address faculty professional development and growth, the lack of language on cross-cultural or anti-racist training is problematic. Again, CAIS WASC document itself places value on racially inclusive practices, as elsewhere in the "Climate and Community" section of the manual it states the importance of "foster(ing) cultural competence in its faculty and staff" (p. 25). As well, the same section recommends that "students experience the school as a safe, equitable, and inclusive place."

As this study demonstrated colorblind classroom environment comprised of teachers' silence surrounding racial microaggressions and lack of sufficient multiculturalism in the school curricula, teacher training on cross-cultural understanding and skills is an urgent necessity. Hence, my third CAIS WASC revision recommendation is to add language on cultural competence training for teachers. Moreover, as stated earlier in the "school-level" recommendation, teacher training should address the ability to maintain high academic expectations for all students while being able to hold equity and inclusive practices at the forefront.

Racial Inclusivity Training for All School Employees. The previous section addresses the importance of faculty training on cross-cultural competency. However, it is important that *all* school employees have a level of cross-cultural understanding and anti-racism training. Hence, my third CAIS WASC revision recommendation is to add the language that specifies yearly cross-cultural competency and anti-racism training for all school employees, including all school administrators and board of trustees.

Final Remarks

This study was more than a study, as it was a product of my lifelong career of teaching students with the intention of providing every student with the best educational opportunities possible. Many of the stories that were put forward in this study were stories that I, as a teacher at a predominantly-white independent school (PWIS), have heard throughout my 23 years of working closely with students within my classroom. While there were surprises and unexpected findings, common sense and an open heart would inform any adult at a PWIS on the experiences detailed in this study. What this study offers is a formal organization of students of color experiences, as seen from the viewpoint of alumni, which will hopefully be helpful in furthering future initiatives for inclusivity practices.

My long tenure at a PWIS has also exposed me to many well-meaning, admirable, and heartfelt teachers who lovingly engage with students outside of their cultural comfort zone. I have also been exposed to well-meaning teachers who do not engage in race conversations out of fear of inadvertently offending, for, as Noah said in Chapter 4, in a trigger-happy world of "liberal" white communities in which a racially charged misstep can ignite community anger, it is easy for teachers feel anxious. However, as Ethan said, "Not engaging them is ten times worse

than engaging them." This underscores the importance of school adults' active engagement in racially inclusive practices.

The urgency is real, as we are currently failing many students who remain silent with their experiences. This study underscores the gravity of educators' role in providing a sense of belonging, as without this, school-wide initiatives float disconnected to students' daily lives. As Kendi (2019) poignantly put it, "there is no neutrality in the racism struggle" (p. 9). A closing quote to illustrate this urgency is provided by Tessa, who stated:

> I guess maybe I'm a little jaded or a little cynical about it. I have seen these policies at a college level put in place and you still kind of feel like they don't trickle down into really getting into student culture.

The students, non-white and white alike, are currently being educated, socially and academically, through hidden as well as formal school curricula. In the wake of George Floyd's tragic death, and the amplified voices of Black, Indigenous, and numerous people of color as well as increased or renewed interest by white anti-racist allies, it is time for all PWIS educators to take an active stance in creating true equity and inclusivity for students of color within our ivy walls.

Appendix A: Demographic Key

Key	Definition
GF	Gender Fluid
NG	No Gender
NB	Nonbinary
GQ	Gender Queer

Asian	**Asian F**	**Asian M**	**Asian GQ**	**Asian LGBTQ**
11	6	4	1 GN	7
Black	**Black F**	**Black M**	**Black GQ**	**Black LGBTQ**
7	5	2		1
Latinx	**Latinx F**	**Latinx M**	**Latinx GQ**	**Latinx LGBTQ**
12	9	1	1 NG 1 GF	7
Total	**Total F**	**Total M**	**Total GQ**	**Total LGBTQ**
30	20	7	3	15

