MAPPING ANTI-RACIST PEDAGOGY THROUGH ENDARKENED STORYWORK: TOWARDS A CRITICAL RACE TRAUMA REDUCING PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

A critical attribute of an anti-racist English Language Arts (ELA) classroom is a curriculum that includes literary works that represent the full Black experience and readings of authentic storytelling (Toliver, 2022). When educators lack the autonomy to select their own classroom texts and/or lack the efficacy to navigate classroom discourse surrounding race and racism, an anti-racist pedagogical framework for literature instruction is critical (Johnson & Neville, 2018). My dissertation addresses the relationship between personal perceptions of literary representations of experience, relationships to race, and implications for pedagogy. The study investigates the choices teachers make when engaging students in Black authored texts and narratives about race and racism through the responses and perceptions students have about experiences in the secondary ELA classroom. My project demonstrates a coupling of theoretical inquiry and empirical project, using the participants' lived experiences to better understand where and how Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Racial Trauma Theory can be a conceptual framework to attend to issues or gaps in classroom engagement with race in literature. The theoretical findings are responsive to and co-constructed by the lived experiences and perceptions of participants. My empirical study shares Black students' lived experiences through the lens and methodology of Endarkened Storywork.

Findings revealed that anti-racist pedagogy and trauma-informed pedagogy are not only inextricably linked, when anti-racist pedagogy is missing, misguided, or deficit in the ELA classroom, Black students experience racial (re)traumatization. The same practices that undermine anti-racist pedagogy were the context and cause for racial trauma. Ultimately, my goal within this study is to contribute to ongoing theoretical conversations about promoting an anti-racist, trauma-reducing approach to literature instruction that centers the lived experiences of Black students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 36
CHAPTER 3: METHODS 77
CHAPTER 4: STORYWORK FINDINGS 131
STORYWORK **132**
FINDINGS PART II **157**
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS 197
REFERENCES 273
APPENDICES 281
VITA 301

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 Tenets of Critical Race Theory from Laughter and Han (2019, p.7) 14
Table 1.2 Delgado and Stefancic (2017) Tenets and Features of Critical Race Theory..... 15
Table 1.3 Tracing a Theoretical Perspective: CRT and the Move to Education 17
Table 5.1 Towards a Critical Race Trauma Informed Framework ..……271

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Theoretical Framework in Context 5
Figure 1.2. Theoretical Framework of Complex Racial Trauma..... 24
Figure 1.3. Developmental and Ecological Model of Youth Racial Trauma 26
Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework Situated in Scholarship 37
Figure 3.1. Endarkened Storywork Alignments 96
Figure 5.1 Towards a Critical Race Trauma Reducing Pedagogical Framework…….268
Figure 5.2 CRTR Framework in Context……..269
Figure 5.3 CRTR Framework in Context……..270

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A critical attribute of an anti-racist English Language Arts (ELA) classroom is a curriculum that includes literary works that represent the full Black experience and readings of authentic storytelling (Johnson, 2022; Sarigianides & Borsheim-Black, 2019; Toliver, 2022). In response, teachers have selected Black-authored Young Adult Literature (YAL) titles that singularly situate the Black experience in trauma (societal, racial, violence, oppression), and/or fail to acknowledge the racial trauma present in canonical texts (Franzak & Noll, 2006; Freedman, 2020; Grinage, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Thomas, 2015; Toliver, 2022). This is, ultimately, a problematic decision with far-reaching repercussions, as teachers who neglect to explicitly attend to representations of racial trauma in course texts can further anti-Black narratives and (re)traumatize students who engage with the literature, activities, and classroom dialogues (Brown & Brown, 2010; Carello & Butler, 2014; Freedman, 2020; Quiros et al., 2020; Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Toliver 2020, 2022). Further, Black representation in taught literature often fails to extend beyond a singular narrative of racism and trauma; missing from the ELA curriculum are narratives of joy, pride, agency, imagination, and rebellion (Ambrosia et al., 2021; Love, 2019; Martin, 2014; Toliver, 2018, 2020, 2022).

Current empirical research in the field found that teachers fall short of anti-racist pedagogy in English Education, even when that is their intention, due to a fear of tense topics and a counterintuitive commitment to white-authored canonical texts. Teachers are mistaking a passive approach to race (such as including Black-authored texts or topics of race in their curriculum) for anti-racist pedagogy that explicitly calls out overt and covert racial structures in and out of the literature. What is missing from the scholarship, and what my work intends to address, is a theoretical lens that considers how this is a form of racial trauma and a responsive pedagogical framework for explicitly guiding teachers in an anti-racist trauma-informed literacy.

Purpose of the Study

When educators lack the autonomy to select their own classroom texts and/or lack a shared lived experience with race and racism, an anti-racist pedagogical framework for literature instruction in the ELA classroom is critical (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Boler, 2014; Freedman, 2020; Johnson, 2022; Johnson & Neville, 2018; Martin, 2014; McCardle, 2017). Research in the field of racial literacy supports the belief that because of potential tensions, teachers need to have a deep understanding of why and how taught texts are positioned in the English classroom, and the efficacy to navigate texts and topics anchored in race and racism without potentially (re)traumatizing students or maintaining racist narratives (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Grinage, 2018; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Saleem et al., 2019; Thomas, 2013, 2015). A pedagogical framework grounded in anti-racist teaching can be a critical literacy throughline and attend to the potential tensions of engaging students in classroom discussions about race

and racial trauma.

Tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) can provide a framework for including Black experiences in taught literature and understanding overt and covert racialized academic trauma. Racial Trauma Theory contributes to this theoretical framework by illuminating the rationale for CRT as a pedagogical approach to the topic of race, racism, and the reading of racial narratives (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Johnson, 2018, 2022; Johnson & Neville, 2018; Martin, 2014; McCardle, 2017; Williams et al., 2016). Findings from the literature support my argument that anti-racist and trauma-reducing pedagogy are inextricably linked. Anti-racist pedagogy falls short when educators fail to consider racial trauma, and frameworks for trauma reducing pedagogy exclude Black students when race is not explicitly named as an interacting variable (Petrone & Stanton, 2021)

The Significance of the Study Situated in Scholarship

Recent trends in ELA curriculum and policy, such as mandated curriculum, book bans, and moratoriums on the teaching of CRT, contribute to the significance and urgency of my study (Brown & Brown, 2010; Johnson & Neville, 2018; McCardle, 2017). Further supporting the rationale for my research are gaps in the existing scholarship. I situate the significance of the study in scholarship by examining (1) the lack of intersectional race and trauma research; (2) the need for responsive and explicit frameworks for anti-racist pedagogy; (3) lingering questions regarding ethics and best practices for teaching trauma narratives in ELA classrooms; (4) and the need to center Black student's lived experiences and voices as a source of epistemological knowledge in this context.

Critical Race and Racial Trauma Theory

CRT has provided a framework for diverse research goals and methods in English Education scholarship (Ledesma et al., 2023). There has been little empirical investigation, however, conducted to explore the use of CRT as a trauma-informed practice or as an instructional approach to literary analysis. Racial Trauma Theory has yet to find a place in English Education research, despite research findings that provide a rationale for its inclusion (McGhee & Stovall, 2015; Quiros et al., 2020). While there are examples of potential theoretical frameworks for anti-racist and trauma-informed research in the field of education, missing from the scholarship are empirical studies to evaluate and refine theory into practice (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Freedman, 2020; Golden, 2020; Johnson & Neville, 2018; Jolly, 2011).

Pedagogy

Teachers fall short of anti-racist pedagogy in English Education, even when that is their intention, due to a fear of tense topics and a counterintuitive commitment to white-authored canonical texts (Boylorn, 2011; Grinage, 2014, 2018; Simpson et al., 2007). Teachers are mistaking a passive approach to race (such as including Black-authored texts or topics of race in their curriculum) for anti-racist pedagogy that explicitly calls out overt and covert racial structures in and out of the literature (Ambrosia et al.,

2021; Dumas & Ross, 2016). What is largely missing from the scholarship is a theoretical lens that considers how this is a form of racial trauma, and a responsive pedagogical framework guided by student's lived experiences.

Literature and Trauma in the Anti-Racist Classroom

Trauma narratives that are central to or embedded in taught texts can provide healing and transformation for students when coupled with a trauma-informed pedagogy that reduces harm and promotes healing (Carello & Butler, 2014; McGhee & Stovall, 2015; Williams et al., 2016). Specifically, when we consider Black-authored narratives of traumatic lived experiences, educators can honor these testimonies by including them in their classroom discourse (Freedman, 2020; Grinage, 2018). Scholars at the intersection of Trauma Theory and narrative pointed out a key ethical dilemma when bearing witness to literary acts of violence in the context of a classroom: "Should we, as teachers, aim to bring our students, especially Black and other silenced literary voices, to such moments of crisis for pedagogical purposes? And if so, what is the responsible way to teach narratives with trauma at their center?" (Spear, 2014, p. 56; see also Jolly, 2011). Student experiences can provide a rationale for including/excluding these narratives in the classroom. CRT and Racial Trauma Theory can provide a lens for evaluating the contexts in which these narratives are healing for Black students and guide educators in providing space for the victims of trauma to have control of their relationship to the story.

Methodological Considerations

Narrative inquiry studies that aim to gain insight into student participant's experiential knowledge are an essential but missing feature in the field (Toliver, 2022). Language is both interpretive and fluid, as are experiences and perceptions (Thomas, 2013, 2015; Williams et al., 2016). Therefore, researchers cannot assume that individuals will experience or interpret racism or trauma in a way that can be operationalized, or that individual understandings of key terms can be generalized (Carello & Butler, 2014; Quiros et al., 2020). Before a responsive pedagogical framework can be proposed, there must be an investigation into the ways these dynamics are understood and interpreted by individuals in context (Boylorn, 2020; Simpson et al., 2007). For this reason, Endarkened Storywork as a methodology and onto-epistemological commitment inform my study design and analytical framework (Toliver, 2022).

The most significant contribution my study makes to the field of anti-racist education research is the storied experiences of Black students told in their own voices. Ultimately, my goal within this study is to contribute to ongoing theoretical conversations about promoting an anti-racist, trauma-reducing approach to literature instruction that centers on Black students' voices, lived experiences, and visions for the future. Emerging theoretical scholarship in the field of trauma called for interdisciplinary empirical studies at the intersection of education, race, and trauma; the narrative inquiry aspect of my study stands to benefit research across multiple disciplines (McGhee & Stovall, 2015; Quiros et al., 2020).

Research Question

My dissertation aims to share Black students' lived experiences with secondary ELA curriculum and teacher pedagogy through the lens and methodology of narrative inquiry, and more specifically, Endarkened Storywork (Toliver, 2022). My purpose for including CRT and Racial Trauma Theory in my theoretical framework is to consider the implications in my analysis, not to prove a hypothesis or generalize a phenomenon; participants can consider anti-blackness and racial trauma if they choose to, but are not required to (Toliver, 2022). Therefore, my research question is intentionally worded to empower and emancipate both storytellers and story listeners. The research questions guiding my study and rationale for Endarkened Storywork as my methodology are as follows:

RQ: How do Black students describe and understand their experiences engaging in taught texts and teacher pedagogy in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms?

SRQ: How can CRT and Racial Trauma Theory contribute to an analytical and responsive framework for anti-racist pedagogy?

My project coupled theoretical inquiry with an empirical project, using the participants' lived experiences to better understand where and how Critical Race Theory and Racial Trauma Theory can be a conceptual framework to attend to issues or gaps in classroom engagement with race in literature, with an explicit goal of anti-racist and trauma-reducing pedagogy in the ELA classroom and curriculum. Findings from the theoretical inquiry component are responsive to and co-constructed by the lived experiences and perceptions of study participants. The empirical project shares Black students' lived experiences with secondary ELA curriculum and teacher pedagogy through Endarkened Storywork. Figure 1.1 presents a visual representation of the study, theoretical framework, and related complexities.

Organization

Before Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate adopted CRT into their scholarship, ushering it into the field of education, they sought a depth of understanding of the legal precedents upon which many of the early CRT arguments rested. Their work "was not merely reading these scholars; it was reading them in relation to the legal cases they were citing" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 32). I take up Ladson-Billings and Tate's approach in my overview of the emergence and critical attributes of CRT, as well as CRT's move to education research.

First, I highlight pivotal Supreme Court decisions that motivated the emergence of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and then CRT in legal studies. The Supreme Court opinions included in this overview also work to illuminate the theoretical perspectives that will become the foundations for later articulations of the tenets of CRT. Next, I situate the development of the key features of CRT in the seminal scholars and the concepts introduced in their early scholarship.

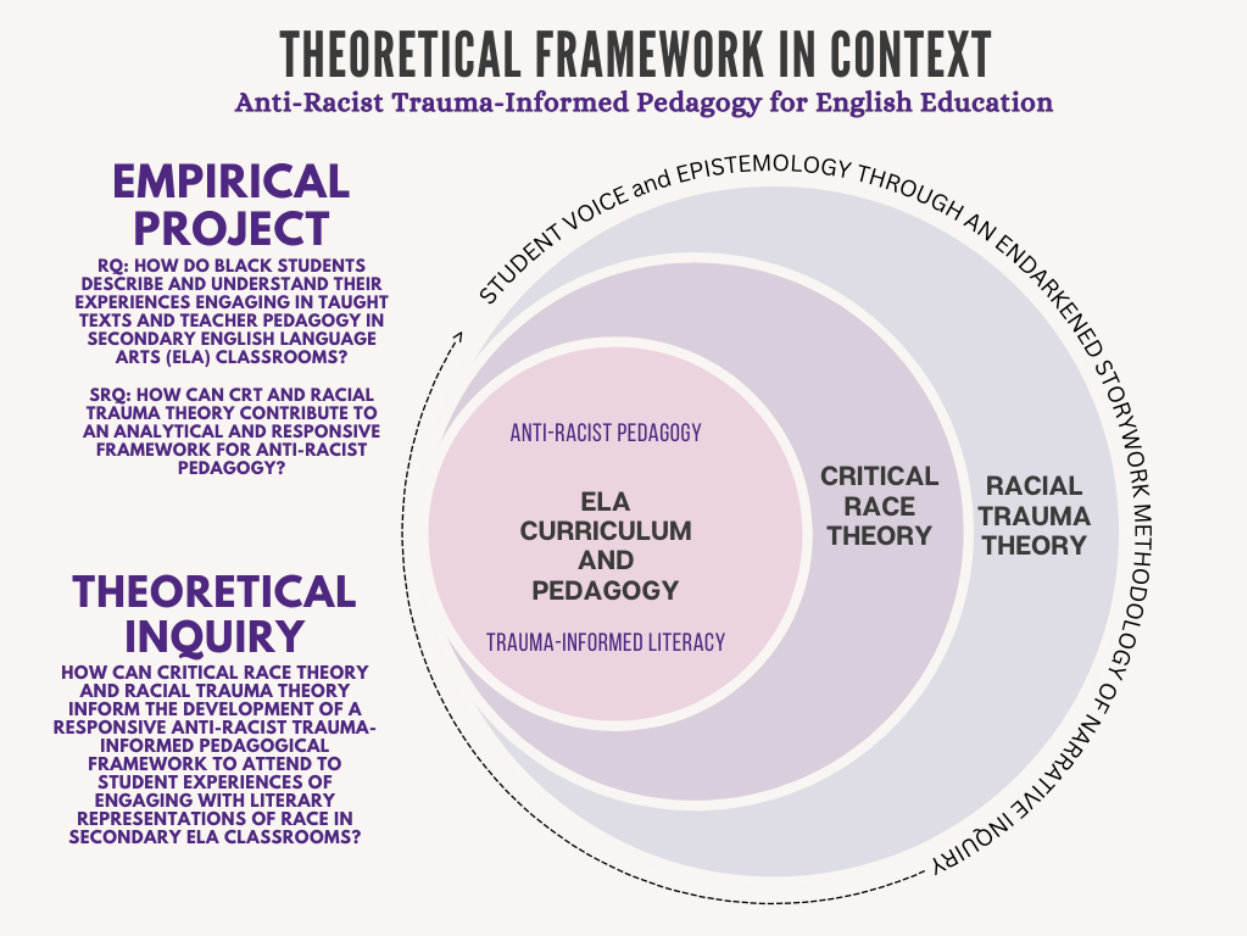


Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework in Context

I provide a brief overview of the emergence and rationale for CRT in education research and highlight key scholars and concepts specific to the field, including relevant work in the field of CRT and English Education specifically. I outline and define the central propositions, or tenets, of CRT, demonstrating through associated scholarship how they are framed in education and English Education research.

In the next section, I introduce the underpinning theories and concepts of Racial Trauma Theory. I make connections to Racial Trauma Theory scholarship in the field of education as well as Literary Trauma Theory to demonstrate the relevance to my study and theoretical framework grounded in CRT. Finally, I provide an in-depth discussion of the CRT features that inform my dissertation study and theoretical framework, demonstrating a rationale for including Racial Trauma Theory as a critical attribute of this work.

Critical Race Theoretical Framework

CRT is an interdisciplinary, intersectional discourse that draws on multiple lines of inquiry to construct a critique of race and racism that incorporates issues of ethnicity, social class, gender, and nation (Lynn & Dixson, 2021). CRT as a critique of racism in the law and society emerged as a race-based critique growing from the National Critical Legal Studies (CLS) conferences that took place at the Harvard and UC–Berkeley Law Schools in the early to mid-1980s (Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lynn & Dixson, 2021). Out of this evolving critique of the role of law in society, a second strand of critical scholarship emerged through the writings of Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Richard Delgado, Angela Harris, and Kimberlé Crenshaw (Tate, 1997). These scholars argued that a new understanding of the law was necessary before racial oppression would end. Bell's work is often cited as the primary source of the critical theory now known as Critical Race Theory, with Crenshaw often receiving credit for coining the term (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Lynn & Dixson, 2021).

The work of CRT in the courts caught the attention of theorists who saw connections between the law and education. In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate proposed the adoption of CRT as an analytical tool for critiquing education theory and notions of multiculturalism. Racial inequities and disparities in education and the need for education research grounded in CRT were amplified in the years following *Brown v. The Board of Education* (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) used CRT tenets and research "as an analytic tool for understanding school inequality" (p. 48). In the field of education, and specifically my dissertation study, CRT can be used to question the variables chosen (or ignored) in quantitative research as well as to establish counter-narratives in qualitative research (Brown & Jackson, 2021).

History of a Theoretical Perspective

CRT was born out of a need to respond to a preponderance of historical and legal developments. In 1954, the unanimous Supreme Court opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education* ended statutes that

authorized racial segregation of public-school students. What followed were fifteen years of unprecedented legal, political, and educational measures aimed at dismantling segregation's residual structures of racism and oppression (Brown & Jackson, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Ten years after *Brown*, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, followed the next year by the Voting Rights Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and, in 1968, Congress passed the Fair Housing Act outlawing discriminatory practices in real estate (Crenshaw, 2011).

However, four new conservative Supreme Court Justice appointments under Richard Nixon in 1970 set into motion the reversal of many of the hard-won legal victories for minorities (Brown & Jackson, 2021). The underpinnings of these legal opinions exemplified the white supremacist ideologies CRT would work to name and define, particularly the ways in which racism was intentionally made invisible and systemic in legal and political institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Pivotal Supreme Court Decisions

The Supreme Court decisions in *Keyes v. School District No. 1* (1973) and *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) halted ongoing efforts to desegregate schools. Schools that remained segregated were not deemed unlawful unless it could be proven that the segregation was a result of intentional district-wide conduct. If State zoning decisions resulted in *de facto* segregation because there were not enough white children in the area to integrate the schools, the State would not be held responsible (Brown & Jackson, 2021). Due to white flight in major urban areas across the country and the insurmountable task of proving district-wide malfeasance, the 1970s saw a rapid return to the segregated schools of the 1950s (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

The Court's 1976 *Washington v. Davis* case produced one of the most significant race discrimination decisions, effectively determining what constitutes unconstitutional race discrimination. Like *Keyes* (1973), the Court concluded that it had to be proven that governmental actions were motivated by discriminatory intent rather than discriminatory effects in order to be considered unconstitutional. The ability to claim colorblind neutrality when challenged with discriminatory practices remains a current hallmark of both systemic and individual racism and is a critical attribute of CRT's framework (Brown & Jackson, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Critical Legal Studies

A responsive movement of scholars and school of critical theory called Critical Legal Studies (CLS) emerged within the legal academy. CLS was officially started in the late 1970s, but its roots extend to a time when many of the founding members participated in social activism surrounding the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War (Fitzpatrick & Hunt, 1987; Tushnet, 1991). CLS sought to expose and challenge the view that legal reasoning was neutral, value-free, and unaffected by social and economic relations, political forces, or cultural phenomena (Crenshaw, 2011). Rather, CLS argued that

the law works to enforce, reflect, and legitimize the dominant social and power relations through social actors who believed or claimed that they were neutral and arrived at their decisions through an objective process of legal reasoning (Brown & Jackson, 2021; Crenshaw, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In this way, American law and legal institutions serve to legitimize an oppressive social order.

The Emergence of Critical Race Theory

While CLS had developed some significant insights into how the legal process worked, the first meeting of CRT emerged from a concern that the CLS movement did not adequately address the struggles of people of color, particularly Black people (Brown & Jackson, 2021). The legal scholars who met at the first CRT meeting were motivated by a desire to understand how white supremacy and its subordination of people of color had been created and maintained in America and how it could be dismantled (Brown & Jackson, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

What distinguished these CRT scholars from conventional liberal scholarship about race and inequality was an understanding that traditional legal and civil rights discourse about racism and racial insubordination was neither neutral nor sufficient to overcome the embeddedness of racial oppression in American institutions (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). As was revealed in the Supreme Court decisions of the 1970s, the appearance of neutrality operates to obscure the fact that the perspective of the white majority is ingrained within this view. Given the definition of discrimination produced by the Court in *Washington v. Davis*, actions motivated by racially neutral justifications regardless of the negative impact on people of color were not considered discriminatory under the law (Brown & Jackson, 2021).

Critical Race Theory Concepts Situated in Scholars and Scholarship

The early writings of CRT scholars articulated the principles and concepts that would shape understandings of CRT today. Charles Lawrence (1987) argued that the Supreme Court's definition of race discrimination was inadequate because it failed to acknowledge the influence of unconscious forms of racism. According to Lawrence, because the cultural belief system is inherently racist, our experiences and participation in those systems influence our beliefs. Because we do not recognize the racism embedded in our cultural beliefs, a large part of the actions that produce and reproduce racial discrimination are influenced by unconscious racial motivations.

Derrick Bell (1987) introduced the interest convergence principle and racial realism, two pivotal and interrelated concepts, into the discourse. Bell's interest convergence principle posits that Black people will only make substantial progress against racial oppression when their interests align with or benefit those of white supremacy (Bell, 1987). He critiqued the opinion in *Brown* as being the result of such interest convergence, placing the benefit to the dominant culture before any sense of social justice altruism. Until the dominant culture takes up the interests of Black America as its own, racism remains a real and integral part of society (Bell, 1992).

Because legal discourse alone had failed to reveal the nature of racial oppression, and in many cases actively worked to obscure it, CRT took up the technique of storytelling and counternarratives to expose the ways racism manifests and oppresses in the everyday lives of Black people. Cheryl Harris (1993) discussed the concept of whiteness as property, both exemplifying the use of storytelling in CRT scholarship and the ways in which counternarratives can work to expose the socially constructed nature of race. Because realities are socially constructed, they are subject to multiple interpretations; stories and counterstories can demonstrate the ways racial phenomena are interpreted differently based on the social positionality of a particular group (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Other early examples of storytelling in CRT scholarship include Bell's (1987*) And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice*, Patricia Williams's (1987) *Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor*, and Richard Delgado's (1995) *Rodrigo Chronicles: Conversations about Race in America*.

Current CRT scholars and Black authors use storytelling and counter-narratives to undermine claims of racial neutrality and reveal that racism and racial discrimination are deep and enduring parts of the everyday existence of people of color, making visible the racial biases that are deeply embedded in the norms of American society (Toliver, 2022). Both storytelling and the social construction thesis would become central tenets of CRT, particularly CRT in the field of education and as a research methodology (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Solórzano & Yasso, 2002; Taylor, 2023).

Another concept that emerged as a critical attribute of CRT was intersectionality, first articulated by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), one of the principal organizers of CRT, and Angela Harris (1990). Crenshaw explained that the traditional political discourse often ignored the issues of intragroup differences, particularly women of color. Although efforts had been made to politicize experiences of racism and sexism, feminist and anti-racist practices had yet to be effectively integrated. Crenshaw and Harris noted that intersectional experiences are often marginalized or ignored and that multiple identities need to be considered when critiquing and restructuring the social world (Crenshaw, 1991; Harris, 1990).

Although CRT began as an intellectual movement in the law, it is now utilized as an analytical tool to examine the way race and racism are operational across various and within specific disciplines. As many of the original legal CRT scholars, such as Bell and Crenshaw, were professors in major Universities, and many of the Supreme Court decisions that inspired the CLS intellectual movement were concerned with discrimination in education, CRT as a lens for education research was a logical extension of the framework.

Critical Race Theory in Education Scholarship

In education, race has primarily functioned as one of the many variables used by scholars to examine educational outcomes. In the mid-1990s, CRT emerged as a way to engage race as both the cause of and the context for disparate and inequitable social and educational outcomes (Tate, 1997). CRT

scholars in both the law and education argued that researchers must place race at the center of analyses (Lynn & Dixson, 2021). Ladson-Billings and Tate are often credited with formally introducing CRT into the field of education research (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

After conducting extensive research and reading seminal legal CRT scholarship, Ladson-Billings and Tate published *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education* in 1995. Within a few years, Tate (1997) published a comprehensive history of the field and its major proponents, contributing to the growing understanding of CRT in education research. As CRT gained traction in education scholarship, Ladson-Billings (1998) published an article warning education researcher against using or claiming the use of CRT without an adequate understanding of its roots and ideologies. The overuse and commodification of CRT in education research that happens to be race-oriented, without an explicit alignment with the underlying ideologies, is a tension that is often noted in the scholarship (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Lynn & Dixson, 2021).

Ladson-Billings (1998) described issues in the current configuration of public education and the ways that CRT can be a "powerful explanatory tool for the sustained inequity of people of color experience" (p. 18). She exemplified the relationship that can exist between CRT and education by highlighting the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation.

Daniel Solórzano (1997) began publishing and building the growing CRT scholarship in the field of education. Solórzano's individual work, as well as collaborations with Tara Yosso (2001), expanded the framework for CRT in education with concepts such as critical race methodology, counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research, and critical race pedagogy (Solórzano &Yasso, 1998, 2002).

Solórzano (2013) described how Freirean pedagogy informed his perspective of the CRT framework in education. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) explained that in traditional schooling, students are dependent on the teacher for their acquisition of knowledge and teachers act as conduits through which the ideology and values of the dominant social groups are transmitted to the students. Freirean pedagogy fosters the development of a critical race, gender, and class consciousness from which participants gain the capacity to name and analyze the causes and conditions of a social problem, the ability to look at other possibilities in response to the problem, and a disposition to act to change the problem (Freire, 1970; Solórzano, 2013). From this perspective of Freirean pedagogy, Solórzano developed five tenets specific to CRT in education meant to represent a challenge to traditional modes of education scholarship: (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (b) the challenge to dominant ideology; (c) the commitment to social justice; (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective. Through these tenets, Solórzano aimed to

demonstrate how, in the Freirean tradition, CRT names racist injuries, identifies their origins, and seeks remedies for the injury (2013).

Marvin Lynn (1999), Edward Taylor (1999), and Dolores Delgado Bernal (2002) are also among the notable scholars who made early contributions and expansions to CRT literature in the field of education research. Since the emergence of CRT as a theoretical framework for education in the 1990s, countless education researchers have applied the perspectives of these early scholars to their own race and social justice-oriented qualitative studies (e.g., Borsheim-Black, 2018; Falter & Kerkhoff, 2018; Mosley, 2010; Savitz et al., 2022). Overall, CRT in education identifies and challenges racism as part of a larger goal of identifying and challenging all forms of subordination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Critical Race Theory in the Field of English Education

Researchers in English Language Arts (ELA), literature, and literacy education are among the scholars adopting the frameworks of CRT in empirical education research. However, there have been fewer scholars dedicated to rewriting and reinventing CRT as a unique theoretical framework situated in the specific context of literature and literacy education (Crenshaw, 2011; Macedo, 1994; Solórzano, 2013). Situating my dissertation study in the relevant English Education theoretical scholarship gives insight into my chosen inquiry, study design, and the gaps in research my study aims to address. In terms of my study's broad critical attributes, (1) the literary representation of Black experience and identity; (2) the perspectives and storied experiences of Black students; (3) causes and conditions of harm/trauma; and (4) the specific context of classroom and teacher pedagogy, my dissertation presents an opportunity to define and refine CRT as a theoretical framework in anti-racist English Education research and pedagogy.

One of the earliest and most significant contributions to CRT in English Education is Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), which provided a foundation for Critical Race Theory in English Education research. Morrison examined and critiqued the literary representation of the Black identity in American literature through the lens of the white imagination. More recent critiques focused on the exclusion of Black authors and voices in the ELA curriculum (Johnson, 2022; Toliver, 2022). In a significant and explicit effort, Johnson (2022) coined the term Critical Race English Education (CREE) to refer to the teaching practice of rejecting anti-Black narratives in ELA curriculum and instruction. He argued that the ELA curriculum and literature can both perpetuate attacks on Black bodies and spirits and serve as a site of resistance and emancipation. CREE, as a philosophical and pedagogical approach, centered commitment to the radical love of Blackness and anti-racism (Johnson, 2022).

April Baker-Bell's research and framework for Anti-Black Linguistic Racism and Linguistic Justice (2020) closely align with the goals and methods of my own study design. Baker-Bell highlighted the counter-stories of Black students to demonstrate the harm to their identities and sense of self enacted

by traditional language education. The student voices became the source of knowledge that shaped Baker-Bell's anti-racist pedagogical framework for linguistics and language instruction. My study proposes a similar epistemological approach to anti-racist pedagogy situated in literature and literary instructional practices. Baker-Bell's work exemplified the Freirean pedagogy that Solórzano (2013) advocated for in CRT education research:

> I don't want to be imported or exported. It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them. Please tell your fellow educators not to import me. Ask them to re-create and re-write my ideas. (Freire, 2005, p. 58)

I similarly aim to import theoretical features from CRT, Racial Trauma Theory, and predecessors in the field and use my study as a vehicle to export a new pedagogical practice for anti-racist and trauma-reducing literature instruction.

Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides contributed to the field with their book *Letting Go of Literary Whiteness: Anti-Racist Literature Instruction for White Students* (2019), which attempted to expand the foundational propositions of CRT into a specific context and community. The authors explicitly connected understandings of racism stemming from CRT to literature curriculum and instruction with implications for anti-racist education. Like my work, they drew on Morrison's (1992) assertion that literature does not simply reflect race and racism in American society; literature has played a role in constructing race and racism in American society. Anti-racist education involves deliberately challenging racist structures in and through our curriculum and instruction (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). While Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) focused on their own experiences as teachers and the anti-racist education of white students, my study prioritizes the experiences and anti-racist literary imagination of Black students.

I aim to add to the growing theoretical "reinvention" of CRT for the community and context in which I serve. A Critical Race Trauma-Reducing theoretical framework for English Education has the potential to act as a critical tool for understanding the ways Black students experience racism in the ELA classroom, the ways they respond to racism, and the assets they possess to act against this form of oppression (Solórzano, 2013). I align with Ladson-Billings' perspective that adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity requires exposing racism in education and proposing radical solutions (1998).

Tenets of Critical Race Theory

As race-oriented scholarship continues to take up CRT as a theoretical framework, Crenshaw (2011) warned against efforts to define and restrict CRT as a stable project. As CRT was and continues to be developed through dynamic engagements in specific institutions, CRT scholars prefer a socio-cultural perspective of CRT over a definitive articulation of its terms (Crenshaw, 2011). Table 1.1. from Laughter

& Han (2019, p. 7) demonstrates how seminal works and authors conceptualized features that commonly appear across CRT research. In *Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory: Looking Back To Move Forward* Crenshaw stated:

> CRT is not so much an intellectual unit filled with natural stuff—theories, themes, practices, and the like—but one that is dynamically constituted by a series of contestations and convergences pertaining to the ways that racial power is understood and articulated…I want to suggest that shifting the frame of CRT toward a dynamic rather than static reference would be a productive means by which we can link CRT's past to the contemporary moment. (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1261)

While this may read as a resistance to naming and defining tenets of CRT, Crenshaw is encouraging scholars to ground their theoretical perspective by considering the roots of CRT and the contemporary moment to better understand both contexts. The scholarship in the field of CRT and education research demonstrates how different scholars prioritize, emphasize, and operationalize features of CRT to create a rich interdisciplinary perspective.

Nonetheless, what sets Critical Race theorists apart from someone simply writing about race and racial issues is that "those who are CRT scholars subscribe to a number of tenets that Delgado and Stefancic (2017) identify as hallmarks of CRT" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 34):

- belief that racism is normal or ordinary, not aberrant, in U.S. society;
- interest convergence or material determinism;
- race as a social construction;
- intersectionality and anti-essentialism; and
- voice or counter-narrative.

Table 1.2 defines the CRT tenets outlined by Delgado & Stefancic (2017) with supporting literature from Ladson-Billings (2021), relevant to education research. This framing most aligns with and demonstrates the way I engage with the tenets in my theoretical and analytical framework.

Tracing a Theoretical Perspective

The underpinning theoretical perspectives of CRT can be traced from the pivotal Supreme Court opinions to the responsive CRT scholars and concepts that emerged by examining the features of each tenet. It is important to note that the ways in which scholars organize and emphasize certain principles will vary across disciplines.

Table 1.1 Tenets of Critical Race Theory from Laughter and Han (2019, p.7)

Table 1.1. Tenets of Critical Race Theory

General Tenet/ Author	Racism Is Systemic	Rebuke of the System and Neo-liberalism	Activist Theory / Interest Convergence	Use of Voice	Across Disciplines
Milner (2007)	Racism endemic, pervasive, widespread, and ingrained		Interest convergence	Centrality of narrative & counternarratives	
Delgado & Stefancic (2001)	Racism is ordinary, not aberrational	Race and racism are products of social thought; differential racialization; anti-essentialism	Interest Convergence (material determinism) and Colorblind concepts of equality	Unique voice of color	
Solórzano & Yosso (2001)	The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism	The challenge to dominant ideology	The commitment to social justice	The centrality of experiential knowledge	The interdisciplinary perspective
Ladson-Billings (1998)	Racism is normal in American society	Critique of liberalism	Interest convergence	Sometimes employs storytelling to analyze culture	
Tate (1997)	Racism is endemic	Portrays dominant legal claims of neutrality as camouflage	Reinterprets civil rights law in light of its limitations	Insists on a contextual/ historical examination	Racism crosses epistemological boundaries
Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995)	Racism as endemic and deeply ingrained	Challenging claims of neutrality and meritocracy	Reinterpretation of ineffective civil rights law	Naming one's own reality	

Table 1.2 Delgado and Stefancic (2017) Tenets and Features of Critical Race Theory

Tenets of CRT (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, 2017)	**Features of the Tenet**
racism is normal, not aberrant	Racism is systemic and rooted in history. Racism is not some random, isolated act of individuals behaving badly but rather the normal order of things in U.S. society. Racism is endemic, "the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). The ordinariness of racism makes it difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged or recognized. Colorblind or neutral conceptions of equality can only remedy the most blatant forms of discrimination (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001).
interest convergence or material determinism	Because racism advances the interests of white supremacy the majority of society has little incentive to eradicate it. People believe that which benefits them or absolves them of fault. Civil rights gains for communities coincide with white self-interest rather than social justice. Materialism means that certain groups are demonized to rationalize their exploitation by the dominant culture, and the configuration of these groups and their status in society are dynamic and responsive to the current desires of the dominant group. Racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status with tangible benefits for some and not others. Rights are almost always procedural rather than substantive and almost always cut back when they conflict with the interests of the powerful. (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001).
race as a social construction	Race is not a scientific reality, but the effects of racism are real. Society constructs categories based on genetic differences and uses these differences as a mechanism for creating hierarchy and an ideology of White supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 2021). The power of this social reality allows for significant disparities in the life chances of people based on the categorical understanding of race (Ladson-Billings, 2021).
intersectionality and anti-essentialism	Intersectionality means the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combinations play out in various settings, and the understanding that categories may be operating simultaneously (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Anti- essentialism is a rejection of a collective (and/or socially fabricated) Black identity. Essentialism is a belief that all people perceived to be in a single group think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways. Such thinking leads to considerable misunderstanding and stereo-typing (Ladson-Billings, 2021). **This tenet overlaps with race as a social construction and the importance of narrative to both acknowledge intersectionality and reject essentializing the perspectives and experiences of racial groups.*
voice or counter-narrative	The voice component of CRT provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step in understanding the complexities of racism. Social reality is constructed and corrected by the formulation and the exchange of stories about individual situations (Delgado, 1989). Storytelling facilitates the psychic preservation of marginalized groups. Members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power. Historically, storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression. The story of one's condition leads to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated, thus allowing one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Stories can affect the oppressor. The dominant group justifies its power with stories that construct reality in ways that maintain its privilege. Stories and counter-narratives by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to make racism visible (Delgado, 1989).

Ladson-Billings (2021) explained that,

> The work of the critical race scholar must be as rigorous as that of any other scholarship (or perhaps more so). We have an obligation to point out the endemic racism that is extant in our schools, colleges, and other public spaces. We must deconstruct laws, ordinances, and policies that work to re-inscribe racism and deny people their full rights. And we must be careful to guard this movement that is entering its "academic adolescence." We must be willing to say what critical race theory is not. (p.42)

Because CRT emerged from legal studies as a theory, not a research methodology, it is through "application of theory to practice that method becomes defined" and scholars can evaluate what CRT is and is not in education research (Laughter and Han, 2019, p. 5). To demonstrate the application of theory to practice, Table 1.3 traces the theoretical perspective by (1) situating the tenets in foundational CRT scholarship; (2) examining the articulation of the tenets in education research; and (3) considering how CRT has been applied in anti-racist English Education research. For the purposes of this overview, I use the term English Education broadly to include ELA, literature, and literacy education research.

Racial Trauma Theoretical Framework

Racial Trauma Theory is included in my theoretical framework to (1) illuminate the rationale for CRT as a pedagogical approach to the topic of race, racism, and the reading of racial narratives; and (2) provide an analytical framework for understanding implications for trauma-informed pedagogy. Racial Trauma Theory provides a framework to better understand the impact of reading and teaching about race and racism in the ELA classroom, specifically the reading of both overt and covert racial traumas and traumatic events represented in taught texts. My theoretical framework specifically draws on scholarship in the field of Racial Trauma broadly, in education specifically, as well as Literary Trauma Theory (Comas-Díaz, 2019; Dutro, 2016).

Racial Trauma Theory

The concept of trauma-informed practices in education settings is not a new discourse. I must make it clear that the terms *trauma-informed* and *trauma-reducing practices* in the context of my study explicitly refer to trauma perpetrated in school by the institution (e.g., via pedagogy and curriculum) as well as students' existing trauma. For many students of color, the school setting can be a source of distressing race-based incidents where "racially traumatic experiences at school can add new scars, exacerbate old wounds, and add an additional layer of complexity to a child's experience of the world" (Handford & Marrero, 2021, p. 4). Traditional trauma-informed models are concerned with awareness and responsiveness to student behaviors that are a product of prior traumas occurring outside of school; these models fail to hold schools accountable for exacerbating trauma and neglect how racism induces

Table 1.3 Tracing a Theoretical Perspective: CRT and the Move to Education

Tenets of CRT (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001)	**Foundational CRT Scholarship**	**CRT in Education**	**CRT in English Education**
racism is normal, not aberrant	The Supreme Court's definition of race discrimination was inadequate because it failed to acknowledge the influence of unconscious forms of racism. The cultural belief system is inherently racist, and because we do not recognize the racism embedded in our cultural beliefs, a large part of the actions that produce and reproduce racial discrimination are influenced by unconscious racial motivations (Lawrence, 1987).	Race-neutral perspectives in education purport to see deficiency as an individual phenomenon (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Curriculum: Critical race theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script (Ladson-Billings, 2021). School Funding: CRT argues that inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998).	It is challenging for teachers to help white students see and acknowledge racism in literature and in themselves, in the context of a curriculum that is also centered on whiteness (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). Literature is often complicit in constructing and reinforcing ideologies that disguise, minimize, and justify racism (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). CREE serves as a way to begin healing from the embedded racism in ELA curricula and instruction (Johnson, 2022).
interest convergence or material determinism	Black people will only make substantial progress against racial oppression when their interests align with or benefit those of white supremacy (Bell, 1987).	CRT offers a transformative solution to racial, gender, and class discrimination by linking theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (Solórzano, 2021).	Does a focus on white contexts center whiteness and continue to privilege white students? Our response is that we understand white supremacy in the United States to be a white problem (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019, p.20)

Table 1.3 Continued

race as a social construction	Throughout U.S. history, the subordination of Black people has been built on "scientific" theories that depend on racial stereotypes that make their condition appear appropriate. These stereotypes were developed to rationalize the oppression of Black people and serve a hegemonic function by reinforcing an illusion of whiteness as superior and normative (Crenshaw, 1988).	**Curriculum:** Minority accounts and perspectives are omitted from the curriculum unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation. "Content that does not reflect the dominant voice must be brought under control, *mastered*, and then reshaped before it can become a part of the master script" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 341) **Assessment:** Intelligence testing has been a movement to legitimize African American student deficiency under the guise of scientific rationalism (Ladson-Billings, 1998).	Literature does not simply reflect race and racism in American society; literature has played a role in constructing race and racism in American society (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). The whitewashed, state-sanctioned curriculum and texts that Black youth are required to study misrepresent many aspects of their lived experience (Johnson, 2022). Narratives of Black experience should include Black joy and Black love. If educators are not intentional about teaching Black texts from a critical standpoint, showcasing Blackness in a positive light white people will not unlearn their racist ideologies (Johnson, 2022).

Table 1.3 Continued

intersectionality and anti-essentialism	Traditional political discourse often ignores the issues of intragroup differences, particularly women of color. Intersectional experiences are often marginalized or ignored; multiple identities need to be taken into account when critiquing and restructuring the social world (Crenshaw, 1991; Harris, 1990).	CRT foregrounds race and racism and challenges separate discourses on race, gender, and class by demonstrating how racism intersects with other forms of subordination which impact students of color (Solórzano, 2021).	Educators often view conversations around anti-blackness, racism, and white supremacy as taboo topics that have no correlation to ELA because ELA classrooms are dominated by white, mono-lingual, middle-class perspectives (Johnson, 2022).
voice or counter-narrative	For those who bear the burden of racial insubordination (and their allies), the truth, no matter how dire, may be uplifting (Bell, 1992). Naming one's own reality with stories can affect the oppressor. Most oppression does not seem like oppression to the perpetrator (Lawrence, 1987).	Stories of African Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant cultural authority and power (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT focuses research, curriculum, and practice on the experiences of students of color and views these experiences as sources of strength (Solórzano, 2021). Counterstorytelling and narrative serve as pedagogical tool that allows educators to better understand the experiences of their students of color through deliberate and mindful listening techniques (Taylor, 2021).	Counterstories are not counterstories simply because they are told by people of color; they are counterstories because they challenge dominant narratives. This tenet is fundamentally important for thinking about our literature selections (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). CREE necessitates telling, listening, and hearing the stories of Black people (Johnson, 2002). Canonical texts, even about the Black experience are told from and taught from the white gaze (Johnson, 2022).

trauma (Grinage, 2019a; Thomas et al., 2019). Trauma-informed care promotes a system shift from asking, "What is wrong with this student?" to "What has happened to this student?" My study necessitates a paradigm shift to ask, "What is being done to this student?"

An anti-racist trauma-informed framework requires that the teacher goes beyond simply recognizing, supporting, and caring for students who have experienced trauma. Educators must also recognize and abolish curriculum and practices that perpetuate trauma (Johnson, 2022; Love, 2019). In the context of my study, trauma is something being actively done to the students, not something they passively have. Because a significant portion of racial identity development occurs at school or in response to school happenings, schools and curricula can either be sources of racial trauma or sources of post-traumatic growth (Handford & Marrero, 2021).

Racial Trauma Defined

Racial Trauma is a form of race-based stress that refers to People of Color and Indigenous individuals' (POCI) reactions to real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination (Comas-Díaz, 2019). These experiences include threats of harm and injury, humiliating and shaming events, and witnessing racial discrimination toward other POCI (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Helms et al., 2010). Occurrences of Racial Trauma can be categorized in two main ways: major racial trauma and everyday trauma (Carter, 2007; Metzger et al., 2018; Saleem et al., 2020). In academic settings everyday trauma can include openly racist remarks by classmates and teachers and a sense of rejection based on skin color (Cénat, 2022).

Academic Racial Trauma

Black youth experience differential treatment by race (e.g., racial discrimination, microaggressions) at higher rates than other racial/ethnic groups in the United States (Galán et al., 2022; Saleem et al., 2019). Although the frequency of racial discrimination exposure varies across contexts and perpetrators, schools and teachers are consistently reported as a primary context for racial discrimination (Del Toro et al., 2016; Greene et al., 2006; Hughes, 2016). Scholars suggest that the enduring, pervasive effects of racial discrimination can lead to trauma symptoms; this has led to the recent emergence of the concept and naming of Racial Trauma as a distinct theory of trauma (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019).

Scholars noted that vicarious trauma is an especially prevalent source of Racial Trauma for Black people, especially teens and adolescents (Galán et al., 2022). Vicarious trauma occurs from exposure to and the witnessing of acts of racism and racial trauma on other people of color, including media coverage and discussion about racially stressful and traumatic incidents (Bor et al., 2018; Galán et al., 2022). Vicarious racial trauma can occur when viewing the unarmed killing of Black and Brown children by police in media or literature (Bor et al., 2018; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015), witnessing the persistent use of racial epithets (Tynes et al., 2015), and hearing about efforts to hurt or murder those from one's racial

background (Douglass et al., 2016). Vicarious exposure to racial discrimination can cause trauma symptoms like those of direct racist acts toward an individual (Quintana & McKown, 2008).

Considering the content of commonly taught canonical texts in the ELA classroom (e.g. Lee, 1960; Wright, 1940) that contain racial slurs and violence towards Black people, and YAL such as *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2018) and *All American Boys* (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015), which depict police brutality against Black bodies, educators must be aware of and attend to the vicarious racial trauma caused by bearing witness to racial violence as reported by teens and adolescents (Galán et al., 2022).

Children and adolescents who experience different forms of racial discrimination face developmental concerns and major internalized and externalized problems that interfere with significant aspects of their lives later, including their mental and physical health (Cénat, 2022). When youth of color suffer racial trauma, many experience an attack on their sense of self and cultural identity (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019), and there is clear empirical evidence that supports the association between greater experiences with racial discrimination and poorer mental health, including elevated levels of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidality (Galan et al., 2021).

The effects of Racial Trauma, such as hypervigilance to threats, avoidance, suspiciousness, and somatic symptoms, are like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Although similar to PTSD, Racial Trauma is unique in that it involves ongoing individual and collective injuries due to exposure (direct and/or vicarious) and re-exposure to race-based stress. (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). The "post" outlined in PTSD cannot fully reflect racial trauma because

> BIPOC individuals continue to consistently live through societal oppression. Although these victimizations are micro, they are a constant reminder of other major discrimination they experienced. They are also associated with pervasive consequences on multiple aspects of the victim's life. The impacts of racist experiences surrounding all spheres of life go far beyond what the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) diagnostic criteria for PTSD can capture. (Cénat, 2022, pp. 667-678)

These vulnerabilities result in a baseline of stress that is exacerbated by ongoing experiences of overt and covert racism. If racial trauma goes invalidated and students have no perceived safe space to process the encounter, these ongoing distressing experiences can culminate into further traumatization (Saleem et al., 2019).

There are several reasons why research and institutions like education have overlooked racial trauma as a unique and enduring form of trauma. First, the current definitions of trauma, traumatic stress, and trauma treatment are embedded in European perspectives. Consequently, education and other institutions lack the cultural perspective needed to contextualize the causes and symptoms of racial trauma (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Further, many researchers in the field of psychology have argued that

because race is not biological, it should not be proposed as a categorization in scientific research (Saleem et al., 2019). Other scholars in the field of trauma theory, however, have taken note of CRT's proposition that the ramifications of perceived race are real:

> For all its fraudulence, however, race is a myth with teeth and claws, one that continues to tear bodies apart. Institutions, structures, beliefs, practices, and narratives have been created around it and have helped to perpetuate it. Until we recognize it for the collective delusion it is, it might as well be real. (Menakem, 2017, pp. 67–68)

Racial Trauma theorists, however, consider that racial categorizations are useful in studying the causes and outcomes of racial trauma (Saleem et al., 2019).

Experiences with racial trauma are often misperceived, dismissed, or unacknowledged (Helms et al., 2012). Particularly overlooked experiences of Racial Trauma include humiliating and shaming events and witnessing racial discrimination toward other people of color, both potential tensions when engaging Black students in racist narratives in a public classroom space (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Recent Racial Trauma scholars have developed theoretical frameworks grounded in CRT to better understand racial trauma and its effects. In the next section, I describe two theoretical frameworks at the intersection of trauma and CRT: (1) complex racial trauma (Cénat, 2022); and (2) a developmental and ecological model of youth racial trauma (Saleem et al., 2019). Although philosophical underpinnings of CRT are embedded in the frameworks, both are categorically situated in the field of trauma and trauma treatment.

The Intersection of CRT and Racial Trauma Theory

It is clear from the scholarship that CRT has played an integral role in the recent emergence of theoretical frameworks that are meant to explicitly attend to the unique nature of Racial Trauma. Scholars argued that intersectional oppression, such as racial, gender, sexual orientation, and xenophobic microaggressions contribute to the cumulative effects of racial trauma, particularly because of the invisibility of racial trauma's historical roots and the institutional and systemic pervasiveness of racism (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Galán et al., 2022). The pervasive, systemic, and historic nature of Racial Trauma has rendered it invisible to most of society because it has become embedded in the social construction of race:

> Unhealed trauma acts like a rock thrown into a pond; it causes ripples that move outward, affecting many other bodies over time. After months or years, unhealed trauma can appear to become part of someone's personality. Over even longer periods of time, as it is passed on and gets compounded through other bodies in a household, it can become a family norm… And if it gets transmitted and compounded through multiple families and generations, it can start to look like culture. But it isn't culture. It's a traumatic retention that has lost its context over time.

(Menakem, 2017, p. 39)

Without a depth of understanding of CRT and its features, Racial Trauma scholars and trauma-informed educators risk invalidating the uniqueness and scope of the Racial Trauma inherent in schools and curricula. Prominent Racial Trauma frameworks demonstrated the inextricable relationship between CRT and Racial Trauma theory.

Complex Racial Trauma

In 2022, Jude Mary Cénat published *Complex Racial Trauma: Evidence, Theory, Assessment, and Treatment*, a theoretical framework for complex racial trauma (CoRT). The CoRT framework provided evidence that racial trauma must be understood through the lens of *complex trauma*, defined as the exposure to multiple, recurring interpersonal traumatic events over an extended period of time (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020). Racial discrimination is similar to complex trauma in the sense that racism is (1) experienced by BIPOC individuals at a young age; (2) continues over the course of their lives; (3) surrounds all aspects of their lives (e.g., home, school, community); (4) is cumulative and pervasive; and 5) has destructive consequences throughout their lives (Cénat, 2022). The author argued that racial trauma requires its own category of complex trauma due to its origin and internalization.

Racial trauma is a product of a racist ideology of white supremacy (Kendi, 2017, 2019) that is based on skin color and cultural characteristics, which sets it apart from other complex trauma (Cénat, 2022). Further, whereas complex trauma impacts an individual, racist ideologies shape policy and permeate institutions, including social, economic, and educational systems (Cénat, 2022). It is a trauma that is inescapable, and the victim can come to see their own racial identity as the perpetrator of the trauma.

This internalized racism makes racial trauma even more complex. Internalized racism is a consequence of racial trauma that Bivens (2005) defined as the process by which racialized individuals internalize the thoughts of the dominant group over that of the racial group that they belong to, leading to the reproduction of racist attitudes and behaviors. Figure 1.2 presents the CoRT theoretical framework and its related complexities.

Cénat (2020, 2022) emphasized that all trauma-informed care provided to BIPOC individuals should integrate an anti-racism framework, which starts by providing a safe space, free from any kind of racial discrimination. No teacher, classroom, or curriculum can prevent and heal racial trauma without an explicitly anti-racist and trauma-informed framework like the one proposed and investigated in my study. Cénat (2022) noted, “It is important to be clear: Racist settings cannot provide anti-racist care” (p. 682).

Developmental and Ecological Model of Youth Racial Trauma

Saleem et al. (2019) and Galán et al. (2022) integrated hallmarks of CRT into their intersectional,

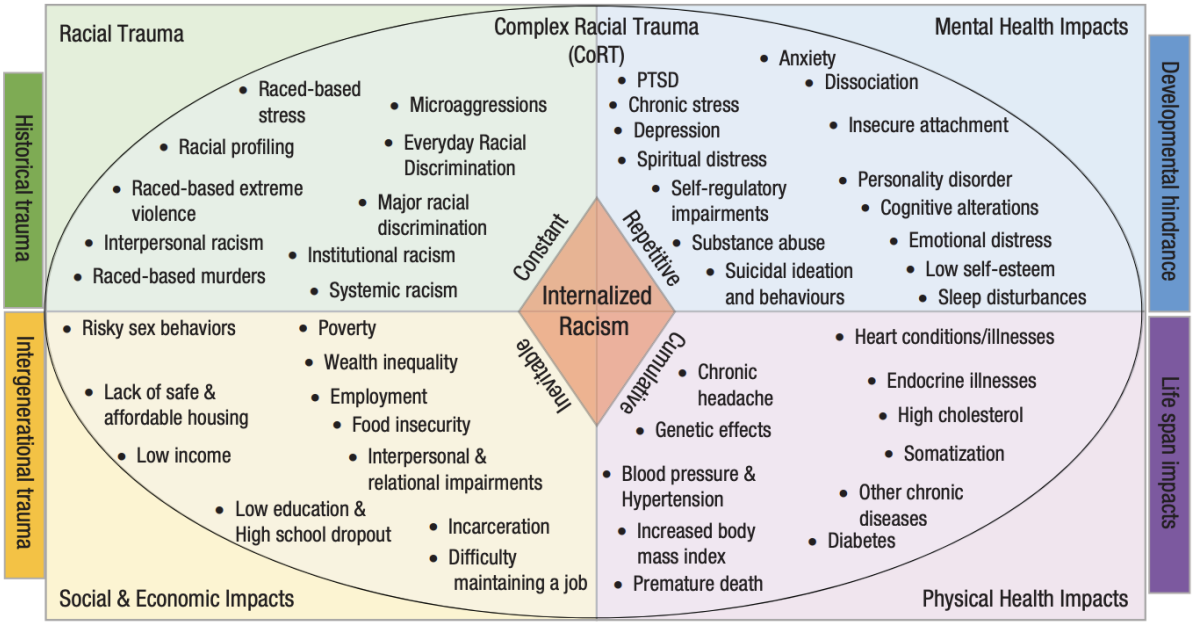


Figure 1.2 Theoretical Framework of Complex Racial Trauma (Cénat, 2022, p. 679).

contextual, ecological, and developmental frameworks for understanding racial trauma. Saleem et al. (2019) proposed the Developmental and Ecological Model of Youth Racial Trauma (DEMYth-RT) to address the gap in racial trauma research with children and adolescents (see Figure 1.3). Racial trauma often goes unacknowledged in classroom experiences when teachers lack the rapport to discuss racial topics due to their own bias and discomfort. Teachers may fail to acknowledge that racial events such as those represented in literature can in fact be traumatic, invalidating Black student's perceptions and experiences of racial trauma (Saleem et al., 2019).

