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Psychological Lynching: An Examination of Educational Trauma and Identity Development

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to shed light on the ways urban educational spaces aid in the traumatization of Black students and their identity formation. Educational spaces and experiences have continued to shape identity development for many individuals who encounter this contextual setting. This article positions the theories of critical race and racial space as a vehicle to more intentionally explore and link trauma work to discussions of identity development. In these spaces, identities are strengthened or disrupted, with implications for academic and social well-being. This study highlights the voices of eleven Hampton Roads, Virginia teachers. These teachers reflect and share their traumatic experiences and provide insight into how those experiences influenced their identity development. Additionally, this article contributes ideas for conducting identity-conscious trauma research and building race-conscious pathways for supporting trauma-exposed youth in urban educational spaces.

Keywords: educational trauma, critical race theory, identity development, education

A positive identity is essential for Black children. The development of one's identity and sense of self throughout the life course occurs within a collective and dynamic set of experiences and interactions with the environment (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Robinson et al., 2021). Influential theorists studying the concept of identity like Erikson (1968), Marcia (1966), and Higgins (1987), assert that identity is organized, learned, and dynamic, and that subjective evaluation of an individual's identity has emotional consequences. Erikson (1968) argued that developing a clear, positive, and coherent identity is the primary developmental task in adolescence. Children who can cultivate a clear and positive identity after their developmental struggles during adolescence often advance more smoothly into adulthood (Tsang et al., 2012). The

factors that shape the identity are still understudied, and little research has addressed how trauma exposure links to emerging identity (Truskauskaite-Keneviciene et al., 2020). As educators, we must be vigilant in protecting students' positive identities and mitigating the effects of childhood trauma.

This article magnifies the voices of Black teachers who attended urban elementary and secondary schools in the Hampton Roads, Virginia, area. They recall their traumatic K-12 experiences and reflect on their beliefs about how those experiences have shaped their identities and career trajectories. Additionally, this article contributes ideas for conducting identity-conscious trauma research and building race-conscious pathways for supporting trauma-exposed youth in urban educational spaces. Is there a link between racial identity development and educational trauma? This study sought to explore that perceived link between racial identity development and educational trauma through the lens of critical race theory and racial space theory. The theoretical lens critical race theory is used to structure the article, followed by a discussion of racial space theory and the complexities and implications of educational trauma and its impact on racial identity development. Both frameworks are used as a guide for the overall framing and analysis of the findings from the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) has become an increasingly permanent fixture in the toolkit of education researchers seeking to critically examine educational opportunities, school climate, teacher perceptions, representation, and pedagogy. CRT is a form of race-based oppositional scholarship (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005; Brayboy, 2005; Calmore, 1992; Liu, 2009; Love, 2004) which challenges Eurocentric values and especially those that systematize these values to the detriment of individuals who are not white.

CRT research can be traced back to the Critical Legal Studies movement, which gave rise to CRT (Crenshaw, 2011; Tate, 1997). In the 1980s, a noted group of legal scholars, including Derrick A. Bell, Jr., Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, and Kimberle' Crenshaw, questioned the role of law in maintaining and further constructing racially based social and economic oppression (Lynn & Adams, 2002; Taylor, 1998, 2009). These early critical race scholars sought to challenge prevailing racial injustices while committing themselves to interrogate racism's continued presence in U.S. jurisprudence and stalled advancement of civil rights legislation (Manning & Muñoz, 2011; Stanley, 2006; Yosso, 2002). Therefore, contemporary critical legal scholarship builds upon an already robust literature base (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw et al.,1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

In education, critical scholars have often looked to CRT's foundational legal scholarship, ethnic studies, and the pioneering work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Solorzano (1998), who introduced the study of CRT to K-12 and higher education, respectively. As a theoretical framework, CRT examines the "unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and

gendered lines" (Taylor, 2009, p. 1). CRT is a movement comprising scholars committed to challenging and disrupting racism and its associated social, legal, political, and educational consequences (Patton et al., 2011). As previous critical race academics (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Parker & Lynn, 2002) have observed, the task of applying a CRT framework to educational scholarship is complex and multifaceted.