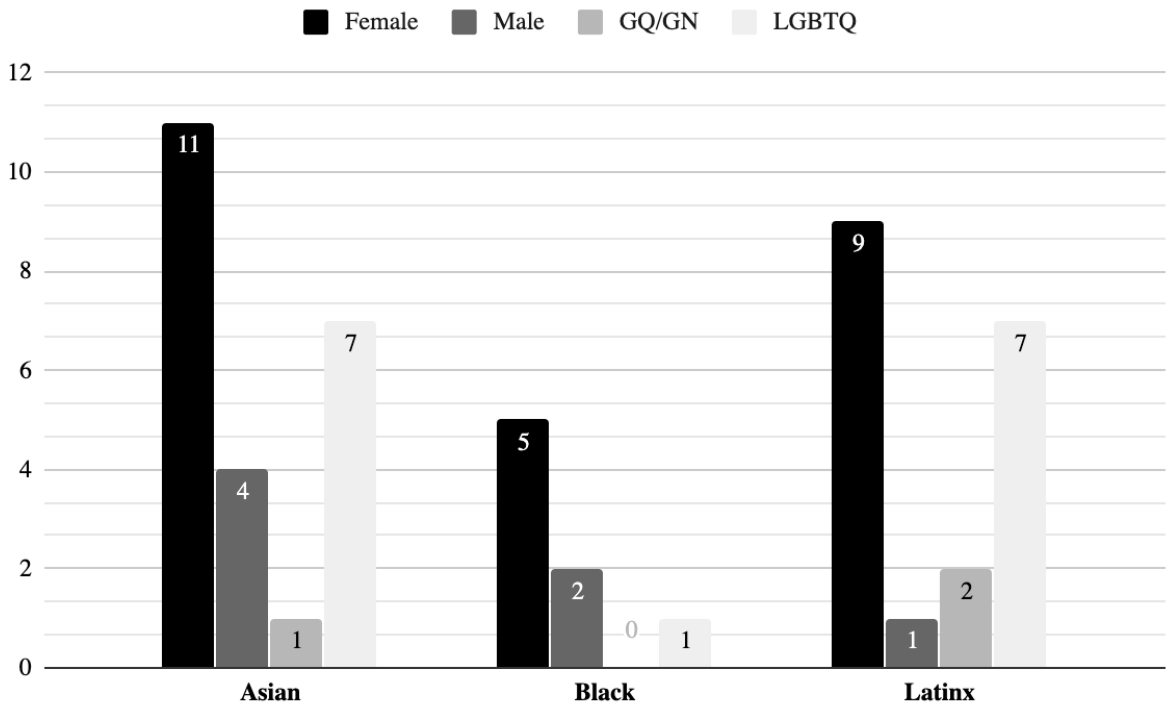
Appendix B: Participant Demographics

Name	Race	Gender	Pronoun	Sexuality*	Pseudonym School	Graduation Year
1. Caleb	Black	M	he, him, his		Bayshore Academy	2016
2. Bo	Latinx	NG	they, them, theirs	LGBTQ	Millson	2012
3. Opal	Latinx	F	she, her, hers		Sheffield Academy	2016
4. Barbara	Asian	F	she, her, hers	Bisexual	Sheffield Academy	2019
5. Nathan	Asian	M	he, him, his	Bisexual	Sheffield Academy	2018
6. Jackie	Black	F	she, her, hers	LGBTQ	Sheffield Academy	2017
7. Katherine	Latinx	F	she, her, hers		Sheffield Academy	2019
8. Finn	Latinx	GF	they, them, theirs	Gay	Sheffield Academy	2015
9. Nancy	Latinx	F	she, her, hers		Sheffield Academy	2017
10. Taylor	Asian	GN	they, them, theirs	Gay	Sheffield Academy	2014
11. Carol	Latinx	F	she, her, hers	Queer	Danister Academy	2016
12. Michelle	Asian	F	she, her, hers		Braye	2014
13. Nicole	Black	F	she, her, hers	Bisexual	Upton Academy	2014
14. Kim	Black	F	she, her, hers		Mayflower Bridge	2015
15. Tiffany	Latinx	F	she, her, hers		West Dansberry	2018
16. Ethan	Asian	M	he, him, his	Straight	Dorothy Appleton	2015
17. Beth	Latinx	F	she, her, hers	Straight	Sheffield Academy	2016
18. Charlotte	Black	F	she, her, hers		Mossfield Prep	2014
19. Tamara	Asian	F	she, her, hers	Queer	Coral Coast High	2015