High school-aged students (15-18) have an increased understanding of advanced forms of racism (e.g., institutional racism), exposure to racial discrimination, and the ability to make meaning of racial encounters (Brown & Bigler, 2005). Parents begin to adjust how they engage in mature conversations with their teenagers related to safety and racial discrimination (Coll & Pachter, 2002; McAdoo, 2002). Parents may provide personal and historical explanations of racism that contradict the color-blind, post-racial, or absent narratives about race teenagers encounter from teachers and curricula (Saleem et al., 2019). At this developmental time of increased autonomy, teenagers are more likely to witness or experience racial trauma in their community and have increased exposure to racial violence on social media. This coincides with increased literary representation of racism and racial violence in the ELA curriculum, creating a particularly tenuous time for the effects of racial trauma according to the developmental and ecological model proposed by Saleem et al. (2019).

Intersectional Racial Trauma

Galan et al. (2022) expanded on the framework for Racial Trauma proposed by Saleem et al. (2019) to include a gender-based intersectional lens for understanding experiences with racial socialization and implications for racial trauma. The authors put forward a theoretical model that recognized how racism interacts with other types of oppression like sexism. They drew on critical race theories of intersectionality to suggest that experiences of racism may vary by gender (Crenshaw, 1991). Black girls and boys are likely to have distinct experiences of racism because of different gendered racial stereotypes, and therefore different manifestations of racial trauma (Galan et al., 2022).

Racial socialization is a practice that involves instilling racial and cultural pride in youth, as well as preparing them for potential racial bias (Hughes et al., 2006). Schools, teachers, and curriculum can play a role in either fostering positive racial socialization or reproducing damaging racial stereotypes by understanding gendered racial socialization and discrimination. Although Black girls are subjected to disproportionate exclusionary school discipline (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), their unique experiences and needs have been rendered largely invisible in the field of racial trauma (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016).

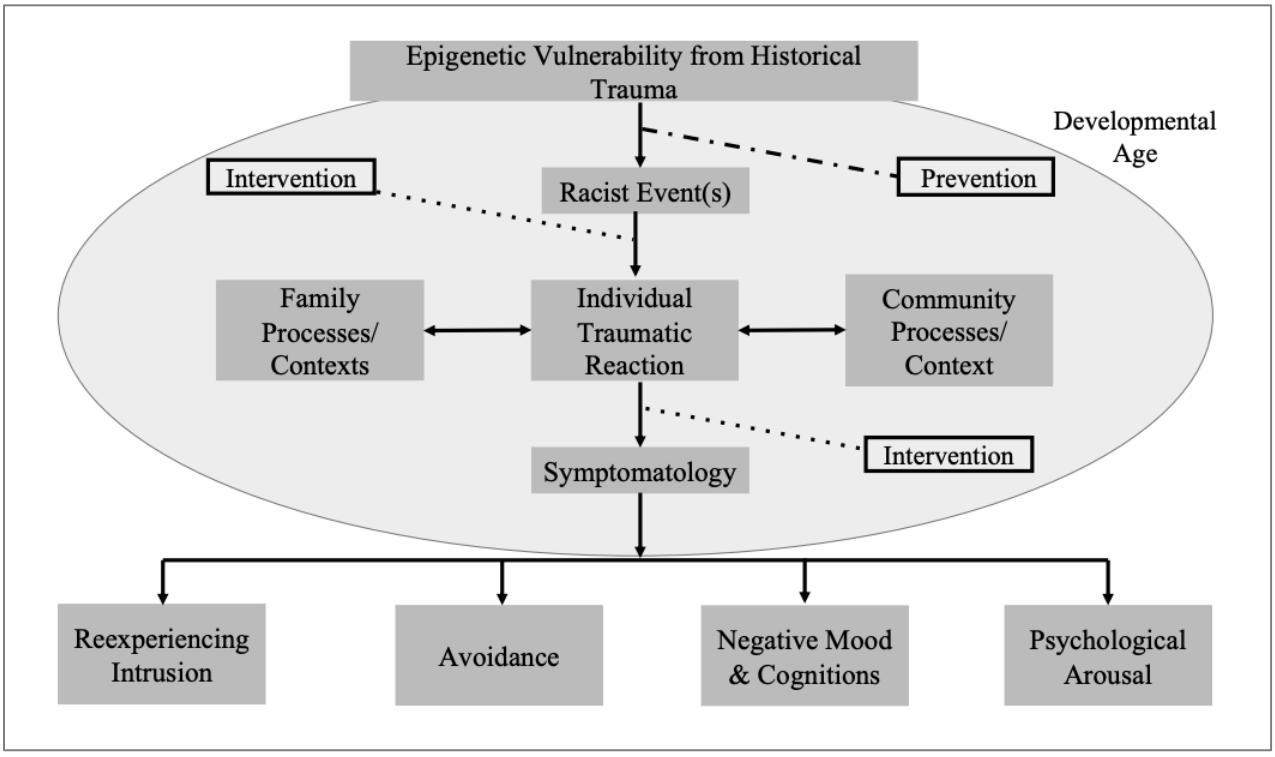


Figure 1.3 Developmental and Ecological Model of Youth Racial Trauma

There is evidence to suggest that discipline referrals for Black girls tend to enforce white, mainstream standards of femininity, such as being compliant, passive, and quiet (Blake et al., 2011). The school-to-prison pipeline also harms Black girls, but their behavior is seen as deviance of gender norms rather than racial bias, and their experiences of Racial Trauma are invalidated (Galan et al., 2022).

The recent theoretical models of Racial Trauma Theory have the potential to guide inquiry in the field of education research and refine both anti-racist and trauma-informed pedagogical frameworks. At the time of this writing there have been no empirical studies in education research that have taken up Racial Trauma Theory generally or the established theoretical frameworks specifically. The participant stories shared in this work stand to bridge the gap between analytical frameworks of Racial Trauma Theory and anti-racist trauma-informed pedagogy. Absent from CRT and Racial Trauma intersectional discourse are implications for the reading and teaching of literature.

Literary Trauma Theory

My theoretical framework considers that experiences of bearing witness to racial shaming and discriminating events as a racial trauma extend to the reading of race-based narratives, especially in the public space of a classroom community, and within the hierarchy of a teacher-student dynamic. Educators must recognize that the reading of literature with representations of racial trauma is exposure and re-exposure to race-based stress for students (Pederson, 2014).

Literary Trauma Theory as a specific model of trauma was first developed in the 1990s (Mambrol, 2018). The key ideas of Literary Trauma are grounded in the Freudian theory that we have the compulsion to repeat traumatic experiences, and narrative reproductions of the past are the only way we can truly process traumatic experiences (Penderson, 2014). Cathy Caruth was the most prominent of the first wave of Literary Trauma scholars that sought to examine the role of trauma in literature. Caruth (1995, 1996) argued that historical trauma is processed and experienced in the same way as individual trauma, creating a shared collective trauma over time. When a classroom community has the shared experience of reading literary trauma, the effects of the traumatic narrative must be attended to regardless of an individual's history with that trauma (Pederson, 2014).

The second wave of Literary Trauma Theory challenged some of Caruth's ideas, led by Richard McNally (2003). McNally argued that it is not that trauma victims cannot accurately speak of or represent their trauma, but that they choose not to. Literary Trauma Theory emphasizes the importance of trauma narratives in healing individual and collective trauma wounds, such as racial trauma (Freedman, 2020; Grinage, 2018; McNally, 2003). If the ELA classroom is to be a site of social justice and anti-racist pedagogy, then trauma narratives may have a place in the curriculum (Jolly, 2011; Pederson, 2014).

Teachers often approach trauma-related material with apprehension and a fear of the unknown. This resistance is often because teachers cannot predict how students will react to the content and their

own lack of efficacy in being able to navigate sensitive topics (Grinage, 2019a; Leverette, 2022; Menakem, 2017). However, research in the field of Literary Trauma recognized that trauma narratives can open up transformative opportunities for both students and teachers, and ultimately, these texts can become catalysts for learning, self-actualization, and social consciousness (Grinage, 2018, 2019a). Nonetheless, researchers in the field of Literary Trauma still question, "Should we, as teachers, aim to bring our students, especially Black and other silenced literary voices, to such moments of crisis for pedagogical purposes? And if so, what is the responsible way to teach narratives with trauma at their center?" (Spear, 2014, p. 56).

Trauma Theory research has formed a consensus that trauma healing often occurs in the telling and retelling of lived trauma. This is a way for the trauma victim to gain control and agency over their own story. Similarly, trauma narratives embedded in taught texts may potentially provide the same healing and transformation for students when coupled with a trauma-informed pedagogy that reduces harm and promotes healing (Jolly, 2011). Literary Trauma Theory provides a rationale for the inclusion of trauma narratives as a source of agency for trauma victims, witnesses to trauma, and the authors themselves who have chosen to share their stories (Spear, 2014).

Lingering Questions

In concert, CRT, Racial Trauma Theory, and Literary Trauma suggest two ends of a spectrum to consider: 1) If literature allows us to access and heal trauma, then racial trauma narratives have a place in the anti-racist trauma-informed ELA classroom; and 2) Exposure to representations of racial trauma, even in literature, is a form of vicarious trauma, and due to the cumulative nature of Racial Trauma, racial trauma narratives do not have a place in the anti-racist trauma-informed ELA classroom. The goal of my study and subsequent refinement of a theoretical framework is not to determine the "correct" theory of Literary Trauma in the context of Racial Trauma. Rather, I aim to understand the authentic, lived, and unique experiences of Black students in ELA spaces so that their knowledge can inform the immense story of anti-racist pedagogy.

My research question is intentionally worded to consider all classroom experiences with texts and pedagogy to investigate the occurrence and impact of racial narratives that are not situated in trauma. CRT asks researchers to not only consider the nature of the racism present in a context, but what can be done to eradicate it (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Authentic experiences that attend to the intersection of race, trauma, literature, teacher pedagogy, and classroom discourse are missing from the existing theoretical scholarship and the current study provides insight into not only the representation of Black experience and identity needed in the classroom, but the pedagogy required to ethically navigate instruction.

Toward a Critical Race Trauma-Reducing (CRTR) Framework

CRT as a framework for a critical and complex analysis of what contributes to ongoing racial inequality is not monolithic; basic tenets are often used to condense and encapsulate the scope and complexity of racial inequities. Black experiences, and especially an analysis of how they are represented in literature, are equally complex, so rather than selecting individual tenets to guide analysis with a singular focus, my theoretical framework for anti-racist and trauma-reducing pedagogy draws from several tenets, features, and associated scholarship. My research specifically attends to and critiques the intersection of representations of Black identity in literature and teacher pedagogy; it is at this place of tension teachers need to evaluate text selection and practice. An examination of CRT scholarship informs and defines the pedagogical frames relevant to this discourse: (1) race is a social construct; (2) racism is systemic and rooted in history; and (3) authentic voice and counter/storytelling (Delgado, 2017; Toliver, 2022). These frames are positioned as an analytical framework for reading, understanding, and responding to Black counter/narratives, both in literature and in the context of narrative inquiry.

CRTR Frame One: Race is a Social Construct

The first frame addresses the ways in which race is a social construct. Further, it examines how Black identity is fabricated in its construction, how this construction enforces a simplified collective Black identity, and how social participation in maintaining the resulting narrative informs Black experience (Best, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado, 2017).

The "social construction" thesis is one of the basic tenets of CRT and is built upon the fact that "race"—as a way to categorize or classify humans—is defined, measured, and experienced in demonstrably different ways both across and within societies over time (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Because the social construction of race and the resulting Black experience is dynamic over time and place, this frame provides an analytical throughline from early American literature to contemporary YA novels, as well as the storied lived experiences of Black students in ELA classrooms.

The literature selected for classroom instruction is integral to an anti-racist pedagogy and anti-racism in the broader social context (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019; Johnson, 2022; Toliver, 2022). Critical Race theorists consider "everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a deeper understanding of how Americans see race" (Delgado, 2017, p. 45). It is through reading Black experiences as they are represented in narrative that we can better understand the imagined Black identity, the changing nature of Black trauma, and the trauma of living in a body marked for oppression. Intentionally anti-racist literary analysis is in a reciprocal conversation with the goals of CRT; literature provides access to experiences that expose the ways racial construction operates in America, and CRT provides a lens to understand these tensions in literature.

In the following section I describe the features of the CRTR social construction frame in terms of (1) the fabricated Black identity; (2) collective Black identity; (3) societal and institutional participation in maintaining racist constructions, and the applications and implications for my research.

Fabricated Black Identity

Because race itself is not biological but rather a product of racialized societal constructions, then Black experiences in literature must be examined and understood for the implications on the formation of the Black identity. Literature can reveal the ways in which white authors imagine Black experiences and fabricate Black identity, as well as the ways in which Black authors represent the experience of having a fabricated identity mapped onto their bodies (Johnson, 2022; Morrison, 1992). The social construction pedagogical frame attends to the effects of racial construction on individual identity, and how a fabricated Black identity and narrative becomes nonetheless real in the fabric of society (Mills, 1997). Through literary analysis, teachers can evaluate how a socially constructed category produces real race effects for Black characters. It is in this moment where real Black bodies take on trauma towards imagined Black identities that these socially fabricated identities become very real in lived experiences (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Morrison, 1992).

This theoretical frame can also be used to examine the ways Black authors authentically represent experiences of racism and racial trauma caused by the real-world white imagination. This is in line with CRT's emphasis on authentic storytelling, narratives, and counter-narratives to understand Black experiences. According to Delgado (2017), "If race is not real or objective but constructed, racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction; the pernicious beliefs and categories are, after all, our own. Powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of correction in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity" (p. 51). This argument extends to the reading of research participant narratives as well as literary texts.

Collective Black Identity

The purpose of this feature is to attend to Black experiences that are specifically situated in trauma. The social construction of race and imagined Black identity has resulted in a simplified "collective Black identity" that is dynamic over time and through literature (Mills, 1997). Scholarship in CRT acknowledged that contemporary Black experience has historical roots in enslavement and the continued navigation of life *in the wake* (Sharpe, 2016). However, authors such as James Baldwin (2012) and Stephen Best (2018) pointed out that these narratives can collectively root Blackness in the horror of enslavement with no clear exit or room for divergent identity. It is imperative that teachers not only choose literature that provides a space to understand the collective Black identity but include a literary space that disarticulates the individual from the collective traumatic model of Black history (Best, 2018).

If racism and violence is presented as a singular representation of Black experience, this can

reinforce rather than reject the constructed collective Black identity, and further validate the narrative of perpetual Black trauma. A pedagogical framework is needed to acknowledge and navigate the implications of a traumatic model of collective black identity in literature while also facilitating a process for selecting texts that provides freedom from the constraints of a Black identity that can only be collectively understood as it is situated in white violence. Ultimately, it is racism—not race—that drives and explains racial differences in experience and social outcome, a discourse largely absent from literature instruction even when the classroom texts present the opportunity (Delgado, 2017).

Contemporary and YA literature read through this frame can illuminate the ways in which an oppressive collective Black identity still exists in society today, but that the individual has agency and autonomy in defining their own authentic identity and their unique experience of Black joy-- because of, not in spite of-- their Blackness (Love, 2020). Through a CRT and trauma-informed lens for literary analysis, representations of Blackness can be read as backdropped by but not fundamentally bound to trauma.

Social Participation in Maintaining Narratives

Reading stories has the power to either maintain or shift the fabricated narrative of Black experience (Delgado, 2017). Teachers can unknowingly participate in maintaining damaging racial narratives by either singularly representing Blackness as it is situated in trauma, or by failing to acknowledge when instances of Black trauma in fiction are products of society's participation in dehumanizing narratives (Toliver, 2022). Teachers may not understand or may choose not to acknowledge that the absence of Black authors in commonly taught classroom literature is not a coincidence, nor is it a coincidence that Black representation in classroom literature has been additive in nature (Combs, 2022; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Johnson, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1998). These racial structures are reproduced in classroom literature for the same reasons that other structures do (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Bonilla-Silva, 2018). If the ultimate educational goal of white supremacy is to defend its collective interests, then the role of the literature taught in classrooms helps defend this interest (Mills, 1997). The responsive pedagogical frame outlined here is intended to require that teachers either: evaluate and dismiss literature that serves to privilege a white supremacist narrative or attend to the racial structures represented in the literature explicitly through a CRT lens (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019; Johnson, 2022).

Racism is difficult to address when it goes unacknowledged, so by avoiding texts and topics that are racialized teachers are contributing to maintaining society's narrative about race. Contemporary racial inequality is reproduced through practices that are subtle, institutional, and appear to be nonracial, such as excluding representations of racism and racial trauma in classroom literature (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). I include this research to argue that because all individuals are in

a racialized society with racialized implications, no literature is free from the effects of race; by avoiding texts that directly address racial tensions, teachers are not rejecting the topic of race and racism in their classroom; rather they are rejecting, devaluing, and discrediting Black voices, Black narratives, and Black ideologies on race.

Teachers must acknowledge race and racism as a societal construct that is maintained by the privileging of white narratives. By continuing to center these dominant narratives teachers are complicit in maintaining the implication that either racism is not real, that racism is only relevant to Black bodies, and because classroom spaces are racialized as white, racism is not a topic to be addressed in English Education (Mills, 1997).

CRTR Frame Two: Racism is Systemic and Rooted in History

The second analytical and potentially pedagogical frame draws on CRT tenets that consider racism as systemic with roots in history. Bell's (1992) concept of the permanence of racism applies to education and racism's impact on Black students; if racism is an invariable feature of social and political domains in the U.S., then racial trauma must also be defined as an enduring aspect of schools and classrooms (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Grinage, 2019a). When analyzing literature in the English Education classroom, a pedagogical frame that explicitly confronts the systemic nature of racism can bring to light the often invisible and covert ways in which racism informs Black experiences. Teachers need to acknowledge that systemic racism and its effects are as traumatizing as overt racist acts (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019).

The attention CRT gives to modern-day systemic racism's roots in history is not to enforce the perpetual trauma of history on Black identities. Acknowledging this background can help students better understand the experiences represented in literature, as well as their own experiences and participation in these systems and become advocates for their own social justice. However, scholars acknowledged that the tension that arises when a teacher attempts to navigate the painful history of racial violence can become a barrier to anti-racist pedagogy. While it can be "damaging to say how damaging racism has been…it is equally harmful not to talk about this history of sorrow. Our racial wounds persist even if we choose to ignore them. The antiracist pedagogue must make the choice to address racial injury" (Grinage, 2019b, p. 137). As a tool for literary analysis this framing allows students to acknowledge that although the means and modes of Black subjection may have changed, the fact and structure of the subjection remain (Sharpe, 2016). This frame is a method for encountering a past that is not a past in the literary Black experience.

CRTR Frame Three: Voice and Counter/storytelling

One premise of authentic storytelling is that members of the U.S.'s dominant racial group cannot easily grasp what it is like to be non-white. CRT states that people of different races have radically

different experiences as they go through life, and engaging in experiential stories can help us understand what life is like for others (Delgado, 2017). It is not history alone that keeps perpetuating Black trauma; continually presenting content from a lens of racial conflict with no counter narrative sends the message that this is the only experience Black students face (Sharpe, 2016). Society constructs the social world through a series of tacit agreements mediated by literature, images, media, and other scripts, and the classroom may be the only space where students are offered the critical tools and critical stories to reject oppressive social constructs (Boler, 2014; Delgado, 2017).

Black students in ELA classrooms, however, cannot be made to bear the burden and responsibility of providing counternarratives through their lived experiences (Boylorn, 2011). One coping trauma response Black students employ in predominantly white spaces is to make themselves racially innocuous to avoid further racial trauma (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Toliver, 2022). This may include suffering in silence or accepting racist narratives when discussing literary racial trauma in the classroom space (Liu, 2019; Thomas, 2013). Teachers can play a role in counteracting this trauma response by explicitly aligning their pedagogy with anti-racist and trauma-informed practices and highlighting authentic Black counterstories in the curriculum. While literature can provide an anchor for reading race as a social construct and confronting the impact of a violent racist past on Black experiences, Black joy and Black love must exist in the space simultaneously (Johnson, 2022; Toliver, 2022). This approach mitigates the risk for teachers to perpetuate the damaging narrative that Black bodies are inherently bound to trauma or that they are to blame for ongoing trauma (Bonilla-Silva, 2017).

More than the text itself, a teacher's pedagogical choices can be the most damaging source of microaggressions and vicarious traumatization (Spears, 2014). Mitigating and healing racial trauma is challenging because racial wounds occur within a sociopolitical context and on a continuing basis, and unfortunately, classroom spaces can be a stage where racial wounds are reopened or ignored (Grinage, 2018; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). Teachers can contribute to the work of dismantling damaging narratives by (1) rejecting racist texts in the classroom; (2) using an anti-racist, trauma-informed pedagogical framework to expose racist images and ideologies in these texts; (3) including authentic counternarratives in their text selections with an anti-racist agenda; and (4) including titles that consider shifts towards agency in identity and Black joy. The tenets of Critical Race Theory included in this analytical framework are a potential theoretical basis for transforming instructional practice and anti-racist education research methods.

Anti-Racist Trauma Reducing Methodological Commitments

Narrative inquiry is an essential but missing feature of the field. An essential contribution to the existing literature my study provides is the storied experiences of Black students told in their own voices. The knowledge participants share informs not only my work but can be a lens through which to evaluate

past theoretical and empirical studies. The most significant contribution the authentic voices of Black students make to anti-racist and trauma-informed literacy, however, is not a critique of what has been done or what currently is; it is their new visions for the future.

With this in mind, my study aimed to understand how Black secondary students perceive storied representations of Black experiences through assigned readings within their ELA classrooms. I examined how teachers shape Black students' experiences when engaging in Black authored texts and narratives produced about race and racism, to explore students' perceptions of engaging in such narratives. I utilized Critical Race Theory and Racial Trauma Theory to situate my work and attend to issues in classroom engagement with race in literature, reflecting my commitment to social justice and anti-racist pedagogy. Ultimately, my goal within this study is to contribute to ongoing theoretical conversations about promoting social justice through an anti-racist, trauma-informed approach to literature that centers on the lived experiences of Black students. Findings from the existing scholarship are described in Chapter 2.

My study methods are situated in Endarkened Storywork with explicit alignments to anti-racist research methods and trauma reducing practices in narrative inquiry. The description of my methodological commitments is supported by rationale situated in theory, scholarship, and the aim of the study. To make explicit the values and perspectives that shaped the methodological commitments of the study, I describe the reflexive projects I navigated to comprehend my researcher positionality and refine my proposed methodology in Chapter 3 (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Holmes, 2020; Lapum, 2021). Through a transparent and authentic representation of the imaginative labor I engaged in to make my researcher identity legible, I both *write* and *write myself* to disclose, interrogate, and critique my motives and methods and engage deeply with the topic and community I aim to study (Freeman, 1999; McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021).

Positionality Statement

Toliver (2022) argued that the researcher must bring the reader into the study by making clear the social and political context in which the study took place. Within Endarkened Storywork, these questions are answered in a way that fosters a synergy between the research, the researcher, and the reader (Toliver, 2022). Because my racialized identity is relevant to the rationale for many aspects of my methodology, it is necessary that I address my researcher identity upfront: what it is, what it is not, and what came to matter in the context of this study. When describing my internalized identity in the context of racial formation I self-identify using the term *Hispanic*. I want to pause and acknowledge that using the term *Hispanic* as an organizing concept to describe my identity is a choice; it is not a term that is clearly defined or universally accepted within and across the groups it is meant to describe (Rodriguez, 2020; Wagner, 2015). I identify as Hispanic because in my lived experience and specific community, the word

describes more than an individual identity. I am Hispanic because *nosotras somos hispanas*: a unique culture, community, place, and heritage that expresses collective pride and belonging.

I dedicate a section in Chapter 3 to an explicit exploration of identity and positionality. I aim to map myself in the research through a narrative reconstruction of my personal racialized identity, teacher identity, and researcher positionality. Throughout the description of my methodological commitments, I aim to make visible and explicit the ways in which the narrative reconstruction of my researcher identity is meaningful in the context of the study. I describe a reflexive framework I constructed for the purposes of this research that is grounded in the findings of my self-study, accidental autoethnography, and principles of anti-racist and trauma-informed research.

Summary of Chapter 1

An evaluation of the ways in which Black experiences are represented in traditionally taught literature, as well as trends in YAL titles emerging in the classroom, revealed the need for a theoretical and pedagogical framework to guide teacher critical content analysis and anti-racist literacy. A pedagogical framework grounded in anti-racist teaching can be a literary criticism throughline and attend to the potential tensions of engaging both Black and non-Black students in discussing race/racial trauma. Tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) can provide a framework for including the Black experience in taught literature and understanding overt and covert racialized academic trauma. Racial Trauma Theory contributes to this theoretical framework by illuminating the rationale for CRT as a pedagogical approach to the topics of race, racism, and the reading of racial narratives.

It is important that educators have literary works that represent the unique and complex experiences of Black authors and characters through authentic storytelling. When educators lack the autonomy to select their own classroom texts due to a mandated and/or scripted curriculum, an anti-racist and trauma-informed pedagogical framework is critical. My study investigates the relationship between personal perceptions of literary representations of experience, relationships to race, and implications for pedagogy.

Trauma narratives that are central to or embedded in taught texts can provide healing and transformation for students when coupled with a trauma-informed pedagogy that reduces harm and promotes healing. Specifically, when we consider Black authored narratives of traumatic Black lived experiences, educators can honor these testimonies by including them in their classroom discourse. Including Black authored texts in the curriculum, even when they require bearing witness to Black trauma, is an essential component to anti-racist pedagogy, but it is equally essential that the reading is coupled with trauma-informed practices. Understanding both CRT and Racial Trauma Theory can provide a rationale for including these narratives and guide educators in providing space for the victims of trauma to have control of their relationship to the story.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following is a review of the existing literature relative to the study. The purpose of the literature review was to evaluate the framing and efficacy of theories and methodologies in existing anti-racist education research. It is clear from the research reviewed that Critical Race Theory provided a framework for diverse research goals and methods while Racial Trauma Theory has yet to find a place in English Education research despite research findings that provide a rationale for its inclusion. While examples of potential theoretical frameworks for anti-racist and trauma-informed education research are well established in the literature, missing from the scholarship were empirical studies to evaluate and refine theory into practice. Although I point out gaps in the research in my review of the literature, filling a gap is not a rationale for research in and of itself; supporting the rationale for my study are the calls for further interdisciplinary research from scholars in the field (Carello & Butler, 2014; Jolly, 2011; Quiros et al., 2020).

The research showed that teachers fall short of anti-racist pedagogy in English Education, even when that is their intention, due to a fear of tense topics and a counterintuitive commitment to white authored canonical texts. Teachers are mistaking a passive approach to race (such as including Black authored texts or including topics of race in their curriculum) for anti-racist pedagogy that explicitly calls out overt and covert racial structures in and out of the literature. What is still missing from the scholarship, and what my work intends to address, is a theoretical lens that considers how this is a form of racial trauma, and a responsive pedagogical framework for explicitly guiding teachers in an anti-racist trauma-informed literacy. Figure 2.1 illustrates the existing scholarship at the intersection of race, trauma, and literacy and exposes the gaps in the research, significantly the lack of student voice.

The Study Situated in Scholarship

Boote and Beile (2005) argued that a thorough review of literature is crucial in education research, more so than other fields, "with its messy, complex problems" (p. 3). The following is a review of the existing literature relative to my study so that my work can build on and learn from prior research and scholarship. My literature review process and findings set the broad context of the study and provide justifications for my inquiry and study design.

There has been little empirical investigation conducted to engage CRT in a trauma-informed practice or as an instructional approach to literary analysis. Missing in the scholarship is a literary pedagogy that attends to the intersection of race and trauma or the potential implications of a Critical Race Theory and Trauma Theory conceptual framework on practice. Further, language is both interpretive and fluid, as are experiences and perceptions. Researchers cannot assume that individuals will experience or interpret key terms, such as trauma, race, and racism, can be generalized.

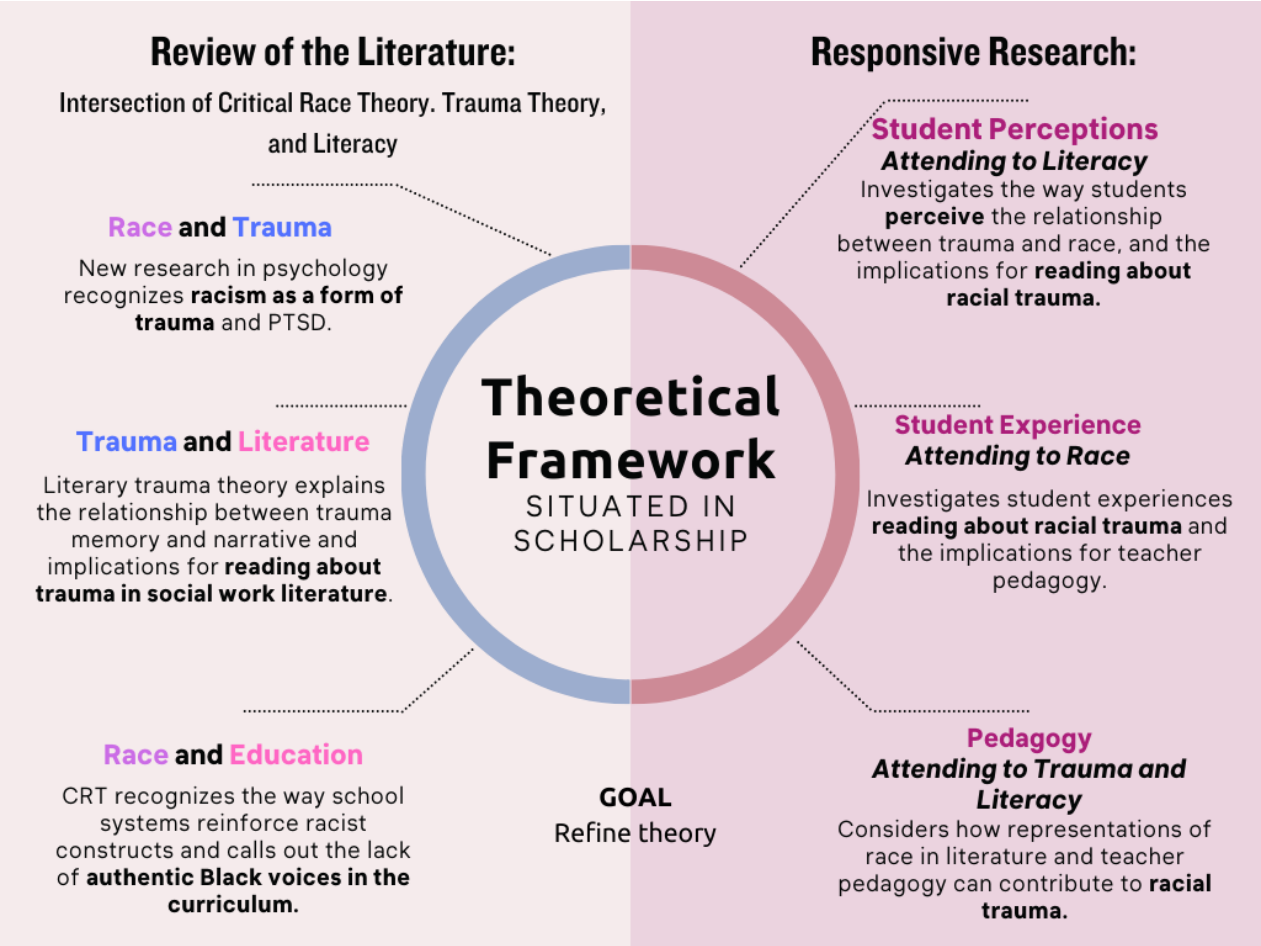


Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework Situated in Scholarship

Before a responsive pedagogical framework can be proposed, there must be an investigation into the ways these dynamics are understood and interpreted by individuals in context. For this reason, my review of the literature for this study aimed to investigate research conducted at the intersections of trauma, race, and the reading of literature in the secondary ELA classroom, particularly research that supported the inclusion of student voices.

Search Method

I oriented my search for relevant literature by conceptualizing the study by its interdependent features. I considered which features would characterize existing empirical studies as significant to my research by defining my study ontology, methodology, context, and epistemology:

1. **Ontology: Race-oriented research, explicitly or implicitly grounded in Critical Race Theory.** I use CRT in my study as a theoretical framework to situate the problem and as part of the methodological and analytical conceptual framework. I considered literature that positioned CRT in various ways within the research.
2. **Methodology: The reading or teaching of race and racism through literature.** I was specifically interested in the ways in which classroom literature represented race and racism, how these texts were positioned in the curriculum, and teachers' pedagogical choices when engaging in classroom discourse about race and racism anchored in taught texts.
3. **Context: The secondary ELA classroom.** I aimed to locate studies that either occurred in the ELA classroom or included reflections on experiences in the ELA classroom, specifically at the secondary level.
4. **Epistemology: The lived experiences of Black students, voiced by Black students.** I was particularly interested in firsthand narratives of student experiences that had not been filtered through researcher interpretation or inference, but I broadened this feature to consider various methods of student-focused study.

My purpose for including Racial Trauma in my theoretical framework is to consider the implications in my analysis, not to generalize a phenomenon. Additionally, the naming of Racial Trauma as a unique theory of trauma is recent and primarily situated in the field of clinical psychology and social work (as opposed to education).

For this reason, I considered attention to racial trauma in a study a criterion for inclusion, but not exclusion. The relevant theoretical literature at the specific intersection of Critical Race Theory and Racial Trauma Theory is included in my theoretical framework; no empirical studies explicitly situated in both Critical Race Theory and Racial Trauma Theory were found. Although an explicit conceptualization of racial trauma was not an essential criterion for literature in this review, I included trauma in search term configurations as a related phenomenon or variable (Boote & Beile, 2005; Hart, 1998).

Search Method: Study Features and Search Terms

I generated specific and alternative search terms using the ontology, methodology, context, and epistemology noted above, including search terms for related phenomena and variables. Based on these study features I created initial criteria for exclusion. A catalog of the search terms used for each feature as well as the associated exclusion criteria can be found in Appendix A.

I began my search using the most specific search terms for the ontology, methodology, and context study features. Then I broadened my search by systematically using alternative search terms for each feature, one feature at a time. Ladson-Billings (1998) warned against the uninformed and overused commodification of CRT in education research without an explicit alignment with the underlying ideologies. Based on this tension, I prioritized search term configurations that explicitly named Critical Race Theory. Searches for each combination of terms were carried out in ERIC, Education Source, and APA PsycInfo (through the University of Tennessee Libraries databases). Successful search term combinations were then cross-checked as phrases in Google Scholar.

The combination of "Critical Race Theory" with alternative search terms for context and setting produced minimal results. To mitigate the risk of narrow concepts and superficial details obscuring interacting variables (Randolph, 2009) I combined either methodology or context search terms with "Critical Race Theory." I was able to locate potentially relevant literature using this modification. Next, I broadened the search through systematic combinations of features and the associated search terms. Results for empirical studies in the field were limited so I broadened my criteria to include relevant theoretical research.

Methodology and Related Scholarship

Endarkened Storywork as a methodology and onto-epistemological commitment inform my study design and analytical framework (Toliver, 2022). Stephanie Toliver described and modeled the qualitative research process in *Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research: Endarkened Storywork* (2022). For Toliver, Endarkened Storywork as a specific form of narrative inquiry provided a new epistemological stance that honors the storied traditions of Black people. For this reason, I conducted a search for empirical studies situated in Toliver's Endarkened Storywork that may not have been located using the study feature search method. I was unable to locate relevant studies that cited Endarkened Storywork as a methodology, so I considered Toliver's other scholarly work for inclusion in the literature review.

From my prior reading and research into the intersecting topics of my proposed study, I considered that there were relevant scholars who that were falling outside of the scope of my search terms. I conducted a search for published literature associated with the following scholars: April Baker-Bell, Lamar Johnson, Justin Grinage, Michael Dumas, and Stephanie Toliver. These authors have made

significant theoretical and/or methodological contributions to the disciplines relevant to my proposed study.

In the field of English Education, Baker-Bell (2020) put forward a framework for Antiracist Black Language Pedagogy grounded in methodologies similar to my proposed study. Johnson (2022) conceptualized Critical Race English Education (CREE) as a pedagogical framework situated in radical love for Blackness. Grinage (2019a) is one of the few English Education researchers that explicitly attends to the intersection of race, literature, and trauma to investigate *racial melancholia* in the ELA classroom. Dumas and his co-author Kihana Ross (Dumas & Ross, 2016) put forward a theorization of a Black Critical Theory, or BlackCrit, to explain anti-blackness in spaces of education, and Dumas contributed to the *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* (2021).

Endarkened Storywork, the method of narrative inquiry put forward by Toliver (2022) explicitly informs my proposed study design and methodological commitments. For my final search method, I used the “Related Articles" search tool in the databases in relation to the relevant literature I had already identified. The related articles search produced no new results (all relevant results had already been identified through my initial search method). At this point, I was confident that I had adequately located the available relevant scholarship for my literature review. Appendix B details the search process and results.

The combined search methods generated 86 potential texts for inclusion. After reading and evaluating the texts for inclusion/exclusion criteria, I arrived at the 36 texts included in this review of the literature. I used deductive coding to organize my synthesis of the research. I coded each article for the following attributes:

- Empirical or Theoretical
- CRT (explicit)
- Race oriented (CRT not explicitly named)
- Trauma focus
- Reading of literature
- Secondary ELA setting
- Student voice

A table listing the included articles with deductive coding can be found in Appendix C.

Review of the Literature

My review of the literature starts with a zoomed-out overview of the scholarship guided by the attribute codes listed above. Next, I provide an in-depth synthesis of the included studies, organized around the interacting contexts of theory, methodology, findings, and implications. Finally, I situate my proposed study in the literature to discuss its significance in the field.

Overview of the Scholarship

Of the identified empirical studies (n=21) relevant to my research, six explicitly included Critical Race Theory in the theoretical framework. Of the six studies situated in CRT, only two incorporated the topic of trauma, but neither were situated in the context of an English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. The remaining empirical articles focused on race through theoretical lenses such as culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, critical pedagogy, and anti-racist pedagogy. The studies that centered student voice as a methodology were often outside of the school setting or included post-secondary participants; these studies focused on student experiences in educational settings in general rather than the ELA classroom specifically.

An additional fifteen theoretical studies were included in the identified literature. Of these studies, eight explicitly named CRT as a theoretical framework and two included theories of trauma in the framework alongside CRT. Although several theoretical articles centered on trauma, no study in this literature review explicitly named or cited Racial Trauma Theory. Although there is a growing consensus in racial trauma studies that research demonstrates a connection between racial discrimination and subsequent trauma response, Racial Trauma Theory as a specific theoretical framework has yet to be taken up in English Education research (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Hardy, 2013; Henderson et al., 2019; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Saleem et al., 2019).

Theoretical Foundations

The following section offers a summary of the studies that engaged CRT as an explicit theoretical framework, rather than a synthesis, because each offered a unique positioning and operationalization of CRT in the research. I felt that comprehensive study details were needed to explicate and evaluate the relationships between theory and method in the literature. Although each study framed CRT in a different way, there were general categories that emerged within the empirical studies and within the theoretical works respectively. In the next sections I describe the use of CRT in empirical studies as (1) an analytical framework and (2) as a methodology, with a significant focus on counternarratives as both method and rationale for the study. The theoretical works broadly positioned CRT (1) as curriculum; (2) as praxis; (3) and as part of a race-oriented theory of trauma.

Empirical: CRT as an Explicit Theoretical Framework

Recently, Ledesma et al. (2023) published a review of critical race studies in qualitative research, from foundational CRT scholars to present, to advance the understanding and application of CRT as a methodological and theoretical tool in education research. In the review, the authors displayed the broad scope and utility of CRT research conducted in the field of education. Uses included CRT to analyze systemic racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998), to capture lived experience in specific populations (Solórzano, 1998), CRT as a methodology for data collection, coding, and analysis (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), and as

an epistemological stance (Bernal, 2002). Similarly, my review of the literature aimed to understand how scholars in the field of anti-racist English Education framed and utilized CRT within their studies. In the next section, I provide a summary of the research and reflect on the implications for my study.

CRT as an Analytical Framework. One way the authors used CRT in their empirical research was by translating the tenets of CRT into an analytical framework (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Masko, 2005). Masko (2005) utilized Solórzano's (2000) six tenets of CRT to code interview data in a narrative inquiry case study of one 12-year-old girl's understanding of what it means to be Black. The article did not include examples of the CRT-coded transcripts, and the findings solely focused on the ordinariness of racism, the most prevalent tenet code in the participant's dialogue. Although the study centered on a student's experience told in her own voice, the aim was to understand the participant's understanding of her racial identity in general, not specifically in the context of school or the classroom. The participant described school-based incidents in her narrative of the ordinariness of racism in her life, but only in peer-to-peer social interactions that occurred outside of the classroom, curriculum, or pedagogy (Masko, 2005).

Masko (2005) noted an implication of this study that is significant to my own research. While all children begin to question their identity and appearance in adolescents, white children do not typically question their racial identity, whereas Black children do. Racial identity formation is especially salient during adolescents when perceptions of being a member of a disfavored group can exasperate puberty-linked insecurities (Masko, 2005). This aligns with Racial Trauma research that claims the classroom and literature can have a significant influence on either positive or negative racial identity formation (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Galán et al., 2022). While teachers may only consider race and racism when it is explicitly addressed through literature and classroom discourse, perceptions of racial identity influenced all aspects of the participant's school experience. When asked how often she thinks about her race, the participant replied, ''I think about it all the time'' (Masko, 2005, p. 341).

Bedford & Shaffer (2023) closely aligned with the theoretical aspect of my study by addressing a gap in the prior research related to using tenets of CRT to analyze literature in ELA classrooms. They argued that when analyzing literature, CRT offered insight into characters that may not be visible through other theoretical lenses (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023). Their pedagogical framework focused on four tenets: the permanence of racism, experiential knowledge and counter/storytelling, interest convergence, and a critique of liberalism. The goal of the study was to evaluate the efficacy of a proposed CRT framework for reading about race through secondary young adult (YA) classroom literature. Our studies diverged, however, in terms of the setting, participants, and method of evaluation. Bedford and Shaffer (2023) integrated tenets of CRT with white preservice teachers (PST) in a YA and Children's Literature course as they worked toward integrating talk about race and racism into discussions about literature. My study,

however, includes the lived experiences of secondary ELA students to inform and refine a CRT pedagogical framework for reading about race in literature. The researchers, who were also the instructors of the course, taught the tenets of the framework to the PSTs and modeled lesson planning steps for race-based texts using *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 2016). The PSTs then read and analyzed *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2018) using the pedagogical tool. The reported findings came from the PSTs' reading responses and reflections about what they learned about themselves and racism using the approach (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023).

Findings revealed that most PSTs still expressed uncritical colorblind beliefs and their reflections demonstrated that they "clearly did not understand the concepts" even though the tenets and CRT framework had been explicitly taught and modeled (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023, p. 18). The authors suggested future research into CRT as a pedagogical tool for literature analysis, noting that, "there is still much for [PST] (and us) to learn about implementing CRT in the classroom" (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023, p. 18). An evaluation of the authors' discussion of the findings revealed the ways in which my study addresses gaps in the knowledge. Significantly, this study did not include the voices of secondary students or any voices of color. This inherently shifted the findings away from the initial purpose of the study which was to provide teachers with a "tangible way to work toward safer, anti-racist spaces, which allow…secondary students to look at their own world more critically" (p. 7).

Instead, the implications the authors arrived at were that literature acted as a safe space for white PSTs to discuss challenging topics, and that this pedagogical approach would "empower students of color" (p.18). There is no reflection on how this framework would make Black students comfortable when talking about race and no empirical evidence to support the claim that it would empower students of color. Nonetheless, employing key tenets established by Critical Race theorists in literature instruction may still be a useful tool for confronting systems of injustice for both teachers and students. For that reason, the lived experiences of Black students in secondary ELA classes are essential to refining CRT as a framework in my own work. The detailed model Bedford and Shaffer (2023) provided for CRT as an analytical framework for literature is a valuable tool for informing future goals of my narrative inquiry.

CRT as Methodology. While Masko (2005) and Bedford and Shaffer (2023) utilized CRT tenets as an analytical tool within their studies, the remaining empirical studies with explicit foundations in CRT (n=4) positioned CRT as a methodological framework (Brooks et al., 2022; Martin, 2014; Toliver, 2020; Williams et al., 2016). Counterstorytelling, a fundamental tenet of CRT, has been articulated many times before as a research method (Bell, 1980; Cook & Dixson, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Espino, 2012; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Lynn et al., 2002; Matias, 2013; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Yosso,

2001, 2002; Tate, 1997; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). Across the research included in this literature review, the concepts of counterstories and storytelling were the primary if not exclusive way CRT was operationalized.

Toliver (2020) explored how Black girls use speculative fiction as a counterstorytelling method. Toliver suggested that speculative fiction as a specific method of storytelling created space for people of color to envision possibilities for a world beyond the one in which we currently live. This is essential in a field that is saturated with counterstories that critique existing constructions of race and oppression but provide minimal opportunities for Black students to voice and define a responsive call to action. As I demonstrate in the methodology section of my dissertation, I invited participants to share stories that included their own visions of anti-racist pedagogy.

Although Williams et al. (2016) did not utilize narrative inquiry to explicitly ask Black students what an anti-racist ELA classroom would look like, the authors analyzed classroom dialogue or "race talk" as a type of narrative/counternarrative exchange in action. This CRT framework centered on the complexities of racial power and power sharing in the classroom dialogue of 9th-grade ELA classes in which white teachers taught predominantly Black and Latinx students a lesson centered around reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960). The authors analyzed (1) shifts in teacher-provided opportunities for student engagement during race talk; (2) student attempts to shift the content or direction of race talk; and (3) teacher attempts to shift the content or direction of race talk (Williams et al., 2016). One of the significant findings of the study was that teachers made statements that ignored or misrepresented the narratives offered by students of color in response to racial dynamics in the novel.

While the authors provided examples of the ways in which teachers accepted, rejected, or silenced students' counternarratives during race talk, they noted a significant limitation to the study: they were unable to speak with student participants directly to explore their interpretations of the classroom interactions (Williams et al., 2016). The authors suggested that future research should include qualitative methods to gain an understanding of participant meaning-making when the narrative about race authorized by the teacher is counter to their own interpretation:

> Insight into participants' subjective experiences during race talk, including systematic investigation of their internal psychological states, will help us to better explicate the interrelations of individual factors (racial identity) and setting level factors (facilitation of race talk). (Williams et al., 2016, p. 29).

My study aims to fill this gap in the research by investigating students' experiences in the classroom and their interpretations of provocative interactions.

CRT as a Rationale for Study Design. Martin (2014) and Brooks et al. (2022) both cited CRT, and specifically counternarratives, as rationales in their study design. Martin (2014) conceptualized CRT

as pedagogy when designing a classroom unit of study centered on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1884), which would become the context for narrative inquiry into student experience. This study is another example where the researcher was also the classroom teacher and data were generated through class assignments. The author sought to investigate how the analysis of race and racism through counternarratives of out-of-school literacies (hip-hop lyrics) contributed to a deeper and more critical reading of *Huckleberry Finn*. Black students shared that they were hesitant to read the book or discuss the use of racist language in a racially diverse class setting (Martin, 2014). The author agreed with the students' sentiments that "the majority of texts used in this district depicting aspects of the African American experience are stories only of atrocity" (Martin, 2014, p. 261). The author concluded that without positive textual experiences to balance this one, the text was not a responsible choice for the ELA classroom, even when framed by pedagogy justified through a CRT framework (Martin, 2014).

Similarly, Brooks et al. (2022) cited CRT and counterstories as a rationale for the chosen YA novel, *Hush* (Woodson, 2006), in an afterschool book club with three Black middle school girls. The authors situated their study in books as representations of textual rather than lived counterstories to explore what participants' responses to the novel's depiction of racism revealed about how they interpreted and experienced contemporary racism in their own lives. The authors made explicit connections to CRT in the discussion of their findings. The participants' experiential knowledge played a key role in their meaning-making about race in the novel and prompted them to voice their own realities through storied experiences of racism in their own lives (Brooks et al., 2022). The implications for my current study were limited by the missing interacting variables of a teacher, classroom, or structured curriculum.

In Ledesma et al. 's (2023) review of Critical Race studies in qualitative research, the editors noted that for some researchers CRT is not an easy framework and may be too rigid for the context under study. They argued, however, that when Critical Race Theory is masterfully employed, the scholarship has the potential to change the way people understand issues of race and racism and help to empower racially marginalized communities (Ledesma et al., 2023). The studies that utilized CRT in a way that was most informative and relative to my study were those that were grounded in CRT as both a theoretical and analytical framework. The studies that were less intentional in their positioning of CRT or the philosophical underpinnings were still useful in demonstrating how my study addresses these gaps and limitations.

Theoretical: CRT as an Explicit Theoretical Framework

Due to the limited empirical research in the field relevant to my own study design, I included theoretical research grounded in CRT that informed some feature or construct of my work. In the next sections, I describe the theoretical works that (1) put forward a guide for curriculum and instruction

guided by CRT tenets; (2) suggested a CRT framework to conceptualize praxis and pedagogy; or (3) argued for trauma research at the intersection of race guided by a critical race theoretical framework. I then provide a summary of the race-oriented theoretical perspectives cited across the remaining studies that were not explicitly situated in CRT.

CRT as a Guide for Curriculum and Instruction. Freire warned educators against exporting pedagogical practices without reinventing them (Freire, 2005, p.58). Dumas & Ross (2016) and Johnson (2017, 2018) did as Freire advised by reimagining CRT as a theoretical framework for a specific context. Dumas and Ross (2016) put forward a theorization of a Black Critical Theory, or BlackCrit, within, and in response to, Critical Race Theory. The authors argued that while CRT is a theorization of race, BlackCrit is a theorization of Blackness, and more specifically, the culture of anti-Blackness. Johnson built from the theoretical foundations of CRT, BlackCrit, and critical literacy to conceptualize Critical Race English Education, or CREE (Johnson, 2018). CREE provided a theoretical and pedagogical framework to address white supremacy and anti-black racism within ELA classrooms. Johnson argued that the reading of texts is a way to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships and contexts (Johnson, 2017, 2018).

Johnson and Neville (2018) presented a framework for literature instruction explicitly grounded in CRT, similar to the version created by Bedford and Shaffer (2023). Rather than including an empirical component, Johnson and Neville provided an in-depth justification for text pairings in the secondary ELA classroom to facilitate the evaluation of racism as systemic in both historical and contemporary settings. The authors described how to teach the CRT tenet rubric and included guiding questions for critical engagement with *Beloved* (Morrison, 1987) and *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2018). The instructional framework was presented in a way that made it ready for educator implementation with the exemplar texts. The article also offered sufficient rationale and guidance so that educators could apply the framework to other text pairings. Johnson and Neville (2018) and Bedford and Shaffer (2023) demonstrated growing interest and research into Critical Race Theory as a specific tool for anti-racist literary analysis.

My study considers CRT as a framework for pedagogy and literature instruction in the ELA classroom, not only as an intellectual and analytical project but as a potential mitigator of the social-emotional labor required to engage in racial narratives. In a similar line of inquiry, Brown and Brown (2010) positioned CRT as textual analysis for evaluating the representation of racial violence in mandated curriculum, specifically middle grades social studies textbooks. Although their framework is intended to evaluate texts outside of fiction and the ELA classroom, their inquiry is positioned at the intersection of race and trauma. The authors noted that while a few empirical studies have examined how African Americans are represented in school texts, little research has focused specifically on the rendering of

racial violence as a subject of inquiry (Brown & Brown, 2010).

The study explored whether the official state-adopted curriculum included histories of racial violence and if this inclusion gave attention to the institutional aspects of race and racism. The theoretical importance CRT placed on examining the institutional nature of racism in U.S. society informed their literary analysis method. The authors found that the textbooks presented vivid accounts of racial violence but neglected to include explanations of the larger structural and institutional ties that supported the violence (Brown & Brown, 2010). Applying a CRT framework to depictions of racial violence revealed a narrative of race and racism that was individual in nature and that veiled the role institutions played in the history of racial violence. The authors argued that this limited representation of racial violence has an adverse effect on the larger sociocultural knowledge available to students, limiting the extent to which students can fully understand the legacy of racism and racial inequity in the U.S. (Brown & Brown, 2010).

The limitations and gaps found in curricular knowledge sources must be considered for students entering the secondary ELA classroom, where fictionalized narratives of racial violence perpetrated by individual actors often ignore historical and contemporary institutional racism (Brown & Brown, 2010). Collectively, this knowledge defines how Black experience and identity are imagined in the present. When students come to the ELA classroom with a sociocultural knowledge of Black history and racism that has been intentionally limited through the social studies curriculum, it is critical that ELA teachers facilitate this discourse with guidance from a CRT framework (Brown & Brown, 2010). Teachers have the opportunity to shape the cultural memory of Black history not only through the literature selected for the ELA classroom but through an analytical framework grounded in CRT. Understanding how students have experienced the reading of representations of racial violence in classroom texts is a needed line of inquiry in the scholarship. Although the CRT frameworks presented by Johnson and Neville (2018), Bedford and Shaffer (2023), and Brown and Brown (2010) provided a foundation for this field of study, still missing are the voices of Black students who are meant to benefit from these theoretical curricular choices.

CRT as Praxis. CRT provided valuable frameworks for anti-racist education research focused on the positioning of curriculum and tools for instruction (Brown & Brown, 2010; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Johnson, 2017, 2018; Johnson & Neville, 2018). My study similarly considers teacher pedagogy and practice as complex interacting variables in the ELA classroom that will inform student experience. Based on theories of racial trauma and literary trauma, teacher pedagogical choices more than a traumatic text itself can be the most damaging source of microaggressions and vicarious traumatization in classroom discourse (Comas-Díaz, 2016). The CRT framework presented by Boler (2014) addressed this aspect of the pedagogical theory that was missing from the empirical scholarship in this review.

In response to the ways in which systemic racism manifests at the level of classroom discourse, Boler (2014) suggested an Affirmative Action Pedagogy that privileged minority voices in the anti-racist classroom. Affirmative Action Pedagogy seeks to ensure teachers bear witness to marginalized voices in classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting dominant voices (Boler, 2014). The author argued that classrooms are unique spaces where marginalized and silenced voices can respond to ignorant expressions rooted in privilege, white supremacy, or other dominant ideologies. Unlike other public spaces where students may encounter racism or threats of racial violence, the classroom is one of the few public spaces in which Black students can respond and be heard (Boler, 2014). While an anti-racist curriculum must include the literary counterstories and testimonies of marginalized voices, Affirmative Action Pedagogy must *privilege* the testimonies of marginalized student voices in the classroom (Boler, 2014).

CRT and Racial Trauma. There is a substantial body of scholarship, primarily in psychology and social work, that investigates the relationship between race and trauma, but few explicitly named CRT as a theoretical perspective. Quiros et al. (2020) and McGhee and Stovall (2015) explicitly cited CRT in their theoretical research into trauma. The authors posited that although critical race theorists have unmasked and attacked the racism experienced at all levels of the educational system, the connection of CRT to mental health and wellness research is in its embryonic stages. For these reasons, McGee and Stovall (2015) argued that CRT scholars need to incorporate mental health praxis in order to address a fuller spectrum of Black students' racialized worlds.

Quiros et al. (2020) similarly argued that the links between individual and structural racism and trauma are insubstantial in the trauma literature. The authors made connections between CRT and trauma-informed practices and positioned CRT as a useful vehicle to intentionally link trauma work to discussions of race and racism. The focus of this research was on establishing that the specificity of racial trauma needs to be addressed in education research (McGhee & Stovall, 2015; Quiros et al., 2020). Missing from this research are the implications for pedagogy or the specific trauma that can occur from reading racist and racially traumatic literature in the classroom.

Theoretical Perspectives in the Field of Race-Oriented Research

Research that is positioned in the field of Critical Race Theory must prevent the over-commodification and misunderstanding of the theoretical perspective by demonstrating a depth of understanding and aligned methodologies (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This is not to suggest that all race-oriented research must be grounded in Critical Race Theory; the majority of the empirical and theoretical studies located for this literature review cited other established theoretical perspectives relevant to the study of race and racism. Equally relevant were studies grounded in theories from multiple disciplines to examine racialized experience in specific contexts and populations.

