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The Beautiful Struggle: A Qualitative Examination of Black Educator Experiences Creating Academic Spaces for Student Success

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DePaul University
College of Education

The Beautiful Struggle: A Qualitative Examination of Black Educator Experiences

Creating Academic Spaces for Student Success

A Dissertation in Education
with a Concentration in Educational Leadership

by

Catherine B. Whitfield Martin

@2022 Catherine B. Whitfield Martin

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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I certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation. Any assistance received in the preparation of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized including the use of data, ideas, and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according to program guidelines as directed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Attorney', written in a cursive style with large loops and flourishes.

Author Signature:

Date: November 12, 2022

Abstract

While any student is susceptible to experiencing a traumatic incident, students living in socio-economically marginalized communities are often exposed at higher rates. Students from racial minority groups are more likely to experience distress from acts of violence committed against People of color than their White counterparts. For educators working in predominantly Black, Chicago communities, exposure to violence directly and via the shared experiences from students occurs disproportionately compared to educators working in other areas of the city.

Educators working within particular communities battle the effects of chronic stress and structural racism, while striving to create hope and academic success within their students. Research suggests that African-American educators' use of culturally responsive pedagogical methods in tandem with their humanistic commitment to students is integral to student success. It is critical that the perspectives of Black educators committed to creating environments where students can thrive academically amidst stressful conditions found outside the classroom are captured. Their narratives can further identify practices necessary to better support success within Black students while also highlighting the impacts felt by educators working in chronically stressed communities.

The purpose of this research study is to present educator personal narratives on how they create supportive academic spaces for students to thrive, while highlighting the barriers faced by students and educators on the road to academic success. This study employs Critical Race Theory as both the methodological and theoretical framework to analyze the experiences of participant narratives.

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Dedication

This work is first and foremost dedicated to all of my beloved ancestors who sacrificed so very much in order for me to achieve all that I have. It is upon their shoulders that I stand and I am eternally grateful. I dedicate this to my paternal grandmother, Bernice Woodson. Lovingly known as Gran, she impressed upon all of her children and grandchildren the power of a quality education. It is because of her love for and dedication to the betterment of her family that I am who I am today. I dedicate this to my parents, William and Rosalyn Whitfield. It is truly due to their hard work, sacrifice and drive that I am who I am today. It is because of them and their encouragement that I have exceeded all that I ever planned for in my life educationally. Their reiteration of our family mantra ‘Whitfield’s are held to a higher standard’ continues to fuel my internal drive that pushes me, daily, to do and achieve more for my community. I dedicate this work to my husband and life partner, Kenhasa Martin. Your encouragement to and patience with me as I toiled over this work is truly appreciated. Thank you for creeping by quietly as I took over the office, kitchen island, dining room table and our backyard oasis while writing. Thank you for never giving me an ounce of grief about how our time was impacted by my need to write another chapter or edit another page. This work is truly a labor of love that you should be proud of! To my ship, Kristal, thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you for reminding me that I am a capable of doctoral level work and need not let anyone tell me different. With all that you have going on, your support to me is truly appreciated. Thank you to my brother Terry. Thank you for reminding me that those two plump kids off Braile Street are pretty amazing and we owe it to ourselves to show the world our greatness.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In my 17 years as a public-school educator, there have not been many things that surprise me. However, on November 3, 2016 the realities of Chicago gun violence hit closer than any other experience. While attempting to protect his sister from an abusive partner, one of my students was murdered alongside his sister. I did not learn of his death through the typical, albeit disturbing, manner that school administration are notified - an email, but rather from grief-stricken students as they arrived at school the following morning. Students wondered why I greeted them, as I always did, with a large smile in the front lobby. It was not until one pulled me to the side and showed me the student's Facebook profile that I understood the shift that had taken place in just one evening. Another child's life had been taken leaving another Chicago community rocked to the core by the loss.

In just four months, this was the second young person mourned by my school community as a result of gun violence. Attending the double funeral for my student and his sister alongside dozens of his peers stands as one of the toughest days of my career. Sitting in the funeral service of yet another young, Black male impacted by gun violence was difficult. However, returning to school and standing as a figure of social emotional support to a building full of grieving students left in their wake was even tougher.

In their article, Harden, Kenemore, Mann, Edwards, List and Martinson (2014) determined that "over 800 young people have been killed in Chicago since 2008, with the majority residing in 22 African-American or Latino communities" (p.65). Chicago is comprised of 55 distinct neighborhoods. The concentration of violence within the city limits beg to question larger social structures that create social disorder evidenced through violence. Within each of the

twenty-two communities' home to the 800 murdered youth, lies a school community left to mourn their death.

Research Problem

For many Chicago educators working in the twenty-two predominantly Black and Latinx communities highlighted by Harden et al, exposure to violence directly and via the shared experiences of students occurs disproportionately compared to educators working in other areas of the city. During a time when on average 58%-75% of teachers leave the profession within 3 years, up to 64% within 5 years, it is questionable how educators sustain themselves amidst the realities of community violence (Papay, et al, 2017).

As a Black educator, I have intentionally chosen to work within Black communities on the south and west sides of Chicago. When confronted with the double homicide of my student and his sister, I questioned whether I could continue working not just in the communities that I previously sought out, but in the field of public education as a whole. Educator retention and how individuals continue to serve in communities plagued by community violence is what brought me to this research study as it affected my life so powerfully.

While any student is susceptible to experiencing a traumatic incident, students living in socio-economically marginalized communities are often exposed at higher rates. Students from racial minority groups are more likely to experience distress from acts of violence committed against People of color than their White counterparts (Harrell, 2000; Sackett, 2016). Violence often lies as a byproduct of the chronic-contextual stress experienced by members of particular communities. This stress is due to the "unequal distributions of resources and limitations on opportunities for People of color [which influences] the living conditions and quality of life for individuals and families" (Harrell, 2000, p.46). For African-American students, "despite being

the ‘beneficiaries’ of many US public school restructuring and educational reforms, such as Title I, Head Start and Success for All, African-American students....[continue to struggle to meet academic benchmarks] in the public education system” (Roberts, 2010, p.450). Furthermore, descriptions of African-American children as one of the most disenfranchised and underachieving students in the US K-12 population further complicate the work of public-school employees (Howard, 2003).

For educators working within communities battling the effects of chronic stress and structural racism, the work of creating hope and academic success amidst students can prove difficult. Research suggests that African-American educators’ use of culturally responsive pedagogical methods in tandem with their humanistic commitment to students is integral to student success (Casey, 1993; Howard, 2003). It is critical that the perspectives of Black educators committed to creating environments where students can thrive academically amidst stressful conditions found outside the classroom are captured. Their narratives can further identify the practices necessary to better support success within Black students while also highlighting the impacts felt by educators working in chronically stressed communities.

Purpose of Study

This investigation will explore the experiences of African-American¹ Chicago Public School educators serving low-income, predominantly Black Chicago Westside school

¹ African-American and Black will be used interchangeably throughout this work. Throughout literature Black and African-American have been used interchangeably to reference Black people in America. African-American came into use to highlight the experiences of African peoples already here reflecting both their origins in the African continent and their history on the American continent. ‘Black’ is more inclusive and contemporary of those from African and the Caribbean who have more of a modern experience in America. As race is a social construct used to justify the subjugation and denial of privilege to many people of African descent, I find it critical to incorporate terms which are most inclusive of the African-American experience in this country (Wilkerson,2010; Delgado, 2017; Patterson, 2015).

communities. The purpose of this research study is to present educator personal narratives on how they create supportive academic spaces for students to thrive, while highlighting the barriers faced by students and educators on the road to academic success. Critical Race Theory is the theoretical framework that grounds this study. I am seeking to shed light on the environments many public educators are working within, despite some of the horrific realities of poverty. Additionally, I am seeking to highlight in their personal narratives the strength in their relationships with students which contribute to their on-going commitment to the field and the academic success they seek to bring out of their students.

The communities featured in this research are not only rich in social, cultural and religious assets, but also serve as home to generations of Black families. Many of these families migrated north from the southern states during the Great Migration creating strong communities thought to provide more opportunity and safety from the Jim Crow south. Various church communities have deep histories woven throughout the neighborhoods of focus offering programming, counsel and spiritual guidance to community members. Community agencies including the Chicago Park District, YMCA, Better Boys Foundation and Chicago Public Library offer regular youth programming to ensure the community's young people are consistently provided with enrichment opportunities. Schools located throughout the neighborhoods of focus are long-established Chicago Public elementary and high schools with ties to educating generations of the communities' families.

Though rich with abundant history, many well-established schools and numerous centers of faith, the communities of focus also have long histories of segregation and structural racism. Disinvestment in the communities is evident via: limited access to fresh fruit and vegetable markets; the closure of centralized transportation stops which support resident ability to move

freely to employment and educational opportunities outside of the neighborhood; scarce numbers of outpatient physical and mental health services increasing reliance on emergency room care which is also not easily accessible to families; high rates of neighborhood violence as a result of few economic opportunities within the community for members to obtain wages to raise families. These examples provide just a snapshot of the effects of structural racism and disinvestment in these areas. This disinvestment causes me to question the impact felt by educators working in the communities. This disinvestment was escalated during the summer of 2020 as multiple episodes of civil unrest occurred as a result of the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbury, and George Floyd. Chicago alone experienced multiple incidents of looting and rioting which totaled over \$20 million dollars in damages and over 3000 arrests of citizens for disorderly conduct and civil unrest (Armentrout, 2020; Bauer, 2020).

Guiding Research Questions

This study will address the following research questions:

- Is there classroom evidence that educators in this study cite in their work to ensure student success?
- What tenets of CRT help explain classroom practices that Black educators in this study use to foster Black student success?
- How do Black educators in this study respond to students' traumatic experiences and/or after-effects of community violence in their school communities?

Purpose and Significance of Research

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the experiences of Black educators serving low income, predominantly Black, Westside public school communities. Chicago is composed of 55 distinct neighborhoods that lie within the city's boundaries. Within each

neighborhood is a distinct history and feel that makes them unique. This research will unveil how some of the realities of the varying neighborhoods impact the lives of the students and teachers who live and work there.

Chicago's history is laden with racist housing initiatives and public policies which have negatively impacted African-Americans' educational, civic and social lives for generations. A topic of study for many authors is the city's "racialized hierarchy of well-being" (Sampson, 2012, p.97). Drake and Clayton's *Black Metropolis* (1945) unveiled how extensive poverty and social disorganization are in some communities within the city. The text's use of Chicago as the city of focus, highlighted the impact of racialized policies on African-Americans. While problematic in the manner in which he pathologized the lives of African-Americans, Daniel Moynihan's *The Negro Family: A case for action* (1965) further highlighted the disparity experienced by many African-Americans as a result of structural inequalities. Now over half a century from when both of these prolific texts were published, the racialized structures highlighted continue to impact the experiences of African-Americans who reside in many of Chicago's communities and, I argue, the educators who work within them as well.

Amidst all of the racially based barriers African-Americans face, long-standing histories of success exist. As a Black educator who actively chooses each day to serve racially similar students, I am looking to amplify the voices of educators with similar intentions. By focusing on Black educators, I seek to analyze how their race and lived experiences impact their work and relationships with students in predominantly African-American school spaces.

As a Black woman from a working-class family, I knew the focus of my professional efforts was to educate Black students in some of the city's most socioeconomically marginalized communities. In my role as a school leader, I experience tremendous highs as I witness students

successfully making the transition through elementary and high school and on to post-secondary studies. I build strong relationships with families and stand as a provider of necessary resources to students as needed. Formally trained in clinical social work, my work as an assistant principal and now principal in both elementary and high schools throughout Chicago allows me to balance my drive to maintain relationships with families, with supporting and leading macro level change efforts in my school environments.

In my role as a K-12 leader I experience extreme struggles. These struggles include: being a first responder to a student who was shot on the way to school; transporting home (daily) one of my former ninth grade students was raped in an alley on her walk home from school and feared returning to school due to continued risk of violence; supporting one of my students shot in a gang war on his walk from work. More struggles that catapulted my research include immense grief endured from losing two Black, male, sixteen-year-old students within a four-month period due to gun violence. Their funerals rounded out my exposure to seven student deaths in a five-year period and changed the trajectory of my graduate work and career.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) will be used as both a theoretical and methodological approach for this study. CRT will support my analysis of how the intersections of race, class and gender impact Black teachers working in low-income Chicago communities. The racially influenced experiences that African-American educators bring to their work with students provide a common understanding between both teachers and students. However, when considering the long history of racially based discrimination experienced by individuals living in low income communities, CRT allows for a deeper analysis of teacher experience. CRT provides the theoretical framework necessary to unpack the role race places in perpetuating social

disparities. Incorporation of key critical race theorists including Kimberle' Williams Crenshaw, Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado will support arguments made throughout this research.

The origins of CRT lie at the hands of various activists and scholars dedicated to addressing the relationship between race and power. CRT aims to “reexamine the terms by which race and racism have been negotiated in American consciousness, and to recover and revitalize the radical tradition of race-consciousness among African-Americans” (Crenshaw, 1995, p.xiv). CRT is born out of legal scholarship and is grounded by two interests. The interests include understanding how the subordination of People of color as a result of White supremacy was created and maintained. It is also grounded in understanding that law and racial power are required to create change (Crenshaw, 1995). The history of CRT reflects a movement amongst legal scholars to develop a language that critiqued law, racism and social power. Use of CRT is essential to this research as it “uncovers the ongoing dynamics of racialized power, and its embeddedness in practices and values which have been shown [to be] explicit, formal manifestations of racism” (Crenshaw, 1995). When considering the racially based structures and policies which create many of the difficult experiences some educators confront daily, a CRT lens is essential.

CRT consists of the following tenets: 1) Counter-storytelling; 2) Permanence as racism, 3) Whiteness as property; 4) Interest conversion; 5) Critique of liberalism; and 6) Intersectionality and Commitment to social justice or Institutional transformation (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Love, 2019). Counter-story-telling, permanence of racism and commitment to social justice are of primary emphasis in this research. I am choosing to focus on these three because they most strongly support the foundation of my research. When considering the experiences of African-American educators serving students in predominantly low-income

African-American communities, Counter story-telling is critical as it supports the narratives shared by educators regarding their students' experiences. Permanence of racism stands as an additional tenet of focus for this research as it acknowledges that racism controls the political, social and economic experiences of members of US society (Hiraldo, 2013). The communities of focus for this research are heavily impacted by racially biased systems and initiatives that contribute to and sustain continued disinvestment in the community. This tenet will support the theoretical framing of the narratives offered by African-American educators serving the communities' students as their experiences are not happenstance. Rather, I argue, a byproduct of structural racism.

It could be argued in my study that White educators are emotionally impacted at levels similar to Black educators when serving students in low-income communities. Application of Critical Race Theory as my theoretical method will support a deeper analysis of the experiences felt by Black educators working within communities of the same race. By virtue of the humanistic commitment Black educators bring to their work with students, the experiences and level of understanding of how larger racialized structures impact the experiences of their students will be analyzed.

Research Methods: Qualitative Research and Critical Race Theory

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), qualitative research "attempts to understand individuals [and] groups...in their natural settings in ways that are contextualized and reflect the meaning that people make out of their own experiences" (p.2). This method best aligns with my research study as it honors the individual experiences of each research participant. Use of a qualitative research approach allows for the uncovering of the intersecting economic, political and social issues that exist in racially marginalized communities. I am interested in bringing

marginalized, often ignored, voices to the forefront of educational research. In the context of my research, these voices are low-income, Black people who live in communities plagued daily with the impacts of structural racism and violence. I also want to unearth and add to the existing body of literature that speaks to how these research participants remain resilient and live their lives with hope and vision for change.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) best suits this qualitative study as it is a framework that explicitly pushes for a thorough examination of how race impacts the experiences of individuals. Yosso (2005) defines CRT as “a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices and discourses” (p.70). My research will unveil the intersection of race, class and gender through the narratives shared by Chicago educators working in West side communities with an extensive history of disinvestment. Utilization of CRT will support my analysis of how structural racism impacts Chicago educators working with students as CRT is “a theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process” (Yosso, 2002, p.24). CRT as my methodological approach will allow for the narratives offered by participating educators to be analyzed for themes which highlight how they make meaning of the impact of structural racism on their work with students and families. Interviews with five African-American Chicago public educators will serve as data points contextualize and their experiences. Individual interviews will allow for personal narratives to surface of how educators experience and internalize their work within their respective educational communities of service.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are critical to the context and the reader's overall understanding of this research:

African-American - descendant of African Diaspora born in the United States; reference may also include Black² person, Afro-American and Negro depending on age of generation.

Humanistic commitment - belief found within African-American educators who see teaching as synonymous with taking on a personal responsibility for the education and well-being of Black students (Casey, 1993)

Neighborhood - geographically bounded place. Bounded can be defined as an area with specific geographic markers, streets and/or landmarks that clearly delineate where the neighborhood begins and ends (Vargas, 2016).

Poverty - having insufficient funds to purchase basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter; recurring conditions that affect the mind, body and soul (Jensen, 2009).

Social class - a socially constructed position in society dependent on an individual's level of wealth, prestige and power (deMarrias & LeCompte, 1999).

Structural Racism - a set of structural arrangements that locks a racially distinct group into a subordinate political, social and economic position, effectively creating second-class citizenship (Alexander, 2012). Structural racism influences an individual's opportunity for success as it shapes one's access to environmental resources which can ultimately improve one's access to material and social resources (Finnegan, 2017).

²'Black', 'White', 'People of color' and 'Students of color' are capitalized throughout this research to reflect that I am discussing groups of people. By capitalizing Black and White, I am making a necessary distinction between colors and race - ex. Black hair versus black hair.

Trauma - an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person's capacity to cope. The experience is often direct and personal and involves an actual or threatened death or serious injury or witnessing an event that involves a death (Rice & Groves, 2005; Finigan-Carr, 2017).

Complex Trauma - simultaneous or sequential occurrences of child maltreatment - including emotional abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and witnessing domestic violence - that are chronic. Complex traumatic experiences are interpersonal and invasive and often have wide-ranging and long-term effects as a result of the exposure (Cook, Blaunstein, Spinazzola & Vander Kolk, 2003).

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

The work of many public educators is focused on creating and working in educational environments dedicated to supporting academic success in children. Identifying the best ways to create equitable academic outcomes for African-American children remains of significant focus in public education (Hale, 2001; Perry, Steele and Hillard, 2003; Payne, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Carter & Welner, 2013; Finigan-Carr, 2017). Considering that African-American students continue to lag behind their White counterparts in both reading and math achievement nationally, the work of educators serving students from predominantly Black communities is all the more urgent (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Abiola Farinde-Wu, Ayana Allen-Handy, 2017; Egalie, Kisida & Winters, 2017). Rates of community violence within socioeconomically marginalized communities are significant. Violence often lies as a byproduct of the chronic-contextual stress experienced by members of particular communities. A source of this stress lies at the “unequal distributions of resources and limitations on opportunities for People of color [which influences] the living conditions and quality of life for individuals and families” (Harrell, 2000, p.46). For educators working within communities battling the effects of chronic-contextual stress and structural racism, the work of creating hope and academic success amidst students can prove difficult (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton and Freitas, 2010). It is critical that the perspectives of African-American educators committed to creating environments where students can thrive academically amidst the stressful conditions found outside the classroom are captured.

This literature review will guide the understanding of my research on the experiences of Black educators working in predominantly Black, low-income communities. The review will provide an analysis of the social contexts many Black educators work within while creating

environments which nurture academic success for Black students. The first section reviews race as an evolving social construct and how racially biased policies and institutions contribute to disproportionate rates of poverty within many Black communities. This discussion is grounded in relevant theories from various authors including Robert Sampson, William Julius Wilson, Richard Rothstein, Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton.

In the second section, violence as a byproduct of structural racism will be introduced and the impact it has on youth living in communities with high rates of crime. This section will describe how violence is born out of the systemic disinvestment of economic resources in particular communities. Of key importance is the reality that systemic disinvestment does not remove the need for residents to ensure their human necessities for living are met. Rather, this necessity creates an environment where a by any means necessary approach is employed by residents to ensure their needs are met. This approach often causes community members to justify involvement in illegal activities for income (Wilson, 1996; Wilson, 2009; Sampson, 2012). The second section reviews the impact felt by educators working with students from and within communities with high rates of violence. Secondary trauma experienced by educators will be highlighted.

The third and final section of this literature review is a synopsis of the positive impact Black educators have on the academic outcomes of Black students. This section provides an overview of the research which highlights the positive impact Black educators have on the academic outcomes of Black children via cultural synchronicity. Furthermore, the humanistic commitment Black educators bring to their work with students will be highlighted in terms of the impact it has on educator engagement and retention in schools located in high poverty communities.

Section I: Race as an Evolving Social Construct

Historically, race has been used to create, justify and maintain systems of oppression against People of color. US society mimics a caste-based system where identity is racialized. The construction of White identity and racial hierarchy has roots in the establishment of US slavery. By virtue of their African descent, the racial otherness of slaves “came to justify the subordinated status of Blacks” (Harris, 1993, p.1717). Black racial identity was then linked to one who is a slave, while Whiteness was linked to one who is free. This binary approach to race supported a clear division between what individuals within each racial group were and were not entitled to as those who were free and those who were slaves.

Post-slavery, historical forms of domination evolved to create and reproduce the subordination of African-Americans in this country (Harris, 1993). The slave culture of the Jim Crow south continued to:

“...define the ex-slave and her descendants as persons who did not belong, who had no honor that needed to be respected by White free persons and who were so powerless that their young men could be hunted down like helots with bloodhounds, lynched and burnt alive by the thousands with impunity” (Patterson, 2017, p.280).

Extending beyond the Jim Crow era, United States history is laden with discriminatory practices where Blacks were segregated from Whites to support continued domination. Domination of the Black body and its movement was used as justification for the institution of norms, privileges and benefits extended solely to Whites. These norms, privileges and benefits were a “valuable asset that Whites sought to protect...and over time have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law” (Harris, 1993, p.1713). Structural racism is born out of the concept where being:

“white means gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and survival. [Being] White increase[s] the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one’s life rather than being the object of other’s domination” (Harris, 1993, p.1713).

Rothstein (2017) argues that structural racism is indistinguishable from societal discrimination as it is embedded in blatant discrimination in public policy that operates to the disadvantage of Blacks. Biased practices embedded in public policies to continue dominance of Whites over African-Americans in this country will be explored further throughout this research.

Construction of High Poverty Communities

The development of Black communities with high crime and low resources were not happenstance; but rather constructed through intentional and deliberate decisions grounded and backed by federal policy and structural racism. Denton & Massey (1993) argue that “White [America] made a series of deliberate decisions to deny Blacks access to urban housing markets and to force racial segregation. Through its actions and inactions White America built and maintained the residential structure of the ghetto” (p.19). The impacts of racially biased structures continue to be found in areas with concentrated poverty in the US. Through the institution of numerous policies that restricted the availability of housing to African-American citizens, the Federal government significantly contributed to the segregation found in inner city neighborhoods.

Stemming back to 1910, African-Americans were impacted by discriminatory practices to prevent their habitation in neighborhoods where middle-class Whites resided. Zoning ordinances were created to systemically “reserve middle class neighborhoods for homes with single-family homes that lower-income families...could not afford” (Rothstein, 2017, p.48).

The development of the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) in 1934 negatively impacted Blacks. The FHA's creation of racially biased policies severely limited the ability of Black to obtain mortgages and government subsidized loans to purchase property (Bell, 1992; Wilson, 1996; 2009; Moore, 2016; Rothstein, 2017; Freeman, 2019; Taylor, 2019). The FHA's launch of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) was perceived to be embedded with policies to assist applicants in their ability to purchase homes. HOLC mortgages were beneficial for homebuyers because they had low interest rates and were:

“...amortized...so when the loan was paid off, the borrower would own the home. Thus, for the first time, working- and middle-class homeowners could gain equity while their properties were still mortgaged” (Rothstein, 2017, p.64).

Nevertheless, HOLC mortgages institutionalized redlining. Redlining practices, motivated by racial bias, “severely restricted opportunities for building or even maintaining quality housing in the inner city, which in many ways set the stage for the urban blight that many Americans associate with Black neighborhoods (Wilson, 2009, p.28). Applicants interested in applying for mortgage loans from the HOLC program were required to have the neighborhood of their prospective property rated. The rating of neighborhoods included four categories: green for ‘best’; blue for ‘still desirable’; yellow for ‘definitely declining’; and red for ‘hazardous’ (Jan, 2018). Green, blue and yellow areas were typically home to predominantly White residents. African-American neighborhoods were historically rated in the fourth tier, coded red, and therein ‘redlined’, even if it was a middle-class neighborhood of single-family homes (Massey & Denton, 1993; Rothstein, 2017; Harriott, 2019). This practice made it increasingly difficult for home loan applicants to purchase homes in Black communities. “HOLC not only channeled federal funds away from Black neighborhoods but was also responsible for a much larger and

more significant disinvestment in Black areas by private institutions “(Massey & Denton, 1993, p. 52). Redlining practices supported the intentional segregation of African-Americans to specific areas within American cities.

The FHA further contributed to the segregation of neighborhoods and suburbanization of the United States by virtue of a variety of lending practices. The development of the suburbs created isolation in inner city communities. The FHA discouraged banks from providing loans to applicants in urban neighborhoods, but were plentiful in their allocation of funds to applicants in newly developed suburbs. Considering land availability in the inner city versus the sprawling suburbs, families seeking to be considered for loans inside of the city were negatively impacted. The FHA:

“favored mortgages in areas where boulevards or highways served to separate African American families from whites, stating that ‘natural or artificially established barriers will prove effective in protecting a neighborhood and the locations within it from adverse influences...including prevention of the infiltration of...lower class occupancy, and inharmonious racial groups” (Rothstein, 2017, p.65).

The creation of freeway systems supported by federal transportation policies, negatively impacted African-American neighborhoods. As highways eased the ability of workers to live outside of the city limits and travel in for work each day, individuals living in many poor neighborhoods were subsequently isolated from business districts due to their location (Perry, 2020). The Federal Highway Act of 1956 was cited as the federal policy used to justify the creation of a fourteen-lane expressway that cuts through numerous African-American neighborhoods in Chicago. The expressway, known as the Dan Ryan, conveniently created a barrier between Black and White Chicago residents. Therefore, increasing the level of

segregation and isolation experienced by poor Blacks (Wilson, 2009; Moore, 2016; Freeman, 2019).

Joblessness

The industrialization of America in the early 1900s created a substantial labor market that benefited many northern cities. This coupled with the severe discrimination and racial prejudice experienced by many Blacks in the southern states, created the great migration of millions of African-American families to northern cities (Harrison, 1991; Wilkerson, 2011; Chatelain, 2015; Moore, 2016). From 1910 to 1920, over 500,000 African-Americans left their lives in the southern states and took up residence in northern cities including Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland and New York (Massey & Denton, 1993; Moore 2016; Ewing, 2018). The industrialization of American industries granted Blacks access to low-skilled jobs in manufacturing plants (Harrison, 1991; Patterson, 2015).

While many Blacks entered the northern labor market via low-skill jobs over 100 years ago, the concentration of Blacks in low-skill labor industries continues. For example, while Blacks make up only about 13% of the general population, 40% of textile workers are African-American...This overrepresentation is typical in the low skill industry (Wilson, 2009, p.9). The overrepresentation of Blacks in low-skill positions makes laborers highly vulnerable to declining employment opportunities. The decline in demand for low-skilled labor had a “more adverse effect on Blacks than on Whites in the United States because a substantially larger proportion of African-Americans are unskilled” (Wilson, 2009, p.9).

When considering African-American men, on-going “lack of success in the job market [has been found] to [lower] a man’s self-confidence and [give] rise to feelings of resignation that frequently results in temporary, or even permanent abandonment of the job search” (Wilson as

cited by Anderson, 2008, p.55). The disappearance of employment opportunities in many inner-city communities had irrevocable consequences including concentrated poverty. This concentrated poverty is heavily due to continued disengagement in the labor market of community members due to lack of access to employment (Wilson, 2008; Fosse, 2015). In the following section, the prevalence and impact of concentrated poverty community members will be explored.

Concentrated Poverty

Racially inequitable structures and political processes contribute to concentrated poverty. Historically, discriminatory housing practices denied African-Americans access to housing markets that could have deconcentrated high poverty areas (Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1996, Harriot, 2019). “Through its actions and inactions, White America built and maintained the residential structure of the ghetto” (Massey & Denton, 1993, p.19). African-American neighborhoods experienced the most rapid increases in concentrated poverty in the 20th century (Wilson, 1996). From 1959 to 1991, the number of individuals living in poverty rose from less than one-third of the population to close to half of individuals living in many of the nation’s central cities (Wilson, 1996). In 2011, over half of the Black population was either poor (27.6%) or low income (23.7%; i.e. earning below twice the poverty rate) (Patterson, 2015). Patrick Sharkey’s multidimensional definition of disadvantaged communities creates a more comprehensive view of what social issues create disadvantages. Sharkey found that disadvantaged neighborhoods are not only communities battling poverty, but also unemployment, receipt of public assistance, segregation and single-parent, female-headed households. According to Sharkey (2012), 78 percent of all Black children (under 18 years) were raised in neighborhood communities of “high disadvantage” from 1985-2000.