CRT has evolved into a methodological approach to studying complex phenomena involving race, racism, and power in and across disciplines in education (Parker & Lynn, 2002). It allows researchers to critically examine Black people's experiences within educational spaces. This approach is essential since schools work as institutionalized microcosms of society (Sullivan & A'Vant, 2009). CRT provides a way to theorize, examine, and challenge how race and racism covertly and overtly impact the social structures, practices, and discourses within an educational setting (Yosso, 2005). Critical race theorists purport that without Black people's voices contextualizing their daily experiences with oppression, a clear and critical understanding of their struggles with race and racism in and out of the educational system would not be possible (Yull, 2014).

The CRT tenet of counter-storytelling seeks to amplify the voices of marginalized groups whose stories often go untold (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-stories chronicle the experiences of people of color against the pervasive dominant narratives constructed by white people. The narratives of the dominant group frame the message of dominant and non-dominant groups into the message of a single story (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). On the other hand, counter-stories depict how people of color experience social, political, and institutional systems and often differ from dominant group counterparts and the prevailing dominant message. In an educational context, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contended that authentic voices of Black people through storytelling are needed to gain useful information about their experiences in these settings. Ladson-Billings (2005) cautioned using counter-stories as a standalone tenet of CRT since stories are likely to be misunderstood or misinterpreted without being properly unpacked (Fasching-Varner, 2009). Moreover, it may unconsciously move scholars not embedded within CRT away from the foundational scholarship (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). In this regard, it is useful to consider additional theories to help to bolster research that highlight and amplify counter-stories offered to shed light on the experiences of people of color. For purposes of this study, CRT is used in conjunction with racial space theory (RST) as a framework or lens through which we can further understand the experiences of teachers

Racial Space Theory

Since 2000, a growing number of scholars have begun to explore how spatial analysis of racial processes "teaches us things about race we cannot know by other means" (Knowles, 2003, p. 78). Extending the exploration of the Black experience in school by examining the impact of race and its various changes over time and space has provided a core basis for the theory of racial space (Neely & Samura, 2011). Neely and Samura (2011) built upon the analysis of CRT by including the lens of

space and Knowles' (2003) theoretical underpinnings that suggested that "social constructions of space illuminate the social constructions of race and vice versa" (p. 78).

Neely and Samura's (2011) theory of racial space outlined four ways that racial and spatial processes intersect: (1) Both race and space are contested; (2) Race and space are fluid and historical; (3) Race and space are interactional and relational; and (4) Race and space are defined by inequality and difference. Neely and Samura (2011) suggested that examining race and racism within any milieu must be conducted within a sociohistorical context because how race and racism have been defined and experienced by people changes over time and space. Knowles (2003) stated that racism is encountered and reworked in place and over time. Embedded in spaces of domination are layers of racialized social histories and experiences, lived and remembered archives that provide the gist for community building, organizing, and action. Neely and Samura (2011) suggest that within any locale, the lived experiences of Black people in the U.S. have influenced social structures, spatial arrangements, and institutions.

By anchoring RST in the study, it centers the space (zip code) in which the teachers grew up and now teach. It allows the teachers to reflect upon and name their individual traumas. It allows them to make sense of their experiences, reflect on their sense of self, and conceptualize it in terms of the history of their geographical location (space). The Hampton Roads region encompasses the cities of Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg, Virginia. The area has a painful, traumatic past built on slavery when the first kidnapped, human trafficked Africans were shipped over and landed at Point Comfort, Virginia, in late August 1619. Luci Cochran, executive director of the Hampton history museum, refers to the region's status as the location for the first slave ship landing as a double-edged sword. While the area is positioned to tell a powerful story, its narrative is fraught with pain, controversy, and contradictions at the heart of the intersection between American slavery and American freedom (The 1619 Landing, n.d.). Four hundred years forward, the region is still impacted by the effects of trafficked Africans being stripped of their languages, cultures, and traditions. Blacks make up 30.96% of the Hampton Roads area, and the median household income is $51,882, coming in last under all other race/ethnicity populations (Greater Hampton Roads Connects.org, n.d.).