Across his research into race and racism in the ELA classroom, Grinage situated his work in

theories such as BlackCrit and Racial Melancholia (2019a, 2019b), critical literacy (2018), and racial socialization (2014). Other theoretical frameworks used to orient research in this field included culturally relevant teaching (Thomas, 2013), culturally responsive pedagogy (Golden, 2020), critical literacy (Gordon, 2019; Grinage 2018; McCardle, 2017), anti-racist pedagogy (Ambrosia, 2021; Baker-Bell, 2020), reader-response theory (Brooks & Hampton, 2005), and theoretical perspectives on race talk (Boylorn, 2011; Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Simpson et al., 2017; Sosa, 2020; Thomas, 2015).

Attending to Trauma as a Theoretical Perspective

A review of race-oriented literature revealed a lack of intersectional scholarship on the relationship between race, trauma, and literature, specifically the reading of trauma narratives in the classroom. While there were studies that explored the use of trauma narratives in the classroom, they often did not approach the research with a critical race lens (Dutro, 2013; Kidd, 2005). Although there were minimal studies at the specific intersection of race, trauma, and literature, it was useful to evaluate the ways in which trauma was used as a theoretical perspective in the field.

Theories of Trauma

Scholars at the intersection of Trauma Theory and narrative pointed out a key ethical dilemma when bearing witness to literary acts of violence in the context of a classroom. How, in teaching acts of violence, can the teacher minimize the suffering of the potentially stigmatized and traumatized subjects in the classroom whom the teacher is seeking to serve (Jolly, 2011)? Research in the field of Literary Trauma also recognize that trauma narratives can open up transformative opportunities for both students and teachers, and ultimately, these texts can become catalysts for learning, self-actualization, and social consciousness. Nonetheless, researchers in the field of Literary Trauma still question, "Should we, as teachers, aim to bring our students, especially Black and other silenced literary voices, to such moments of crisis for pedagogical purposes? And if so, what is the responsible way to teach narratives with trauma at their center?" (Spear, 2014, p. 56).

Race and Trauma. One study in the field of trauma and social work offered a theoretical perspective at the intersection of race, trauma, and narrative that can potentially inform similarly angled empirical education research (Quiros et al., 2020). Quiros et al. (2020) addressed a gap in the field of trauma by linking CRT to trauma-informed practice. The authors noted that there has been limited discussion of race, racism, and whiteness within the field of trauma. By highlighting the individual and structural nature of racism through CRT the authors aimed to emphasize the importance of understanding racialized experiences within trauma-informed practice. Drawing on the ordinariness of racism and counterstorytelling narratives, the authors positioned CRT as a useful vehicle to have explicit conversations about race, racism, and whiteness in the context of trauma work (Quiros et al., 2020). The authors focused on select CRT tenets and merged them with trauma-informed practice.

Understanding the ordinariness of racism is one of the first steps in trauma-informed practice from a CRT lens (Quiros et al., 2020). The aim is to move beyond a color-blind framework to acknowledge racism as a trauma. The trauma-informed version of this tenet expands beyond the framework of race and racism as a narrowly defined issue for people of color to also include whiteness. The authors noted that "many people who go into the field of trauma have been trained to see trauma in a monolithic way, rooted in their own experiences of interpersonal trauma, and thus may not recognize structural trauma such as racism and/or minimize interpersonal experiences of trauma" (Quiros et al., 2020, p. 164).

Counternarrative through a trauma-informed lens emphasized the importance of looking at the many stories that make people who they are and how they perceive their experiences of trauma. Currently, trauma is distinctly defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition as "actual or threatened death, injury, or sexual violence" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 271). Failing to explicitly name race and racism as a real and valid source of traumatic injury and violence, maintains a colorblind ideology towards experiences of trauma (Cénat, 2022). This current definition, and therefore the best-intentioned trauma-informed practitioners, may fail to perceive racialized experiences of oppression as sources of trauma. Failing to include experiences of racism as part of the trauma narrative presents a monolithic narrative about what is and what is not trauma and its effect (Quiros et al., 2020). The authors suggested that a trauma-informed approach from a critical race lens makes space for the voice of counternarratives (Quiros et al., 2020). Currently, trauma-informed practices in educational spaces are established to respond to the needs of some but not others. Without a commitment to recognizing Black students' existing racial trauma and the sources of racial trauma embedded in the curriculum, current trauma-informed practices "do nothing to move an organization towards anti-racism" (Quiros et al., 2020, p.164).

Carello and Butler (2014), like Quiros et al., (2020), positioned their theoretical framework in the field of social work and at the university level; however, they examined the intersection of trauma and literature rather than trauma and race. At the time of the article, the authors pointed out that the effects—both positive and negative—of exposure to literary trauma in the classroom were unknown because no empirical research had been published outside of clinical disciplines (Carello & Butler, 2014). They argued that given the high rates of trauma histories (66%–85%) and posttraumatic stress disorder (9%–12%) among college students, the risk of retraumatization and secondary traumatization from being exposed to trauma narratives should be decreased or intentionally mitigated (Carello & Butler, 2014). To that end, the authors argued that a trauma-informed approach to pedagogy that prioritizes student emotional safety in learning is essential. There is an urgent need for research into the implications of exposing students to narrative trauma in classroom spaces because students do not have the option to

remove themselves from ongoing and mandated curricular trauma. Further, the authors cited previous research that indicated that university-level educators who used trauma narratives to invoke empathy viewed the students' trauma responses as evidence of effective teaching (Carello & Butler, 2014). The authors offered several theories as to why some educators engage in risky pedagogical practices:

(1) Outside of disciplines directly related to trauma, educators lack an understanding of the implications of trauma, retraumatization, or secondary traumatization for students. In order to minimize the risk of traumatization that comes from bearing witness to the testimony of trauma, students must understand that even if their experience and/or identity overlap with the victim, they are not the victim (Carello & Butler, 2014). In ELA classrooms where racial trauma narratives are used as mirrors to the Black experience, students may not have the mental maturity needed to regulate their responses in this way and educators don't have the clinical background to understand this risk. The authors observed instances where educators assumed that trauma can and should be used to "shock students into feeling 'appropriate' responses to atrocity" (Carello & Butler, 2014, p.164). When educators conflate trauma with learning, they risk students responding not with empathy but with pity, guilt, shame, and disassociation to avoid these feelings.

(2) Well-intentioned educators who seek out trauma-informed practices may misinterpret the benefits of trauma therapy. Testimony of trauma in therapeutic sessions is private and the participant has agency over the saturation and duration; a classroom setting is not anonymous and involves required coursework with grading penalties (Carello & Butler, 2014). In terms of the teaching of trauma narratives in the ELA classroom, and particularly representations of racial trauma, engagement with the material occurs daily over a long length of time with related dialogue in a public setting. The authors disagreed with scholars who theorized that increasing risk increases the potential for student transformation and empowerment: "Trauma may be endemic to our present political, social, and private worlds, but marching it into the classroom to be prodded, provoked, and endured" does not transform trauma but "potentially recapitulates it" (Carello & Butler, 2014, p. 163). More interdisciplinary research is needed in this area, as most of the available literature was anecdotal, based on clinical training, and did not explicitly adopt a trauma-informed framework.

Carello and Butler (2014) never explicitly mentioned race in their critique of risky pedagogical practices around narrative representations of trauma, but when read alongside the Quiros et al. (2020) theory of racial trauma in the classroom, it is clear Black students in ELA classrooms face a devastating likelihood of traumatization. My proposed study aims to bridge the space between Carello and Butler (2014) and Quiros et al. (2020) by answering the call for empirical interdisciplinary research at the intersection of race, trauma, and pedagogy. It is possible that teaching about racial trauma is necessary for outsiders to comprehend and confront race and racism, but educators must proceed with compassion and

responsibility toward the humanity of both the trauma victims and those who are learning about them.

The final trauma-based theoretical perspective included in my review of the literature is at the intersection of trauma-informed pedagogy and student voice. Golden (2020) put out a call to education researchers to incorporate student experiences into the investigation of trauma-informed praxis. The author argued that the dominant framing of trauma-informed approaches in educational settings is based on a biomedical understanding of trauma, in which trauma is a stress response that manifests externally as a behavior to be controlled or eliminated (Golden, 2020). To understand the role of pedagogy as a cause or mediator of trauma, research must include student perceptions of related environmental and systemic factors. Researchers of trauma-informed pedagogy should focus on students' understanding of past experiences as well as future possibilities (Golden, 2020). My study aims to fill this gap in the research by centering the experiences and perspectives of Black students as primary sources of knowledge.

It is clear from the theoretical frameworks put forth by scholars in the field of trauma research, as well as the absence of empirical studies at the intersection of trauma, race, and literature, that researchers in the field of education, and anti-racist English Education specifically, need to take up this work. My empirical study has the potential to both further the understanding of anti-racist and trauma-informed literacy for educators and support the efforts of scholars in the field of trauma studies.

Methodological Considerations

In my review of theoretical perspectives relevant to my research, I included literature that shared limited methodological features with my proposed study but were nonetheless useful in understanding the existing scholarship and gaps in the field. In the next section, I focused my evaluation of the literature on specific methodological features: literature in the ELA classroom and student voice. As a narrative inquiry grounded in Endarkened Storywork (as opposed to an ethnographic approach), my study design did not include observing student participants engaged in explicitly selected literature in an ELA classroom setting. Rather, my study was interested in the way participants talked about literature relative to their experiences in ELA classrooms. Because I was unable to locate empirical studies that took up this methodological approach, my review included research that varied in proximity and significance to the ELA classroom and reading literature. From this body of literature, I evaluated the features of the studies that inform the rationale for my methodological perspective.

The Positioning of Literature

To evaluate literature as a feature I considered what literature (title) was used and how it was positioned in the study. The positioning of literature generally fell into four categories: (1) theoretical perspectives on trauma novels; (2) critiques and suggestions for literature in the ELA curriculum; (3) literature to model a pedagogical approach; and (4) literature as a catalyst to analyze talk about race.

Trauma Novels in the Classroom. Trauma scholarship demonstrated a need for research into the

uses and effects of trauma literature in the ELA classroom, especially when used as an anchor for discussions about race and racism. Brooks and Hampton (2005) offered the only empirical study in the identified literature that explicitly investigated this phenomenon. The authors made the case for exposing adolescent readers to the complexity and dangers of racism through literature in their study of an 8th-grade ELA class and students' written responses to *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1976). Participants included 26 Black students, 2 Latinx students, and their teacher. Taylor's novel differed from many of the Black-authored novels included in the ELA curriculum set in the tumultuous times of enslavement or Civil Rights. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* was set during the Great Depression and later years, an often-neglected time for understanding systemic racism (Brooks & Hampton, 2005).

What made the positioning of the novel especially interesting in this study was the added context of a mostly segregated school in an isolated, rural area. The authors theorized that because of this context, the students struggled to identify their personal experiences with the racism depicted in the novel. Students struggled to understand the racist events in the novel because their own segregated community did not reflect the white supremacist power relations portrayed in the text. The students did not initially make connections between the systemic racism of segregated schools presented in the book and their own segregated school. Their reader responses, however, demonstrated that the novel helped them gain a historical understanding of race and racism. The teacher was able to facilitate this learning because the students often sought or offered rationales to make sense of the racist events in the text. The authors concluded that literature served as a "laboratory" for studying the complexity of racism, a context they felt was a nontraumatic way for adolescents to encounter and learn about racism (Brooks & Hampton, 2005). This study, along with others in the literature, highlighted the significant influence classroom, school, and community demographics have on student perceptions of experience. I thread this research throughout the description of my researcher identity and positionality in Chapter 3 to situate aspects of my methodological commitments.

Grinage (2018) also made a case for trauma narratives of racism and racial violence in the ELA classroom. The author argued that engagement with trauma novels is necessary to understand the complexities of racial trauma and to engender new visions for racial justice. Teachers must create opportunities for students to embrace and interact with the intergenerational trauma of racism using critical literacy (Grinage, 2018). Whereas a lack of knowledge of historical and contemporary systemic racism in Brooks and Hampton (2005) was attributed to the segregated nature of the community, Grinage pointed out that teachers' unwillingness to teach about racial violence and the revisionist history of the curriculum also limit the ability to teach students about racism. The author argued that trauma novels by themselves cannot solve racial problems, but when used as a type of critical literacy in the ELA classroom, students can envision racial justice and bring about social change (Grinage, 2018).

Brooks and Hampton (2005), Carello and Butler (2014), and Grinage (2018) all offered varying perspectives on the role of trauma novels in the ELA classroom, particularly relative to confronting racial violence and racism. Missing from the discourse were student perceptions and experiences. What is still left unknown based on the literature is whether students consider the content of these novels to be traumatic or how they felt reading traumatic literature. Further, it is possible that students recognize the events depicted in a work of literature as traumatic events, but they do not *feel* traumatized by reading them. It is also possible that the act of engaging in the reading and discussion surrounding these texts in a public classroom space is the source of trauma, not the content of the book itself. The stories participants shared in my current study presented the opportunity to examine these gaps in the research through the lens of Racial Trauma and Literary Trauma theories outlined in my theoretical framework.

Critiques of ELA Curriculum and New Visions. Before I arrived at the central inquiry of my empirical study, I went through the formal and informal process of critiquing the existing curriculum and anti-racist practices I had observed in the ELA classroom, as well as conceptualizing possibilities for the future. Scholars in the identified literature similarly provided their own critiques and possible responsive theoretical frameworks for revised anti-racist literature instruction.

Ambrosia et al. (2021) reached out to ELA teachers who met regularly online as a cohort to reflect on and develop their anti-racist pedagogy. The authors posed the question: How do you think about anti-racist reading practices and what are some ways that you incorporate them into your pedagogy? (Ambrosia et al., 2021). Taught texts and methods for text selection were consistent themes in the participants' responses. One participant shared that in previous years her conceptualization of anti-racist teaching meant incorporating Black authored texts into her existing curriculum, citing *A Raisin in the Sun* (Hansberry, 1959), *Dear Martin* (Stone, 2018), and *All American Boys* (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015) as examples. Working to construct an anti-racist text selection process for other teachers, she noticed several patterns.

First, the only people of color represented in the “diverse” curriculum were Black, even though the school had a significant Latinx and Indigenous population. Further, there were no representations of women of color in the literature. The second pattern she identified was that all the texts centered on tragedy–racism, death, injustice, and suicide. Missing from the curriculum were stories centered on joy. The participant created a text selection protocol (not shared in the article) that refined her previous conceptualization of anti-racist pedagogy to include stories that presented not only sorrow but joy, hope, and cultural connection (Ambrosia et al., 2021). The author suggested that anti-racist educators need book lists that strike a balance between confronting truths and celebrating the resilience and power of culture.

Other new visions for the ELA curriculum included decolonizing texts such as Black Speculative Fiction and Afrofuturism and allowing students to develop the criteria for texts that positively represent

their racial identity (Ambrosia et al, 2021). Although I included this study as a critique of the ELA curriculum, I wanted to note that the participants are not critiquing a mandated ELA curriculum. They are critiquing their own choices of literature in a teaching environment where they had the agency to enact their evolving visions for anti-racist pedagogy. Critiques of ELA literature are often aimed at traditional or mandated texts. The author demonstrated that even when teachers have the agency to select their own texts, it is essential that they (and researchers) continue to reflect on and refine these choices. While text selection processes grounded in anti-racist pedagogy are useful, student voices need to be included in this evaluation process. Researchers and educators should prioritize student experiences and visions for the future in the evaluation of classroom literature.

Johnson's (2017) critique of the ELA curriculum prompted the development of a framework for Critical Race English Education (CREE) (Johnson, 2018). Johnson similarly argued that the texts selected for Black students provided a narrow representation of Black life steeped in stereotypes of inferiority. The symbolic violence of the ELA curriculum mirrored the real-world violence Black students faced in their lives (Johnson, 2017). Johnson argued that anti-blackness shows up not only in the ELA curriculum but in routine pedagogies that omit, devalue, and make invisible the knowledge of Black students (Johnson, 2018). CREE requires teachers to reject school-sanctioned curriculum that relies only on required texts and literacies. Although my study does not directly adopt CREE as a methodology, the theoretical foundations and goals of my work are closely aligned. The student perspectives I center through narrative inquiry contribute to the empirical body of scholarship for researchers wishing to explore CREE further.

My study adopts the methodology of Toliver's (2022) Endarkened Storywork, whose scholarship I included in this literature review. Prior to publishing *Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research: Endarkened Storywork*, Toliver contributed to the critique of the ELA curriculum and offered new visions for the future (2018). Based on Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors, which argued that books should offer mirrors to reflect readers' multilayered and complex identities, windows to show readers real and imagined worlds, and sliding glass doors to enable readers to enter creative worlds using their imaginations, Toliver aimed to investigate the mirrors and windows Speculative Fiction had to offer featuring strong, Black girls (Bishop, 1990; Toliver, 2018). To analyze which mirrors and windows were used to analyze Black adolescent female representations in fiction books, Toliver conducted a meta-analysis of studies between 2000 and 2017 that included research into the representation of Black girls in fiction novels (Toliver, 2018).

Toliver found that all the selected books depicted Black girls combating negative beliefs about their physical appearance, race and racism, and stereotypical images. Of the four books representing the late stage of adolescents (high school age), all included topics such as teen pregnancy, abuse, racism, and criminal activity (Toliver, 2018). Toliver argued that according to these texts, regardless of age, Black

girls navigate hostile worlds that discriminate against them based on their race and/or gender. Not only did these texts confine Black girls to a metanarrative about Black girlhood, but they also alienated girls who would rather have a break from the bombardment of racial tensions prevalent throughout the stories (Toliver, 2018). Missing from the narratives about Black Girlhood were stories of hope, imagination, and diverse futures.

Although Toliver situated her meta-analysis in the literature found in research, the findings reflect the ELA curriculum's portrayal of Black girlhood, as well as the books cited throughout the studies in this literature review. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, The Hate U Give, Beloved,* and *Hush* are all the books cited in the included research that feature Black girls as the main characters; all of them experience violence, racism, and trauma, in addition to sexual assault and rape. In fact, none of the literature used in the research relevant to this review centered on Black joy or Black characters free from the trauma of racism. Endarkened Storywork is committed to allowing participants to consider anti-blackness if they want to, but does not require them to (Toliver, 2022). This methodological approach has the potential to provide empirical insight into research surrounding the inclusion of literary Black joy in the ELA classroom.

Toliver (2020) addressed this gap in the research in a subsequent study; she asked Black women what they looked for in the fiction they enjoyed reading. Although the survey was conducted with Black women over the age of 18, Toliver used these data to discuss the importance of diverse Speculative Fiction in secondary classrooms to liberate Black girls from a singular narrative of racial trauma (Toliver, 2020). Participants consistently mentioned the need for Black, Brown, queer, and female representation in characters and authorship. One participant shared that the perspectives of white men are so taken for granted in literature that writers don't develop them well, making them poor choices for literary analysis in the classroom. Missing from the classroom are books where white male protagonists interrogate their whiteness or privilege or imagine a future absent of white supremacy. Participants also wanted novels that provided escapism from the violence they experience in their lives as Black women. Many narratives about the Black experience are about struggle and participants desperately needed visions of Black people thriving (Toliver, 2020).

This analysis of the positioning of literature in ELA classrooms speaks to the scope of the problem and the purpose of my own study. A text does not need to be saturated with racial violence towards Black bodies and identities to be harmful to Black students; the absence of Black bodies and ways of knowing has a negative effect as well. Trends in the research and ELA curriculum take hostage insight into how Black students' experiences might be different if they were provided with texts and pedagogy with positive representations of Black life and identity. The current trends in taught texts, even those selected with anti-racist intentions, send the message to Black students: your stories aren't worth

much if you don't bleed on the page for us (McKinney, 2020). Further, many of the books cited in the studies included in this literature review were written by white authors: *To Kill a Mockingbird, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Heart of Darkness,* and *Dangerous Minds*. The texts researchers and educators used to analyze issues of race and racism either depicted racial violence, were presented from the white imagination, or both.

Pedagogy Anchored in Literature. Literature was also positioned as an anchor to model a pedagogical approach. Bedford and Shaffer (2023) and Johnson and Neville (2018) used works of literature to demonstrate instructional frameworks using tenets of CRT. McCardle (2017) presented an interesting outlier using white-authored classic literature in the ELA curriculum to teach about racism using critical literacy. None of the articles included empirical data with students in context to evaluate the success of the pedagogical frameworks for literature instruction, but all three mentioned the complications that arise from both CRT bans and mandated curricula that restrict teacher autonomy. Bedford and Shaffer (2023) advised educators to teach the individual tenets as tools for literary analysis without mentioning CRT and Johnson and Neville (2018) suggested that students create their own critique of the secondary ELA curriculum through a CRT lens.

McCardle (2017) addressed the issue of the state-sanctioned mandated ELA curriculum. The author demonstrated how critical literacy can be used with classic texts in the required curriculum to examine structural racism (McCardle, 2017). Critical literacy is an active and reflexive way to read texts to (a) challenge common assumptions and values; (b) explore multiple perspectives and imagine those that are absent or silenced; (c) examine differences in power; and (d) take action for social justice (McCardle, 2017). McCardle modeled this approach using *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1902), noting that while it is important to incorporate multicultural texts, mandated and/or traditional curriculum requires that teachers adapt and adopt a critical approach to the texts already present in the classroom. Works, such as *Heart of Darkness*, can introduce students to historical and contemporary issues, such as colonialism, racism, and sexism. McCardle suggested that teachers can decenter themselves as the narrative authority in the classroom by pairing literature with scholarly texts to facilitate discussion. The author's positioning of literature reinforced the concept that anti-racist pedagogy is not relegated to the teaching of Black authored texts and stories; the author offered a practical way for the committed anti-racist ELA teacher to subvert both CRT bans and mandated curriculum in their literature instruction (McCardle, 2017).

Literature as a Catalyst. A less direct way literature was positioned in the research was as a catalyst for discourse or to *create* the phenomena under study (i.e., race talk, teacher pedagogy). Brooks et al. (2022) and Brooks and Hampton (2005) examined Black and Latinx middle school students' written and spoken reader responses to YAL depicting racism. Because narrative inquiry was not included in the study designs, student perceptions were limited to overheard or written responses to direct questions from

the teacher/facilitator. Literature was also used as a catalyst for race talk in the secondary ELA classroom so that the researchers could analyze both student engagement and teacher pedagogy. In some studies, the specific literature choice is a significant interacting variable under examination, while others focus exclusively on the discourse or pedagogy produced around concepts relative to a text (Grinage, 2019b; Martin, 2014; Sosa, 2020; Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2015; Williams et al., 2016).

An analysis of the ways literature was positioned throughout the literature suggested several trends in the research. First, the empirical studies that occurred in ELA classrooms centered on texts that were already part of the traditional curriculum. Several studies noted the importance of text selection in anti-racist pedagogy, but empirical classroom data demonstrating the effects of intentionally selected literature for students is missing from the scholarship. It is imperative that researchers access students' perceptions of taught texts, both mandated and teacher selected, to grow our understanding of the complex and dynamic interacting variables of text, talk, and pedagogy.

Second, missing from the literature entirely were empirical studies that examined students' experiences with classroom texts that represented Black joy, success, and empowerment. Scholars in the field have insisted that the ELA curriculum tells a singular story of Black pain and suffering that needs to be countered with a love of Blackness, but there have yet to be empirical studies that can help educators understand and refine this pedagogical future. Even though many of the texts in the ELA curriculum and in the studies in this literature review have been used for years to teach about race and racism, it is still a topic under great study and constant refinement. Teachers, especially predominantly white ELA teachers, will need similar guidance when it comes to teaching and talking about Black joy. Finally, without the inclusion of student perspectives, studies that claimed to examine reading about race in literature were, in actuality, studies about observable race talk in the ELA classroom in proximity to reading about race. While several studies cited race talk as the phenomena under study, even those that did not aim to investigate race talk in the ELA classroom featured race talk in the findings.

My study aims to fill the gap in the research that was highlighted in the evaluation of literature in English Education research: student voice. Although it is useful to observe and analyze the race talk that emerges from literature in an ELA classroom, each study only captured a snapshot of what was said. Missing is what the students felt and thought during these experiences and their visions for the future. One way to address this gap in the research would be by conducting ethnographic observations of ELA classrooms followed by narrative inquiry into student perceptions of the events. I chose to center student voice as both epistemological knowledge and auto-ethnographic observation by inviting participants to share the lived experiences that were significant to them as well as their feelings and interpretations. This aligns with my methodological commitments and belief that students are capable of interpreting and telling their own stories precisely because they are both participant observer and meaning maker of their

own lived experiences; the presence and filter of a researcher perspective is not needed to render the stories valid.

In the next section, I synthesize the epistemological and methodological positioning of student voice in the relevant literature. For the purposes of this review, I defined student voice as the result of narrative inquiry where students are asked about their perceptions and experiences, not just observations of what students said in class.

Student Voice

To evaluate student voice as a feature in the studies, I first examined this construct from a methodological standpoint. When student voice was centered in the study as a source of knowledge, I evaluated how it was elicited, the context, the researchers' purpose or rationale for including student voice, as well as implications for the exclusion of student voice. For this section I focus on student voice as a methodological and epistemological choice; a later section will synthesize what was learned from the inclusion of student voice in the studies–what the students had to say when asked.

The studies that included student voice fell into two categories: a) Researchers engaged in narrative inquiry about a topic designed to center student voice as the source of knowledge on that topic and b) Researchers conducted interviews with students after an inciting event or experience that occurred during a larger ethnographic study to gain insight into student perspectives about that incident or experience. The findings in the second category of studies included student voice as one among multiple data sources.

Student Voice as Source of Knowledge. Masko (2005), Grinage (2019a), Toliver (2020), and Simpson et al. (2007) conducted narrative inquiry studies with students to gain insight into their experiential knowledge of a topic. Masko (2005) used purposeful sampling to identify the 12-year-old girl for a narrative inquiry case study based on the researcher’s positionality. The researcher had an established relationship with the participant and her family which was important in terms of having a degree of insider perspective on the participant's life as well as the role of a trusted community advocate. The researchers’ aim was to understand the role of race and racism in the adolescent participant's life and an organically established relationship of trust allowed the participant to be open and vulnerable in their interview (Masko, 2005).

Grinage (2019a) also used purposeful sampling to select five Black secondary students with whom he had previous relationships to participate in interviews. His aim was to understand the complexities of racial trauma, its effects on Black identity, and the ways Black youth resisted in a predominantly white high school with predominantly white teachers. Grinage stressed the significance of his positionality; it was important that he had a prior relationship with the participants and insider knowledge of the research setting but was not positioned as an authority such as teacher. Just as white

researchers should interrogate the implications of their whiteness when working with students of color, Grinage shared insight into both the benefits and complexities of his positionality as a Black teacher and researcher:

> The trusting connections I had formed with this core group of participants served to enrich data collection, yet a primary challenge surfaced as a result of our history of Black racial bonding and my insider knowledge of the research setting. Namely, participants began to share only stories of racism with me, rather than communicating other experiences in their lives unrelated to race… I was aware of these dynamics in the field and sought to mitigate them by having informal conversations unrelated to race. (Grinage, 2019a, p. 236)

As a former teacher at the school in which Grinage conducted his ethnography and narrative inquiry, his previous relationship with the participants had been one of reciprocity where Black students would come to him as one of the only Black teachers at the school to discuss racial issues and he would offer advice and healing. There were challenges in shifting the dynamic to a researcher who listened to their experiences with racial trauma without helping them work through their trauma (Grinage, 2019a).

Toliver (2020) also had a close relationship with the Black middle school girl in her narrative inquiry into how Black girls used speculative fiction as a counterstorytelling method. In what Toliver called a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, her study included data from the fiction stories the participant wrote as part of a writing workshop for speculative fiction. Data also included information shared by the participant in interviews and data from conversations during the writing workshop. Toliver argued that including student voices in narrative inquiry is more than a methodological and epistemological choice to gain insight into a phenomenon; Toliver showcased how student voice in research is testimony and counterstory that calls for readers to bear witness to experiences and act (Toliver, 2020). Toliver provided a rationale for highlighting the story of one girl:

> Black girls' narratives are layered, vibrant, and complex, so it is essential to allow space for their dynamic storytelling to thrive. Segmenting Black girls' testimonies to include a larger number of stories dulls their vibrancy, diminishes their complexity, and reduces their layers. Black girl storytelling is a mosaic, and their stories need adequate space to be told. (Toliver, 2020, p. 513).

Toliver included the participant's entire story, uninterrupted, not as a finding, "but as a way to centralize her knowledge and experiences and to bear witness to her words" (p. 517). The literature that centered on student voice as a source of knowledge collectively made the case for purposeful sampling of limited participants to give adequate space to their immense stories. Close relationships with the study participants, purposeful sampling, and the inclusion of full, uninterrupted participant stories are critical attributes of my current study, which I describe in Chapter 3.

Simpson et al. (2007) also conducted a narrative inquiry study with students to gain insight into

their experiential knowledge on a topic, but from a more distant position. The researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with college and university students (not in education or teacher education) to understand their experiences talking about race and racism in the classroom. They were specifically interested in the barriers to discussing race in university classrooms and what instructors could do to facilitate discussions about race. The authors were interested in student perspectives from a range of racial locations. Simpson et al. (2007) argued that understanding students' insights as primary and authoritative can inform how instructors provide attention to race and other related issues in the classroom. The authors made brief note of researcher positionality when forming focus groups to solicit student perspectives. They divided the focus groups so that they consisted either entirely of minority students or all white students. One of the racial minority researchers was present at the focus group in which all participants were white, and the white principal investigator was present at the focus group, which was made up entirely of racial minority students, but the authors did not provide a rationale for this decision (Simpson et al., 2007).

The narrative inquiry studies from this literature set demonstrated an ideology that values, to varying degrees, disrupting researcher positions of authority, purposeful sampling, attention to researcher positionality, and thoughtful disclosure of the rationale, if not advocacy, for including student voices as a critical source of knowledge on topics such as race, trauma, and pedagogy. Although several researchers addressed the implication of their whiteness in relation to the participants, no connection or reflection is made between whiteness and the implications for their findings. I explicitly attend to my own racialized research identity and reflexive considerations throughout the description of my study design and analytical framework.

Student Insight After Inciting Event. While some of the studies sought out participants who might be able to offer experiential insight on a specific topic, an equal number of studies included student voice in their ethnographic study after a particularly provocative inciting event, observed by the researcher. In these studies, student voice was interpreted alongside a preponderance of data from observations, written reflections, and teacher input (Grinage, 2019b; Martin, 2014; Sassi & Thomas, 2008).

Grinage (2019b) and Sassi and Thomas (2008) conducted student interviews after observing a particularly tense incident in the classroom involving perspectives around race and racism. Grinage aimed to better analyze a pedagogical encounter between a white ELA teacher, a Black student, and a white student by conducting reflective interviews post-incident. During an ELA classroom activity about the nature of racism today versus in the past, the white teacher remained neutral in his verbal discourse while physically moving his body towards a white student when conflict arose. This seemingly caused the Black student to shut down, creating a ripple effect amongst the other students and halting any further

discussion on the topic. Grinage conducted interviews with the teacher and Black student after the incident to further contextualize the conflict (Grinage, 2019b).

Sassi and Thomas (2008) included student voices in their study by asking students to write a response to their experience after participating in a privilege walk activity in class. The racially diverse 9th and 10th grade ELA classes under study had tense conversations about race previously when studying *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Of Mice and Men*. The teacher wanted to include diversity in the curriculum by including a novel that centered on Native American issues but was unsure how to proceed with the layers of interracial tension already present in the classroom. In collaboration with the researcher (Sassi) the teacher (Thomas) planned an activity where the students would do a privilege walk and then reflect on the experience in writing. Although the study does not address this, it is not an insignificant variable that the student voice was shared through a class assignment to be turned in and evaluated by the teacher (Sassi & Thomas, 2008).

While I fully support teachers investing in student perspectives of experiences in their classes to inform future pedagogy, the circumstances under which student voice was elicited must be taken into consideration when evaluating the findings. Martin (2014) similarly held a dual role of researcher and teacher of the ELA classroom under study. After an inciting event, Martin aimed to analyze the incident from the student's perspective by assigning a written reflection about the experience (Martin, 2014). These studies invite new lines of inquiry in terms of the efficacy of various methodologies for teachers who wish to incorporate student voice as pedagogy into their anti-racist ELA practice.

While the three studies described above incorporated student voice after a specific event was observed in the classroom, Gordon (2019), Ispa-Landa and Conwell (2015), and Boylorn (2011) sought student insight about their experience after participating in a course, curriculum, or pedagogical framework. Gordon (2019) examined students' perspectives on critical English Education in an urban, high school classroom consisting of mostly Latinx (59%) and Black (32%) students over two school years. The author interviewed senior students over two years in the class of the same teacher using the same curriculum. At the time of the study, missing from the literature were students' perspectives on the advantages and limitations of implementing critical pedagogy in the English classroom. The author argued that student perspectives play a vital role in shaping practices that affirmed their ways of knowing and the instruction that takes place in critical English classrooms should be shaped by the voices of students for whom classroom instruction is meant to benefit (Gordon, 2019).

Rather than assuming all students would benefit from critical pedagogy, the interview study examined students' perspectives on critical English Education in an effort to construct more inclusive knowledge about this instructional approach. The study found that students were highly capable of ascribing meaning to their experiences and naming the things that might advance their learning. Gordon

(2019) suggested that teachers and educators need to count students among those who have the knowledge and the position to shape what counts as education and that combining students' voices across studies will contribute to a fuller representation of what it means to teach equitably and towards critical ends in the classroom (Gordon, 2019). The study supports a rationale for including student voice as critical empirical evidence in refining anti-racist and trauma-informed pedagogical practices, not only in critiquing past experiences, but envisioning and naming better practices for the future.

Studies in this literature review and education more broadly considered the demographics of a learning space as an interacting variable. Ispa-Landa and Conwell (2015) conducted a comparative interview study to examine the school contexts that prompted Black students to classify schools in racial terms. The authors argued that school practices influenced the way students racially categorize academic achievement, and perceptions of demographics influenced the racial categorization of schools as collective spaces. At the time of the study, scholars had not identified the conditions under which students will or will not construct schools as racial spaces. The authors explained that this is because a thorough examination of the relationship between different school contexts and the racial classification of schools required a comparison of students from similar backgrounds attending schools with different features (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015). The authors found a unique opportunity to fill this gap in the research.

Through a district busing program called Diversify, one group of Black students attended an affluent suburban school with "white-dominated achievement hierarchies" (n=38). Other Black students from the same neighborhood (n=16) attended local, predominantly urban schools without "white-dominated achievement hierarchies" (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015). As all the interview participants were from the same neighborhood and had attended the same schools up until the high school busing program, this provided an opportunity for the researchers to examine the effects school environments had on the racialization of the school, self, and academic achievement. They also examined what meaning students assigned to categorizations such as "white" school and "Black" school. The authors found a stark difference in the ways in which Black students racialized each space as well as their perceptions of themselves in that space (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015).

Sociologist Barbara Combs (2022) put forward a theoretical framework for *Bodies Out of Place* in which she argued that in a white supremacist stratification system, Black bodies are on the bottom, and this racialization is so deeply ingrained in society that even subordinated groups can be complicit in maintaining and defending this order. Ispa-Landa and Conwell (2015) found that Black students attending the predominantly white Diversify school recognized that they were a body out of place in the school hierarchy while at the same time ascribing negative attributes to the local "Black school" they would have attended. They adopted the belief that proximity to whiteness provided educational opportunities that they would not have had at the "Black school." Students at the predominantly Black school, however, did not

assign racial categories to their school space or make correlations between the race of a school and the quality of education. They did not perceive proximity to whiteness as necessary for a school to offer quality education, and in fact, the findings suggested that it is the absence of whiteness that supported their perceptions of their own efficacy in achieving academically (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015).

This study, as well as Combs's theory of bodies out of place is significant to consider in my own findings and implications (Combs, 2022). I had identified literature used in the ELA classroom as well as teacher pedagogy as key interacting variables on a student's experience, but the demographics of a space and a student's perceived racialized location in that space emerged as a prominent influence on their experience.

The methodology Boylorn (2011) used to examine students' lived experiences demonstrated an awareness of classroom demographics as an interacting variable on student experience. A university professor (who was also the author) of a mixed-race cultural studies course initiated a focus group with Black students from the course to reflect on their experiences (Boylorn, 2011). The focus groups were held after the course had ended and in a non-academic location. This helped decenter some of the limitations seen in other studies where student voice was solicited in the academic space (classroom), in an academic context (assignment), and by the figure of authority in that space (teacher). The author found that the way the Black students talked about race and racism in the mixed-race class was different from the way they talked about race and racism outside of class with only other Black students and their Black professor (Boylorn, 2011).

This highlights the need for research that does not rely solely on what can be observed and heard in the ELA classroom as evidence of student experience. While students' lived experiences told in their own words is a source of legitimate knowledge all on its own, Boylorn (2011) demonstrated how much can be learned about anti-racist pedagogy by comparing the way Black students observably engage with topics of race and racism in class with the way they describe their experiences. The findings from the current study, however, demonstrate that students delineate and describe their desire to engage in topics of race and racism in the classroom and their choices not to do so in past experiences, juxtaposing and acknowledging the contradiction between the observable and the internalized.

Missing Voices. Several of the studies that did not include student voice in the study design highlighted this limitation in their findings. Williams et al. (2016) acknowledged that because they were unable to speak with participants directly to explore their interpretations of observed classroom interactions, they had to rely on subjective theoretical inferences. Thomas (2015) similarly noted that the conditions of the larger research study prevented interviews with individual students. The author explicitly stated that without student interviews to learn what they were thinking and what they meant during classroom discourse, it could not be known for certain if their words expressed what they were

truly thinking about the conversation.

Themes Across Findings and Implications

So far, I have provided an evaluation of the scholarship and implications for my own research through the lens of relevant theoretical frameworks and methodology. In the next section, I discuss the research findings and implications relative to two prominent themes that emerged across the scholarship: *race talk* and *safe spaces*.

Race Talk

Toni Morrison (1992) has said that "in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse" (p.9). Studies in this literature review utilized classroom spaces, and particularly ELA classrooms, as a setting and/or context to analyze the ways in which people talked about race. Race talk is broadly defined as public attempts to negotiate the complexity of the concept of race (Williams et al., 2016). Scholars in the field of education refined this definition to include risky dialogue, dilemmas, and conflicts that are inherent to talking about race and racism (Grinage, 2014; Sosa, 2020; Thomas, 2013, 2015; Williams et al., 2016). Classroom race talk occurs when students and educators exchange stories about the meanings and feelings associated with race and racism in their lives and can be especially tense in secondary English classrooms, where controversial literature is under study (Thomas, 2013; Williams et al., 2016). ELA classrooms can be the most highly contested site in the school curriculum because literature is bound up with discussions of identity and ideology; when teachers and students have contrasting ideologies about the curriculum, pedagogical practices, or race talk in the classroom, conflicts often occur (Thomas, 2013). When race discussions do occur in the ELA classroom, they often fail to acknowledge the unequal distribution of power, both socially and structurally, resulting in silencing or teacher-controlled boundaries about the topics that can be addressed (Sosa, 2020).

For these reasons, race talk was featured heavily in the literature, both as the explicit phenomena under study and in findings and implications throughout the research. The research analyzed student experiences when talking about race in the classroom, barriers to discussing race, teacher pedagogy as an interacting variable in race talk, how and when students bring up race, and the terms used when attempting to discuss race (Boylorn, 2011; Grinage 2014, 2019a, 2019b; Sassi & Thomas, 2015; Simpson et al., 2007; Sosa, 2020; Thomas, 2013, 2015; Williams et al., 2016). Students' insights on race talk in the classroom were often noted as being primary and authoritative sources of understanding, both in studies that included student voice and those that cited the lack of student voice as a limitation in a study. Findings relevant to *race talk* were discussed in relation to (1) Black students' responses and perceptions; (2) whiteness as an interacting variable; and (3) teachers' pedagogical maneuvers.

Classroom Race Talk and Black Students

The literature provided findings from both ethnographic and narrative inquiry research focused on

Black students and classroom discourse about race. Most of the research centered on observed tensions during race talk in the classroom and critiques of pedagogical approaches. Classroom observations suggested that Black students responded to race talk with either silence or evasion. Narrative inquiry into Black student perceptions provided insight into rationales for avoidance maneuvers during classroom race talk.

Race Talk in the Classroom is Silence. The most prominent feature of Black students' engagement with classroom race talk was silence and disengagement. This often occurred as a response to a statement made during race talk by peers or the teacher, or as an intentional self-preservation measure based on prior experience. Silence included physically shutting down by putting their head down or walking out (Grinage, 2019b), exiting the conversation once white students introduced a conflicting viewpoint that dismissed their lived experience (Thomas, 2013), or disengaging when teachers either evaded race talk or remained neutral during racist discourse (Grinage, 2019b; Sassi & Thomas, 2015).

Participants in the narrative inquiry conducted by Boylorn (2011) brought up the concept of "racial solidarity" during race talk which can be observed across studies. Black students said that they could tell when a white student was getting upset or tense when discussing race, and they collectively fall silent to avoid the anger being transferred to them if they respond (Boylorn, 2011). Grinage (2019b) observed that when one Black student put his head down to disengage from race talk, all talk in the class halted. Other researchers noticed that as soon as a white student said something problematic about race or made a comment that defended white supremacy (even unknowingly) all of the Black students in the class would go silent and did not talk for the remainder of the class, sometimes ceasing participation in any subsequent classroom dialogue, even when the teacher explicitly asked them for their opinion on the topic (Sassi & Thomas, 2015; Thomas, 2013, 2015). Transcripts of the classroom race talk included in the studies irrefutably demonstrated this pattern.

Black students also made preemptive decisions to remain silent during classroom race talk. Many students of color described a sense of internal conflict over the decision to engage in race talk because of the potential consequences of speaking up (Williams et al., 2016). They did not want to be seen as angry or emotional for fear it would confirm and justify stereotypes about Black people as violent (Boylorn, 2011). Speaking up could also prompt white students to say something racist, and students of color did not want to bear the burden of provoking racial trauma for themselves or the other Black students in the room (Grinage, 2019b).

Evading Race Talk. Researchers found that conversations about race that emerged from literature created moments of racial tension that were characterized by evasion on the part of Black students (Grinage, 2019b; Thomas, 2013, 2015). Thomas (2015) observed a teacher giving book talks to his mixed-race class so that they could choose the final book of the semester. When the teacher described

a book option that centered the experience of a bi-racial character struggling with his identity, students said they did not want to read another book about race, became visibly distracted or disruptive during the book talk, or stayed silent. When the teacher switched the topic to poverty, the Black students in the class became very vocal, sharing their opinions and even calling out their teacher on topics they disagreed with (Thomas, 2015). They sent a clear signal that they were willing and able to engage in opinionated classroom discourse, but not when it was about race. In the end, the class voted to read the white-authored canonical text *A Farewell to Arms* as the final book of the year over "another book about race" (Thomas, 2015). The researcher noted that not being able to interview students about this experience limited what could be learned about their reason for evading the text, a gap my study aims to address.

Other ways students evaded race talk was by remaining neutral on a topic or saying they did not know the answer to literary analysis questions having to do with race. Black students also evaded tense conversations or potential personal attacks by relegating discussions about race to the context of the text (Thomas, 2013). Students would redirect conversations about race back to the text rather than their own experience. They also took the opportunity to express strong opinions about what they considered racist actions by aiming their criticism at characters in the text (rather than making a broad statement of ideology) (Thomas, 2013). Researchers found that the academic burden of being Black in mixed classes with race talk prompted Black students to pretend not to care about every day or overt racism to avoid the topic altogether (Boylorn, 2011).

Who is This Race Talk For? In the studies that included student voice, Black students provided reasons why they avoided race talk in the classroom. Black students shared that race talk often resulted in tension in the classroom and they experienced this tension as a problem for which white students blamed them. They felt that white kids grew weary of talking about the plight of being Black, an experience they could not relate to or empathize with, causing an environment of discomfort, resentment, and guilt (Boylorn, 2011; Grinage, 2014; Simpson et al., 2007). Black students perceived that race talk was not for their benefit anyways; they did not need to be taught what racism was and the pressure to educate others on demand was an undesirable burden (Boylorn, 2011; Grinage, 2014; Simpson et al., 2007).

With no identifiable or productive outcome, Black students thought addressing race in the classroom was pointless and not worth the conflict (Boylorn, 2011; Simpson et al., 2007). The gap in knowledge about race between the Black students, white students, and white teachers made talking about race in the classroom too difficult (Simpson et al., 2007). Participants noted that they thought white students wanted to understand and were often trying to be helpful in conversations about race, but they often had entirely different views on what constitutes racism (Boylorn, 2011; Simpson et al., 2007).

Race Talk Successes. There were studies that demonstrated successful race talk in the classroom, and students were able to offer potential solutions to the barriers that prevented successful race talk when

asked for their insight. Across the studies, successful race talk in the classroom was not characterized by the absence of conflict, but by the consistent active engagement of Black students (Sassi & Thomas, 2015; Sosa, 2020). Sosa (2020) found that Black students actively engaged in race talk through resistance. Black students resisted being silenced by white supremacist discourse by refusing to decenter racism when analyzing literature, explicitly naming racism for what it is, sharing experiential knowledge in the context of interpreting literature, and by sharing their own stories of racism (Sosa, 2020). Black students would reject de-raced text interpretations by centering race and racism in their discussion contributions and using terms like "race" and "discrimination" over evasive or neutral language. Students would share their embodied stories of racism to disrupt interpretations that relegated racism to the past or denied the existence of white privilege (Sosa, 2020).

The findings from this study were derived from the researcher's ethnographic observations, so we do not have student insight into how and why they used these strategies of resistance to facilitate empowering race talk. However, the class in which this race-talk-success was observed shared an important feature with other studies that demonstrated race talk success: the demographics. The class in Sosa (2020) consisted of 29 students; a total of 24 students were Black, 3 were Latinx (and rarely participated due to limited English proficiency), and 2 were white. Across the literature, in mixed-race classes, Black students choose silence and evasion; in segregated spaces, Black students engaged in open and complex dialogues about race and racism (Boylorn, 2011; Brooks et al., 2022; Brooks & Hampton, 2005; Grinage, 2018; Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015).

The study conducted by Sassi and Thomas (2015) is perhaps the only empirical study in the literature review to offer insight into how race talk in mixed-race classrooms can be successful. The ELA classroom under study had a history of tense and unsuccessful discussions about race in the context of literature and the Black students had withdrawn their participation from classroom discussions (Sassi & Thomas, 2015). The author argued that the privilege walk activity the class participated in was pivotal in transforming the race talk in the class going forward. It gave the white students tangible evidence of white privilege and systemic racism and allowed the teacher to validate and state her alignment with the perspective and experiences of the Black students in the class (Sassi & Thomas, 2015). According to the study, the Black students engaged in race talk daily in the context of the next literature unit after the privilege walk. Again, missing from the findings are the student voices and perspectives of the experience to verify the author's interpretation. Another variable that had implications for these findings was that the next novel the students engaged in featured Native American racial and cultural identity. This may have offered a third space for students to discuss race outside of the tension of the Black/white binary of the classroom. This detail presents an interesting line of inquiry for future research; one way to facilitate productive race talk in mixed race classrooms may be to select texts that represent racial identities outside

of those present in the classroom, or to represent stigmatized identities from a place of joy and pride.

Black students confirmed in their interviews what other studies had posited: the way Black kids talked about race outside of class was completely different from the conversations they had in class about race. The topics teachers selected to center conversations about race in the classroom did not reflect the topics that were a part of Black students' everyday consciousness (Boylorn, 2011). Participants stated that Black kids know when everyday racism is happening in the classroom and they collectively grow silent but ready; if another Black student chooses to engage in a race-talk conflict, they automatically take up their argument no matter what it is. This "racial bonding" took precedence and denied them the opportunity to engage in complex discussions and debates about race with other Black students in the classroom. They would only do so in segregated groups because "Black people can't criticize each other in mixed company" (Boylorn, 2011, p.66). Participants in the studies expressed relief to have an all-Black space outside of class to finally talk about these issues because they could not do that with white kids there. Even though they said it wouldn't change the way they navigated race talk in the classroom, Black kids needed a space outside of class to talk about race and reflect on class experiences free from the white gaze (Boylorn, 2011).

Classroom Race Talk and Whiteness

The perspectives of Black students offered valuable insight into the ways they responded to and navigated race talk in the classroom. Researchers also provided findings from the analysis of the way whiteness was operationalized and created barriers during race talk. Grinage (2019b) referred to the methods used to interrupt critical race dialogues in the English classroom as "technologies of whiteness" (p. 128). White students often resisted learning by denying their culpability in perpetuating racism (white intellectual alibis), by claiming ignorance, or by seeking empathy (white fragility) (Grinage, 2019b; Simpson et al., 2007; Sosa, 2020). These technologies of whiteness enabled them to talk about race without considering themselves racist. White students escaped authentic considerations of the pervasiveness of racism through indifference or dismissal of Black students' lived experiences (Grinage 2014, 2019b). Much of the scholarship revealed that white students dominated conversations about race in the classroom, even when Black students silenced themselves in the discourse (Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Simpson et al., 2007; Thomas, 2013, 2015). It was only when conflict arose that white students claimed they couldn't speak about race for fear of offending Black students. It was also only after conflict that they felt attacked by references to white privilege and said they didn't think race was an appropriate topic for the classroom, even though they had previously dominated the conversation (Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Simpson et al., 2007; Sosa, 2020).

Evaluating the complexity of classroom race talk from the perspective of Black students and white students introduced a disheartening and seemingly insurmountable barrier. The white gaze and

racial trauma prompted Black students to disengage from race talk in the classroom. As a result, white perspectives were allowed to dominate and reproduce white supremacist perspectives about race. Therefore, when teachers introduced the topic of race in the classroom, even in the best-intentioned attempts at anti-racist pedagogy, they are actually just providing a platform for white supremacy to reproduce. We therefore run up against a dilemma when thinking about having conversations about race: If both staying silent about race as well as talking about it is equally damaging, how can we begin to have conversations about this issue? (Grinage, 2014). The literature offered a third lens through which to evaluate and conceptualize productive classroom race talk: teacher pedagogy.

Classroom Race Talk and Teacher Pedagogy

One of the biggest pedagogical errors teachers made when introducing race talk into the classroom was a pedagogical strategy of neutrality (Boler, 2004; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Falter & Kerkhoff, 2018; Grinage, 2019b; Johnson, 2017, 2018; Mosley, 2010). Effectively, teachers cannot be neutral and anti-racist at the same time (Grinage, 2019b). They must be willing to hear ignorant and racist talk and then take the opportunity to correct it (Boylorn, 2011).

The research also evaluated teacher pedagogy and race talk in terms of omitting and silencing. Students shared experiences where educators refused to teach or discuss the topic of race in their courses or used their position of authority to silence race dialogue. Further, Black students were frustrated that teachers failed to recognize their silence during race talk as a communication of their trauma and discomfort (Grinage, 2019a). Teachers actively silenced Black students during race talk, particularly when they emphasized a "correct" or expected response to literature (Williams et al., 2016). Empirical findings identified multiple instances in which Black students engaged in race talk in response to literature by offering up interpretations of the text or relating the text to their personal lives, only to have their competence and beliefs negatively evaluated by the teacher. Teachers often shifted the direction of race talk in ways that obscured Black students' interpretations of race-related content (Thomas, 2013, 2015; Williams et al., 2016).

Many students of color were taught by white teachers who may not have experience engaging diverse perspectives on the nature and consequences of race and racism in society; as a result the majority of the findings about classroom race talk and teacher pedagogy are inherently about *white* teacher pedagogy. This does not mean that white teachers should excuse themselves from attempts at anti-racist pedagogy. In fact, this research is essential to examine the specific ways in which those that consider themselves anti-racist actually come to develop this identity. Specifically, white activists can be helpful to study as an example of comprehending that there is more than one way to be white. White students do not often see white anti-racist role models (Grinage, 2014).

Grinage offered his perspective on race talk in the classroom to demonstrate that engaging in anti-racist pedagogy as a Black teacher is not without its own challenges (Grinage, 2014). When race was a topic of conversation in the classroom students perceived the teacher's Blackness as the prominent reason for engaging them in discussions about race. It was challenging for a Black teacher to disrupt students' colorblind ideologies because they thought race was only being discussed because of the teacher's personal agenda. When students do not talk about race in the ELA classrooms of their white teachers, this narrative is compounded. Grinage found it difficult as a Black teacher to challenge his white students' perspectives or address white supremacy, whereas white teachers may not feel hesitant to confront their white students. The author discovered that he had just as much of an unwillingness to make his white students uncomfortable as white teachers in the research did (Grinage, 2014).

Regardless of race, Thomas (2015) described teachers' approaches to talking about race as falling into one of three categories: (a) apprehensive and authorized, (b) incidental and ill-informed, or (c) sustained and strategic. These categories can be used to evaluate the teacher role in race talk across the research. Students offered their perspectives on the ways teacher authority can be a barrier to productive race talk. Research participants pointed out that in the classes where students had knowledge and/or experience that instructors did not have, the instructor was often threatened by that knowledge, and in turn, threatened by the student (Simpson et al., 2007). There was also tension created by the power dynamic inherent to a teacher/student relationship. One of the first and most-often mentioned issues in terms of barriers to discussing race was the issue of a student's grades and the tension between earning a grade and voicing a contradictory opinion (Simpson et al., 2007). This aligned with earlier critiques that student voice solicited by the instructor through a classroom assignment may be productive, but perhaps not completely authentic representations of student voice. The literature suggested the importance of grading students based on their process for thinking, such as listening to others, considering various perspectives, and making connections between theories/concepts, rather than *what* they think or their personal opinions (Simpson et al., 2007, Thomas, 2013).

Power sharing was found to be a method for successful race talk. Power sharing in the classroom included acknowledging multiple viewpoints, providing space for the evaluation of different perspectives and the chance to be heard. Further, teachers must validate students' experiences, demonstrate that they understand their perspective, and show genuine investment in students as sources of knowledge (Grinage, 2014; Simpson et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2017).

Often the teacher's disposition towards race talk seemed incidental or ill-informed as suggested by Thomas (2015). Talk about race was superficial or the teacher showed discomfort when the topic of race was brought up (Boylorn, 2011; Simpson et al., 2007). Empirical studies demonstrated through student voice and ethnographic observation that shifts can be made towards successful and sustained

teacher pedagogy in relation to race talk. Students said that instructors can construct classroom environments where race talk can occur by first laying out parameters and guidelines for class content and discussion. Teachers may need to take the time to mentor their students to become proficient in productive race talk and work together to come up with "routines of agreement" if conflict does arise (Thomas, 2013). Routines of agreement require that the teacher is attuned to and follows students' lead during classroom discourse; examples from the studies included only talking about race in the context of the text (Williams et al., 2017) and allowing students to select classroom texts that shift away from narratives of racism and racial trauma when needed (Martin, 2014; Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Thomas, 2015). Students wanted instructors to make clear their reasons for addressing race and the significance to course content (Simpson et al., 2007).

Scholarship in the field demonstrated that race talk in the classroom is inevitable and necessary, particularly in an anti-racist ELA classroom curriculum, but not without complex challenges. The literature provided explicit evidence through student-voiced lived experiences that successful anti-racist pedagogy for Black students cannot be evaluated through observation alone. Each student's personal experience and perception is part of an immense story of anti-racist and trauma-informed literacy that scholarship is only just beginning to hear. My study is intentionally positioned to learn from student lived experience and attend to the gaps in narrative inquiry as a methodology in secondary English Education research.

Safe Spaces

Just as frequent as *race talk*, and often hand in hand, *safe spaces* emerged as a theme in the literature, both as the phenomena under study and in the findings and implications. In research and educator spaces there has been much discussion of the goal of maintaining a classroom as a 'safe space' in which to learn (Jolly, 2011). In the context of the literature in this review this could apply to the content of taught texts, trauma-informed practices, or productive spaces for talking about race. The scholarship offered several definitions and perspectives on what makes a classroom or discourse a *safe space* and whether that should be a goal in anti-racist literature instruction.

Defining Safe Space

The definition of safe space has taken on different meaning across time and contexts, from being a place like-minded people could meet and share experiences, to spaces where diverse ideas could be shared productively, to current conceptualizations of safe space pedagogies where students are protected emotionally and intellectually from controversial issues in the classroom (Flenser, 2019). Researchers in the field of anti-racist pedagogy and trauma-informed pedagogy have pushed back against this latest view of safe space, recognizing that for certain pedagogical goals, some students are going to be "unsafe" in the classroom (Leverette, 2022; Menakem, 2021). Educators and students need to understand the

difference between discomfort and danger when it comes to exploring potentially tense topics (Leverette, 2022). The questions remain: Who are we trying to keep safe and what do we think they need to be kept safe from? (Jolly, 2011).