The Urban Poverty and Family Life Study of 1987 under the University of Chicago Center for the Study of Urban Inequality provides extensive data on the impact of joblessness and its link to the expansion of poverty and concentrations of crime in Chicago. While dated, this study provides strong historical context on the nature of poverty and job availability within the geographical location of focus for this research - Chicago. When analyzing the rise of poverty in Chicago, the UPFLS study found that while 8 Chicago communities had rates of poverty upwards of 45 percent, twenty-five years earlier, only 2 of the same neighborhoods had poverty rates above 40 percent (Wilson, 1996). Furthermore, “Chicago had a 61.5% increase in the number of ghetto census tracts from 1980 to 1990, even though the number of poor residing in those areas increased only slightly” (Wilson, 1996, p.14). Chicago is not alone in this disproportionate increase. Numerous northern cities witnessed similar growth (Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1996).

Paul Jargowsky’s research of the sprawl of neighborhood poverty in the 1980s and 1990s further highlights the racialized nature of concentrated poverty. Jargowsky found that “6 million Blacks - one in five - lived in ghettos in 1990, up 36 percent since 1980. [Additionally], on average, the level of ghetto poverty - that is the proportion of a metropolitan area's Black population that lives in a ghetto, increased from 20.2 to 23.7 percent” (Jargowsky, 1994). Concentrated poverty impacts perception and magnitude of the problems of poverty in addition to increasing the level of marginalization and isolation experienced by individuals living in high poverty communities (Wilson, 1993). The marginalization of individuals in concentrated poverty can be linked to withdrawals of commercial institutions, which provide not only employment, but also the distribution of goods and services (Massey & Denton, 1993; Sampson, 2012; Freeman, 2019). The availability of employment opportunities and businesses that allow for

maintaining daily activities (grocery and clothing stores, etc.) are critical. However, increases in concentrated poverty observed during the periods highlighted, led to increases in segregation, “concentrated housing abandonment, crime and social disorder, pushing poor Black neighborhoods beyond the threshold of stability” (Massey & Denton, 1993, p.13). Furthermore, witnessing the social ills of poverty - drug use, unemployment, dependency on welfare and unwed parenthood - become normalized in areas with concentrated poverty (Massey & Denton, 1993; Freeman, 2019).

Social Vulnerability Unveiled in a Pandemic

The first quarter of 2020 hit the lives of Americans, especially African-Americans in a way that has left an immeasurable impact on the livelihoods of families for years to come. The global pandemic known as Coronavirus (COVID-19) brought the realities of racially biased practices in access to health care to light for all. COVID-19 is a severe acute respiratory infection causing societal impacts comparable to the Spanish flu of 1918 (Yancy, 2002). COVID-19 first gained global attention after an outbreak of respiratory illness in Wuhan, China. The virus reached pandemic levels in March of 2020 throwing countries across the globe into massive shutdowns in efforts, of varying degrees, to contain the virus and save the lives of citizens. As the disease raged across the United States, data substantiates the fact that African-Americans were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 when compared to other members of the country (Gaynor & Wilson, 2020; Moore & Pickington, 2020; Wright & Merritt, 2020; Yancy, 2020). While Blacks are just 13.4% of the US population, they represented 40% of COVID hospitalizations (CDC, 2020). In Chicago, while Blacks make up only 30% of the population, they comprised 50% of COVID-19 cases and nearly 70% of COVID-19 related deaths; deaths concentrated in 5 predominantly Black neighborhoods (Moore, Pickington & Kumar, 2020).

Social vulnerability created by structural racism can be found as a contributing factor of the disproportionate rates that Blacks contract COVID-19. Socially vulnerable communities were established through “political decisions such as redlining, gentrification, and industrialization and are less resilient in their ability to respond to and recover from natural and human-made disasters” (Gaynor and Wilson, 2000, p.832). Residents of socially vulnerable communities experience struggles in their ability to respond to COVID-19 in ways that minimize the spread of the disease and its impact. Residence in highly populated housing areas with limited access to healthy food options, and inconsistent access to private transportation all serve as factors that increase one’s susceptibility to contract COVID-19. Additionally, Black people make up large percentages of the essential workforce and frontline jobs (Deshay, 2020). Black people are disproportionately represented in employment in grocery, convenience, and drug stores (14.2%); public transit (26.0%); trucking, warehouse, and postal service (18.2%); health care (17.5%); and child care and social services (19.3%) (Gould and Wilson, 2020). While these positions did protect certain Black workers from job loss during the pandemic, it did not provide the workers the ability to work from home and social distance. Blacks not employed in the essential workforce experienced unemployment rates disproportionate to Whites. Pre-pandemic (February 2020) unemployment rates were at record lows with unemployment claims from Whites totaling 3.1% compared to Blacks at 5.8% (Gould and Wilson, 2020). However, unemployment skyrocketed in April 2020 with the Black unemployment rate more than tripling to 16.7%, compared with the White unemployment rate of 14.2% (Gould and Wilson, 2020).

Black employment insecurity was exacerbated as a result of COVID 19. If an employee was a front-line worker, they experienced a higher susceptibility of being exposed while at work, traveling to work or within the community they resided. If a Black person was not considered an

essential worker, the pandemic almost tripled their likelihood of becoming unemployed. The pandemic and related job losses have been especially trying for Blacks. This is due to a history of suffering from higher unemployment rates, lower wages, lower incomes, less savings, and significantly higher poverty rates than their White counterparts (Gould and Wilson, 2020).

Death of Black Bodies, Civil Unrest and Social Disorder

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd's neck was knelt on for eight minutes and forty-six seconds by Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin causing his death. Floyd's killing was videotaped and circulated throughout the country like wildfire. Floyd's death, arguably over twenty dollars, further highlighted the intentional death of Black bodies at the hands of law enforcement, most commonly - White law enforcement. Floyd's death brought further attention to the death of Breonna Taylor who was also killed by police officers in Louisville, Kentucky in March 2020. Floyd's death also followed the death of Ahmaud Arbery who in March 2020 was murdered by Gregory McMichael, a White, retired police officer, and his son. While all three deaths made national headlines, the video of George Floyd's murder catapulted the country into a state of unrest and lit the fire for numerous civil disturbances, protests and riots to occur.

Chicago experienced many moments of civil disobedience, protests and riots during the summer of 2020. The first of which, occurring on May 30th, is described as a "sprawling protest in downtown Chicago[which] turned violent and erupted into looting across the city for three days. By the time things calmed down, more than 1,200 people had been arrested, the National Guard had been called in and a curfew was ordered" (Chicago Tribune, 2020). While the faces showcased across the news during the Chicago protests were diverse, by and large the impact of the destruction of the multiple days of looting was most significant in Black communities on the west and south sides, thus compiling physical markers of disorder (Sampson, 2012). These

communities were ones who had yet to recover from the riots which occurred in Chicago during the civil rights movement. The re-investment in these communities had yet to amount to the various resources that were found in and near the devastation the riots caused to the Magnificent Mile. The Magnificent Mile is described as:

“the showcase of contemporary Chicago...The famed Water Tower [seen as] mostly glitter and a collage of well-to-do people, with Whites predominant among the shoppers laden with bags from the likes of Louis Vuitton, Tiffany’s, Saks Fifth Avenue, Cartier and more. Pristine stores gleam, police officers direct traffic at virtually every intersection throughout the day, and construction cranes look in the nearby distance erecting (or in anticipation of) new condos. There is an almost complete lack of what James Q. Wilson and George Kelling famously term “broken windows”, a metaphor for neighborhood disrepair and urban neglect” (Sampson, 2012, p.7).

This is very different from the predominantly Black neighborhoods on the south and west sides of the city where looting simultaneously occurred. These neighborhoods were no stranger to looting and rioting as a result of Black death. Wilkerson (2010) paints a description which eerily mirrors what these very same neighborhoods experienced post assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr in 1968.

“Over on the West Side, police sirens wailed and rocks crashed through plate-glass windows of grocers and liquor stores. Whole blocks went up in smoke in Chicago...The receiving stations of the Great Migration would burn all through the night after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. And when it was over, some neighborhoods, the old places the migrants had packed into when the Migration began, would look like Berlin after an airstrike during the Second World War...The typical rioter was a teenager or

young adult, a lifelong resident of the city in which he rioted...Seeking fuller participation in the social order and the material benefits enjoyed by the majority of American citizens" (p.409).

Disturbingly enough, what the rioters were seeking in 1968 are not very different from what Chicago rioters were seeking in 2020. Thus, shedding a blaring light on how far Black people have come in terms of their ability to engage in and share the benefits afforded to other, White, members of society. Of great significance is how the physical markers of the riots - broken windows, graffiti, garbage strewn about the street, burned out businesses - contribute to the already existing physical indicators of disorder. What is further problematic, is that physical indicators of disorder, when multiplied, contribute to continued disinvestment in affected communities due to societal perception of what occurs in the community and the residents who reside there - which are oftentimes racialized. Wilson and Kelling (1982) coined the 'broken windows' theory as an explanation of how visual cues signal signs of disorder. The theory argues how such disorders can attract further disorders such as crime, lack of community intervention in crime prevention, etc. Social disorder "changes the calculus of prospective home buyers, real estate agents, insurance agents, investors, the police, politicians... and may also dampen the effectiveness of residents seeking neighborhood improvement, and it may discourage activism" (Sampson, 2012, p.78).

Structural racism is intricately linked to social disorder within the Chicago riots and looting by virtue of the disinvestment that already existed in many of the impacted communities. Chicago Alderman Burnett summarized this reality while coordinating a clean-up effort in the 27th ward after the 2020 riots. "I was four years old in 68 when they burnt up the west side. And it's taken 26 years of my lifetime to be able to try and help to almost get it built back up"

(Nakayama, 2020). While many stores on the Magnificent Mile were opened within days post clean-up, many stores on the west and south side may not return, further contributing to the visual cues of disorder which already exist.

Violence as a Byproduct of Structural Racism

It has been established that violence tends to concentrate in very small geographic units or hot spots and that 3 - 4% of blocks within a city account for nearly half of all its crime (Weisburg, 2012). This debunks a very racially influenced myth that crime permeates every area within the south and west side of Chicago. In Chicago, violent crime does exist in neighborhoods inclusive of West Garfield Park, Englewood, North Lawndale and Roseland. However, it is essential to unveil the racist practices that created and sustain the conditions for violence to occur and continue (Vargas, 2016).

How violence is concentrated within particular communities is critical when discussing community exposure to violence. While Chicago “does clock in more murders than any other U.S. city and is more violent than New York or Los Angeles...Chicago is smaller and much more racially segregated than both of [these] cities” (Moore, 2016, p.161). When analyzing neighborhood crime data, it has been found that higher concentrations of violence occur within particular blocks of a specific neighborhood community. Violence does not occur everywhere in Chicago and very rarely occurs at random. Chicago is especially unique in the manner in which the city is segregated in many areas along the lines of race and class. This reality creates a different context when comparing Chicago to other large metropolitan cities within this country such as New York and Los Angeles.

The trauma experienced by Chicago youth highlights the “failure of current policy to address important quality of life issues for youth of color. [This failure] remains a substantial

barrier to their full civic participation, educational achievement, and healthy adulthood” (Hart and Atkins as cited by Ginwright, Cammarota & Noguera, 2005, p.24). According to Buka (2001), “as many as one third of children in urban neighborhoods have witnessed a homicide” (as cited by Ginwright, 2016, p. 2).

For young people growing up in marginalized communities with higher rates of violence, analysis of the social and economic conditions they experience through a lens grounded in structural racism is critical. This lens allows for an analysis of the “formal and informal policies and practices as well as cultural norms and stereotypes that contribute to racial disparities. [Furthermore, this] lens helps identify factors...that contribute to racially disparate outcomes” (Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, 2005, p.13). In July 2020, Chicago experienced a nearly 139% increase in murders when compared to the previous year (Chicago Sun Times, 2020). The impact of the direct or vicarious witnessing of this violence is evident via the decreasing mental stability of our young people. Suicide and homicide are the second and third leading causes of death among youth ages 15-19 (Center for Disease Control, 2018). This is evidence of the struggle youth are experiencing in their attempts to grapple with the violence they directly and indirectly witness.

Structural racism is intimately linked to exorbitant rates of violence and trauma experienced by youth in marginalized communities. According to Farmer (2004), “on a broader canvas, violence can be understood as actions from systems that injure young people” (Farmer as cited by Ginwright, 2016, p.3). Many of the socio-economic systems under which families in marginalized communities rely and participate in daily (access to employment opportunities, public education, public safety, and financial support via public aid, and public health assistance via Medicaid for example) serve as indicators of their decreased value when compared to the

experiences of their higher socio-economic standing peers. “Structural issues such as poverty, unemployment, underfunded schools, incarceration, lack of access to quality health care, and poor-quality housing are the root causes of violence and causes of trauma. Violence, at its root [cause], is not simply experienced as an individual phenomenon, but rather [represents] the collective experience shared by young people and their families. These structural issues contribute to socially toxic environments” (Garbarino cited by Ginwright, 2016, p.3).

Ginwright (2016) contends that “socially toxic environments are environments like neighborhoods and schools lack of opportunities, blocked access, constrained resources, unclear pathways to a better life can erode " (p.3) relationships which might support improvements in the experiences of the larger neighborhood collective. Therefore, when 800 young people are killed in predominantly African-American and Latino communities, their deaths reflect a lack of access to prosocial and upwardly, financially mobile resources. Resources which inspire community members to see beyond their current, economically limited view are key to minimize feelings youth may feel of “meaningless and hopelessness” (Ginwright, 2016, p.4). When feelings as these grow they have the ability to manifest into socially destructive and even illegal behaviors. Anderson (2008) finds that for young Black men in particular, “living in areas of concentrated poverty, still shadowed by the legacy of slavery and second-class citizenship, [leave] too many... young Black men...trapped in a horrific cycle that includes active discrimination, unemployment, poverty, crime, prison and early death” (p.3). Structural racism is intricately linked to the segregation, joblessness, poverty and crime experienced by individuals in marginalized communities.

Joblessness and Black Youth

The deindustrialization of numerous urban cities caused irrevocable damage to the availability of employment opportunities for many members of marginalized communities. Structural racism contributed to the decrease of employment opportunities available to low-income communities. The lack of employment opportunities in some urban communities created a vacuum where many members of low-income communities chose alternative and possibly, illegal means to survive (Anderson, 2008; Patterson, 2015; Vargas, 2016). “The economic restructuring of post-industrial cities left urban communities bereft of stable employment opportunities. Consequently, urban residents experience severe social isolation that produces self-destructive behaviors and reproduces values that foster hopelessness” (Ginwright, Cammarota and Noguera, 2010, p.27). The economic restructuring is further complicated by the issue of race and the availability of jobs deemed desirable. Waldinger (1999) argues that the low-skilled jobs available to marginalized populations, Blacks and immigrants namely, were available as Whites fled urban areas as well-paying jobs were also being lost to industrialization. These jobs, deemed undesirable due to the low wages provided, could have been perceived as entryways into better paid blue-collar jobs later. However, once passed by Black workers, immigrants “established themselves in these niches” (Patterson, 2015, p.121). This created a division of labor for future Black youth workers who may have been willing to take these jobs if they were not excluded based on “racial discrimination on the part of White employers” (Patterson, 2015 p.122). Holzer (1996) suggests that these early decisions by some Black workers, coupled with a perceived willingness of members of immigrant communities to accept lower wage positions created prolonged unemployment by Black workers. Periods of prolonged unemployment eventually led to perceived unemployability and deep resentment felt by Black

youth which intensified and contributed to involvement in illegal street culture (Holzer, 1996). Holzer's argument of Black youth resentment coupled with feelings of hopelessness highlighted earlier can be argued as fuel for acts of violence and other socially maladaptive behaviors executed by Black youth on members of the community.

Cohen brings a local lens in terms of the impact of joblessness on Black Chicago youth. Cohen (2010) highlights the highly violent and traumatic experiences of Chicago youth to exist as:

“collateral damages that result from the absence of low-skilled, living-wage jobs; educational systems that are uncommitted and under resourced to teach and meet the needs of young Black people; the transformation of what was once our limited welfare state into a neoliberal project with an emphasis on privatization and personal responsibility; the move toward incarceration in place of employment; the explosion of technology and its adjoining hyper-consumerism; and the emergence of a dominant rhetoric of a supposedly color-blind society, which asserts that talk of system or structural racism is the purview of ‘victims’ “(p.2).

Cohen (2010) highlights that while “young Whites...believe that racism is no longer a major problem in the United States” (p.8), young Blacks are gaining a greater sense of the structural challenges they face. The structural challenges, or invisible knapsack - similar to Peggy McIntosh's (1989) articulation of this when speaking of social privileges afforded to Whites, carried by Black youth are extensive. Cohen (2010) offers that it is increasingly common knowledge that:

“Black youth suffer disproportionately from poverty, HIV/AIDS, childhood obesity, incarceration, and unemployment...That one in six Black men [were] incarcerated by 21;

that of Black males born today it is expected that one in three will spend time in prison at some point in their lives; that on any given day one in eight Black men in their twenties is in jail...Black women are three times as likely as White women to be in jail or in prison, and 30 percent of the women incarcerated under state or federal jurisdiction are Black” (p.9).

Finally, Cohen (2010) highlights the failure of current policy to address the quality of life needs of African-American youth with the following:

“We must also face the fact that morally the country has failed many young Black people who are more likely to live in poverty, who are at risk when they go to school because of uncontrolled violence in their neighborhoods, who when they show up at school are less likely to graduate than their White counterparts, and who if they graduate will face higher rates of unemployment, even with a college degree” (p.10).

Structural racism created the stage on which racially and socio-economically marginalized communities illustrate the crimes against one another that create the disproportionate rates of violence witnessed and experienced by youth. These experiences are what spurn the complex traumas experienced by youth, therefore increasing the weight of the invisible knapsacks they take to school each day in their attempt to learn.

Youth Exposure to Violence

As discussed, decreased employment opportunities and feelings of hopelessness have been found to contribute to illegal behaviors and acts of violence. Children living in communities with concentrated poverty disproportionately witness acts of violence. More than 6 out of 10 children in the United States are exposed to some form of violence in the neighborhood...or

within the home; half of these children experience poly-victimization, or exposure to multiple forms of violence (Santiago & Galster, 2014). Voisin, et. al (2011) found the five most common forms of violence exposures to include physical attacks, fighting, incidents involving the police, gun violence and murders. The gender of youth witnesses and victims of violence has been found to disproportionately impact young men. African-American males are “9 times more likely to be victims of homicide compared to White men, 6 times higher than African-American women and 26 times higher than White women” (Centers for Disease Control as cited by Voisin, 2011, p.2484).

The violence that permeates particular blocks within neighborhood communities further compounds the stress that exists for those living in poor socio-economic conditions. In Chicago, “violent crime persists in pockets of neighborhoods like Little Village, Englewood, West Garfield Park and Fuller Park” (Vargas, 2016, p.5). This reality is key despite monikers like “Chiraq” which creates a false narrative of an ominous threat of danger across the city as a whole. Additionally, the term contributes to communities being stigmatized as war-torn which is a by-product of White colonialism and rationalization for gentrification. The neighborhoods referenced and other neighborhoods with higher rates of violence are predominantly on the south and west sides of the city and struggle with poverty, segregation and unemployment. Moore (2016) argues:

“The most brutal enclaves of the city are the most troubled Chicago neighborhoods characterized by excessive unemployment, blight, food deserts, underperforming schools, high rates of preventable diseases, lack of economic development. Each year thousands of adults return to just a handful of Black Chicago zip

codes after they get out of prison. A large pool of parolees living in those communities adds a collective burden to those under resourced locales” (p.161).

Children living in the ‘most brutal enclaves’ have an increased likelihood of witnessing the negative social ills of concentrated poverty or falling victim to the violence which exists in the community.

From January to August of 2020, over thirty-eight juveniles were shot and killed in Chicago. One child’s death, nine-year-old Janari Hicks, brought widespread media attention. Janari was shot and killed while playing with friends outside his Cabrini Green townhome. Cabrini Green in the late twentieth century became a “national symbol of the high-rise containment of the urban poor, housing over four thousand predominantly Black families...synonymous with gangs, drugs, misery and murder” (Sampson, 2012, p.414). The high rise was demolished in 2003, displacing thousands of families. Some families who re-housed in the townhomes surrounding the former towers. Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown pleaded for Chicagoans to not “get used to hearing about children being gunned down in Chicago every weekend” (Fry, 2020). As Janari was killed while playing with friends, his death exposed his peers to just one of the negative social ills of concentrated poverty - gun violence. This witnessing of social ills takes many different forms. Children from low socio-economic communities are more likely to experience stressors:

“...inclusive of family chaos, conflict, violence and dissolution, victimization/incarceration and/or death of a family member, and neglect and/or maltreatment than children raised in more affluent communities. They are also prone to live through financial instability, residential instability and/or homelessness, parental

mental illness and/or substance abuse” (Kiser, 2007, p.212).

Childhood adverse experiences as these pose long-standing impacts on the mental and physical health of an individual into adulthood (Harris, 2018). Childhood reactions to adverse experiences and trauma contribute to the display of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. As these adverse experiences are often not singular in their presentation in a child’s life, many children’s symptoms manifest into complex trauma syndrome. Symptoms of complex trauma affect a child’s attention, concentration and memory, [and] often disrupts learning and skill development (Kiser, 2007; Ford and Courtois, 2009; Souers and Hall, 2016).

Section II: Reality and Responses of Educators

Educating Youth with Complex Trauma

Trauma experienced by students significantly impacts their respective school communities. Exposure to traumatic events has wide-ranging effects on the functioning of the student. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2017), traumatic events:

“...cause increased anxiety, depression, symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, difficulty managing [and establishing] relationships, and most important for educators, difficulty with school and learning... When children and youth experience traumatic events, they often adopt coping strategies to survive these difficult life situations. Some strategies are adaptive and foster a sense of safety. For example, avoiding a route where gun violence is likely to occur. However, a similar strategy in a different situation may instead be maladaptive, such as avoiding going to school for an extended period of time because school has become a reminder of gun violence” (p.2).

Schools located within communities where students have high exposure to trauma must incorporate teaching and culture systems which are trauma responsive. Daily routines and

systems that acknowledge that students may arrive at school highly aroused due to exposure to violence are critical to ensuring the most productive learning environment. Absent these practices, youth grappling with the impact of exposure to trauma can begin disengaging from school as it becomes a trigger of their trauma.

For educators servicing children grappling with complex trauma, the aforementioned symptoms (anxiety, depression, isolation) further complicate the often-difficult realities which already exist in public schooling. The academic needs of youth who experience complex trauma are unique. The shift of schooling to remote and distance learning for most American youth since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the trauma experienced by children. Schools provide not only academic instruction for students, but also serve a protective function for the social, emotional and mental well-being for many children (Hoffman and Miller, 2020). School closures upended the lives of many children and their families in addition to forcing many educators to create methods for educating youth in an equitable fashion, absent an equitable distribution of resources. Prior to the pandemic, many schools educating primarily low-income Students of color already struggled with fewer curricular, material and human resources to meet student academic needs (Owens, Reardon & Jenks, 2016; Hoffman and Miller, 2020). This inequity was exacerbated for many of these same children as access to items necessary to create successful remote learning environments were non-existent - access to reliable internet, home environment void of distractions, consistent adult supervision to assist with staying on task. Furthermore, during school closure students and families are experiencing a range of stressors. Hoffman and Miller (2020) find salient stressors to include:

“...the death and illness of family members; social distancing from friends, extended family, teachers and colleagues; exposure to frightening news information; parental job

stress and job loss; and parents being forced into the role of educators while either working from home or providing essential services to the community. Students' health and mental health needs are going to be even more acute in the wake of the pandemic given the social, emotional, and economic stress that are preceding concomitantly" (p. 303).

Just as school provides social emotional support for students, it also provides protective factors which are at risk during school closures. Teachers and school staff are mandated reporters and seeing students daily allows for acknowledgement of shifts in student behavior or physical markers of abuse to be noted. These support prompt referrals to be made to mental health or child protective service personnel. Remote learning does grant some visual cues to be noted, but not to the degree of in-person instruction.

According to Ludwig and Warren (2009), youth who witness violence report higher rates of post-traumatic stress, depression, distress, aggression, and externalizing behavior. These symptoms frequently disrupt current functioning and may influence a young person's future expectations. Furthermore, research shows correlation between decreases in achievement tests scores significantly below other children when African-American children witness violence (Ginwright, 2016). This compounded with the fact that "untreated trauma can predict lower total verbal and IQ scores on standardized achievement tests (Shakey as cited by Ginwright, 2016, p.3) highlight the need for increased academic support and interventions to students impacted by trauma. It is critical that adults who support young people impacted by trauma have the resources and skills necessary to best support them. Adequate provision of resources remains an issue of significant concern within public education.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is composed of over six hundred elementary and high schools which educate just over three hundred and sixty thousand students. Student demographics are as follows: 36.6% African-American; 46.7% Latino; 10.5% White; 4.1% Asian (Chicago Public Schools, 2022). 20.4% of CPS teachers are African-American, 21% are Latino and 50% are White. During the 2016-2018 academic years, CPS endured multiple budget cuts to fill a funding gap of over two hundred fifteen million dollars. Though each local school budget faced a .9% decrease in funding on average; some schools servicing a higher proportion of African-American and Latino students - faced budget cuts of up to 1.8% (Perez, 2017). Issues of race are inextricably linked to the impacts experienced by students and families as a result of budgetary cuts. Arguably, funding discrepancies contribute to the widening gap experienced by African-American students compared to White peers as adequate educational supports are not in place for students to thrive academically. Carter (2013) offers that “the average White 13-year-old reads at a higher level and performs better in math than the average Black or Latino 17-year-old. Furthermore, one in five African-American students will fail a grade in elementary or secondary school, compared to the overall rate of one in ten” (p.2). Ginwright, Cammarota and Noguera (2005) argue that disparities in achievement rates between African-American and White students highlight “failure of so many urban school districts to prepare young people academically” (p.24). Proper allocation of school funding is critical to best meet the needs of students from racially and socio-economically communities. Carter (2013) contends:

“...talent is being wasted, particularly among those living in poverty and in disadvantaged communities of color. Children in these communities are not reaching their full potential and are not “closing the gap” in achievement precisely because they are not receiving equitable and meaningful opportunities

to reach that potential. Recent policy has attempted to solve problems on the cheap, looking for magic beans and silver bullets instead of investing in key community needs and classroom resources necessary to create engaging support learning and learners (p.3).

While policymakers appear to absolve themselves from ensuring equitable learning opportunities exist to support the academic success for African-American children, the teachers who tirelessly serve them are individually held accountable for poor student performance on high stakes tests.

However, in order for marginalized students to achieve academic outcomes similar to their White, middle-to-upper class peers, “the conditions and resources necessary to create and maintain a system of excellence that offers universal opportunity” must exist (Carter, 2013, p.4). Absent this, marginalized students will continue to remain in “a downward cycle, facing poverty-related obstacles outside of school” (Carter, 2013, p.4). This downward cycle is further complicated by constant turnover of school staff due to their succumbing to the pressures of working in a high needs, high stress environment.

Burnout and compassion fatigue are significant areas of concern for educators, especially educators of color (Koenig, A., S. Rodger & J. Specht, 2017). “58% of teachers reported feeling stressed ‘all the time’ and a few times a week’, compared with only 36% of the general working public” (Koenig, A., S. Rodger & J. Specht 2017). For those who choose to enter the field, 46% of teachers are likely to leave the profession in their first 5 years citing job dissatisfaction as the significant reason for their departure (Hoffman, Palladino and Barnett (2007); Koenig, Rodger and Specht (2017); Ingersoll, May and Collins (2017). It can be argued that numerous duties within a teacher’s job description can cause dissatisfaction ranging from lesson plan submission, to a disconnect in pedagogical approaches of their building principal. However, I argue in this

research that for teachers working in communities with concentrated poverty, feelings of dissatisfaction lie more as a result of the impact of structural racism.

The national rate for teacher turnover is 8%, in low performing high needs schools the rate surges to 20% (Lee, 2018). In Chicago, the attrition rate is 18% with a growing number of teachers seeking employment in suburban districts (Lee, 2018). The historical residential segregation of African-American families juxtaposed with a large-scale movement of families to the suburbs in many parts of the country, creates high rates of school segregation for African-American students (Sampson, 2012; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 2009). Double segregation by both poverty status and race are now the realities of many African-American public-school students. Nationally, the “typical Black student is...in a school where almost two out of every three classmates (64 percent) are low-income, nearly double the level in schools of the typical White or Asian student (37 percent and 39 percent, respectively)” (Orfield, Kucsera & Siegel-Hawley, 2012, p.10).

Section III: Contributions of Black Educators

Nationally, the educator workforce does not reflect individuals with racial demographics similar to many school districts servicing low-income, minority students. Currently, Black educators represent only 6.7% of the educator workforce (Taie and Goldring, 2017). In Chicago, while 20% of teachers are African-American, 50% are White compared to 36.6% of African-American students (CPS, 2020). Research indicates that Black teachers are particularly motivated to work with Students of color (Easton-Brooks, 2014). Irvine (2002) found that Black teachers tend to see education, specifically the education of Black children, as a ‘calling’. Similarly, Black teachers have been found to believe that teaching is community work, synonymous with taking on a personal responsibility for the education and well-being of Black

students (Casey, 1993; Dixson and Dingus, 2008; Lewis, 2016). “Positioning themselves as school- and community-based advocates, [African-American] teachers believed that they played a crucial role in the social, political, and economic advancement of the larger African-American community” (Dixson and Dingus, 2008, p.823). This can also be recognized as a humanistic commitment that Black teachers bring to their work with students. Therefore, it can be argued that Black teachers carry an additional, self-imposed emotional weight and sense of urgency to their work with students (Lewis, 2016).