The spatial perspective on race may provide a valuable lens for understanding identity development and trauma and provide language for explaining its persistence in educational settings. Educational spaces and experiences shape identity development for many individuals who encounter this contextual setting (Clayton, 2020; Leath et al., 2019). These spaces may strengthen or disrupt existing identities, with implications for academic and social well-being (Renn & Shang, 2008). Racial identity is well documented in the literature and highlights racial identity development as extraordinarily complex. Several Black identity scholars (e.g., Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; DuBois, 1903) suggest that Black people are often forced to develop multiple selves. Consequently, it is essential to reflect further on identity as critical to the health and well-being of Black students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Childhood trauma is a significant public health concern that can evoke irreversible damage to children, families, and society. The exact estimates of its prevalence are difficult to obtain and study due to underreporting, inadequate surveillance systems, and definitional inconsistencies (Saunders & Adams, 2014), but numerous studies have concluded that childhood trauma is widespread (Copeland et al., 2007; Fantuzzo et al., 2007). Urban areas have been identified as a specific geographic area in which childhood trauma reports are underreported and underrepresented. According to Goldfeld and colleagues (2015), urban areas pose five unique domains related to child development: physical environment, social environment, socioeconomic conditions, services, and governance. Physical environment refers to items such as parks, transportation, housing, and other built environment conditions (Prado-Galbarro et al., 2021; Lavin, 2006). The social environment consists of factors such as crime, trust, and safety, and socioeconomic conditions include poverty, employment, and access to education. Services include institutional resources such as schools, headstart/daycare centers, and healthcare facilities. Governance often looks at citizen engagement, leadership, and social coordination (Prado-Galbarro et al., 2021; Goldfeld et al., 2015). This study is unique as it considers these various domains related to child development but focused specifically on exploring the impact of educational trauma on racialized identity development.

> Educational trauma is the inadvertent perpetration and perpetuation of harmful systemic and cyclical practices in schools. On the mildest end is the anxiety, pressure, and stress felt around testing and overloaded curricula. It moves along to bullying, value-added measures for teachers, and the use of chemical restraints for non-conforming students. The spectrum of educational trauma culminates with the school-to-prison pipeline, which is enforced by the presence of law enforcement on school campuses in poor communities (Gray, 2016, para.1).

Educational trauma is significant and is not only a mental health issue, but a social justice one as well.

Identity Development

Tragically, healthy identity attributes such as one's sense of self as being good enough, our integration of emotion and intellect, our basic awareness of emotional state, and feeling of security as an individual are disrupted by developmental trauma (Brenner, 2017). When developmental trauma is experienced, basic survival takes precedence over normal self-development (Brenner, 2017). Brenner states, "Early trauma shifts the trajectory of brain development because an environment influenced by fear and neglect causes different adaptations of brain circuitry than one of safety, security, and love" (para. 4). Early child development directly impacts lifetime trajectories and adult health (Gouin et al., 2015; Siddiqi et al., 2007).

Racial and ethnic identity is integral to the overall framework of individual and collective identity. Literary and theoretical manifestations of racial identity are

discussed not in biological terms (which may imply a racist perspective) but as a social construction, which "refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1993, p. 3). Chávez and Guido-DiBrito (1999) stated that for minoritized populations in the United States,

> racial and ethnic identity is manifested by two conflicting social and cultural influences. First, through the cultural traditions and values in which they were born and raised. Second, and in contrast, through negative societal treatment and messaging received from others who do not share that same identity (p. 39).

They further stated that the consistent messages that minoritized populations receive in the U.S. make it clear that people with minority status are less than desirable within mainstream society.