Safe for Who?

Researchers have demonstrated that even in anti-racist pedagogy, safe spaces often mean safe spaces for white students. Bedford and Shaffer (2023) assigned Black-authored YA literature to their white PSTs as a safe space for them to examine their own racial identity, claiming literature acted as a safe space to discuss challenging topics students may have been previously blind to. The challenging topic at hand was the existence of contemporary racism in the lives of young adults. What is missing from the authors' implications is what an unsafe space to learn about racism would have been and why that unsafe space would have been less productive. It is significant to note that even though the pedagogical framework explicitly taught the tenets of CRT and analyzed them through literature, the white PSTs still did not fully understand them or evolve from their colorblind ideologies.

While the space may have been *safe*, it was not particularly effective. The authors stated purpose of the study was to demonstrate how a pedagogical approach, using the key tenets of CRT, could provide teachers with a tangible way to work toward safer, anti-racist spaces (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023**).** Based on the findings of the study, these safe spaces were meant for students that share the same white racial identity as the PSTs and therefore needed the same protection from knowledge of the existence of racism (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023).

Genuine discussions about race are compromised in the name of maintaining safety for white students and the "white gaze acts as a pedagogical method of surveillance" (Grinage, 2014, p. 92). The theoretical and empirical studies in this literature set have demonstrated that seemingly safe spaces for race talk become hostile for students of color who partake in them (Grinage, 2014; Boylorn, 2011; Simpson et al. 2007).

Literary and Literal Safe Spaces

Literature was identified as a safe space to explore the topic of race and racism in several studies, including trauma novels with representations of racial violence (Brooks et al., 2022; Brooks & Hampton, 2005; Grinage, 2018). Using books to study the complexity of racism was safer than encountering racism first-hand and may be necessary in schools where books provide the only exposure to racial diversity (Brooks et al., 2022; Brooks & Hampton, 2005). Scholarly literature was used as a safe space for teachers, particularly in a time of banned and mandated curricula and topics. Published scholarship served as an authoritative proxy when there was a fear of disclosure of a teacher's own personal ideologies (McCardle, 2017). Safe spaces also referred to the literal spaces and places where students could explore topics of

race and racism. In the literature included in this review, literal safe spaces exclusively meant outside of the school or classroom, and in monoracial (Black) settings.

Safe to be Unsafe

The fact that literal safe spaces did not occur in schools supports the theory that classrooms are not inherently safe spaces. As the primary facilitators of interactions in classrooms, teachers can exert a strong influence on students' perceptions of psychological safety. Williams et al. (2016) described psychological safety as the sense that one's identity, perspectives, and contributions are valuable, despite the experience or possibility of discomfort or harm within a learning setting. My proposed study and the scholars in this literature review recognize that in the framework of anti-racist and trauma-informed pedagogy, this means the psychological safety of *Black* students, both in the exposure to racial trauma through literature, and through classroom discourse about race, mediated by teacher pedagogy.

Educators can foster a sense of psychological safety for Black students by shifting out of neutral and embracing an affirmative action pedagogy that privileges marginalized voices by creating a space that allows, uniquely, the unheard to be heard (Boler, 2004; Falter, 2018; Grinage, 2014). Without the technologies of whiteness such as white intellectual alibis, Black students are less inclined to put themselves in harm's way and risk the provocation of racial trauma within the anti-racist project. However, Grinage (2019a, 2019b) argued that facing racial injury is a necessary component of anti-racism and can create moments of healing for Black students. Confrontations may occur but a pedagogy of discomfort is also necessary for teachers to improve their ability to teach about traumatic subjects (Grinage, 2019b). In the anti-racist classroom, safety must be redefined to include a location where students can safely feel unsafe and teachers must be just as willing as students to arrive at uncomfortable locations (Grinage, 2014).

Boler (2014) argued that the obligation of educators is not to guarantee a space that is free from hostility, but rather to challenge oneself and students to critically analyze any statement made in a classroom, especially statements that are rooted in dominant ideological values. Because racism is irrational classroom discussions cannot rely on rational exchanges; teachers and students need to make room for the emotional investments, and even traumatic emotions, that occur when discussing race (Boler, 2014; Grinage, 2014). The classroom space is one of the few opportunities where speakers can be held accountable for offensive speech and beliefs, where the targets of racism can speak back and develop critical agency, and students can learn to come to grips with the strong emotions that come with discussing race (Boler, 2014; Grinage, 2014).

Rather than creating *safe spaces*, educators should create "unreal" spaces that do not mirror the society of the outside world. Both white students and students of color can then learn in solidarity to act against racial oppression and experience the psychological safety to take intellectual and social risks

(Boler, 2014; Grinage, 2014; Williams et al., 2016). As with the studies that examined the construct of *race talk* in the classroom, insight into participants' subjective experiences, including systematic investigation of their internal psychological states, will help us to better explicate the interrelations of individual factors (e.g., positive racial identity) and setting level factors (e.g., facilitation of race talk) on psychological safety and human development (Williams et al., 2016). At the time of this literature review, there were no empirical studies that examined implementations of "unreal" spaces of affirmative action pedagogy or student's experiences in safe spaces for unsafe learning.

Chapter 2 Summary

The purpose of this review was to evaluate the framing and efficacy of theories and methodologies in existing anti-racist education research. It is clear from the research reviewed that Critical Race Theory provided a framework for diverse research goals and methods. Racial Trauma Theory has yet to find a place in English Education research, despite research findings that provide a rationale for its inclusion. While examples of potential theoretical frameworks for anti-racist and trauma-informed education research are well established in the literature, missing from the scholarship are empirical studies to evaluate and refine theory into practice. Although I have pointed out gaps in the research in my review of the literature, filling a gap is not a rationale for research in and of itself. Supporting the rationale for my proposed study are the calls for further interdisciplinary research from scholars in the field (Carello & Butler, 2014; Jolly, 2011; Quiros et al., 2020). My study stands to benefit both students in ELA classrooms and scholars in the field of English Education and trauma studies.

The research showed that teachers fall short of anti-racist pedagogy in English Education, even when that is their intention, due to a fear of tense topics and a counterintuitive commitment to white authored canonical texts. Teachers are mistaking a passive approach to race (such as including Black authored texts or including topics of race in their curriculum) for anti-racist pedagogy that explicitly calls out overt and covert racial structures in and out of the literature. What is still missing from the scholarship, and what my work intends to address, is a theoretical lens that considers how this is a form of racial trauma, and a responsive pedagogical framework for explicitly guiding teachers in an anti-racist trauma-informed literacy.

Trauma narratives that are central to or embedded in taught texts can provide healing and transformation for students when coupled with a trauma-informed pedagogy that reduces harm and promotes healing. Specifically, when we consider Black authored narratives of traumatic Black lived experiences, educators can honor these testimonies by including them in their classroom discourse. Including Black authored texts in the curriculum, even when they require bearing witness to Black trauma, is an essential component to anti-racist pedagogy, but it is equally essential that the reading is coupled with trauma-informed practices. Understanding both CRT and Racial Trauma Theory can

provide a rationale for including these narratives and guide educators in providing space for the victims of trauma to have control of their relationship to the story.

Narrative inquiry is an essential but missing feature of the field. The most significant contribution to the existing literature my study provides is the storied experiences of Black students told in their own voices. The knowledge participants provide informs not only my current work but can be a lens through which to evaluate past theoretical and empirical studies and provide new visions for the future.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Narrative inquiry studies that aim to gain insight into student participant's experiential knowledge are an essential but missing feature in the field (Toliver, 2022). Language is both interpretive and fluid, as are experiences and perceptions (Thomas, 2013, 2015; Williams et al., 2016). Therefore, researchers cannot assume that individuals will experience or interpret racism or trauma in a way that can be operationalized, or that individual understandings of key terms can be generalized (Carello & Butler, 2014; Quiros et al., 2020). Before a responsive pedagogical framework can be proposed, there must be an investigation into the ways these dynamics are understood and interpreted by individuals in context (Boylorn, 2020; Simpson et al., 2007). For this reason, Endarkened Storywork and Black Counter/Storytelling as a methodology and onto-epistemological commitment inform my study methods and analytical framework (Toliver, 2022).

Findings from the literature suggest that anti-racist and trauma-informed pedagogy are inextricably linked and there is a need to center Black student's lived experiences and voices as a source of epistemological knowledge in this context. Emerging theoretical scholarship in the field of trauma called for interdisciplinary empirical studies at the intersection of education, race, and trauma; the narrative inquiry aspect of my study stands to benefit research across multiple disciplines (McGhee & Stovall, 2015; Quiros et al., 2020).

Research Question

Alignment with Endarkened Storywork requires research methods that allow participants to consider anti-blackness and racial trauma if they choose to, but are not required to (Toliver, 2022). Therefore, my research question is intentionally worded to empower and emancipate both storytellers and story listeners. The research questions guiding the study and rationale for Endarkened Storywork as my methodology are as follows:

RQ: How do Black students describe and understand their experiences engaging in taught texts and teacher pedagogy in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms?

SRQ: How can CRT and Racial Trauma Theory contribute to an analytical and responsive framework for anti-racist pedagogy?

Researcher Identities, Philosophies, and Methodological Considerations

A description of my methodological commitments is supported by rationale situated in theory, scholarship, and the aim of the study. To make explicit the values and perspectives that shaped the methodological commitments of the study, I first describe the imaginative labor and reflexive projects I navigated to comprehend my researcher positionality and refine my methodology (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Holmes, 2020; Lapum, 2021). Through a transparent and authentic representation of the imaginative labor I engaged in to make my researcher identity legible, I both *write* and *write myself* to

disclose, interrogate, and critique my motives and methods and engage deeply with the topic and community I am committed to (Freeman, 1999; McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021).

The next sections are dedicated to an explicit exploration of identity and positionality. I map myself in the research through a narrative reconstruction of my personal racialized identity, teacher identity, and researcher positionality. Throughout the description of my methodological commitments, I aim to make visible and explicit the ways in which the narrative reconstruction of my researcher identity is meaningful in the context of the research. I conclude the discussion of identity and positionality by presenting a reflexive framework I constructed for the purposes of this research that is grounded in the findings of my self-study, accidental autoethnography, and principles of anti-racist and trauma-reducing research.

Revising Positionality through Rigorous Sight

I knew that anti-racist and trauma-informed pedagogy were going to be the focus of my research endeavors before I left my job working in a high school as an ELA teacher and reading specialist. This was the work I had been engaging in directly with students for eleven years at a predominantly Black secondary school. As I transitioned from an educator to an education researcher, I considered how I would continue to engage in anti-racist pedagogy in a way that was for and about the communities I love. This methodology for this study emerged from ongoing engagement in scholarship and research projects alongside constant and rigorous reflexivity. This work required a methodology that privileged the knowledges of Black students and did not mute their stories behind my voice as the researcher.

I am often racialized as white in monoracial spaces and whiteness is a significant interacting variable in anti-racist work. I prioritized methodologies intended to mitigate the ways in which my perspectives and interpretations might misrepresent the meaning making of participants. Ultimately my study is built on the premise that when teachers lack the experience and efficacy to navigate topics of race and racism in the classroom, they need an anti-racist pedagogical framework to guide instruction. I considered the same premise in my research. My experiences and subjective perspectives shape the study; regardless of my intentions, the decisions I make will affect the efficacy of the research as an anti-racist project. Endarkened Storywork aligned with the goals of the study and provided a framework to guide anti-racist research methodology, potentially highlighting and filling in gaps, just as I hope the outcome of this research will do for teachers.

Personal Identity, Culture, and *Conocimiento*

To understand my researcher positionality, I engaged in a narrative reconstruction of my internalized racial identity. Racial identity is a social construction, developed relationally between people, with boundaries that are subjective and fluid for some people across contexts (Wagner, 2015). I was raised in a monoculture as an insider to that monoculture with very limited proximity to whiteness. I grew

up in the Rio Grande Valley on the fluid border of Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Tamaulipas, known as the Matamoros-Brownsville Metropolitan Area. Brownsville has a predominantly (leaning towards exclusively) Hispanic population, which at 94% is the third-highest proportion of Hispanic Americans of any city in the U.S. outside of Puerto Rico. 89% of the population in Brownsville speaks Spanish as their first language and the primary language spoken in their home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

I grew up bilingual, but my mother has said that as a child I understood English when it was spoken to me but usually expressed myself in Spanish. One of my recurrent early childhood memories is talking to my mother and her responding that I was mixing English and Spanish words together, and not knowing what she meant. I did not have a framework to understand my words as anything other than one cohesive language, nor did I have the skills to disarticulate them if I wanted to. Free from an awareness of socially constructed monolinguistic categories that would pry my words apart, I existed in a third space where my way of knowing and communicating was undeniably one cohesive language (Anzaldúa, 1984; Bhabha, 1994).

Scholars have described *third space* as a site where cultural meaning and representation are not fixed, where individuals extend beyond binary forms, and lived experiences are continuously shifting and examined as other ways of being (Anzaldúa, 1984; Bhabha, 1994, 1996). Anzaldúa and Keating (2002) described the relationship between third space and identity as *conocimientos*, or knowledges, as an awakening of the human mind to combat systems established to force us to think in certain ways. My early experience of language hybridity and third space identity is a theme that echoes throughout my racialized and researcher *conocimiento*.

I am aware that monoracial categories of dominant society reinforce the idea that the pigment of my skin inherently embodies existing ideologies of race. Borderline cultures of hybridity, however, are a powerful third space that subvert the authority of the dominant discourse (Bolatagici, 2004). In this third space I claim the agency to name my *conocimientos* and to reject a socially constructed identity that is fixed and determined by my physical appearance. My Hispanic identity, my white body, and my researcher identity can exist cohesively in a liminal space where my way of knowing does not fit into and cannot be defined by the narrow-racialized spaces of white supremacy.

Shared Space

I spent over a decade as an educator in secondary ELA classrooms with Black students where shared experiences were shaped by taught texts and personal pedagogy, the context in which I precisely and intentionally situate my inquiry. What comes to matter here, and the purpose of the study, is how individuals experience this context and how our individual perspectives shape our interpretation and understanding of the experience. This includes intersecting positions of identity and power such as

teacher, student, racialization, demographics of the classroom, and prior experiences. The explicit purpose of the study is to explore the different ways individual students experience this context and to understand their personal perceptions of the interacting variables.

My positionality in this respect is reflected in my methods of narrative inquiry and storywork alignments. The significance of narrative inquiry and endarkened epistemology is not just the power of storytelling "but the power of being able to tell your own story and not allowing someone else to frame the world but to do that framing for yourself" (Combs, 2022, p. 2; McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). As I will discuss later in the description of my interview protocol, I invited participants to tell stories about their experiences as their whole selves– with reading, with ELA class, with teachers– as students and as whole people with intersecting identities. I do not ask interview questions that qualify or commodify race as the singular aspect of their identity that qualifies them as an authoritative source of knowledge, nor do I ask them to understand their experiences only as they pertain to Blackness or anti-Blackness (Freedman, 2020). To do so would replicate the very practices that I aim to critique in the ELA classroom and literature.

The dynamic of the narrative inquiry space is not one where I am inviting Black students to "teach me" a story about race and racism; it is one where participants are invited to tell a story about themselves. Participants can choose to tell stories of joy, stories of pain, and story their identity through their own naming. The role place and cultural experiences played in my own identity formation and knowledges reinforced my commitment to this methodological approach and the rejection of labels such as insider and outsider that privilege race above shared experiences.

The Intersection of Racialization and Internalized Identity

As an anti-racist researcher whose work exists within and because of the Black/white binary of a racist society, I will always engage in intentional reflexivity and vigilant consideration of my white body privilege as a critical attribute of the work. As normalized as white supremacy aims to appear, my *conocimiento* is a powerful third space where identity is productive, not merely reflective and provokes new possibility (Anzaldúa, 1984; Bhabha, 1994; Bolatagici, 2004; Meredith, 1998). Third space identities interrupt, interrogate, and challenge established categorizations of power and oppression and create an affirmative between space to explore new forms of cultural meaning "like borderlands among Mexico and the U.S." (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 64; Bhabha, 1994).

Being raised in a monoculture significantly shaped my perspectives about racial dynamics and my understanding has been dynamic over time from adolescents to now. My intended participants are teenagers in high school. They no doubt have complex, personal, and brilliant insights about racism and racial dynamics based on their family, community, and personal experiences, but their perspectives are not prescribed or universal. It is imperative as a researcher that I understand the deeply embedded

sociohistorical hierarchies of race, power, and oppression that shape the ways in which participants engage in storywork and I engage responsibly as story listener. I cannot, however, intentionally position myself in the work in a way that is responsive to individual and undisclosed ideologies, nor should participants be obligated to disclose such ideologies. I hope the study methodology can offer a third space where both researcher and participants can explore their identities and construct perceptions of their experiences free from the narrow racial ideologies of dominant discourse.

Because my specific upbringing lacked exposure to diverse racial dynamics, much of my current positionality in anti-racist research can be attributed to my experiences in the classroom as an educator. This phase of learning and understanding race and racism was influenced by my lack of indoctrination into a culture where racial disparities were the norm and therefore rendered invisible. My experiences as a teacher shaped my understanding of white body privilege and influenced my current epistemological values and thus form a significant foundation for my research design.

Disrupting Whiteness

When conceptualizing the current study, I considered the veritable research question: *What counts as anti-racist education for Black students?* I arrived at the methodological decision that the perceptions and experiences of Black students, and only their perceptions and experiences, were needed to answer this question. Including whiteness as a critical attribute of the study was not necessary and potentially unproductive. White supremacy and privilege as an ideology is violent and dismissive towards Black bodies that are perceived as out of place and seeks to oppressively impact their lived experiences even when they have no material effect on those who align with whiteness (Combs, 2022). I am not only motivated to reject a racialized identity that I do not identify with, but I am also motivated to deprioritize a racialized identity that has negative material effects on others. This investment shaped the methodology in my proposed work.

The Study Situated in Personal Pedagogy

The rationale for my proposed study is grounded in the premise that when teachers incorporate Black-authored texts into the otherwise white-dominated ELA curriculum, they often select Black-authored Young Adult Literature (YAL) titles that singularly situate the Black experience in trauma (societal, racial, violence, oppression). In addition, teachers often fail to acknowledge the racial trauma present in canonical texts (Franzak & Noll, 2006; Freedman, 2020; Grinage, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Thomas, 2015; Toliver, 2022). This is, ultimately, a problematic decision with far-reaching repercussions, as teachers who neglect to explicitly attend to representations of racial trauma in course texts can further anti-Black narratives and (re)traumatize students who engage with the literature, activities, and classroom dialogues (Brown & Brown, 2010; Carello & Butler, 2014; Freedman, 2020; Quiros et al., 2020; Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Toliver 2020, 2022). Further, Black representation in taught literature often fails to extend

beyond a singular narrative of racism and trauma; missing from the ELA curriculum are narratives of joy, pride, agency, imagination, and rebellion (Ambrosia et al., 2021; Love, 2019; Martin, 2014; Toliver, 2018, 2020, 2022).

My awareness and perception of this trend in ELA curriculum and pedagogy comes in part from the juxtaposition of my personal experience as an ELA teacher at a predominantly Black high school against the mainstream curriculum and pedagogy in schools that are racially diverse. My arrival at this study was shaped by my personal pedagogical and epistemological commitments.

I began my teaching career at a high school that reported student racial demographics at over 90% Black, according to the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) school profile, and I worked exclusively at this school for the duration of my teaching career. The most recently published (2021-2022) TDOE school profile for this high school reported the percentage of students who identified as Black or Black and Hispanic as 91% (84% identified as Black only). This informed the ways in which Black authored texts were incorporated into the curriculum as well as the ways in which they were positioned. A review of the literature suggested that teachers often incorporate Black-authored texts in the ELA curriculum as a catalyst for teaching about race and racism (Grinage, 2019b; Martin, 2014; Sosa, 2020; Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2015; Williams et al., 2016).

Empirical studies into the lived experiences and perceptions of Black students, however, found that for Black students, race talk anchored in literature often resulted in tension in the classroom. Black students perceived that race talk was not for their benefit anyways; they did not need to be taught what racism was and the pressure to educate others on demand was an undesirable burden (Boylorn, 2011; Grinage, 2014; Simpson et al., 2007). With no identifiable or productive outcome, Black students thought addressing race in the classroom was pointless and not worth the conflict (Boylorn, 2011; Simpson et al., 2007). The gap in knowledge about race between the Black students, white students, and white teachers made talking about race in the classroom too difficult (Simpson et al., 2007). Participants noted that they thought white students wanted to understand and were often trying to be helpful in conversations about race, but they often had entirely different views on what constitutes racism (Boylorn, 2011; Simpson et al., 2007).

I juxtapose these findings from the scholarship with my own personal experience as a teacher. My personal pedagogy was not shaped by the added complexities of white students. The Black-authored texts I included in the curriculum were not additive in nature. The absence of Black-authored texts in the mainstream curriculum is glaringly obvious when teaching a class of all Black students. Most of the texts I used to anchor skills instruction were Black authored, as were the novels. Because of my pedagogical commitment to student choice, many of the texts we read were selected by the students themselves. In response to a classroom of all-Black students I did not select Black-authored texts based solely on the

merits of facilitating conversations about race and racism. There were often no white students in my class to incite some sort of teacher obligation to build racial awareness or empathy through a literary representation of racism (Leverette, 2022). This positioning of literature in my classroom resulted in literature that was not singularly situated in Black violence and racism.

Further, conversations about Black-authored texts and characters were not exclusively centered on race. Students talked about race, but we also talked about other aspects of characters and texts as thoroughly as mainstream curriculum explores white authored text. The characters experienced conflicts but their conflicts were not singularly the result of having a Black body in a racist world. The characters also experienced joy, growth, and love. Black-authored literature and positioning these texts as anchors for ELA skill instruction was normalized in my classroom. Blackness was normalized in my classroom.

Why This Work: From Teacher to Researcher

My contextualized personal pedagogy is significant to the proposed study because it demonstrates the degree to which racial demographics of the classroom shaped my intuition, improvisations, and pedagogy. The unique racial demographics of my classroom where Blackness was the norm and normalized rendered whiteness and anti-blackness in the standard ELA curriculum hyper visible. It also highlighted the difference between anti-racist pedagogy and text selection in a classroom where the learning of Black students was prioritized and the "anti-racist pedagogy" and text selection in diverse classrooms where the learning of white students was prioritized (Boylorn, 2011; Grinage, 2014; Leverette, 2022).

Although my personal pedagogy and experiences as an ELA teacher are the reasons I arrived at my current inquiry, my underlying epistemological values shape the methodology. I value students as the experts of their own experiences and learning. There is one moment that resonates as the bridge from my teacher positionality to my current study, and had it not occurred I may not have arrived at this specific research question. Halfway through my tenure at the high school where I worked, I transitioned from classroom teacher to Literacy and Intervention Specialist. I spent a significant amount of time in the ELA classrooms, and this moment occurred while I was working in one of the ELA teacher's room. The teacher had already read *All American Boys* (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015) and *How it Went Down* (Magoon, 2014) with the class that semester. The teacher let the class know that they would soon be reading *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2017). A student asked, "Why do we always have to read about Black kids getting shot?"

It was a great question, and one I couldn't let go of. During the 2019-2020 school year, my last year at this high school before I left to pursue my Ph.D., six students and two former students were murdered. One of the students was murdered by police officers inside of the school, right outside the stairwell of my classroom. Our students would come to ELA class and read about Black kids getting shot.

They would turn on the news or go on social media and hear about Black kids getting shot. They would go home, and Black kids—their friends, family, and classmates-- were getting shot. They came to school and got shot.

So why do we always have to read about Black kids getting shot?

At the end of that school year, the district decided the school needed a hard reset and moved the administrators to other schools in the district. Many of the teachers disagreed with this decision and left as well. I thought about the new teachers who would take their place in the ELA classrooms, not knowing the shared experience we had been through the year before. I thought about a new teacher coming into an all-Black classroom with an empty desk in memory of a student who was murdered while leaving school and deciding to "teach" the students about the realities of racial violence through a text like *The Hate U Give*. It is not that I assumed it was an unequivocable fact that teachers would reproduce racist narratives and trauma, but the possibility was enough to incite action.

I came to the Teacher Education Ph.D. program at UT for the express purpose of exploring this research question. I carried it inside me; I brought it with me. One of the reasons I do not dedicate significant focus and space to exploring whiteness in this study is because of how significant my actual shared, lived experiences with Black students were in motivating this work. When I interrogate my purpose and investment in engaging in this project of anti-racist and trauma informed pedagogy, the only answer that resonates as meaningful is *how could I not?*

Liminal Identities in Academia

There has been a recent emergence of dissertations authored by graduate students with liminal identities, specifically those who identify as multi-racial and Latinx but are racialized as white in academic spaces. I found strong correlations to my own experience, and this has shaped the way I position participants in the methodological consideration of my study. I have had similar experiences to those with liminal identities in academia when presenting my research. I am consistently met with questions focused exclusively on my racialized identity and positionality, like a child being told I was mixing my English and Spanish words together, without acknowledgment of the substance of the research I was communicating. I have been asked to focus on the ways my perceived identity is a barrier that creates difference and isolation from human connection with participants. These experiences that I share with other emerging scholars further aligns with the commitments of Endarkened Storywork and validates my trauma-informed approach to participant positioning. In my interview protocol, I do not request that participants share experiences within the framing of race or trauma. They can share stories of anti-Blackness if they choose to, but this approach ensures they are free to share and/or withhold stories at their discretion and disclose the significance of their racial identity within the story only if they do so voluntarily and free from coded prompting (Combs, 2022; Toliver, 2022).

Massoud (2022) suggested that scholars should communicate positionality by recording privileges and vulnerabilities throughout their research and writing processes. “Regularly considering positionality could help in framing theoretical contributions, which may render positionality statements a more structured and integrated part of our methods” (Massoud, 2022, p. 86). He hoped that this approach to integrating disclosure of positionality into the written methodology would prevent experiences of academic trauma for those with liminal identities and experiences that do not fit with monoracial categories and constructions of identity. To dismantle systems of privilege and oppression based on monoracial construction of race, all individuals must have access to third space sites of identity conceptualization. My commitment to anti-racist and trauma-informed research methods with participants is in alignment with this approach to positionality (Massoud, 2022). I aimed to communicate to participants that their experiences and knowledge are of value independent from social constructions of race through methods that opened up a third space for identity disclosure and understanding.

Ethnicity, Race, and the Politics of Belonging

In addition to not experiencing race-based oppression, the nature of my racial identity as flexible across contexts is itself a privilege. I am not directly affected by the racially motivated prejudice experienced by those whose appearance does not permit them to choose how and when they disclose their racial identity or those who cannot gain access to white privilege through the performance of race work (Renteria, 2015). I can engage in efforts to dismantle and reject my white body privilege, but people of color who are racialized as oppressed in society based on their skin cannot simply choose to not identify as a person of color and avoid racial discrimination. For this reason, I find it necessary, rather than optional, to assert my Hispanic identity, despite my connections to white body privilege.

I would never claim that my experience is in any way similar to the unique experience of being Black in America. I have, however been witness to the racial oppression of others around me, so I argue that this is a political perspective that I can speak to even if it is not a personal experience. Unlike privilege, oppression is not invisible. Anyone who claims that they have not witnessed the experience of oppression and therefore cannot speak to it are engaging in white alibi and ignorance (Grinage, 2019b). Those who choose to speak out against racism from a political perspective should not accept the imposition of socially constructed barriers to anti-racist work, particularly when those barriers reinforce white supremacy.

The Paradox of Deconstructing Whiteness

The perception of others is not a contributing factor to the way I identify and understand my internalized racial identity. However, this becomes complicated in the context of research with minoritized populations. On one hand, I hold my internalized identity intact, but the perceptions of others, specifically the perception of whiteness, is significant to this work. Acknowledging that others, including

research participants, might racialize me as white was not an insignificant interacting variable in this work. I had to paradoxically first reflect from a position of whiteness so that I could acknowledge the power lines between myself, my participants, and the audience while simultaneously deconstructing that conceptualization of whiteness. I had to impose a barrier of fabricated identity on myself so that I could then dismantle it methodologically. Although this was a traumatic and frustrating exercise in self-study, it strengthened my alignments to trauma-reducing research methods and my commitment to individual agency in self-identification, disclosure, and meaning making.

The barriers imposed on both myself and participants because of racialized identity originate from the same source: white supremacy. Prioritizing the deconstruction of whiteness, especially in research where neither the researcher nor participants are white, reifies the social construction of its power. What mitigates this reluctance is my belief that society needs more models of white activism (Grinage, 2019). I presented an iteration of this study at the 2023 International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. Both white and Black attendees encouraged me to disclose my internalized identities and ideologies alongside my methodological maneuvers in anti-racist research to serve as a model for other white and white bodied researchers who want to engage in this work. If I am going to receive the privilege of whiteness, then I can engage in the emotional labor of understanding it and deconstructing in. If I do not, I am complicit in maintaining its invisibility.

I will continue to reflect on how I can be the most non-oppressive and anti-racist person in these spaces with the awareness that I am perceived as white. That said, I would not be engaging in anti-racist and trauma informed research if I did not feel there was validity or value in my perspective, regardless of whether I perceive myself as Hispanic or whether others perceive me to be white. I reflect this positioning in my work with Black student participants. Their perspectives are valid and valuable because they have experiential insight, *and not just about being Black*. If whiteness only serves to challenge my internalized identity or prevent me from doing the work I am committed to doing ethically and well, then I am inclined to limit its imposition on the participant's stories.

My Hispanic identity and experiences with racialization play a pivotal role in my politics, specifically regarding anti-racist pedagogy and racial trauma. These political loyalties involve rejecting whiteness and its privileges and critically engaging in education and organizing around racial justice (Renteria, 2015; Wagner, 2020). I will continue to "stand with those for whom race is not optional and who are subject to palpable structural discrimination" (Renteria, 2015, p. 106). I do not view whiteness as a culture but a reflection of privilege that exists for no reason other than to defend it (Anton, 2020; Renteria, 2015; Rodriquez, 2020). Without the privileges attached to it, white skin would have no social significance and whiteness would be understood as simply a proxy for racist attitudes, privilege, and

ignorance, “an unmarked category against which difference is constructed” (Lipsitz, 2013, p. 78; see also Matias, 2016; Renteria, 2015).

Researchers of social identities described the paradox of both seeking to deconstruct notions of biological identity (e.g., race, gender) while at the same time reifying these same identities through their recognition and use in academic literature (Renteria, 2015; Wagner, 2020). Whiteness can only exist with its counterpart, so the attention paid to understanding and deconstructing whiteness simultaneously and necessarily maintain constructions of Blackness and oppression. In the Black/white binary people often conflate the construction of whiteness as automatically internalized and something they must resign to it. Individuals who are Hispanic or multiethnic, however, present a unique opportunity to explore the complexities of privilege and oppression.

Third Space Strength and Insights

Engaging in reflexive work that was oriented towards my authentic identity illuminated the ways in which my experiences are a strength in this work. Many multiethnic individuals experience a sense of not belonging within a binary understanding of U.S. culture, but instead in a unique alternative third space with other individuals who share similar experiences (Bhabha, 1994, 1996). Scholars incorporate unique third space feminist views to emphasize that third space subjects extend beyond binary forms and their lived experiences are continuously shifting and being examined as other ways of being (Anzaldúa, 1984).

Third space is a site where cultural meaning and representation are not fixed and the emphasis is on a productive view of identity, not merely a reflective, to provoke new possibility (Anzaldúa, 1984; Bhabha, 1994; Meredith, 1998). In monoracial categories there is no liminal space and trying to fit into monoracial categories is a cause of conflict, distress, or pain (Rodriguez, 2020; Wagner, 2015). Philosopher Linda M. Alcoff (2005) wrote that people of color in the United States are bonded not only by social oppression but by the opportunity for social insight. A liminal social location provides Hispanics who are assumed to be white a unique epistemological insight that often politicizes individuals towards social justice (Renteria, 2015).

The right to self-identify was a central concern that prompted my search for a third space reflexive community in scholarship. Similar to other scholars with liminal identities, I have been politicized by my unique experience of race and will continue to act as an ally and co-conspirator to Hispanics and other people of color against structural racism (Renteria, 2015).

My early experiences shaped the way I question assumptions about race and ethnicity because they deviated from dominant narratives of identity (Renteria, 2015). If I identified as white alone or grew up around white society, I would not have the same insights about the ways race operates in varying contexts (Renteria, 2015). Hispanic and multiracial individuals can shed light on the changing state of race relations, in which it is desirable and even advantageous to disavow whiteness (Renteria, 2015).

Liminal individuals "navigate and negotiate complex positionalities of racial perception and racial identity and are often faced with numerous tensions, dilemmas, and contradictions in their experiences of race" (Wagner, 2015, p. 133). Sitting at the borders of racial identity, experiences like mine can help elucidate an understanding of the social construction of race and racial identity, a direct correlation to the goals of study.

Moving Forward: A Framework for Reflexive Praxis

It was by shifting the focus of reflexivity away from ascribed whiteness that I was able to arrive at an understanding of my racialized identity that resonated as authentic. At the same time, I have acknowledged that both white body privilege and the perspectives of others are significant interacting variables that I will continue to seriously engage reflexively as a part of responsible anti-racist research. I describe this specific and contextualized process of understanding as *racialized researcher identity as praxis.* Identity as praxis provided an anchor for understanding how my identity has been shaped prior to this work, during this work, and an acknowledgment that my identity will remain dynamic throughout the research. Just as my experiences shape the way I perceive the world, the way the world perceives me shapes my experiences. This includes experiences during the research process.

I developed responsive reflexive questions that I embed throughout the research process to account for myself and my subjectivities in the work and to trace the reciprocal relationship between my racialized identity and my researcher positionality.

My external racialized identity is shaped, in certain contexts, by other people's perceptions based on visible physical characteristics. My awareness of this perception is not necessary for the social construction of whiteness to be embedded in my experiences. The way others perceive my race affects the ways I am able to move through the world. The experiences I have as I move through the world continue to shape and refine my internalized sense of self. It follows, then, that my identity and my white body experiences are inextricably tangled in one another. In the context of researcher identity and positionality, this means that the lens I approach my research with is also inextricably tangled. I do not have to identify with whiteness as my internalized identity or ideology to acknowledge the privileges it affords me.

Reflexive Self Questions

This project of reflexivity and my conceptualization of racialized researcher identity as praxis led me to refine my methodology to embed reflection questions to explore and make explicit the ways in which the research experiences were racialized. I added a second layer of reflection questions to consider whether my methodological maneuvers were effective in accomplishing what I had intended. Throughout the research I engaged in praxis to account for the synergy between myself, the research, and the participants:

1. How does my racialized identity and experiences shape my alignments, decisions, and interpretations throughout the research?
2. How does whiteness shape my alignments, decisions, and interpretations throughout the research?
3. How does the visibility of and others' perceptions of my racialized body shape the way participants, research partners, and readers align with and engage in the research process and products?
4. How are my choices of methods and intentional positioning responsive to my understanding of my researcher identity?
5. How will I know if the study methods and researcher/participant positioning are aligned with anti-racist and trauma informed research methods?

I aim to make reflexive praxis transparent and explicit throughout the study. The reflexive praxis questions are essential to consider but are too broad to be operationalized meaningfully as a method of embedded reflexivity. I deconstructed them into specific and contextualized questions I asked myself at different phases of the research using both the scholarship that informed the study as well as my own reflexive journey as a guide.

Accidental Autoethnography

Reflexivity alone has not been sufficient in the past in terms of deeply understanding my positionality and/or the effectiveness of my positionality. I have reviewed artifacts from my research activities to evaluate and refine my methodology in a process I refer to as *accidental autoethnography*. I will provide examples of recent engagement with accidental autoethnography and then outline how I generated artifacts for reflection throughout the research to supplement the reflexive self-questioning.

Feedback and Refinement. This study was my second experience investigating my research question using Endarkened Storywork as methodology. I engaged in independent and collaborative learning activities prior to using this method, during the research process, and after the first full iteration. I have worked and workshopped my implementation of the method since June 2022 with the support and feedback of professors, peers, and scholars in the field to refine my methods and build confidence in both using and communicating my use of Endarkened Storywork. I presented the research, methodology, and findings at the 19th International Conference of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI) in May 2023, and the 2023 NCTE Annual Convention in November.

As I was learning about Endarkened Storywork through Toliver's (2022) text, I participated in a semester-long learning community with two Black female doctoral candidates. As we learned and reflected on the method alongside each other, I was able to not only learn from their perspectives on the

approach as Black researchers, but I was able to grow from the critiques, validations, and challenges they offered on my perspective as a non-Black researcher. During this learning process, I kept notes of our weekly learning community meetings, wrote weekly reflections about my engagement with the methodology, and at the end of the first implementation, I recorded an autoethnographic reflection on the entire process. Other activities have included co-authoring a book chapter using poetry as a method of reflexivity with this study in mind and engaging in recorded peer debriefing conversations with various scholars and educators. A community member serves on my dissertation committee to provide insight as a Black educator in a secondary ELA classroom.

Effectiveness of Positionality and Methods. I maintain close relationships with the participants in this study, which generated another source of accidental autoethnography. When I evaluate the effectiveness of my intended research methodology as well as alignments with anti-racist research methods, these ongoing relationships provide valuable insight. Artifacts of our ongoing relationships were considered to evaluate the effectiveness of my methods that centered on building relationships, trust, and reciprocity between the researcher and participants. I paired reflexive questions with accidental autoethnographic artifacts to evaluate the effectiveness of the methodology. This allowed me to identify potential challenges worthy of disclosure and refinement.

Alongside the reflexive questions that are specifically intended to account for interacting subjectivities in the research, I additionally constructed reflective questions that attend to aspects of anti-racist research methodology, trauma informed research methods, and Endarkened Storywork methodology. My findings from the scholarship support my argument that race and trauma are inextricably linked, and that includes my racialized identities as an interacting variable. I make explicit for the reader when and how questions about positionality and questions about methodology become mapped onto one another. Appendix D illustrates the Framework for Reflexive Praxis in the context of the study.

Study Design Through Imaginative Labor

The research question that guided the study was actually the largest in a set of nesting dolls. If you opened it up, you would find a series of smaller dolls inside, each one revealing a layer of the research question-- the participants, the epistemology, the context, and the setting:

> *How do Black students* (the participants*) describe and understand their experiences* (the epistemology) *engaging in taught texts and teacher pedagogy* (the context) *in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms* (the setting)?

Once you reached the last doll, the one at the heart of it all, you would find the veritable research question: *What counts as anti-racist education for Black students?* That is the exigent question that brought me to this work and everything that came after was methodically and intentionally layered around

that fundamental question.

This fundamental question shaped the goals, values, and methodological commitments of my study, with my experiential knowledge as a teacher as the initial source of knowledge to guide the inquiry. My goal was not to prove a phenomenon (or the absence of one); neither did I aim to deconstruct a phenomenon to find the source of a problem. My goal was genuinely to listen to the answers to a question from those who had the knowledge to answer it. *What counts as anti-racist education for Black students?* My study methods provide space for visions of something new and different—something my intuition told me teachers weren't actually doing yet and could not be understood through ethnographic observations.

Radical Love

My study design unwaveringly and unapologetically centers my radical love for Black students (Johnson, 2021; Johnson et al., 2017; Moore, 2018). The Black literacies that are embedded in Black students' everyday talk, experiences, and narratives are situated in a radical love for Blackness (Johnson et al., 2017). I do not adopt the term *radical love* to suggest that my love of Blackness and Black students is an anomaly or an unorthodox stance to take. The word *radical* is used here to mean thorough and complete. *Radical love* is unconditional love given freely without having to be earned and unmotivated by reciprocation or reward. My radical love for Black students is neither because of nor despite their Blackness. To qualify, quantify, or justify a love of Blackness or explain how I came to love Blackness would suggest that it was something I did not love before and something that had to be earned; it would not be *radical love*. I use the term intentionally because it answers *why this work*.

There is an urgency for ELA teachers and literacy educators to start "loving Blackness to death" and to that end, English Education research must also be situated in a radical love of Blackness. Scholars "charge the field of English Education to love Blackness to death in a time where Black lives remain unimagined and unimaginable, and to celebrate Blackness as a dynamic and ever-changing onto-epistemological entity that supports the ingenuity, brilliance, and humanity of Black children" (Johnson et al., 2017, p. 63). My decision to center the lives and voices of Black students is directly shaped by my experiences as an educator.

Maps to Methodology

I engaged in the imaginative labor of layering my values and goals onto the original research question to create a new question that would guide my methodology. I have insider knowledge of the ELA classroom, curriculum, literature, pedagogy, and teaching Black students in the secondary ELA classroom. I refined my research question to center my inquiry in that context and setting. CRT and Racial Trauma Theory had guided my interest in this empirical pursuit, and I had already drafted a potential pedagogical framework for literature instruction grounded in this theoretical framework. One of

the first courses I took when I returned to UT for my Ph.D. was a Critical Race Theory and Literature class though the English Department. We read seminal CRT scholarship, studied the tenants in depth, and then read multiple works of fiction and non-fiction with CRT as a guiding lens for literary analysis. This is when I began to conceptualize CRT as an analytical framework for addressing the problem I wished to investigate in my research, and this is why CRT became the foundation for the theoretical framework of the proposed study.

I also took Trauma Theory coursework through the Social Work Department which is when I learned about Racial Trauma Theory as a distinct category of trauma. I incorporated Racial Trauma Theory into my theoretical framework to consider the effects of the study problem on the lived experiences of students. Review of the theoretical scholarship provided further guidance in aligning my study methodology.

Black Storytelling. Counter storytelling as a critical race methodology in education research begins by asking whose stories are privileged and whose stories are distorted and silenced (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Although CRT is essential to my theoretical framework, this framing of counterstories as a methodology suggests that a gap in the research is the rationale for the research. I was not interested in the experiences and perspectives of Black students solely because they were *missing* from the discourse or could provide a corrective lens for evaluating anti-racist pedagogy. I was interested in their stories because Black students are brilliant sources of knowledge and insight–*and not just about being Black*.

I selected a methodology that showed radical love and respect for Black students as sources of pedagogical knowledge. I positioned the lived experiences of Black students as *stories*, not just counter stories. My methodology does not compare participants' stories and experiences to any other stories or experiences or situate them in a dominant narrative to render them visible or comprehendible (Combs, 2022; Neville, 2020). One of the central problems my study addresses is the positioning of Black authored texts and characters as a barrier to deeper meaning beyond race and racism. I was intentional in choosing not to position Black study participants in this way. This approach was further shaped by my personal experiences and perceptions of monoracial categories as a limitation on understanding the full human experience and to reinforce white supremacist racial binaries of oppression and privilege.

(Only) Black Stories Matter. If racism and anti-racism cannot co-exist in the same space, then I had to consider that anything currently being called anti-racist pedagogy in traditional English Education is co-opting a name for something that does not yet exist (Grinage, 2019a). If white supremacy and anti-racism are on opposite ends of a spectrum, then pedagogy or research that privileges or considers the needs or experiences of white students is driven by interest convergence, not true anti-racism (Leverette, 2022). Anti-racist pedagogy must be unwaveringly and unapologetically centered on a radical love for Black students (Johnson, 2021). Many educators organize their "anti-racist" pedagogy around the needs

and race consciousness of white students rather than the empowerment and personal development of Black students (Boylorn, 2011; Leverette, 2022). Black students are positioned as participant observers to the racial awakening of white students, gaining nothing but expertise in the field of white consciousness-raising, belying the intention to be anti-racist (Combs, 2022; Leverette, 2022). Teachers are perhaps mistaking *anti-white-supremacy pedagogy* for anti-racist pedagogy. Similarly, researchers may be mistaking Critical Whiteness Studies for Critical Race Theory. I arrived at the methodological decision that the perceptions and experiences of Black students, and only their perceptions and experiences, were needed to answer what counts as anti-racist pedagogy for Black students. This reflects my perception that a focus on whiteness is an unnecessary and unproductive imposition on the goals of the study.

Endarkened Storywork as a Guiding Methodology

When developing Endarkened Storywork, Toliver (2022) reflected on what alignments were necessary to engage in her work. She defined alignment as an arrangement in which two or more parts are properly adjusted in relation to each other. Toliver used the term *alignment* rather than *tenet* because Endarkened Storywork does not embrace the rigidity of a fixed set of principles or beliefs; rather, she had to ensure her mind, body and spirit were properly aligned in relation to the minds, bodies, and spirits of the participants who were willing to share their stories (Toliver, 2022). Alignments were the adjustments *she* needed to make as a researcher to engage in Endarkened Storywork.

In order to be aligned, Endarkened Storywork needs something to align with shared investments, connections, and radical love (Toliver, 2022). I considered the best methods to address the research question in alignment with my philosophical and theoretical commitments. By imagining the methodology for my research question before I turned to scholarship, I had a foundation that I was able to align with Endarkened Storywork when I came across it. It was a love letter to where I was and how I got there, and a map to where I needed to go (Toliver, 2022). This is the process Toliver embraced in order to arrive at a new, culturally responsive methodology.

My perspectives and experiences, along with scholarship, shaped my initial conceptualizing of the study design. To mitigate the ways in which my perspectives and interpretations might misrepresent the meaning making of participants I selected Endarkened Storywork as a framework to further guide my anti-racist research methodology and potentially highlight and account for gaps in my own perspective and intentions, just as I hope the outcome of this research will do for teachers.

Endarkened Storywork

Endarkened Storywork is considered in all aspects of the methods and strategies in the study design. Toliver described and modeled her qualitative research process in *Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research: Endarkened Storywork* (2022). Storytelling is an essential component of Black existence, integral to life and culture. For Toliver, Endarkened Storywork as a specific form of narrative

inquiry provided a new epistemological stance in research and a new way of representing research in a way that honors the storied traditions of Black people (Toliver, 2022). This methodology is built from the confluence of Endarkened feminist epistemologies (Dillard, 2000), Indigenous storywork (ISW) (Archibald, 2008), and Afrofuturism (Womack, 2013), and it allows space for creative and artistic storytelling.

Stories are not a new construct in qualitative research, as researchers gather stories to learn more about the people they are studying (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002); narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of Black teachers and students is not a new concept either (Dixon & Dingus, 2008). When Toliver said that Endarkened Storywork was an answer to the Black storied lives that are ignored in research, she meant the unique storytelling traditions of Black people that synthesize Black values and cultural practices – and are often disregarded (Toliver, 2022). Ultimately, Endarkened Storywork is one way of making space for other ways of thinking, knowing, interpreting, and representing our work.

Although not explicitly stated, Endarkened Storywork makes space for third space identities like the one I embody and new possibilities for those explicitly oppressed by monoracial categories of identity. Anti-racist pedagogy must be a site where cultural meaning and representation are not fixed, where individuals extend beyond binary forms, and lived experiences are continuously shifting and examined as other ways of being (Anzaldúa, 1984; Bhabha, 1994, 1996). Endarkened Storywork subverts the authority of traditional methods of narrative inquiry and provokes new possibilities (Anzaldúa, 1984; Bolatagici, 2004; Toliver, 2022).

Endarkened Storywork Alignments

Research in the field of anti-racist pedagogy, including using CRT tenets as a framework for literature instruction, aligns in some ways with the positioning of the theoretical framework in my study. The difference is the existing scholarship developed anti-racist pedagogical frameworks with CRT as the primary source of knowledge (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Brown & Brown, 2010; Johnson & Neville, 2018). Some studies stopped there, while others extended the theoretical work by conducting empirical research with participants to evaluate the efficacy of CRT as an instructional framework (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023). My study design reverses this flow of knowledge construction. In my study, CRT and Racial Trauma Theory are theoretical and analytics frameworks for *me*, the researcher, to understand and analyze student experience and communicate the implications of this experiential knowledge with teachers. Black students do not need theoretical frameworks to understand their experiences or tell their stories.

For this reason, to evaluate where and how CRT and Racial Trauma Theory may operationalize an anti-racist pedagogical framework that is responsive to student's visions for the future, student stories must come first and be positioned as the primary source of knowledge (Neville, 2020). As the scholarship

in the field demonstrated, “we have tried to put reconciliation before truth but when you do that, you don’t really see what is really oppressing people and really what the problems are. We need truth before we can have reconciliation. That truth is a necessary prerequisite to understanding, contrition, and full reparation” (Combs, 2022, p. 9). I do not use the word truth here in the positivist sense, but rather, our perception is our reality (Combs, 2022), and therefore all stories are true (Toliver, 2022).

In the following section, I will describe the methodological commitments embedded in Endarkened Storywork, which Toliver refers to as alignments, relevant to my study design (Toliver, 2022). These alignments include (1) Storywork; (2) Endarkened; (3) Afrofuturism; and (4) data representation and storytelling aesthetics. In the coming sections I will frame a rationale for Endarkened Storywork methodology in the context of my study by demonstrating the relationship between the goals and values guiding the study, Endarkened Storywork alignments, the theoretical framework, and existing scholarship. Figure 3.1. provides a visual overview of the Endarkened Storywork alignments described in the following section (Toliver, 2022), the relationship to critical race methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and features of trauma informed approached to narrative inquiry (Freedman, 2020; Jolly, 2011).

Storywork Alignments

The decision to center narrative inquiry, and specifically the stories of students, was intentional and essential to the ultimate goal of informing anti-racist pedagogy. Critical theorists pursue emancipatory work by making use of voices and perspectives that have been traditionally excluded to uncover the existence of silences and absences where traditional scholars had only seen what was there (Ashgar, 2013). In this study, I aim to share the voices of Black students who have been excluded from the immense story of successful pedagogy (Dixson & Dingus, 2008). I specify my methodology as Endarkened Storywork rather than narrative inquiry in alignment with my commitment to centering Black epistemologies and new visions for the future.

`Although the necessary inclusion of student's voices is an argument often made in anti-racist education research literature, empirical studies that incorporate student voices and experiences are largely missing from the English Education scholarship (Simpson et al., 2007; Thomas, 2015; Williams et al., 2016). Empirical studies situated in CRT reviewed for this study did not focus on student's voice as a methodology, even though counter storytelling is a central tenet of CRT (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Brooks et al., 2022; Martin, 2014; Williams, et al. 2016). Traditional narrative inquiry is described as “a storytelling methodology that inquiries into narratives and stories of people’s life experiences” (Kim, 2016, p. 304). This definition of narrative inquiry lacks the nuance and cultural responsiveness needed to highlight the storying of Black people’s experiences (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). Black-centric onto-epistemologies have a history of using storytelling to pass on information, tell one’s story orally, and share stories of struggle, oppression, and wisdom (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021).



Figure 3.1 Endarkened Storywork Alignments

The traditional methodological discourse in narrative inquiry reproduces knowledge from predominantly white scholars. The term 'narrative inquiry' itself is a sanitized renaming by academia of what is essentially storytelling. The existing frameworks for narrative inquiry offer methods for storying people's experiences that are universally applicable rather than culturally situated (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). McClish-Boyd and Bhattacharya (2021) created an endarkened narrative inquiry framework that legitimizes Black-centric structures of storytelling to enrich the methodological discourse in narrative inquiry. Bhattacharya then edited a series of methodological guides for culturally situated qualitative research, one of which was Toliver's *Endarkened Storywork* (Toliver, 2022).

Although stories and storytelling by any name are essential in qualitative research, in traditional narrative inquiry and storytelling, the researcher is often restricted to gathering stories, not telling them (Toliver, 2022). *Storywork*, however, demands that the scholar is accountable to the people and community they engage with and honor the community's storytelling traditions from data collection to data representation (Toliver, 2022). Endarkened Storywork, centers on a "paradigm of spirituality, one in which the researcher's scholarship serves humanity and the self, seeks creativity and healing, and centers peace and justice" (Toliver, 2022, p. xvii). Toliver arrived at Endarkened Storywork by letting go of traditional qualitative research methods that did not serve the work she was doing. This opened space for improvisation and new methods that better aligned with the goals and values of the research and where the researcher's methodological commitments to the community were greater than those to the institution or academia. (Toliver, 2022).

The term *Storywork* rather than *storytelling* provides insight into the role and positionality of the researcher. The storyteller, or research participant, is not the only one doing work; the work of story requires engagement from the story, the storyteller, and the story listener. The story listener refers not only to the researcher's role of listening to the stories, but their accountability to share the stories and ensure that they are heard (Toliver, 2022). The story listener is vital, as the story cannot work without a participant to actively listen (Archibald, 2008). In Storywork, the line between the researcher, participant, and reader are blurred. Storytelling and listening mindfully to others' stories help us to

> Imagine scenarios and test various responses in our own imaginations. We then move from imagined responses to what we read on the page to making conscious choices about our presence in the world. How will we be? We imagine. We decide. We act. Stories facilitate this shift from page to presence. We need stories because they inspire. They create. They cause. They build. When we're mindful, reflection on others' stories leads us to curiosity and wonder about their lives, sometimes to deep concern and righteous anger, often to a sense of connection when we realize what we share—even with those we perceive as different. The qualities of curiosity, concern, and connection may then propel us to broader community engagement. (Leverette, 2022, pp. 59-60)

By letting listeners know that this is *work*, "the spokesperson is ensuring that people pay attention to the story as they will be involved or impacted by what is said and told" (Toliver, 2022, p. xix). This aligns with the social transformation goal of Critical Race Methodology in education, where knowledge is generated specifically as a catalyst for action against oppression (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Endarkened Alignments

The term *endarkened* is essential to understanding and using Endarkened Storywork as a methodology. Coles (2020) coined the term *Black storywork* as "the individual or collective stories, which emerge from the lived experiences of Black people and communities that uses Black knowledge/s as a tool to extend and author oneself beyond the conditions of anti-Blackness" (Coles, 2020, p. 4). The goals of Black storywork were to counter the negative perceptions society held about Black people. Although Endarkened Storywork aligns with Black storywork in the centering of Black traditions in storytelling, there are critical differences guiding the methodology (Toliver, 2022). Endarkened storywork "is a method of nurturing, not countering…[it] is about healing, nurturing, affirming, and truth-telling" in spite of oppression (Toliver, 2022, p. xix). While countering negative stories can be a part of the healing process, Endarkened Storywork chooses joy, community, nurturing, spirituality, and love. It is a "radical response to traditional research methods and to anti-Black portrayals of Black existence…It allows Black people to consider anti-Blackness if they want to, but it doesn't require us to focus upon it" (Toliver, 2022, p. xix).

Endarkened is meant to reject and contrast with *enlightened*, which denotes new insight (Dillard, 2000). Rejecting enlightened inherently discards traditional Eurocentric research, refuses limitations on how research should be conducted and written, and "chooses to liberate the mind by allowing space for different truths about reality" (Toliver, 2022, xvii). Endarkened Storywork is a way of communicating that the discourse and analysis of the narrative research will be culturally responsive and aligned to Black-centered epistemologies (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021; Toliver, 2022). Endarkened stories center history, identity, and knowledge as a way to (re)cover and (re)member the past (Toliver, 2022).

Afrofuturism Alignments

Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic that honors the speculative thinking of Black people and challenges traditional conceptions of time, place, and being (Ambrosia et al., 2021; Leverette, 2022; Toliver, 2022). It is an onto-epistemological tool and ethical premise that is embedded in Endarkened Storywork. Afrofuturism refers to the "ethical responsibility of researchers to focus upon the words of our participants, not only as a means to better understand our historic and current world, but to better situate inquiry for what the future world and future research could look like" (Toliver, 2022, xxi). As a storytelling methodology, Afrofuturism is a way for Black people to reclaim their past, counter negative perceptions, and elevate positive present realities; the stories we hear from Black youth create new

possibilities for the future (Toliver, 2022). Because Endarkened Storywork doesn't have a rigid set of tenets, researchers and participants can choose to incorporate Afrofuturistic aesthetics into their storywork but acknowledges that Afrofuturism is just one way of thinking and learning (Toliver, 2022).

Data Representation Alignments

Toliver argued that the embeddedness of storytelling in Black people's lives means researching responsibly would require storytelling in research, not just in data collection, but in data representation as well (Toliver, 2022). Endarkened Storywork as a methodology rejects traditional methods of data representation and embraces creativity and fiction as a means of accountability and responsibility to the storytelling aesthetics of the communities researchers work in (Toliver, 2022). Endarkened Storywork is committed to data representation that ensures "[participant] voice is centered, not the voice of the writer" and the discourses participants use to critique and suggest are entwined with the analytical and representational methods, even if it requires a departure "from what is traditionally known or spoken of as academic" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxxiii). Participants deserve research that speaks to them, not just about them.