The cultural synchronicity that Black teachers have with Black students is found to provide an advantage to them over White teachers in advancing the academic outcomes and overall school experience of Students of color (Irvine, 2002). The connections that Black teachers have with Black students via a shared cultural experience is also found to support their ability to help students build connections between their lived experiences and academic content (Easton-Brooks, 2013; Perry, 2020). For many Black teachers, “teaching provide(s) the opportunity to heal souls, [and impart] encouraging words for spirits wounded by racial discrimination, poverty and miseducation across generations” (Dixson and Dingus, 2008, p.827). Black teachers have been found to positively impact student achievement when compared to teachers working across differences (Hanushek, 1992; Evans, 1992; Easton-Brooks, 2013; Farinde, Allen and Lewis, 2016; Perry, 2020). Furthermore, research has found that African-American teachers prefer to work in urban environments and buildings with higher numbers of African-American students (Fitchett, Hopper, Eyal, McCarthy and Lambert, 2017).

In realizing the additional weight that Black teachers bring to their work with students, the emotional toil of working in high stress, under-resourced environments with students grappling with complex trauma can prove difficult. Research finds that teacher exposure and

response to student trauma has the potential to impact the teacher's own "cognitive schemas, or beliefs, expectations and assumptions about [themselves] and others" (McCann and Pearlman, 1990, p.132). Absent a look into the impacts of traumatic exposure on Black teachers and the structures and systems that sustain them in the work, downward trends in teacher attrition rates and availability of Black applicants may continue. This has the potential to contribute to the decline in academic outcomes for many Black students who thrive within the relationships and classrooms their Black teachers create.

Summary

The social contexts under which many Black educators work is highly influenced by racist practices and policies. The legacy of slavery and the institution of racially based policies and systems continue permeate US social systems. Members of many socio-economically marginalized communities around the city remain impacted by racially biased practices at rates disproportionate to others who have been able to make more socio-economic gains. This literature review provides an analysis of the social contexts many Black educators find themselves working in their pursuit of creating positive academic outcomes for Black youth. COVID-19 and the deaths of numerous Black people which incited rioting throughout many urban cities only amplified the already tense environments Black educators are working within.

The humanistic commitment and cultural synchronicity that Black educators bring to their work with students supports the increased academic outcomes for Black youth. Considering the declining rates of Black educators in the field of public education, it is critical that the experiences of educators seeking to work within marginalized communities are highlighted to inform the support needed to sustain them in the field. This notion is the basis of my research. In

Chapter three, I detail the process through which five K-12 Black, public school educators were selected to participate in this research study.

Chapter III: Methodology

Public schools are the heartbeat of many neighborhoods standing as a beacon of light for the advancement of the community via its youngest members. Schools provide physical and emotional safety from the perils of life which, for some, lie right outside the building. For schools located in communities grappling with the generational effects of structural racism, violence is a byproduct (Harrell, 2000; Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton and Freitas, 2010; Sackett, 2016). Youth exposure to trauma stands as a reality many educators confront in their pursuit of creating academic environments conducive to success for their students. The efforts required of educators working with low-income students are substantial. Koenig, Rodger and Specht (2017) argue that teachers are challenged daily to undertake many roles inclusive of “being a motivator, manager, counselor, school leader, resource provider, mentor..., [an] active agent for change for...their students, and [educators] of the future leaders of tomorrow” (p.1). Currently, there is an opportunity in research to amplify the voices of educators working in particular communities grappling with the impacts of structural racism. Academic research and discussion on how educators create environments conducive for academic success is critical.

Black Teachers on Teaching: Critical Race Theory as a Theoretical Lens

My research will explore the experiences of Chicago-based, Black public-school educators. The participating educators work in predominantly Black communities. This research presents their personal narratives on how they create supportive academic spaces for students to thrive, while highlighting the barriers they and their students face on the road to success in school and life. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the theoretical framework that grounds this study. Ultimately, I am seeking to shed light on the realities confronting public educators which, I argue, are reflective of structural racism. Additionally, I seek to highlight how the

strength of these educators' personal relationships with students contribute to the academic success they bring out of their students.

Well-being for the purposes of this study will be qualified to include educator retention – specifically retention in schools housed in communities with higher rates of violence. The findings of this research could impact the type of professional development and support offered and targeted to teachers serving students in particular communities. The study could also lend itself to adjustments to courses offered to pre-service teachers during their studies. Lastly, the study will build upon existing participant knowledge on the impact of exposure to trauma on Black teachers.

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), qualitative research “attempts to understand individuals [and] groups...in their natural settings in ways that are contextualized and reflect the meaning that people make out of their own experiences” (p.2). Qualitative research provides an understanding of a particular topic to guide an increased knowledge on a particular narrative (Moore, 2009). This method best supports deeper understanding of how educators experience working and supporting students in socio-economically and racially marginalized Chicago communities. The recursive nature of qualitative research will support my analysis of educator experiences. Moreover, a qualitative research method will allow for the uncovering of the intersecting issues – economic, political and social-emotional - which maintain the conditions that educators experience. I argue that these issues are disproportionately experienced by African-American educators at increased rates due to the intersection.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) will be used as both a theoretical and methodological approach for this study. Use of CRT as a lens will support analysis of the intersections of race, class and gender which exist for Black teachers working in low-income, Chicago communities.

The racially influenced experiences that Black educators bring to their work with students provide a common understanding between teacher and student. However, when considering the long history of racially based discrimination experienced by individuals living in low income communities in Chicago, CRT also allows for a deeper analysis of teacher experience. CRT provides the theoretical framework necessary to unpack the role race places in perpetuating social and educational disparities. Derrick Bell, Jr. (1995) argues for educational equity and improved performance for “all children who have been the objects of discrimination” (p.5). Members of low-income Chicago communities are historically negatively impacted by structural racism and discrimination.

The origins of CRT lie at the hands of various activists and scholars dedicated to addressing the relationship between race and power. CRT aims to “reexamine the terms by which race and racism have been negotiated in American consciousness, and to recover and revitalize the radical tradition of race-consciousness among African-Americans” (Crenshaw, 1995, p.xiv). CRT theorists argue that racist structures are embedded within the psychology, culture and way of being in American society (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, 2009). CRT is born out of legal scholarship and is grounded by two interests. The interests include understanding how the subordination of People of color as a result of White supremacy was created and maintained. It is also grounded in understanding that law and racial power are required to create change (Crenshaw, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The history of CRT reflects a movement amongst legal scholars to develop a language that critiqued law, racism and social power. Use of CRT is essential to this research as it “uncovers the ongoing dynamics of racialized power, and its embeddedness in practices and values which have been shown [to be] explicit, formal manifestations of racism” (Crenshaw, 1995). When considering the racially

based structures and policies which create many of the difficult experiences some educators confront daily, a CRT lens is essential. CRT scholars argue that a racial lens can be helpful to understanding the educational barriers that impact People of Color (Taylor, 2009).

CRT is a theoretical framework and analytical tool used to acknowledge and interrupt racially biased systems and structures. The tenets of CRT include: 1) counter-storytelling; 2) permanence as racism, 3) Whiteness as property; 4) interest convergence; 5) critique of liberalism; 6) intersectionality; and 7) commitment to social justice (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Love, 2019). Counter-storytelling, permanence of racism and commitment to social justice will be the tenets of primary emphasis in this research. I am choosing to focus on these three because they most strongly support the foundation of my research.

Counter-storytelling

While CRT was borne out of legal doctrine, methods of storytelling and narratives have served as tools to share various ideas of how discrimination against People of Color are perpetuated and justified through institutionalized policies and ways of being (Delgado, 1989; Harris, 1994; Parker & Lynn 2002). The framework of counter-storytelling validates the racially biased experiences of marginalized members of society. When considering the experiences of African-American educators serving students in predominantly low-income African-American communities, this framework is critical as it supports the narratives supporting students' marginalized experiences. Critical race scholars find the lived experiences of People of Color to be of value and essential to understanding and analyzing the impact of racial discrimination and oppression in this country (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002 & DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Solorzano & Yosso (2002) argue that "counter-story telling developed as both a method of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told... (those on the margins of society), and as a tool for

analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant course” (p.232). This tenet is considered fundamental to using a critical race theory in educational research as it pushes for discourse to focus on the racialized and classed experiences of People of Color as sources of strength rather than deficits (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; McCoy & Dirks, 2015). Counterstories provide alternatives to the dominant discourse in educational research as they provide “multiple and conflicting models of understanding social and cultural identities” (Stanley, 2007, p.14). Furthermore, counterstories contradict a historically deficit informed narrative regarding People of Color that silences and distorts our experience (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Counter-storytelling serves as a critical foundation for analysis of the narratives shared by research participants as they work to support communities that have been marginalized as a result of continued disinvestment. Furthermore, when considering the research participants, it is key to remain cognizant of how storytelling aligns to the manner in which African-Americans disseminate traditions and key information between generations (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014). Use of participant narratives will mimic the traditions embedded in their cultural experiences. Counter-storytelling as a grounding tenant of my research will allow participants to reflect on the manner in which they experience their work environments, heavily impacted by structural racism, the relationships created with students and the academic environments conducive to success that they consistently work to create.

Racism Permanence

In educational research, CRT allows for race to not be situated as variable, but rather pushes for an understanding of “how race and racism intersect with gender, class, sexuality,

language, etc. as structural and institutional factors that impact the everyday experiences of People of Color" (Malagon, Huber & Velez, 2009, p.256). Permanence of racism stands as a tenet of focus for this research as it acknowledges that racism is a permanent aspect of and influence on the political, social and economic experiences of People Color (Bell, 1992; Taylor, 2009; Hiraldo, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) argue racism to be "above institutional power, a form of power, People of Color - non-whites - have never possessed" (p.61). The tenet highlights the ingrained influence that racism has on the lives of People of Color while being invisible to many individuals not of Color (Taylor, 2009; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). White privilege helps maintain racism and whiteness as a category of privilege. Tatum (1997) reminds us that "every social indicator, from slavery to life expectancy, reveals the advantage of being White" (p.8). Therefore, recognition of permanence of racism as a central tenet of focus in my application of CRT is essential. The fact that racism exists and negatively impacts the experiences and lives of Black people must remain of focus. Use of another methodology other than CRT could distort the experiences of People of Color whose lives are impacted by racism daily; as they are those "at the bottom of society's well" (Bell, 1992, p.vi). The communities of focus for this research are heavily impacted by racially biased systems and initiatives that contribute to and sustain continued disinvestment in the community. Therefore, utilization of this tenet is critical and aligns accordingly.

This tenet will support the theoretical framing of the narratives offered by African-American educators as their experiences are not happenstance; but rather a byproduct of structural racism. Racism must be viewed realistically, as a knowingly, dominant construct of America (Bell, 1992; Taylor, 2009). An example of this tenet lives in the disproportionate rates of poverty that exist within predominantly Black Chicago neighborhoods. Structural racism

created policies and permits behaviors that exclude black families from access to resources afforded to individuals across difference residing in different zip codes. The use of this tenet will allow for educators to analyze their experience juxtaposed to the realities of the communities they serve and the educational experiences they seek to create for their students.

Commitment to Social Justice

Critical Race scholarship is dedicated to eradicating racial injustice and inequity in institutional spaces like schools (McCoy & Dirk, 2015). Commitment to social justice is essential to providing voice to the disenfranchised and resisting the “racialized and gendered inequality and injustice [therefore creating] access to social, political, economic and cultural resources” (McCoy & Dirk, 2015, p.14). Bell (2013) defines social justice as:

“full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (p.21)

An emphasis on social justice supports the larger goal of CRT to eradicate racism and, for the purposes of this research, its role within education. This study will reflect a commitment to social justice through the narratives shared by educators on what sustains them to work in their respective schools. Black educators have been found to have a humanistic commitment which sustains them in their work with Black children (Casey, 1993; Howard, 2003). Therefore, commitment to social justice will be evident in research participant narratives regarding creating academic spaces where students can thrive. Parker & Villalando (2007) argue that the purpose of Critical Race Theory is to “unearth what is taken for granted when analyzing race and privilege, as well as the profound patterns of exclusion that exist in U.S. society” (p.521). Additionally,

CRT can be leveraged to “uncover the ingrained societal disparities that support a system of privilege and oppression” (Hiraldo, 2013, p.54).

Utilization of critical race methodology will allow for the discovery of answers based on the methodological, conceptual and theoretical questions aligned to the experiences of marginalized groups and communities (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Structural racism has plagued Black communities in Chicago for generations. This research will analyze the narratives of Black educators working in black communities in an effort to identify trends in the participants' experiences creating successful academic spaces for Black children to experience success and thrive.

This research study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how Black educators experience creating academic spaces for student success while working in communities impacted by structural racism. The research study is dependent upon the narratives shared by participants who are working with students living in marginalized Chicago communities. Seidman (2013) argues that interviewing is the “primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process...through the experience of the individual people...who make up the organization (p.9). Educator reflections on the conditions they work within to create academically safe and productive spaces for students will be analyzed through semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview method allows one to understand “the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of [their] experiences, and to uncover their lived world” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.1). I seek to amplify the voices of black educators working within marginalized communities and capture the experiences offered.

The focus of my research are educators working within socio-economically and racially marginalized communities housed on Chicago’s Westside. These communities are

predominantly comprised of Black and Brown residents. Interview participants are employees of neighborhood public schools. Neighborhood (open-enrollment) schools are environments which lack restrictions on the students eligible for enrollment as long as they live within predetermined, district-set address boundaries. This is critical as it further intensifies the experience of educators working with a concentrated community of students who share experiences by virtue of their neighborhood. The sample size includes five participants. Patton (2002) argues that what matters most is the quality, not the quantity. The sample size supports my ability to strategically choose participants based on their individual racial demographic as well as the racial and socioeconomic composition of their school. Schools where the employees work comprise over 75% of students in receipt of free or reduced lunch. Additionally, the schools serve over 90% students of color. These demographics were chosen as they increase the likelihood of identifying themes regarding the lived realities of educators working within low-income, racially marginalized communities.

Research Method

This research study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how Black educators experience creating academic spaces for student success while working in communities impacted by structural racism. Qualitative research provides an understanding of a particular topic to guide an increased knowledge on a particular narrative (Moore, 2009). It aligns with the goal of my research to increase collective understanding of how educator professional experiences are influenced as a result of structural racism. This research study is dependent upon the narratives shared by participants who are working with students living in marginalized communities. I seek to amplify the voices of Black educators working within marginalized communities and capture the varied experiences offered.

Storytelling, along with personal stories and counter-storytelling, are used as vehicles to better understand People of Color's experience in education (Liu, 2009). Interviews will be used as the method to garner participant narratives (stories) regarding their work with students. Seidman (2013) argues interviewing as the "primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process...through the experience of the individual people...who make up the organization (p.9). Interviews serve as an essential, flexible and powerful method as they support the participants ability to recount their experiences, most specifically for this work, with forms of racism (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Qu & Dumay, 2011; Rabione, 2011). Educator reflections on the conditions they work within to create academically safe and productive spaces for students will be analyzed through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are arguably the most widely used interviewing format in qualitative research (Dicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured interview method allows one to understand "the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of [their] experiences, and to uncover their lived world" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.1). Semi-structured interviews, as opposed to structured and unstructured interviews, aligns best with this research as it is:

"accessible...intelligible and, more important, capable of disclosing important and often hidden facets of human and organizational behavior... The method provides the opportunity for participants to provide responses in their own terms and in the way they think and use language. It proves to be especially valuable if the researchers are to understand the way the interviewees perceive the social work under study" (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 246).

The nature of questioning permitted within the semi-structured interview is a key component to this research method. The flexibility of the method supports the discovery and elaboration of information from participants which might not have otherwise been possible in structured interviews. The method permits the use of key questions which define the topic of focus, but allows the researcher to shift in order to follow an idea or participant response in more detail (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).

Semi-structured interviews require attentiveness to the development of rapport with interviewees. This rapport will allow for increased levels of transparency from the interviewee balanced with the need for increased sensitivity from the interviewer to create greater levels of trust from the participant (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The development of rapport is a critical component of successful semi-structured interviews (Douglass, 1985; Brown & Danaker, 2019). When engaging with participants, the researcher will remain attentive to employing practices which will create and sustain positive support with participants. Brown & Danaher's (2019) CHE principles - Connectivity, Humanness and Empathy- serve as additional theoretical frames for my interview approach. Techniques such as maintaining eye contact, use of body language and physical positions which display openness and requesting to acknowledge participants on a first name basis was leveraged to deepen rapport throughout the interview process (Dickson-Swift, et. al 2007; Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007). Connectivity between the researcher and the participant will be enhanced as a result of the semi-structured interview method and interviewer behaviors to maximize the building of both trust and rapport. The principle of Humanness is grounded in the value of reciprocity (Brown & Danaher, 2019). The dual nature of information sharing which occurs in a semi-structured format which encourages the exploration of participant thinking beyond structured questioning further supports positive

rapport. Both Humanness and the final principle of Empathy, call upon the active listening of the researcher as a method of rapport building. The semi-structured interview format supports this method of rapport building as maintaining one's attention is critical to the development of follow-up questions which bridge upon ideas introduced by the interviewee.

Semi-structured interviewing provides space for the unveiling of counternarratives as participants share their experiences creating academic spaces for students. Museus (2013) contends that experiential knowledge offered from People of Color provides legitimate data for analyzing the impact of racism on their lives. Use of this data collection method is essential to CRT as it highlights the "centrality of experiential knowledge as a strength and means for informing research" (Brayboy, 2005). The participant narratives that arise out of semi-structured interviews regarding their experiences as Black educators will raise awareness regarding their lived experience.

Participants and Setting

Black educators working within socio-economically and racially marginalized communities housed on Chicago's Westside are the focus of this research. The community is predominantly comprised of Black residents. Interview participants are employees of neighborhood public schools. Neighborhood (open-enrollment) schools are environments which lack restrictions on the students eligible for enrollment as long as they live within predetermined, district-set address boundaries. This is critical as it further intensifies the experience of educators working with a concentrated community of students who have shared experiences by virtue of their neighborhood. The sample size does not exceed 5 participants. Patton (2002) argues that what matters most is the quality, not the quantity. The sample size supports my ability to strategically choose participants based on their individual racial

demographic as well as the racial and socioeconomic composition of their school. Schools where the employees work comprise over 75% of students in receipt of free or reduced lunch.

Additionally, the schools serve over 90% students of color. These demographics were chosen as they support themes regarding the lived realities of educators working within low-income, racially marginalized communities. These communities also overlap the Chicago communities noted as having higher rates of crime and gun violence. Correlations will be drawn between educator experience and Chicago crime data.

Data Collection & Methods Plan

Individual interviews were conducted with research participants. Participants were extended the option of meeting in-person or virtually. The quality of interview responses gathered virtually have been found to be similar as those provided via more traditional methods (Denscombe, 2003; Salmons, 2012). As research participants will be over the age of eighteen years, they were provided with the Adult Consent to Participate in Research form and the Interview Consent Form. The forms were electronically mailed to them. During their interview, I reviewed the elements of the research study and reviewed in detail the documents required for participation. Participants had the option to remove themselves from the study at any point. After written consent was received by the researcher, virtual interview times were scheduled. All interview times occurred outside of the educator's work day. Interviewees were informed that their participation was purely voluntary and that there were no consequences if they chose not to participate. Participants were informed that they would remain anonymous in the presentation of data through the use of pseudonyms.

The five semi-structured interviews took place on an electronic platform (Google Meets). Calendar invites were sent to participants with a virtual meeting link no later than 24 hours prior

to the co-determined interview time. The interview process included a thirty to sixty-minute individual virtual session. During the interview, the participant had the right to stop the interview whenever they felt necessary. Participants were able to opt for the recording transcriptions.

Transcription software was used to transcribe all interviews.

Each interview began with a review of the research objectives and then proceeded to the questions listed on the Interview Protocol Document (Appendix A) used for all interviews. After each interview concluded, participants were thanked for their engagement. A recording of the Zoom was transcribed post completion. Again, all identifiable data obtained from the interviews was coded using pseudonyms to ensure that participant anonymity was protected throughout the research study. Any and all collected and transcribed data was stored on a password sensitive computer. Post-transcription, participants were provided with a transcription of their individual interview and allotted an additional Zoom invitation to adjust interview data. This provided an additional level of accuracy and validity as participants were able to ensure their responses were captured accurately during the transcription process.

Data Coding and Analysis

Theme identification is critical to this research. Coding is essential to the analysis of data as it allows the researcher to capture salient themes and patterns in participant responses. According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2012), “coding is the process of noting what is of interest or significant, identifying different segments of data, and labeling them to organize the information contained in the data” (p.142). Categorizing themes via coding supported my ability to categorize participant data to Critical Race Theory tenets. Utilization of a CRT lens during my analysis of the research data will provide insight on how structural racism impacts the

experiences of Black educators in their pursuit of creating safe, academic spaces for students to thrive.

Informed Consent

Informational meetings were held virtually with each research participant via Zoom. During the initial participant meeting, the parameters of consent were highlighted. The consent process, benefits and potential risks of participation in the research study were also reviewed. All participants were reminded that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that at any time they could withdraw themselves from the research study.

Participant Anonymity & Data Storage

All research participants were guaranteed anonymity. The researcher ensured participant privacy occurred throughout the duration of the research study. Participant names and identity were omitted from documents. All participants were coded with pseudonyms to ensure that any identifiable information, be it direct or indirect information, was not able to be linked back to the participants. Safeguards were in place during the following stages to support participant anonymity: recruitment; initial collection of data; analysis of collected data; sharing of findings; data storing; disposal of research records. Physical, administrative, technical and design safeguards were put in place to further support participant anonymity. All printed research files were locked in a file cabinet away from any and all public in an office that was not accessible to the public. Administrative safeguards lied in the number of individuals with access to participant information. The researcher was the only person with access to participant information and worked independently on this study. Technical safeguards in place included the storing of electronic data files on the researcher's private computer which required a password and is equipped with anti-virus software and firewalls to protect data from any unauthorized parties.

Research design safeguards included the transcription of participant interview data as soon as possible and the storing of any de-identified data separate from coding documents. All hard copies of documents containing any sensitive participant information were destroyed (shredded) as soon as possible.

Limitations of the Research Study

Various limitations can be anticipated with the chosen research design. Relationship between the researcher and participant has the potential to impact data collected. The level of rapport and trust a participant feels with the researcher can impact their level of vulnerability in sharing information and responding to interview questions and journal prompts. To support the development of a positive rapport, the research will engage the participant in an initial discussion around topics of lighter concepts to hopefully unearth a level of comfort between the participant and the researcher.

The researcher's personal bias may affect the analysis of collected data. As an educator who has spent their entire professional career working in schools with high percentages of students from socio-economically marginalized Chicago neighborhoods, questioning, data collection and analysis may be impacted by the researcher's lens. Additionally, it could be argued in my study that White educators are emotionally impacted at levels similar to Black educators when serving students in low-income communities. Application of a Critical Race Theory will support a deeper analysis of the experiences felt by Black educators working within communities of the same race. By virtue of the humanistic commitment Black educators bring to their work with students, the experiences and level of understanding of how larger racialized structures impact the experiences of their students can be analyzed.

Limitations exist within the sample size of five educators. A quantitative project with a greater number of participants might lend itself to the articulation of more widespread and applicable outcomes. It could be found that a sample size of five is not generalizable enough to draw conclusions that would speak to the experience of other Black educators. However, use of my identified sample size within the context of a qualitative research study comprised of participants within the same school system and of similar communities is beneficial for reasons inclusive of the following: 1) a smaller sample size allows for more-depth in terms of questioning during interviewing; and 2) creation of a greater level of relationship between the researcher and participant which could lead to more candor in information shared regarding educator's lived experience. While a larger sample size would provide an increased amount of data to analyze, the level of transparency granted by participants during the interview session may be impacted as the protocol would be required to be more structured due to limitations of time required to interact with a higher number of participants.

Delimitations

The population of focus are individuals who identify as Black or African-American and work in a teaching capacity at elementary and high schools within the city of Chicago. The sample for this research project will not exceed five participants. A quantity of this size will allow for greater analysis of the experience of Black educators serving students in communities of similar demographic. Limiting participant size to this number also allows for more in-depth analysis of their identity as Black educators working within Black communities. The smaller sample size also supports my ability as a researcher to unveil similarities in the educator's narratives as they align to on-going impacts of structural racism on education.

The educators' geographic location and socio-economic status of the communities served maintain the boundaries of this research. However, boundaries will also be maintained as each environment is governed under the same district, Chicago Public Schools. Information gathered from the participants will be more in-depth and richer in context due to the chosen data collection method of semi-structured interviews and responses to journal prompts. This will allow for the researcher to draw conclusions of each of their lived experiences as Black educators and analyze within the context of their shared lived experiences as educators working within the same city and school district.

An additional delimitation is that the data collected is via participant self-report. The self-reported nature does not yield itself to fact checking or a need for corroboration of any information participants share. This stands a further delimitation to this study.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methodology of this qualitative study. The chapter examined how Critical Race Theory will be used as both the theoretical lens and research method. During this study, the researcher recorded virtual meetings with each participant. The researcher then transcribed each interview and identified participant themes within participant narratives. The researcher concluded the chapter by discussing the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Chapter IV: Presentation of Data

In order to obtain insight into the experiences of Black educators working to create academic spaces which nurture academic success within communities impacted by structural racism, five Chicago Public School teachers were interviewed. Research participants were interviewed using the semi-structured process (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Moore, 2009; Qu & Dumay, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews best supported the researcher's ability to capture the narratives of participating educators. As the researcher's ultimate goal is to amplify the voices of Black educators working within marginalized communities, each participant's interview, post-transcription, was revised into a narrative. Participant narratives are critical to the researcher's chosen theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory, as the interviews and subsequent narratives highlight the "centrality of experiential knowledge as a strength and means for informing research" (Brayboy, 2005). Museus (2013) contends that experiential knowledge offered from People of Color provides legitimate data for analyzing the impact of race and racism on their lives. In this case, participant experiences will speak to and examine the impact structural racism has caused in socio-economically marginalized Chicago communities and the impact on Black educators working in these spaces. Critical Race Theory (CRT) contextualizes the participating educator experiential knowledge as legitimate, valued, and essential to comprehending, analyzing and illuminating the impact of structural racism in education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).

Chapter four amplifies the voices of five Black educators in public schools located on the west side of Chicago, specifically the communities of North Lawndale and West Garfield Park. As detailed in the Adult Consent to Participate in Research form and Interview Protocol document (Appendix A and Appendix C), pseudonyms have been given to research participants

to protect their anonymity. Pseudonyms have been specifically chosen to represent the history of the community of focus for this project as each educator has been renamed to represent a west side thoroughfare. To further contextualize this research and the location of the schools of focus, quotes by Chicago Black educator Marva Collins lead each participating educator's narratives. Each quote was intentionally chosen to align with the central tenets of the participants narrative. Marva Collins, a Black educator, founded the Westside Preparatory school in the Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago's Westside. Like the educators of focus for this study, Collins intentionally focused on serving students residing in the racially and socioeconomically marginalized west side area of Chicago (Hollins, 1982; Roberts, 2015). The instructional methods used in Collins' school were culturally congruent to her student population. Collins' classroom and instructional methods to support student engagement are described as being similar to a traditional Black family setting. Her classroom and later school climate embodied a climate "fostering cooperation, flexibility, collective responsibility... and strong adult leadership" (Hollins, 1982). While Collins ultimately felt the need to leave public education and create a private school to educate west side children, this research highlights the educators who continue to focus their support in public schools.

Each research participant is actively employed as a full-time teacher within a Chicago Public School (Pre-Kindergarten to twelfth grade). All participants were interviewed virtually, per an option extended to them as detailed in the shared research protocol. This option was essential as this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher sought to be intentional in providing each participant with an interview method (virtual or in-person) that reflected their interpersonal comfort level amidst a rise in cases as a result of the Omicron

variant of the virus. The reader is provided with access to each participant’s summarized narrative.

Table 1:

Summary of Participants

Name	Gender	Years in Education
Mrs. Wilcox	Female	20
Ms. Jackson	Female	25
Ms. Lexington	Female	19
Mr. Tripp	Male	5
Mr. Kildare	Male	8

Mrs. Wilcox

“I am a teacher. A teacher is someone who leads. There is no magic here. I do not walk on water, I do not part the sea. I just love children” - Marva Collins

Schools within the Chicago Public School system are geographically grouped into networks. The network which houses the school the participant works is one of over twenty-five schools located on Chicago’s Westside. Ms. Wilcox was introduced to the researcher through her local school principal who works alongside the researcher in the network she serves. Within just a few hours of the email being sent to garner participants, Mrs. Wilcox expressed her willingness to schedule the Zoom interview within a few days. As Mrs. Wilcox appeared on the screen, she shared that she was under the weather and actually had to leave school early that day. After dismissing the researcher’s option to reschedule to a time that she was feeling better, she assured that she was not only looking forward to, but very interested in this opportunity. As we were still deep within the COVID-19 pandemic, Wilcox almost immediately followed-up with a verbal

denial of having contracted COVID. Due to our then current reality as the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus continued to impact the larger city of Chicago - especially communities with limited access to health services like the west side community she works within - qualifiers as to whether one has COVID had become second nature. The researcher shared her gratitude for Mrs. Wilcox's willingness to participate and launched into her introduction. After, Mrs. Wilcox, a teacher who identifies as a Black female educator with over twenty years' experience working with Chicago Public Schools quickly began her story.