Given whites and Blacks' dominant/subordinate relationship in society, it is not surprising that this developmental process unfolds differently (Tatum, 1992). Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (1996) model of Black identity development was used as a reference for this study. It is assumed that a positive sense of oneself as a member of one's group (which is not based on any assumed superiority) is essential for psychological health (Tatum, 1992). Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (2001) model of Black racial identity development explores the phases of Pre-encounter (the pre-discovery of one's racial identity), Encounter (explorations of one's identity because of some critical moment or incident regarding race), Immersion/Emersion (the transition between the old and the emerging identity), and Internalization-Commitment (individuals' comfort with racial identity, a heightened awareness of what being Black means). "Black identity functions to fulfill the self-protection, social anchorage, and bridging needs of the individual (Cross, 1991, p. 220). It is important to mention that not all individuals experience every stage. Some individuals get stuck in-between phases and are still waiting for emerging stages to be explored and met. It is at this crossroad where trauma and identity development meet and where purposeful and intentional interventions are needed.

Racial Identity

While the participants did not express any specific knowledge about the Black identity stages of development, as the researcher their respective stages were identifiable with most straddling and still making-sense of the Internalization (transition between an old and emerging Black identity) and Internalization-Commitment (heightened awareness of what being Black means) stage. While the identity concepts of race, ethnicity, and culture are deeply intertwined, they are not interchangeable (Lee et al., 2015). Ethnicity, sometimes described as racial identity, is defined as "a type of categorization based on labeling (by self or other persons) that reflects membership in, a sense of belonging to, evaluation of, and identification with that group" (Scherman, 2010, p. 128). Especially considering these experiences shared by participants, it is important to keep in mind that educational spaces and experiences continue to shape identity development for many individuals who

encounter this contextual setting (Burrell-Craft & Eugene, 2021; Clayton, 2020; Leath et al., 2019). These spaces may strengthen or disrupt existing identities, with implications for academic and social well-being (Burrell-Craft & Eugene, 2021; Renn & Shang, 2008).

Colorism, which results from the positive evaluation favoring light skin over dark skin (Blair et al., 2002) is major sociological issue (Hunter, 2002) that is prevalent in society as a color-based system of inequity (Webb & Robinson, 2017) affecting a wide cross-section of areas for people of color including in the areas of education (Murguia & Telles, 1996) positionality (Robinson, 2011), and health (Robinson & Barbel, 2020).

Trauma and Identity Development

Identity is often used to describe the goals, values, roles, and beliefs about the world that people adopt to give their lives a sense of direction and purpose (Berman et al., 2020). However, trauma can cause people to question and re-evaluate their commitments to these goals, values, roles, and beliefs. For example, the death of a parent or guardian figure may profoundly affect an identity vested in a role that no longer exists. Experiencing traumatic events at an early age might make specific goals seem less obtainable and challenge one's beliefs about the world. Worry and anxiety about the inability to resolve identity issues are known as identity distress (Berman et al., 2004), which has been linked to trauma (Ertorer, 2014; Merrill et al., 2016). Trauma can cause identity delay, identity threat, and identity loss (Waterman, 2020). Just as trauma affects identity, identity can affect how trauma is perceived, interpreted, and experienced. Brenner (2017) states our integration of emotion and intellect, our basic awareness of emotional state, and feeling of security as an individual are disrupted when we experience developmental trauma. Early trauma shifts the trajectory of brain development because an environment influenced by fear and neglect causes different adaptations of brain circuitry than one of safety, security, and love.

A previous literature review argued that traumatic experiences might shape identity development, and the need for more empirical research in the line of research has been emphasized (Berman, 2016). The adverse effects of early exposure to trauma include difficulties forming secure attachments, trouble coping with stress, feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, behavior problems, feeling responsible for bad things that happen, and poor social skills, to name a few (Howse et al., 2003; Huaging & Kaiser, 2003; Reiland & Lauterbach, 2008). Childhood trauma is known to impede brain development in structure and functioning and may interfere with developing a child's self-regulation and executive functioning skills (Nelson et al., 2011). Long-term outcomes include learning difficulties, academic challenges, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and incarceration (Chu & Lieberman, 2010). Trauma can impact one's sense of identity through identity loss, identity alteration, trauma-centered identity, identity affirmation, and identity replacement (Berman, 2016). Disruptions to one's identity make it difficult for children and adults to recognize their sense of self. Brenner (2017) reports that identity gets disrupted because basic

survival takes precedence over and uses resources ordinarily allocated for the normal development of the self.