Toliver (2022) argued that the stories of Black people are either overlooked in academia or muted behind the voices of others. Black students may have something to say but they are often in spaces where they cannot say it without risking getting in trouble for saying it (Boler, 2004; Combs, 2022; Toliver, 2022). Endarkened Storywork honors participants by listening to and sharing their stories through methods of data representation focused on understanding what participants are saying, not the researchers' interpretation.

Ultimately, Endarkened Storywork makes space for other ways of thinking, knowing, interpreting, and representing our work. It requires the responsibility of the researcher to consider how our work aligns with or against methods used by the communities we work with. It honors "the sacred work of story and storytelling woven into the intricate fabric of Black life" and "recognizes that even if these ideals are not integral to the Western ethical framings solidified by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), we must remember that we can't easily bypass subjectivity, responsibility, or spirit because we are beholden to a community much greater than those formed within our institutions" (Toliver, 2022, p. xvii). For anti-racist researchers, Endarkened Storywork is a useful methodological tool for education critiques now and in the future. In my study, Endarkened Storywork is a love letter to my research partners; it is unwavering and unapologetic radical love for Black students through aligned research methodology.

A Rationale for Endarkened Storywork in Context

The alignments between Endarkened Storywork and my study support engagement with the framework from a methodological standpoint. Situating Endarkened Storywork in my theoretical framework and the relevant literature further demonstrates the usefulness of the methodological approach

in the context of this work. In the next section I provide a rationale for the chosen methodology by considering (1) the onto-epistemological commitments of my research; (2) Toliver's experiences that informed her arrival at the methodology; (3) alignments between critical race methodology and Endarkened Storywork; and (4) methodological gaps in the existing scholarship.

Onto-epistemological Commitments

The philosophical assumptions underlying my proposed research align with a critical paradigm, which identifies and addresses socially unjust policies, beliefs, and practices to develop a vision of a better way of teaching and learning (Taylor & Medina, 2011). I situated my narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of students in secondary English Language Arts classrooms to address the unjust practices surrounding the exclusion of Black authored texts and the potentially damaging engagement with literary racial trauma. I approached this work with the belief that understanding students' perceptions and experiences can refine a pedagogical framework and be transformative for anti-racist literacy. A critical approach can bridge the gap between theory and practice with emancipatory ends by investigating the pedagogy that reproduces systems of racism and oppression (Combs, 2022). My critical ontology includes a historical realism approach to examining the constructed lived realities that exist beneath the surface of historically specific social structures, such as mainstream ELA curriculum and pedagogy (Assalahi, 2015; Mustafa, 2011).

Language can be both empowering and unreliable in the co-construction and understanding of our realities, and truths are not universal, but local and contextual, so the pairing of a critical empirical investigation into the lived experiences of students with the theoretical foundation to inform pedagogy is an essential component to my critical paradigmatic approach (Asghar, 2013). I include the polyvocal lived experiences of Black students in ELA classrooms and the experiences and voices of scholars in the field of Endarkened Storywork (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021; Toliver, 2022) and anti-racist pedagogy. I believe that values are inevitable and should be recognized in the research process (Holmes, 2020); my research is explicit in its radical love, anti-racist aim, and intention to deconstruct and co-construct to an actionable social justice end.

Maps to the Harbor

Endarkened Storywork is an appropriate method for my specific study because the problems Toliver experienced as a Black student that led her to this particular method of Storywork, as well as the experiences of her research participants, are echoed in the problems I address in my research. She expressed the trauma of reading about racial violence and school and the effect an absence of Black authored texts had on her own identity formation. My reflexive journey to understanding my racialized researcher positionality was transformed by locating researchers who shared similar identities and experiences and used their *conocimientos* to design a responsive study. It is significant that Toliver

similarly designed a study and methodology that was situated in her lived experience and identity.

Black Representation in Taught Texts

Scholars and educators have called for English Language Arts teachers and curriculum developers to increase the inclusion of representations of Black experiences and Black authored texts (Johnson, 2022; Sarigianides & Borsheim-Black, 2019; Toliver, 2022). In response, teachers have selected Black-authored Young Adult Literature (YAL) titles that singularly situate the Black experience in trauma (societal, racial, violence, oppression), and/or fail to acknowledge the racial trauma present in canonical texts (Franzak & Noll, 2006; Grinage, 2018, 2019a; Toliver, 2022). Further, Black representation in taught literature fails to extend beyond a singular narrative of racism and trauma; missing from the ELA curriculum are narratives of joy, pride, agency, imagination, and rebellion (Love, 2019; Toliver, 2022). Toliver similarly reflected on her experiences in ELA classrooms, where Black authors and texts were mostly absent from the taught literature, or singularly featured traumatic representations of Black experience. She remembered that "the only Black literature we read…were centered on Black pain and struggle. We were never presented with stories about Black joy, Black freedom, and Black liberation" (p. 164).

This sentiment is shared in the scholarship from which I draw my theoretical framework (Carello & Butler, 2014; Martin, 2014; Toliver, 2020b). Toliver argued that without positive representations of Blackness or visions of Black people escaping oppressive conditions in literature, "so many Endarkened children accepted an inability to dream because we were never given access to the mechanics of dreaming. We were never taught what it looked, felt, or sounded like to dream. Even if we did happen to dream, we couldn't be sure. We were never given books about dreaming written by Endarkened authors. The books we did see were always written by and about [white people]" (p. 28).

Racial Trauma

Racial Trauma research argues that the classroom and taught literature can have a significant influence on either positive or negative racial identity formation (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Galán et al., 2022). The focus of this research was on establishing that the specificity of racial trauma needed to be addressed in education research (McGhee & Stovall, 2015; Quiros et al., 2020). Missing from this research are the implications for pedagogy or the specific trauma that can occur from reading racist and racially traumatic literature in the classroom.

Toliver's (2022) own experience and perception provide support for my inclusion of Racial Trauma Theory in my theoretical framework:

> These [characters] are so much more than the negative experiences they've had, so much more than the damaging narratives used to define them. This is a result of a well-constructed schooling system. There is a reason for this: the future belongs to [white people]. Your job is to minimize

> yourself and become part of [their] dream. This is not a physical attack in the general sense. Instead, they test our mental capacity. For hours, they show us videos of violence against Endarkened people. We see lynching demonstrations, whippings of enslaved people, the forced removal of Endarkened from their native lands, and concentration camps filled with Endarkened children. We are allowed to blink, but we aren't allowed to look away for longer than four seconds. (p. 73)

Compounding the traumatic experience of literary racial violence is the inability to speak about negative experiences without fear of repercussion (Boler, 2014; Combs, 2022).

Toliver (2022) shared that she would never have thought to stand up to a teacher, even if she knew what they were doing was wrong. She empathized with the students who stay silent for fear of punishment because that is what they were taught to do (p. 67). Research in the field has demonstrated that the most prominent feature of Black students' engagement with classroom race talk was silence and disengagement (Boylorn, 2011; Grinage, 2019b; Sassi & Thomas, 2015; Thomas, 2013). When students do not feel they have the agency to speak out against or resist the racial trauma they experience through taught texts and pedagogy, sharing their experiences through narrative inquiry can provide one of the only spaces where they can safely be heard (Boler, 2014; Boylorn, 2011; Simpson et al., 2007).

Toliver's (2022) experiences as a Black student in classrooms where the literary representation of Blackness and racial trauma were/not included served as a map that guided her to create Endarkened Storywork methodology. Her own story is an answer to my study's research question, so it seemed appropriate that I continued to follow the map she started by utilizing Endarkened Storywork as my methodology.

Theoretical and Methodological Alignments

Although identifying a theoretical framework to guide my research and inform implications of the findings may seem counterintuitive to Toliver's intentional turning away from the rigid traditions of acceptable scholarship, Endarkened Storywork is grounded in and born of the theoretical othermothers in the field. Toliver argued that "theories help us to explain, anticipate, interpret, critique, and broaden our worldview. They provide us with a blueprint for understanding a specific phenomenon and encourage us to investigate various elements that influence our studies. Theory is integral to Endarkened Storywork" (Toliver, 2022, p. 165). Similarly, CRT and Racial Trauma Theories provided a blueprint for my arrival at a study aimed at an understanding of anti-racist pedagogy. My theoretical framework situated in CRT and Racial Trauma Theory aligns with and supports an engagement with narrative inquiry, student voice, and Endarkened Storywork as epistemology and methodology.

Critical Race Theory and Methodology

CRT considers "everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a deeper understanding of how Americans see race" (Delgado, 2017, p. 45).

Storywork is in a reciprocal conversation with CRT; Stories provide access to experiences that expose the ways racial construction operates in context, and CRT provides a lens to understand these tensions. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined critical race methodology as a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color and views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). A theoretical framework situated in CRT must embrace research methodologies that align with the theoretical underpinnings, and narrative inquiry is one way to meet the criteria for critical race methodology put forth by Solórzano and Yosso (2022; Combs, 2022).

Critical race methodology confirms that we must look to experiences with and responses to racism as valid, appropriate, and necessary forms of data (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race methodology in education embraces counter-storytelling, oral traditions, poetry, or by other artistic means (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Lynn & Dixson, 2021). Endarkened Storywork is a methodological tool that meets the criteria of a critical race methodology through the centering of participant experience and the openness to creative and alternative ways of representing stories. A narrative inquiry into the experiences of Black students, particularly through Endarkened Storywork, is in alignment with Critical Race Theory and critical race methodologies.

Student Voice, Voiced by Students. Critical race methodologies are also intended to produce actions towards social justice, and student voice is a critical aspect of that goal. One of the goals of CRT is to name racist injuries and identify their origins (Combs, 2022). In examining the origins, racist injuries are named, and victims of racism can find their voice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For this reason, my research aims to examine the role of classroom literature and teacher's pedagogical choices as the origins of student's experiences. In sharing their stories, Black students "become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed, and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27).

Critical Race theorists believe that student stories as a methodology in education research serve several functions. Black students and their experiences have the capacity to put a human and a familiar face to educational theory and practice. In doing so, their voice can challenge the basis for educational practices and provide the context and understanding needed to transform established belief systems. Not only can student's voices expose the reality of their education experiences, but they can illuminate new possibilities for the future (Combs, 2022; Lynn & Dixson, 2021; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Although the

necessary inclusion of student's voices is an argument often made in anti-racist education research literature, empirical studies that incorporate student voices and experiences are largely missing from the English Education scholarship (Ambrosia et al., 2021; Simpson et al., 2007; Thomas, 2015; Williams et al., 2016). CRT and Endarkened epistemologies agree that counterstories are a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (Combs, 2022; McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

In my review of the literature, I was curious as to whether these stories are not *told*, or if they are not *heard* because researchers in the field do not elevate those studies. The literature revealed that these stories are in fact rarely being told, and when they are, they are told through the ethnographic observations and inferences of the researcher. (Brooks et al., 2022; Brooks & Hampton, 2005; Combs, 2022; Martin, 2014; Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Sosa, 2020; Thomas, 2013, 2015; Toliver, 2022; Williams et al., 2016). It is important to recognize the power this provides white ideologies in constructing stories about race (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). What remains is a "representation of Blackness devoid of Black people" (Combs, 2022, p. 24). The physical integration of Black participants is falsely equated with the social integration of their authentic, firsthand perspectives as authoritative knowledge (Combs, 2022).

The Paradox of Voice(lessness) in CRT Education Research. Perhaps more significantly, the storied experiences of Black students are not being sought out; the literature reviewed for this study that was explicitly situated in a CRT framework was mostly theoretical, and the empirical studies did not focus on student's voice as a methodology, despite the fact that counter storytelling is a central tenet of CRT (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Brooks et al., 2022; Martin, 2014; Williams, et al. 2016). By avoiding stories that directly address the racial tension of the Black experience, researchers are not rejecting the topic of *race and racism* in research, but rather they are rejecting, devaluing, and discrediting Black voices, Black narratives, and Black ideologies on race.

Researchers must acknowledge race and racism as a societal construct that is maintained by the privileging of traditional white qualitative methodologies; by continuing to only include these narratives filtered through a white lens, researchers are complicit in maintaining the implication that authentic stories of racism can only be understood when translated by the researcher's academic (i.e., superior) rigorous sight (Mills, 1997). Prior to publishing *Endarkened Storywork,* Toliver's (2022) empirical scholarship demonstrated an early commitment to narrative inquiry and participant perspective (Toliver, 2018, 2020). This demonstrates a process of improvisation and intuition to arrive at naming a methodology in alignment with my own. My epistemological commitments and proposed Endarkened Storywork methodology not only align with the goals of critical race methodology but stand to fill a substantial gap in the literature.

Anti-Racist and Trauma Informed Methodology

I approached this work with the belief that research into anti-racist practices must be intentionally conducted with anti-racist research methodologies. Similarly, a study situated in theories of trauma must consider trauma-informed research methods. Endarkened Storywork is an appropriate methodology for understanding Black student's experiences related to the reading and discourse around race and racism in the ELA classroom, while also offering an embedded trauma-informed approach to narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry and storytelling as a research method align with and are supported by scholarship in the field of trauma studies (Freedman, 2020; Golden, 2020; Quiros et al., 2020). Golden (2020) argued that trauma-informed pedagogy must be related to environmental and systemic factors and value the meaning-making processes of the youth. Trauma itself cannot be reduced to a narrative, but narratives are how people engage in retrospective meaning-making of their traumatic experiences and this retrospective meaning-making can be an important site of healing (Golden, 2020; Grinage, 2018; Jolly, 2011). In current frameworks of trauma-informed pedagogies, what is considered an appropriate way of being or a valid response to a challenging situation is not seen as socially or culturally mediated.

By including narrative inquiry in anti-racist trauma research, trauma-informed pedagogies can "shift from a set of practices in response to the fight or flight biological phenomenon to connecting deeply with student experience" (Golden, 2020, p. 74). Researchers would do well to focus on the meanings young people make or take up as they work to make sense of their past experiences, current realities, and future possibilities (Golden, 2020). In order to understand where and how Racial Trauma Theory can contribute to an anti-racist and trauma-informed approach to literature instruction, my study attends to youth voices, understandings, and narratives of lived experience.

Endarkened Storywork provides a framework and disposition towards methodology but leaves space for the individual researcher to incorporate specific methods relative to interview protocol, data analysis, and implications that extend beyond the study. To ensure an alignment with anti-racist and trauma informed research methodologies I constructed and incorporated two rubrics for methodology based in scholarship to guide decision making, evaluation, and reflexivity. Goings et al. (2023) provided an anti-racist research framework with principles and recommendations for dismantling racism through research. This rubric is particularly useful for ongoing reflexivity and considering the goals of the research beyond the parameters of the study design. The guiding principles and approaches provided by Goings et al. (2023) can be found in Appendix D.

Petrone and Stanton (2021) called for trauma-informed researchers to consider how schools harm children. They offer specific guiding questions researchers should use to ensure their research methods are also trauma reducing:

> For example, researchers might ask themselves (and community and youth partners) how to care for stories of trauma. How is the transfer of stories to numerical data or statistical analyses received by those who have lived the stories? How *should* such stories be responsibly shared, in terms of cultural protocol and sustaining ethical relationships with survivors? How can the stories and the storytellers be respected? How will the participants and the community benefit from the program and study, and how do we know that the benefit is meaningful and the partnership is truly reciprocal?... Once these factors and structures are identified, how then might schools work to mitigate them and be part of a trauma-reducing approach to engender well-being and academic success for students? (Petrone & Stanton, 2021, p. 542)

I address the ways in which I operationalize my commitments to trauma informed methodologies in my Framework for Reflexive Praxis (Appendix D). It is at the intersection of these two rubrics that the overlap between anti-racist and trauma informed methods is most evident. Many of the reflexive questions and reflexive activities listed in my framework address guiding principles from both Goings et al. (2023) and Petrone & Stanton (2021).

Trauma Narratives, Narratives of Trauma

Critical Race Theorists believe that authentic stories of racialized trauma have a valid deconstructive function. Society constructs the social world through a series of tacit agreements mediated by literature, images, media, social media, and other scripts, and the classroom may be the only space where students are offered the critical tools and critical stories to reject oppressive social constructs (Delgado, 2017). My research methods considered that including narratives that represent the Black experience, even when backdropped by trauma, can contribute to this reconciliation. Quiros et al. (2020) argued that the field of trauma would benefit from CRT research at the intersection of trauma to support their efforts. Although Endarkened Storywork is not explicitly situated in Critical Race Theory, there are alignments between the two frameworks, particularly the emphasis on student voice and experience.

By highlighting the individual and structural nature of racism through CRT, trauma researchers are attempting to emphasize the importance of understanding the experiences of Black communities within trauma-informed practice. In trauma research it is impossible to engage with and understand a context or person without engaging with the stories of that context or person (Quiros et al., 2020). A trauma-informed approach from a Critical Race lens, grounded in empowerment and trustworthiness, makes space for the voice of counter-narratives. By failing to include experiences of racism as part of the trauma narrative "we are presenting a monolithic narrative about what is and what is not trauma and its impact" (Quiros et al., 2020, p. 165).

Trauma theories support narrative inquiry as an appropriate research method, and Endarkened Storywork as a specific form of narrative inquiry is especially appropriate because of the way the

researcher is framed as a story-listener (Toliver, 2020a). Healing takes place when students speak the truth about their traumatic experiences, and it takes two to speak the truth-- one to speak and another to hear (Freedman, 2020; Jolly, 2011). For the researcher to witness responsibly, they cannot appropriate the participant's narrative. This is a risk in qualitative research when the researcher assumes they have gained a thorough understanding of an experience merely by having encountered the testimony, and researchers then center their interpretation of the experience over the participant's original narrative (Freedman, 2020, p. 17). Endarkened Storywork supports responsible witnessing through an emphasis on centering the voice of the participant rather than the researcher, and representing participant stories in a way that centers the storyteller's thinking rather than the researcher's interpretation (Freedman, 2020; Toliver, 2022).

Methodological considerations in the field of trauma research have presented key ethical dilemmas for scholars in the field, specifically when engaging in research with participants whose identity may be perceived as their source of trauma: How, in researching and representing trauma, can the researcher minimize suffering on the already stigmatized subject they are interviewing? Why should we expect a traumatized individual to deal not only with their suffering but educate us as well? (Jolly, 2011). Again, Endarkened Storywork attends to this tension, making it a trauma informed method of narrative inquiry within a racial trauma framework. Endarkened Storywork is a method of nurturing and healing that allows Black people to consider anti-Blackness and racial violence if they want to, but it doesn't require participants to testify to suffering (Toliver, 2022).

An evaluation of the methodologies that align with my theoretical framework (CRT and Racial Trauma Theory), the missing student voices from the existing scholarship, and the underlying goals of my proposed study all demonstrate narrative inquiry and Endarkened Storywork as an appropriate and effective methodology for this work. I acknowledge that future lines of inquiry could include teacher perspectives or the voices of the community to inform what counts as anti-racist pedagogy for Black students, but as Toliver's narrator, Jane, learns from the Othermothers in the Harbor, "you'd learn much more working with the youth instead of me. We all learn together, and they push me to think about things in vastly different ways. I'm pretty sure you would learn more from them than I could ever teach you" (Toliver, 2022, p. 58).

Interview Methods and Alignments

Endarkened Storywork as a methodology, to the best of my ability, was honored in all aspects of my research design. As a result, my positionality is made discernible through the methods I used to engage in Endarkened Storywork. One of the ways my positionality is made evident is through my unstructured interview approach to narrative inquiry. I use the available term *unstructured interview* to indicate a greater freedom of expression and an overall tone of *conversation with a purpose*, but my

interview protocol is structured in many subtle and intentional ways in terms of positioning and considerations for trauma-reducing practices (Collins, 1998). The significance of narrative inquiry is not just the power of storytelling "but the power of being able to tell your own story and not allowing someone else to frame the world but to do that framing for yourself" (Combs, 2022, p. 2). Endarkened epistemology encourages participant agency in constructing their own narratives (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). My interview protocol does not include scripted questions that may impose frames and limits on how participants self-identify and understand trauma; rather I introduced a variety of topics and invited participants to share the thoughts, memories, and stories that those topics inspire. See Appendix E for examples from a July 2022 interview transcript (UTK IRB-23-07501-XP) of how I introduced topics without language that framed the discourse in race or trauma, and examples of responsive story listening questions.

I recruited participants from two community settings in which I was embedded outside of the context of this research. I interviewed two participants recruited from the first setting together in one session (I will refer to this interview as Summer Storywork going forward). I interviewed one participant from the second setting in a separate session (I will refer to this interview as Fall Storywork). In both situations, I had previously discussed my proposed research in casual conversations before I invited individuals to participate, so they already had a general idea of the study. Regardless, I established and followed a pre-interview protocol, which l replicated during the Fall Storywork in accordance with the IRB approval for the study (see Appendix F for IRB Approval Letters and related documents). My University Zoom account was used to record and transcribe interviews.

Interview Protocol

I shared the research question and the goals of the study, including next steps in the research agenda such as developing an instructional framework for ELA teachers. Because I had spent extensive time interacting with the participants prior to the study, they have experiential knowledge of my personality, values, and positionality through observation and interaction, not solely what one would normally disclose in term of a positionality statement. I shared my methodological and epistemological alignments with participants prior to the interview by explaining my rationale for centering their stories as an authoritative source of knowledge in this research. I briefly described storywork to invite participants to tell stories as opposed to a question-and-answer format; I aimed to establish an environment that broke the master script of *school* where the teacher/researcher asks questions, and the student/participant provides answers to only the question and in turns. I assured them that they were not obligated to talk about anything they did not feel comfortable talking about. If I asked a follow up or clarifying question that they did not have an answer to, they were welcome to think aloud and process the question, take think time, ask me to clarify, or say they did not have an answer at that moment, and we would move on. I

provided information about the experiences that informed my positionality such as my time spent as an ELA teacher and the school I worked at. Participants were sent the interview transcripts prior to analysis so that they could clarify, amend, or add information.

I began by asking participants to tell me a little about themselves with no additional framing or labeling. I asked follow up questions to build a conversational tone. In the Summer Storywork, this created an opportunity to make connections between the participants, who interviewed together, by bridging their stories in a way that was low stakes. The purpose was to foster an environment where the participants were not exclusively taking turns talking or only in response to my prompts, but were invited to contribute to each other's stories, ask questions, and share the stories that might be inspired by what the other participant had said. Participants in the Summer Storywork began engaging with each other as story listeners and storytellers, and by the end of the session I was no longer introducing new prompts or questions.

I engaged in this methodology of surrender (Dillard, 2006) by centering a process that rejected a clear divide between researcher and researched and placed the needs of the storyteller over my personal research agenda (Toliver, 2022). Storytelling and story listening as an approach to interview makes space for conversation to flow wherever it needs to go rather than imposing story frames to collect specific data (Toliver, 2022).

Agency in Naming and Framing

I invited the participants to tell stories about their experiences as their whole selves. What I mean by this is that I did not ask interview questions that qualified or commodified race as the singular aspect of their identity that qualifies them as an authoritative source of knowledge (Freedman, 2020). My interview approach did not include asking them to story or understand their experiences only as they pertain to Blackness or anti-Blackness. To do so would replicate the very practices that I aim to critique in the ELA classroom and literature. This was meant to shift the tone from rigid question and answer to storytelling and story listening and communicate to participants that they are invited to talk about racialized experiences, but they should not feel they have to (Kim, 2016).

I instead invited them to share their experiences– with reading, with ELA class, with teachers– as students and as whole people with intersecting identities (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). Toliver (2022) stated that in the real world, dominant groups attempt to control the methods of communication, which allows them to control and often create the structures that confine our beliefs, values, and norms. I did not want to silence their Endarkened voices, overlook their realities, or position them as racialized "bodies who take up space in a [white]-centric universe" (p. 177). My interview methods aimed to provide them the space to bring race into their stories either explicitly or implicitly if they chose to attend to that aspect of their identity in the stories. As a response to traditional research methods and to anti-

Black portrayals of Black existence, Endarkened Storywork allows Black people to consider anti-Blackness *if they want to*, but it does not *require them* to focus on it (Toliver, 2022, p. xix). Participants could choose to tell stories of joy, stories of pain, and story their identity through their own naming.

Participant Positioning

In the Summer Storywork, I engaged in interviews with two participants together. I offered both the choice of interviewing 1:1 or together simultaneously, and they both independently chose to interview together. It can be valuable for the researcher to be the same race as their participants when focusing on issues of racism, as the researcher can draw from their experiential knowledge on the subject (Milner, 2007). Because my racialized identity cannot offer a collaborative environment of Black racial bonding, multiple participants interviewed together can facilitate connection between participants, further decentering the researcher as the source of knowledge (Grinage, 2019a). Because participants were recruited from a community in which I am embedded, I was able to offer an interview partner with a shared racialized identity who was also already well known to the other outside of the research project. I personally felt more empowered to articulate my racialized experiences when I had located a community of shared identity and experiences, even if only in scholarship.

I planned to offer future participants this choice as well, acknowledging that some participants may feel more comfortable engaging in disclosure in a 1:1 dynamic (Carello & Butler, 2014; Freedman, 2020; Jolly, 2011). Other participants may prefer a dynamic that supports what Grinage (2019a) calls *Black racial bonding,* where shared racial identities enable participants to collaboratively navigate discourse about race. As I only interviewed one participant from the second setting, this was not an option.

It is the multiple consciousnesses of the participants that are critical to the construction of a successful pedagogy that resists the practices within school systems that exclude children in non-dominant groups (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). This specific participant selection and dynamic has the potential to tap into a "networked consciousness and uncover the covert patterns within the everyday talk and storytelling" of Black students (Toliver, 2022, p. xxvii). I considered alignments with theory and method of storywork, while still ensuring that the goals and needs of the storytellers, particularly within a trauma reducing research framework, were put before my goals as a researcher (Freedman, 2020; Jolly, 2011; Petrone & Stanton, 2021; Toliver, 2020a, 2022).

Participant Description

The research question for my study makes clear two critical attributes for participant inclusion: secondary school-age students who identify as Black and who have participated in secondary ELA classes. Although Endarkened Storywork as a methodology was developed around the experiences of Black girls, I did not exclude participants by gender identification. The diversity of theoretical and

analytical frameworks included in the study design provides inclusivity for all gender identifications despite the origins of the methodology (Goings et al., 2023; Petrone & Stanton, 2021; Toliver, 2022). Further, there has been a precedent set in the literature for using Endarkened Storywork as a methodology with male identifying participants (Cahill, 2022; Coles, 2020; McCray, 2022). I selected these criteria for participant inclusion to reflect my experiences as an educator where the research question originated from and theoretical frameworks in Racial Trauma Theory provide further rationale.

Ecological and Developmental Perspectives

As a former high school ELA teacher at a predominantly Black high school, limiting potential participants to this context provided a degree of insider status to understanding participants' experiences (Grinage, 2019a). Scholarship in the field also provided a rationale for situating the study in the context of high school ELA classroom experiences. High school-aged students (15-18) have an increased understanding of advanced forms of racism (e.g., institutional racism), exposure to racial discrimination, and the ability to make meaning of racial encounters (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Coll & Pachter, 2002; McAdoo, 2002). At this age, parents may provide personal and historical explanations of racism that contradict the color-blind, post-racial, or absent narratives about race teenagers encounter from teachers and curricula (Galán et al., 2022; Saleem et al., 2019). These moments of tension create an educative space in relational narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

At this developmental time of increased autonomy, teenagers are more likely to witness or experience racial trauma in their community and have increased exposure to racial violence on social media (Galán et al., 2022; Grinage, 2018; Johnson, 2022; Saleem et al., 2019). This coincides with increased literary representation of racism and racial violence in the ELA curriculum, creating a particularly tenuous time for the effects of racial trauma according to the developmental and ecological model proposed by Saleem et al. (2019). Participants in this age group will have had several years of ELA experiences where literature addressing race and racism was potentially included in the curriculum. They also have the experience, vocabulary, and mental maturity to articulate their experiences around these topics (Handford & Marrero, 2021).

The ELA classroom is also a particularly appropriate environment for examining what counts and anti-racist education for Black students. The ELA curriculum and literature can both perpetuate attacks on Black bodies and spirits and serve as a site of resistance and emancipation (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Johnson, 2022). Considering the content of commonly taught canonical texts in the ELA classroom (e.g. Lee, 1960; Wright, 1940) which contain racial slurs and violence towards Black people, and YAL such as *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2018) and *All American Boys* (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015) which contain police brutality against Black bodies, there is increased opportunity for the vicarious racial trauma caused by bearing witness to racial violence as reported by teens and adolescents (Galán et al., 2022).

The classroom and literature can have a significant influence on either positive or negative racial identity formation (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Galán et al., 2022). Scholars in the field of trauma research made connections between CRT and trauma-informed practices and positioned CRT as a useful vehicle to intentionally link trauma work to discussions of race and racism. The focus of this research was on establishing that the specificity of racial trauma needed to be addressed in education research (McGhee & Stovall, 2015; Quiros et al., 2020). Missing from this research are the implications for pedagogy or the specific trauma that can occur from reading racist and racially traumatic literature in the classroom.

Purposeful Sampling

I used purposeful sampling for participant recruitment with a limit to the number of participants included in the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006; Creswell & Báez, 2020; Grinage, 2019a). It was important in terms of my positionality in this work that I recruit participants from communities in which I was already and organically embedded, and that I was not in a position of authority (Grinage, 2014). My commitment to the whole of this research endeavor is evidenced by the fact that I am already a part of the participants' communities and did not need to seek out participants or artificially embed myself in a space for the purpose of recruitment. This is one of the criteria for responsible co-conspirator research methods, validated through feedback from scholars in the field when I presented this work at an academic conference, and one of the principles of anti-racist research methods (Goings et al., 2023).

Further, trauma informed narrative inquiry methodologists state that researchers must avoid passive witnessing at all costs (Jolly, 2011). It is detrimental for research participants to be put into a research context in which "they are forced to confront a researcher/observer who has no explicit role and whose presence, therefore, cannot be explained" (Jolly, 2011, p. 301). This highlights the importance of existing relationships with the participants and their communities prior to them becoming research partners. Our identities as researchers and educators are implicated within relationships of power and privilege in classroom spaces where unequal power dynamics are always present (Grinage, 2014). This made it essential that I was well known to participants as an embedded member of their community, and our relationship was not one where I was in an explicit position of power, such as their teacher.

Creating Space for Participant Stories

It is important to this work and the study design that the number of participants was limited. Toliver (2020a) argued that she limited the number of participant stories highlighted in studies because Black students' "narratives are layered, vibrant, and complex, so it is essential to allow space for their dynamic storytelling to thrive" (p. 508). Segmenting participant testimonials to include a larger number of stories "dulls their vibrancy, diminishes their complexity, and reduces their layers…their stories need adequate space to be told" (Toliver, 2020a, p. 508). Limiting the number of participants in the study

created space for their stories to be told more fully, which aligns with the Endarkened Storywork's method of data representation. Commitment to my research communities, responsible anti-racist and trauma-informed research methods, and my alignment with Endarkened Storywork and storytelling provided a rationale for my planned method of purposeful sampling and participant inclusion criteria (Goings et al., 2023; Petrone & Stanton, 2021; Toliver 2022).

The following materials are provided in Appendix F: IRB outcome letter 1, IRB outcome letter 2, and the interview guide. To safeguard participant anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to secondary characters and institutions referenced by participants, including names of teachers, principals, friends, and schools, before being included in the narrative (Stroud, 2023). Research conducted with human subjects requires approval by an Institutional Review Board and adherence to ethical standards. I submitted this project to the university's IRB for the Summer Storywork iteration, and it was determined to comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects. I submitted a second request to IRB for the Fall Storywork as the setting had changed and received approval for the second iteration as well.

Locating Participants Through Existing Engagement

I did not enter community spaces to gain access to participants or with the intention of recruiting participants for the current study. Study participants were located during my participation in local community engagement on other projects. Although I did build trust and relationships with participants prior to their involvement in the study, it was not for the purpose of recruitment. Recruitment –and the conceptualization of the study---occurred well after and because relationships and trust had already been established outside of the context of this research.

In the summer of 2022, I participated in a month-long summer camp with high school students who were considering going into teaching after high school. The high school students would be the instructors for a STEM based summer camp for middle school students. During the first few weeks the high school "teachers" planned and practiced hands-on STEM activities together, and then they ran the summer camp. Two of the five high school students participating in the summer camp fit the inclusion criteria and became participants in the study after the summer camp had ended.

During the 2022-2023 academic year, I participated in an after-school program at a local teen recreation center. I was not employed by the teen center, and I was not in a position of authority relative to the program participants. The program participants already attended the teen recreation center as their after-school care and chose to participate in the weekly project as part of their choice programming. During the after-school program sessions, I was able to participate alongside the students, support them on their projects, and develop close relationships. Towards the end of the project, I received IRB approval to conduct the study with participants from this context. To recruit research participants, I first obtained

letters of support from the project directors. After receiving IRB approval (UTK IRB-23-07501-XP), I invited four potential participants based on the established inclusion criteria. I met with the parents of potential participants to share the details of the project and provide information about informed consent. After obtaining informed parent consent, I met with the potential participant to share the details of the project and provide the opportunity for questions, consent, or assent. I received informed consent and conducted an interview with one participant for the Fall Storywork.

Storytellers and Context

Toliver (2022) invited story listeners into the world of her research partners through their everyday talk and dialogue, their descriptions of themselves and their world, and finally, their stories. Toliver (2022) begins her introduction to the research partners in the collective, and then describes each storyteller individually to "provide behind the scenes information about each story" and to "see things I might not have been able to see just by reading it" (p. 83). Testimonies can be a means to define and redefine one's humanity and empower the storyteller through retellings of personal experience and the world they live in (Davis & McTier, 2023). In the next section, I introduce each of the participants in my study individually in the hopes that connecting their personal stories to their narrative stories prepares the story listeners/readers to bear witness to their humanizing testimonies.

The descriptions reflect individual participant language and their descriptions of themselves shared directly as part of this research. Because I knew and spent time with each participant outside of the context of and prior to this research, I include descriptions shared indirectly through artifacts of accidental ethnography. Participants were invited to choose their own pseudonyms. Two participants selected the pseudonyms included in the narratives and one elected to keep the pseudonym I used for transcription purposes. Descriptions and references to specific school settings play a prominent role in participant stories; Appendix G presents the pseudonyms created for the schools referenced by the storytellers. Descriptions of each school, located on the state's department of education website, are provided for context.

Derrick

Derrick self-identified as Black and male. At the time of the interview (Summer Storywork) Derrick was seventeen years old, in between his 11th and 12th grade year at Kelley High School, where he attended all four years of high school. He is one of eleven siblings, and his Granny plays a prominent role in his life. Standing at 6'3", Derrick was an exceptional student athlete, playing basketball and soccer on both the high school team and local club teams. He participated in his soccer team's win at the state championship and was named the captain of the varsity soccer team his senior year. Derrick was academically successful, taking advanced courses his junior and senior year in engineering, coding, and

cyber security through partnerships with local colleges. He graduated with a full scholarship to a Master's track university program in coding and cyber security through the military.

Derrick and I met in the summer of 2022 when he participated as a camp counselor and teaching intern through a local university's summer STEM camp for middle grade students. The campers described Derrick as fun, funny, kind, helpful, and an amazing teacher. At the end of the summer program the campers voted him *Most Likely to Become a Teacher* and *Kid at Heart* in the counselor superlatives.

In the summer of 2023 Derrick texted me to ask if I would meet him at the airport on the day he left for basic training; in the conversation he said "It means a lot to me to hear you say you are proud of me. I feel like everyone hates law enforcement and the best way to change a corrupt system is by sending good people in to make it better." When he returned from basic training, I invited him to be a guest speaker at a teacher preparation course I was teaching at the university.

Akoye

Akoye self-identified as Black and female. At the time of the interview (Summer Storywork) Akoye was seventeen years old and in between her 11th and 12th grade year at Hunter High School, where she attended all four years of high school. She lived with her parents and two siblings. She was born in Africa and move to the United States with her family at the age of five. Akoye was an academically successful and community engaged student, participating in student government, the local chapter of the National Achievers Society of the Urban League, and her high school's International Baccalaureate (IB) degree program. She organized and hosted spoken word poetry events for local youth artists as part of her IB personal project. She enjoyed expressing herself through poetry, both writing and performing. During her senior year I invited her to host as master of ceremonies for a community engagement awards event I was coordinating. She wrote and performed an original poem for the event titled *Unity*.

After graduation she accepted a full scholarship to a private university where she enrolled in the visual and performing arts degree program. She served on the university's student government senate and said in an interview published in the university's student newspaper "she hoped to support the amplification of minority voices on campus so that they feel like they are seen and that their problems are not only heard, but also that solutions are found for their problems."

Akoye and I met in the summer of 2022 when Akoye participated as a camp counselor and teaching intern through a local university's summer STEM camp for middle grade students. The campers described Akoye as sweet, intelligent, nice, and fun. At the end of the summer program, she was named *Favorite Counselor* by the campers in the counselor superlatives. At the end of her senior year, Akoye wrote and presented a Theory of Knowledge project about the problem central to this research and the insights she gained about her own perspective after participating as a research partner in the study. She

shared her project with me and our conversations surrounding her work prompted us to schedule a one-year-later follow up interview. Her reflections and counter/narrative from the follow up interview are shared in Chapter 4 as a stand-alone story.

Melget

Melget identified as Black and female. At the time of the interview (Fall Storywork) Melget was sixteen years old and in her 10th grade year at Savannah Academy. She attended Hunter High School for her 9th grade year (at the same time as Akoye) and then transferred to Savannah Academy for 10th grade. She was born in Ethiopia and moved to the United States at the age of two and half when she was adopted by an American family who identify as white. She has two siblings, one of which is also a transracial adoptee. Melget is outgoing and creative; she enjoys music, dance, and fashion. She aspires to attend college out of state to study criminal psychology.

Melget was the singular participant from the second setting to participate in the study and she interviewed with me one on one (Fall Storywork). I met Melget prior to her participation in the second recruitment setting through other community engaged contexts, but she was not approached for participation in the study until the second request to IRB for the Fall setting had received approval. At the time of this writing Melget and I maintain a close relationship and communicate often outside of the context of this study.

Akoye and Derrick met and spent the summer together through the 2022 summer camp counselor and teaching internship. They were interviewed together on the last day of the internship and their intertwined stories are presented in the original format. Although they both share individual experiences and perspectives, the dialogue between the participants and their co-construction of meaning is an essential aspect of their stories. There are moments in both the Summer and Fall Storywork narratives where participants reference previous shared experiences and rely on shared knowledge from previous experiences to make meaning. I have left these moments unaltered and uninterpreted for the reader to preserve the everyday talk and storytelling aesthetic of the participants.

Data, Analysis, and Data Representation

Endarkened Storywork (Toliver, 2022) and Endarkened narrative inquiry (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021) as methodological and analytical frameworks, as well as the respective authors' engagement with the methods in their own empirical research, informed the data and data analysis for my study. Toliver's comparison between data/data analysis and Black traditions of quilting frames the disposition of my analytical framework; *thinking with theory* describes my method for analyzing the data sources for refinement of the CRTR framework (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). In following sections I first describe the methods of data analysis used in this study, including the underpinning philosophies and dispositions which are critical attributes of this method of engaging in data analysis and representation. I

then discuss the procedures and methods I used to process my study data and findings using the analytical framework.

The next section includes (1) a description of my data sources; (2) the disposition towards data analysis described in Endarkened Storywork; (3) my methods of analysis; (4) and a rationale for the analytical framework in the context of my research question. I provide a rationale by situating the method of analysis in Endarkened Storywork, trauma-informed research methods, and considerations for my researcher positionality. I then

Data Sources

The research participants' stories are the data in my study. The stories provided the experiences and perspectives that I engaged in analysis; however, I include secondary artifacts in the data analysis and discussion. My research question centers on literature read in and out of the ELA classroom and the participants reference specific texts throughout their stories. I considered these texts to be a part of the broader context of the participant's stories (Banks-Wallace, 2002) and included them in aspects of my analysis and findings to create a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Jackson & Mazzei, 2022; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Endarkened narrative inquiry as a methodological framework offers an expanded understanding of narrative inquiry that supports the inclusion of secondary artifacts in data analysis. In seeking ways to frame Black students' storied lives, researchers would benefit from looking to Black authors, particularly literature that emerged as significant to their experience (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). For this reason, I considered that understanding the literature participants include in their stories as essential to a deeper understanding of their experiences with those texts. Endarkened epistemologies encompass participant memories and stories as well as how they engage in other art forms to theorize and explore their ways of knowing and being (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). Because I am embedded in the participants' communities and have relationships outside of the context of the proposed study, I considered the art, poetry, communications, and other artifacts the participants shared with me as part of their narrative and storytelling aesthetic. Endarkened narrative inquiry involves examining participant's ways of being, knowing, and living by looking beyond refereed articles and academic texts (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). I have discussed and demonstrated my personal disposition of supplementing an understanding of my own narratives with artifacts of accidental autoethnography. I considered this approach in understanding my participant's narratives as well.

Patches, Seams, and Quilts

Toliver (2022) explained the method of data analysis used in Endarkened Storywork by comparing it to the Black tradition of quilting. Black quilters combined the technique of piecing (sewing scraps of cloth together) and applique (stitching small pieces of cloth on top of larger ones), which

disregarded traditional quilting styles and resulted in no apparent pattern, no color scheme, and no strict lines or boxes. In reality, Black quilts and quilt patterns were used to secretly communicate and signal times and locations along the underground railroad (Lavender, 2019; Toliver, 2022). Quilting was a form of resistance and a way to tell life stories. In other words, "quilts provided coded messages that Black people could decipher to obtain freedom, build community, and tell stories. To break the code, to find the message hidden within the layers of the quilt, it was important to follow the threads, to find the hidden moments that brought the disparate pieces together into a collective whole" (Toliver, 2022, p.xxvi). In Black quilting traditions, the quilting artist does not cut the thread; the seams that connect each piece are connected by the same thread. Toliver brought this idea into her analysis of the participants' stories and how they could tell individual stories as well as communicate a message about collective experience.

Toliver (2022) analyzed the stories by identifying seams that converged within and across the participants' stories. According to Toliver, this method of analysis was a departure from the rigid practice of deductive coding or the inductive method of constructing and combining codes as she "began to realize that every pattern, every intersecting line, and every piece of thread was important in my effort to understand the [participants] and their stories" (p. xxvii). To understand why this method of surrender in data analysis is appropriate for answering my research question, it is important to remember the inquiry encoded within: *What counts as anti-racist education for Black students?* My research question includes the specific reference to taught texts and teacher pedagogy to communicate location and context, not to limit what can be learned from the stories. To consider what counts as anti-racist education for Black students, I considered all aspects of their stories: every patch and every piece of thread. Therefore, Endarkened Storywork methods of data analysis consider that there are multiple stories to be told: the individual patches (participant stories), the seams (connections within and across stories situated in theory), and the larger quilt as a whole (visions for anti-racist pedagogy).

Presenting Stories

Aligning with Endarkened Storywork methodology, I do not reimagine the participants' stories for readers. The goal of Endarkened Storywork is not to frame or force interpretation for readers, allowing for a connection that traditional research writing does not: "If the researcher interprets everything for the reader, it presents the argument that there is nothing more to learn from the stories. Instead, Endarkened Storywork ensures that readers have much to ponder long after the story ends" (Toliver, 2022, p. 187). In traditional qualitative narrative inquiry, the researcher controls the method of data communication which allows them to regulate the meaning of the stories being told and Black stories are often voiced by others. Particularly when adult researchers work with Black youth, "although they are included, their voices are often muted behind the words of the researcher" (p. 75).

Endarkened Story work methods of data analysis and presentation require that the reader participate in the work by listening to the participant's stories with the same resolve they use to listen to traditional academic writing. In anti-racist research, people of color often bear the burden of engaging in emotion work that is not equally distributed with their white counterparts (Combs, 2022). By requiring readers to engage in participants' whole stories as they were told, readers become part of the storywork. Endarkened Storywork creates narrative space for the stories to be told, makes space for readers to become story listeners, and asks readers to find connections between their own lives and the lives of the students whose stories they are reading (Toliver, 2022, p. 182).

Testifying ideology is an intellectual exercise between the teller and listener, as the listener is asked to engage with the testimony and critically reflect on old ideas and make space for the previously unthought. "Testimonies require witnesses, those who can readily recognize the truth in the tale and those who are willing to see beyond the truths they know. In this way, testimony is a call that invites response" (Toliver, 2020a, p. 510). Presenting the entirety of stories in this way invites readers in and aligns with principles of both anti-racist and trauma-informed research methodologies (Goings et al., 2023; Petrone & Stanton, 2021). This method is intended to disrupt the dynamic in which the experiences of oppressed groups are often reinterpreted for them by others (Toliver, 2022). I engage deeply with but do not interpret the participant's stories for the reader. This approach to data analysis centers on the epistemic privilege of Black students and readers who have the second sight to understand and name racist practices and envision the future of anti-racist policies (Combs, 2022).

Toliver (2022) asked researchers to interrogate their writing and consider how it aligns with or against methods used by the communities we are blessed to work with. While I engage in storytelling as research, I did not feel I could or should responsibly fictionalize the participants' words as an outsider to their unique storytelling community. For this reason, in an act of radical love for my participants, this method of analysis allows the researcher to "testify, without saying a word. Words are not always necessary, and sometimes they are less eloquent than our silence or our actions" (Combs, 2022, p. 209).

Method of Analysis

Although I approached the data, or participant stories, with an openness to new learning and questions beyond what I had set forth as the question of this study, data analysis in Endarkened Storywork is not without method. Rather, Toliver (2022) advocated that researchers not feel bound to traditional research methods that did not serve their work or honor the communities they worked with. Toliver argued that the study of narratives through modern qualitative research methods can help researchers become better witnesses to Black storied testimonies. For my study, I engaged in *thinking with theory*, specifically CRT and Racial Trauma Theory, as an analytical framework (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). I describe my approach to analysis as a layering of two distinct but interconnected methods using

multiple perspectives (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). Appendix H presents a timeline of the data analysis for this study.

The first data analysis method in the framework focused on the individual participant stories, using *emergence and encounter* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022; Toliver, 2020a). It is the participant's individual stories, not my analysis, that answers the question: *How do Black students describe and understand their experiences engaging in taught texts and teacher pedagogy in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms?* Emergence and encounter as data analysis, then, is a performative engagement with the stories as a story listener, demonstrated through the representation of the data in a way that honors Black storytelling traditions and aesthetics. I aimed to accomplish this by presenting the participants stories, uninterrupted, in their entirety. The first reader experience with the stories is free from my perspective, interpretations, or analysis. They reader can hear the stories as they were told and consider their own meaning making and interpretations.

The second step in the data analysis framework aimed to create seams within and between the stories by engaging in *thinking with theory* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). Repeated readings of the stories through the multiple lenses of the study's theoretical framework and relevant scholarship were an applique method of data analysis. Together, the stories and seams respond to the question: *What counts as anti-racist education for Black students?* This process of data analysis– following the theoretical threads that connect individual experiences to the larger quilt that is anti-racist education– are represented in the implications and discussion sections. My methods of analysis in this framework further my methodological alignment with Endarkened Storywork by including both analysis through storytelling and a companion analysis with theory (Toliver, 2022).

Emergence and Encounter

In their approach to data analysis, Jackson and Mazzei (2022) reframed the language of traditional qualitative research practices, shifting *data* to *performative accounts* and *analysis* to *becoming questions.* Because Endarkened Storywork embraces creative storytelling aesthetics in research and is committed to highlighting participants' thinking over the researcher's interpretation, this reframing provided an appropriate foundation for story analysis and representation in my study (Toliver, 2022).

Like Toliver (2022), Jackson and Mazzei (2022) arrived at their analytical framework and method of emergence and encounter while working against conventional data analysis, traditional coding, data reduction, and thematic analysis. Conventional methods of data analysis prioritized reading stories to intentionally identify something already recognizable, anticipated, and known. In the data analysis technique of emergence and encounter, research questions are bracketed off to allow new questions, or *becoming questions*, to emerge during deep encounters with the data and to make space for the previously unthought. In this method of analysis, codes and themes are not decided in advance and the researcher

"forgets" for a moment the expected patterns in the story that are prompted by specific research or interview questions.

For analysis through emergence and encounter, I read and engaged with the stories to see what emerged, "not a pinning down but an opening up**" (**Jackson & Mazzei, 2022, p. viii). First-person stories gathered through narrative inquiry already put meaning-making on display in narrative form (Pelias, 2018). As the researcher engages in the data and something new emerges, assemblage means revealing the production of thought in the data analysis. The authors called these moments *thresholds*, similar to the seams Toliver encountered in her participant stories. The emergence of new connections creates *becoming-questions* that interrupt the story, transform a reader's thinking, and create thresholds– spaces where responses or effects occur. The researcher writes thresholds not by reimagining and (re)presenting participant knowledge, but by creating seams within the stories (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). Data analysis in this framework is not about signifying, but about creating maps and crossing thresholds to previously unthought questions.

In conventional research, the findings present the results of the study supposedly objectively and without interpretation followed by a discussion section follows in which the researcher interprets the findings, makes connections to the theoretical framework and research literature, and describes the significance of the results (Toliver, 2022). Endarkened Storywork "rejects the upliftment of objectivity" because the researcher's analysis of the data is "essential to the creation of the story's foundation" (Toliver, 2022, p. 182). Rather, the researcher becomes a story listener, interpreting the stories for themselves, and finding synergy between the stories, the storytellers, and themselves. To align with this idea, Toliver diminished her voice within the participant stories except to account for herself as a present and engaged story listener. I took a similar approach, removing my voice from the participant stories, while accounting for and making visible my subjective reading of the stories through the becoming-questions that emerged as I read.

Transacting with Storied Representations of Black Experience. Critical Race Theory and Racial Trauma Theory serve as frameworks for transacting with storied representations of Black experience in my study. This can be seen as a pedagogical framework for the reading and teaching of literature as well as the ways I navigated reading participant stories as a researcher. I offer this framework as a potential way that educators can account for themselves and their insider/outsider knowledge when reading and teaching texts in the classroom. This framework is also how I account for myself as a researcher when navigating the stories of the participants.

All readers, whether they are transacting with a work of literature or texts produced as artifacts of narrative inquiry, and whether they claim insider or outsider status relative to the subject of the text, hold racial identities and positionalities that inform their interpretations of storied representations of Black

experiences. The way I account for myself as a reader of participant stories is similar to the way I account for myself as a reader of literature. The way I navigate texts is informed less by my internalized racial identity relative to the experiences represent in the text, but rather, is shaped by theories of mindful reading (Carrillo, 2017; Leverette, 2022).

Reading mindfully means paying attention not just to the content of the text but rather to the process of reading itself by adjusting how you read based on what the piece asks of you (Carrillo, 2017). Engaging your empathetic imagination requires that the reader not only fully encounter their own emotional and relational responses to a text, but also engage with the text through questions that increase their sense of curiosity about another's experience (Carrillo, 2017). This, at times, requires the reader to imagine themselves in that other experience. As a reader of participant stories, I make space for the emotions that emerge while reading and then investigate those moments of encounter for what can be learned both about myself and my interpretations, and about the experience the participant is describing (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022; Leverette, 2022).

Transacting with storied representations of Black experiences with altruistic narrative empathy requires self-other differentiation (Coplan, 2004). This is when the reader/empathizer "observes the boundaries of the other as well as his or herself and respects the singularity of the other's experience as well as his or her own" (p. 144). Reading texts in this way made space for and allowed me to see the boundaries of my own subjective interpretations of the stories while differentiating my interpretations from the storytellers.

It may be that self-differentiation between the storyteller and story listener in this case, both our internalized racial identities and the material effects of society's construction of race on our experiences, broadens the scope of analysis rather than limits it. Empathic recognition functions on the boundary between self and other, highlighting the fact that empathy is other-focused:

> In order to successfully empathize, I must not confuse what I would experience with what the target experiences so I must be careful not to let aspects of my own characterization influence the central imaginative task. (Coplan, 2004, p. 146).

When we hear or read stories and imagine the perspective of the other person, coupled with compassion and concern, this leads us to our own desires for the well-being of that person. In so doing "we encounter ourselves—our own desires being fueled by who we feel ourselves to be and the values we hold" (Leverette, 2022, p. 56). This recognition of difference and a theoretical framework for narrative analysis is particularly significant when encountering and recognizing narratives of race and racism that are bound to trauma.

Thinking with Theory

The second step in the data analysis process builds off the first, creating seams within and between the stories by *thinking with theory* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). In emergence and encounter the researcher engages in a deep reading of the data, paying attention to his or her own becoming-questions and assemblage of thought. In thinking with theory, the researcher adopts a theoretical or philosophical concept and then reads the data while "thinking with" the theory to provoke understanding and insight.

In order to think with theory to analyze findings, the researcher must deeply understand the theory and related scholarship and enter the protocol of the theory so that the theory transforms and reorients his or her thinking. Thinking with theory mirrors the method of emergence and encounter, only the researcher reads deeply and intentionally for the recognizable; thresholds emerge when connections to the theory are made (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). This thinking with theory encourages repetition of the method, analyzing the data through multiple perspectives and theories in turn.

Thinking with theory differs from coding for theory because it makes room for the emergence of a new concept that cannot be understood with the current theory. The theory is responsive to the data, a chance encounter that incites the unthought (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). Each theory the researcher enters the data with is a threshold where something new can be learned but is never disconnected from what was learned before. The method, then, thinks across theories looking for absence, not just presence, difference rather than sameness. One can begin to see this method as a quilt, with multiple pathways of seams crossing over each other and back again, patches layered over each other in some places but not others, moments of repetition and moments of difference. This disorderly circuitry of theory, encounters, and performative accounts is a way of reading intensively to enact a thinking with. Similar to quilts made in the Black tradition, the researcher does not aim to create patterns, but listens for what the authors call echoes in the data (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022).

Trauma Informed Data Analysis and Representation

My method of data analysis and representation aligns with the practice of testimony and witnessing in trauma studies. Trauma researchers agree on "the necessity of trauma witnessing-- the speaking, writing, or otherwise conscious acknowledgment of a traumatic event-- in order to overcome it." To confront and heal from experiences, participants must "piece together an individual history and voice a fully realized narrative" (Freedman, 2020, p. 5). Endarkened Storywork as a method of data analysis is both trauma informed in its practice and has the potential to heal trauma when the researcher and readers bear witness to participant's testimony. As the researcher and writer, I did not appropriate participants' stories by sharing only the parts that serve my analysis and research question. To do this is to invite readers to engage and understand my co-opted narrative, not the testimony of the participants (Freedman, 2020).

Racial Trauma Theory argues that the race-based trauma that Black students experience in the classroom, either from reading representations of racial violence in literature or through teacher pedagogy, is often missed or misunderstood (Saleem et al., 2019). Although I include Racial Trauma Theory in my theoretical framework to guide analysis, it is possible that my own racialized identity prevented me from having the rigorous sight needed to see the threads of trauma in the stories. By presenting the whole stories as they are, I not only honor my methodological commitments, but I provide the field of trauma studies with the student voiced empirical data that is missing from the field. My data analysis and representation through an Endarkened Storywork methodology is a show of radical love, letting my participants and readers know that these stories are "a must-read text to be delivered into the hands of all of us who work to achieve the wonderful light of knowledge, love, and beauty" (Bambara, 2005, p. 1).

I present the participants' complete stories as a means to bear witness to their words and experiences. I put the stories in conversation with my theoretical framework and scholars in the field to explore what participant experience with taught texts and teacher pedagogy in the ELA classroom can tell us about what counts as anti-racist education for Black students. To do this I draw upon the idea of narrative inquiry as relational, looking for moments of "tensions that live between people, events, or things, and are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). Attention to tensions helps to identify moments in the stories and within the experiences under study that may contribute to refining anti-racist pedagogy in ELA classrooms. This critical approach to data analysis bridges the gap between theory and practice in educational research by emancipating the researcher from repressive and taken-for-granted ideas about problems and solutions in education and research practices (Assalahi, 2015; Mustafa, 2011). Rather than attempting to operationalize pedagogy from a purely theoretical standpoint, I sought to understand teachers' pedagogical practices through the students' lived experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

Ultimately, this study included two rounds of open-ended interviews with three participants. The Summer Storywork interview with Derrick and Akoye lasted a little over an hour. The Fall Storywork with Melget concluded at about 45 minutes. Data sources from these interviews included audio recordings with transcription. I did not take field or observation notes during the interviews, but rather engaged in a method of surrender, actively engaging as a story listener. Immediately following the interviews and initial transcription, I cross checked the transcript with the audio for accuracy and identified speakers using their chosen and/or approved pseudonyms. I shared the transcripts with the participants for any additions, amendments, or clarifications.