Mrs. Wilcox's Story

I chose to work at my current school because of its location. My mother is a retired Chicago Public Schools teacher and I come from a family of educators. Up until about two years ago, my mother would substitute teach for schools in the suburbs. Once she got a taste of suburban life, she would keep telling me to come out to the burbs where it is easier and so much more fulfilling; that it was a place where I didn't have to work so hard. My mantra to her was that I want to go where I am needed. I do not feel that I am needed in the suburbs, but rather in the city. Plus, I am familiar with the city and my area. I went to Providence St. Mel (a local Kindergarten - High School parochial school). So, the area of my school, the demographics, the violence, everything that comes with this area does not scare me. I will not say that it attracts me, but I know it is where I am needed most.

My school is an institution where once students are in the building it's a different world than what you see outside of the building. It's a safe space. I feel like everyone treats one another as family. We have community members who work in the building, so for the students they see their neighbors throughout the day. We have generations of families there. When you walk into the building, you get a sense of home. I remember one time my father came and brought me

lunch at school. He walked into the building and commented on how good the food smelled coming from the lunchroom. He wanted to go into the cafeteria and see what they were serving. He had that 'at home' feeling when he walked into the building.

On the outside of the building you question if you are in Chicago. You would think that because of the location and the reputation of the area, not the historical reputation, but the present-day reputation, that the environment would make you feel unsafe. However, there are some of the politest drivers over here. People are very courteous. Believe it or not, the only thing that bothers my soul is driving into and leaving work. It is then that I truly see the effect of drugs on our community. When I am driving home, it would not be outlandish for me to see someone in the alley taking a bowel movement near a dumpster. It would not be out of the ordinary for me to see a few people bent over as if they are in pain, but we now know what it is. There are a lot of people walking around at all times of the day. You see the gestures being made to passers-by asking if you want something from them - drugs. There is heavy drug activity and a lot of trash around the area; not on the school grounds per se, but around the neighborhood.

The community that houses my school could be described as dangerous and drug-infested, but also busy and family-oriented. Our families work together. Within my school, it seems like families are more involved. You see not just grandmothers walking students to school, but adults of varied ages walking children. The families seem to know the value of education so much that our attendance is great. They are making sure their kids come to school. Even if the mom is not around, the grandma is around, or the aunt is around, there is always a family member involved with the students at my school. Our school staff knows the cousins, aunts, uncles and relatives of our students.

Every morning I lead my students through morning meetings and every afternoon I close the day with sunset meetings. During the morning meetings we recite the Brave Pledge that I created for them. We set a focus for the day which is typically a character trait like determination, confidence, empathy, grit or something like that. I also open up the space for them to discuss how they are feeling or to share what happened since we saw one another the previous day. It would not be unusual during our morning meeting for one of my students to share how a rat was caught in their house the previous night. While that would be out of this world for me as I am terrified of them, it would be normal for them. Our students are living with rats, pests and exposure to inappropriate language and behaviors. This is what they see every day. They are walking outside of their homes and seeing - I don't want to call the hypes - but seeing people strung out, getting beat up, you know, those are some of the things that are shared during our morning meetings. It's not sunshine and rainbows. I think that gets in the way of allowing the children to be children. It gets in the way of the whole child receiving the necessary nurturing. For some of the children that I work with, they are not allowed to be children. They are forced to grow up so quickly because their mind is not ready for what they have seen. This causes them to shut down. Things like abuse - physical abuse, domestic violence, the impact of all of those types of things troubles young people's minds. It scrambles their brains and they don't know what to do with that information.

I look at trauma as a delicate consequence of these exposures that must be handled with care. As their teachers, we see it show up in their inability to complete their assignments, the inability to socialize appropriately. The inability to follow instructions, focus or problem solve. The trauma creates a blockage. I know a lot of my students have experienced some severe trauma. I know it's there. When they get to my classroom, they are nurtured, but outside of the

school, it's horrible. I think that those types of environments I described with sunshine and rainbows are necessary for the whole child to develop appropriately; for them to be able to dream and be able to feel motivated; to be able to feel like they are going to be successful in life and be an asset to society.

The morning meetings set the tone for the day. We have had plenty of meetings where we've talked about what they are experiencing due to COVID. I know that we all know someone that may have unfortunately passed from COVID, or we know someone that knows someone who passed. For my students, they are coming to me with multiple people, plural - uncles and cousins who have died from COVID. In the classroom this is causing them to be easily distracted and daydreaming. My current fourth graders were in second grade the last time they were in a classroom. They are adjusting to writing on the lines of notebook paper, writing on the correct side of the notebook paper, spelling and writing letters correctly, following multi-step directions, not sharing their food with friends during lunch. They are struggling with mathematical concepts like place value, adding and subtracting multi-digit whole numbers, regrouping and multiplying. Some of them are still writing their letters backwards. A lot of them are having a difficult time writing a complete sentence or starting the sentence with a capital letter. My students are juggling all of this while still dealing with trauma on top of their regular stress.

My students keep me young. They have so many strengths. They are observant, very intuitive and resilient. My students aim to please. They show empathy. They want to learn. There is nothing better than seeing a child that is ready to learn. They are genuine. In my classroom I have a policy where they can speak freely. I intentionally create an environment in the room so there is a sense of relational trust that mitigates the effects of stress and trauma. I want them to know that when they cross the threshold of my room it is a safe place. If they do not have the

right look on their face when they arrive, I say “you ain’t ready”. When they cross that threshold to the room, we will have to unpack the issue and then try entering the classroom again. It is a safe place, we are going to have fun and we are going to learn each day. It's a place where teaching and learning take place together. I learn from them every single day.

There are many challenges this year in particular to teaching my students. Wearing the mask all day is physically taxing for everyone. I give the students constant reminders, but they also often need a break from wearing them all day long. When my students are not feeling well they are sent home. However, oftentimes, students are returning to school without a negative COVID test. My guess is that some of those times, families are not getting tested or they are not receiving the results. There are so many places where I know families can get tested, but I also know and have experienced times where the results were never sent back. The process is not as streamlined as it should be. So I know that trickles down into our neighborhood too. This year the challenges my students bring are enveloped around the pandemic. I am teaching fourth grade, however many of them are at a first or second grade level. Nevertheless, I must still expose them to fourth grade content. So, I am constantly juggling. It is a little taxing for me. However, I feel like at our school, our kids get the representation they need in staff every single day to be great and strive for excellence.

Given all the challenges this year, I think it is so important for my students to feel heard. For them to be able to see themselves in the instruction which will better allow for them to be able to receive what I have prepared for them. In order for them to be able to receive the instruction, I have to set the tone for them. Who knows what environment they came from that morning or what they may have experienced the night before. So, I work to create a safe place for them to learn so they can walk into the room and feel like they can exhale. When children are

hungry or traumatized, how are they to learn if I am not addressing their realities immediately upon seeing them? To do this I create a space where there are restorative practices. We have a peace corner. Some days they come in or there are moments throughout the day where they are not feeling it and I get it. My students do not have to say anything, they can just go over to the peace corner and have their moment. They handle that pretty well. They are pretty responsible with it. I have not experienced anyone abusing that privilege. I also have a box in my classroom labeled notes. Because of the age they are, they like to write notes all the time. So if they want to write a note to me, they can leave it in the box and I check it every evening. I use classroom jobs so that they can take more autonomy over their learning. The jobs motivate them to be on point. I create math work problems that have their names in it and put in information that they can relate to, like, 'Makayla has five bags of Flamin Hots...' just to make sure everyone has an access point. I find that they receive it better because it is someone in their class. They are able to internalize what I am trying to teach, opposed to them reading about some random person or about farm animals. My students like to make beats, they like to rhyme. I infuse their love for beats and rhyming into my math instruction to help them learn their multiplication. It helps keep them engaged. I customize everything for them.

We close each day with our sunset meeting. During the sunset meeting we revisit the focus we set during our morning meeting. We revisit the focus and I have them share moments throughout the day where they demonstrated the focus. I acknowledge students who were superstars of the day. These are students I see modeling self-control and leading by example. I always close the meeting by telling them, "Okay, good night, come back to me safely tomorrow." Sometimes the students finish the sentence for me.

To celebrate students, I typically choose three to four students and give them a treat like a starburst or bag of chips, something like that. I try to keep our days together very tight, wholesome and routine. My students like and need that structure. Each payday Friday I do a special lunch for some of my students who are killing it. These are students who had limited moments of me having to redirect them, they turned in their homework all week or may be doing really well with their multiplication tables. I do Door Dash and order out whatever they want to eat and they eat with me in the classroom. There are lots of moving pieces in my room, but it all comes together to build the community of learners I want. When I notice that the same students are meeting the expectation, I try to create moments where I can see more students being successful. I love what I do.

When COVID first hit our community, I realized even more how much my school was not a priority in terms of the resources received from CPS. Our staff was scrambling for chrome books and devices. I could not even wrap my mind around the whole phrase - digital divide. Why was there such a divide? Why is there so much confusion with our students getting what they need? I have educator friends all over the city complaining about the same thing because of certain school locations. We had to put in place consequences for students that broke their chrome books or if the devices were stolen. However, other schools in other locations of the city had a plethora of devices. If it was stolen or broken, they just passed out another one. It was not a big deal. I feel like whenever things are flowing in that manner, it's by design. That's structural racism to me. Where my students and our school community are not a priority. Equity isn't even considered. Structural racism is not on the surface level so you may not be able to identify it right away; but if you pull off layers, boom, there it is.

With me doing this work for a little over twenty years, there are certain things I've learned to do to make sure I can come in and give 200% to my students. My car ride must be peaceful. My husband knows not to call me and try to pick a fight with me on the way to work because I have to get my mind right for my students. I can't worry about what is going on in my household. If I am bothered with something, before I make it to the school parking lot, I have to figure out where to put it so that I can show up for my class. On the flip side, when I am leaving work, I have to leave what happened at school in my car. I use the time on the drive home from school to figure out how I can address whatever it is and make things better.

Ms. Jackson

"Success doesn't come to you, you go to it". - Marva Collins

Ms. Jackson serves as a high school educator on the west side of Chicago. She and the researcher crossed paths while working alongside one another at another west side high school prior to the participant transitioning to her current school. Ms. Jackson identifies as a Black female and has over twenty-five years' experience working within Chicago Public Schools. Jackson is a Chicago native and a graduate of Chicago Public Schools. After responding to the request to interview her, Ms. Jackson was gracious enough to engage in a virtual interview within a week of responding to the email. As her face appeared on the screen at the onset of our interview, a huge smile spread across her face. After thanking her once more for her willingness to participate in the interview, we jumped into her sharing her story.

Ms. Jackson's Story

I chose to work at my current school because of the school's focus on medicine. Prior to the school being renamed and given a focus on medical preparation, it had a negative connotation associated with it. When I was in high school, this was not the school you wanted to

go to. When the school was closed and reopened with this new focus and mission to provide students and the community with an opportunity to get into the health science careers - careers that Black people are not well represented, I was interested. I saw the school as being so purposeful. It was like they looked at the community and said, we are going to give these kids this type of exposure. We are going to have these types of programs and increase the amount of Black students who are interested in this field of work. It would help everybody out, so I was definitely interested in it. Ironically, I was offered another job that was only ten minutes from my house the same week I was offered this position. But because of the school's purpose, I decided to move forward with accepting the position, even though it is not close to my home.

The community surrounding my school is changing. In the 1980s and 1990s, it was just a poor, Black, Westside neighborhood. Now it is being gentrified. The housing projects near the school have been closed and new housing is being built. There are still some low-income families, but now there is a mix of some high income families. It is really different. I do not believe anyone in the community that is of a higher income has their child attend the school. There are homes being rehabbed across the street from the school that cost between \$500-600,000. It's weird. My students who come to the school are not from the families who are buying those homes, but they are still within the neighborhood, just the lower income units. When people immediately think of this community, even though there is development, the perception is still that it is a low-income neighborhood.

My school serves as a haven of sorts for my students. Even though students have to apply for our school, we are enrolling more and more students from the immediate community. We are becoming more of a neighborhood high school. Even with our focus on medical preparation you do not have to have that aspiration to attend the school. Some of our students just want to get out

of high school and go to cosmetology school. So, I think it's a haven that is welcoming to everyone. I think everyone has a space here. I find that a lot of my students struggle with emotional issues. Some of my students have experienced the death of a parent and have shifted to being under the guardianship of an aunt or a grandmother. While it's great that they have a family, it is not the same thing for them as their parents. Some of those students are not supported emotionally throughout the grief process by their remaining family members and they experience anger and bring that anger to school. This is one of the things that negatively impacts their academic performance as well contributes to their depression.

As a high school math teacher, another challenge that my students bring are academic weaknesses. Students may not be on grade level in reading and math which means that they have to work really hard to make a year's improvement. But as they are already behind, they really need to make up a year and a half to truly catch up with their peers. This is not necessarily by any fault of their own. Maybe their elementary teacher was not certified in math or they did not get the best teacher. I also believe the physical health of my students impacts their academic ability. When my students are coming to school eating Hot Cheetos and red drinks and things like that they are not in peak condition to learn. This coupled with not sleeping enough at night because they are on their phone on Snapchat and Tik Tok does not make them the most prepared for school each morning.

I will acknowledge that we also do not always have the best academic programs for Black and Brown students. When you look at the demographics of the teaching staff in Chicago Public Schools, more than 50% of the teachers are Caucasian. If you look at the demographics, something like 33% or close to of the [student] population is Black. We have teachers who say it [race] does not matter. As a Black teacher, it's not just that the staff does not look like the

students, but they also have completely different backgrounds. I am not quite sure how they relate to our students or how those teachers conduct their classrooms. I am always asked if a new teacher can come into my room and watch how I manage my classroom. Every year, it is 'so and so is having problems with a student and we are trying to help them come up with ideas and you have a pretty good grasp on the kids'. I always find it funny and tell the observing teacher not to feel bad if they are struggling a little bit. I do feel like there is an advantage with me being Black, but being Black only goes so far. I empathize with my students, but I do not let my empathy create an excuse for them to do whatever they want. There has to be discipline and structure. I think some of the other teachers are so busy empathizing and feeling sorry for the students and they allow them to misbehave. Our students know how to act. So, my expectations are higher. Actually, it's not that they are higher. My expectations are my expectations. My students have to follow the rules and regulations of the school. They should be compliant. I do not care about having an easier workday. No, I don't fight every battle, but I do fight the battles that I know will benefit our classroom environment. I am very conscious of paying attention to students' behavior. I know what does and does not work with certain students.

I see my students' personalities. We have students who walk around looking like they are in a heavy metal band. Then we have students who look like Britney Spears. Then we have students who look like they want to be the next ASAP Rocky. I see that and I do not know if other teachers see that these are different types of students. In every aspect you can name, our kids are different. We have kids asking me to sponsor an anime club. You would not even expect that a lot of times on the west side. I have the advantage of seeing students as individuals and it does not surprise me.

Realizing that each of my students are different, at the start of each year we set norms in my classroom. I always solicit their ideas and give them voice in the process. I ask ‘what do you think would be a good rule for the classroom?’ The students always say that they want to be respected. So, we build our community around their thoughts. I find it funny sometimes when I go back to what they asked for in the class and say ‘hey, you’re not being respectful. You’re yelling at me to finish talking’. Or ‘I’m talking and you are talking while I’m talking and giving instructions’. I have rules and regulations, but I know that a rule will be broken every now and then. We talk about pet peeves as far as school is concerned. I share with them that mine is around communication. I let my students know that I need them to communicate with me and when they are not communicating what is going on with them I will not know how to help them. I ask them to please tell me when they have a headache or a tummy ache rather than just laying their head on the desk. If they know my expectation is to be on task, they should not give me attitude when I am asking them to get back on task. I do the same with them. I will tell them every blue moon that I don’t feel well. I share how I know it [the class] can get a little rowdy, but can then keep it more on the quiet side that day. I do not think a quiet room is a good room, I actually like to hear students talking because that is how I hear academic conversation and I can see who knows what. But, again, if I do not feel good, I do not want to hear loud talking. So, there’s an understanding and communication that I like to leave open so that my students can talk to me. I definitely try to make sure that I am approachable. But I am also stern, because that is how I was raised. You typically emulate what you experience.

The pandemic highlighted the inequity in resources available to my students. For my school, we are not one-to-one with laptops. Not at all. The fact that some CPS schools were able to go one-to-one with laptops and others were not was a problem. We have old computers and

we are not up to date on our equipment. I don't think that there are other school districts that are predominantly white going through these issues. If we do not have the resources, how are we supposed to instruct our students? As a union member we can strike, but we should not have to for things like this. Structural racism to me lives in situations like this. There are structures in place that do not benefit poor People of Color. We are just cogs in the wheel. We [Black teachers] try to work around it, but there are just certain things that are not set up to allow us to succeed or maneuver to the best of our ability as compared to people in other communities.

As a Black educator, I can see bias in some principals as it relates to teacher hiring. This definitely impacts Black students. When I've asked about the lack of Black teachers being hired, the response has been that they just are looking for the best teachers. I get that. However, you are also looking at what university candidates graduated from forgetting that Black and Brown people are still not always able to attend prestigious colleges and universities due to structural racism. If a principal goes by that standard, of course they are going to choose mostly white teachers. The white teachers are the ones going to those schools in the first place and that does not mean they are the best teachers all the time. We hired seven new teachers this school year and not one of them was a teacher of Color. It was the excuse that there were no applicants [of Color]. I just questioned that there were no Black candidates that applied? And that is what we were told. But again, I do not know. It's possible, but I just do not know.

As a Black teacher, it is hard when I do not have the cultural advantage of having a larger community of Black teachers to connect with. During rougher days, it helps when I am able to vent to my co-workers. Because we are Black, there is a cultural advantage there because there are some things I will not say to another teacher of another race because I am still representative of my [Black] people. I always feel like I have to give another perspective in meetings when

discussing issues relating to our Black students. Often, I am the one to say there is another narrative here that is not being considered [in defense of our Black students]. I told another Black teacher the other day that I'm going to stop talking in our grade level [teacher team] meetings. She encouraged me not to stop and said we have to keep talking even if it makes other [non-Black] teachers uncomfortable. She said if I don't say anything, then who is going to speak up for our kids? This issue stemmed from a fight that happened in a classroom and the other [White] teachers felt that before the students returned from suspension they should have to write a letter of apology to the class. I told them that that was not a good idea and it is a slippery slope in that situation. In [Black] culture, we are taught that if somebody touches you, you have the right to defend yourself. The student in question was attacked in class. I asked them how they would handle the situation if the student's parent came into the school questioning the teacher in the class as to why they were not protecting their child in the class for them even to have been jumped? I pushed the team to be conscious of the entire story before pushing to require an apology letter. I suggested holding a peace circle where the kids can actually sift through their emotions on how the fight impacted them.

I empathize with my colleagues and my students in regard to trauma. In the situation with the fight in the classroom, if you are a person not used to that level of chaos it's difficult. Even as an adult, not that that should be anyone's everyday life, but it is hard to process. Our students are often seeing flights all the time while they scroll through social media. Being in a fight or watching a fight is traumatic. To most people seeing someone get hurt is traumatic. Bullying is mental trauma. I guess we all are suffering from a level of PTSD. For our students they also experience it walking through gang infested neighborhoods. In the last two or three weeks, we have come back after a weekend and there are bullets all over the stairwell and the windows have

been shot out. The kids and staff are entering the building seeing glass in the stairwell and the windows have not been boarded up by the engineering staff yet. That is trauma.

I have this term to describe some of my students on some days - emotional vampires. It is like they are sucking the soul out of me. On bad days, it is like some students are so needy they take your energy away. Look at me today, I am tired because it was a rough day. I realize that students draw on my energy because they need it and whatever support I can offer - comfort or discipline - takes a toll. There are articles that I have read about the number of decisions a teacher makes in a day. This number is equal to the number of decisions surgeons or doctors make in one day. Teachers are always making decisions about how to interact with students. I have to interact with 125 students a day and all those people draw from me. It takes a toll. To take care of myself, I work out four days a week. I do it for my physical health, but it makes a difference to just release the stress. It allows me not to think about work and school. I am just able to [focus] on me. I like to read and still physically go to the library to pick out books. I enjoy relaxing and having a good old venting session with one of my teacher friends who actually understands what it means to be a teacher. All of these things help.

Mrs. Lexington

“There is a brilliant child locked inside every student”. - Marva Collins

I received referrals from a local administrator for teachers in their building which would make good candidates to participate in my study. After speaking with a colleague, they recommended Mrs. Lexington. I reached out to her via email and she promptly responded, sharing that she was very much interested in learning more about the study and how she could contribute.

After sharing the interview protocols over email and engaging in a short amount of emails confirming the best time for the interview to occur, we were set. Her completion of the interview demographic questionnaire, confirmed her identification as a Black female teacher with just under twenty years teaching experience currently working in an elementary school in the West Garfield Park/North Lawndale neighborhood on Chicago's Westside. Mrs. Lexington logged into our zoom meeting and welcomed me with a huge smile. I shared the interview protocol with her once more, to which she expressed she understood and began her story.

Mrs. Lexington's Story

I was at my last school for about ten years. The school was taken under the control of the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) and pretty much all of the employees were fired. This caused me to be a displaced teacher. One of my former assistant principals knew the then principal of my current school and shared with me that this school had an open teaching position. I knew that I wanted to stay in urban education and that I wanted to stay in this (west side) community. This community was similar to where I taught previously so I felt that I would be comfortable in that environment with the demographic of students.

I feel like my school is a hidden gem. There is nothing around our school. What is crazy is that I am from the west side and I had never been to this area of the community prior to working here. There are not a lot of grocery stores or even fast food restaurants near our school. There are few mom and pop restaurants, but no chain restaurants and no healthy food options. This is one of the major problems with my students. I feel like they are not healthy. One of my former students who is in first grade came into the building today with a sixteen-ounce bottle of Pepsi in their lunch. Luckily our teachers are invested in our students so we did not let him drink it, but he had it and his intentions were definitely to drink the whole bottle. It is not just Pepsi,

it's hot chips and other unhealthy options. For some of our parents with no transportation, their options are limited to the gas station or a local corner store to shop for their children. These locations do not have healthy options either. I just know it affects my students' brains; not having healthy food options and coming to school loaded with junk and all the bad things that are not good for them. The pandemic definitely showed us what they were eating in their weight gain when they came back to us. So many of our kids were overweight, sluggish and tired. All of this I feel has a negative effect on our students.

There is a vacant lot directly across the street from our school and just a ton of empty land. While we are a hidden gym, we are in the middle of a desolate area. The larger community is described as dangerous even though there is a lot of history in North Lawndale. It's pretty mixed as well on how it is viewed. While some view it as dangerous, people take a lot of pride in North Lawndale. I guess it depends on who you talk to and what era they came from which for sure impacted their experience in the neighborhood. While working at the school, I have been able to participate in a lot of North Lawndale community meetings and learn more about the history of the area. But, even with this knowledge it can be dangerous.

The history of the neighborhood is a definite strength in addition to the number of community resources. There is nothing that I could possibly think of that you could want that is not available in the community. When I sit in those community meetings it is really eye opening to how much is poured into the community. I think a lot of the community members appreciate that, but I do not know if it is taken advantage of like it should be. There are people who love this neighborhood - even though I was not super familiar with it prior to working at the school. Some people love living in the community, but they are sometimes afraid. Even with that fear, when they consider leaving, they wonder where else can I find a school like our school. At our

school there are generations of families who attend. Some of our parents live in the home their parents lived in, so they are comfortable. I think that if they probably had the choice and felt that they could, they would leave (move).

Our teachers are a huge strength within our school. Our teachers are very passionate about our students and it just flows over to the kids. I think our parents know that and appreciate that we invest in our students. On the flipside, we do not get a lot of parental involvement when we host activities. I would love to see our parents come out more and just be more involved and show their investment in the activities at the school. It makes a difference when we have a family night at school and our families come together to eat and read books together and just have fun. It shows how all of us at the school are an extension of their family. We have so many activities and resources for them that they just do not take advantage of and I think that's a tremendous challenge for us.

The challenges my students bring are a result of people getting away from old school thinking that a child should be in a child's place. I think our kids are exposed to way more than they should be. They are seeing fighting, arguing and other bad stuff on tv. Adult issues like those they are not shielded from and it puts stress on them. They tell me some of the things that are happening at home and I just wonder why they even had to hear that. I do not remember being that stressed out as a six-year-old kid worrying about my parents arguing or somebody throwing a chair across a room. They have stories like this that are just heartbreaking. It affects them because they are thinking about it. [Exposure to] violence is the biggest one. I hear a lot of stories about violence in their homes - mothers and fathers or boyfriends arguing and being violent towards one another and the kid saw it. Another [traumatic] event is seeing the police come in and raiding their house at night. A lot of my students have lost their fathers tragically. It

makes it difficult for me to concentrate on teaching the letter of the week or anything educational because their minds are just elsewhere. We always say that children are resilient and they will bounce back, but they still have the effects from being exposed to these things. I have always taught in the primary grades, so my students always talk a lot about what is going on.

To help my students manage [their exposure to trauma], I let them talk about it and get it out. My thinking is that it hopefully allows them to release it so that we can move onto something else as it is obvious they have feelings that are bothering them. Other times, I just work to keep them in a happy mood. I work to make sure the environment is comfortable and that they feel safe when they are with me. I look to make sure that the culture in my classroom is one where they feel they can release the bad things they see outside of our room. In my room and in my presence, I just want them to feel like they can release and just be a kid. I reach out to my students a lot more with attention and hugs, just loving on them more because I feel for them. At such a young age, they have experienced so much trauma. I have a student now who is dealing with the death of her grandmother. Some of the [difficult] behaviors she is displaying is trickling down from what she is seeing her mother do. I talk to her mom and try to let her know that her daughter is pulling from and feeding off of her energy. She is watching her be sad, crying and upset. Situations like this, they pull on my heartstrings because they are so young. They are supposed to be happy with no worries or cares in the world, but they are carrying around all of this weight at such a young age and it is heartbreaking.

While I have a great relationship with my parents, sometimes I have to pull back because I can get super involved. I pray for my students, their families and the situations. I pray that I can be a beacon of light for them and continue to just be a positive source of light to them at that time. I try to share resources and let them know to reach out if they need anything and I do not

think that is necessarily a bad thing. But I also know that [to take care of myself] I have to pull away and that is always kind of hard. I work to keep a humble mind and a humble heart and to just have empathy for them. The connection I have with my students and their families is because I want better for them, their kids and the community. This pushes me to continue to do what I do to keep the parents trust in us with their students.

My daughter goes to a school on the northside of the city and it's just different. While our school was going through budget cuts, her school was getting extra teachers and extra this and that. It always frustrates me to see the difference as it's a real thing. I feel like sometimes [predominantly Black] schools are set up in a way that is not positive or helpful to our race. The barriers that our schools face impact the lives and type of education our kids receive and hinders our progression as a people. But these barriers also push me to work harder for our kids.

Mr. Tripp

“Determination and perseverance move the world; thinking that others will do it for you is a sure way to fail.” - Marva Collins

Mr. Tripp responded to an email I sent to him based upon a referral from a mutual colleague who felt that he may be a good research candidate. I was very eager to speak with him to deepen the research data with the perspective of a Black male educator. After a series of brief emails we decided to engage in a virtual interview on a Saturday morning before his planned trip to the Museum of Science and Industry on Chicago's south side with his young son. On the morning of our interview, I was greeted by a smile and his need for clarity once more on the purpose of my research study. I shared my research question with him once more, to which he gave an emphatic, “that's what's up”. After sharing the protocol for our conversation, he gave one more confirmation that he understood what was being asked and began his story.

Mr. Tripp's Story

I chose to work at my current school because it was a great opportunity for me when I first moved to Chicago from Florida. The school reflected the demographic I wanted to work with when I moved here. As a Black male, I have come from and survived many things personally and wanted to work with students of a similar background. My current school is a small school and the surrounding community is poverty-stricken. While the community is pretty accessible and you can get other neighborhoods fairly easily from it, it has weaknesses. When you come into the community you can tell there has not been much investment. There is litter, crime, drugs and it is pretty much a food desert. There are abandoned houses and prostitution. There is policing of the area, but it is like, what are they really doing? You still do not feel safe even when the police are there. The neighborhood just seems like it has been forgotten. While there are still active community members, it just seems forgotten. I have been working within this community for five years and nothing has truly changed. It just makes me question our elected officials and what they are truly doing to improve the neighborhood. For example, if you go just a few miles east, west or north of my school, you can see how those areas are being invested in. You see people picking up the litter and helping to beautify the neighborhood. But in this neighborhood, it is just really bad.

For our students, the surrounding community environment can make the walk to and from school crazy. Their block can be crazy in terms of the fact that they cannot go outside and play. There may be shooting, dope fiends or alcoholics just loitering around. For our young ladies, there is the fear of being abducted. While walking as a young man, there is a fear of getting into an altercation with another person or the police. It's a lot. Our students are dealing with a lot outside of school. Then they come to school and deal with a whole bunch of different

pressures on top of what they are dealing with outside. I understand that it can be very confusing, distracting and overwhelming for them. It makes them display behaviors in the building that would not normally be acceptable; like outside behaviors that you would do in the street to handle a problem, they think that is the way to handle a problem inside of the school. Arguing, cursing, hitting and fighting become the way in which they feel they are supposed to handle conflict.