Our sense of self is mainly developed when we are children and continue to form and develop as we age and mature. When children experience trauma, their identity development is altered (physically) and slowed (functionally). This is relevant to consider especially among teachers who play an important role in the lives of children and have the potential to also shape their identities.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design which sought to explore the perceived link between educational trauma and identity development using CRT and RST to make-sense of the lived experiences and choices of urban K-12 teachers. Qualitative research was used for this study because of its naturalistic approach to understanding phenomena in a "real-world setting where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2001, p. 39). As a Black female scholar practitioner seeking to understand, phenomenology allows me to "begin with the assumption that multiple realities are rooted in subjects' perspectives" (Ary et al., 2006, p. 33). This study was designed to "describe and interpret an experience by determining the meaning of the experience as perceived by the people who have participated in it" (Ary et al., 2006, p. 461). Employing this design allowed data to organically flow from the experience and perspective of each teacher's lens.

As a Black woman engaging in research about Black people, I bring strength, credibility, and control to this study in my unique ability to understand the racialized identities of Black people and Black teachers. The best way to explore the perceived link between educational trauma and identity development was to highlight the voices of teachers who attended urban K-12 schools to share their experiences. Teacher voices can add credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness to the study (Golafshani, 2003).

Participants

Participants included mentor teachers, university supervisors, teachers with varied years of experience, and students. An open-ended questionnaire was distributed to 65 Black teachers, 32 responded, and 11 met the criteria for participation. The study is specific to zip code trauma, so the criteria were to isolate and include those participants who attended and now teach in K-12 schools in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. The 11 participants include the voices of four male and seven female teachers; two teach in elementary, six in middle, and three in high school. The study sought to explore the perceived link between educational trauma and identity development while centering ideas for conducting identity-conscious trauma research and building race-conscious pathways for supporting trauma-exposed youth in urban educational spaces.

Procedures and Data Analysis

Participants engaged in an online questionnaire and one virtual follow-up discussion. Participants were emailed a participation statement that included a Google link to the questionnaire that opened with demographic questions to determine whether participants met the criteria for this study, and those who met that criteria were asked for their consent. No personal identifying information was requested. There was no compensation offered, Institutional Review Board approval was received, and all procedures to comply with ethical research were followed. Participants were asked questions that helped them make sense of their K-12 schooling experiences. Some of these questions were:

1) What were some of your most memorable experiences as a K-12 student?
2) Do any teachers, administrators, or experiences stick out in your memory?
3) Why did you choose to pursue teaching as a career?
4) Have you ever thought about how your K-12 experiences influenced or shaped your identity and career choices?
5) When considering educational trauma, how do you feel those experiences have shaped you as a person and educator?

In a phenomenological study, the foundational question is "What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). The interpretation of the experience as well as the perspective of the person is of great value. The Google questionnaire collected open-ended responses from the participants and a follow-up virtual group discussion further expanded upon the responses received from the questionnaire. First, data were engaged by noting ideas about meaningful patterns. The second step involved identifying preliminary codes and sorting codes by similarities to generate categories and subcategories. The next step included describing overarching themes which emerged from the teachers' narratives and the final step involved ongoing analysis in refining the specifics of each theme.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived link between educational trauma and identity development while centering ideas for conducting identity-conscious trauma research and building race-conscious pathways for supporting trauma-exposed youth in urban educational spaces. Patton (2002) indicates that by capturing how an individual experiences a phenomenon provides the researcher with that experience as to "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (p. 104). Careful analysis of the data showed that all participants discussed three recurring ideas which are organized as the following emergent themes: sense of security, self-esteem, and racial salience.

Sense of Security

This first theme that emerged, sense of security, was woven throughout all 11 narratives. The participants all either described the lack of feeling safe and secure traveling to and from school or in relation to feeling unsafe in the school's physical space. Seven of the teachers spoke of bomb threats, violent fights, drugs, and gangs in their middle and/or high school, as well as some referencing the community in which they lived. Those seven teachers said there was no escape, it was as if they lived in a bubble.