After I had received participant approval, I proceeded to prepare the transcripts for analysis and

data representation. I kept a written record of my aesthetic decisions and rationale to evaluate these decisions through my Framework for Reflexive Praxis and ensure alignment with my methodological commitments. In the next section I describe the aesthetic decisions I made in preparing the transcripts to make my presence as a listener and researcher transparent.

Storytelling Aesthetic

In Endarkened Storywork, the story listener refers not only to the researcher's role of listening to the stories, but their accountability to share the stories and ensure that they are heard (Toliver, 2022). For this reason, the participant stories are shared in full in Chapter 4 and reflect the transcripts used in the data analysis procedures. I do not paraphrase any parts of their narrative from the original transcript. Endarkened Storywork honors participants by listening to and sharing their stories through methods of data representation focused on understanding what participants are saying, not the researchers' interpretation.

Toliver argued that the embeddedness of storytelling in Black people's lives means researching responsibly would require storytelling in research, not just in data collection, but in data representation as well (2022). Endarkened Storywork rejects traditional methods of data representation and embraces the storytelling aesthetics of the communities researchers work in (Toliver, 2022). Edits from the initial transcript to the stories shared here were made solely for the purpose of storytelling aesthetics and to capture the context, meaning, and nuances inherent in the participant's spoken interactions. I maintained the participants' speech patterns by including utterances such as *like, yeah, and oh,* and repeated phrases/false starts (i.e., *it was, it was one of the*…; *it's like, well no, it's like*…) adding punctuation to convey the tone from the audio of the spoken stories. Some spoken word aesthetics are edited down when I include direct quotes in the implications and discussions for clarity and conciseness. Additional stylistic decisions meant to capture the participant's storytelling cadences are described below.

Endarkened Storywork is committed to data representation that ensures "[participant] voice is centered, not the voice of the writer" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxxiii). Toliver (2022) argued that the stories of Black people are either overlooked in academia or muted behind the voices of others. For this reason, I removed my literal voice from the transcripts so that the participant's stories and words can be read uninterrupted. The table in Appendix E provides verbatim examples of the interactions and responsive story listening questions from interview transcripts I have removed from the shared stories. Other utterances included instances when the participant's asked me direct questions and I responded with yes or no or redirected the question back to the participant (*i.e., tell me what you remember the book being about*). I removed my responses, but not the questions, from the stories.

The participant stories reflect the following stylistic choices for clarity and storytelling aesthetics:

1. Pronoun clarifications are in brackets.

2. Quotation marks are used to signify that the participant is directly quoting what someone else said. Italics are used when participants are quoting their own internal dialogue.
3. Italics are used at the words level to reflect emphasis in the spoken story.
4. Written descriptions of non-verbal communication are included in parts of the storytelling.
5. Ellipses are used to recreate pauses in speech patterns and signify when a participant is searching for words or thinking aloud. This is distinct from the moments when participants speak with prosody and conviction in their storytelling.

Participants moved between district cadences in their storytelling aesthetics. The cadence and nuances inherent in the participant's spoken interactions informed my meaning making as the story listener, and I aimed to recreate the experience of witnessing the spoken story for the reader. After I prepared the stories as described above, I again shared the transcripts with the participants for approval. In the next sections I describe the data analysis procedures that followed.

Data Analysis Procedures

My first data analysis procedure using the analytical framework I have described was *emergence and encounter*. In the data analysis technique of emergence and encounter, codes and themes are not decided in advance and the researcher "forgets" for a moment the expected patterns in the story that are prompted by specific research or interview questions. This allows new questions, or *becoming-questions*, to emerge during deep encounters with the data and to make space for the previously unthought. For analysis through emergence and encounter, I read and engaged with the stories to see what emerged **(**Jackson & Mazzei, 2022).

Emergence and Encounter

I began formal data analysis procedures by reading each story without looking for anything in particular and without the study inquiry in mind. I annotated the transcripts at moments of encounter, describing what I noticed and wondered. I used the annotations to create *becoming-questions* at these thresholds. The becoming-questions were not focused on interpretation of the moments, but rather, noticing which experiences they described, how they described aspects of their experiences, and their personal perspectives on topics that emerged in the stories. I repeated previous annotations when they reoccurred or echoed throughout the first reading. I then re-read the transcripts and the annotations and created *becoming-questions* for each annotation, not combining or deleting repeated questions, to account for and make visible my subjective reading of the stories as a present and engaged story listener (Toliver, 2022). This initial data analysis procedure resulted in 227 becoming questions, including repeated questions.

Becoming-Questions

For the next step in my method of analysis, I reread the transcripts with the becoming-questions in mind. I initially read each participant's story individually and in full for each becoming question, one question at a time. I used a block and file method to capture the words of the participant relative to the question. I did not rephrase participants words as answers to the questions or include analysis at this time. I simply captured the moments in the transcripts where participants addressed the given becoming-question.

Although the becoming-questions were created in response to an encounter in an individual participant's story, I applied each becoming-questions across all transcripts. In this way, the questions were like threads and each participant helped to co-construct meaning within and across the other stories, highlighting moments I may have missed and creating seams for analysis. Many of the broader questions occurred early in the transcripts, and I processed each individually and in the order they occurred in the story. Examples of this category of becoming question include: *how do participants describe the content (topics, ideas) of the books they read? (question 4)* and *how do participants describe/ define good teachers? (question 7).*

Two methods of collapsing and combining questions emerged during this stage of analysis as I moved into the more nuanced and contextual becoming questions. First, I used narrower and more specific becoming questions as *thresholds* to create broader questions that could then be considered within and across stories. Second, I had created clusters of questions that were about similar topics, from the same moments in the transcripts, but each wondering about a slightly different aspect. Because the nuance was relevant, I did not collapse these into one broader question. Instead, I coded and organized these becoming-questions into groups by topic using inductive coding. For example, I coded 28 becoming-questions for *race talk* with subgroups for *race talk and silence, personal goals in race talk,* and *the impact of demographics on race talk.* I captured all sections in the transcripts that addressed race talk and created an individual file with the 28 questions and corresponding sections of transcript. I did this for each of the question groups. All coded questions were organized and grouped by topics, preserving the subtopics within each group.

After I completed this procedure for each topic and participant, I returned to the captured sections of transcripts to analyze and synthesize participant responses to the becoming questions and topics. I recorded my summaries, reflecting on the *Specific Methodological Reflexive Considerations* from my reflexive framework to ensure I was not interpreting stories in a way that obscured participant meaning making or conflating shared understanding and experience in my reading of participant stories. At this stage, I also made note of the seams and threads that emergend within and across stories. At the end of

this process, I engaged in peer debriefing procedures outlined in my Framework for Reflexive Praxis and Data Analysis Timeline.

Thinking with Theory

During emergence and encounter I bracketed off the research question and theoretical framework to ensure that I attended to everything the participants shared without predetermination of the significance to the research question. After I completed the descriptive analysis using the becoming-questions as a guide, I reintroduced the research question into my analysis to determine which topics were essential to the current study and begin the process of *thinking with theory*. This second step in the data analysis process built off the first, creating seams within and between the stories (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). In emergence and encounter the researcher engages in a deep reading of the data, paying attention to his or her own becoming-questions and assemblage of thought. The methods used for thinking with theory mirrored those used with the becoming-questions, only now I read intentionally for connections to theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). Thinking with theory encourages repetition of the method, and I analyzed the data through the theoretical perspectives in turn. I reread and considered the stories through the lens of Critical Race Theory, Racial Trauma Theory, findings from the literature review, and theories that emerged from the becoming questions.

The findings from the analytical framework along with the participant stories are shared in Chapter 4. The participants' stories answer: *How do Black students describe and understand their experiences engaging in taught texts and teacher pedagogy in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms?* I then discuss finding and implications from thinking with theory to locate the threads that inform *how CRT and Racial Trauma Theory can contribute to an analytical and responsive framework for anti-racist pedagogy in Chapter 5.* I discuss the implications for a responsive Critical Race Trauma Reducing pedagogical framework to ultimately answer *what counts as anti-racist pedagogy for Black student*?

Methodological Commitment to the Storytellers

This study authorizes student perspectives by foregrounding participants' interpretive frames (Cook-Sather, 2002). Centering the participants' stories as the source of knowledge and insight for this project is not only a methodological alignment but a commitment I made to the storytellers. My discussion of the results and implications intentionally reflects deference to the storytellers and their reflections of truth. The goal of my study is not to simply include the perspectives of students in existing conversations and within existing power structures; I aim to provide a legitimate and valued space where students can share their voices and educators can listen.

This study does not speculate about the perceptions or intentions of the secondary characters present in the stories (such as teachers or other students). Rather, I offer the participants an "unreal" space to experience the psychological safety required to take intellectual and social risks (Boler, 2014; Grinage, 2014; Williams et al., 2016). I acknowledge that future lines of inquiry could include teacher perspectives to contextualize the experiences of Black students in the ELA classroom to a social justice end. However, it is my position that these perspectives and voices do not inform what counts as anti-racist pedagogy for Black students. To this end, I invite readers to engage as story listeners with reverence and deference to the everyday knowledge of youth voices and visions for the future.

How to Be: Story Listening and Disposition

The participants' stories shared here are true, just as all experiences and perspectives are true (Toliver, 2022). They are not counternarratives to an objective or alternative perceived reality, but their own narratives and authorized truths. Authorizing their perspectives introduces into critical conversations the missing realities of those who experience the daily effects of existing pedagogies in practice (Cook-Sather, 2002). Educators who count students among those who have the knowledge and the position to shape what counts as anti-racist education have the opportunity to improve their teaching practices and create more effective, anti-racist classrooms. By listening carefully and learning from the way students understand their classroom experiences, we can create a more equitable and empowering educational system.

Healing takes place when students speak the truth about their traumatic experiences, and it takes two to speak the truth-- one to speak and another to hear (Freedman, 2020; Jolly, 2011). In Endarkened Storywork the researcher is framed as a story-listener and for readers of this research to witness responsibly they must position themselves as story listeners as well ((Freedman, 2020; Toliver, 2020a). Story listening may require educators to reimagine something they believe and ask themselves how they will be in response (Leverette, 2022). The participants in this study testified by sharing their experiences and invited listeners to witness their testimony. Testimony and bearing witness are essential to trauma reducing social justice efforts (Toliver, 2022).

Summary of Chapter 3

Endarkened Storywork as the study methodology provided a way of conducting interviews, thinking about participant stories, and approaching data and data analysis in alignment with the anti-racist and trauma reducing goals of my research. Participant descriptions of the ways they read and responded to representations of Black identity and experience in literature served as a map for how I read their storied experiences. Endarkened Storywork as a method of narrative inquiry was both a reflection of and window to the phenomena under study: how to represent Black experiences, stories, and epistemologies

from a place of radical love, not just about Black students, but for them. My methodological commitments and reflexive researcher identity shaped my study into a third space to invite participants to tell their stories.

CHAPTER 4: STORYWORK FINDINGS

In this chapter, I share the participants' stories and findings from the analysis through storywork. To consider what counts as anti-racist education for Black students, I considered all aspects of their stories: every patch and every piece of thread. Endarkened Storywork methods of data analysis consider that there are multiple stories to be told: the individual patches (participant stories), the seams (connections within and across stories situated in theory), and the larger quilt as a whole (visions for anti-racist pedagogy).

This chapter is divided into two distinct sections: Storywork and Findings. The Storywork section includes the participants' full stories. Although the stories are themselves findings, I use the word Storywork as a way of letting the reader know they will do the work of story listener and invite them to make their own meaning. I then move into the Findings section of Chapter 4. This section is a synthesis of the threads and seams that emerged within and across the stories through emergence and encounter with becoming-questions. In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings by thinking with the theoretical framework and related scholarship to find the moments within the layers of the quilt "that brought the disparate pieces together into a collective whole" (Toliver, 2022, p.xxvi). My goal is to tell individual stories as well as consider how CRT and Racial Trauma Theory can contribute to an analytical and responsive framework for anti-racist pedagogy.

In the next section I share the Storywork: participants' full stories, told in their own words. There are four stories included in these findings, in the following order:

1. Derrick and Akoye, Summer Storywork
2. Derrick and Akoye, Reflection
3. Melget, Fall Storywork
4. Akoye, One Year After Summer Storywork

STORYWORK

"My dear ones, our work is about to begin" (Toliver, 2022, p. xix)

Derrick and Akoye, Summer Storywork

Derrick

In my house, I'm not trying to flex, but we have like a library area in our house. We all go in there and read sometimes. It's very funny because my Granny actually encourages that. Because she used to live with us and she was the one who told us to make the library in our house. We have fiction, nonfiction, graphic novels. There was a series of books I used to read all the time, but they stopped making them. It was the Brother Grimm. And I loved them because when you read the Brother Grimm you kind of figure out that's where Disney got all the stories they made. I was like, *whoa, okay, I like this book.* So it's all thanks to my Granny that we have that.

Akoye

For my family, it's mainly me and my brother that like, really like reading. And my dad saw that and he would just bring us a bunch of books or go to the library and he'll let us get a lot of books and we'll finish them in the summer. And yeah, we just like continued reading and now I see my little sister is also in that phase where she's reading a lot of stuff and bringing home books.

Derrick

I read *The Giver*, I read *Hunger Games*. *The Giver*. That's an all-time favorite. I love that book and then the movie came out and it was ten times better. Okay, it started off as black and white. You've read it right? I don't know why, but I liked that part about it, how it started off and they talked about how they were setting aside differences. It gave it... what is it called… no diversity? And I don't know, that kind of triggered me afterward… But then there is the whole memory part where you can just touch his head and it gave him the memories and then it turns from a utopia to a completely... There are differences… but they're not *bad* differences. Yeah… I don't know if I explained it. That's how I kind of felt about it. I don't know why… [thinking]…I'd like to look into this.

It was assigned to me in school but I had a good teacher and that was Ms. Jay. She gave us the book to read. She read it along with us and she made the work fun. She had us create a utopian society based on the book. The teacher, or like, what you do with it, can make or break a good book. I may not have loved *The Giver* as much if I hadn't been able to have that experience. I think that's why I loved it.

Have you ever read anything that you just loved?

Akoye

Yeah, I think I told you about it. It's *Stamped from the Beginning*. I really liked it. That's kind of what started getting me into nonfiction really, just because of how he like wrote the book. It was very unfiltered, like he gave his all into the book. And how it was straight facts too. But I like how informal it

was because it does feel like he was talking to like, the reader. And it was really good. That book was kind of a new experiences because most of the books that I read aren't like, very serious, like young adult books. But this one was... well this one, and then *Sing, Unburied, Sing* were kind of like the two books I really liked that tackled like, racial issues. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* was something I read for school but *Stamped from the Beginning* I read by myself. I was scrolling through tik tok and --I follow a guy on tik tok-- and he talked about a lot of racial issues and deep dives into other racial theories. And he was talking about--he just graduated-- he was talking about some books that he did for his independent study and I was looking through them and I kind of like, wrote down all the books and *Stamped from the Beginning* stood out, and that's the one that I started off with.

Derrick

None of the books I've said have Black authors or Black characters. Okay, I did just notice that.

Akoye

I like reading, but I've seen over time I've kind of lost interest in it, mainly because of school and how its taught and, I don't want to say forced upon us, but like, we have to read and it kind of like pushes me away. It's like having to analyze and all that. Because a lot of the books that we read in class, I think that they're good, but when it gets to like, *Oh, now we have to dive deeper into it* and look at the meanings of certain things and just analyze it more-- I lose interest because it's like, I'm taking way too long to read this book. Like we're reading this book for a month and we could have like finished it in a weekend. Or we could be having a discussion about it instead of doing worksheets about it and doing other stuff that just kind of waters the book down more. I don't like the task attached to it. Because I can talk about the book, I don't have a problem with that, just the work that comes with it, and the writing an essay about the book. It takes you out of it.

Derrick

Yeah. being required to state your knowledge on the book, when you were initially just engaged into it. That kind of turns it off. There is this new book, I want to say *Refuge*? They just gave it to us for summer reading. I'm actually wanting to read it, and then they told me after I have to like write two essays [hangs his head and shakes no].

Akoye

I think I'm good at English, like English class, in the work that we do. I just don't like it. Really, I don't like the subject, but I'm good at it. Just kind of weird to say out loud.

Derrick

No, that makes sense.

Akoye

I just don't…I don't really like the workload like… well, specifically my teacher [Hunter High School]. She kind of just tends to hand out a bunch of work that is useless because we probably won't turn it in. She'll just tell us to put it in a folder. And she'll never look at it. Like she'll give us a bunch of work that she won't be able to grade. She probably just sees that you submit it in my opinion. So I just find I'm doing a lot of useless work that's taking a lot of my time.

And you know, I love poetry, like spoken word poetry, and I like to read. So English class, like it should be something that I would like…I would have to say it is because probably the texts that we're reading or just like the experience that I have in that class.

My teacher, she likes to read very sad books; just– they're not really interesting. Or like, when we get to the topic of like, race. There's like three black people in that class. Which is kind of weird for me. Like, we'll talk about race and it's like everyone else has ...They're viewing race through like, their eyes but for the three people in that class, sometimes we've experienced that firsthand. Everyone else, they're just seeing it through the experience of a book. And so that's probably why I have a hard time being in that class. And in that class is also a lot of people who like to really express their ideas. So I don't really talk in that class. I only talk when I have to. But the people who *do* like to talk, like when we're talking about the book, they'll try to analyze the book and see the meaning it has, and it's about, like, a Black family and their trauma. So when I see my white peers trying to analyze the book, it's kind of like *okay, you guys are seeing it through the book's eyes*. *These are real experience that Black people have to face though, and you may not understand it*. So like… we need allies, but I just have to sit back and listen because sometimes I may not be comfortable saying what I actually feel about the book and how I think the characters actually may be feeling.

Because like, they won't understand you know? I mean, they may *sympathize* with me but they can never really be in my shoes and understand how I view, like, current events that have to do with race, or how all the characters in the book feel because, like I keep saying like, they'll always like…They'll never, like… *feel*, you know? Like, no one will ever like, *be* racist towards them. You know what I mean? So it's kind of like, even if I do say it, they probably wouldn't understand. They'll probably think "Oh that's too bad" or "that's real sad." But not understand fully, to the full extent…The other Black students in the class tend to stay quiet as well.

I think if there was an environment where I saw more people that look like me, maybe I would be more willing to talk. Like we all probably talk the same amount in that class. Like we don't talk a lot. Unless we have to, like if we're in a group discussion where we have to give our opinion or whatever, we won't talk.

And the teacher isn't saying anything about this or facilitating the conversation about race. It's

more student led. Like, all the conversations I'm having in that class, it's mainly us talking and then the teacher will give her advice or her two cents or whatever. But we'll just continue the conversation. And most of the books that she gives us, like I said, are really sad. So like when it comes to like, books that we've read about race, they're also sad. So it's always like, Black trauma, so it's not… It's like that's the only aspect that we're seeing of Black life. You know? We don't ever see the happy part of life… the books that we could be reading. And so most of the conversations that we have are very…they hold a lot of weight when we're talking about them. I've had her for two years now, so I would say that she likes it to be student-led.

In her class we read *Bloodroot*. *The Handmaid's Tale*. We read *Sing, Unburied Sing*. We read one book…I forgot the name of it…but yeah, we read it over the summer and it was also sad. Those are the ones I can remember right now.

But also, we like only talk about race, like the race of the author or the race of the characters if the teacher is like, introducing a conversation about race. Like if the *teacher* is saying, "this book is mainly about race". But *I'm* thinking about race in the book when it comes up, because like, sometimes it will come up in a book. Like we read a book called *We*. I forget what year but it was a very old book. And it's a translated work. And so, one of the characters in the book was Black. And the author, he was white, and like, the main character who's white, was describing another character in the book who was Black and he said, "Oh, wide, big lips" and I was like, *Dang, what? That's kind of weird*. And I think there was an instance where he also said he thought like, he resembled a monkey. I was like, *this is like, really weird.*

Derrick

Did your teacher address it when that came up? When that happened?

Akoye

Nope. So like, in the books in class, the teacher won't really think about race unless like, the author *puts it in the book,* or like, the book has the main characters as Black.

Unless the book was mainly around race, I don't… We didn't really much discuss this. When we were, like, reading *Sing, Unburied, Sing*--- that was like the *only* thing that we're talking about. Because that's kind of what the book was about. When we were reading *We* and that part of the book come up, we didn't like, *really* read it. When we were talking about that book it was mainly in general. But like… I'm uncomfortable, like talking about race in that class but like… I would still like to have diversity [in taught texts]. Because I want to see representation. If I was mainly reading books by a white author or developed mainly around white people, you know? It's like, well, why aren't we reading other books? You know? Like, what's different about those books? And what's the reason why we aren't reading them?

If I did have a teacher that was open to selecting Black authored texts that were *not* trauma, but like, were joy, you know, that's something that I would want to read in the… like that public space. In the

classroom. Because only reading a book about Black trauma and the part of the Black---the bad part about being Black--- that's only what other people see. I want to see Black joy, I want to see the good parts of being Black. And I think it kind of creates a narrative that…[thinking]… Like, I think because most of the books we are reading are mostly about, like, history and how racism came to be it's like, well now they're only thinking that we're always like, just *sad*, you know. Or that our whole life is full of racism, you know. And that's not what it is like. We're like… regular. We live regular lives. And we may experience bad things, but that doesn't make up, like…who we are.

I think you need to have a value system and you do need to say you know, we're reading this book, and there's Black trauma in it and the reason we're reading it is because racism is present today and we're going to talk about it so that you guys feel empowered to do something about it. I think you should have a value system and you can't be like, "Oh, the white kids are gonna feel bad."

Derrick

Have you ever had a Black teacher?

Akoye

I want to say no. If I had a Black teacher teaching those books, like it would inherently change the narrative.

Derrick

They send all the Black teachers mainly to Kelley High School…Actually…Not even Kelley really. You know, if I'm being honest, the only Black teacher that's actually been there and stayed and was actually good at her job was Ms. Kay [previous English teacher]. But even then the only…You know, it's funny. The only book that was made by a Black author that we ever read was *Born a Crime*. It was a summer book, too and they made us like, take a test when we got back. Like why would you….?

So I'm never good at English class, right? So it became hard when we were learning verbs, adjectives, and nouns. But then once I got to my junior year is when I actually enjoyed English. Because we talked about theory. Like Critical Race Theory. With Mr. Gene. I loved that. Because…are we allowed to teach that? No right? But he just…okay, that's why I love him.

We did an assignment on that. It kind of made me feel connected more to English. And it made me wonder why some schools don't teach that… But back to the point. English started off as very boring and all this curriculum was strict. And then later on, the further on you get in school, it becomes better and better and makes you want to teach it almost. If I was going to teach a subject, it would be English. Because I realized that it's not all about words and what they are. You get into theory. And I like theory a lot.

So, you know, it's a different situation because Kelley H.S. is like over 90% Black and I've had a Black teacher so it's gonna be different from your experience [talking to Akoye]. But, you know, I've

been to a white school. My experience there versus Kelley was so much different, I noticed. So at Leigh Middle School, when we would read, we would read a white book. You have an all-white class. I was quite often, most of the time the only Black kid in class. And when we would actually read a book, I felt I didn't want to speak. Every time I tried to push it out and speak they all told me I was wrong. Even a teacher was like, "No, this is what the book says. This has to be true." And he would listen to a book over my, the actual experience. Like speaking on the Black experience or even just trying to contribute to a conversation about a white author's book. Both. Your perspective was invalidated either way.

They kind made me feel bad or told me I was wrong, which really affected me. Because then I get to Kelley and it's a majority Black school where you see them expressing everything. You're too shocked and stunned. You don't want to say anything because you feel like it's gonna happen all over again. And you just sit there and listen to what they have to say. I mean, me *now*…and in Mr. Gene's class… Because, I don't know how he did it. But he kind of got me to speak up. Now I feel more open talking about it, like race or racism, now that I'm used to it, but back then it really affected me. I feel like if they put more Black teachers at Leigh…I think there was only one Black teacher…

Well, but like Mr. Gene? He's white. But I don't know what he did, he did something that made me feel more comfortable speaking out in class. I think it's his vibe. He gave off a vibe. He didn't ...I didn't see any favoritism. And I think there's something in him that kind of.... [thinking]… I don't know how he did it! But I know he, he noticed it somehow, like that I wasn't talking. Or that I had something to say but I wasn't talking. It wasn't just me in our class who he did that for. There were other...I feel like he got a full English class of people just like me reading for him. And he converted all of us to speak, getting a bunch of students who were extremely shy on that topic to talk about it. And I guarantee, if he taught that class again, I put all my money on it, that they're all going to speak out. The first one who is going to speak up? It's going to be them, the ones who never felt like they could talk about it before.

But like, with Critical Race Theory specifically. We read these pages about what it was and how it should be taught. And then we read the versus, like why some people think it shouldn't be taught. And he kind of let us decide. And as a white teacher like teaching me about Critical race Theory? I want him to teach it probably over a Black teacher, like if it was *only* just because they were Black. He did it right. And I had never even learned it before! I only learned it *once*, so for me to think you get it right I guess doesn't make much of a difference, but I feel like… [talking to Akoye]…If *you* had a teacher that was like him, it would shift diversity, like out of the picture. Like, whether the teacher was Black or like even, like you're saying, you don't talk because, you know, all the other students are white….I don't know why, but it *would*. It *would*. Because he pushes everybody to talk, and he does it in a way that you don't even notice.

So I feel like, if you get it right, the race of the teacher doesn't make much of a difference. He was comfortable talking about it. He wasn't trying to go around the issue. He did it better than any other teacher I've had.

Akoye

I have never had a teacher teach Critical Race Theory or talk about it. It's never even been mentioned once in my school. Or any school I have been to.

Derrick

I don't have a problem with a Black or white teacher teaching it, as long as they teach it right.

Akoye

Okay so, I talked about how, my experience, it did have a lot to do with the teacher, right? But---like what you're saying about teaching it right, teaching it wrong—what would have made my experience different, with like, talking about race in class--- it's also a lot about the books we're reading.

I just think that having more books with more representation… because I find that when we *do* read books by Black authors about the Black experience, I think … like the only thing that we see about the character or like the main characteristic about the character that we're talking about, is them being Black. We never just see them as a regular person. But when we're reading books by white authors about white people… We don't ever talk about their race. It's mainly about what they're going through, like in the book. When I find that we're about to read a book about the Black experience, I'm like *that's all we are going to talk about*, not really like the events that are taking place or why this happened. It's just mainly, "okay, this is *Black*, how do you think that ties into like their day-to-day experience?" Like okay, yes, they're Black, but I think that…like they should… that shouldn't be the only defining characteristic. It's like they're not willing to go any further or they don't think that there's any value beyond a conversation about Blackness.

Whereas when you have a white author and white characters, we're going to talk about all of these other elements. Because their whiteness isn't seen as some barrier to deeper meaning. And so these Black characters are being seen as not having a deeper meaning besides their Blackness… And that…that controls everything about their life.

Derrick

Right. Like, in my day-to-day life I'm not always like thinking about race. Or my race. Or like racism in general. I don't think about it much unless it has to be thought about. Like, I'll go about my thing, just seeing everybody as equal to me, and then out of nowhere, if it comes to mind, I'll be stuck on it the whole day.

Akoye

I think I've started thinking about it now more because I went to a predominantly Black elementary school, and then after that I've only gone to predominantly white schools, and so when I first started going to Grace Middle School, that's when I thought about it way more because I started being in classrooms where there's only like five of us. I just had never experienced that before. And so I've started just thinking about like how this whole time I've been comfortable in a space where I see people like me, you know, with teachers I can confide in. Like my elementary school, I feel like my teachers-- I think they did a great job making everyone feel equal. Like if someone was really being racist, if they were saying stereotypical jokes, they [the teachers] really didn't take it. And so by going to the predominantly white school after that, it was kind of like… like a change that I had to make.

Our freshman year we read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and I may not remember all parts of the book, but I remember it because my teacher –you know, Atticus the lawyer—he posed him as like a hero and stuff, and I don't know, it was just kind of weird because like, Atticus, at the same time, he wasn't like fully like, *for* the guy who was he was defending. Tom. Yeah, it wasn't like, fully for Tom. You can kind of see that in the second book. But I just thought it was like really weird. The teacher did talk about race in the classroom with the book, considering the fact that they're defending Tom, and he did talk about it, but looking back at it now…I don't think he went like…really deep. I think he kind of just scratched the surface.

Derrick

Like out of his own discomfort?

Akoye

I don't want to say his own discomfort because like, I only had him for one year so…[thinking]…

Actually, I *do* remember… I want to say it *was* of his own discomfort, actually, because I remember a part in the book where the N-word came up, and he was like, "I'm just saying this for educational purposes. I don't want to offend anyone." So he just said that and then he like, *reads the quote* that had the N-word in it. And I didn't know how to take that. I guess that he didn't have a problem with it. I think he just saw it all as "this is for educational purposes*."* I think he just *had* to teach it and that's why…

I don't know. Like a part of me just felt like this is still not right even though you like…. Because like even me, I won't say the N-word. With him saying it was educational, I feel like he could have just found a way to kind of like breeze over it because like… We all had the book. We all see the word. And like, every other student there didn't say the word, you know? It just made me feel uncomfortable. We all see the word. We all know it's there… like you don't really have to *say it*— move past it. But I don't know.

Derrick

Did anyone else bring it up, or like address it? Did you have a conversation. About it?

Akoye

He said, I remember when we first started reading, “I just want you to know that the N-word is in this book and it is okay to say it when you see it.” He didn't ask if we were okay hearing it. He just like “if you see it it's okay to say it.” But no kid said it. They just passed it. But when it was his turn to read– he said it.

Derrick

If he had said “Does anyone feel uncomfortable” or “How do you guys feel about it?” Do you think you would have spoken up and said, “I don't want us to say this word”?

Akoye

Yeah, I think so. Because freshman year, I think I spoke more in that class than I've done like sophomore and junior year in my English classes. I think then I would have been comfortable. Comfortable to say I was not comfortable like with you saying the word. Or anyone else.

Derrick

Let me give you the honest truth. I think we *should* be equal, but it's not treated that way. Even when laws are made, it's not equal if you ask me. Because these laws are made but some states have the option to refuse, which really doesn't help. I don't think it is equal. I want to believe its equal. They tried to tell us at school that it’s equal. But you can go outside and tell. A good example is if a Black person called the police on a white person, they take forever or they probably will try to talk to you down before they even call the police. But let it be a white person calling on a Black person and they will be right there and it's like it’s already proven real. I've seen it happen firsthand, too.

Akoye

Yeah, I feel the same way. I think the issue is we should all be equal and we should all be treated good but we're not. And I think that when it states *like all men are created equa*l I think it really means a *standard* of man, it’s not like every man in the world—White, Black, Asian. It is like they're only telling this to a specific type of man. And so we see that like in the world where it’s happening, like in hospitals where they would cater to white women when it came to childbirth. And so when you see an increase in the amount of Black woman that die during childbirth, they weren't given the amount of care. And we see that just like in prisons and like… it's not very… I think there are things being put in place and like laws to keep, like systematically, keep Black people down.

Derrick

Well just saying *all men are created equal* I have a problem with, because it’s not just men. What about women? Like, why are we still *talking* like this?

Akoye

Yeah, when they said all men are created equal, it's like, Black people weren't even considered people. It wasn't written considering you know, Black people. And so it's like… we're using the same constitution that was written at a time when only white people were considered people.

Derrick

This is really bad. Really bad, and so discretion is advised. This is a very deep topic and it happened to me, and I don't speak to a lot of people about it. I've only talked to my grandmother about it. Back at elementary school I had his principal Ms. Richards. I had this teacher named Ms. Holloway. One day she took us to the bathroom after lunch so we can go to the playground. So we go to lunch, use the restroom, and then go outside to play for recess. I went to the bathroom, and when I got out to wash my hands, I looked behind me and I saw two guys. This is elementary school by the way. I see two kids peeing on the floor. All over everything. I come out and I'm like, "Hey, those two kids were peeing on the floor, shouldn't we get someone to clean it up?" She [the teacher] looked me dead in my eyes. "Okay". Goes back to what she was doing. The two boys came out and said, "Derrick was peeing on the floor." And I sat there in shock. I was like *what*? And I looked at her and I said, "I didn't pee on the floor. I swear I watched him do that." And so she sent me straight to the office and I got suspended for a week or two.

And it happened again and kept happening. And eventually, I looked at the teacher and principal and I said, "What's the point of defending myself if I'm going to have the same penalty over and over again?" Then the principal convinced me that *I did it* at one point. I started to believe what she said. I said, "I'm sorry for peeing on the floor" just to see If I can get reduced time. It's happened regularly.

Akoye

Why didn't they believe you?

Derrick

I don't want to say it but I think it's obvious it was a race issue. I don't feel like I got to talk to anybody. My grandmother was the closest thing I had. But even the police officer, every time I walked by the police officers there, their eyes are trained on me only. It made me feel like I was the problem. Now that I'm older and more mature, I know it was them that was the problem. It was probably because of their background.

Akoye

That doesn't excuse you from doing your own research and seeing how you treat someone as right or wrong. It's common sense.

Derrick

The other thing is these statistics they make around schools. They say Kelley has like the highest suspension rate of Black students. I'm like, *because all the students are Black*. You throw a statistic out there like that, like all the Black kids at Kelley are getting suspended, but it's because there's no white kids. Of course it's all Black kids. But when you *say it like that* what people hear is *all Black kids*. But we have no way to counter that narrative.

Akoye

I think it's because really, Black men and Black boys are raised to think they have to be like… I'm pretty sure a lot of Black boys have discussions with their parents like, *you need to act this way*. You need to act a certain way.

I remember--- this is like when a lot of like police shootings are happening---and this guy… Like, my brother---he's like very outspoken. Like he will speak his mind. And there's a guy, an older guy, who he didn't like really get along with because they're very outspoken. It's like when we have them together they're constantly arguing. And this white guy, he's talking about race, and *something about it*…

And he's always talking about like the Black experience like…like…I don't know, he just, he thinks that he understands. Like he has authority over it and so… I can't remember what they were arguing about but he told my brother "I can't wait to have a cop pull you over one day" and I was like, *what?* and like *what do you mean by that?* And I don't know how my brother felt because we never discussed it. But the guy, he was telling my brother "You can't talk to a cop like that." He was just telling him how to act and my brother is the type of a person who wants people to be treated in the right way. Like if he's getting treated like trash he's gonna treat you that way back, like the golden rule. And the guy, he just didn't like that. He was like, "No, but you need to treat a cop respectfully. Wait until one day when a cop pulls you over and you have that attitude." I was like *what are you trying to say?*

And you know, I don't think when a white boy is being raised he has to be told that. I feel like the system has to put Black men in a bad light so that they can't be defended. When something bad happens it's like "oh, well look at the statistics, they're always in jail" so they have nothing to back them up because the system's always doing them wrong. So they always have these bad statistics put against them.

Derrick

Going off what Akoye said, if you look at the statistics… I'm thinking about that now… *they* set those statistics. Like they create them. They're playing all this about statistics when *they* are the ones who made the statistics.

Akoye

I wrote a poem about this. When I first started going to a predominately white school, I felt like a statistic. You know, you'd never see a statistic about a white kid, but it's always a person saying that Black kids are

not graduating from high school, not going to college. You won't see this statistic about other races, so I personally was like, *oh wow that's really bad*. That was hard to hear…I feel like I have to be driven, like *for me*. Like with school. I am driven by my success, I'm driven by what kind of school I would get into, my ACT scores…. and maybe it's because of that statistic. I don't want to fit into that. That's what has made it so hard for me.

Derrick And Akoye, Reflection

At the end of the interview, I asked participants' how they felt engaging in the topics and their thoughts coming into a research space to discuss their experiences. This is the transcript of the conversation immediately following the storywork once I had explicitly asked about research and researcher positionality in this space.

Akoye

I feel comfortable. Because when I saw you in the whole roasting environment [camp] how you were quick to check someone like if they said something that was out of pocket or a narrative that was untrue. And I was like, *okay, like, I feel safe if I were to talk to her about my experience. I would feel unjudged.* That's true.

Derrick

Yeah, you did. You put us all in check. But you also made sure we were accountable to all the other kids. Like checking on them and telling us how to handle their trauma responses. With…especially with… what was his name? Oliver! Yeah, you not only put us in check on him, but any other kid that had a problem. You also settled that. You're good at settling differences.

Akoye

And when you talk about cultural humility. When we were talking about the taste testing they did. And Mark [a camp facilitator] said "If two people get married and have a kid…" And you said, "If two parents have children, you know it doesn't mean that they have to be married." Yeah. And you talked about cultural humility with the…the squares…for the traits? Punnett squares. Yeah, you pointed out that if we asked them to make those charts for their parents, like, some of the kids may be adopted, or may not know their dad and that the activity wasn't inclusive or it might even feel bad. Like when I saw that, from the beginning, I thought *I would feel safe around her*. And I think that's what a lot of teachers lack. It's like when they're always like, "oh, feel safe, feel free to talk to me"— like the [school] counselors say that. And it's like… I don't feel like they show it. I feel like they just say it but they don't really show it in their actions.

And that's why I'll never talk to a teacher about a problem that I have. Because I haven't seen one teacher that really meant it and acted upon those actions. Because a lot of kids in our school say a lot of

out-of-pocket stuff. And no one will check that. Or they will check it but it's not enough. They don't take the time to get this kid to stop and see what's wrong with what they're saying.

Melget, Fall Storywork

So my name is Melget. I am a very outgoing person. I am very creative and I love to kind of explore and do a bunch of stuff that like. That's who I am outside of school. I change myself to fit into the school because my school is a lot more professional. So, I act a lot more professional than I do outside of school.

I've been to different schools. I've changed schools a lot. I went to two middle schools [Rosemary Middle School and King Charter] and two high schools [Hunter High School and Savannah Academy]. Just because of how different schools' environments are. The first one [Middle School] was just kind of chaos. It wasn't the best fit for me. And then I went to King Charter. That was very different, but still wasn't the best fit. It was a lot more Black students and I was thinking that would be the best fit for me but it still seemed to be chaotic again. And then I went to Hunter H.S….kind of the same thing. Not the best. The people I was with were not the best. And then I transferred to Savannah Academy and that's probably like the best school I've ever been to; a lot more professional. A lot more…like very studious, I guess. Like, everybody wants to learn, everybody wants to make sure they're doing their best, so there's no like "fitting in to school" because everybody who goes there is very different. They are going to school to do school.

The schools where I felt like it just wasn't the right fit, it had to do with the students and the social aspect. But also the teachers and the way that they taught and the way they interacted with us. I would say both because, just the social like aspect of it, the students… they just didn't have the right mindset. I kind of had the right mindset but I was still kind of changeable. Like my mindset could change anytime and I would act like the students around me even if it wasn't…me. And then the teachers they just…either they didn't know how to teach or they didn't know how to handle things. Like there was this one time where I was super upset and the teacher just yelled at me and said, "I wasn't talking to you!" It's just not… It wasn't good…. It wasn't a good fit for any of those schools.

Savannah Academy is different because the students all have a similar mindset and the teachers especially do a better job. The teachers definitely…they know how to teach. They kind of like, you know, they have their humor here and there, but they're always still teach, teach, teach, and that's what I do like. And then the students, they kind of bring out that fun in a classroom. Because they are on board with what we are learning too. But not to the point where it's like you're getting in trouble. It's to the point where it's like, everybody's, you know, having fun in a way that they can still learn and still be entertained. Still be educated.

I do love to read but I also hate it at the same time. I love to read like, very interesting books. Kind of like there is a little bit of romance, a little bit of mystery, maybe like murder in it too. It has to be kind of like a cliffhanger. And then I also love informational books, just because I love to read about anything that I'm super into. I don't care if it's just informational. If I am into it, then I would gladly read it. I never got into, in middle school, like the chapter books that everyone was reading. A book I can remember loving, like really enjoyed, would probably be *Monday's Not Coming*. It wasn't assigned in school. I found it on my own. I just kind of picked out a book randomly for Christmas. And then I would slowly, like it'd be like once a month, I would probably read one chapter. But then when we went on a trip and I just wanted to bring a book so I brought that one and I really started getting into it. And then I finished the entire book. And it was really interesting and I loved it.

I liked the fact that what you knew in the beginning wasn't like… I don't know how to explain it. Probably the fact that you learn new things as you go along. And they're like big things. So like big events happen. And then later on, you'll figure out that *oh, this happened*. Like five pages before. Like it has twists. It gives me goosebumps sometimes. That moment when you are like *Oh my gosh, what?!* You know?

When I pick out a book for myself, I look for… well, I like anything that has to do with race. Like if racism is a theme in the book, if it's like about just racism in general, or just the story of someone who's like... their storyline with race. Like the fact that they dealt with racism before. It doesn't matter what race they are, just what they dealt with and how they dealt with it that has to do with their identity and who they are. It's just very fascinating to me, and I love to hear about other people's perspectives and how they think about it because maybe it's different. And learning, because a lot of books about race, it's true. Like, it's a true story. And so, it's new stories I've never heard before. But those are all books I have just found on my own. It's not like I am looking for a connection or someone who feels the same way as me. It's more that I like learning. With books…it's different from learning through like media or parents because...well, most of my friends are *white* [draws out the word and laughs] so they don't have that, you know, that connection that we have [referring to me]. And then through media, I mean, I can learn a lot, but I don't trust it a lot. Because sometimes it can be fake. It could be put in words that weren't accurate. I rather it be about someone's real story in a whole book. It means that it meant that much to them to put it in a book for everyone to read it.

I don't have any memories of reading books that were assigned through school that were about race or about racism, that had Black authors…Or Black characters… or that we actually talked about it. I would want to read a book like that in, like, a classroom environment where we were reading about race or discussing race and racism. I would love to do that. *Yes*. I mean, I like to, again, hear about other people's perspectives in it. So when I hear somebody else, it's kind of…not like looking for a debate or

anything, but I'm wanting to kind of hear what they have to say and I want them to hear what I have to say. Maybe we could learn something from each other. Or maybe one of us can change each other's minds, like…[thinking]

Because I do remember this one time it was about race, but it was just a…it was an event that happened a long time ago, about someone who got shot, and the person would have been put to either death or just sent to jail, and that type of debate--- that I like. It was about, like, it *had* to be him. He was Black and everybody was kind of was picking their thing and I wanted to know if that was… [under her breath] "*Was that about race? Are y'all thinking that?"* So yeah, I love to be like, emersed in that type of environment.

My classes right now at Savannah are mostly white. But still, in that environment…Even if it meant I might hear some, you know… problematic things. I'm the only Black girl in my classes…[thinking]…yeah, mostly. But, I mean, I don't mind because in elementary school I was also that person. But at Savannah you don't really see race that much. Like you don't… you don't be like… cuz nobody who…[pauses to search for words]. Because you can tell in other schools. Like if you're Black, you probably act a specific way. You know, kind of like that stereotypical ghetto. But at this school, if you're Black, there's none of that. It's just kind of… you're you. Someone who is Asian--they're them, you know? No one kind of fits a standard. Everybody's just a person in a classroom. I like that.

At my other schools, I didn't feel that way. I definitely had pressure to be Black in a certain way. Because a lot of times I would get called like "whitewashed" or like "not Black enough" or "you're white" -- this and that. And then I would be like, *Okay, how do I act then?* Because I *am* Black. *I don't know what you want from me*. So, then I moved to this school and nobody… I haven't heard a single thing like that. And when I told someone about that they were in complete shock. They [students at new school] didn't even know because a lot of them come from like… they don't go to those schools or like those middle schools. They kind of go to more private, smaller schools. So they are in shock when I tell them about this.

In school, you know, English class or whatever, I never had a teacher assign a book or give me a book that I remember liking. I remember a teacher having us read something I *hated*. I mean, they're [assigned books] just so… I remember one was just about war. Like, this means *nothing* to me. You know? I'm not the biggest, you know…I don't want to learn about *war*. And then another one was just poems about basketball. And then there was another one I *do* remember...the mockingbird...*To Kill a Mockingbird?* That was...wasn't that about racism a little bit? It was like… like a white lawyer writing. He was defending a Black guy for… was it sexual assault? Yeah, it was sexual assault.

I can't remember any other time that we read a book in class that was like, explicitly about race… Or that was Black characters, all Black characters…[thinking]…or we didn't talk about it [shrugs].

Because they [teachers] are always like, “that's a hard topics” … or not a *hard* topic, but it's an *emotional* topic. Sort of like, people will get, you know, offended by it I guess? So we don't really talk about race at school. With *To Kill a Mockingbird* we just talked about, like… that it was about… shoot I can't even remember. I do like English class. Like, *now* I do. I don’t, like, hate English class or hate reading, or like, the English stuff that comes with it like essays and question. I like writing essays. I would have liked it [English at previous schools] if it was more about things I was interested in. Because in my English class now, our summer essay-- like our summer assignment--it was a lot. I was so happy that she picked this. It was a video that we had to watch and it was about like… it was about racism. And the girl who was talking, she was talking about how she was from Jamaica, and she came to America and people would be like “Oh, you don't, you know, *look* Jamaican” or “you don't do *this* you don't do *that*.” That entire thing. And I was like, *nobody has ever talked to me about this in any school*. Except now. We had to write about, sort of like our personal thoughts about it, but it was also like, connecting things that she said in her speech. I don’t think teachers are, like, *on purpose* not talking about it. I mean, I feel like people aren't aware. I think teachers know it's important, but they're like, “we have other things to cover, you need to learn about grammar.” How to, you know, put sentences together. I don't think they think about the social world. Like maybe we need to learn this side in English too. Or at the same time.

I *did not* like reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It was just really boring. I like the hardcore, like, *sensitive* topics, but…. It was just kind of… I mean, I liked the whole concept of it, but then we didn't really get into the things I thought I would be interested in. The teacher, he kind of like, sidestepped talking about race with this book. But the book has the N-word in it-- a lot. I remember that! I mean, he [the teacher] mentioned it, he was like, "by the way, the N-word is in this book". And so I was kind of… he said that and I like, kind of [acts out looking down and then popping her head up quickly]. You know, my ears perked up. I was like, *oh, okay what are you gonna say about this*? and he was like, “We're not gonna say it out loud here.” But then he kind of just moved on from it after that. He didn’t say why. He just said we're not going to say it. And then immediately my thought was like, *I wonder what these kids are gonna do when they have to read it.* Are they gonna like, like, try and take advantage like, “oh, it's in the book, I can say it” you know? Or are they just going to kind of pass over it like it's whatever.

We didn’t read it out loud in class**.** So it never came up. It was always just like a homework reading thing. Even in like, student-to-student activities with that book, race wasn’t one of the topics that we talked about that much. We really just talked about…like how do I explain this? It was mostly about Atticus. I mean, literally, like at the end of the book, we really just watched the movie. And then we would pause it here and there and just be like, “so, what did he [Atticus] bring up?” How did he, you know, win the case. Yeah, it just wasn't a whole lot about racism. Afterwards…Does he get shot? Or no,

does he get hanged? Tom is the Black guy, right? Yeah. Because they didn't…They didn't believe him. Just it was later on…Wait…[thinking]…but how…it ended with him winning the case….

So… [thinking]…they didn't care. They didn't care if it was true or not…[long pause, thinking]…That seems like an important part of the book to talk about.... but...*okay*. …[long pause, thinking]…The way you said that…I wish my teacher kind of explained it like that. He didn't…he didn't make it sound like it was important. He didn't make you really think about it. He just said like, "oh, he died" you know, "people didn't believe him" or whatever. He didn't…. The way you said that made me like, *oh my gosh,* you know, like, *really*… really take a second and think about that. Wasn't the dad like really abusive? He was the one who was doing that stuff to her but, like… Wait, they didn't get in trouble, no one cared, right?... And the author is, she's like, it's a white person…[thinking].

I don't read a lot but when I read on my own, like books not for school, I don't think about the race of the characters because like…I mean that's all I ever read about. That's my, that's my main thing, so I already *know* and don't have to like *think* about it. Because if it has like Black characters or whatever, it's like, pretty much on the cover of it. Or I'll read the back of the book. And honestly, if it's, even if it's not a Black character, if it's like any other race, I just want it to mostly be about like, a sensitive topic. Because it makes me you know, learn more about it. And that's something I'd love to get. I'd like to see that in class.

I had a librarian once that was Black but never a Black teacher. She was really weird. I definitely thought about how it would be different if I had a Black teacher, definitely. They would…I feel like they would definitely get into it, like if we were on the topic of racism. I feel like they would really get into it because my librarian really actually got into it too. Even though we weren't like *talking* about it. Like, it was library and we were supposed to be picking out books. But she definitely, she would get into it anytime at any point of the day. But, I don't…I *want* to say it's a Black thing, like, because she's Black. But then I don't because, like, you will always get into it if it comes up, like we [her and I] talk about race.

I've definitely had experiences in classes that made me question or wonder like, *Is this because I'm Black* or *is this about race*? Well, there's been a couple times like once in elementary school, I got called out from this white boy, he was like, your hair looks like poop. And I was like, *Oh, okay*. And then this one time this dude, I forget what it was about, but he went up to me and he was like, "it's because you're Black, isn't it?" I was like, *I don't know*. There's been a few times where they are kind of straight up to me about it. Either way, it's still, like, very racist. With teachers, I never really thought about it a lot.

If I were back at a different school, like, I wouldn't want to talk about this stuff, like race, in class. I know that if we were put in that, like, situation, like we were talking about race, I know it would end differently. I feel like people wouldn't take it seriously. Like, they wouldn't act mature about it. They

would either goof off about it and not take it actually seriously or they would go a little too far. You know, I don't exactly know how to explain that part. But they would just ...they wouldn't act the way they should be acting if we were talking about it. They wouldn't take it as an opportunity to learn or an opportunity to speak their mind. But now, any opportunity like that--- for *me*--- I'm glad to take it.

I don't really talk much in class. I mostly just like to listen to what other people say. I mean usually, I don't really have anything to say, but if I do, I kind of figure out… I'm like, *do I really actually want to say this out loud?* So I don't and also I just rather kind of listen to what people say and especially what the teacher has to respond about what they said.

There *is* a lack of diversity at Savannah but it is the most positive experience that I've had at a school. I have actually been thinking about that a lot. I was like, *why is it that this school and Hunter are so different?* And yet they [Hunter] has more diversity? It's just still chaotic. I think it's from the environment you're put in. Like Talia. She actually goes to Savannah now but she went to Hunter and King Charter with me and both times and she acted ghetto. She was super different. She got into trouble all the time. She would talk about how she got suspended 24/7 And then she comes to Savannah and she's the most calmest, most sweetest person you can meet now and it's all about, just, what place you're put in. Like Savannah, I feel like they really focus on you-- who you are. And you know, they just care a lot about you and how, like, they focus a lot on the positive. What you're actually doing not what they think that you might be doing.

I mean, yeah, I would love to see more diversity [at Savannah], but at the same time, it doesn't…to *me*, it doesn't make a difference. If people from Hunter came to Savannah and they would act like how people act at Savannah, then race or stereotypes wouldn't matter. No one would have to fit in or act a certain way to feel like they would actually be there without the pressure of feeling like you have to be a specific way. Race never really comes up at Savannah. It's not a thing because again, like being homophobic being transphobic being racist, being sexist being you know, anything, anything like that, it just does not come up because that's never been a problem.

I don't really think about my Blackness as being like a positive thing or a negative thing. I'm just very neutral about it. You know, going to any other school I was kind of like, I would take pride in being Black but in the wrong way. Like I felt a lot of pressure to be Black in a certain way. Now--now that I go to Savannah--I just don't think about it. I don't think about it as a negative thing. I don't think about it as a positive thing. I just…I'm just like, *I'm Black. That's cool*. I don't really have any role models for what it looks like to be proud of being Black. It either all negative or stereotypes that I don't feel like I fit into.

But, actually---not in a book or talking in class about race or anything, because, well, we don't read a lot of books at school that have Black characters--- but like, *conversations* I have had about race that *weren't* about racism, like being Black as a bad thing or like, a source of trauma-- like I've had *one*

conversation with a friend like that. We were talking about a place we were going, like my friends and I, we went to a place and it was like some car place, like showing off cars. And one of my friends was like, "It's mostly white people and country, you know, so they…" She was like "they wouldn't see this beautiful Black queen, as what she really is, they would see her as like a threat or something." But she said it like, not like... She said it like a compliment. She complimented me the entire way. And then again, at any other school that would not have happened. It would not have been like that. Because other people at other schools will just see *you're Black,* you know, so you have to act this way. You're gonna *be* this way.

Conversations I've had with my parents about race or like being Black --- or them kind of telling me about being Black and what that was going to be like--- I would honestly have to say it's mostly negative. Because it's like either… "You get pulled over. You're Black. You're in a dangerous situation." Or it's about what I look like out in public, because my parents will get very…like they will care *so much* about what other people, like *Black people,* see of me. Like if my hair looks bad. Or I don't dress a certain way. They're like, "Oh, these people are gonna look at you differently and be like, "Oh my gosh, who are her parents?" It's all that *don't do this, don't do that*. It's never like, you know… "You're Black and you can do whatever with your hair." Like, I don't know how to say it…again, it's like you have to be Black in a certain way, like with cops and stuff, but also, like other Black people? I don't know…

But like, those warnings don't match my experience. The things that they're worried about, you know? Not really. I mean, definitely, obviously the police thing that's, you know, obviously a big thing but, like, people looking at me? That's never actually been a thing. I have gone out in public and looked *really bad* [laughs]. Nobody said anything. Nobody cares. Nobody actually thinks about that. I think it's the fact that I'm adopted, and my parents see it like Black people are gonna be staring at my *parents*, you know. They're so scared about that. And I understand that, but…

So, you know, the conversation we *should* be having about you know, race in classrooms isn't just, *hey, let's read some books with Black characters*. When I talk about wanting to talk about like race as a topic in the classroom, the conversations I wish I could be having are positive ones. Like if we had to read a book, and there was a lot of Black characters, it would be… I would hope it would be like, *oh, this person went on to be a lawyer or doctor*. Instead, it's more just, you know, *they got shot*. Or, you know, *overcoming their Blackness*. And yes, I would also love to have some serious topics but we never have actual… it's either never a serious topic or it's very…very neutral. Or it's about the negative. It's very negative. It's never just a super serious topic that we should actually get into. We should all think about it. We should explain it and speak our minds. Or it's never about something positive that a person did.

It's hard to like, visualize something that hasn't happened, right? But you know, let's say that this year in my English class…[thinking]… I'm trying to name a book that's like…[thinking]… Okay, let's

say that this year in English class. The teacher wanted to read a book where the characters are Black. Like the character goes to a mostly white school. Or there is a lot of like, stereotypes as well. There's a lot of violence in the book…. That thought excites me. It would definitely, because---even with a white teacher, white class---the fact that it would be such a serious topic, I don't care *who* is talking about it. I don't care what race or whatever. The fact that I get to hear other people's opinions about it and hear what they have to say… It really interests me and I like learning. I don't have an opportunity to truly know what other people think about the topic. It never really gets brought up at school. So it's like… I get to hear a side of me that I've never heard before.

When I read a book about that and it's a difficult thing to read about, knowing that it's about…it's like…racially charged, I think I can definitely separate myself from some of it, knowing that I haven't had that personal experience before. It's not… Obviously it's still a very serious topic. I would definitely *take it* seriously. But again, it never has happened to *me*, so I can't…I can't really see it that way. I don't have *that* experience to have *that* feeling. So I can definitely keep myself away from that and keep myself in not a dark place when I am reading it.