On the flipside, our students are resilient. They are resilient in a way of understanding that the outside community is troubling, but they still try to do their very best every day, regardless of the circumstances they're placed into. I try my best to keep them engaged in spite of all the distractions that are happening to them outside of school. I try to relate my content to what I hear the students talking about and make it come full circle for them. Our school incorporates a lot of social emotional learning to just help the students unpack their feelings and emotions. Our school guidance counselor does a very good job in terms of helping them sort out these issues as well.

As a Black male educator, it can be very triggering to me at times. There are things that I have survived and experienced and I see the same things being repeated in my students, but I feel limited in what I can really do to stop the cycle from continuing within their experience. It's like I want to help so much, but at times I feel that I can only do so much. I can talk to a student until I am blue in the face, however, if it is not being reinforced at home it does not hit the same. Sometimes I feel that when I try to communicate with parents, it actually does more of a disservice than actually helps because the parents are the ones that are displaying the poor behavior that the student is displaying. So, when I see the parent doing the things they are doing, I realize how it's a learned behavior for the student. In that case, I just try to influence what they

are doing since I'm not their mom or their dad. It is one of those things that I can speak on, but I feel like I cannot physically change it unless the person wants to change or actually receives the help.

My work with students definitely impacts me to the point where I have to separate it and say that it is not my life at the end of the day. I am with students five days out of the week all day. I cannot ignore or brush over what they are going through. The traumas they experience are shared. When I go outside into the neighborhood, sometimes I see the same thing. To take care of myself, I have to do different things. The first is staying hydrated to make sure that my body has the water it needs to process the information. This also helps me to think clearly so that my brain is not all over the place. Sometimes taking a walk, exercising or journaling definitely helps if the situation is very crazy. As a teacher I know that I am doing God's work. However, sometimes I question if I am being punished when I show up everyday to a community with the same trash and it just looks horrible. It makes me begin to question if there will ever be any real change or if I have to lead the change by myself. It just becomes very hard at points when you feel overworked, underpaid and underappreciated from parents and students. At times it makes me wonder if I really want to invest more time and energy into my students when it is not being returned. It becomes a constant battle on a daily basis.

Mr. Kildare

"Can't make a mistake, can't make anything". - Marva Collins

Mr. Kildare was referred to me by a mutual colleague who felt that he would be a good fit for the project. When I reached out to him regarding the opportunity to participate in the research study, he eagerly responded. We were able to determine a date for the zoom interview within just a few short email exchanges.

Mr. Kildare's demographic survey reflected his identification as a Black male educator with nine years' experience in Chicago Public Schools. When our zoom interview began, Mr. Kildare greeted me with a warm smile. I shared with him the interview protocols, to which he expressed he understood and was ready to dive in. Before I launched into my first question, I asked Mr. Kildare if he had any questions or needed any clarity on the process and thanked him in advance for his participation. He gave a head nod, smiled and stated "No problem, I'm happy to help".

Mr. Kildare's Story

I chose to work at my current school when I began looking for a different career path. Prior to coming into education, I was in restaurant management. I have worked in restaurants since I was sixteen and was just looking for something different. A friend told me there was an opportunity at the school and that they felt I had the skills for the position and for what was going on at the time in the school to help the overall climate and culture of the classroom. They felt like I embodied some characteristics like patience, kindness and a willingness to be helpful and those things would be helpful to the students. So, I interviewed with the principal and she raved about me. She said that I sounded like an ideal candidate for the position and introduced me to the teacher in the class that I would be working with. The teacher and I talked for a bit and from there I was in and rocking.

My school is like a hidden gem. While there are a lot of negative things said about the west side of Chicago with the violence, crime and other things that we are exposed to going back and forth to the school, the school is still a gem. My students tell me what is going on in their lives and some of the things they are exposed to and there is definitely some negativity. But in spite of this, we don't have a lot of violence at the school. I co-lead our school's after-school

program and when I speak with other resource coordinators and hear what is going on in their schools, I am just thankful for our students. I mean they are a bunch of talkers. They may talk a big game about what they are going to do in terms of fighting and other things, but there are rarely any physical altercations. Considering the community that we are in, you would think that there would be a lot more physical activity amongst the students, but there is not. I have been at the school nine years and even when there is a buzz that there is going to be a big brawl outside the school at the end of the year like in June. Everybody just leaves the building and walks home. I'm just always like, I've been here nine years and this big brawl has not happened yet. The students just talk and I love the fact that they are just talkers.

The community around our school is a bit stepped over. There is a lot of work and development going on in the community to the east and west of us, but none in our immediate community. When I drive to some of the neighboring areas like Cicero you see a lot of beautification and new school buildings, new apartment buildings. When you look in our community and the little pocket that we are in, you don't see those things. We have a huge vacant lot across from the school that is not even considered good land to build on because there's been numerous offers, but for various reasons, it hasn't been utilized. It would be a great spot for a track. So many people walk on the small track near our building all times of the day. The vacant lot across the street presents a perfect opportunity to just lay a big track down and turn it into a beautiful space. People would come from miles around and just walk. It would not be overly expensive. In that way I think this is a stepped over community. I have done research on this neighborhood as a part of my graduate studies and people like Walt Disney lived near our community. The founder of the Chicago Bears lived in our community. Martin Luther King, Jr stayed in the vicinity of our school when he stayed in Chicago. There are maybe six or seven

prominent figures and celebrities that have stayed in the community. You would expect that given this history, there would be some type of input from the state or whoever the powers that may be in our area to create more investment.

The community is just very destitute. The look of the community is so hard on the students' eyes. You look around and see abandoned land, boarded up houses, weeds growing up, prostitutes walking by, drug addicts bent over. When you look at those things on a daily basis, our kids have to say, is this what a man looks like? Bent over and hung over a fence recovering from drug usage? I wonder if they think this is what I have to look forward to as an adult growing up in this community with abandoned houses that take up whole blocks? All of those things are disadvantages and very depressing to a child. You can hear it sometimes in the school in the way they talk about things. They will say, "why does it matter if I do [certain things]?" They will say that they feel like it does not matter because this is what their future could potentially be. That's definitely one of the weaknesses of the community and how it impacts our kids.

Even though it is stepped over, the community has a lot of strengths. There is a lot of history in this community. I know people, grandparents and parents that have kids that have attended our school. We have families where three to four generations have attended which means they are still in the community. So, you have people who have experienced all the different ups and downs through the years that have occurred in the neighborhood, but have proven to still be resilient. All this stuff is happening, the drugs that occur, forced poverty, lack of funds being put in the community in the right places, but the people still show resilience. They push through all of that and make sure to set a high expectation for their kids to go to school and get an education. You can see the older generation pushing to get the kids to college. This is a

strength. They are getting to the level that the first generation of college students are coming up. While the older generation may have missed that opportunity or were not able to take advantage of it, they are making sure their kids get to that next level of education to potentially have a better life.

The students are so resilient. I have experienced some of the rough situations they are dealing with. Like the mother may have cancer, the father may be in jail and someone may be on drugs, another person may have a bad case of lupus and the child kind of in limbo. I'm sure they are thinking, I don't know who I am counting on or who I can depend on. My grandma's too old to give me the full attention I need; or I'm with my aunt, but she has three kids of her own already. I just find students who just end up being in places like this. Now, more than ever, it seems like they don't have a lot of options or the support that they need. Our school tries to control our situation and provide what they need, but that's just a few hours a day. They have fifteen or so hours outside of that where they have to figure out how to access somebody who can teach and nurture them; someone who can console or counsel them on all the situations going on in their life. I just think that is a real challenge. I was speaking with a student a week or two weeks ago and she was saying, "well, my mom and dad are no longer together. My mom's in the hospital and my dad's gone now. I'm with my auntie". I just don't know what to do with the student and she is only in the third grade, just trying to figure it out. I'm like, you are way too young to worry about all of that. All I can offer her is encouragement that I'm sure her parents would want her to do her best. I explained to her how whenever she talks to her parents, she would want to be able to tell them that she is doing great in school. But, it's an ongoing situation. It's just hard for them.

The challenges the students bring are just the overall visual effects of the community. They go home and have these situations they are dealing with as a child who maybe is not even ten years old yet. They have to figure out what is going on with mom, what's going on with dad and who is going to help them. Then they go to the community and look for the types of figures that are missing in their life. They may see a man, but then he may be utilizing drugs or maybe just finished begging for change trying to make ends meet. Vice versa, they may see a lady who is somebody who can help, but her own struggles are too overwhelming and too much for her to deal with. So, they find themselves not having constant stability. The kids go from class to class, teacher to teacher and they are trying to figure things out and look for consistency in their life. It's hard to figure out when you're young and you don't have it at home and you don't see it outside.

To help my students manage the challenges, I try to be consistent. I try not to go from being nice, humble and attentive to them to not even noticing them at all. Something I learned from a mentor when I was younger was that whatever is going on in your life before you get to work, you have to leave it outside on the doorstep or in the car. I can definitely pick it back up when I leave, but the people that need your attention should be the focus. I try to make sure that I'm the same person every day and just really transparent. I let my students know that we all have our struggles, but we all can make it. I share a lot of personal stories of things that go on in my life and how I wasn't the best student, but I still made it through high school and college. I share how I had a lot of help from tutors and different people who pulled me on my way. I share experiences of how my mom didn't help me with school. She made sure I went to school, but after maybe like first grade, she pretty much just told me to go to school. But if I had homework, it was pretty much my choice to do it. I could do it wholeheartedly or half-heartedly, but it was

just up to me. As I got higher in grade school, she was busy working more to try to provide for my brothers and sisters and there was more pressure on us to stay on top of our schoolwork. I went and I finished school, but my brother dropped out of high school because he didn't feel pressed. He said that he didn't think our mother cared whether or not he went to school. I told him that it may seem that way, but she does care. She ultimately told him that it was his choice because she was too busy trying to make sure all the kids were ok so she did not have time to follow him to school and chase him through classes. So, he quit.

I think sharing my experiences with my students helps them realize that their teachers are real people. That we have experiences very similar to them. That we came up in neighborhoods very identical to the places they live and have family members who do good and some who do bad. Some of the students think that teachers have the perfect life and don't have to worry about anything. I try to share with them that struggles are everywhere and it's what we choose to do and how we handle them determines how we succeed in life. As a Black male, I think my presence is a big thing. I don't know what the percentage is, but my students are not privy to a lot of positive, Black male images. It may seem kind of surface, but I think that visually seeing something positive and being able to identify with the person as an individual is an image my students need to see. I want my students to look at me and see something good. Like I mentioned earlier, a lot of their fathers are not in the picture, whether it be jail, drugs, separation from their mothers, whatever - the father may not be there in a full-time capacity. I feel like if I can be that male figure in your life to show you what a male should be doing in your life then they have a little glimpse of what they may attach to when they are looking for a male figure - whether it's a boyfriend, husband or those types of things. The other part is that I can relate to my students, specifically the boys because I was a boy who came up through Chicago Public Schools. I grew

up in a crime-filled neighborhood and went to a school with a lot of activity - a lot of fights, gang wars and things like that going on around me. But I was able to go off to college and have that experience and just have my eyes opened to the way other people do things and operate. It was mind blowing. I feel like I can bring that to the table, a lot of the experiences that I had. I want to continue to work in communities that are similar to the one I grew up in. A community that needs some upliftment. That needs people to be an example that you can make it even though you have some struggles. I cannot see myself working in a different type of environment. I know the need and the necessity for people who grew up like me, this is where I'm from.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to obtain insight into the experiences of Black educators working to create academic spaces which nurture academic success within communities impacted by structural racism. In order to obtain this insight, interviews were conducted and later transcribed into narratives as a means of elevating the voices and experiences of Chicago educators working in public school spaces. As found by Brayboy (2005), narratives highlight the centrality of experiential knowledge as a strength and means for informing research. The use of narratives dovetails with the chosen theoretical framework for this research, Critical Race Theory. In Chapter five, participant narratives will be analyzed to examine the impact of structural racism in socio-economically marginalized Chicago communities.

Chapter V: Discussion & Analysis of Data

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the experiences of Black educators serving low income, predominantly Black, Chicago Westside public school communities. The research seeks to present educator narratives on how they create supportive academic spaces for students to thrive, while highlighting the barriers faced by students and educators on the road to academic success. Museus (2013) contends that experiential knowledge offered from People of Color provides legitimate data for analyzing the impact of race and racism on their lives. In an attempt to amplify the voices of Black educators, the goal of this work is to create increased visibility on the level of intentionality Black educators bring to their work with students, while also highlighting many of the barriers faced in this pursuit. Through sharing the narratives of Black educators, I seek to influence the level of emotional support and financial resources extended to educators working in similar school spaces at both the local (school) and district levels. Using tenets of Critical Race Theory, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

- Is there classroom evidence that educators in this study cite in their work to ensure student success?
- What tenets of CRT help explain classroom practices that Black educators in this study use to foster Black student success?
- How do Black educators in this study respond to students' traumatic experiences and/or after-effects of community violence in their school communities?

In chapter five, analysis of data garnered from participants will be shared. The chapter is also inclusive of an articulation of themes extracted from participant narratives.

Black Educator Themes

Five Black educators, each with varied paths within education, shared similar attitudes regarding their experiences working within Chicago Public Schools located on the Westside of the city. The narratives of Mrs. Wilcox, Ms. Jackson, Ms. Lexington, Mr. Tripp and Mr. Kildare unveiled the following three themes:

- Commitment to Students
- Impact of Community Environment on Student Readiness for Instruction
- Student Exposure to Trauma.

These themes are woven throughout their narratives, as well as the research literature on structural racism and the education of Black children. Whether discussion of lack of community resources or issues with managing the stressors their students present each day, the educators of focus for this research shared many commonalities. They also shared constant and consistent dedication to their work for students and their school communities.

Theme 1: Commitment to Students

The first thematic category was determined by participant responses to their experiences working within their school communities. Essential factors included demographic location of the school, personal and community member descriptions of the surrounding neighborhood as well as descriptions of the school community. Participant responses, while individualized, were similar in their commitment to students which exemplified the humanistic commitment which drives each participant's work with students. This was in alignment with Irvine's (2002) findings that Black teachers tend to see education, specifically the education of Black children, as a 'calling'. Educator responses were synonymous with finding their work as teachers to be community work, synonymous with taking on a personal responsibility for the education and

well-being of Black students (Casey, 1993; Dixson and Dingus, 2008; Lewis, 2016). The five educators of focus all highlighted the intentionality of their working within their specific school community and their respective students.

Building connections with students was also highlighted within each participant interview. This is in alignment with research that finds the connections Black teachers have with Black students via a shared cultural experience supportive of their ability to help students build connections between their lived experiences and academic content (Easton-Brooks, 2013; Perry, 2020). Mrs. Wilcox speaks to this connection and her level of intentionality in cultivating the connection via her morning and sunset meetings. Ms. Lexington speaks to this intentionality in terms of her level of responsiveness to the needs of her students. Her narrative highlighted providing time for students to share so they know they have a safe space that is reflective of their developmental stage; very different from the spaces she shares they are immersed within that are reflective of adult conversations, actions and at times violence while outside of the school building. The level of intention brought to their work with students was fluid in each educator's data set. This aligns with the goals of CRT to promote racial equity (Yosso and Solorzano, 1995; Delgado and Stefanic, 2001). Each teacher spoke to how they saw an alignment between their work with students as a means to contribute to the betterment of the Black community. A key goal of CRT is to transform the relationships between race and racism, the work done by the participating Black educators works to disrupt the perpetuation of the inequities within their school communities; inequities which exist as a result of structural racism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

Mrs. Wilcox's narrative highlighted her work to be a "calling". She shared how as an educator she felt it critical to work where she was needed and found that need within her current school community. This was in contrast to where she was encouraged to work by her own

mother. Her narrative highlighted the intention behind her school location as one where she would be best suited to support and create change within the community. This idea could also be found in the intentional manner and steps that led Ms. Lexington, Mr. Trip and Mr. Kildare to their school location. Each educator highlighted the connection they felt to the community where their school resides and the students it serves. For Ms. Lexington, she was a resident of the Westside. While not familiar with the exact neighborhood where her school is located, she is familiar with and has roots within the larger Chicago Westside community. It is for this reason that she intentionally sought out and was open to working within her current school. Both Mr. Tripp and Mr. Kildare spoke to similar rationales for choosing to work in their school location. Both educators spoke to a desire to work with a student demographic which mirrored themselves and their experiences as young, Black male youth. Additionally, each educator spoke of seeing themselves as role models and visuals for their students to emulate as they work to cultivate their space in this world.

Participating educators take the reader on a narrative journey which highlights the significant level of dedication they have to their community. The analysis which follows details their dedication juxtaposed to the negative realities of their school's surrounding community which, as argued by the researcher, are a result of structural racism.

Summary

Each participating educator's dedication to their school community and the students served was evident throughout their narratives. Their experiences highlighted the humanistic commitment Black educators bring to their work with Black students. Furthermore, research participant experiences correlate with the research literature which highlights Black teacher preference to work in urban environments and schools with higher numbers of Black students (Fitchett, Hopper, Eyal, McCarthy and Lambert, 2017). It is essential that the individual teaching

practices of Black educators are encapsulated within the social and economic conditions they are working within. Each educator is functioning within a community dynamic that is impacted by the ever-enduring realities of structural racism. Each educator expressed not only knowledge of the dynamics which frame their work - poverty, community violence, lack of resources - but a continued dedication to their school community and the children they serve in spite of the dynamics. An opportunity exists within the educators in this study to more fluently articulate the daily practices which promote institutional transformation of the systems which create their work environment. While each educator spoke of their deep commitment to their work with Black children and their goals to create change for the children they serve, the educators lacked a deeper understanding of how their work is impacted directly by structural racism

Theme 2: Impact of Community Environment

The second thematic category, community environment, was determined by educator responses to how they and others (community members, students, etc.) define the community where their school is located. Essential factors included aesthetic descriptors of the community, access to healthy food options, and sentiments regarding gaps in the level of economic investment observed within the community. Participant responses were similar in their overall descriptions of their communities as ones that had been victim to disinvestment and as described by one participant to be 'virtually stepped over'. Each educator's narrative spoke to the surrounding school environment mimicking that of a socially toxic environment. Ginwright (2016) argues that "socially toxic environments are environments like neighborhoods and schools where lack of opportunities, blocked access, constrained resources, unclear pathways to a better life can erode " (p.3). Each educator's narrative provided descriptors in alignment with a socially toxic environment. Mrs. Wilcox, Mr. Tripp and Ms. Lexington spoke to the lack of healthy food options in or near their school communities. This lack of healthy food options

therein leaves students arriving at school with a lunch consisting of offerings from the local gas station or liquor store; offerings reflective of high sugar and high fat contents which leave students lethargic post consumption and not in a condition best for learning. The marginalization of individuals living in concentrated poverty experienced by the participating educators can be linked to withdrawals of commercial institutions, which provide...the distribution of goods and services (Massey & Denton, 1993; Sampson, 2012; Freeman, 2019). This aligns to the CRT tenet permanence of racism as it further highlights the impact of race on the political, social and economic experiences of People of color (Hiraldo, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Shaumbaugh, Nunn, and Anderson, 2019).

The participating educators in this research all shared common descriptors of some of the community's residents which paint less than ideal images for students to model themselves. Wilcox, Tripp and Kildare speak to the high number of drug addicted community members which can be found within their school's surrounding community. These members can be viewed by students during morning entry, at times, in the midst of usage. Their narratives align with the findings of Ginwright, Cammarota and Noguera (2010) of urban residents who "experience severe social isolation that produces self-destructive behaviors" (p.27).

All of the educators work within communities that have histories of racially inequitable structures and political processes that contribute to the concentrated poverty. Historically, discriminatory housing practices denied African-Americans access to housing markets that could have deconcentrated high poverty areas (Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1996; Rothstein, 2017; Harriot, 2019). Therefore, research participants are fighting the effects of structural racism. The effect of housing discrimination juxtaposed with unemployment rates compounds their experience. The unemployment rate skyrocketed in April 2020 for Blacks more than tripling to 16.7%, compared with the White unemployment rate of 14.2% (Gould and Wilson, 2020). CRT

tenet permanence of racism is evident. The experiences of each educator are influenced by the communities in which they serve. These communities have a history that has been and continues to be impacted by very intentional policies, systems and structures which limit and control the opportunities bestowed upon the Black community members who reside there (Shambaugh, Nunn, Anderson, 2013). The intended and unintended consequences experienced by the educators who work within these communities are not happenstance, but rather reflective of racism.

Summary

Each participant was able to speak to multiple strengths of their school's surrounding community. From generations of family systems who attend the schools, to the longevity of invested neighbors who remained throughout turbulent times. Each participant highlighted the impact of the aesthetics of the neighborhood surrounding their school community. They highlighted how the lack of healthy food options impacts the ways in which their students engage each day. Additionally, each discussed how the surrounding community's aesthetic was a reminder of the lack of economic investment being made in the community which therein impacts the conversations and levels of hope they are able to instill in their students each day.

Theme 3: Student Exposure to Trauma

The third thematic category, student exposure to trauma, was determined by participant responses to their definition of and understanding of trauma, the realities their students bring with them to the classroom each day, and the impact these realities have on their own emotional well-being. Research finds the emotional toil to be immense for teachers working in high stress, under-resourced environments with students grappling with complex trauma. McCann and Pearlman (1990) build upon this in their argument that teacher exposure and response to student trauma has the potential to impact the teacher's own "cognitive schemas, or beliefs, expectations

and assumptions about [themselves] and others” (p.132). The educators participating in this research, are working within a city that totals “more murders than any other U.S. city and is more violent than New York or Los Angeles...Chicago is smaller and much more racially segregated than both of [these] cities” (Moore, 2016, p.161). It is key to consider their experiences working with students who are exposed to community violence.

Ms. Jackson, for example, provided a clear description of the realities of Chicago violence during her narrative as she described entering her school building after a weekend to a hallway filled with broken glass from stray bullets. She shared the impact it has upon her, but also the impact it has upon her students who she walked in the building alongside and discovered the disarray. It has been established that violence tends to concentrate in very small geographic units or hot spots and that 3 - 4% of blocks within a city account for nearly half of all its crime (Weisburg, 2012). This reality colors the experience of our educators who work within these hot spots. Ms. Wilcox and Ms. Lexington highlighted the experiences their students share with them of witnessing situations of domestic violence and the loss of family members, sometimes fathers, from gun violence and incarceration. For them this impact spoke to the spaces they create in their classrooms to support feelings of safety and warmth to support student engagement. They were also able to speak to the methods they take to maintain their own emotional well-being as a result of supporting students exposed to trauma. Each educator spoke to the intentional moves they make to maintain their well-being in light of what they witness each day within their school's community. Methods ranging from exercise, prayer and spending time commiserating with colleagues in similar schools surfaced as methods educators use to sustain themselves in this work.

Summary

Every educator in this research agreed that while there are many strengths within the communities they work within, there are also notable areas of weakness and despair which color not only their experience, but that of their students. Through their narratives, the educators spoke to the impact of trauma on themselves and their students. Each educator was able to speak to varying levels of economic disinvestment in the community which surrounds their school and how that impacts their work with students; in their attempt to create hope for students, they remain aware of the community's aesthetic that at times reflects hopelessness.

Analysis of Participant Data Through CRT Lens

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the theoretical framework that not only grounds my study, but is also my chosen method for analyzing participant data. CRT supported the contextualization of participating educators' experiences and knowledge shared as legitimate, valued, and essential to comprehending, analyzing and illuminating the impact of structural racism in education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). CRT consists of the following tenets: 1) Counter-storytelling; 2) Permanence as racism, 3) Whiteness as property; 4) Interest conversion; 5) Critique of liberalism; 6) Intersectionality; 7) Commitment to social justice or Institutional transformation (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Love, 2019).

Counter-storytelling, permanence of racism and commitment to social justice are the tenets of primary emphasis in this research. I choose to focus on these three tenets because they most strongly supported the foundation of this research. First, the tenet of counter-storytelling validates the racially biased experiences of marginalized members of society (Decuir and Dixson, 2004; Delgado and Stefanic, 2017). When considering the experiences of Black

educators serving students in predominantly low-income, Black communities, this framework is critical as it underpins their narratives reflective of their students' marginalized experiences.

Permanence of racism stands as the second tenet of focus for this research as it acknowledges that racism controls the political, social and economic experiences of members of American society (Hiraldo, 2013; Shambaugh, Nunn, and Anderson, 2017). The Westside communities of focus for this research are heavily impacted by racially biased systems and initiatives that contribute to and sustain the continued disinvestment evident in the community. This tenet supports the theoretical framing of the narratives offered by Black educators serving the communities' students as their experiences are not happenstance; but rather a byproduct of structural racism.

Commitment to social justice is the third tenet of focus as it contextualizes the humanistic commitment that Black educators bring to their work with Black students. Research finds that Black teachers are not only particularly motivated to work with students of color, but also see it as a 'calling' (Irvine, 2002; Easton-Brooks, 2014). Black educators find their work with students to be a very intentional choice - a choice to contribute to the betterment of the Black community, by virtue of dedicating their professional lives to educating Black children. This goal of contributing to the betterment of society is reflected in the role Black teachers believe they play in the "social, political, and economic advancement of the larger African-American community" (Dixson and Dingus, 2008, p.823).

In Chapter four, all participant data was summarized and presented to the reader as narratives. In this chapter, the narratives are cross-analyzed to support fluidity throughout each section of data through the selected CRT tenet of focus. This analytical approach was chosen because constructed, as well as interpreted, meanings of participant data must be intertwined, rather than separated during analysis (Dicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Dicco-Bloom and

Crabtree (2006) further argue that “qualitative data analysis ideally occurs concurrently with data collection so that investigators can generate an emerging understanding about research questions, which in turn informs both the sampling and the questions being asked” (p. 317). This was evident in this research as I was able to strengthen my understanding of participant narratives in relation to the research questions and unveil themes which surfaced. This chapter closes with the sharing of themes identified throughout the participants' narratives inclusive of a discussion of the impact of trauma on their experiences. According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2012), the identification of themes is key to the data analysis process, just as significant as the identification of data that interconnects and tells each participant's story. The coding of each participant's data unveiled distinct ideas that were placed into categories and later grouped into themes.

As stated above, this research unveiled the following themes: Commitment to Students; Impact of Community Environment on student readiness for instruction; Student Exposure to Trauma. To critique and analyze these themes, I utilized the following CRT tenets: Counter-storytelling, Permanence of racism and Commitment to social justice. A visual representation of the correlation between each participant, the unveiled theme and the aligned CRT tenet can be found in Table 2, and is presented throughout the following discussion and analysis. As student and staff exposure to trauma was fluid throughout the narratives, each participant's analysis closes with the research data as it relates to the impact of trauma on the participant, their students or both parties.

What follows is an examination of each participant's narrative. The scrutiny of each participant narrative highlights the impact of structural racism within socio-economically marginalized Chicago communities and the educators who serve them. Participant narratives are cross-analyzed. A summary of similarities and differences between participant data is then presented to the reader at the close of each sub-section. Table 2 is located at the close of this

chapter and provides a visual of each participant, the themes unveiled in their narrative and the aligned CRT tenet.

Mrs. Wilcox's Story through CRT Frameworks

According to Sleeter (2017), Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides conceptual tools for analyzing and critiquing how racism impacts education. Again, in the context of this study, specific CRT tenets were employed to help elucidate the tools that Black educators draw from in fostering Black student success, in spite of structural racism. The realities of structural racism were fluid throughout Mrs. Wilcox's data. In my coding and analysis, three tenets of CRT were prevalent: Counter-storytelling; Permanence of Racism and Commitment to Social Justice. Embedded in Mrs. Wilcox's account, I find these tenets to be evident and impact her experience as Black educator working within her school community.

Counter-storytelling

When considering Mrs. Wilcox's experiences working within her Westside school, the tenet of counter-storytelling is evident throughout her narrative. Mrs. Wilcox's narrative highlighted the experiences her students bring with them to school each day. These experiences are laden with exposure to trauma that, as offered by Wilcox, impacts their ability to engage in learning. Rather than taking a deficit approach to these realities, she creates classroom systems responsive to her students' needs and facilitates their ability to better engage in learning each day. This action aligns with the tenet of counter-storytelling as it pushes for discourse to focus on the racialized and classed experiences of People of Color as sources of strength rather than deficits (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; McCoy & Dirks, 2015). In this context, Wilcox creates a classroom environment that is a safe space for her students to be nurtured with a variety of entry-points for engagement in learning.

“Every morning I lead my students through morning meetings and every afternoon I close the day with sunset meetings. During the morning meetings we recite the Brave Pledge that I created for them. We set a focus for the day which is typically a character trait like determination, confidence, empathy, grit or something like that.” (Wilcox, personal communication, October 2021).

Wilcox’s use of morning and sunset meetings supports her development of relationships with her students. The daily practices incorporate student voice and that not only create, but also maintain community between the class as a whole. These practices provide an opportunity to support her students as they enter the school space potentially “wounded by [the] racial discrimination [and] poverty [imparted] across generations” (Dixson and Dingus, 2008, p.827). These practices also impact her students’ readiness for instruction as it provides an access for them to process their experiences prior to entering the classroom; therein allowing them to settle in, more fully prepared to learn.