Each teacher stated their identities were impacted by the lack of feeling "safe and secure" in school. One teacher said, "You wanna talk about trauma, man, schools are mini war zones. I don't know anyone who has come out of school whole. Real talk." Another referenced how "it always felt like somebody wanted to fight you for something, for stupid stuff like you think you better than everyone else or accidently knocking someone's paper or pencil on the floor when walking past their door." To further illustrate the dominance of the theme and the way in which it has characterized the teachers' experiences, one teacher pointed to "the constant feeling of being on edge is hard to shake. I can still feel that feeling and I see it in my building where I currently teach." The poignance of security is evident in the way in which one teacher described safety in contrast with other typical high school events that are considered milestone and memorable, stating, "My most vivid high school memories do not include prom and graduation, but gang and gang-related activity. There was always lots of fighting, shooting, murders, robberies, drugs, and fear. My friends and I walked to school in a constant state of fear."

Six of the teachers who participated in the study spoke of incidents of bullying in front of teachers who would not intervene and protect the student(s) who were being victimized. Interestingly, five participants in this study spoke of teachers being identified as the perpetrators of bullying; in recalling an experience about bullying, one participant said, "Some teachers would belittle students, make them clean up their room, pluck or pinch them, or threaten to fail a student when they don't act the way the teacher wants them to act." In another instance, one participant recalled, "A teacher let my sister and another student fight in class. The teacher told us let them fight so they can get suspended cause she needed a break. Some of our classrooms were out of control!" In an emotional recounting, another reminisced about being in an English class one year where she and other students were bullied. She said, "

> ...the teacher would constantly let the bullies in my personal space. The students would dare me to touch them. They would bully other students as well. The teacher would not intervene. I think all our identities were shaped by experiences like this. We all have many stories we can share about how unsafe we felt in school." Emotional and physical safety should be a foundational pillar in our educational settings as identity is so closely tied to these variables. Our teachers can benefit from resources that help them identify and deal with their own trauma so they will not pass along that trauma to their students or inflict their students with new trauma caused by them.

Self-Esteem

The second theme that emerged is self-esteem/self-worth. Developing a healthy sense of self includes an awareness of our physical, psychological, and social self. Physical self includes an awareness of how our bodies look, feel, and sound; psychological self includes qualities such as intelligence, personality, and emotional responses; and social self is how we integrate and relate to others (Brodzinsky et al., 1992). The process of discovering and defining one's self is a matter of recognizing personal strengths and weaknesses and building self-esteem (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990).

On 19 occasions in the questionnaire participants discussed the overall negative impact their K-12 experiences had on their self-esteem or self-worth. One teacher wrote specifically to the point, in only one powerful sentence: "My experience in middle school was very difficult; I dealt with self-esteem issues and often struggled with self-worth." Another teacher commented on how their elementary experiences made them feel "dumb" and that they were put in remedial classes. They expressed feeling "embarrassed and unworthy" and

> this feeling followed me the rest of my time in middle school and even into high school. I now struggle with bouts of anxiety and feeling unworthy of the experiences I am receiving like being accepted into this teacher in residence program. Can I keep up? Will I fail? I constantly second-guess myself. Not just in school situations, but in life choices.

One participant added:

> I was depressed during my senior year. My parents always pressured me to get good grades. As a result, I was not allowed to hang out or attend many school events. I spent my high school years feeling like no one cared about me, not my parents and not my teachers. They all only wanted good grades. I did not have any concept of who I was outside of my identity as a student.

In reference to grades, performance, and identity, three other teachers echoed these sentiments. One stated, "I didn't even get good grades. My identity was tied up in my contribution as an athlete. My teachers loved me during sports season, but when the season ended, I was back to being a regular, mid-to-low performing student who couldn't do nothing right."

Four participants reported feeling "regular" in school. When asked to expand upon what they each meant by "regular," they each spoke of being treated like everyone else. When asked to further clarify what that meant, one participant stated "those teachers in that school didn't care about anyone but themselves. They didn't care if I turned in homework or not. They just didn't want me disturbing the rest of the class. As long as I was quiet, I was fine." Another described "regular" as

> just trying to get attention just like everyone else, positive and negative. I wish I had teachers giving me affirmations at my school. Don't get me wrong, they all weren't bad, but the bad did outweigh the good. Shoot, I feel my identity was

> tied up in attention-seeking. I just wanted to be paid attention to… to feel like I mattered, period.