And clearly my teachers…we haven't read these types of books very often in class, so if we read a book like that and it was like…the *only* book we read and we just have this narrative of like Black kids getting shot or whatever and this is what….what every Black person's life is like, I feel like…you know, I feel like that's just not…That wouldn't be.... But if you know, I may have a smallest bit of like [cringe face]… like concern, I could just talk to my teacher because she's very open about, you know… I can just be like, *Hey, can we have some discussions or some books that have to do with positive outlooks?* You know, especially when people start saying like, you know, this is about Black teenagers in America, I would be like, *well, hold on.* Like, not me. Not, you know, like, *let's not make it seem like this is the only experience*. And we should be talking about race, even when there's not Black characters in the book, you know. I've never had a teacher who went out of their way to say that the white characters were white and what that meant for them. But this school is so much different than any other school I've been to. So they are definitely, they think kind of the opposite of what any other school thinks so it's kind of like they're looking towards the future and seeing like, oh, it's not all that… It's not all like race is just racism. Or Black is just racism.

But I did want to say about the whole English thing…so I am definitely going to college. I want to be a criminal psychiatrist, going into that and mostly learning how people, like criminals, like how their brains work. So my teacher, she goes into things that are like… *you* pick. You pick what you want to learn about, you know. That's what we've had been doing since school started, what *you* want to do. Right now we're doing kind of a video essay and you get to pick the topic of what you want to do. So mine is Criminal Minds. But you could do race. She doesn't mind that. She wants to know that. She wants to

know that you're into that thing. The shift has been...the teacher is not the holder and gatekeeper of knowledge or like you have to get it in a certain way. Like, we are sources of knowledge or able to go find knowledge on our own. And I found that empowering. I find this class....I love this school. Because she's very much… So you find what you want to learn about and what you want to know, because she knows that's how we're going to learn. That's how we are going to get our information. It's how we're going to pass her class. She wants us to pass her class. So, you know, she picks topics that we want to know or we pick our own topics.

Like if there was one thing that if you took it away, this class, it just wouldn't work anymore, I think it's the way she teaches. That is like, what's holding it together. That's a main, *very much so*, a main thing, I think with everybody. The way a teacher teaches is like one of the most important things and the way she's teaching seems to work because everybody's passing her class. So you can tell what she's doing is the correct way. If you took that away that would...that would definitely be bad. So even if you put a bunch of fools in the class, and she kept doing what she was doing, I think that they would...because it's what they're interested in. At Hunter, they are doing stuff they don't want to do, right? They don't want to and if they can't do what they want to do, they're not going to do it at all. They're not going to pay attention. They're going to do what they want to do. It's going to be in a negative way. They're gonna want to goof off or whatever. But if they're put in a class. where they can do what they want to learn about, they get to choose what they want to learn about, they're gonna put their mind to it and they're actually going to do their work right. The way the teacher is teaching changes everything and those kids that were acting a fool, don't act so foolish anymore, because they… they want to be doing it.

We're doing a video essay right now. Because before this we were actually just watching video essays, different random ones. Like, *why are parking lots important*? *What is a dumb tattoo*? Like just kind of stupid ones like that? They were actually quite interesting to listen to and anyone can have a thought on. So we were doing a song analysis. We got to pick our own song and we got to describe it, you know, describe it our own way. Explain how that song makes us feel and why we picked it and… always just something *we* want to learn about. So yeah, and that made her a good teacher, you know. She gives you that choice. You could pick a pretty hot topic and she would be… she would support you in that, definitely. She is just… she's the most open-minded person. I think it's also definitely just the type of person she is, you know. Like she could pick a different way of teaching and she would, it would, still teach, you know, but it's definitely… I think it's about just the fact that she acts the way she acts, like just the type of human she is.

In English class, it has not been my experience that teachers teach any Black authors, like books. Well, no, *To Kill a Mockingbird*…but no actually the author is white… I guess I'm saying, when they *do* teach about or talk about race it's about violence and racism. And that…it's a trauma to the Black

students sitting in that classroom, to always have Black people, being Black, represented in this traumatic way. It might almost be better to not have it at all, you know. Because I would think, *like do they think that is all Black is?*

I know I haven't had that experience yet to be able to know what that would be like, but I'm still excited about that, like the idea of talking about race in class or reading about it in class. It's just…I don't know, it's really interesting. But I would want English teachers to teach Black authors and Black characters in a way that, like, acknowledges the reality of being Black in America but in a way that is positive and that is for Black students. Like for *me* to learn about and talk about. And maybe when teachers don't know how to do that, students can say, *"Hey, here's how you're going to do it. Here's what you're not going to say. Here's what's going to make me, like make your Black students not uncomfortable. Here's what's going to make them feel heard."* And putting that together. For them.

And maybe some Black kids don't like talking about race in the classroom because they feel like it's not for them. Like, they feel like it's for the white kids to learn because they [Black kids] already know. They've probably experienced it too. But even knowing that, I think the important part is, you know…I'm thinking, or like saying [to the teacher]: *Hey, it's an all-white class. And I know that we're talking about this for their benefit, but I'm here for it and I want to be part of that conversation.* I really feel like I should definitely have that because…The fact, again, that I haven't really had that much of an experience with racism. I feel like I still need to know more too.

And another thing that I think is a great thing to talk about is the fact that maybe teachers who have, who see a mostly Black classroom, maybe they feel like "Oh, we need to really get into this" But then at *this* school [Savannah], it's mostly white. And so maybe the teachers see it in a different way. Like they don't think they need to talk about it because, like they don't see the Black kids because its mostly white. I'm not saying that the teachers have the right to do that. They *feel* like that should be the right way to do it. But no, it's not. But maybe that's the way they think, because of the fact that there's different types of students in the class. But still, I feel like my English teacher now knows who I am, she cares about me, she sees who I am. Especially, you know, the teachers, the principal's, even the staff, you know, they always tell me like "have a good day" or "it's been nice seeing you" this and that. Like they all show that they really do care about you. I think that's a really big thing in the school. The fact that they acknowledge you and you can see that, *oh, these people actually care about me*. They want me to learn, they want me to get out of high school to go to college, you know. I feel like a lot of schools don't really show that.

I think other schools can get there. Like I could see Hunter being this way. I definitely see it but…There are some teachers that are like, perfect, you know, they teach super well. But there is also more teachers that are like, you know…I don't know how to explain it… *just not the best fit* for teaching.

But they don't think that. They think that what they do is perfect and they're not going to change. And obviously that's not the way that a lot of students want to learn. Maybe some students, you know, the ones that are acing that class. Maybe that's the way they like to learn. But most students like to learn the kind of the way that Savannah is. I feel like it's the best. The change comes from the teachers.

The way I feel talking about this right now, like it's very, very …intriguing. I love talking about this. This was very… fun?...[laughs] I don't mean the topic is fun, but you know… very, very interesting. I was very focused, very into it. It's interesting because I had a friend who went to an all-Black school, and I would try and like ask him about it and he said like "you know, I don't go through my day thinking about race, I don't think about my Blackness" and all that. And he's in an all-Black school. So that makes sense. When I was at Hunter I like, thought about it *all the time*, like all my interactions. I think actually, it's because the fact that like at an all-Black school, you know, everybody's Black, you don't really, you know, think about it. And the fact that I go to a mostly white school, pretty much the only black person there, again I don't really think about it. But if you put a mix, and you can see this group, this group, this group, and in each group they all look the same. They'll *act* the same…You're gonna notice what you look like and you're like, *where do I fit in?*

Even though there were other, like a lot more, Black kids at Hunter, my experience at Hunter with race was in a negative way. But that wasn't teachers really, that was more from like, my peers. And it was more about like, social stuff and my own Blackness, you know, the narrative there. Not really about what the teachers were having us talk about in class and learn about in class. It was a lot more where my sense of, you know, my identity is not respected here and I'm not comfortable here. But—*Oh!* [interrupts herself and snaps her fingers. Starts speaking rapidly] So it's like the *numbers*. So in honors-- it's called honors right? – it's like all white. So I was in History honors [at Hunter]. There's like, four black kids in the class and all of these white kids. And the white kids are talking and like, the Black kids, even though we're talking about race. We don't talk. We don't. I'd say it's *numbers*. I was in Honors history, we would go deep into, you know, racism. And I didn't really, you know, talk in that class. It just, it wasn't something I wanted to get into. Like *the way* they were talking about it. I was like, I wanted it to be more of a mature environment. Because even if it's an honors class, right? They are not mature at all. Like it's a bunch of preppy football boys and preppy girls who… and the *girls…* I didn't even want to hear what they had to say.

Akoye, One Year After Summer Storywork

My initial storywork with Derrick and Akoye was during the summer after her 11th grade year. At the end of her 12th grade year, she sent me her senior Theory of Knowledge project based on her participation in the Summer Storywork. This prompted us to schedule a follow up interview. The following is the transcript of that interview, one year after the in initial Summer Storywork.

Akoye

This past year I had a really good experience in my ELA class. I noticed that throughout high school the experiences that I had in my English classes progressively started to get better. Although the literature that we were reading was significant to my experience, how the literature was presented and taught was the determining factor on whether or not the experience was bad. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of the books that I read in 9th grade. Although this book is a good idea, in theory, to teach because of its literary devices, it takes on uncomfortable topics, and themes, I think that it should be retired. I did not like reading this book because of the perspective that it took. I had a hard time connecting with the book because it was written by a white female author and a place of privilege. It's harder to write or speak on the Black experience when someone doesn't resonate with or ever experience the life of a Black person. That alone made the book uncomfortable to read because it was written with such certainty yet in reality it was just a white author writing from the outside looking in about the Black experience during The Great Depression.

My teacher's choices really impacted me my senior year. That year we read a book called *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It has a collection of short stories that take place in Nigeria and America. It accurately depicts, for many, the Black experiences in different countries. Before reading the book we studied post-colonialism and postcolonialism literature and how that plays a big part in the stories of the book. We also discussed how the book is a mirror or a window for certain people. For some of the stories, the book was a mirror, and having a book that I was able to relate to that showed great representation was encouraging.

I would say that I participated much more this year. The literature that we read and how it was taught made me feel comfortable to participate, it made me feel like my voice was heard and that when speaking I could provide a different perspective for my classmates. I think that both internal factors and external factors played a significant role but it was mainly the things that the teachers did and the environment that I was in and the different experiences that I had in my ELA classes. In all of my ELA classes, I was one of the very few amount of Black students so I was aware that when it came to reading books written by Black authors or books centered around a Black character, I along with the other Black students had insight into certain experiences that our peers did not have. My experiences sort of resulted in how I interpreted my class environment and teachers' actions when reading books written by Black authors.

Being interviewed by you motivated me to do my final Theory of Knowledge project on this topic. I wanted to share my views as a Black student, especially knowing that I was not and will not be the only student that experiences this. Students of many minority groups go through this but hopefully, there can be an improvement in how literature written by minorities or having minority representation is

taught. I know that English teachers do not intentionally misteach books that take on the topic of race but it is something that does happen and needs to be talked about. Up until you interviewed me, I was aware of my sometimes discomfort or my reservedness in my past ELA classes but I didn't know how to formally put together what I was feeling and why. The interview allowed me to articulate how I felt and allowed me to reflect on how it has impacted my performance ---my interactions, my work, my participation-- in my ELA classes. This experience has given me the courage to point out and speak up when situations like that happen. Bringing acknowledgment to people by bringing different perspectives into the picture can allow growth. I'm glad that I was able to share my experiences.

FINDINGS PART II

In analyzing these stories individually and collectively, as well as in coding and grouping the *becoming-questions,* several themes appear prominently within and across the individual narratives. Although the participants' share different experiences and perspectives relative to the topics, by looking closely at these echoes, the interacting variables that potentially impact experience emerged. Within each thematic topic participants discussed their visions for the future in terms of what would have made an experience different in the past, descriptions of counternarratives to experience, and visions for teacher pedagogy. In Chapter 5, these visions for the future are discussed further as implications for a responsive Critical Race Trauma Reducing pedagogical framework.

The participant stories are rich, complex texts, and like patches in a quilt, the themes I discuss in the findings cannot be disarticulated from one another. Similar to *thinking with theory,* sections of the stories are discussed multiple times in the finding through different lenses, revealing additional patterns, connections, and themes. Because the thematic findings are inextricably linked, they are embedded throughout the discussion of the prominent patterns and perspectives relative to the goals of the study here. The Findings section is organized at the following thresholds: 1) teacher conflation of race; 2) agency over narratives; 3) race talk/talk about race; and 4) visions for the future.

Teachers Conflate Blackness, Race, and Racism

A key variable that significantly influenced participants' experiences with taught texts, race talk, and pedagogy was whether the teacher perceived a taught text as "about race." This factor was central to many prominent themes and shaped experiences in the classroom. Participants recounted specific classroom instances when teachers conflated Black-authored texts and Black characters with books "about race." Teachers often presented narratives that equated Blackness not only with race but with racism and racial trauma. Additionally, teachers overlooked or neglected to acknowledge when a text addressed issues of race. This study centers students' experiences and perspectives as the basis for epistemological knowledge, so I start by placing these findings in the participants' descriptions of what it means to be "about race" and their use of language to clarify concepts teachers frequently confuse. This underscores the importance of the language participants employ to articulate meaning, both explicitly and through the aesthetics of storytelling.

Participant Language

The participants used language that explicitly differentiated between Black authors, Black characters, Black experiences, race, and racism. In separate moments Melget mentioned: "I don't have any memories of reading books that were assigned through school that were about race or about racism, that had Black authors…Or Black characters… or that we actually talked about it," and later, "I can't remember any other time that we read a book in class that was like, explicitly about race… Or that was

Black characters, all Black characters…[thinking]…or we didn't talk about it [shrugs]." Her repeated emphasis on "or we didn't talk about it" underscores a recurring theme: the teacher ultimately determined if a taught text was "about race" through race talk. Derrick used precise language such as, "None of the books I've said have Black authors or Black characters" and Akoye consistently used specific delineating descriptors such as Black authored texts, books about the Black experience, books about Black Trauma, and books about Black joy, often within in the same story, to signify different meaning.

Whereas teachers positioned texts with Black characters and the surrounding classroom discourse as "about race" based on the visibility of Blackness, participants described "about race" in terms of topics and issues. Derrick described race and racism as topics discussed in the context of learning about Critical Race Theory. He delineated between race as a topic, racialized identity, and racism: "Like, in my day-to-day life I'm not always like thinking about race. Or my race. Or like racism in general."

Both Akoye and Melget expressed a preference for books about race outside of school, without specifying a focus on Black authors or characters. Akoye and Melget described seeking out books about race on their own, outside of the context of taught texts. They did not refer to them as books by Black authors or books with Black characters like they did when describing the texts assigned in school. Akoye described her favorite book, *Stamped From the Beginning*, as a book she "really liked that tackled racial issues" because it was "unfiltered" and "straight facts." She chose the book because it explored "racial issues and deep dives into other racial theories." When picking out books to read outside of school, Melget indicated that she did not equate the topic of race with the presence of Blackness. Melget said she looked for:

> "Anything that has to do with race. Like if racism is a theme in the book, if it's like about just racism in general, or …their storyline with race. Like the fact that they dealt with racism before. It doesn't matter what race they are, just what they dealt with and how they dealt with it that has to do with their identity and who they are."

Participants did not describe their experiences reading what they considered to be "about race" in terms of Black authors or Black characters, a notable contrast to the way they used these precise delineators when describing the texts they encountered in the classroom. Melget stressed the importance of expanding the conversations about race in classrooms beyond just reading books with Black characters:

> "Honestly, even if it's not a Black character, if it's like any other race, I just want it to mostly be about like, a sensitive topic. Because it makes me you know, learn more about it… The conversation we *should* be having about race in classrooms isn't just, *hey, let's read some books with Black characters*."

Although participants had perspectives that differed from the teacher's, their experiences were bound to and limited by the narratives teachers introduced and excluded.

Equating Race and Blackness

Participants recounted specific classroom instances where teachers conflated Black-authored texts and Black characters with books "about race." Teachers often presented narratives that equated Blackness not only with race, but with racism and racial trauma. Participants described racial discourse in terms of topics and issues, whereas teachers positioned texts and the surrounding classroom discourse as "about race" based on the visibility of literary Blackness. When describing the ways teachers equated race with Blackness, a prominent theme emerged in participant stories: discrepancies in the way teachers positioned white-authored texts and white characters versus Black-authored texts and Black characters. Conversations about race were relegated to Blackness, and conversations about Black characters were limited to racial identity.

Akoye shared that unless a text had a Black author and Black characters, the teacher did not mention race. She gave a specific example of ignoring racism in white-authored texts: "When we were reading, *We* and that part of the book come up, we didn't like, *really* read it. When we were talking about that book it was mainly in general." When the teacher assigned a Black-authored, text, however, the discourse was exclusively about race: "When we were reading *Sing, Unburied, Sing*--- that was like the *only* thing that we're talking about."

Although Akoye gave specific examples to illustrate the phenomena, these were not singular occurrences; rather, Akoye described her teacher's positioning of literary Blackness as pervasive and predictable:

> "I find that when we *do* read books by Black authors about the Black experience…the only thing that we see about the character, or like the main characteristic about the character that we're talking about, is them being Black. We never just see them as a regular person. But when we're reading books by white authors about white people… We don't ever talk about their race…When I find that we're about to read a book about the Black experience, I'm like *that's all we are going to talk about*, not really like the events that are taking place or why this happened. It's just mainly, 'okay, this is *Black*, how do you think that ties into like their day-to-day experience?' Like okay, yes, they're Black, but I think…that shouldn't be the only defining characteristic. It's like they're [teachers] not willing to go any further or they don't think that there's any value beyond a conversation about Blackness. Whereas when you have a white author and white characters, we're going to talk about all of these other elements. Because their whiteness isn't seen as some barrier to deeper meaning. And so these Black characters are being seen as not having a deeper meaning besides their Blackness… And that…that controls everything about their life."

While Akoye is the only participant who had multiple experiences reading Black authored texts and analyzing race through literature, she pointed out that her teacher only selected texts that represented

Blackness as bound to racism, and trauma. This resulted in a narrative of Blackness as equated to racism; racism was positioned as a character trait of Blackness, not a product of whiteness, and a phenomenon that only existed when Black bodies were visible.

It is significant to consider this teacher positioning of Blackness and race in Black authored texts with the way participants describe texts they read outside of the classroom. Melget said she enjoyed fiction that had "a little bit of romance, a little bit of mystery, maybe like murder in it too. It has to be kind of like a cliffhanger." An example she gave was *Monday's Not Coming,* a book she "can remember loving" that "wasn't assigned in school. I found it on my own." She described what the book was about and why she liked it:

> "I liked the fact that what you knew in the beginning wasn't like… I don't know how to explain it. Probably the fact that you learn new things as you go along. And they're like big things. So like big events happen. And then later on, you'll figure out that *oh, this happened*. Like five pages before. Like it has twists. It gives me goosebumps sometimes. That moment when you are like *Oh my gosh, what?!* You know?"

Monday's Not Coming is a book written by a Black author, with Black main characters, that addresses the societal and systemic disenfranchisement of children of color. Melget did not include these details in her description of the book or why she liked it. It is possible that these details did play a part in why she selected and enjoyed it, but Melget's description made clear that Blackness was not a "barrier to deeper meaning" or the only "defining characteristic." She stated explicitly, "When I read on my own, like books not for school, I don't think about the race of the characters… I already *know* and don't have to like *think* about it." This contrasts with the way literature is read and analyzed in the classroom, where the race of the characters is "the only thing that we see about the character" ---but only if the character is Black.

Melget could not recall her teachers assigning Black authored texts or books with Black characters in any of her ELA classes, however, she did not think her teachers should not have discussed race in the literature they did read: "We should be talking about race, even when there's not Black characters in the book, you know. I've never had a teacher who went out of their way to say that the white characters were white and what that meant for them." Participants did not see Blackness and race as mutually exclusive, but this was the context their teachers acknowledged race in taught texts. Although teachers did not acknowledge the race of white authors, this detail was significant to Akoye's reading of Black representation in white-authored texts. She contextualized the racist language in *We* by pointing out that the author of the text was white. Akoye described her experience and perspective in our interview one year following the Summer Storywork:

> *"To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of the books that I read in 9th grade… I did not like reading this book because of the perspective that it took. I had a hard time connecting with the book because it was written by a white female author and a place of privilege. It's harder to write or speak on the Black experience when someone doesn't resonate with or ever experience the life of a Black person. That alone made the book uncomfortable to read because it was written with such certainty yet in reality it was just a white author writing from the outside looking in about the Black experience during The Great Depression."

This detail also seemed to shape Melget's understanding of *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a book about race. She started to reference the book as a text that teachers used to teach about race and racism but revised based on the race of the author: "Well, no, *To Kill a Mockingbird*…but no actually the author is white." The participants demonstrated that the race of the author should be acknowledged when the author is white, and particularly when the text included representation of Black characters and experiences.

Teacher Agency Over Narratives

Ultimately the teacher determined whether taught texts were about race; the narratives created by the teacher's positioning of race in the text subsequently controlled the opportunities to engage in discourse about race. Unless the teacher perceived a text or topic to be "about race," participants did not have the agency to introduce a conversation about race. Conversely, when teachers did perceive a taught text to be about race, participants did not have the agency to counter this narrative. Teacher agency over racial discourse was described by the participants in terms of two prominent themes described in the previous section: neglecting to acknowledge race, and conflating Blackness with race and racial trauma. The discussion of these threads will continue in the presentation of thematic findings in terms of teacher agency. Participants experienced teacher agency over racial narratives when teachers: 1) rejected student agency and counternarratives; 2) intentionally excluded racial discourse; and 3) lacked racial literacy and awareness.

Rejection of Student Agency and Counternarratives

The participants described teachers' neglect of racial issues in taught texts as intentional pedagogical maneuvers or lack of awareness. Derrick is the only participant who shared an experience where he pushed back against the teacher's agency over racialized narratives in the classroom. The rejection of his perspective and counternarrative in this discourse had a lasting effect. Derrick shared that when he was in middle school, he was often the only Black student in an all-white class, where they primarily read "white books." He felt that his perspective was invalidated when it countered the teacher's narrative, including insight into the Black experience:

> "I felt I didn't want to speak. Every time I tried to push it out and speak they all told me I was wrong. Even a teacher was like, 'No, this is what the book says. This has to be true.' And he

would listen to a book over my, the actual experience. Like speaking on the Black experience or even just trying to contribute to a conversation about a white author's book. Both. Your perspective was invalidated either way."

Derrick contextualized this story in terms of demographics, another prominent theme in the findings, to describe the lasting effect of denied agency during racial discourse:

> "They kind made me feel bad or told me I was wrong, which really affected me. Because then I get to Kelley and it's a majority Black school where you see them expressing everything. You're too shocked and stunned. You don't want to say anything because you feel like it's gonna happen all over again. And you just sit there and listen to what they have to say. I mean, me *now*… Now I feel more open talking about it, like race or racism, now that I'm used to it, but back then it really affected me."

In his dialogue with Akoye, Derrick often co-constructed meaning through the lens of student and teacher agency over racial narratives and counter narratives.

When Akoye described an experience of racist language being overlooked in a taught text Derrick asked, "Did your teacher address it when that came up? When that happened?" In a story about the teacher's use of racist language Derrick asked, "Did anyone else [student] bring it up, or like address it? Did you have a conversation about it?" Even though Derrick's question is about student agency in racial discourse, Akoye's response and the dialogue that followed illustrated the perception that the teacher had absolute agency over classroom narratives about race:

> "He said, I remember when we first started reading, 'I just want you to know that the N-word is in this book and it is okay to say it when you see it.' He didn't ask if we were okay hearing it. Just like, 'if you see it it's okay to say it.' But no kid said it. They just passed it. But when it was his turn to read– he said it."

Derrick asked:

> "If he had said 'Does anyone feel uncomfortable' or 'How do you guys feel about it?' Do you think you would have spoken up and said, 'I don't want us to say this word?'"

Akoye responded:

> "Yeah, I think so. Because freshman year, I think I spoke more in that class than I've done like sophomore and junior year in my English classes. I think then I would have been comfortable. Comfortable to say I was not comfortable like with you saying the word. Or anyone else."

To feel comfortable exercising agency over racial discourse in the classroom, the opportunity needed to be made explicit by the teacher, ultimately reinforcing that the teacher's perspective "about race" was the only available narrative.

Like Derrick's experience, the teacher rejected the counter-narrative students demonstrated

through collective refusal of the word by continuing to say the word, endorsing the acceptability of the racial slur. Derrick and Akoye experienced lingering effects on both their engagement in subsequent classroom discourse about race and identity formation. They questioned both their agency and efficacy to understand their own experiences and discomfort as racialized.

Intentional Exclusion of Racial Discourse

The participants shared experiences of teachers rejecting or neglecting race as a topic of discourse, which they attributed to intentional pedagogical maneuvers. Akoye attributed the lack of meaningful discussion about race and racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird* to her teacher's discomfort with the topic. She speculated that he only taught the novel at all because it was mandated curriculum. Although the district and the schools the participants attended all had the same mandated ELA curriculum, each had vastly different exposure to racial discourse and representation of Black authors and characters in their ELA classroom. This further highlighted individual teacher agency over racial narratives through the texts they included, excluded, or the intentional positioning of race in their approach to literature.

Melget highlighted her absent experiences with taught texts or discourse about race in the classroom throughout her story, which she attributed to intentional decisions on the part of the teacher. Although her teacher took the opposite approach to Akoye's when reading *To Kill a Mockingbird,* telling the class they would *not* be saying the N-word when it came up in the book, like Akoye, Melget felt the teacher intentionally avoided talking about race in a meaningful way:

> "We didn't really get into the things I thought I would be interested in. The teacher, he kind of like, sidestepped talking about race with this book. But the book has the N-word in it-- *a lot*. I remember that! I mean, he [the teacher] mentioned it, he was like, 'by the way, the N-word is in this book'…and he was like, 'We're not gonna say it out loud here.' But then he kind of just moved on from it after that. He didn't say why. He just said we're not going to say it…. So it never came up...Even in like, student-to-student activities with that book, race wasn't one of the topics that we talked about that much."

The teacher's pedagogical choices shaped Melget's experience with and understanding of the book through the exclusion of topics and the positioning of race in the text.

After we discussed the book and I clarified and described aspects of the books she had questions about, she reflected on this as a counternarrative to her experience in the classroom:

> "That seems like an important part of the book to talk about.... but...*okay*. I wish my teacher kind of explained it like that. He didn't…he didn't make it sound like it was important. He didn't make you really think about it."

She attributed the intentional avoidance or neglect of explicit racial discourse in her ELA experiences more broadly to the teachers' perceptions of race as an emotional topic that "people will get offended by." Alternatively, Melget speculated that teachers were not "*on purpose* not talking about it" and that "teachers know it's important, but they're like, 'we have other things to cover, you need to learn about grammar.'" She didn't think English teachers considered the social world as a part of the ELA curriculum.

Like Derrick, Melget identified the demographics of a classroom as an interacting variable on individual student experience. Whether teachers included race in the discourse around taught texts and the way teachers positioned race in the curriculum was the result of a conflation of race and Blackness:

> "Teachers who…see a mostly Black classroom, maybe they feel like 'Oh, we need to really get into this.' But then at *this* school [Savannah], it's mostly white. And so maybe the teachers see it in a different way. Like they don't think they need to talk about it because, like they don't see the Black kids because its mostly white. I'm not saying that the teachers have the right to do that. They *feel* like that should be the right way to do it. But no, it's not."

Regardless of the reasons teachers intentionally excluded or avoided the topic of race (their own discomfort, perceived demographics, or disregard for counternarratives), the teacher ultimately had agency over the students' individual experiences. This is supported by the fact that all three participants went to schools with the same mandated ELA curriculum.

Derrick and Akoye were in the same grades at their respective schools. Derrick could not initially recall Black authored texts that were assigned in his ELA classes; however, he had a positive experience learning about Critical Race Theory in his 11th grade ELA class, with a profound positive effect on his willingness to engage in discussions about race and racism in the classroom. He directly attributed the choice to teach CRT and his experience to his teacher at the time. His teacher did not include *To Kill a Mockingbird* in his 9th grade ELA class, which is mandated curriculum for 9th grade in the district, because his ELA teacher at the predominantly Black school that Derrick attended refused to teach it.

At the same time Derrick was learning about CRT, Akoye was having a "hard time" in her 11th grade ELA class because of the teacher's positioning of Black authored texts "about race." Akoye "never had a teacher teach Critical Race Theory or talk about it. It's never even been mentioned once in my school." Melget went to the same high school as Akoye [Hunter High School] in 9th grade and could not recall *any* experiences reading Black authored texts or talking about race.

Racial Literacy and Awareness

Participants described experiences in ELA classes when texts and topics they perceived as racialized went unacknowledged by the teacher. In these experiences, the participants did not indicate intentional teacher "side stepping" of the topic, however, they did not have the agency to voice their

interpretation of the text as racialized unless the teacher had already asserted that the text overall was about race(ism). Akoye had the same teacher for 10th grade ELA and again in 11th grade ELA and she described her experience with engaged story listening from Derrick:

> "We only talk about race, like the race of the author or the race of the characters, if the teacher is like, introducing a conversation about race. Like if the *teacher* is saying, 'this book is mainly about race.' But *I'm* thinking about race in the book when it comes up, because like, sometimes it will come up in a book. Like we read a book called *We*…One of the characters in the book was Black. And the author, he was white, and like, the main character who's white, was describing another character in the book who was Black and he said, 'Oh, wide, big lips' and I was like, *Dang, what? That's kind of weird*. And I think there was an instance where he also said he thought like, he resembled a monkey. I was like, *this is like, really weird."*

Derrick asked, "Did your teacher address it when that came up? When that happened?" Akoye responded:

> "Nope. So like, in the books in class, the teacher won't really think about race unless like, the author *puts it in the book,* or like, the book has the main characters as Black. Unless the book was mainly around race, I don't… We didn't really much discuss this."

In Akoye's experience, race was only discussed if the teacher explicitly introduced the topic. The teacher did not acknowledge race or racist language unless they had intentionality positioned the book as one "about race."

The determining factor for whether the teacher decided a text was "about race" was whether the author or characters were Black. Racism was not discussed otherwise, even when explicit in the text, and the teacher did not mention the race of the author/characters unless they were Black. Akoye did not attribute the specific experience described above to teacher intention; rather Akoye attributed it to the fact that the teacher didn't think about or notice race at all unless the main characters were Black. Teachers conflated Blackness as both inclusion and exclusion criteria for "about race."

Self-Efficacy in Racial Discourse

Although Akoye recognized this interaction as racialized, she did not voice or reconcile her concernment, nor did she express a desire to. Akoye and Melget both indicated that acknowledging, facilitating, and redirecting productive classroom discourse on the topic of race was the responsibility of the teacher. Although all three participants described memories they perceived as racialized, the lack of acknowledgment or validation in the moment caused them to doubt the efficacy of their interpretation. Akoye often described these moments as "weird" and she "didn't know what to think" and "didn't know how to feel about it."

Melget described gauging the response of both the teachers and other students to verify her perception that something was "about race" and to hear what they had to say. She shared that she had

"definitely had experiences in classes that made me question or wonder like, *is this because I'm Black* or *is this about race*?" She said she would love to be in a classroom environment where they read about and discussed issues surrounding race and racism, but like her experience with *To Kill a Mockingbird,* her teachers had not facilitated or acknowledged the topic when the opportunity presented itself. She recalled reading a text that she thought was about race, but it was not addressed in the conversation: "He was Black and everybody was kind of picking their thing and I wanted to know if that was… [under her breath] '*Was that about race? Are y'all thinking that?'"*

Although Melget knew the interaction was "about race" and, like Akoye, she was *"*thinking about race in the book when it comes up" she wanted to know if it was racialized to anyone else. When there was no acknowledgment or corroboration from the teacher (or the majority white students in her class) she described this as missed opportunities for her to engage in and learn from classroom discourse about race, not just to voice her own perspective, but to understand the perspective of others, "even if it meant hearing some problematic things."

Akoye was aware that the missing classroom discourse about race reflected the teacher's lack of awareness and agency, and not whether a text was or was not actually about race. Melget, however, perceived the narrative provided by the teacher to be an accurate reflection of the text, and this shaped both her experience and perception. She accepted that racism was of little significance in *To Kill a Mockingbird,* a book she described as "mostly about Atticus" and how he "won the case" with not "a whole lot about racism" because her teacher "didn't make it sound like it was important." She described herself as the type of person who will easily take up the mindset of those around her; for her, the absence of a teacher facilitated discussion about race meant that race was not important: "I can't remember any other time that we read a book in class that was like, explicitly about race… Or that was Black characters, all Black characters…[thinking]…or we didn't talk about it [shrugs]."

A key variable that significantly influenced participants' experiences in ELA classrooms with taught texts was whether the teacher perceived a taught text as "about race." Teacher agency over racial discourse resulted in the conflation of Black-authored texts with books "about race" and narratives that equated Blackness with racism and racial trauma. Participants described experiences where teachers overlooked, rejected, or neglected racial discourse intentionally, from lack of awareness, or based on the visibility of Blackness. Although classroom conversations played a pivotal role in the way participant's experienced teacher agency over narratives of race and Blackness, race talk emerged as a prominent and discrete theme. In the next section I present findings related to different aspects of race talk.

Race Talk/Talk About Race

Race talk featured prominently throughout the participant stories as a concept and as a lived experience. Participants described race talk in the classroom in terms of the narratives produced as well as

their participation in talking about race. In this section I present thematic findings within the participants' perspectives and experiences with race talk. I begin by contextualizing the theme of race talk in the participants' own definitions; I provide a summary of the settings in which race talk was discussed and the participants' perceptions of the experience.

Derrick described his experience learning about CRT in his ELA classroom as race talk, with race as a topic, not an identity. Race talk centered on sharing individual opinions and perspectives on contemporary issues. Race talk occurred in a school and classroom Derrick described as majority Black. Race talk was a positive experience which he attributed to his ELA teacher at the time.

In her initial interview Akoye described race talk as students expressing their ideas and individual meaning making about Black characters as they attempted to analyze and understand Black experiences in literature. She described race talk as talk about "what it is like to be Black." Race talk occurred in a school and classroom Akoye described as predominately white where she was one of three Black students. Race talk was a negative experience which she attributed to the demographics of the classroom, the types of texts the teacher selected, and the role the teacher played during race talk. In our interview one year later after her senior year, Akoye described her new experience with race talk that occurred in the same demographic context but with a different teacher. This was a positive experience which she attributed to the literature selected, the way the teacher framed the discourse around race, and the courage she gained to speak up in class after our initial Summer Storywork.

Melget did not have experiences with race talk in the classroom. She described conversations about race outside of the classroom and learning about racism in class, but she did not identify these interactions as race talk. Although she did not describe lived experiences with race talk, she provided a definition of the concept. Melget described race talk as reading about and discussing race and racism in a classroom environment where she can hear other people's perspectives, they can hear what she has to say, and there is a potential that they learn from each other or change each other's perspectives. She wanted to engage in race talk in her current ELA class where she described herself as the only Black girl in class, but she would not have wanted to engage in race talk at her former, more diverse school. She thinks race talk in her current school would be positive because of the other students' dispositions, the school's cultural climate towards race in general, and the type of person her teacher was. She did not think race talk would have been a positive experience at her previous school because of the students' dispositions and the school's cultural climate towards race in general.

Participating in Race Talk

The participants described race talk as a task associated with taught texts. They described their willingness to engage in race talk in terms of speaking and their experience with listening during race talk. The perceptions of what it meant to engage in race talk varied across participants and contexts.

Engaging in race talk could mean sharing an interpretation of a text, describing opinions and perspectives about topics, and disclosing personal lived experiences.

Silence During Race Talk: Derrick

The decision to stay silent during race talk was a common theme in the participants' stories. Derrick described both being silenced and silencing himself during classroom conversations about race because of the demographics of the space and his perception that his perspective was not valued by the teacher: "You have an all-white class. I was quite often, most of the time the only Black kid in class…I felt I didn't want to speak. Every time I tried to push it out and speak they all told me I was wrong." His lived racialized experience was not treated as a valid source of knowledge, and this made him feel like his perspectives and interpretations were wrong. This had such a profound effect that his willingness to engage in race talk was not mitigated by classroom demographics. Even when he got to his majority Black high school and saw the students "expressing everything" he was hesitant to participate out of fear of being silenced. He described himself and other students as "extremely shy on that topic" during race talk regardless of seeing other Black students expressing themselves openly. Derrick did not describe negative or positive experiences with race talk surrounding literature or literary representation because he did not recall reading novels in class that were positioned as, or he perceived as, about race.

Silence During Race Talk: Akoye

Akoye intentionally withheld from engaging in race talk, however, it was not because she did not think her perspective was accurate and valid. The demographics of the class contributed to her discomfort during race talk, but ultimately, she didn't feel that sharing her perspective with her white peers during race talk would be productive. Perspectives about personal disclosure, white students' capacity to understand Black experiences, and the environment created by the teacher during race talk all contributed to Akoye's silence during race talk:

> "There's like three black people in that class. Which is kind of weird for me. Like, we'll talk about race and it's like everyone else has ...They're viewing race through like, their eyes but for the three people in that class, sometimes we've experienced that firsthand. Everyone else, they're just seeing it through the experience of a book. And so that's probably why I have a hard time being in that class. And in that class is also a lot of people who like to really express their ideas. So I don't really talk in that class. I only talk when I have to. But the people who *do* like to talk, like when we're talking about the book, they'll try to analyze the book and see the meaning it has, and it's about, like, a Black family and their trauma. So when I see my white peers trying to analyze the book, it's kind of like *okay, you guys are seeing it through the book's eyes. These are real experience that Black people have to face though, and you may not understand it*. So like… we need allies, but I just have to sit back and listen because sometimes I may not be comfortable

saying what I actually feel about the book and how I think the characters actually may be feeling.

Because like, they won't understand you know? I mean, they may *sympathize* with me but they can never really be in my shoes and understand how I view, like, current events that have to do with race, or how all the characters in the book feel because, like I keep saying like, they'll always like…They'll never, like… *feel*, you know? Like, no one will ever like, *be* racist towards them. You know what I mean? So it's kind of like, even if I do say it, they probably wouldn't understand. They'll probably think "Oh that's too bad" or "that's real sad." But not understand fully, to the full extent…The other Black students in the class tend to stay quiet as well… And the teacher isn't saying anything about this or facilitating the conversation about race."

Akoye perceived that participating in race talk would require disclosure of her personal lived experiences. Because a singular narrative about race and Black experiences were represented in the taught texts, providing a counter narrative during race talk would require Akoye to disclose her personal lived experiences as a disruption to the narrative created and maintained by the teacher's text selection.

There were times when she did have shared lived experiences with the characters in the text, but contributing to or correcting the analysis of her white peers would also require disclosure of her personal lived experiences. Either way, Akoye did not feel she could engage in the race talk surrounding literature without disclosing her personal experiences and perceptions. Her teacher's pedagogy created a classroom environment where Akoye did not feel comfortable participating in race talk, and where the race talk was for the benefit of the white students in the room, not her. She viewed race talk as a misguided and ultimately harmful exercise in white sympathy and allyship.

Having a positive experience with race talk in her senior ELA class and talking through her experiences in the Summer Storywork allowed Akoye to reflect on the interacting variables that contributed to her silence in her ELA classes. Ultimately it was her "interpretation of the class environment and teachers' actions when reading books written by Black authors" that impacted her decisions to participate in race talk or not.

Silence During Race Talk: Melget

Although Melget did not have experience with race talk to draw upon, she described the context in which she would not feel comfortable participating in race talk. She speculated as to how Black students might act and feel during race talk, and her predictions accurately reflected Derrick and Akoye's stories and experiences. Melget reflected on her previous diverse high school and talked through the interacting variables of student disposition, demographics, and school culture that shaped her perspective on participating in race talk:

"If I were back at a different school, like, I wouldn't want to talk about this stuff, like race, in class…I know it would end differently. I feel like people wouldn't take it seriously. Like, they

> wouldn't act mature about it. They would either goof off about it and not take it actually seriously or they would go a little too far. You know, I don't exactly know how to explain that part. But they would just ...they wouldn't act the way they should be acting if we were talking about it. They wouldn't take it as an opportunity to learn or an opportunity to speak their mind."

Melget felt she would feel very comfortable, however, participating in race talk in her class where she was the only Black girl. Melget, like Akoye, concluded that teacher pedagogy ultimately shaped the class environment, and these were critical attributes that determined participation in race talk, not demographics.

Melget said that outside of ELA class and literature "when teachers *do* teach about or talk about race it's about violence and racism" and this is a traumatic experience for Black students. Her speculation about Black student's perceptions of race talk echoed the experiences Akoye described:

> "Some Black kids don't like talking about race in the classroom because they feel like it's not for them. Like, they feel like it's for the white kids to learn because they [Black kids] already know. They've probably experienced it too."

Although she could not recall experiences with race talk in ELA classes or with literature as a catalyst, she did recall an experience at her previous high school (Hunter) where she withhold participation in discourse about race because students were not taking it seriously. Reflecting on her lived experience led her to the realization that her discomfort in participating in race talk was a matter of demographics; white students were dominating the conversation and shaped the overall tone:

> "So it's like the *numbers*. So in honors-- it's called honors right? – it's like all white. So I was in History honors [at Hunter]. There's like, four black kids in the class and all of these white kids. And the white kids are talking and like, the Black kids, even though we're talking about race. We don't talk. We don't. I'd say it's *numbers*. I was in Honors history, we would go deep into, you know, racism. And I didn't really, you know, talk in that class. It just, it wasn't something I wanted to get into. Like *the way* they were talking about it. I was like, I wanted it to be more of a mature environment. Because even if it's an honors class, right? They are not mature at all."

It was not the "numbers" alone, but rather that the white students dominated the conversation, and the race talk that resulted was not one the Black students wanted to participate in.

All three participants describe listening during race talk. At times they preferred to listen during race talk, and at other times they described their experience as being forced to listen during race talk. Although the main reason Melget wanted opportunities to engage in race talk was to listen and learn from other students' perspectives, it depended on the students included in the race talk. Melget added the caveat, if students were not taking the topic seriously, "I didn't even want to hear what they had to say."

Speaking Up During Race Talk

The participants described silence and "staying quiet" during race talk as the default. At times all three participants described active engagement in race talk as the choice to "speak up," "speak out" and "speak my/their/his mind." Notably, the participants did not describe negative experiences speaking up during race talk because they only spoke up during race talk when the teacher pedagogy created the required conditions for them to feel that their perspective was valued. Otherwise, they did not take the risk and stayed silent. The participants' stories illustrate their processes of thinking through, revising, and realizing in real time. They used their own and each other's stories and experiences as artifacts to co-construct and reconstruct their perspectives, particularly when thinking through the catalysts and interacting variables that contributed to them speaking up during race talk. I had created a cluster of becoming questions that noticed moments of realization, revisions in the moment, and the evidence that prompted revisions. When I reread the stories through the lens of these becoming questions, the thresholds predominately connected to race talk, specifically speaking up and visions for the future. In the next section I present findings for speaking up during race talk. Within these findings are seams with other prominent themes such as taught texts, teacher pedagogy, and visions for the future. I end this section with descriptions of race talk outside of the classroom to consider the connecting threads with race talk in the classroom.

Speaking Up During Race Talk: Derrick

Derrick did not enjoy English class or feel that he was "good at" it until his junior year, which he attributed to learning about Critical Race Theory and his teacher, Mr. Gene. When recalling his previous negative experiences with race talk, he considered for a moment Akoye's suggestion that Black teachers were required for positive experiences with race talk in ELA classes. Derrick then revised his perspective when he recalled that Mr. Gene got him to speak up in class, specifically when it came to talk about race and racism:

> "I don't know how [Mr. Gene] did it. But he kind of got me to speak up. Now I feel more open talking about it, like race or racism, now that I'm used to it, but back then it really affected me. I feel like if they put more Black teachers at Leigh [Middle School]… I think there was only one Black teacher…
>
> Well, but like Mr. Gene? He's white. But I don't know what he did, he did something that made me feel more comfortable speaking out in class…I didn't see any favoritism…I know he noticed it somehow, like that I wasn't talking. Or that I had something to say but I wasn't talking. It wasn't just me in our class who he did that for. There were other... I feel like he got a full English class of people just like me reading for him. And he converted all of us to speak, getting a bunch of students who were extremely shy on that topic to talk about it. And I

guarantee, if he taught that class again, I put all my money on it, that they're all going to speak out. The first one who is going to speak up? It's going to be them, the ones who never felt like they could talk about it before…

I feel like… [talking to Akoye]… If *you* had a teacher that was like him, it would shift diversity, like out of the picture. Like, whether the teacher was Black or like even, like you're saying, you don't talk because, you know, all the other students are white…I don't know why, but it *would*. It *would*. Because he pushes everybody to talk, and he does it in a way that you don't even notice. So I feel like, if you get it right, the race of the teacher doesn't make much of a difference. He was comfortable talking about it. He wasn't trying to go around the issue. He did it better than any other teacher I've had."

Derrick's story included counters to the reasons other participants gave for staying silent during race talk. Participants described staying silent while most of the class dominated the race talk with no interference from the teacher. In contrast, pedagogy around race talk that valued equitable participation and individual perspectives contributed to Derrick's positive experience speaking up during race talk. This is further illustrated by the fact that he did not describe speaking up in this context as a decision or risk he had to take as he did in his previous experience. The pedagogy itself combined with the environment created by the teacher prompted Derrick to speak up during race talk in a way he didn't even notice.

Derrick's experience revealed seams with Akoye and Melget's experiences with teachers neglecting to address issues of race in the classroom by sidestepping the topic and discomfort with the topic. Derrick attributed his positive engagement with race talk to the fact that his teacher was comfortable talking about race and did not avoid the issue. It is relevant to follow these threads and consider the effect of teacher neglect of racial issues on subsequent engagement and experience with race talk when it *is* introduced by the teacher.

Speaking Up During Race Talk: Akoye

Akoye did not describe experiences speaking up during race talk in her Summer Storywork. It was not until her interview one year later that she revised her perspective on speaking up during race talk, and like Derrick, a specific ELA teacher's pedagogy was a primary catalyst for change:

"I would say that I participated much more this year. The literature that we read and how it was taught made me feel comfortable to participate, it made me feel like my voice was heard and that when speaking I could provide a different perspective for my classmates. I think that both internal factors and external factors played a significant role but it was mainly the things that the teachers did and the environment that I was in… In all of my ELA classes, I was one of the very few amount of Black students so I was aware that when it came to reading books written by Black authors or books centered around a Black character, I along with the other Black students had

> insight into certain experiences that our peers did not have. My experiences sort of resulted in how I interpreted my class environment and teachers' actions when reading books written by Black authors."

The choices Akoye's teacher made included choosing *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as a taught text. Whereas previous taught texts singularly represented Black experiences as situated in racism and trauma, this collection of short stories depicted diverse and accurate narratives of Black experiences both in America and in other counties. Significantly, the teacher did not introduce the text as "okay, this is *Black*, how do you think that ties into like their day-to-day experience?" but contextualized the text in colonialism and post colonialism to consider the effect on experience.

Akoye had refrained from race talk in the past because it would require disclosure of personal lived experience. The teacher's pedagogical choices created a narrative that explicitly mitigated feelings of personal disclosure:

> "We also discussed how the book is a mirror or a window for certain people. For some of the stories, the book was a mirror, and having a book that I was able to relate to that showed great representation was encouraging."

Akoye's revised perspective on speaking up during race talk echoes thematic findings about the representation of Black identity and experience in taught texts, providing another thread to consider between teacher text selection and the effect on engagement in race talk.

Derrick made the argument for teacher pedagogy as a catalyst for speaking up in race talk, which Akoye validated one year later. Akoye also accurately predicted text selection as a condition to her willingness to speak up in race talk:

> "Okay so, I talked about how, my experience, it did have a lot to do with the teacher, right? But--- like what you're saying about teaching it right, teaching it wrong—what would have made my experience different, with like, talking about race in class--- it's also a lot about the books we're reading. I just think that having more books with more representation… because I find that when we *do* read books by Black authors about the Black experience, I think … like the only thing that we see about the character or like the main characteristic about the character that we're talking about, is them being Black. We never just see them as a regular person."

Although the classroom demographics and the race of her teacher were consistent with her previous experiences, teacher pedagogy, text selection, and the narrative the teacher explicitly provided for race talk allowed Akoye to speak up and have a positive experience engaging in race talk.

Disposition and Race Talk

The participants additionally attributed their comfort engaging in the topic of race and racism in the classroom to their perception of the general disposition of the teacher and other students. Derrick

described his teacher's disposition during race talk as a key aspect of his experience. Akoye and Melget made inferences about teacher efficacy during race talk based on teacher actions and dispositions they observed in contexts other than race talk.

Although Derrick was able to experience a setting where other Black students were speaking up during race talk, he ultimately attributed his experience to his teacher's disposition. One aspect of this was his teacher's decision to teach Critical Race Theory even though it was not an allowed concept in the ELA curriculum. Derrick added that there was just something about his teacher's vibe that contributed to his efficacy during race talk. Melget shared that she would be excited to engage in race talk in her predominately white classroom because of the disposition of the students and her teacher. She described the students at her school as collectively professional and studious with a desire to their best. She felt that she was able to just be a person in her classroom without being othered or stereotyped based on her race, and this was an inclusive disposition of the school that extended beyond just racism: "It's not a thing because again, like being homophobic being transphobic being racist, being sexist being you know, anything, anything like that, it just does not come up because that's never been a problem."

Melget noted aspects of her teacher's pedagogy and disposition that she predicted would transfer to race talk in the classroom. Her teacher assigned an essay that addressed expectations on the performance of Blackness, a theme that featured heavily in her personal identity formation and experiences in school, and this mirror was something "*nobody has ever talked to me about… in any school*." Melget also cited a teacher's willingness to "really get into" the topic of race as a key feature of race talk. She speculated that if she ever felt uncomfortable with the texts or topics the teacher selected surrounding race talk in the classroom:

> "I could just talk to my teacher because she's very open…. She is just… she's the most open-minded person. I think it's also definitely just the type of person she is, you know…I think it's about just the fact that she acts the way she acts, like just the type of human she is."

Although her teacher had not yet provided opportunities for race talk in the classroom, this did not diminish Melget's trust in her to successfully facilitate race talk:

> "Like they don't think they need to talk about it because, like they don't see the Black kids because its mostly white. I'm not saying that the teachers have the right to do that. They *feel* like that should be the right way to do it. But no, it's not…But still, I feel like my English teacher now knows who I am, she cares about me, she sees who I am…The fact that they acknowledge you and you can see that, *oh, these people actually care about me*. They want me to learn, they want me to get out of high school to go to college, you know. I feel like a lot of schools don't really show that."

Melget described experiences where she felt the teacher intentionally avoided talking about race in the classroom to the detriment of her access to learning. However, the absence of race talk in her current ELA classroom was mitigated by her perception that her teacher was invested in her learning and cared for her as a person., an experience she had not had at other schools.

Both Akoye and Melget shared that they had recently been reflecting on their different experiences in different schools. Melget grappled with the fact that her previous schools, which were either more diverse or had predominantly Black students, were not a good fit for her. Akoye had the opposite experience, where she felt more comfortable at her predominately Black elementary school but had struggled since:

> "I think I've started thinking about it now more because I went to a predominantly Black elementary school, and then after that I've only gone to predominantly white schools, and so when I first started going to Grace Middle School, that's when I thought about it way more because I started being in classrooms where there's only like five of us. I just had never experienced that before. And so I've started just thinking about like how this whole time I've been comfortable in a space where I see people like me, you know, with teachers I can confide in. Like my elementary school, I feel like my teachers-- I think they did a great job making everyone feel equal. Like if someone was really being racist, if they were saying stereotypical jokes, they [the teachers] really didn't take it. And so by going to the predominantly white school after that, it was kind of like… like a change that I had to make."

While Akoye notes the demographics of the space as a key aspect of her experience she also explicitly noted the teacher's response to racism in general and, like Derrick, a teacher disposition towards equality. The fact that the teacher's "didn't take" racist or stereotypical comments in general allowed Akoye to trust them to do the same when it came to reading or talking about race in the classroom. Her description of her experiences suggests that teachers at her predominately white school ignored racism and racist remarks in general. This coupled with the fact that her teacher 9th ELA teacher used racial slurs in class and her 10th and 11th ELA teacher let the white students dominate race talk, demonstrated the role teacher disposition played directly and indirectly in the perception of race talk in the ELA classroom.

Although the setting and context is a departure from the focus of the study, Derrick and Akoye noted disposition as a key factor that influenced their decisions to participate in race talk through storywork in this research study. The artifacts they described as evidence of disposition were not related to race, but they drew inferences based on a preponderance of my actions and reactions:

Akoye

> "I feel comfortable. Because when I saw you in the whole roasting environment [camp] how you were quick to check someone like if they said something that was out of pocket or a narrative that

was untrue. And I was like, *okay, like, I feel safe if I were to talk to her about my experience. I would feel unjudged.* That's true.

Derrick

Yeah, you did. You put us all in check. But you also made sure we were accountable to all the other kids. Like checking on them and telling us how to handle their trauma responses. With…especially with… what was his name? Oliver! Yeah, you not only put us in check on him, but any other kid that had a problem. You also settled that. You're good at settling differences.

Akoye

And when you talk about cultural humility. When we were talking about the taste testing they did. And Mark [a camp facilitator] said "If two people get married and have a kid…" And you said, "If two parents have children, you know it doesn't mean that they have to be married." Yeah. And you talked about cultural humility with the…the squares…for the traits? Punnett squares. Yeah, you pointed out that if we asked them to make those charts for their parents, like, some of the kids may be adopted, or may not know their dad and that the activity wasn't inclusive or it might even feel bad. Like when I saw that, from the beginning, I thought *I would feel safe around her*. And I think that's what a lot of teachers lack. It's like when they're always like, "oh, feel safe, feel free to talk to me"— like the [school] counselors say that. And it's like… I don't feel like they show it. I feel like they just say it but they don't really show it in their actions.

And that's why I'll never talk to a teacher about a problem that I have. Because I haven't seen one teacher that really meant it and acted upon those actions. Because a lot of kids in our school say a lot of out-of-pocket stuff. And no one will check that. Or they will check it but it's not enough. They don't take the time to get this kid to stop and see what's wrong with what they're saying."

The participants make explicit connections between general teacher disposition and their willingness to engage in race talk. Although not made as explicit, there are threads within and across their stories that connect teacher disposition to the pedagogical choices that make engaged race talk possible for Black students. These threads are explored in Chapter 5.

Visions for the Future

Considering unsuccessful and damaging teacher attempts at race talk and complex interacting variables such as demographics and individual prior experience, it is relevant to consider whether participants *wanted* teachers to include racial discourse and representation in the ELA classroom and taught texts. Akoye and Melget both expressed a need for representations and race talk in the ELA classroom; Derrick expressed more of a need for racial discourse and counternarratives at a societal level, but he is the only participant that already had successful experiences with race talk in the ELA classroom,

had multiple Black teachers, and went to a predominately Black school, all interacting variables that Melget and Akoye could only speculate about.

Explicitly and through their storied lived experiences, the participants gave insight into their inclinations towards future race talk in the ELA classroom, the purpose for race talk surrounding taught texts, and explicit visions for successful pedagogy. Representations of Black identity and experience in taught texts was a prominent theme in the participants stories and the findings from this theme are inextricably linked to their visions for future pedagogy. For these reasons, findings from several prominent themes are woven into the presentation of participants visions for future racial discourse. Visions for the future include findings at the threshold of representation in taught texts such as: representation of racism and trauma, authentic counter/narratives, and Black Joy. Included in visions for future pedagogy are decentering whiteness and explicit purpose setting for racial discourse.

Representation of Racism and Racial Trauma in Taught Texts

It is notable that Akoye named *Sing, Unburied, Sing* as one of her favorite books that tackled racial issues, but it was also the text that provided the context for many of her critiques of her ELA teacher's pedagogical choices and text selection. Akoye sought books about race and racism outside of school and loved *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, which she describes as a book about a Black family and their trauma. It was not a general aversion to reading about race or racial trauma that determined Akoye's experience in class, but rather the race talk surrounding the text in the classroom and the collective absence of representation other than racism and trauma:

> "When it comes to books that we've read about race, they're also sad. So it's always like, Black trauma, so it's not… It's like that's the only aspect that we're seeing of Black life. You know? We don't ever see the happy part of life… the books that we could be reading. And so most of the conversations that we have are very…they hold a lot of weight when we're talking about them. I've had her for two years now, so I would say that she likes it to be student-led."