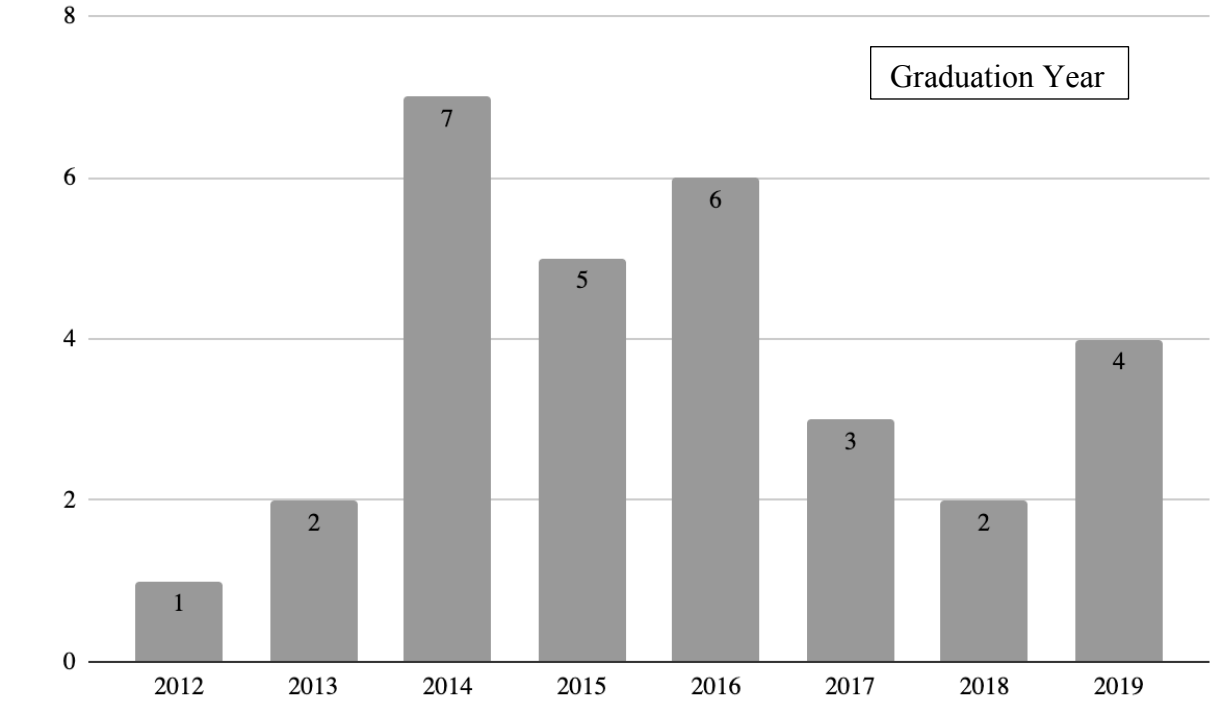
20. Melanie	Latinx	F	she, her, hers		Sheffield Academy	2013
21. Jake	Asian	M	he, him, his		Sheffield Academy	2013
22. Noah	Black	M	he, him, his		Chessman Academy	2019
23. Nora	Asian	F	she, her, hers		Chessman Academy	2016
24. Pam	Asian	F	she, her, hers	LGBTQ/Bisexual	Chessman Academy	2019
25. Cameron	Latinx	NB	they, them, theirs	Queer	Sheffield Academy	2017
26. Gail	Latinx	F	she, her, hers		Sheffield Academy	2014
27. Sarah	Black	F	she, her, hers		Winslow Pine	2014
28. Henry	Asian	M	he, him, his	Bisexual	Sheffield Academy	2015
29. Tessa	Asian	F	she, her, hers		Redfields Prep	2014
30. Ben	Latinx	M	he, him, his	Queer	Sheffield Academy	2016