One participant stated, "I felt like no one cared that I was struggling, I self-medicated in school to cope, and school was just traumatic. No one cared about me, so I didn't care about me either. In fact, I didn't care for a long time and my attitude and behavior showed it."

When asked if they felt their identity was impacted by their K-12 experiences, they reiterated that they felt their importance was contingent on external factors like good grades, being quiet, an athlete, class clown, or being an attention seeker. Overall, the teachers each reported battling with self-esteem and self-worth issues as a result of their schooling experience. "We survived," one teacher said aloud, "but we all took a hit and some of us are still dealing with it."

Racial Salience

The third theme shared among the participants was racial salience. The concept of race in their schooling experiences has been salient and present in every space. The participants' narratives all included racialized experiences at all educational levels in their schooling experience. These racialized experiences were usually discussed in conjunction with the other themes of sense of security and self-esteem/self-worth.

Colorism experiences were painfully described by participants in this study. Some recalled being teased and bullied for having a much lighter or darker complexion than their peers. One person stated that their educational experience "made me self-conscious. Being of lighter skin I was either not Black enough for my Black peers or I acted too Black for my white peers." Two recalled being called names like "darkie, the n word, house n word, and light-bright" by both their peers and a teacher after having switched from an urban Black high school to a majority white high school.

All 11 teachers spoke of race as being normalized, meaning that racialized experiences were a part of their daily routines and interactions. "We see most things in black and white," said one teacher. Another teacher chimed in and said, "that's because it's been crystal clear since we were in elementary that Black people are different. Our schools don't look like white schools, and we have different rules we play by, real talk." Another added, "We all know that but the cycle continues, and they don't want us discussing race in school. Kids need tools to empower themselves and white kids need to know how race impacts us all. How do we break the cycle though." "We are fighters, and we keep fighting," another said.

Eight teachers attended schools in a district with many Black teachers and three attended urban schools in which the majority of teachers were white. A side conversation ensued when the teachers realized this in our group discussion. From their experiences, they discussed Black teachers often being "harder" on them than white teachers. I asked for clarification, and they reached common ground to say that Black teachers in general had higher expectations of them, and "in those spaces we felt included and cared about."

DISCUSSION

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments describe school safety as schools and school-related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying and harassment, and the influence of substance use (n.d.). School safety is also linked to student and school outcomes, in particular emotional and physical safety in school is related to academic performance (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environment, n.d., para.1). This is significant and could also partly explain why a sense of security was one of the main themes that emerged from the study. Additionally, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (n.d) describes individual trauma as an event or circumstance resulting in physical, emotional, and/or life-threatening harm that has lasting adverse effects on one's mental, physical, emotional, social, and/or spiritual well-being (paras 2). The sense-making of space, trauma, and identity are unique to the participants surveyed for this study. This type of study "is designed to describe and interpret an experience by determining the meaning of the experience as perceived by the people who have participated in it" (Ary et al., 2006, p. 461) While their experiences mirror those of Black professionals in other careers, geographic locations, and educational spaces, the perception of those experiences and their impact on their identity is unique to them and their respective spaces in the Hampton Roads area.

Urban schools would benefit from more discussion around collective healing and healing justice approaches (Ginwright, 2016). It takes endurance of time and effort for healing and restoration to occur in people who have suffered repeated trauma from regular exposure to spatial inequalities (Garo et al., 2018). Ginwright (2016) recommends supporting and adopting a healing justice framework to confront racial and social inequality and advocate for collective healing and restoration of hope through transforming schools, institutions, and social relationships that create or impart harm through injustice. Teaching our kids self-compassion is a core emotional skill that helps build emotional resilience.