Permanence of Racism

The COVID-19 pandemic truly highlighted the disparity within this country and the city of Chicago in particular. The disparity was evidenced through the communities impacted most by the virus. While Blacks are just 13.4% of the US population, they represented 40% of COVID hospitalizations (CDC, 2020). In Chicago, although Blacks make up only 30% of the population, they comprised 50% of COVID-19 cases and nearly 70% of COVID-19 deaths - deaths concentrated in five predominantly Black neighborhoods (Moore, Pickington & Kumar, 2020). The pandemic truly unveiled those who according to Bell (1992), are “at the bottom of society’s well” (p.vi). Historically, Students of Color already struggle with fewer curricular, material and human resources to meet student academic needs (Owens, Reardon & Jenks, 2016; Hoffman and Miller, 2020). The pandemic further exacerbated this existing problem. Be it lack

of funding or lack of equitable allocation of resources, Black children and the Black teachers who serve them in communities like Mrs. Wilcox were consistently impacted. Funding disparities between high and low poverty school communities can be found to be even worse when we are mindful that “students in poverty are likely to need additional support in order to achieve academically” (Morgan & Amerikaner, 2018, p.3). As the pandemic pushed all students to learn remotely, the children in Mrs. Wilcox’s community lacked the most basic equipment to access learning. The digital divide was evident within her particular school community.

“When COVID first hit our community, I realized even more how much my school was not a priority in terms of the resources received from CPS. Our staff was scrambling for chromebooks and devices. I could not even wrap my mind around the whole phrase digital divide. Why was there such a divide? Why is there so much confusion with our students getting what they need?” (Wilcox, personal communication, October 2021).

Wilcox’s narrative highlighted her experience as a Black educator working to support Black students lacking the resources necessary to truly excel.

CRT tenets of counter-storytelling and permanence of racism validate the racially biased experiences of the members of Wilcox’s school community. Counter-storytelling revealed how Wilcox’s employment of a strength-based, non-deficit approach to her work exploring students’ lived experiences was critical to her ability to create a learning environment responsive to and reflective of the social emotional needs of her students. Permanence of racism revealed how the experiences of both Wilcox and her students continue to be heavily impacted by the realities of funding inequities prevalent within her predominantly Black school community.

The stories Wilcox’s students share regarding their exposure to community violence, drug use, and unclean living conditions are not happenstance; but rather representative of the

perpetual manner that structural racism endures within American society (Shambaugh, Nunn and Ander, 2019). Wilcox shares the following detail of her drive home:

“It would not be outlandish for me to see someone in the alley taking a bowel movement near a dumpster. It would not be out of the ordinary for me to see a few people bent over as if they are in pain, but we now know what it is. There are a lot of people walking around at all times of the day. You see the gestures being made to passers-by asking if you want something from them - drugs. There is heavy drug activity and a lot of trash around the area; not on the school grounds per se, but around the neighborhood”

(Wilcox, personal communication, October 2021).

The fact that this behavior has become something that Wilcox no longer finds “outlandish” (Wilcox, personal communication, October 2021) is indicative of the rate in which it is witnessed. These behaviors are a byproduct of the inconsistency in allocation of resources to curtail the prevalent use of illicit drugs by community members. Wilcox cited inequitable allocation of resources as well as the influx of drug activity and other disparaging activities as barriers to her student’s ability to fully engage in learning. These barriers are ones she actively navigates through the creation of various supports for her students to engage; barriers which exist as a result of racially biased policies and systems.

Further analysis of Wilcox’s narrative substantiates the argument that structural racism continues to impact the experiences of Black educators serving in socio-economically marginalized communities. Her interview details her experience working to foster academic success within her Black students who are forced to live in and witness the intended negative consequences of US policies. Shambaugh, Nunn and Anderson (2019) argue that the continued position of African-Americans in communities with the “lowest prospect for upwards mobility...is not an accident; [but rather] reflects both the intended and unintended consequences

of U.S. policies that have shaped where people live and the opportunities people have in those communities" (p.1). Their argument is grounded in the historical fact that high concentrations of African-Americans in large metropolitan areas, such as Chicago, experience significant racial and economic inequalities. As discussed in Chapter two of this research, the concentration of Blacks in high poverty areas is crafted out of US policies inclusive of redlining, blockbusting, highway construction and decreased access to employment opportunities (Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1996; Harriot, 2019; Shambaugh, Nunn and Anderson, 2019). Wilcox's experience as articulated in her data set is yet another consequence of the creation of policies which continue to limit and control the lives of Black people in US metropolitan areas.

Commitment to Social Justice

Mrs. Wilcox acknowledges the dedication she has not only her students, but to the larger school community. This aligns with CRT tenet commitment to social justice as she consistently articulates the level of intention she brings as a Black educator to her work with her Black students within the school and community she serves. In her narrative, Wilcox shares the following in reference to a conversation where her mother encourages her to shift her work to the suburbs:

"She would keep telling me to come out to the burbs where it is easier and so much more fulfilling; that it was a place where I didn't have to work so hard. My mantra to her was that I want to go where I am needed. I do not feel that I am needed in the suburbs, but rather in the city. Plus, I am familiar with the city and ...the area of my school, the demographics, the violence, everything that comes with this area does not scare me. I will not say that it attracts me, but I know it is where I am needed most" (Wilcox, personal communication, October 2021).

Wilcox's statement highlights the intent she brings to working within her Westside school community. It is in pursuit of this that Wilcox remains where "she is needed most" (Wilcox, personal communication, October 2021). It is in her Westside school, rather than the suburbs where she feels that her talents are best suited. Wilcox's commitment to her students aligns with the social justice agenda as articulated through CRT.

Wilcox's narrative highlights the dedication to the community she serves speaks. Her narrative speaks not only to her "awareness of [the] marginalization and social justice issues [within her school context, but also her] sense of responsibility for 'transcending current norms'" (Silverman, 2010, p.294). Wilcox's articulation to work where she is needed speaks to her sense of responsibility to her students and the larger community. It highlights a major component of social justice work to "move inside [our] own community and... [tear] down racism where [it] does exist" (Carmichael, 1966, p.5). For Wilcox, structural racism impacts and constricts the daily lives of her students' lived experiences by virtue of the community they reside.

Wilcox's deeper understanding of her role in her students' lives, not only highlights her approach to her work with students and the academic space she creates, but also underscores the intentional moves she makes to sustain herself in the work of creating an environment to nurture student success. She speaks to the actions she takes each day to ensure she arrives emotionally ready to greet her students. These actions are key as they allow her to be fully-present to support her students and all they bring to school with them each day. She shares how she must ensure she has a peaceful car ride to school, avoiding any conflicts with her partner so that she can be prepared for her students each morning. For Black educators who intentionally seek to serve Black students in schools located within socio-economically marginalized neighborhoods, they, like Wilcox, are very intentional regarding how they maintain their sense of self and emotional well-being. When educational professionals are ill-prepared to work with Black students they

can “contribute to and even exacerbate social emotional learning issues for students of color” (Ford, 2020, p.2). Therefore, the intentionality Wilcox brings to maintaining her emotional well-being is essential to the quality of support she is able to provide to her students.

Trauma

Trauma experienced by Wilcox’s students impacts her experience as an educator working in her Westside community. Hoffman and Miller (2020) argue that school provides not only academic instruction for children, but also serves as a protective factor of their social, emotional and well-being. Wilcox’s narrative speaks to her students' experience as a result of exposure to violence, but also the perils of poverty. Wilcox shares how her students walk outside of their homes and in the neighborhood see “people strung out, getting beat up...physical abuse, domestic violence (Wilcox personal communication, October 2021). Wilcox actively works to be responsive to her student’s exposure to violence by creating classroom structures and systems that provide not only consistency, but also provide space for her students to process their experiences.

According to the National Child and Traumatic Stress Network (2017), students exposed to trauma have increased rates of anxiety and incorporate maladaptive coping strategies to manage their experiences. Wilcox’s classroom practices are responsive to the realities of her students and work to decrease the use of maladaptive techniques that students may employ inclusive of school avoidance (National Child and Traumatic Stress, 2017). Wilcox’s creation of a classroom community where students feel not only cared for, but also heard (counter-narrative intersection), works to support the continued engagement of her students given the difficult situations they often encounter in their neighborhoods. Wilcox’s narrative also corroborates what research finds to be a negative correlation between exposure to violence and rates of student achievement (Ginwright, 2016; Hoffman and Miller, 2020). Black children who witness

violence are shown to score significantly below other White children (Ginwright, 2016). In her narrative, Wilcox highlights this reality, sharing how her students are:

“...struggling with mathematical concepts like place value, adding and subtracting multi-digit whole numbers, regrouping and multiplying, some of them are still writing their letters backwards. A lot of them are having a difficult time writing a complete sentence or starting a sentence with a capital letter. My students are juggling all of this while still dealing with trauma on top of their regular stress (Wilcox personal communication, October 2021).

The skills that Wilcox highlights are all standards that are typically addressed in the grade level preceding the one she teaches. Amidst these realities, Wilcox pushes forward to ensure that her students grow not only academically, but socially amidst all that is going on around them.

Nevertheless, her students exposure to violence impacts their readiness to engage in the learning environment.

Ms. Jackson’s Story through CRT frameworks

Critical Race Theory in Ms. Jackson’s data examined structural racism through the lens of her experience as a Black teacher working in a socio-economically marginalized Westside school community. In my analysis and coding, three CRT tenets surfaced repeatedly: Counter-storytelling, Permanence of racism and Commitment to social justice. Due to Jackson's experience, the on-going impact of structural racism is evident in her work with Black students. Ms. Jackson’s narrative was similar to Wilcox as both articulated not only their deep dedication to their Black, Westside school communities and students, but also the intentional manner in which they work to sustain themselves in the work which pulls from each of their emotions.

Counter-storytelling

Incorporation of participant narratives mimics the manner in which members of the Black community actively disseminate traditions and information through generations (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014). The CRT tenet counter-storytelling shines through Ms. Jackson's narrative specifically in her translation of the behaviors of her Black students to her White colleagues. In her narrative she educates her White colleagues on a norm within Black culture:

“In [Black] culture, we are taught that if somebody touches you, you have the right to defend yourself. The student in question was attacked in class...I pushed the team to be conscious of the entire story before pushing to require an apology letter. I suggested holding a peace circle where the kids can actually sift through their emotions on how the fight impacted them” (Jackson, personal communication, November 2021).

Jackson's sharing of the lessons extended to Black children within their community which conflict with ways of managing conflict in the school setting is key. Jackson's voice challenges the majoritarian stories often placed upon Blacks by White ideology. Jackson's personal and professional positionality as a Black educator, not only makes her privy to this ideological knowledge, but also grants her the ability to view the student's situation with a dual lens as both a Black person and a member of the school community dealing with the larger impacts of the disruption to the class and school community.

Jackson's dual lens further contextualizes the work impressed upon Black educators working alongside Whites who impress their majoritarian thinking on Black youth and educators in school spaces. In these spaces, the critical work of counter-storytelling is often left to People of Color (Mitchell, 2012). As CRT seeks to expose issues of racial oppression, they also centralize race and challenge meritocracy (Matsuda et. al, 1993). Similar to Matsuda (1993),

Mitchell (2012) categorizes four common themes found in United States educational settings, two of which found to be most evident in Jackson's experience: difference is deficit and meritocracy is appropriate. Majoritarian stories stand in alignment with meritocracy.

"Contemporary majoritarian stories often downplay the centrality of race and racism in social institutions like schools and promote deficit ideologies that blame social and educational inequities on non-dominant populations" (Mitchell, 2013, p.342). When analyzing Jackson's White colleagues' response to the fight which occurred in the classroom, the teachers postulated that the student response was something to be fixed, rather than a response to issues within the broader school community. The response and presented solution from Jackson's White colleagues is "deficit-laden... [where the students were] problems to be solved rather than students with much to contribute to [and critique the] learning environment" (Viesca, Torres, Barnatt, Piazza, 2013).

It is through Jackson's ability to share a counter-story that she unveiled not only the realities of Black students, but also Black educators advocating for Black students. In her narrative, Jackson speaks of a desire to begin silencing herself within staff meetings with colleagues across race. This appears to be a protective factor she employs so that she does not feel compelled to constantly defend the behaviors displayed by her Black students. It is at the utterance of another Black colleague that she is encouraged to speak up. This experience illustrates how race structures how schools operate and impacts the experiences of both staff and students of color (Castagno, 2008).

The response of Jackson's White colleagues speaks to the larger need for White educators who gain "institutional and societal power by virtue of their professions...to meaningfully grapple with racism and other issues of inequity to disrupt...the persistence of white privilege, hegemony and normativity" (Viesca, Torres, Barnatt, Piazza, 2013, p.99).

Jackson's experience and need to educate her White colleagues on an alternate approach to the identified issue speaks to the deeper work required of White educators working in service to Black youth.

Permanence of Racism

Permanence of racism acknowledges the influence of race on the political, social and economic experiences of People of Color (Hiraldo, 2013). Jackson's details of the inequity in resource allocation further speaks to the continued impact racism has on Black students and the teachers who serve them in public education. Similar to the aforementioned narrative and analysis of Mrs. Wilcox's experience, the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the ever-present realities of structural racism evident via the lack of resources available to Ms. Jackson's Black students. Akin to Wilcox, Jackson highlighted how her students were at the crux of the digital divide and struggled to access instruction due to lack of access to adequate technology and reliable internet. Jackson questions the struggles faced by her Black students compared to students living in other Non-Black zip codes throughout the city. This lack of resources to support student's access to instruction is further reminiscent of the lives of the students and residents of our Black communities who, according to Bell (1992), reside "at the bottom of society's well" (p.vi).

Jackson's narrative also highlights how racism continues to impact teacher hiring practices within her school setting. Her narrative speaks to a history of racial-bias experienced by Black teacher candidates. Jackson offers the following:

"When I've asked about the lack of Black teachers being hired, the response has been that they are just looking for the best teachers. I get that. However, you are also looking at what university candidates graduated from forgetting that Black and Brown people are still not always able to attend prestigious colleges and universities due to structural

racism. If a principal goes by that standard, of course they are going to choose mostly white teachers” (Jackson, personal communication, November 2021).

Jackson’s sentiments display how her school leader’s hiring practices extend preference to individuals who attend more prestigious colleges and universities; institutions that are disproportionately White. Jackson’s sentiments further hint at systemic barriers to entry faced by Black teacher candidates as “Black college students who completed teacher preparation programs are more likely to borrow federal student loans than other students. High amounts of student loan debt can be a barrier for students of color entering the teaching profession given low teacher salaries” (Fiddiman, Campbell and Partelow, 2019, p.3). This reality impacts her experience as a Black educator as it creates a dynamic where her professional community inclusive of Black colleagues is severely limited. This contributes to the burden she articulates in her narrative of being constantly responsible for sharing the social context of her students to her White colleagues. While she is committed to the well-being of her students, it contributes to another weight that she must carry as a Black educator working with Black children, in a predominantly White professional space. While she has chosen to dedicate her professional life to the education of Black children who look like her in a Black neighborhood, she must not only work to create a space to support her Black student’s academic success within her classroom, but also within the classrooms of her White colleagues.

Furthermore, analysis of Jackson’s narrative working in a school located within a gentrifying neighborhood found her professional experience to be negatively influenced by the ongoing impacts of structural racism. Her school’s inability to meet the emergent needs of her students at the onset of the pandemic is not happenstance. The fact that she questions the availability of Black candidates is further troubling as she relies on her Black colleagues for support. This has the potential to impact not only her, but her other Black colleagues' feelings of

collegial support at the school. It may also contribute to her longevity at her school. As the diversity gap widens in US public education, Jackson points out how Black candidates are available, but may be overlooked due to bias in hiring practices (El-Mekki, 2022). The multiple barriers that Jackson speaks to in her narrative which impact her experience as a Black educator are linked to the on-going impact of structural racism in America.

Commitment to Social Justice

The CRT tenet commitment to social justice strives to provide voice to the disenfranchised, therein resisting racialized inequality (McCoy & Dirk, 2015). The emotional load Jackson highlighted in her narrative is reminiscent of the humanistic commitment Black educators bring to their work with Black students. As discussed in Chapter two, Black educators tend to see the education of Black students as a ‘calling’, akin to community work and synonymous with taking on personal responsibility for the education and well-being of Black students (Casey, 1993; Dixson and Dingus, 2008; Lewis, 2016; Irvine, 2022). This humanistic commitment and desire to work with Black children is qualified by the fact that Black teachers are found to prefer to work in urban environments with higher numbers of Black students (Fitchett, Hopper, Eyal, McCarthy and Lambert, 2017). Lewis (2016) argues that Black educators carry an additional, self-imposed emotional weight and sense of urgency to their work with students. Jackson’s narrative speaks to the humanistic commitment of Black educators, but also the toil caused when there is inadequate support from other Black colleagues. Jackson offers that working alongside other Black educators who acknowledge this reality supports her ability to continue in this work.

The humanistic commitment Jackson brings to her work also mirrors the CRT tenet commitment to social justice as she pushes her colleagues across racial difference to understand the counter-narratives of her students. It also influences the academic space she creates for her

students to thrive. Jackson's inclusion of her students' voice in the creation of her classroom norms and rules is responsive to the developmental and emotional needs of high school students. It supports her goal of developing a positive classroom environment and positively impacts her students' readiness to engage in instruction. It speaks to her understanding of the social justice agenda which sees school as a key vehicle in the development of critical thinking skills within students who recognize and disrupt social inequities (Viesca, Schoepner-Torres, Barnatt, and Piazza, 2013). Her inclusion of student voice is transformative. The inclusion of student voice impacts the individual ways in which her students experience classroom culture, but also impacts the manner in which they experience how their voice can shape their experience in school as an institution.

Jackson's narrative further highlights her sense of responsibility for "transcending current norms" (Silverman, 2010, p.294). This responsibility is intricately linked to the level of intention she brings to her work as a Black educator in service to Black children. Jackson pushes beyond simply making connections with her students based on similar racialized experiences. Rather, her narrative speaks to her intentional creation of an academic space that seeks to create equity and honor Black youth voice within a school where there are instances of "White decision makers...unconsciously perpetuating issues of racial inequity" (Miller, 2013, p.346). While it could be considered that Jackson's colleagues are genuinely dedicated to improving the academic outcomes of Black students, their contributions in the experience shared are well-positioned to maintain the further marginalization of Black youth in education. Her classroom practices are transformative in the ways in which they work to empower the voices of youth, something unfortunately in contradiction to more traditional ways of schooling which see knowledge lying solely in the hands of teachers; rather than in a reciprocal nature, where students are contributors to the learning environment (Friere, 1968). The practices that Jackson

incorporates into her classroom are essential as they work to support her students' readiness to engage in the overall learning environment.

Trauma

Jackson's narrative highlights the dual lens she has as an educator working with colleagues across racial differences in a predominantly Black, Westside school. While her lens allowed her to provide context to her colleagues regarding lessons taught to Black children in particular instances, it also highlighted a reality of working with youth experiencing trauma. Youth who witness violence report higher rates of aggression and externalized behavior (Ludwig and Warren, 2009; Hoffman and Miller, 2020). Jackson's narrative defends her students' response to an instance of violence with violence as a learned behavior within the Black community. However, the response stands as an unfortunate response by her students as a result of their exposure to trauma. Children exposed to trauma are subject to developing maladaptive behaviors as coping mechanisms. Considering the fight highlighted in Jackson's narrative, there is a gap in her critique of her students' need for additional conflict resolution skills. She makes no mention of where these skills can and should be taught. Her absence highlights a potential missed opportunity in her school for the inclusion of teaching conflict resolution skills with the students. While Jackson highlighted that responding with violence when presented with it is a norm within Black culture, she was remiss of critiquing how that is not a productive method for resolving conflicts that occur, especially in the school setting. Nor did her narrative speak to the desensitization of violence experienced by youth who are constantly exposed to violence (Hoffman and Miller, 2020).

Jackson's narrative also highlighted the fatigue she experiences as a Black educator working within her Westside community with students. She introduces the term "emotional

vampires” as a descriptor of her students (Jackson personal communication, November 2021).

Jackson shares how:

“it is like they are sucking the soul out of me. On bad days, it is like some students are so needy they take your energy away...I realize that students draw on my energy because they need it and whatever support I can offer - comfort or discipline - takes a toll

(Jackson personal communication, November 2021).

Children exposed to trauma often have difficulty managing relationships (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017). As an adult who works with this population daily, Jackson’s narrative speaks to the fatigue she feels in not only educating youth exposed to trauma, but also maintaining positive relationships with them in effort to support their continued engagement in academic coursework. Jackson shared the intentional work she does each week to refuel – exercise, going to the library and spending time with friends (Jackson personal communication, November 2021). Her ability to refuel is essential as her work with and impact on the academic outcomes of her Black students is critical to their success.

Mrs. Lexington’s Story through CRT Frameworks

Use of participant narratives serves as a method recognized within a CRT framework to share ideas of how discrimination against People of Color are perpetuated and justified through institutionalized ways of being (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Mrs. Lexington’s details of the experiences of her students as a result of living in communities lacking healthy food options and inequities in school funding exemplify the on-going impacts of structural racism that Black educators confront within their work with Black students. In my analysis and coding, counter-storytelling, permanence of racism and commitment to social justice were evident. The fluid nature in which these tenets were found within Mrs. Lexington’s narrative functions as an explanation of how she continues to manage the impact of structural racism while working at her

socio-economically and racially marginalized Westside public elementary school. Similar to Wilcox, Lexington's narrative speaks to how disinvestment in the community surrounding her school impact her students' academic level of engagement and overall readiness to learn. As Lexington introduced the impact of food deserts on her students' readiness for instruction, she builds upon Wilcox's narrative of serving in a forgotten community in terms of allocation of resources. Different from Jackson, Lexington does not expound upon the impact of working with colleagues across racial differences on her experience as a Black educator. Nevertheless, Wilcox, Lexington and Jackson all speak to the level of intention they bring to their work with Black students every day.

Counter-storytelling

In an effort to address a one-billion-dollar deficit in 2013, then Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel announced a wave of school closures. While it was first publicized that as many as three hundred thirty schools would be closed, the closures were ultimately pared down to forty-nine elementary schools and one high school to be closed by the end of the 2012-2013 school year. Students attending these institutions would be assigned seats in nearby schools, while the teachers were displaced from their positions and made eligible to apply for open positions at other schools. Over 88 percent of the affected students were Black, 90% of the schools were majority Black and 71% had predominantly Black teachers (Ewing, 2018; Todd-Breland, 2018). Lexington's narrative opened with her positionality as a Black teacher previously displaced from her predominantly Black Westside school in 2013.

The Chicago Public School closures of 2012-2013 are the largest mass school closure in modern US history (Straus, 2018; Ewing, 2018). A consistent narrative provided as rationale for the closures was that the identified schools were under-enrolled and underperforming (Ewing, 2018). What was missing from this storyline were the historical realities that contributed to the

under enrollment of the closed schools in the first place. Todd-Breland (2018) argues that it was “not coincidence that the Black neighborhoods where schools were closed also suffered from other forms of disinvestment and inequality: foreclosed homes, commercial flight, mass incarceration and a lack of access to grocery stores” (p.225). Despite the disinvestment within her previous and current school community, Lexington consistently shares her continued level of intention to serve on Chicago’s Westside. Even after being displaced from her original school as a result of the school closures, she continued to pursue work at a school on the city’s Westside serving Black students. I find Lexington’s conviction admirable. She expounds in her narrative her desire to:

“stay in urban education and... stay in this (Westside) community. This community was similar to where I taught previously so I felt that I would be comfortable in that environment with the demographic of students” (Lexington, personal communication, October 2021).

Lexington’s aspiration is similar to the commitment of many of the Black teachers’ impacted during the 2012-2013 school year. During the 2012-2013 academic year, over 70% of the closed schools had majority-Black teacher and student populations (Todd-Breland, 2018).

Lexington’s story further embodies the tenet of counter-storytelling in her ability to share her personal experience as a displaced teacher. Despite her negative employment experiences, she continued to seek work within Westside neighborhood schools serving Black students. Her description of her Westside schools as “hidden gems” (Lexington personal communication, October 2021) is in direct contradiction to the wider public, deficit-laden depiction of the schools identified for closure. The forty-nine schools were described as failing and under-enrolled. “Public discourse... implicated them as failures as students, as parents and teachers” (Ewing, 2018, p.134). For Lexington, her school was not failing, but rather a “gem” where she proudly

served for over 10 years. Her narrative challenges the popular discourse of the forty-nine elementary schools closed during 2013.

Lexington's interview data also highlights her level of intentionality to serve in her Westside community. Her choice accentuates a personal and professional dedication to supporting the academic success of Black students. Furthermore, I argue that her narrative is not unique to the over nine hundred teachers impacted by the 2012-2013 school closures. Solorzano & Yosso (2002) assert that "counter-story telling developed as both a method of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told... (those on the margins of society), and as a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant course" (p.232). Lexington's narrative amplifies the voices of the many Black teachers displaced.

Missing from Lexington's analysis of her experience as a displaced teacher, was her understanding of the structural inequities which created the conditions under which she served as the schools impacted by the closures were described as under-enrolled and underperforming, missing from Lexington's narrative is her articulation of the structural factors which contributed to her experience. Lexington and the other 900 teachers impacted by the 2012-2013 school closures were the unintended casualties of structural racism. It was not a coincidence that the closed schools were under-enrolled and underperforming, but rather the result of calculated and very intentional systems and structures which limited the upward mobility and growth of Black Chicago neighborhoods (Solomon, Castro and Maxwell, 2019; Shambaugh, Nunn, Anderson, 2020). Lexington's absence of speaking to racist practices that created her experience as a Black educator working in service to Black students in her Westside school communities might reflect a lack of criticality of broader structural issues. While her narrative spoke to the strengths within her previous school community, it was remiss of contradicting the deficit-laden ideology that

was used to justify the disclosure of over forty-nine predominantly Black schools. It also was remiss of making the connection that the majority of displaced teachers were demographically similar to her, Black. (Todd-Breland, 2018).

During the pandemic, the experiences of Black teachers were further marginalized and placed at risk. Lexington's dedication to her students was evident as she was one of the first groups of educators selected to return to work-in person amidst the COVID-19 pandemic due to the student population she served (pre-kindergarten). As Chicago Public Schools fought to reopen schools amidst the pandemic in January 2020, Black teachers who worked at predominantly Black West and South side schools were significantly impacted. Due to the racially segregated manner in which Chicago is demographically situated, the highest concentration of Black Chicagoans live on the West and South sides of the city. COVID-19 vaccination rates of Black Chicagoans trended behind those of White and Asian Chicagoans. In Chicago, although Blacks make up only 30% of the population, they comprised 50% of COVID-19 cases and nearly 70% of COVID-19 deaths; death concentrated in five predominantly Black neighborhoods located on the South and West Side of the city (Moore, Pickington, & Kumar, 2020; Reyes, Husain, et.al, 2020). Furthermore, nationally, "Black children accounted for 20% of those who had lost a parent to COVID-19 through early 2021, despite making up only 14% of all children in the United States" (Office of Civil Rights, 2021). In Chicago, Black educators align with national norms where they are found serving most predominantly in schools with Black students (CPS, 2020). The pandemic once again put Black educators on the frontlines of not only working to ensure the academic success of their students, but also placing them at disproportionate risk of infection as the rates of infection within their school communities were disproportionately higher than teachers serving predominantly White students.

Permanence of Racism

Inequitable school funding, availability of healthy food options and the concentrated nature in which Lexington's students are exposed to community and domestic violence underscore the continued impact of racism on the lives of she and her students. Lexington's data emphasized the realities of how socioeconomically marginalized community members are affected by lack of resources and inequities in school funding allocations. The inequity in school funding highlighted by Lexington is in alignment with Morgan and Amerikaner's (2018) argument that "funding gaps between high and low poverty [schools] look even worse when we consider that students in poverty are likely to need additional supports in order to succeed academically" (p.3). Todd Breland's (2018) argument of the "long-standing funding inequities at the state and city levels" (p. 227) further intensifies and exposes racial and economic inequities in education. Lexington's articulation of her experience as a result of funding inequities aligns and colors Breland's argument as it provides a from the ground perspective on how the inequities impact the lived experiences of Black teachers.

Lexington's narrative called attention to the neighborhood blight which impacts the community's aesthetic. She expounds upon the number of unused and abandoned lots throughout the community, one of which being directly across the street from the school. This is representative of the lack of public and private investment found in some Black communities as a result of structural racism (Shambaugh, Nunn and Anderson, 2019). Vacant and abandoned lots create feelings of disregard from community members regarding the city's level of investment in the community and its' residents. This mimics the broken windows theory coined by Wilson and Kelling (1982), discussed in Chapter two. In affluent Chicago neighborhoods, vacant lots are virtually non-existent as opposed to the numbers in which they can be observed in the West Garfield Park/North Lawndale communities as described by the research participant. There is an

undisputed divide across Chicago wards, communities and neighborhoods with respect to fiscal resources towards technological, educational and housing equity.

Mrs. Lexington also spoke to the additional socio-emotional supports she puts in place to support her students due to their exposure to community and familial violence/trauma/readiness. A particular question in her circumstance is what additional resources are available to students and families beyond the in-class support offered by Lexington due to a potential lack of community resources? Darling-Hammond (1998) echoes sentiments expressed by W.E.B. DuBois in 1903, “the color line divides us [Americans] still” (p.1). Hammond (1998) offers that “two-thirds of minority students still attend schools that are predominantly minority, most of them located in central cities and funded well below those in neighboring suburban districts” (p.2). This is evident in the experiences of inequitable resource allocation articulated by Lexington. Additionally, Lexington highlighted a lack of parental participation in school offered programs and activities. I question whether the programs offered are truly reflective of the needs of parents, or more so reflective of the programming available in light of the school’s budget. If programming is not reflective or inclusive of the needs of the community, involvement will consistently lag.