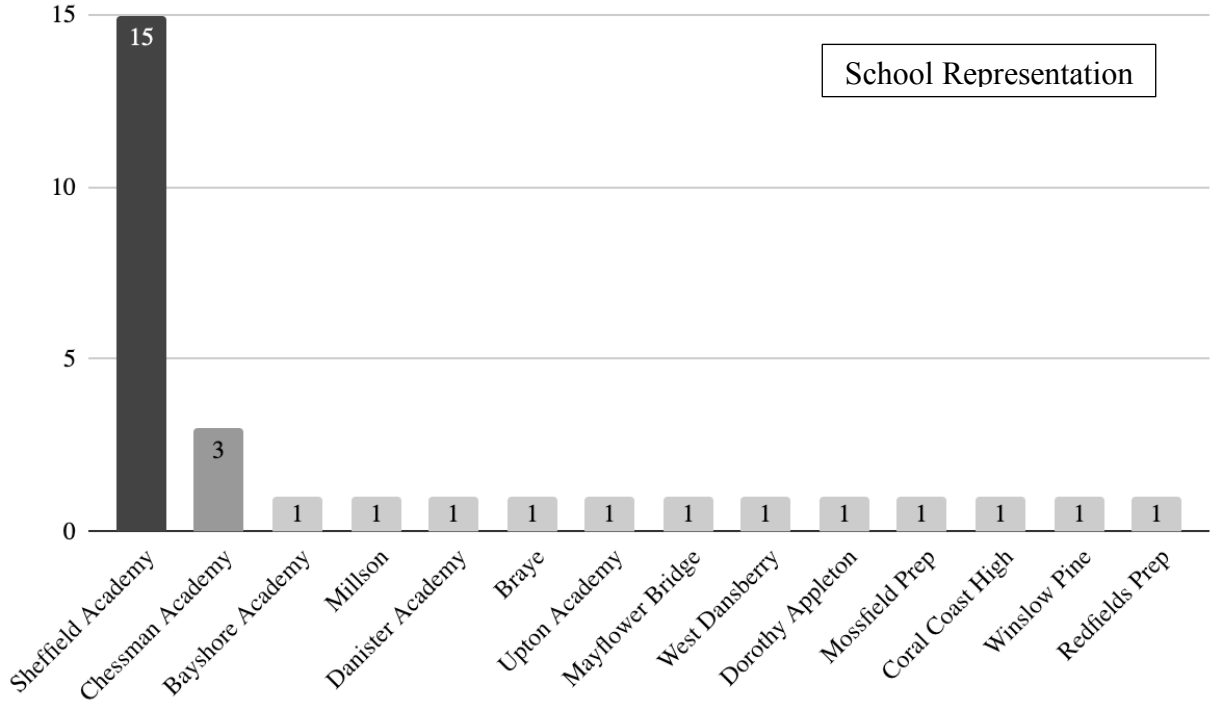
*Blank indicates that the participant did not specify.

Appendix C: Participant Breakdown by Race, Gender, and Sexuality



Appendix D: Participants by Graduation Year and School





Appendix E: Interview Protocol

1. Warm up Questions:
    a. What stands out to you as a positive memory of your experience at your school?
    b. Is there anything that stands out to you as a negative memory of your experiences at your school?

2. Instructional Practices:
    a. How were people of color represented in classroom discussions and curriculum?
    b. What class activities around race or culture, if any, excited or engaged you at your school?
    c. On the flip side, was there a time when you felt uncomfortable with the way race or culture was talked about by your teacher in or out of class?

3. Teacher communications:
    a. What are some things that told you (verbally and nonverbally) that a teacher believed in your ability to do well in class?
    b. What are some things, if any, that gave you the opposite message?
    c. What are some things that communicated to you (verbally and nonverbally) that a teacher cared about you as an individual?

4. Pertaining to the treatment of you or others:
    a. How, if at all, would you say your teachers held your classmates accountable for communicating in a racially inclusive and sensitive way?
    b. What would you say are some ideal ways for teachers to manage classroom behavior to promote racial inclusivity within the high school context?

5. Pertaining to your relationship with other students of color:
    a. What were your relationships like with other students of color?
        i. What about with those who are of a different race or ethnicity?
    b. To what extent do you think race played a part in these relationships?

6. Overall experiences:
    a. Would you recommend a friend or a family member to attend an independent school similar to yours? Why or why not?
    b. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experiences as a student of color at an independent school?

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