Also, employing a conceptual framework for empowerment, equity, and social justice like the one presented by Robinson et al., (2021) can also be implemented to transform schools into welcoming, safe, nurturing spaces for Black children. The Critical Media Literacy Framework created by Robinson et al., (2021) focuses on Black female identity construction, but the concept is transferable and applicable to all students. The framework can be implemented with students as early as preschool (p. 85) and would be scaffolded as the students' progress through school. The conceptual framework addresses the development of critical media literacy skills and critical consciousness to strengthen the self-concept, self-esteem, and self-ideals of Black students. "We live in times of historical amnesia and unprecedented levels of uncertainty. To achieve social transformation, we need to increase mindfulness, develop new skills, and seek deeper understanding" (Gray, n.d., para. 4). By developing these skills provided by existing frameworks, our students can decode, analyze, and deconstruct the negative imaging in this world. Our students must learn how to reject, replace, and reframe the many images, messages, and circumstances that impact their identity to minimize the effect and impact of trauma. Just as curricula builds upon itself, so does the teaching and implementation of frameworks that

empower students. We all have a shared responsibility to the well-being and healthy identity development of Black students. We can utilize frameworks such as these to address and combat various complex issues related to trauma in educational spaces.

Limitations

Helms (1990b) once stated that studying a person's identity development poses a possible limitation to some forms of studying identity development because identity development takes time. This study was the first time the participants said they thought of their identity in terms of their educational experiences. They agreed that they need more time to unpack and explore this phenomenon. It is possible that after reflecting for some time, participant responses would change and be more explicit. The small number of participants in the study also present a limitation. The study does not claim that a majority of Black teachers have had traumatic experiences and does not generalize the lived experiences of urban educators.

The researcher in this study is the instrument and the sole data collector and analyzer. Therefore, it is possible that unconscious biases occurred during the data collection process and analysis. Patton (2002) states, “the principle is to report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation either negatively or positively” (p. 566). As a Black woman, scholar/practitioner, who is also the director of the teacher residency program from which my participant pool was recruited, may have allowed for researcher and/or participant bias. I have a particular understanding based on my lived experiences of what it means for race, gender, and space to intersect, and because of this connection to my participants, it is possible that the ways in which the final themes are selected was influenced by my positionality, though not likely since the study was framed by two critical theories that were used to guide the structure and analysis. Additional research needs to be conducted with additional teachers and teachers who differ in race from the participants.

CONCLUSION

Each teacher spoke of advocating for students like themselves as their motivation to become teachers. They discussed that their experiences shaped them in various ways, many struggling with bouts of depression, anxiety, and issues related to their self-worth. One teacher said, "In moments of darkness, it is understandable to feel sadness. I want to be there for my students, so they do not stay in that place." All 11 participants commented that they each experienced some form of educational trauma as referenced in the recurring themes. “I didn’t know how deep this could be. I see the connections between my thought pattern, my behavior, and my trauma.” “Me, too” another stated, “me, three, four, five, etc.” All participants expressed that they would have liked a follow-up group discussion once they had more processing and reflection time. Many connections were made by the teachers as to why they chose teaching. They stated they were aware that they wanted to become a teacher to be that positive role model and advocate for students.

This study provides the opportunity to explore the perceived influence of educational trauma on identity development. Trauma has no boundaries and how someone responds to a traumatic experience is personal. For this reason, the need to address it is an important part of effective health care and an integral part of the healing and recovery process (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, n.d.). This study emphasizes the need for a more intersectional, critical race-spaced identity theory that would encompass the complex identities and experiences of Black people. Employing a critical race-spaced lens to this study moves research forward to a more intersectional approach by allowing "critical race scholars to challenge racism empirically (as a central axis of oppression in daily reality), personally (as a vital component in how CRT scholars view themselves and their experiences of the world), and politically (as a point of group coherence and activism)" (Burrell-Craft, 2020). Critically race-spaced identity theory (CRSIT) allows the encompassing of the whole experience, the then and the now, to better understand and explain the how and why of Black specific experiences like educational trauma. This understanding is important especially as we consider issues such as teacher shortages and the recruitment and retention of teachers who ultimately play a role in helping to not only shape academic careers but also the personal identity of their students. While educators cannot directly control the trauma experienced in the communities where their students live, they can control the educational spaces in which they learn, grow, and develop.

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