Commitment to Social Justice

During a moment of reflection on her student’s experience, Ms. Lexington discussed the lack of Black male role models for her students. She highlighted that as a result of the tremendous loss experienced by many of her students as a result of the tragic deaths of their fathers, there are limited male options to change the status quo of Black men in their lives. Lexington’s reflection is in alignment with the disproportionate rates in which Black men are incarcerated and victims of homicide in this county (Anderson, 2008; Alexander, 2012; Freeman, 2019). Her work with students is directly impacted by the realities they bring to school with them

each day which, at times, impact their ability to engage. This therein impacts her instructional plan and methods she must employ to best meet their needs which are not the fault of her or her students, but rather a necessary response to the continued impact of racist systems which disproportionately impact low income, Black children and their community.

Lexington's dedication to remain responsive to the needs of her students provides evidence of the CRT tenet commitment to social justice. In light of the negative realities experienced by her students as a result of racially biased systems, she remains dedicated to creating an educational space that encourages them to feel safe and cared for and supports their readiness to engage in the learning environment. Her classroom space is one that reflects a social justice agenda as it seeks to affirm the varied experiences influenced by exposure to trauma her students bring to school each day (Zeichner, 2009). Lexington's dedication to her students and their need for developmentally appropriate environments is critical. Her creation of this space is in direct opposition of the adult spaces many of her students find themselves responsible to navigate at no fault of their own. Lexington's narrative furthers the argument that race as well as income create the experiences her students bring to the classroom each day; experiences which cause her to navigate and adjust her practice to be responsive in order for students to better engage in instruction and, I argue, thrive. Lexington's practices are transformative to the relationships she builds with her students and their families as they support their continued academic engagement.

Trauma

Lexington's narrative unveiled the experiences of teachers impacted by the massive school closures which occurred during the 2012-2013 school year. In her interview, Lexington's revealed a continued dedication to a Westside community which the popular narrative described as failing. Lexington spoke of the trauma her students bring to school. Her students (consistently)

share stories “about violence in their homes - mothers and fathers or boyfriends arguing and being violence towards one another...[or] somebody throwing a chair across a room” (Lexington personal communication, 2021). For children exposed to trauma, fostering a sense of safety and the development of strategies to cope is essential (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017). The experiences brought to her classroom by her students cause her to adjust her practice. She highlights adjustments to her classroom routines to support her students' feelings of safety. Lexington intentionally incorporates strategies to support her students' ability to process their exposure to trauma:

“To help my students manage [their exposure to trauma], I let them talk about it and get it out. My thinking is that it hopefully allows them to release it so that we can move onto something else as it is obvious that they have feelings that are bothering them. Other times, I just work to keep them in a happy mood. I work to make sure our environment is comfortable and that they feel safe when they are with me. I look to make sure that the culture in my classroom is one where they feel they can release the bad things they see outside of our room (Lexington personal communication, October 2021)

Lexington's narrative also highlights stressors which reflect her student's lives within low socio-economic communities negatively impacted by structural racism. According to Kriser (2007) “children from disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to experience any number of major family stressors, such as family chaos, conflict, violence and dissolution, victimization/incarceration and/or death of a family member, and neglect and/or maltreatment than children raised in more affluent communities” (p.212). In her narrative, Lexington speaks to this reality, sharing how “a lot of my students have lost their father's tragically...Another [traumatic] event is seeing the police come in and raid their [homes] at night” (Lexington personal communication, October 2021). The experiences of her students that Lexington

highlights occurs more prevalently in communities similar to the one she serves than with children raised in more affluent communities. “Although most children are exposed to a few major life events, stressors and traumas during youth, children who grow up in low-income, urban neighborhoods are frequently exposed to these trials” (Kiser, 2007, p. 211). Lexington works doubly hard to ensure that her students have access to a classroom that will support their academic growth, but is also responsive to the negative socio-emotional realities that exist for children exposed to trauma.

Mr. Tripp’s Story through CRT Framework

According to the US Department of Education, just 2% of American teachers are Black men (Nguyen, Foster and Warren, 2020; Borowski and Will, 2021). This disparity is further complicated by the fact that teachers are leaving the career at rates disproportionate to their White counterparts. Integrating the perspective of Black male educators was critical to this research as their position within public education is key within the research literature (Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Joseph Gibson, 2020). While many Black men are present and active in their children’s and extended families’ lives and homes, the ongoing impacts of structural racism continue to be evident via the disproportionate rates of incarceration and homicide amongst Black men (Anderson, 2008; Center for Disease Control, 2018). Nationally, Black Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly 5 times the rate of White Americans (Nellis, 2021). Locally, Illinois is one of twelve states where half of the prison population is Black (Nellis, 2021). These facts juxtaposed with the unfortunate realities of Black male homicide further contextualize the additional role Black male educators carry with their students. While Blacks comprise only 13.5% of the US population, 55.6% of homicide victims are Black (Nellis, 2021). For Black men ages eighteen through thirty years, death as a result of homicide is highest. The realities of homicide and incarceration paint a picture for Black men that is bleak. Black male

educators must shine through these horrific statistics and stand as visible and consistent alternative options for Black students who lack a reliable male presence in their lives.

In my analysis and coding of Mr. Tripp's narrative, the tenets of counter-storytelling, permanence of racism and commitment to social justice were prevalent. Tripp's narrative unveils the impact structural racism has upon his lived experience as Black male educator working in a socio-economically marginalized Chicago community. Similar to Lexington and Wilcox, Mr. Tripp's narrative highlighted the impact of working in communities lacking resources to fully support the physical and mental well-being of its residents. His description of the community laden with abandoned buildings and vacant lots, further contextualizes the impact of working in a community considered forgotten. Similar to each of the previous participants, he speaks to his intentionality to work in a school in service to Black students. However, different from each of the previous participants, Mr. Tripp's narrative highlights how his gender in addition to his race impacts his work with Black students.

Counter-storytelling

Solorzano & Yosso (2002) argue counter-story telling is a "method of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told" (p.232). Mr. Tripp and Mr. Kildare are members of the 2% of Black male educators within the country (Borowski and Will, 2021). As members of a small, but essential population within the field of educators, their narratives and the perspectives offered are critical to this research. Mr. Tripp's narrative, similar to other participants, highlights the intentionality in which he brings to his work with students. Rather than seeing his student experiences as a deficit, Tripp's narrative speaks to the level of resilience he finds within his students. Tripp describes his students as being:

"resilient in a way of understanding that [while] the outside community is troubling..."

They still try to do their very best every day, regardless of the circumstances they're placed into" (Tripp, personal communication, October 2021).

Tripp's observation of his student's as resilient is powerful when cross-analyzed with his position as a Black educator. It is in his narrative that the theme of resilience is presented as a character-trait within his students that he seeks to build upon and strengthen through the creation of engaging and culturally/socially relevant lessons. Tripp offers that in spite of many distractions he works to keep his students engaged via creation of content relevant to his student's lives. He shares his attempt for his content to "*come full circle for them*" (Tripp, personal communication, October 2021). The intention that Tripp brings to his lesson design is integral to social justice pedagogy. His instructional practices and creation of instruction that builds on [his] students' experiential knowledge is in-line with social justice pedagogy (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, et.al, 2009; Viesca, Schoepner-Torres, Barnatt, Piazza, 2013).

A missed opportunity of Tripp's is found within his ability to speak to how his instruction actively works to challenge students' understanding of their current experiences and the inequitable practices which created them and impact their readiness to engage in the learning environment. While his instructional practices are responsive to the needs of his students which exist as a result of their lived experiences in a community negatively impacted by structural racism, his instruction does not reflect his larger awareness of this impact. This action would support his students in their ability to challenge the social structures they witness each day and, ideally, cultivate ways to change them.

Permanence of Racism

It has been suggested by Critical Race theorists that the intersection of racism and other forms of oppression influence the lived experiences of People of Color (Crenshaw, 1995; Brayboy & Bartlett, 2005). Mr. Tripp focuses heavily on the lived experiences of his students

and their parents within a community that has experienced generations of disinvestment. He draws a connection between the disruptive and sometimes violent behaviors displayed by students inside of his classroom, to those the students witness outside in the community. He believes that this impacts his ability to create true change within his students due to a lack of reinforcement by the larger community. He believes his impact lies not only in his visibility as a Black man in the lives of his students, but also in his positionality in the lives of his students as their teacher. According to Tripp, *“it’s like I want to help so much, but at times I feel that I can only do so much. I can talk to a student until I am blue in the face, however, if it is not being reinforced at home it does not hit the same”* (Tripp, personal communication, October 2021).

Evidence of Mr. Tripp’s humanistic commitment to students is found within his interview and subsequent data extracted from his narrative. He speaks of the emotional triggering that occurs as he observes a replication of his own experiences as Black male youth within the experiences of his students. This triggering speaks to the additional weight felt by Black educators working in school communities with Black children. This weight for Mr. Tripp is manifesting in a manner which causes him to see his professional choice as a punishment, rather than a privilege. He offers the following:

“As a teacher, I know that I am doing God’s work. However, sometimes I question if I am being punished when I show up every day to a community with the same trash and it just looks horrible. It makes me begin to question if there will be any real change or if I have to lead the change myself. It just becomes very hard at points when you feel overworked, underpaid and underappreciated from parents and students. At times it makes me wonder if I really want to invest more time and energy into my students when it is not being returned. It becomes a constant battle on a daily basis (Tripp personal communication, October 2021).

Tripp's narrative is further indicative of the emotional toil that Black educators experience working in their school communities. This weight is reminiscent of the experiences shared by research participants Lexington and Jackson. All three underscored how their commitment to their students and school community often weighs heavier upon them due to their race. Each educator spoke to the labor and load of their humanistic commitment which is borne out of their dedication to their Black students housed within a predominantly Black, disinvested community. Their work is also directly related to the circumstances referenced within Tripp's narrative; circumstances directly reflective of the disinvestment in the community surrounding the school. The community disinvestment is representative of structural racism. Tripp's narrative describes this disinvestment as lack of healthy food options (i.e. food desert), crime and over-policing; all of which increase the level of turmoil and trauma experienced by the students served.

Tripp's feeling that he was being punished was especially troubling to me as the researcher; especially considering the low percentage of Black male educators. While "fewer than 7 percent of educators are Black, 2 percent are male and teacher turnover rates are especially high for Black men" (Borowski & Will, 2021, p.1). The resources extended to Black educators working within Black communities must be assessed to support educator longevity. Throughout Tripp's narrative is a tone of fatigue. This fatigue from a Black male educator during the first semester of in-person learning while the COVID-19 pandemic continued to rage through the country is not entirely surprising. Tripp, like others returning to the front lines of education, were receiving students impacted by loss. "Black children accounted for 20% of those who had lost a parent to COVID-19 through early 2021, despite making up only 14% of the all children in the United States" (Office for Civil Rights, 2021). This combined with the need for mental health services, that for students of color heavily rely on receipt in schools; schools which were closed for the prior sixteen months. Tripp's fatigue was palpable in his interview. Nevertheless, he is a

critical component in the lives of the students he serves. It is essential that educators who actively seek to work in communities with Black children remain there as their impact on positive academic outcomes are significant (Easton-Brooks, 2013; Perry, 2020).

Commitment to Social Justice

McCoy and Dirk (2015) interpret commitment to social justice to be inclusive of providing voice to the disenfranchised and resisting the racially biased distribution of resources. Tripp's narrative accentuates the intentional moves he made as a Black educator to work with his current population of students on Chicago's Westside. Tripp states that he:

“chose to work at my current school because it was a great opportunity for me when I first moved to Chicago from Florida. The school reflected the demographic I wanted to work with when I moved here. As a Black male, I have come from and survived many things personally and wanted to work with students of a similar background” (Tripp, personal communication, October 2021).

In reflecting upon his own experiences as a Black child, Tripp sought to work in a community which mirrored his upbringing to support the positive and transformative development of Black youth. This development is grounded in his reference to his experience as a Black youth growing up in similar circumstances coupled with his desire to create positive relationships with youth to create a learning environment where they can thrive (Eichas, Meca, Montgomery, Kurtines, 2017). He goes on to expound his view of teaching Black children akin to *“doing God's work”* (Tripp personal communication, October 2021). What is absent from Tripp's reflection is alignment to social justice pedagogy and leveraging his role in the classroom to challenge traditional notions of schooling. Tripp's narrative highlights his goal of working within a community that simulated his own upbringing and experience. However, his articulation of how his educational leadership actively works to not perpetuate his negative experiences in the

experiences of his students is left unclear and is of concern. Commitment to a social justice agenda “promotes teaching beyond the knowledge transfer and embraces schooling as an important vehicle in the development of critically thoughtful and compassionate democratic citizens capable of...disrupting current inequities” (Cammarota, 2011; Viesca, Schoepner-Torres, Barnatt, Piazza, 2013). Tripp’s narrative, however, lacks alignment to this critical component of social justice teaching.

Trauma

Tripp’s narrative, given the above analysis, further highlights the impact of exposure to trauma by children. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2017), children exposed to traumatic events have experienced difficulty establishing and managing relationships in addition to the development of maladaptive coping strategies to stressors. Tripp speaks to these realities in his narrative as he highlights how his students respond to conflict. Tripp offers the following:

“Our students are dealing with a lot outside of school. Then they come to school and deals with a whole bunch of pressures on top of what they are dealing with outside. I understand that it can be very confusing, distracting and overwhelming for them. It makes them display behaviors in the building that would not normally be acceptable; like outside behaviors that you would do in the street to handle a problem, they think that is the way to handle a problem inside of the school. Arguing, cursing, hitting and fighting become the way in which they feel they are supposed to handle conflict” (Tripp personal communication, October 2021).

While Tripp speaks to the intentional manner in which he sought to work within his community, he also expresses the emotional triggering that he experiences as a result of working within a community similar to his upbringing. Tripp shares “as a Black male educator, it can be very

triggering at times" (Tripp personal communication, October 2021). Tripp's sharing of this reality highlights the compassion fatigue he experiences as a Black educator working within his Westside community. Burnout and compassion fatigue are significant areas of concern...especially for educators of color (Koenig, Rodger and Specht, 2017). Tripp's comments illustrate his fatigue.

Tripp's narrative discusses the impact of a lack of healthy food options, neighborhood crime and over-policing and the impact they pose on he and his students. Tripp describes the community surrounding his school as one filled with "litter, crime, drugs...pretty much a food desert" (Tripp personal communication, October 2021). This description, in addition to considering the dissatisfaction he shares in his narrative, speaks to the impact of structural racism on Black educators working within communities similar to Tripp's.

Mr. Kildare's Story through CRT Framework

As a Black male educator born and raised in Chicago, Mr. Kildare's account of his teaching experiences further enhances this research. Kildare speaks to the high levels of intentionality he brings to his work with students by virtue of previously sitting in a seat just like theirs as a young man. Kildare came to teaching as a result of a career change and was completing his master's studies during the writing of this research. Counter-storytelling, permanence of racism and commitment to social justice resonated through his dataset and frame his experience as a Black male educator. Similar to Mr. Tripp, Mr. Kildare saw both his gender and race as powerful connections to his rationale for working with and for Black children. Increasing visibility for Black boys of the options they have in life which are not as visible in their immediate community stood as a reason for his work within his school environment.

Counter-storytelling

Counter-storytelling as a tenet critical to Critical Race Theory pushes educational discourse to focus on the racialized and classed experiences of People of Color as sources of strength rather than deficits (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; McCoy & Dirks, 2015). Kildare, similar to Tripp, speaks to his student's strengths rather than their deficits in his narrative. His description of the surrounding community includes the following:

“The community is just very destitute. The look of the community is so hard on the students' eyes. You look around and see abandoned land, boarded up houses, weeds growing up, prostitutes walking by, drug addicts bent over (Kildare, personal communication, October 2021).

In spite of the realities of their surrounding community, Kildare's teaching practices focus on his students' ability to see past their current situations and remain dedicated to attending school each day in spite of what they are experiencing in the community and at home. When considering their home life, Kildare shares the following description of the experiences his students are pushing through: *“the mother may have cancer, the father may be in jail and someone may be on drugs, another person may have a bad case of lupus and the child kind of in limbo. I'm sure they are thinking, I don't know who I am counting on or who I can depend on (Kildare, personal communication, October 2021).* Nevertheless, even given these situations, Kildare describes his student's as resilient and ready to engage in learning each day.

Permanence of Racism

Morrison & D'Incau's (1993) definition of race as a “metaphorical way of referring to and disguising forces...and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body of politic that biological race ever was” contextualizes Mr. Kildare's experience in his Westside school (p.8). This is evident in Kildare's highlighting of the

disinvestment and negative imagery that students witness around school property. He speaks to the community members suffering from drug addiction which are within student eyesight during morning entry. He highlights the disinvestment in the community by sharing how students must walk past abandoned buildings on their way to and from school and speaks to how this impacts their perspective on the importance of education as a whole. Therein making his role as an educator more difficult. He must combat these realities in trying to maintain high academic expectations for his students amidst a lack of visuals in their immediate eyesight of individuals they can emulate outside of the school building.

The struggles that Mr. Kildare shares are in alignment with educational research. Calamore (1995) offers that when members of ethnic minority groups perform poorly, the overall group's characteristics are interpreted as exhibiting inferior aptitude due to "dominant society's nullification of [African-American] distinctiveness and the delegitimation of African-American's as a group" (Calamore, 1995, p.326). Rather than seeing members of the community as something not to emulate, he fears students will view these members as individual's representative of their own fate. Mr. Kildare's students are remiss of knowing the structural factors which contributed to the creation of the individuals they view on the way to school grappling with drug abuse or the history of disinvestment in their school's community which contributes to the abandoned lots and homes they pass on the way to school. They neglect to understand the intention that is behind the concentrated manner in which poverty is manifesting on their walk to school. However, for Mr. Kildare, he is quite aware and consistently grappling with how to create meaningful classroom experiences which provide his students with a space to learn, grow and transform, in spite of the realities which await his students at dismissal. Kildare's narrative highlights an understanding of the lack of upward mobility present in the surrounding school community evidenced by intentional disinvestment due to larger systems and structures as

discussed by Shambuagh, Nunn and Anderson (2019). Kildare's description of the surrounding school community illustrates the 'broken windows' theory as coined by Wilson and Kelling (1982). The social disorder evidenced by abandoned lots, individuals grappling with abuse and observable cues of disorder and lack of investment; evidence which vibrantly signals a community impacted by institutional/structural racism.

Commitment to Social Justice

Commitment to social justice is essential to providing voice to the disenfranchised and resisting/transforming/altering the "racialized and gendered inequality and injustice [therefore creating] access to social, political, economic and cultural resources" (McCoy & Dirk, 2015, p.14). In this research study, commitment to social justice is embodied through the work of Black educators who fight the residual impacts of structural racism within the communities where their schools are housed. Mr. Kildare is representative of the struggle forced upon Black educators who seek to work in racially, and socio-economically marginalized communities. Hiraldo (2013) argues that "CRT can be used to uncover the ingrained societal disparities that support a system of privilege and oppression" (p.54). Mr. Kildare's data reflects this reality through the aesthetic effects of institutionalized racism that his students view each day as a result of walking past abandoned homes and the number of prostitutes and individuals addicted to drugs they witness each morning as they wait for the school bell to ring.

Parker and Villalpando (2007) argue that "CRT's purpose is to unearth what is taken for granted when analyzing race and privilege, as well as the profound patterns of exclusion that exist in US society" (p.521). Mr. Kildare's narrative highlights the realities he faces in regard to navigating patterns of exclusion from economic investment in the community he serves. Mr. Kildare's data emphasizes his intention to work within his school community as it is nostalgic of the community he was reared. He highlights how he believes it is essential for him to work with

students similar to him so that he can be a visual, a counter-image, of a Black man, and more importantly a Black male teacher.

Kildare's goals for teaching align with a commitment to social justice teaching via his larger articulated goal to disrupt observed inequities within the Black community and specifically, Black men. His intention as a Black man to work with Black students is in alignment with CRT pedagogy in its drive to disrupt inequities, but also affirm student cultural differences (Cammarota, 2011). Kildare's narrative reflects his understanding and commitment to social justice as evident by his awareness of the marginalization of Black men in society. He fluidly speaks to what he believes to be his responsibility as a Black male educator to transcend current societal norms by working to improve the experiences of the Black children he serves (Viesca, Schoepner-Torres, Barnatt, Piazza, 2013).

Throughout his narrative, Kildare expresses his concern regarding the impact of what his students observe in their immediate community and how that impacts his ability to show them an alternative way of life. He believes that transformative education is critical to their ability to create outcomes different from those his students view each day in the eyes of the drug addicted community members and prostitutes they pass on their way to school. However, the level of intention that he has to commit to this impact of structural racism in addition to ensuring his students have the content knowledge they need to achieve proficiency in grade level standards is a heavy burden to bear.

Mr. Kildare's intention to work with students within the community he serves, born out of his own experience as Black male Chicago Public School student is fluid in his narrative. His dedication to his school community and the students he serves is evident. As a Black male teacher in a profession where he is the minority in both gender and race, it is critical that his voice and experience is amplified in hopes of drawing attention to the realities faced by

educators like him each day. Educators who are balancing both the demands of creating academic spaces for students to thrive and succeed, but also educating within communities that do not reflect what he is reiterating to his students.

Summary

The five Black educators of focus for this research provided a variety of experiences in their shared narratives as they detailed their pursuit of creating academic spaces to support student success. Utilization of an analytical lens grounded in Critical Race Theory, specifically the tenets of counter-storytelling, permanence of racism and commitment to social justice unveiled three central themes: commitment to students, impact of community environment on student readiness for instruction and educator experiences and student exposure to trauma. This research found a variety of practices employed by Black educators to support the creation of academic success within their students. These practices include: incorporation of student voice in creation and maintenance of classroom norms; consistent classroom structures which provide space for students to process situations experienced outside of the classroom to increase their level of engagement during instruction; emphasis on the development of relationship between the educator and the students. The CRT tenets of focus - permanence of racism, counter-storytelling and commitment to social justice aligned with the participating educator narratives and the manners in which they approach the structures employed in their classroom to support student academic success. CRT tenet permanence of racism, colored each participant's experience in the manner in which is highlighted the on-going manner that structural racism continues to plague the experiences of Black educators on Chicago's West Side.

Table 2*Participant Themes Aligned to CRT Tenet*

Participant	Theme	Aligned CRT tenet
Mrs. Wilcox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Commitment to students · Impact of Community Environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Commitment to Social Justice · Permanence of Racism
Ms. Jackson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Commitment to students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Counter-storytelling · Commitment to Social Justice
Mrs. Lexington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Student Exposure to Trauma · Commitment to Students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Permanence of Racism · Commitment to Social Justice
Mr. Tripp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Impact of Community Environment · Student Exposure to Trauma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Permanence of Racism
Mr. Kildare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Impact of Community Environment · Commitment to Students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Permanence of Racism · Commitment to Social Justice

Chapter VI: Implications, Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the experiences of Black educators serving low income, predominantly Black, Chicago Westside public school communities. The research sought to present the personal narratives of Black educators on how they create supportive academic spaces for students to thrive, while highlighting barriers faced by students and educators on the road to academic success. In an attempt to amplify the voices of Black educators, the goal of this work was to create increased visibility on the level of intentionality Black educators bring to their work with students, while also highlighting many of the external barriers faced in their pursuit. Through sharing the narratives of Black educators, I seek to influence the level of emotional support and financial resources extended to educators working in similar school spaces at both the local (school) and district levels as their work with students is intensified as a result of structural racism. This study sought to address the following research questions:

- Is there classroom evidence that educators in this study cite in their work to ensure student success?
- What tenets of CRT help explain classroom practices that Black educators in this study use to foster Black student success?
- How do Black educators in this study respond to students' traumatic experiences and/or after-effects of community violence in their school communities?

In Chapter four, all participant data was summarized and presented to the reader in narrative form. In Chapter five, the narratives were cross-analyzed to support fluidity throughout each section. Chapter five closed with the sharing of themes identified throughout the participants' narratives inclusive of a discussion of the impact of trauma on their experiences.

The coding of each participant's data unveiled distinct ideas that were placed into categories and later grouped into themes. This research unveiled the following themes: Commitment to Students; Impact of Community Environment on Student Readiness for Instruction; Student Exposure to Trauma. These themes pertain to my CRT tenets of focus - Counter-Storytelling, Permanence of Racism and Commitment to Social Justice.

In Chapter six, while maintaining a lens grounded in Critical Race Theory, the study's research questions will be interpreted via coded participant data. Chapter six will provide implications of this research on future educational practices and research in addition to highlighting both the strengths and limitations found within the study. A discussion of Critical Race Theory within our current social and political climate will also be offered prior to the sharing of the researcher's reflections on the impact of this research.

Summary of Research Conclusions

This research sought to capture the perspectives of Black educators committed to creating environments where students can thrive academically amidst stressful conditions found outside the classroom. For educators working in communities battling the effects of chronic-contextual stress and structural racism, the work of creating hope and academic success amidst students can prove difficult (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton and Freitas, 2010). The findings of this research highlighted the continued impact that structural racism has upon the lived experiences of Black educators serving in predominantly Black, socio-economically marginalized communities. Participating educators did not articulate an understanding of how their experiences within their school communities were a result of structural racism. Additionally, they did not highlight how they are exercising a larger commitment to social justice in their conversations with students that might increase their level of criticality in how they understand their lived experiences in their community; a community which continues to be deeply impacted as a result of structural racism.

This research corroborated findings from literature regarding the positive impact Black educators have on the academic success of Black students due to their level of cultural synchronicity and the humanistic commitment brought to their work with students. The research highlighted how the participating educators' levels of cultural synchronicity and humanistic commitments contributed to their levels of intention to not only choose to work within a school serving Black children, but also the practices employed to develop and sustain the relationships with their students.

This research highlighted a current gap in the amount of structured support extended to Black educators working in socio-economically marginalized communities. The research findings identified that each participating educator was grappling at varying points with the emotional stress of supporting students impacted by trauma. However, none of the participating educators spoke to comprehensive efforts extended to them within the school environments to discuss the impact of this exposure on their emotional or mental well-being. This presents a recommendation that will be discussed further in this chapter.

Educator Narratives in Relation to Research Questions and Existing Literature

Research Question 1: Is there classroom evidence that educators in this study cite in their work to ensure student success?

In this study, participants shared a variety of methods utilized in their classrooms to create an environment which supports student academic success. Academic success for the purposes of this research is defined as the “intellectual growth that students experience as a result of classroom instruction and learning experiences” (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p.139). Each educator spoke to the cultural synchronicity they feel with their students which grounds their decision to continue to serve in their school community. As found by Irvine (2002), the

cultural synchronicity that Black teachers have with Black students is found to give them an advantage over White teachers in advancing the academic outcomes and overall school experience of students of color. The participants articulated the connection they feel with their students via their shared cultural experiences which supports their ability to build connections between the students' lived experiences and academic content (Easton-Brooks, 2013; Perry, 2020).

This research question was answered via classroom evidence provided by the participating educators which highlighted how critical allocation of instructional time is to the development of strong relationships with their students. The intentional dedication of time and space to the work of establishing and maintaining relationships with students was fluid throughout each narrative. Methods educators employed for this included incorporation of morning and afternoon (sunset) meetings; intentional use of student voice in the cultivation of classroom rules and norms to support their on-going buy-in and adherence; and the creation of space for students to process their experiences with community violence and stress during the school day. Wilcox, Jackson, Lexington and Tripp all found intentional dedication of time and space to relationship building to be essential to their classroom practices. These practices were integral to their creation of an academic space where students felt safe to take academic risks and also be held accountable during moments of behavioral missteps. These practices are transformative in their ability to not only acknowledge the realities that students present each day and the need to address them to support increased student engagement, but also in how they are culturally responsive to the needs of the students served. Furthermore, as a result of the educators' practices they support students in their ability to actively choose academic success (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

The participating educators' inclusion of these practices and overall understanding of how essential the development of strong relationships with their students to support academic engagement is in congruence with educational research. Hoffman and Miller (2020) contend that schools must provide not only academic instruction for students, but also serve a protective factor for children's social, emotional and mental-well-being. Considering the traumatic experiences witnessed by the participating educators' students as described in their narratives, the educators' actions are critical as they will disrupt the "downward cycle, facing [many marginalized students as a result of] poverty-related obstacles outside of school" (Carter, 2013, p.4).

In the context of this study which focuses on the experiences of Black educators and the practices they employ to create environments to support student success, the intentional creation and maintaining of structures that allow for the building and deepening of relationships between teachers and students as well as between students are critical to student success. The incorporation of both structures and time allow for the deepening of relationships which can support student ability to engage in academic content are key. Additionally, they support students' ability to engage more productively as they have time to process the experiences which, absent allocation of time, might impede their ability to engage.

Research Question 2: What tenets of CRT help explain classroom practices that Black educators in this study use to foster Black student success?

Critical Race Theory (CRT) supported the contextualization of participating educators' experiences and knowledge shared as legitimate, valued, and essential to comprehending, analyzing and illuminating the impact of structural racism in education (DeCuir & Dixson,

2004; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Counter-storytelling, permanence of racism and commitment to social justice are the tenets of primary emphasis in this research. These tenets stood most strongly as the foundation of this research and further contextualize the classroom practices the participating Black educators employ to support student success. The tenet of counter-storytelling validates the racially biased experiences of marginalized members of society (Decuir and Dixson, 2004; Delgado and Stefanic, 2017). When considering the experiences of Black educators serving students in predominantly low-income, Black communities, this framework is critical as it underpins their narratives reflective of their students' lived experiences. The tenet of counter-storytelling answered this research question evident by each participating educators' discussion regarding the level of strength and resilience noted in their students. Structural racism creates the marginalization experienced by individuals in concentrated poverty due to the withdrawal of commercial institutions, which provide employment and the distribution of goods and services (Massey & Denton, 1993; Sampson, 2012; Freeman, 2019). The strength and resilience the participating educators shared visible in their students is in direct contradiction to their community environment that continues to be significantly impacted by the longstanding impacts of structural racism (e.g. lack of access to healthy food options, heavily infiltrated by drugs and prevalence of abandoned lots and vacant homes).

Permanence of racism stands as the second tenet of focus for this research as it acknowledges that racism controls the political, social and economic experiences of members of American society (Hirald, 2013; Shambaugh, Nunn, and Anderson, 2017). The Westside communities of focus for this research are heavily impacted by racially biased systems and initiatives that contribute to and sustain the continued disinvestment evident in the community.

This tenet supports the theoretical framing of the narratives offered by Black educators serving the communities' students as their experiences are not happenstance; but rather a byproduct of structural racism. However, Wilcox, Lexington, Jackson, Kildare nor Tripp articulated racism to be a direct cause of their experience. Moreover, the narratives of Wilcox, Lexington, Tripp, and Kildare extensively highlighted the impact of structural racism on the community surrounding their schools. The 'forgotten' West Side community as described by the participants impacts both they and their students' experiences each day as they prepare to engage in learning. For the educators, it influences the manner in which they approach instruction and the inclusion of classroom practices to support student engagement as they are contending with the image's students witness on the way to school (e.g. vacant lots, abandoned homes, human trafficking, drug abuse, etc.). The educators' and their students' experiences are aligned to research which further detail the perils of concentrated poverty. Massy and Denton (1993) suggest that concentrated housing abandonment, crime and social disorder, [push] Black neighborhoods beyond the threshold of stability" (p.13). This instability contributes to experiences brought to school each day by the neighborhoods' children. For these students in particular, these observances impact their level of readiness as they add yet another layer to the complex trauma that many students are already battling.

Commitment to social justice is the third tenet of focus as it contextualizes the humanistic commitment that Black educators bring to their work with Black students. Research finds that Black teachers are not only particularly motivated to work with students of color, but also see it as a 'calling' (Irvine, 2002; Easton-Brooks, 2014). Black educators find their work with students to be a very intentional choice; a choice to contribute to the betterment of the Black community, by virtue of dedicating their professional lives to educating Black children. This goal of

contributing to the betterment of society is reflected in the role Black teachers believe they play in the “social, political, and economic advancement of the larger African-American community” (Dixson and Dingus, 2008, p.823).

An opportunity exists within the participating educators to truly embody this tenet in their approach with students. While each educator found their work with students to be intentional, even a ‘calling’, Wilcox, Lexington, Tripp nor Kildare were unable to articulate how they specifically support their students in their ability to understand the impact of structural racism on their daily experiences. The practices they highlighted as integral to their ability to support student success were absent a larger discussion of how they work to develop their individual student’s level of criticality towards their immediate environment, or incorporation of their voice as a method to impact their immediate environment and school experience. None of the educators explicitly spoke to the development of the sociopolitical/critical consciousness of their students. Ladson- Billings (2021) argues

“Sociopolitical/critical consciousness [as the] essence of education in a democratic society. If our students cannot apply, analyze, synthesize, and critique their environment and the problems they encounter, they will not be prepared to be effective members of society. Instead, they only will know how to repeat what they have been told” (p.7).

Embedded within each educator’s narrative was a dedication to improving the outcomes of their Black students. However, the narratives were absent a discussion of how the educators actively work to empower students with the skills necessary to critique their current environment and the subsequent experiences caused from it and the larger reasons as to why they exist. Therein, leaving their students at risk of repeating the cycle impressed upon them; a cycle created as a result of structural racism.

In the context of this study which focuses on the experiences of Black educators and the practices they employ to create environments to support student success, Counter-storytelling, Permanence of racism and Commitment to social justice are the CRT tenets most evident in this research. These tenets not only stand as the foundation of this research, but also further contextualize the classroom practices participating educators employed to support student success. The three identified tenets answer the research question as it is critical when considering the experiences of Black educators working in socio-economically marginalized communities as the Westside neighborhood of focus for this study. Race and racism must be acknowledged as distinct factors which impact the daily lived experiences of Black educators and their Black students. The identified tenets allow for race and the racism that occurs against Black people in this country to be isolated and recognized as an issue to be addressed and discussed when working in marginalized communities.

Research Question 3: How do Black educators in this study respond to students' traumatic experiences and/or after-effects of community violence in their school communities?

Weisburg (2012) contends that violence is typically concentrated in small geographic units and that 3-4% of blocks within a city account for nearly half of the crime. This reality is true of the communities of focus - West Garfield Park and North Lawndale. It is key to remain mindful as discussed in Chapter 2 of this study the racist practices which created and sustain the conditions under which this violence continues to occur. It is essential that this larger context remains at the forefront as the participants of this study identified how community violence impacts their school communities. The participating educators spoke more specifically to the trauma students bring to their classroom and the impact it has on their readiness for learning. This research question was answered via the unveiling of common

themes amongst the educators of the varied manners in how their students' exposure to trauma manifests in the classroom. Tripp and Jackson cited gaps in their students' ability to navigate peer conflict. Both articulated how their students tend to respond to conflict with violence as an after-effect of their exposure to community violence. Their narratives unveiled a normalization of violence by their students potentially due to overexposure. This coupled with confusion over Black cultural norms where some children are taught to respond to violence with violence created difficulty for the educators dedicated to supporting their students. Jackson spoke of the need to defend her students' behavior to her white colleagues, while Tripp spoke to the fatigue he feels as an educator working to provide alternatives to the students he serves.

Research findings of the after-effects of community violence were also found in regard to students' academic ability. Wilcox and Jackson spoke to the academic gaps found within many of their students. Their narratives detailed the numerous skills their students lack that should be second nature by the time they arrive in their classrooms. This reality corresponds with research which describes symptoms of complex trauma in youth. Symptoms of complex trauma have been found to affect children's ability to maintain attention, concentration, memory and disrupts learning and skill development (Kiser, 2007; Ford and Courtois, 2009; Souers and Hall, 2016). Furthermore, research shows a correlation between decreased achievement test scores in Black children who witness violence compared to other children (Ginwright, 2016). The adverse experiences that students are exposed to as a result of their exposure to community violence is creating academic consequence in their pursuit of academic success. In the context of this study which focuses on the experiences of Black educators and the practices they employ to create environments to support student success,

student exposure to trauma coupled with educator secondary trauma impacts not only Black educator well-being, but also the strategies they employ to best support student engagement and academic success.

Research also finds burnout and compassion fatigue to be areas of significant concern for educators, especially, educators of color (Koenig, Rodger and Specht, 2017). Almost half (46%) of teachers are likely to leave the profession in the first 5 years citing dissatisfaction as a key reason for their departure (Koenig, Rodge and Specht, 2017; Ingersoll, May and Collins, 2017). These realities highlight the need to increase discussion on the methods educators are employing to sustain themselves in the field and how school leaders can better support Black staff members. The educators of focus in this research highlighted a variety of methods used to maintain their well-being while working in their school communities. Incorporation of prayer, ensuring proper hydration, reading, exercise and actively avoiding familial conflicts on the way to work were strategies the educators of focus spoke to in their efforts to maintain their mental well-being in the field.

The educators in this study did not identify any school-based efforts as a component of the strategies leveraged to maintain their mental and emotional well-being. These findings are troubling as the national teacher turnover rate is 8%, and surges to 20% in high needs, low performing schools (Lee, 2018). Additionally, Black educators represent less than 7% of the workforce (Taie and Goldring, 2017). When considering the limited number of Black educators in the workforce, juxtaposed to the positive academic outcomes which result from Black children who have Black teachers, it is critical that support be in place to sustain Black educators in predominantly Black school communities.

Critical Race Theory: Methodological and Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory was selected as the methodology for this research study to contextualize the experiences of Black educators striving to create environments of academic success for students. CRT was employed as a lens to support the analysis of the intersections of race, class and gender which exist for Black educators working in communities grappling with the continued consequences of structural racism. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define the role of Critical Race Theory in education as the acknowledgement of the “intercentricity of racialized oppression based on race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent and sexuality” (p.25). CRT provides the methodological and theoretical framework necessary to contextualize the role race places in the perpetuation of social and educational disparities. As the reader moves through each participant’s narratives, they gain insight on the practices each educator leverages as they work to create and sustain environments of academic success within their Westside school community. The narratives explore the drive and levels of intention which ground each participants’ work, but also highlights the struggles that exist within their respective school communities.

The current social and political discourse around CRT is also worth noting. The topic of Critical Race Theory has exploded around the country - particularly in the K-12 arena. Several state legislatures are debating bills to determine whether the teaching of Critical Race Theory would be banned in schools. The US social and political climate has been further incensed since the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery (just to share few individuals) and the January 6, 2020 uprising at the US Capital. These items coupled with increased dialogue around the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Blacks in this country have placed the social construction of race at the forefront of discussion. My use of critical race theory for this

research was intentional as it explicitly pushes for the acknowledgement of race and racism and how both work in tandem and influence access and power in the US. Inclusion of Critical Race Theory was critical to this research as it states that “US social institutions (e.g., the criminal justice system, education system, labor market, housing market, and healthcare system) are laced with racism embedded in laws, regulations, rules and procedures that lead to differential outcomes by race” (Ray and Gibbons, 2021, p.1). To best analyze the experiences of Black educators working in service to Black children, inclusion of a lens grounded in Critical Race Theory best supported my ability to unveil how structural racism impacts their lived experiences.

Strengths of Study

Utilization of Critical Race Theory as a methodology is a strength of this study. Through the use of participant narratives, the reader is able to delve into a deeper understanding of the realities faced by Black educators during one of the most difficult times in history - both socially and in the realm of education. This research spanned a pandemic, multiple moments of civil unrest both locally and nationally and the return to in-person instruction while still grappling with the impact of the pandemic. The use of the CRT tenet of counter-story telling allowed for the amplifying of Black educator voices regarding their experiences working to create academic success for Black children. CRT allowed for the experiences of Black educators working within Westside Chicago communities to be contextualized within their work within a community continuing to struggle with the daily consequences of structural racism. CRT allowed for participant experiences to be understood not as happenstance, but as the result of the continued impact of racially biased systems and policies in the City of Chicago and this country.

Amplification of Black educator voices which highlight their experiences and dedication to their school communities is critical. School leaders and policymakers must dissect the unique

needs of communities grappling with the varied realities of poverty and identify resources and supports that work in tandem to counteract a history of disinvestment. The teacher voices shared are at the margins of educational and socio-political inquiry. Their sentiments are critical to better understanding the shifts necessary to improve the academic and social outcomes of the Black children and families they serve.

Limitations of Study

The size of the participant pool for this study is a limitation. Assumptions can be made from readers of this study that it is not representative of the collective struggles of Black educators in and/or beyond the city of Chicago. It is key to note that the findings of this study are only representative of the participants from various PK-12 schools on the Westside of Chicago. Nevertheless, it is critical to note that the experiences of the participants may in fact present those of other educators. Inclusion of additional participants would deepen the amount of qualitative data available for analysis.

An additional limitation of this study is the lack of causality and effect analyses which are typically found within more quantitative research studies. While this research study was diligent in its attempt to highlight the very personal experiences of the participating educators, its focus exclusively sought to amplify their experiences as Black educators. I hope that future research opportunities will allow me to build upon this work and further investigate the experiences of Black educators grappling with the realities of creating academic success with Black children in communities grappling with the consequence of structural racism.

CRT consists of the following tenets: 1) Counter-storytelling; 2) Permanence as racism, 3) Whiteness as property; 4) Interest conversion; 5) Critique of liberalism; 6) Intersectionality; 7) Commitment to social justice or Institutional transformation (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, &

Thomas, 1995; Love, 2019). Choosing to solely focus on Counter-storytelling, Permanence as Racism and Commitment to social justice can be found as a limitation to this research.

Alternative analysis could argue other tenets to be more evident or to correlate more with the presented data.

Recommendations for Future Educational Practices

The narratives offered in this study amplify Black, Chicago educator experiences in their work to create academic spaces of success for Black children in communities grappling with the continued consequences of structural racism. Children living in communities with concentrated poverty disproportionately witness acts of violence. More than 6 out of 10 children in the United States are exposed to some form of violence in their neighborhood or within their home (Santiago & Galster, 2014). The findings of this research highlight the level of intention Black educators working within the Westside communities of focus bring to their work with Black students. Additionally, the findings highlight the on-going, and at times cyclical impact of racially-biased policies and structures which contribute to the disinvestment, violence and subsequent trauma caused from communities' children's exposure to violence. Reactions to the adverse experiences and trauma contribute to the display of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression that often impact student readiness for instruction (Harris, 2018). Behaviors of concern highlighted by the participating educators exist as a result of the institutional, and environmental factors which impact children's experiences outside of school.

Furthermore, this research study highlights the need for targeted professional development and discussion to be extended to Black educators on vicarious trauma and methods to maintain educator well-being. This work is essential to educators working in communities as

those included in this study that continue to be impacted by the on-going effects of structural racism.

Schools must be viewed as a manifestation of our larger society. In light of this, the relationship that schools have with the families and communities served must be responsive to the social and emotional toils that are impressed upon families. These social and emotional toils are often due to structural racism. This research study finds that for Black educators this work requires a very intentional approach to educating Black children. Local school and district leaders must examine the experiences of their teachers to understand the on-going impacts of the realities they are responding to daily from students and families. Their experiences and the systems they are putting in place to create and sustain academic success for students are critical to replicate as the impact of racially biased policies and systems continue to plague communities as those included in this research.

The research highlighted practices employed by Black educators to support the academic success of Black children. The practices discussed in this research embody components of culturally relevant pedagogy (Hammond, 2015; Muhammad, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Educator narratives highlighted two components of culturally relevant pedagogy - cultural competence and student learning. Incorporation of the third component, socio-political/critical consciousness, stands as an opportunity in the participating educators' collective practices. The lack of inclusion of socio-political/critical consciousness does not support Black students in their ability to identify, comprehend and critique social inequities, especially those which impact their lived experience. This gap speaks to a need in both teacher professional development and teacher preparation programs for components necessary to support student success within Black children. As

discussed in Chapter two (2) of this research, the lived experiences of Black Americans has been and continues to be controlled by the continued incorporation of policies and practices grounded in structural racism. Considering education, “African-Americans have been told systematically and consistently that they are inferior, that they are incapable of high academic achievement” (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p.45). Therefore, it is critical that teacher preparation programs and on-going professional development extended to teachers working with Black children, specifically those within communities continuing to be impacted by structural racism as the westside community of focus for this study, incorporate learning on the components of culturally relevant pedagogy. There is no single component of preparation that can support the development of pre-service teachers to meet the all-encompassing needs of students. However, the intentional incorporation of the practices found in this research which align to culturally relevant pedagogy can support the incorporation of practices that increase the likelihood of academic success within Black children.

Who Should Care? Implications for Future Research

In organizing the research for this study, I found a great need for future research to investigate Black teacher educational experiences working within a low socioeconomic public education environment. There is a significant level of research that speaks to the educational and academic needs of children living in poverty. Little research speaks to the work Black educators are doing each day to create improved academic outcomes for students. Furthermore, with few exceptions, there is a gap in literature which distinctly addresses the preparation of teachers to teach Black children effectively (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Lastly, there is a distinct opportunity in research to explore the experiences of Black educators who continue to work in communities

battling the perils of poverty amidst a continued decline in individuals entering the field of education.

With respect to teacher preparation programs, this research highlights specific practices employed by Black, Chicago educators to create supportive academic environments for students amidst the continued consequences of structural racism. None of the educators spoke to their preparation programs as spaces which thoroughly prepared them for the experiences their students presented them with or the subsequent impact these experiences have on their classroom instruction or overall emotional well-being. Therefore, there is an opportunity in teacher preparation programs to explicitly draw connections between the strategies Black educators have developed working within communities impacted by structural racism. It would also benefit teacher preparation programs to highlight the continued impact structural racism has on school communities and, subsequently, the impact it has on the classroom experiences of students.

Additional opportunities lie in the creation of research which strengthens school leaders' ability to identify the impact of race and institutional racism on the experiences of their students, staff and themselves as a leader on their road to leading a school within a predominantly low-income Black community. DeMatthews (2016) articulated the need for a "deeper discussion centered on the intersectionality of racism and classism with educational policy, accountability systems, and the purpose of school" (p.90). There is an opportunity for future research to discover strategies for school leaders to employ to attract and sustain Black educators in their schools as they are directly linked to improved educational outcomes for Black children. Additionally, there is an opportunity for more research that leverages Critical Race Theory to excavate and explore the on-going impacts of structural racism on the experiences of not only individuals living in large urban communities, but also those who are shifting in increasing rates

to suburban and rural spaces in hopes of better housing and living opportunities; opportunities that are not as available in city spaces as a result of structural racism.

Researcher's Reflections

The year I began my doctoral coursework collided with one of the most traumatic and professionally trying years of my career. During the course of my first year of doctoral studies, I experienced the loss of two students to gun violence within a 4-month period. Their deaths were further colored by the on-going impact of gun violence I experienced via my students, many of which impacted their ability to walk to and from school each day. When I began this work I was emotionally and physically drained, to the point of questioning my ability to continue working in public education. I was tired of watching Black children struggle, to survive at points, due to circumstances that were no fault of their own.

Over the span of my career, now 17 years, I have served in a variety of roles in Chicago public education from school social worker, to Assistant Principal and now currently as Principal of a Pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade building. During all of my years as an educator, I intentionally worked in schools predominantly serving Black children. It is in their faces that I see myself. It is in their faces that I want more for them than the, at times, negative experiences they come to school discussing. When I began this research, I was remiss of understanding that the experiences that my students were grappling with, the trauma they were dealing with and the vicarious trauma I was dealing with was due to a larger issue - structural racism. I entered into this research study looking for catharsis. I truly felt that I could not be alone in what I was experiencing. There had to be other Black educators who were leading with their hearts to improve the outcomes of Black children, but filled with fatigue with the circumstances that were placed before them.

This research unveiled for me that the violence which plagues my students and caused the death of two students at the onset of this work, now upwards of twelve, all boys of color, was not a happenstance. It was due to the creation of very intentional policies and practices that operate in very specific pockets of the City of Chicago with the continued goal of controlling and limiting the outcomes of Black bodies; and then there are me and educators like me working against the grain to create and sustain positive outcomes for Black children. It is through this work that I realized why I was and am so tired. I am tired because Black educators like myself are constantly working against the systems and structures created to limit Black children and subsequently continue to stifle Black communities.

This study is near and dear to my heart because not only did it allow me to amplify the voices of Black educators working to improve the outcomes for their students, it also gave me a voice. It helped me to understand why I was at the point of excessive fatigue to the point of leaving education. I was and continue to be tired because the work of education is hard; even harder when you are working in an environment where resources have intentionally and strategically been limited. I am tired because the issues within the Westside community I serve were further exacerbated by a pandemic. I am tired because the shutdown and working from home meant nothing to school administrators in communities like the one I serve because we shifted to being a food site where meals were provided daily to my students and families. I am tired because I lead with my heart. This fatigue has at times made me question if I can continue in this work. I know that I am not alone in this fatigue and this question.

More research needs to be conducted on the impact of administrators and teachers working in communities impacted by structural racism. I hope that after reviewing the findings and recommendations of this study, school districts reflect and redirect additional resources and

supports to address the needs of both students and staff working within communities like the ones highlighted in this study. This study and its findings continue to be critical given the current educational climate and questioning of teaching of Critical Race Theory.

Appendix A: Information and Consent Form

DePaul University
Catherine B Whitfield Martin

ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Beautiful Struggle: A Qualitative Examination of Black Educator Experiences Creating Academic Spaces for Student Success

Principal Investigator: Catherine B Whitfield Martin

Institution: DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Educational Leadership, College of Education

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Horace Hall, School of Education

Key Information:

What is the purpose of this research?

We are asking you to be in a research study because we are trying to learn more about Black educator experiences. This study is being conducted by Catherine B Whitfield Martin, a graduate student at DePaul University as a requirement to obtain his/her doctoral degree. This research is being supervised by her faculty advisor, Dr. Horace Hall. We hope to enroll five participants in this study.

Why are you being asked to be in the research?

You are invited to participate in this study because you identify as a Black or African-American Educator who: (a) has high expectations for student achievement of all students; b) is inclusive; The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of Black educators working in schools which serve predominantly Black children on the West and South side of Chicago.

What is involved in being in the research study?

If you agree to be in this study, being in the research involves your participation in a 1-hour virtual recorded interview and responding to 2 journal prompts over the period of 5 weeks.

In the interview, you will be asked questions regarding your experiences as a Black educator working in school communities predominantly serving Black students and how you create environments for academic success. I will also ask about how you feel that the success of your students and teaching is impacted by institutional racism.

The journal prompts will be sent to you via email and will entail answering questions of your challenges or opportunities as an educator while reflecting upon the previous week of school.

The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into typed notes later in order to get an accurate record of what you said.

Are there any risks involved in participating in this study?

This study has some risks. You may feel some embarrassment or negative feelings during discussions. You can choose not to speak or participate in study activities at any time, if you are feeling uncomfortable. Second, you may reveal embarrassing or damaging information about yourself during discussions. The research is only interested in your perception and reports of practices, policies, and processes, and not in your personal information. Your name and any other information that identifies you will be removed from all records.

Are there any benefits to participating in this study?**This study is expected to have the following benefits:**

You will be helping to produce information that may benefit schools in the future. The knowledge gained from this study may improve teacher and educational leadership programs, teacher hiring and retention practices, policies and programs in schools.

How much time will this take?

This study will take up to 2 hours of your time. The interview will take about 1 hour to complete with the remaining time to complete the journal prompts.

Can you decide not to participate?

Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose not to participate. There will be no negative consequences, penalties, or loss of benefits if you decide not to participate or change your mind later and withdraw from the research after you begin participating.

Who will see my study information and how will the confidentiality of the information collected for the research be protected?

Study data will be kept in a locked file cabinet and/or in the researcher's computer which requires a passcode to be opened. The researcher will remove all names and other identifying information from the data. The people taking part in the research will never be identified in any reports or presentations. I will remove the direct identifiers, like name or record number, from your information and replace it with a random code that cannot be linked back to you. This means I have de-identified your information. We will not use the information collected for this study for any future research of our own or share your information with other researchers."

The video recordings will be kept until accurate written notes have been made, then they will be destroyed.

Who should be contacted for more information about the research?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study or you want to get additional information or provide input about this research, you can contact the researcher, Catherine B Whitfield Martin, catherinebwhitfield@gmail.com or my dissertation Chair, Dr. Horace Hall at hhall@depaul.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the DePaul Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Jessica Bloom in the Office of Research Services at 312-362-6168 or by email at jbloom8@depaul.edu.

You may also contact DePaul's Office of Research Services if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You will be given a copy [can print a copy] of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent from the Subject:

I have read the above information. I have had all my questions and concerns answered. By signing below, I indicate my consent to be in the research.

By completing the signature below you are indicating your agreement to be in the research.

Documentation of Informed Consent

Please sign below if you agree to the following:

- I agree to participate in the individual interview for this study
- I agree to complete 2 journals for the purposes of this study
- I understand the goals, benefits and potential risks of the study.
- I have discussed any questions I have about the study.

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Demographic Survey Questions

DePaul University
The Beautiful Struggle: How Black Educators Create Academic Spaces for Student Success
Demographic Survey Questions
Catherine B Whitfield Martin

Name:

Date:

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my research study, I know you are very busy. In preparation for our interview, I would greatly appreciate if you could complete this brief survey which will provide me with some demographic information. Completion of this survey prior to our interview allows for me to obtain some basic information which will allow our interview to focus more on questions that pertain to your experience in public education.

Demographic survey Questions

- How do you identify race and gender-wise?
- Where are you from originally?
- How long have you lived in Chicago?
- What is your educational background?
- How many years have you worked in education?
- What is your Current School location>
- What schools did you work at prior?
- Identify the age group you best fall into:
 - 25-30
 - 31-35
 - 36-40
 - 41-50
 - 51-60
 - 61-70

Appendix C: Educator Interview Protocol

DePaul University
The Beautiful Struggle: How Black Educators Create Academic Spaces for Student Success
Educator Interview Protocol
Catherine B Whitfield Martin

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. This interview is being video recorded for research purposes. If you would like the recording to stop at any time please let me know. Do you consent to being audio (or video) recorded? Recording starts now.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of Black educators working in school communities predominantly serving Black students. I am specifically interested in the ways in which educators create environments for academic success with their students while working in communities impacted by institutional racism. The interview should last about 1 hour. Do you have any questions that I can answer at this time? We will go ahead and start. Please feel free to interrupt me at any time or let me know if something more pressing arises.

Let's begin with some background questions.

1. Why did you choose to work at your current school?
2. How would you describe your school and its surrounding community?
3. How do you hear it described?
4. What are the strengths and concerns of the community that surround your school?
5. How do the mentioned concerns impact your students?
6. Share strengths you note in your students
7. Share challenges of your current school
8. What challenges do you think your students bring to school? How do you feel they impact their ability to engage in academics?
9. What strategies do you use to help students engage despite noted challenges?
10. How do the strategies help?
11. What does the term institutional racism mean to you?
12. What effects of institutional racism can you find in your school or neighborhood?

13. What is your working definition of trauma?
14. What situations come to mind when you think about trauma and your students?
15. What impact, if any, do you believe their experiences have on you?
16. Do you and your colleagues discuss the experiences students share with you?
17. What support has been extended to you regarding managing the impact of trauma?
18. What strategies do you use to cope after a student has shared a traumatic instance with you?
19. Is there a question you wished I would have asked you?
20. Is there anything additional you would like to share?

Appendix D: Email - Initial Recruitment Script**DePaul University****The Beautiful Struggle: How Black Educators Create Academic Spaces for Student Success****Catherine B Whitfield Martin****Initial Recruitment Email Script:**

Dear Colleague:

My name is Catherine B Whitfield Martin and I am reaching out to you in hopes that you forward this email to teachers in your building who identify as Black or African-American and considered:

- Teachers invested in and working towards social justice
- Teachers dedicated to creating positive academic spaces for Black children

I am looking for teachers who meet both of this descriptor to participate in a research study. This study would involve 1 virtual interview and response to 2 journal prompts.

Please forward this email to any teachers in your building or professional circle and request for them to reach out to me directly at catherinebwhitfield@gmail.com. Feel free to follow-up with any questions or concerns.

Thanks,

C

Appendix E: Email Script - Scheduling

DePaul University

The Beautiful Struggle: How Black Educators Create Academic Spaces for Student Success

Catherine B Whitfield Martin

Scheduling Emails Back and Forth Script:

Hello!

Thank you for responding and sharing your interest in participating in my research study. Prior to scheduling your interview, please take a moment and reply to the following google form questionnaire so that I can determine your alignment to this research study. Completion of the form should take no longer than 7 minutes. Please feel free to reach out directly with any questions/concerns.

Google Form questionnaire:

Educator Last Name, First Name:

How do you identify race and gender-wise?

What City, State, Country are you from originally?

How long have you lived in Chicago?

What is your educational background? Please include the name of the school where you obtained your degree (ex. Bachelors, Master's, etc)

How many years have you worked in education?

Current School location:

What schools did you work at prior?

Please share 3 dates and times outside of your hours of employment that you are available for a 60 min virtual interview.

Dissemination of Transcript Email:

Hello!

Thank you for participating in my research study. Attached you will find an electronic transcript of your interview. Please review the transcript and note via track changes any areas you would like omitted or adjusted to better reflect your thoughts. I request that you send your edits 5 calendar days from the sent date of this email.

Please feel free to reach out to me directly with any questions/concerns.

Thank you,
Catherine

Reminder Email Script:

Hello!

You are receiving this email to remind you of the following:

(Principal Investigator will place a check mark or x next to the topic that is being sent to the participant as a reminder)

- Our scheduled interview which will occur on (insert date, time)
- Completion of the docusign of the interview consent form
- Completion of Journal Prompt #1
- Completion of Journal Prompt #2
- Review of your electronic interview transcript

Appendix F: Email Script - Dissemination of Transcript**DePaul University****The Beautiful Struggle: How Black Educators Create Academic Spaces for Student Success****Catherine B Whitfield Martin****Dissemination of Transcript Email:**

Hello!

Thank you for participating in my research study. Attached you will find an electronic transcript of your interview. Please review the transcript and note via track changes any areas you would like omitted or adjusted to better reflect your thoughts. I request that you send your edits 5 calendar days from the sent date of this email.

Please feel free to reach out to me directly with any questions/concerns.

Thank you,
Catherine

Appendix G: Email Script - Reminder Email**DePaul University****The Beautiful Struggle: How Black Educators Create Academic Spaces for Student Success****Catherine B Whitfield Martin****Reminder Email Script:**

Hello!

You are receiving this email to remind you of the following:

(Principal Investigator will place a check mark or x next to the topic that is being sent to the participant as a reminder)

- Our scheduled interview which will occur on (insert date, time)
- Completion of the docusign of the interview consent form
- Review of your electronic interview transcript

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