Classroom discourse around race was singular in the representation of Black trauma and the teacher allowed white students "who like to really express their ideas" to dominate the narrative. She had a hard time being subjected to her white peers' analysis of a Black family and their trauma in *Sing, Unburied, Sing.*

Additionally, Akoye indicated that only talking about race in the context of fictional texts and characters prevented the white students in the class from having to consider racism as a real lived experience or broader contemporary issues:

> "So when I see my white peers trying to analyze the book, it's kind of like *okay, you guys are seeing it through the book's eyes*. *These are real experiences that Black people have to face though, and you may not understand it.* …They can never really be in my shoes and understand

> how I view, like, current events that have to do with race, or how all the characters in the book feel because, like I keep saying like, they'll always like…They'll never, like… *feel*, you know? Like, no one will ever like, *be* racist towards them."

Akoye did not want teachers to position texts in such a way that conflated empathy with lived experience. Because the teacher equated Blackness with racism, Akoye felt that white students received the narrative that if they understood and empathized with a Black character then they understood what it was like to experience racism.

Melget described enthusiasm for reading "hardcore" books about "sensitive topics" both in and out of the classroom. She specifically wanted to read about and discuss race and racism in the classroom so all students could hear each other's perspective and have their own heard. She saw this a way for students to "learn something from each other. Or maybe one of us can change each other's minds." Melget went on to say she would be excited to read a book about race even if it included stereotypes of Black characters and violence because:

> "The fact that it would be such a serious topic… It really interests me and I like learning. I don't have an opportunity to truly know what other people think about the topic. It never really gets brought up at school. So it's like… I get to hear a side of me that I've never heard before."

Melget adopted the perspective on reading about Black characters' experiences with racism and trauma that Akoye wanted her white peers to have when reading representations of racial trauma:

> "When I read a book about that and it's a difficult thing to read about, knowing that it's about…it's like…racially charged, I think I can definitely separate myself from some of it, knowing that I haven't had that personal experience before. It's not… Obviously, it's still a very serious topic. I would definitely *take it* seriously. But again, it never has happened to *me*, so I can't…I can't really see it that way. I don't have *the* experience to have *that* feeling. So I can definitely keep myself away from that and keep myself in not a dark place when I am reading it."

While Melget reinforced the idea that reading about racial trauma is not in and of itself traumatizing to her, she clarified that this was because she had not experienced that trauma before. Later in her story, she speculated that it would be traumatizing for a Black student to read about the topic in class if they did share that experience.

Across and within their stories Melget and Akoye described their visions for dispositions towards the reading of Black characters' lived experiences as windows to be taken seriously but not conflated with the same understanding that comes from actual lived experience. While Melget believed reading about race and racism had a place in the ELA classroom, she echoed Akoye's critique about singular representations of trauma:

> "If we read a book like that and it was like…the *only* book we read and we just have this narrative of like Black kids getting shot or whatever and this is what…. what every Black person's life is like… You know, especially when people start saying like, you know, this is about Black teenagers in America, I would be like, *well, hold on*. Like, not me. Not, you know, like, *let's not make it seem like this is the only experience*."

Melget said that she was able to read about racial trauma because she had not experienced it herself; she later clarified that even if Black students had not experienced the racial traumas represented in a taught text, repeated exposure to literary trauma, especially as a singular narrative, was a form of trauma for Black students:

> "When they *do* teach about or talk about race it's about violence and racism. And that…it's a trauma to the Black students sitting in that classroom, to always have Black people, being Black, represented in this traumatic way. It might almost be better to not have it at all, you know. Because I would think, *like do they think that is all Black is?"*

Melget addressed two issues with singular representations of Black experiences as racism and racial trauma in taught texts. First, constant exposure to this representation is traumatic for students. Second, this conflated narrative of Blackness then extends beyond the text onto perceptions of a collective Black identity in general. All three participants discussed the need for counternarratives at a societal level due to the singular, dehumanizing narratives reproduced through textual representations.

Counternarratives and Black Joy

Akoye furthered her critique of the singular narrative of Black trauma and racism by describing the broader narrative reproduced about Black identity and experience:

> "If I did have a teacher that was open to selecting Black authored texts that were *not* trauma, but like, were joy, you know, that's something that I would want to read in the… like that public space. In the classroom. Because only reading a book about Black trauma and the part of the Black---the bad part about being Black--- that's only what other people see. I want to see Black joy; I want to see the good parts of being Black. And I think it kind of creates a narrative that…[thinking]… Like, I think because most of the books we are reading are mostly about, like, history and how racism came to be it's like, well now they're only thinking that we're always like, just *sad*, you know. Or that our whole life is full of racism, you know. And that's not what it is like. We're like… regular. We live regular lives. And we may experience bad things, but that doesn't makeup, like…who we are."

Akoye envisioned representations of Black joy in taught texts, not just for herself, but as a counter-narrative to racism as a defining characteristic of Black identity and experience. Akoye's description of the way taught texts map a narrative of Blackness onto her own identity echoes the narrative the teacher

reproduced about Black characters in taught texts: “Like okay, yes, they're Black, but I think that… shouldn't be the only defining characteristic. It's like they're not willing to go any further or they don't think that there's any value beyond a conversation about Blackness…These Black characters are being seen as not having a deeper meaning besides their Blackness… And that…that controls everything about their life.” Akoye refers to both herself and Black characters as “regular people,” a fact that is obscured by teacher pedagogy. Derrick validated Akoye’s critique, responding, “In my day-to-day life I’m not always like thinking about race. Or my race. Or like racism in general.”

Although Derrick did not reference literature or texts taught in his ELA classes specifically, he discussed the way society maintained negative perceptions of Blackness through intentional exclusion of complete or counter narratives:

> “The other thing is these statistics they make around schools. They say Kelley has like the highest suspension rate of Black students. I'm like, *because all the students are Black*. You throw a statistic out there like that, like all the Black kids at Kelley are getting suspended, but it’s because there's no white kids. Of course it's all Black kids. But when you *say it like that* what people hear is *all Black kids*. But we have no way to counter that narrative.”

This is similar to Melget and Akoye’s perspective on including representations of racism and racial trauma in taught texts that represent Black characters. These narratives are important, and the ELA classroom should include serious discussion of these issues, but teachers either need to make clear that this is not meant to be representative of all Black experiences, and counternarrative must be included as well.

Derrick shared this insight as context for the overt racism he experienced in elementary school and the danger of no access to a counter narrative of Blackness. In response to Derrick, Akoye shared that she believed that the current and singular representations of Blackness in society are intentional. Systems and institutions “put Black men in a bad light so that they can't be defended.” Society then believes that the unequal tradesmen if Black people is justified because they believed negative narratives and stereotypes. Although Akoye acknowledges that systemic racism controls the narratives about race that then impact individual perceptions, “That doesn't excuse you from doing your own research and seeing how you treat someone as right or wrong. It's common sense.”

Melget shared similar visions for taught texts that represented Black joy and success. Additionally, she agreed that texts should be positioned by the teacher in such a way that Blackness was not isolated as a barrier to deeper meaning:

> “When I talk about wanting to talk about like race as a topic in the classroom, the conversations I wish I could be having are positive ones. Like if we had to read a book, and there was a lot of Black characters, it would be… I would hope it would be like, *oh, this person went on to be a*

lawyer or doctor. Instead, it's more just, you know, *they got shot*. Or, you know, *overcoming their Blackness*. And yes, I would also love to have some serious topics but we never have actual… it's either never a serious topic or it's very…very neutral. Or it's about the negative. It's very negative. It's never just a super serious topic that we should actually get into. We should all think about it. We should explain it and speak our minds. Or it's never about something positive that a person did."

Melget highlighted the way teachers can position racism as a condition of Blackness that individuals must overcome. She also emphasized that taught texts should be a catalyst for serious discussions of race and racism as a topic; discourse should not be limited to the experience of a character in the text, which maintained racism as a condition of Blackness.

Melget wanted counternarratives and positive representations of Blackness in classroom taught texts in part because she did not have access to counternarratives and discourse in her personal life outside of school. Like Akoye, she expressed a need for both windows and mirrors in literary representations of race:

"It's not like I am looking for a connection or someone who feels the same way as me. It's more that I like learning. With books…it's different from learning through like media or parents because...well, most of my friends are *white* [draws out the word and laughs] …And then through media, I mean, I can learn a lot, but I don't trust it a lot. Because sometimes it can be fake. It could be put in words that weren't accurate. I rather it be about someone's real story in a whole book. It means that it meant that much to them to put it in a book for everyone to read it.

I don't really have any role models for what it looks like to be proud of being Black. It either all negative or stereotypes that I don't feel like I fit into…Not in a book or talking in class about race or anything, because, well, we don't read a lot of books at school that have Black characters--- but like, *conversations* I have had about race that *weren't* about racism, like being Black as a bad thing or like, a source of trauma-- like I've had *one* conversation with a friend like that."

The participants shared concerns about the limited narrative representation of Black experience and identity made available in the ELA classroom through taught texts. Much of the concern was focused on the ways these narratives would be accepted more broadly and mapped into a universal conceptualization of Blackness. The concern was not only that teachers had a narrow, stereotypical view of race and Blackness, but that this narrative would be subsequently adopted by the students in the class.

The participants shared experiences outside of the classroom and taught texts that they attributed to existing narratives of race and Black identity in society. Many of the representations and narratives

they critiqued in the classroom were reflected in their lived racialized experiences, which resulted in material effects on their individual identity.

Impact on Individual Identity

Threads emerged across and within the stories and perspectives participants shared about their own individual racialized identity and their perspectives on the narratives produced and reproduced in ELA texts and teacher pedagogy. Melget expressed several times that she wanted access to perspectives and experiences with race and racial identity outside of her own, both through authentic narratives in literature and the perspectives of her peers. She also shared several experiences with navigating the narratives about race and Blackness that were shaping her personal interactions and racialized identity:

> "I definitely had pressure to be Black in a certain way. Because a lot of times I would get called like 'whitewashed' or like 'not Black enough' or 'you're white' -- this and that. And then I would be like, *Okay, how do I act then?* Because I *am* Black. *I don't know what you want from me*…I would take pride in being Black but in the wrong way. Like I felt a lot of pressure to be Black in a certain way."

One reason the predominantly Black and more diverse schools she attended were not a "good fit" for her was that, like literary representation of Black identity in taught texts, she only had access to a singular narrative of Blackness. Because she did not see Blackness represented in any other way and felt that she could only be understood as Black if she performed Blackness in a prescribed way, it forced her to think about her race all of time. Akoye critiqued teacher pedagogy that made it seem like Black people were not "regular people" or that being Black "controlled everything about their lives." When the narrative of a collective Black identity was replicated in Melget's real life, being Black did become a controlling aspect of her identity:

> "You can see this group, this group, this group, and in each group they all look the same. They'll *act* the same…You're gonna notice what you look like and you're like, *where do I fit in?*"

Even though Hunter was a much more diverse school demographically, it was a very negative experience for her. Not because of the teachers or the content being taught, but "social stuff and my own Blackness, you know, the narrative there…It was a lot more where my sense of, you know, my identity is not respected here and I'm not comfortable here."

The narratives Derrick received about himself that were tied to identity greatly impacted his internalized sense of identity. The way that his perspective in a predominately white class in middle school was invalidated "made me feel bad or told me I was wrong, which really affected me." He told a story about his experience in elementary school when the accusations of white students were automatically believed over his own, and he endured a pervasive cycle of racism and punishment for something he did not do. He prefaced the story with, "This is really bad. Really bad, and so discretion is

advised. This is a very deep topic and it happened to me, and I don't speak to a lot of people about it." It was not until he reflected on this incident that he understood this experience as racialized, but even before he had that awareness the experience profoundly shaped his sense of identity:

> "Then the principal convinced me that *I did it* at one point. I started to believe what she said. I said, "I'm sorry for peeing on the floor" just to see If I can get reduced time. It happened regularly… I don't want to say it but I think it's obvious it was a race issue…Even the police officer, every time I walked by the police officers there, their eyes are trained on me only. It made me feel like I was the problem. Now that I'm older and more mature, I know it was them that was the problem."

Derrick accepted and internalized the narratives about his racialized identity and performed Blackness in the way those around him understood by admitting fault and seeing himself as the problem. Akoye also internalized the narratives she received about Blackness; like Derrick with no agency to counter the narrative of blackness and race, she instead accepted and performed. The lack of acknowledgement or correction of overt racism when she moved to predominately white school was "a change that I had to make."

Both Derrick and Akoye mentioned not having anyone to confide in about the racism they were experiencing and no agency to speak against it, leaving them to internalize these experiences. Like Derrick, when Akoye got to high school she understood narratives as racialized but rather than performing Blackness to meet the narrative like Melget, she performed against the narrative to reject it:

> "When I first started going to a predominately white school, I felt like a statistic. You know, you'd never see a statistic about a white kid, but it's always a person saying that Black kids are not graduating from high school, not going to college. You won't see this statistic about other races, so I personally was like, *oh wow that's really bad*. That was hard to hear…I feel like I have to be driven, like *for me*. Like with school. I am driven by my success, I'm driven by what kind of school I would get into, my ACT scores…. and maybe it's because of that statistic. I don't want to fit into that. That's what has made it so hard for me."

Like the narrative teachers created in taught texts, any failure, lack of ability, or misstep was automatically attributed to their Blackness. When reading about white characters are talking about white students in general, however, race was never mentioned as a contributing factor to their experiences or identity.

Melget received narratives as to how to perform Blackness both at school and at home from her parents. The messages she received about being Black at home were like those in taught texts—she had to work to "overcome her Blackness." To be in a Black body was to be marked for danger, judgement, and surveillance unless performed in a way that was acceptable. Melget received narratives that she had to

perform Blackness in specific way to be understood as Black. She also had to perform Blackness in a certain way to make white people comfortable. Even when the performance of Blackness she received from her parents was meant to mitigate judgment from other Black people, it was her perception that this performance was ultimately for the comfort of her white parents:

> "Conversations I've had with my parents about race or like being Black --- or them kind of telling me about being Black and what that was going to be like--- I would honestly have to say it's mostly negative. Because it's like either… 'You get pulled over. You're Black. You're in a dangerous situation.' Or it's about what I look like out in public, because my parents will get very…like they will care *so much* about what other people, like *Black people*, see of me. Like if my hair looks bad. Or I don't dress a certain way. They're like, 'Oh, these people are gonna look at you differently and be like, *Oh my gosh, who are her parents?*' It's all that *don't do this, don't do that*. It's never like, you know… 'You're Black and you can do whatever with your hair.' It's like you have to be Black in a certain way, like with cops and stuff, but also, like other Black people? I don't know…"

Melget's experiences, however, afforded her access to counternarratives and she pushed back against messaging about the need to perform Blackness in a specific way. She moved to a school where she no longer felt her identity and her performance of her authentic identity were bound to race. Her lived experiences also countered the messaging about Blackness she received from her parents:

> "But like, those warnings don't match my experience. The things that they're worried about, you know? Not really. I mean, definitely, obviously the police thing that's, you know, obviously a big thing but, like, people looking at me? That's never actually been a thing. I have gone out in public and looked *really bad* [laughs]. Nobody said anything. Nobody cares. Nobody actually thinks about that. I think it's the fact that I'm adopted, and my parents see it like Black people are gonna be staring at my *parents*, you know. They're so scared about that."

Although the participants did not make explicit connections between the texts read in class and their personal identity formation, the narratives produced in the classroom that caused them concern were the same narratives as those in society that affected their sense of identity. Because they did not make these connections explicit and we cannot see the direction of the thread, is it possible that this is not a cause-and-effect relationship but a reciprocal one. It is possible that they noticed these narratives as problematic in texts because of their personal experiences; it is equally possible that literary narratives maintained the conditions of their personal racialized experiences.

Authentic Narratives and Lived Experience

In addition to narratives of Black joy and narratives that countered a collective Black identity, the participants expressed a reverence and need for authentic first-person narratives of lived experience.

Lived experience, both in texts and their own lived experiences, were seen as a source of authoritative knowledge and insight on Black identity and issues of race. Akoye and Melget both critiqued the practice of only reading about racial issues through the experiences of fictionized characters in literature. Their personal choices when it comes to reading about race outside of school reflected the need for authentic narratives of lived experience. Melget and Akoye's descriptions of the books they wanted to read about race shared common features such as serious, factual, and straightforward. They respected an author's willingness to disclose lived experiences with race, racism, and identity; this reflected the protectiveness and distrust all three expressed when it came to disclosing their own lived experiences.

Akoye indicated that *Stamped from the Beginning* was the book that got her into nonfiction "because of how he wrote the book. It was very unfiltered, like he gave his all into the book." The author's writing style made her feel like the author was talking to her as the reader, not about her. Melget also looked to non-fiction texts to learn more about race and racism because they offered authentic narratives of lived experiences, "because a lot of books about race, it's true. Like, it's a true story." She distrusted the authority and accuracy of narratives about race unless it came from lived experience: "I rather it be about someone's real story in a whole book. It means that it meant that much to them to put it in a book for everyone to read it." She echoed a respect for an author's willingness to disclose their lived experiences and share their story.

A common thread that emerged in Akoye's stories was her discomfort listening to narratives about Black experiences when they were produced by white people with a sense of authority or understanding, both in literature and her social world. Akoye had a negative experience reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* because of her teacher's overt use of racist language and the authoritative stance he took that it was okay for him to use the N-word "because it was educational." Her position that the book needed to be retired from classrooms, however, was because it was not an authentic narrative about race and racism:

> "I had a hard time connecting with the book because it was written by a white female author and a place of privilege. It's harder to write or speak on the Black experience when someone doesn't resonate with or ever experience the life of a Black person. That alone made the book uncomfortable to read because it was written with such certainty yet in reality it was just a white author writing from the outside looking in about the Black experience during The Great Depression."

Akoye's position on the authenticity of narratives when they are produced by white authors extended to reading texts and engaging in race talk in the ELA classroom. She shared that "when I see my white peers trying to analyze the book, it's kind of like *okay, you guys are seeing it through the book's eyes*. *These are real experience that Black people have to face though, and you may not understand it*."

Lived experiences were a more valid source of understanding than literary understanding. Akoye recognized that her white peers may be well-intentioned in their efforts at allyship, but that they could not speak from a place of authority because they could not speak from a place of lived experience. Even if her white peers were to hear authentic stories of lived experience in addition to literary representation, their level of understanding and empathy would not be equitable to the knowledge that comes from lived experience:

> "Because like, they won't understand you know? I mean, they may *sympathize* with me but they can never really be in my shoes and understand how I view, like, current events that have to do with race…They'll never, like… *feel*, you know? Like, no one will ever like, *be* racist towards them…So it's kind of like, even if I do say it, they probably wouldn't understand."

Akoye's frustration was not that white people could not understand what it was like to be Black, but that white people assumed they could understand the experience of being Black and speak from a place of authority:

> "This white guy, he's talking about race, and *something about it*… He's always talking about the Black experience like… he thinks that he understands. Like he has authority over it."

Akoye felt that her own lived experience provided valuable and valid insight that was essential to these conversations, but that the classroom was not a space where this perspective was reciprocated: "I was aware that when it came to reading books written by Black authors or books centered around a Black character, I along with the other Black students had insight into certain experiences that our peers did not have." Although the participants valued authentic narratives of lived experience in both taught texts and discourse about trace, they also shared a protectiveness and distrust when it came to disclosing their own lived experiences.

Akoye and Melget described interpreting the classroom environment and teacher's actions in their decision to disclose. Melget shared that "I kind of figure out… I'm like, *do I really actually want to say this out loud?* So I don't and also I just rather kind of listen to what people say and especially what the teacher has to respond about what they said." The way a teacher responded to racial discourse was key in not only their participation in race talk surrounding literature but their willingness to disclose their own racialized experiences. Derrick shared that he didn't have anyone to talk to when he was experiencing racism and Akoye echoed Melget's hesitation towards personal disclosure based on teacher actions:

> "I think that's what a lot of teachers lack. It's like when they're always like, 'oh, feel safe, feel free to talk to me'… I don't feel like they show it. I feel like they just say it but they don't really show it in their actions. And that's why I'll never talk to a teacher about a problem that I have. Because I haven't seen one teacher that really meant it and acted upon those actions. Because a lot of kids in our school say a lot of out-of-pocket stuff. And no one will check that. Or they will check it but

it's not enough. They don't take the time to get this kid to stop and see what's wrong with what they're saying."

Participants wanted to see authentic narratives of lived experience in the texts they read about race and racism. They wanted the classroom to be a space where these narratives were seen as valid and authoritative as well. This included not positioning or accepting white perspectives as authoritative narratives on race and Black experiences. Without these conditions, participants would not disclose their lived experiences, even though they knew they held valuable insight.

The Purpose for Reading and Talking About Race

Participants described their visions for teacher pedagogy in the ELA classroom that would create inclusive conditions for reading and talking about race. In this section, I present findings from the participant's stories that described their visions for the future in terms of race and race talk specifically, and experiences with successful pedagogy in general. Participants described their perspectives on the purpose for race talk in the classroom, teacher pedagogy and disposition, decentering whiteness, and liminal identities in the classroom.

The purposes for reading and talking about race in the classroom were: for their own learning and growth, to provide diverse representation, to consider broader social issues, and to empower students to make changes to their world.

Personal Learning and Growth

Derrick's experience reading and talking about race through the lens of theory in the classroom changed his perspective on ELA class because it provided him with a meaningful learning opportunity. By talking about race in the context of Critical Race Theory, Derrick was able to learn something about race and contemporary issues he never knew before. The learning was not situated in or limited to the narrative about race introduced by the teacher. Derrick shared that the teacher provided diverse perspectives on Critical Race Theory and then he "let us decide."

Melget's purpose for reading and talking about race in the classroom was explicitly for her own personal learning and growth. She mentioned several times within her story that her relationships outside of school didn't provide access to racial discourse or opportunities to learn something new about race. She did not trust narratives in the media, she did not feel she could connect with her white friends about the topic, and the conversations she had with her parents about how to perform Blackness were not "the conversation we *should* be having about race." When she tried to talk to a Black friend about race, like Derrick, it wasn't something he thought much about:

"I would try and like ask him about it and he said like 'you know, I don't go through my day thinking about race, I don't think about my Blackness' and all that. And he's in an all-Black

school. So that makes sense. When I was at Hunter I like, thought about it *all the time*, like all my interactions."

Without access to personally meaningful racial discourses outside of school, Melget saw the classroom as a place where she could learn about race in a structured, serious environment.

Not only was she open to new learning, but she was also open to personal growth in terms of her existing perspectives: "Maybe we could learn something from each other. Or maybe one of us can change each other's minds." Melget's purpose for reading and talking about race was not limited to her own racialized identity. She thought she should be learning about diverse issues and perspectives on race as well as diverse racialized experiences:

> "Even if it's not a Black character, if it's like any other race, I just want it to mostly be about like, a sensitive topic. Because it makes me you know, learn more about it. And that's something I'd love to get. I'd like to see that in class…I don't care *who* is talking about it. I don't care what race or whatever. The fact that I get to hear other people's opinions about it and hear what they have to say… It really interests me and I like learning."

Melget shared her perspective that a teacher's purpose for reading and talking about race in the classroom should not be based on the visible demographics of the classroom. She wanted English teachers to teach Black authors and Black characters in a way that "acknowledges the reality of being Black in America but in a way that is positive and that is for Black students. Like for *me* to learn about and talk about." Melget speculated that her teachers did not see a purpose to reading and talking about race in her predominately white classrooms. She believed that when teachers did talk about race and racism in the classroom the instruction was for the white students in the class to learn because teachers assumed all Black students already knew about racism and "probably experienced it too." Melget made the point that teachers cannot look at a student to determine what texts and topics will be windows or mirrors for them or make assumptions about their lived experiences based on race:

> "I think the important part is…saying [to the teacher]: *Hey, it's an all-white class. And I know that we're talking about this for their benefit, but I'm here for it and I want to be part of that conversation.* I really feel like I should definitely have that because…The fact, again, is that I haven't really had that much of an experience with racism. I feel like I still need to know more too."

Melget shared a vision for the future where all students had equitable access to personal learning and growth on topics of race and racism. Participants recognized the ways in which literature could serve as a catalyst for racial discourse in the classroom. However, they also shared visions for the future that included diverse representation in taught texts that were not bound to Blackness or racism.

The Purpose for Diverse Representation

Participants recognized that for teachers the purpose of including Black authored texts in the ELA classroom was singularly as a catalyst for talking about racism. Akoye's purpose for diverse representation in taught texts was to provide windows and mirrors for all students; teachers shouldn't determine what would be a window and what would be a mirror for students based on the way they racialized the students within a Black-white binary. The purpose for including Black authored texts should not be communicated as windows into racism for white students or as mirrors for all Black students. Although she had not shared positive experiences at the time of the Summer Storywork:

> "I would still like to have diversity [in taught texts]. Because I want to see representation. If I was mainly reading books by a white author or developed mainly around white people, you know? It's like, well, why aren't we reading other books? You know? Like, what's different about those books? And what's the reason why we aren't reading them?"

Akoye wanted to see diversity in representation of experience, not just a text by an author that was not white:

> "If I did have a teacher that was open to selecting Black authored texts that were *not* trauma, but like, were joy, you know, that's something that I would want to read…In the classroom."

Akoye's positive experience reading and talking about race in the ELA classroom one year later provided insight into the purpose of including diverse representation in taught texts: "We also discussed how the book is a mirror or a window for certain people. For some of the stories, the book was a mirror, and having a book that I was able to relate to that showed great representation was encouraging."

The purpose for including diversity in taught texts was not limited to the representation of Black characters and experiences. Melget wanted to read and talk about diverse experiences and identities, clarifying that this did not equate to only representation of Black experiences and identities. Taught texts needed to be inclusive of diverse identities beyond just a Black-white racial binary. Diverse texts, however, required a change in teachers' current pedagogical approach. Akoye knew that:

> "I was not and will not be the only student that experiences this. Students of many minority groups go through this but hopefully, there can be an improvement in how literature written by minorities or having minority representation is taught. I know that English teachers do not intentionally misteach books that take on the topic of race but it is something that does happen and needs to be talked about."

Melget agreed that unless diversity in taught texts provided representations of racialized experiences beyond racism and trauma, "It might almost be better to not have it at all."

Teacher Pedagogy and Disposition

The participants' visions for the future were shared directly and indirectly in their reflections on when and how their experiences could have been different. Having both positive and negative experiences allowed them to identify the critical attributes of both effective and harmful classroom experiences. The most explicit visions for the future they shared were for teacher pedagogy and disposition. They described what should happen in ELA classrooms, the values and commitments that should guide teachers' pedagogical choices, and the need for explicit purpose setting by the teacher. I first present findings that called for a decentering of whiteness when reading and talking about race in the classroom, and then I locate the threads in the story that provide insight into effective pedagogy more broadly.

Decentering Whiteness

The participants shared the ways in which white authored texts and white characters were read and discussed differently than the texts teacher positioned as "about race" in the ELA classroom. These racial disparities in literary analysis extended beyond the text and to the students in the classroom. Melget and Akoye shared visions for future pedagogy that revealed their shared perception that teachers were making pedagogical decisions based on what they perceived as the learning needs of the white students in the classroom. One aspect of pedagogy that centered whiteness was protecting the emotional safety of white students during race talk.

Melget shared that her teachers had explicitly rejected race talk in the classroom altogether because "they [teachers] are always like, 'that's a hard topics' … or not a *hard* topic, but it's an *emotional* topic. Sort of like, people will get, you know, offended by it I guess? So we don't really talk about race at school." The fact that Melget attended a predominately white school and her later observations that teachers don't read and talk about race based on the presence of white students suggests that the people who may get offended are the white students. In contrast to her teachers 'description of race as a hard or emotional topic, Melget consistently described race as a "serious topic" that had a place in classroom discourse for all students regardless of their race. She did not describe her experiences reading or talking about race in the classroom as race talk due to teacher neutrality: "It's either never a serious topic or it's very neutral." To decenter whiteness, teachers needed to view race as "a super serious topic that we should actually get into. We should all think about it. We should explain it and speak our minds… even with a white teacher, white class---the fact that it would be such a serious topic…" Melget shared that even if race talk meant potentially hearing "problematic things" as long as the teacher treated it as a serious topic students would take it as an "opportunity to learn or an opportunity to speak their mind."

Melget's perspective was that when teachers decentered whiteness, all students would be empowered to engage in racial discourse in the classroom. Akoye agreed that the purpose of racial discourse in the classroom should be student empowerment and activism which requires teachers to

decenter the emotional safety of white students during race talk. Despite her negative experiences at the time of the Summer Storywork, Akoye still expressed a desire to read diverse texts in the ELA classroom. In addition to representation and narrative beyond the single story of racism and trauma, she described the teacher pedagogy and purpose setting required to successfully navigate texts that do include representation of Black experiences, even when backdropped by trauma.

Akoye's visions for empowering pedagogy, specifically the positioning of racism and racial trauma in taught texts, requires a change in teacher disposition:

> "I think you need to have a value system and you do need to say you know, we're reading this book, and there's Black trauma in it and the reason we're reading it is because racism is present today and we're going to talk about it so that you guys feel empowered to do something about it. I think you should have a value system and you can't be like, 'Oh, the white kids are gonna feel bad.'"

Akoye perceived that teachers consigned racism to the past and a condition of Blackness to avoid pedagogy that risked the emotional safety of white students. Teachers who seemed to have a social justice-oriented disposition were misguided in their approach because their pedagogical decisions centered whiteness. Akoye's teacher included narratives of racism and racial trauma in an attempt to build empathy and allyship in white students, sidelining the emotional safety and learning of the Black students. Akoye believed teachers need to shift focus away from misguided attempts at developing white allyship, and instead communicate a disposition and pedagogy that empowers Black students to take action against current racism.

Black Student Epistemologies and Pedagogical Insight

In their visions for successful pedagogy, Melget and Akoye agreed that it is not enough that teachers have good intentions when reading and talking about race in the classroom. In order for teachers to shift their dispositions, decenter whiteness, and ensure the emotional safety of Black students in racial discourse, they needed to listen to their experiences, perspectives, and guidance. Akoye shared, "I know that English teachers do not intentionally misteach books that take on the topic of race but it is something that does happen and needs to be talked about." Melget agreed that decentering whiteness meant centering both the learning and emotional needs of Black students. If good intentioned teachers lacked the efficacy or disposition to do so, Melget suggested they take guidance from their Black students:

> "I would want English teachers to teach Black authors and Black characters in a way that acknowledges the reality of being Black in America but in a way that is positive and that is for Black students. Like for *me* to learn about and talk about. And maybe when teachers don't know how to do that, students can say, *'Hey, here's how you're going to do it. Here's what you're not*

going to say. Here's what's going to make me, like make your Black students not uncomfortable. Here's what's going to make them feel heard.' And putting that together. For them."

Melget felt that Black students don't like talking about race in the classroom when the opportunity is presented because they know "it's not for them." Rather it is "for the white kids to learn." She points out that the teacher disposition driving this perception originates from the assumption that all Black students have the same experiences and perceptions.

Black students' voices and learning should not be excluded from racial discourse even when the teacher centers whiteness in their pedagogical decisions:

> "Hey, it's an all-white class. And I know that we're talking about this for their benefit, but I'm here for it and I want to be part of that conversation. I really feel like I should definitely have that because… I haven't really had that much of an experience with racism. I feel like I still need to know more too."

Melget agreed that teachers may be misguided in their attempts to include representations of Black experiences and issues of race when they unintentionally create the narrative that racism and violence are the only experiences Black people have. She believed students should have the agency to voice their perspective to their teachers and teachers need to have the disposition to accept their guidance:

> "If we read a book like that and it was like…the *only* book we read and we just have this narrative of like Black kids getting shot or whatever and this is what every Black person's life is like, I feel like… if you know, I may have a smallest bit of…concern, I could just talk to my teacher because she's very open… I can just be like, *Hey, can we have some discussions or some books that have to do with positive outlooks?"*

Melget felt confident contributing to teachers' pedagogical decisions because of the overall disposition of her teachers and the school culture. She felt that the school culture embodied her visions for the future but the pedagogy in the ELA classroom had yet to catch up. She described her school as "kind of the opposite of what any other school thinks" in that "they're looking towards the future" by not conflating "race is just racism. Or Black is just racism."

Melget felt that her ELA classroom and other schools "could get there" but it required more than just a school cultural climate. There had to be a change in teacher pedagogy, and changes to pedagogy required teachers with a disposition open to change:

> "I think other schools can get there. Like I could see Hunter being this way. I definitely see it but…There are some teachers that are like, perfect, you know, they teach super well. But there is also more teachers that are…*just not the best fit* for teaching. But they don't think that. They think that what they do is perfect and they're not going to change. And obviously that's not the way that a lot of students want to learn…The change comes from the teachers."

During the member checking stage of data analysis, I reached out to Melget for clarity on this portion of the story. I was not sure if she was continuing her previous observation about dispositions towards race or if she had shifted to talk about teacher pedagogy more generally. I read her the excerpt above and invited her to describe what she meant by "not the best fit for teaching." Melget responded:

> "Let me tell you a story. I had this teacher and she was like, very passive aggressive all the time. This one time I remember she was asking, 'What do you guys want to learn about today?' And I was like, *Oh, can we work on work on long division?* She was like, 'Um, no, we're gonna work on this.' I was like, *okay, then why did you ask?* She was not a good teacher. She didn't... she taught what she thought that we needed to know. Even when you told her what you needed to know. She would just do what she thinks is best for us. When it's not always what's best for us."

Both when it came to reading and talking about race and pedagogy in general, Melget believed students should have the agency to voice their perspective to their teachers and teachers needed to have the disposition to accept their guidance.

Endarkened Storywork

Additionally, students need a space to process and understand their own experiences and a platform to share their perspectives so that they can contribute meaningfully to future pedagogy. Although Akoye knew that she was having negative experiences in her ELA classes, she had not had a space to process those experiences and consider alternatives for successful pedagogy. Participating in this study and storywork allowed her to think through her visions for the future and gave her the courage to provide teachers with pedagogical guidance:

> "Up until you interviewed me, I was aware of my sometimes discomfort or my reservedness in my past ELA classes but I didn't know how to formally put together what I was feeling and why. The interview allowed me to articulate how I felt and allowed me to reflect on how it has impacted my performance ---my interactions, my work, my participation-- in my ELA classes. This experience has given me the courage to point out and speak up when situations like that happen. Bringing acknowledgment to people by bringing different perspectives into the picture can allow growth. I'm glad that I was able to share my experiences."

The responsibility cannot be on the students to speak up when they are being harmed by the pedagogy surrounding racial narratives and discourse. Teachers need to actively seek out and acknowledge students' experiences and perspectives, invite students to contribute, and then value and accept their guidance with an open mind.

Effective Teacher Pedagogy in the ELA Classroom

This study centers Black students as brilliant sources of epistemological knowledge and insight--and not just about being Black. The participants' stories provide insight into effective pedagogy in the

ELA classroom more broadly. In this section I share findings from both positive and negative experiences with reading, tasks, and instruction to consider visions for the future at the threshold of effective teacher pedagogy in the ELA classroom.

It is relevant to note that the participants enjoyed literature and reading books outside of ELA classes. Participants did not like aspects of ELA class in general for a variety of reasons including the tasks the teacher assigned related to reading and types of texts the teacher selected. Both Akoye and Melget felt like texts were forced upon them and found the assigned texts to be uninteresting and irrelevant to their lives.

While Melget did not mind the tasks associated with taught texts, Akoye and Derrick agreed that the requirement to state your knowledge of a text or complete meaningless tasks effected their motivation to read a text they were initially engaged in. Derrick cited *The Giver* as one of his all-time favorite books and he attributed this is part to the tasks the teacher assigned alongside the reading: "The teacher, or like, what you do with it, can make or break a good book. I may not have loved *The Giver* as much if I hadn't been able to have that experience. I think that's why I loved it."

Initially, Derrick could not recall reading assigned texts by Black authors or with Black characters in his ELA classroom. He then went on to identify two examples of assigned texts that met these criteria; however, they were situated in stories about ineffective teacher pedagogy. Derrick was excited about reading *Refuge* until he found out he had to write two essays to prove he had read the book. He goes on to recall that "the only book that was made by a Black author that we ever read was *Born a Crime*. It was a summer book, too and they made us like, take a test when we got back. Like why you would…?"

Derrick felt the task attached to a text could make or break a good book, and in this case, the task prompted him to not read the book at all. The hallmark of ineffective teacher pedagogy surrounding the reading of texts for Derrick were tasks singularly focused on compliance. The purpose for reading in the ELA classroom was a departure from the purpose for reading outside of the classroom, which he enjoyed. His positive experiences reading *The Giver* and articles about CRT included tasks that valued individual perspectives and meaning making.

Like Derrick, Akoye felt that the way books were read in the ELA classroom defeated the purpose of reading for enjoyment. Coupled with what she perceived to be meaningless tasks, Akoye found that pedagogy in the ELA classroom negatively affected her love of reading:

> "I like reading, but I've seen over time I've kind of lost interest in it, mainly because of school and how its taught and, I don't want to say forced upon us, but like, we have to read and it kind of like pushes me away."

Akoye thought that the books they read in class were good, but constantly stopping to analyze and complete assignments caused her to "lose interest because it's like, I'm taking way too long to read this book. Like we're reading this book for a month and we could have like finished it in a weekend." She found that doing "the task attached to it" like worksheets "waters the book down" and "takes you out of it."

The participants agreed that the purpose for reading outside of class—enjoyment and personal interest--was not reflected in the ELA classroom. For Akoye, her teacher's pedagogy played a significant role in her dislike for ELA class in general:

> "I don't really like the workload like… well, specifically my teacher [10th and 11th ELA]. She kind of just tends to hand out a bunch of work that is useless because we probably won't turn it in. She'll just tell us to put it in a folder. And she'll never look at it. Like she'll give us a bunch of work that she won't be able to grade. She probably just sees that you submit it in my opinion. I just find I'm doing a lot of useless work that's taking a lot of my time. And you know, I love poetry, like spoken word poetry, and I like to read. So English class, like it should be something that I would like."

Like Derrick, Melget found teacher instruction that valued individual perspective and interest to be effective pedagogy in the ELA classroom. Her ELA teacher at the time of the Fall Storywork was the best experience she had in an ELA class because she allowed students to pick what they wanted to learn about based on their personal interests:

> "Right now we're doing kind of a video essay and you get to pick the topic of what you want to do. So mine is criminal minds. But you could do race. She doesn't mind that. She wants to know that. She wants to know that you're into that thing."

Allowing students to pick topics they were interested in was more than just a pedagogical choice to Melget; it made her feel like her teacher was interested in her as a person.

Melget noted that in addition to choice in topics, students were empowered to make their own meaning and had agency over their learning. She described why she enjoyed her current ELA class where she had previously disliked the subject:

> "The shift has been...the teacher is not the holder and gatekeeper of knowledge or like you have to get it in a certain way. Like, we are sources of knowledge or able to go find knowledge on our own. And I found that empowering…You find what you want to learn about and what you want to know, because she knows that's how we're going to learn"

Melget explicitly attributed the studious disposition of the students in her ELA class to effective teacher pedagogy.

Melget felt that "the way a teacher teaches is like one of the most important things" and it was what was "holding it together." She described her teacher's pedagogy as the "correct way" because it transforms student disposition in the classroom:

> "Even if you put a bunch of fools in the class, and she kept doing what she was doing, I think that they would...because it's what they're interested in. At Hunter, they are doing stuff they don't want to do, right? They don't want to and if they can't do what they want to do, they're not going to do it at all. They're not going to pay attention…But if they're put in a class where…they get to choose what they want to learn about, they're gonna put their mind to it and they're actually going to do their work right. The way the teacher is teaching changes everything and those kids that were acting a fool, don't act so foolish anymore, because they want to be doing it."

Melget felt that her teacher's effective pedagogy was a matter of underlying disposition. Her teacher valued student choice and interests because it was "just the type of human she is." For Melget and Derrick, effective teacher pedagogy was a way their teachers communicated that they cared about them as individuals and valued their perspectives.

Summary of Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, I first shared the Storywork that informed the findings, implications, and visions for the future. This was following by a Findings section guided by the becoming-questions relevant to the research questions guiding this study. Although it is impossible to separate the stories into discrete topics and themes, I organized the findings by: 1) teacher conflation of race; 2) agency over narratives; 3) race talk/talk about race; and 4) visions for taught texts and representation. Participants also shared findings relevant to the purpose for racial discourse, and visions for teacher pedagogy and disposition.

My discussion of the implications in the next chapter centers on the storytellers, their reflections of truth, and their visions for the future. Because my aim in the work is to understand the patches and patterns of the participants' experiences, not pull them apart at the seams, the intentions of individual teachers are not relevant to the goals of this discourse. The participants' words and visions make sense of the past and generate possibilities for the future (Leverette, 2022). In Chapter 5 I will discuss the implications from thinking with theory. Chapter 5 begins with a summary of the findings described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I begin by returning to the context of this research and a summary of the principal findings presented in the Chapter 4 Findings Part II section. I follow this with a discussion of the implications of these findings as they relate to theory, practice, and related scholarship. Implications for practice are considered within an anti-racist and trauma reducing pedagogical framework for ELA classrooms situated in Critical Race Theory, Racial Trauma Theory, and participants' visions for the future. I conclude with a discussion of emerging themes, future research, and a chapter summary.

Chapter 5 will cover the following topics:

1. Summary of the Research and Storywork Findings

2. Thinking with Theory

I discuss the findings and implications for 1) teacher conflation of race; 2) teacher agency over narratives; 3) race talk; and 4) visions for the future to address the theoretical inquiry: *How can CRT and Racial Trauma Theory contribute to an analytical and responsive framework for anti-racist pedagogy?*

3. Recommendations for Anti-Racist Trauma Reducing Pedagogy

I locate traumatic pedagogy and contexts and discuss recommendations and visions for practice in terms of 1) taught texts; 2) empowered spaces; and 3) implications for teacher education.

4. Implications for Racial Trauma and Responsive CTRT Framework Refinements

I summarize the implications from a Racial Trauma Theory theoretical perspective and introduce three new analytical frames: 1) Literary Representation of Race; 2) Racial Socialization and Identity; and 3) Racism as a Trauma. I catalogue the related theoretical concepts that explain the nature and effects of the racial trauma identified in this research.

5. Towards a Critical Race Trauma Reducing Pedagogical Framework

I present examples from the implications and recommendations for responsive pedagogy within the refined frames in Table 5.1 to demonstrate how the CRTR framework can be operationalized as both anti-racist and trauma reducing pedagogy. I put forward a CRTR Pedagogical Framework that can be used by teachers to inform practice and disposition and guide literary analysis and racial discourse in the ELA classroom and curriculum.

Summary of the Research

A critical attribute of an anti-racist English Language Arts (ELA) classroom is a curriculum that includes literary works that represent the full Black experience and readings of authentic storytelling (Toliver, 2022). When educators lack the autonomy to select their own classroom texts and/or lack lived experience with race and racism, an anti-racist pedagogical framework for literature instruction is critical

(Johnson & Neville, 2018). Teachers are mistaking a passive approach to race (such as including Black authored texts or including topics of race in their curriculum) for anti-racist pedagogy that explicitly calls out overt and covert racial structures in and out of the literature (Ambrosia et al., 2021; Dumas & Ross, 2016). Missing from the scholarship, and addressed in this study, is a theoretical lens that considers how this is a form of racial trauma, and a responsive pedagogical framework guided by student's lived experiences.

My study addressed the relationship between personal perceptions of literary representations of experience, relationships to race, and implications for pedagogy. I investigated the choices teachers made when engaging students in Black authored texts and narratives about race and racism through the responses and perceptions students had about experiences in the secondary ELA classroom. My project coupled theoretical inquiry and empirical project, centering the participants' lived experiences to better understand where and how Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Racial Trauma Theory can be a conceptual framework to attend to issues or gaps in classroom engagement with race in literature, with an explicit goal of anti-racist and trauma-reducing pedagogy in the ELA classroom and curriculum.

Tenets of CRT provide a framework for including Black experiences in taught literature and understanding overt and covert racialized academic trauma. Racial Trauma Theory contributes to this theoretical framework by illuminating the rationale for CRT as a pedagogical approach to the topic of race, racism, and the reading of racial narratives (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Johnson, 2018, 2022; Johnson & Neville, 2018; Martin, 2014; McCardle, 2017; Williams et al., 2016). Findings from the literature support my argument that anti-racist and trauma-informed pedagogy are inextricably linked. Anti-racist pedagogy falls short when educators fail to consider racial trauma, and frameworks for trauma reducing pedagogy exclude Black students when race is not explicitly named as an interacting variable (Petrone & Stanton, 2021)

Ultimately, my goal within this study is to contribute to ongoing theoretical conversations about promoting an anti-racist, trauma-reducing approach to literature instruction that centers the lived experiences of Black students and refine a framework to guide teacher pedagogy and disposition. The research questions guiding my study were as follows:

> *RQ: How do Black students describe and understand their experiences engaging in taught texts and teacher pedagogy in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms?*
>
> *SRQ: How can CRT and Racial Trauma Theory contribute to an analytical and responsive framework for anti-racist pedagogy?*

The primary research question was addressed in Chapter 4 by the participants' stories. Responsive *becoming questions* guided my analysis and presentation of prominent thematic findings to explore what counts as anti-racist education for Black students in the ELA classroom. The following is a summary of

the findings that answer how Black student participants described and understood their experiences engaging in taught texts and teacher pedagogy in the secondary ELA classroom.

Summary of the Storywork Findings

I presented findings in Chapter 4 at the following thresholds: 1) conflation of race; 2) agency over narratives; 3) race talk; 4) visions for the future. For the purpose of the way I will discuss study implications, I extend the visions for the future into prominent implications for pedagogy: 5) purpose for racial discourse; 6) visions for teacher pedagogy and disposition; and 7) effective pedagogy in the ELA classroom. I describe the thematic topics and summarize the principal findings within each topic.

1. Teacher Conflation of Race. Teacher positioning of literary Blackness was pervasive and predictable. Black characters were exclusively read through the lens of their racialized identity with no consideration for their diverse experiences, motivations, or humanity. Although discussions about race were confined to texts with Black authors and characters, participants expressed the need for teachers to address race in taught texts regardless of Black representation. The perspective of the author, especially when white, was crucial in interpreting and understanding the representation of Black characters. Although teachers attempted to include Black-authored texts and topics of race in their curriculum, racial discourse that conflated racial identity and universal experience failed to resonate with Black students and fell short of anti-racist pedagogy, which explicitly calls out overt and covert racial structures.

1a. Participant Language. The participants used language that explicitly differentiated between Black authors, Black characters, Black experiences, race, and racism. Participants described racial discourse in terms of topics and issues, whereas teachers positioned texts and the surrounding classroom discourse as "about race" based on the visibility of literary Blackness. Although participants had perspectives that differed from the teacher's, their experiences were bound to and limited by the narratives teachers introduced and excluded.

1b. Equating Race and Blackness. Teachers often presented narratives that equated Blackness not only with race, but with racism and racial trauma. Discrepancies in the treatment of texts and characters based on racial identity highlighted the way teachers equated race with Blackness. Teachers did not acknowledge or discuss the race of white authors or characters in taught texts; Black characters, however, were exclusively associated with racism and trauma, reinforcing a narrative that positioned racism as an inherent trait of Blackness rather than a product of whiteness. This was, ultimately, a problematic decision that furthered anti-Black narratives for all students who engaged with the literature and classroom dialogues, with far-reaching repercussions on participants' experiences and internalized racial identities.

2. Teacher Agency Over Narratives. Ultimately, the teacher determined whether taught texts were "about race"; the narratives created by the teacher's positioning of race in the text subsequently

controlled the opportunities to engage in discourse about race. Unless the teacher perceived a text or topic to be "about race," participants did not have the agency to introduce a conversation about race. Conversely, when teachers did perceive a taught text to be about race, participants did not have the agency to counter this narrative. The perception that the teacher had absolute agency over classroom narratives about race meant students were often subjected to racist language and anti-black narratives. Mandated curriculum was a significant interacting variable that highlighted individual teacher agency over racial narratives.

2a. Intentional Exclusion of Racial Discourse. When teachers overlooked, rejected, and neglected racial discourse, it was seen as an intentional pedagogical maneuver. Intentional avoidance of meaningful discussion about race and racism was attributed to teacher discomfort with the topic. Additionally, teachers were interpreted as making intentional pedagogical decisions to exclude racial discourse based on perceived demographics of the classroom, specifically the visibility of white students.

2b. Racial Literacy and Awareness. The conflation of Blackness as both inclusion and exclusion criteria for "about race" was attributed to teachers' lack of awareness. Although participants recognized interactions as racialized, they did not voice their concernment because acknowledging, facilitating, and redirecting productive classroom discourse on the topic of race was seen as the responsibility of the teacher. Missing classroom discourse about race was seen as a reflection of teachers' lack of racial literacy, however, students did not have the agency to voice their interpretation of the text as racialized.

2c. Self-Efficacy in Racial Discourse. Teacher agency over racialized narratives shaped student experience and perceptions despite initial interpretation of a text as racialized. The lack of acknowledgment or validation from the teacher caused Black students to doubt the efficacy of their own interpretations of a text or interaction as racialized. When teachers neglected to acknowledge issues of race students accepted the narrative that race and racism were not important.

3. Race Talk/Talk About Race. Race talk featured prominently throughout the participant stories as a concept and as a lived experience. Participants described race talk in the classroom in terms of the narratives produced as well as their participation in talking about race. Race talk was inextricably linked to other prominent thematic findings such as demographics, prior trauma, taught texts, and teacher pedagogy.

3a. Silence During Race Talk. Overwhelmingly, Black students withheld participation in race talk by staying silent. Perspectives about personal disclosure, white students' capacity to understand Black experiences, and the environment created by the teacher during race talk all contributed to silence during race talk. Because a singular narrative about race and Black experiences were represented in the taught texts, providing a counter narrative during race talk as a disruption to the narrative created and

maintained by the teacher's text selection would require disclosure of personal lived experiences. Teacher pedagogy created a classroom environment where Black students did not feel comfortable participating in race talk, and where the race talk was for the benefit of the white students in the room. Race talk was seen as a misguided exercise in white sympathy and allyship. Ultimately it was teachers' actions when reading books written by Black authors that impacted decisions to participate in race talk or not.

3b. Speaking Up During Race Talk. Silence and "staying quiet" during race talk was the default for Black students and active engagement in race talk was described as a choice to "speak up," "speak out" and "speak my/their/his mind." Specific teacher pedagogy was a primary catalyst for change. Students only spoke up during race talk when the teacher pedagogy created the required conditions for them to feel that their perspective was valued**.** Pedagogy around race talk that valued equitable participation and individual perspectives contributed to positive experience speaking up during race talk. Positive race talk was attributed to effective teacher facilitation, consistent acknowledgment and engagement in racial discourse, and comfort talking about race. Diverse and accurate narratives of Black experiences in taught texts disrupted the single story and mitigated feelings of race talk as personal disclosure.

3c. Disposition and Race Talk. The general disposition of the teacher and other students was a key aspect of experiences with race talk. Students made inferences about teacher efficacy during race talk based on consistent actions and dispositions observed in contexts other than race talk, particularly the teacher's response to racism and microaggressions in the classroom. Students inferred that teacher dispositions towards cultural humility and inclusiveness would transfer to racial discourse.

4. Visions for the Future: Taught Texts and Representation. Explicitly and through their storied lived experiences, participants gave insight into their inclinations towards future racial discourse in the ELA classroom, the purpose for race talk surrounding taught texts, literary representation of identity and experience, and explicit visions for successful pedagogy. Visions for the future and underlying principles to guide pedagogy were consistently embedded in the participants' descriptions of lived experiences and perspectives.

4a. Representation of Racism and Racial Trauma in Taught Texts. Students did not have a general aversion to reading about race or racial trauma; rather, negative experiences with representation of racism and racial trauma in taught texts were determined by the race talk surrounding the text in the classroom and the collective absence of representation other than racism and trauma. Only talking about race in the context of fictional texts and characters and conflating empathy with racial literacy prevented white students from having to consider racism as a real lived experience or broader contemporary issue. Repeated exposure to literary representation of racial trauma, especially as a singular narrative, was traumatic for Black students. Conflated narratives of Blackness extended beyond the text onto perceptions

of a collective Black identity in society. Students called for counternarratives at a societal level due to the singular, dehumanizing narratives reproduced through textual representations.

4b. Counternarratives and Black Joy. Students envisioned representations of Black joy in taught texts, not just for themselves, but as a counter-narrative to racism as a defining characteristic of Black identity and experience, and the negative perceptions of Blackness society maintained through intentional exclusion of counter narratives. While including representations of racism and racial trauma in taught texts that represent Black characters is important and the ELA classroom should include serious discussion of these issues, teachers need to make clear that this is not representative of all Black experiences; counternarratives must be included as well.

4c. Impact on Individual Identity. Perspectives on individual racialized identity reflected the narratives produced and reproduced in ELA texts and teacher pedagogy. Students accepted and internalized the narratives about their racialized identity and engaged in responsive performances of Blackness. Like the narratives teachers created through taught texts, students felt that any failure, lack of ability, or misstep was automatically attributed to their Blackness.

4d. Authentic Narratives and Lived Experience. In addition to narratives of Black joy and narratives that countered a collective Black identity, participants expressed a reverence and need for authentic first-person narratives of lived experience. Participants wanted to see authentic narratives of lived experience in the texts they read about race and racism, and they wanted the classroom to be a space where these narratives were seen as valid and authoritative. This included not positioning or accepting white perspectives as authoritative narratives on race and Black experiences. Without these conditions, participants would not disclose their lived experiences and perspectives, even though they knew they held valuable insight on Black identity and issues of race. For white students, reading and talking about race in the ELA classroom was a misguided effort at allyship, but their level of understanding and empathy was not equitable to the knowledge that comes from lived experience, and teachers needed to make this distinction explicit.

I presented findings in Chapter 4 at the threshold of participant visions for the future. For the discussion of study implications, I extend visions for the future into prominent implications for pedagogy. The following themes were presented in Chapter 4 within visions for the future and will be discussed in more depth for the implications on recommendations for practice: 5) purpose for racial discourse; 6) visions for teacher pedagogy and disposition; and 7) effective pedagogy in the ELA classroom.

5. The Purpose for Reading and Talking About Race. Participants described their visions for teacher pedagogy in the ELA classroom that would create inclusive conditions for reading and talking about race. The purposes for reading and talking about race in the classroom included individual learning and empowerment, diverse representation, and to consider broader social issues.

5a. Personal Learning and Growth. Without access to personally meaningful racial discourses outside of school, the classroom was a place where students could learn about both history and contemporary issues surrounding race in a structured, serious environment. Students were open to new learning and personal growth in terms of their existing perspectives. The purpose for reading and talking about race was not limited to Black racialized identities; teachers should provide opportunities to learn about diverse issues and perspectives on race as well as diverse racialized experiences. A teacher's purpose for reading and talking about race in the classroom should not be based on the visible demographics of the classroom or assumptions about lived experience based on race.

5b. Diverse Representation. The purpose for diverse representation in taught texts should be to provide windows and mirrors for all students; teachers should not determine what would be a window and what would be a mirror for students based on the way they racialized the students within a Black-white binary. Participants recognized that, for teachers, the purpose of including Black authored texts in the ELA classroom was singularly as a catalyst for talking about racism. Students wanted to see diversity in representation of experience, not just the race of the author; taught texts needed to be inclusive of diverse identities beyond the conflation of Blackness and racism. Diverse texts must be accompanied by a change in teachers' current pedagogical approach. Unless diversity in taught texts provided representations of racialized experiences beyond racism and trauma and teachers had the efficacy to navigate racial discourse, they should not include diverse texts at all, as this perpetuated trauma on Black students in the classroom and reinforced racist narratives.

6. Visions for the Future: Teacher Pedagogy and Disposition. The participants' visions for the future were shared directly and indirectly in their reflections on when and how their experiences could have been different. Having both positive and negative experiences allowed them to identify the critical attributes of both effective and harmful classroom experiences. The most explicit visions for the future they shared were for teacher pedagogy and disposition. They described what should happen in ELA classrooms, the values and commitments that should guide teachers' pedagogical choices, and the need for explicit purpose setting by the teacher.

6a. Decentering Whiteness. Racial disparities in literary analysis extended beyond the text and to the students in the classroom. Students shared the perception that teachers made pedagogical decisions based on what they perceived as the learning needs of the white students in the classroom. Pedagogy that centered whiteness included consigning racism to the past and a condition of Blackness to protect the emotional safety of white students during race talk and avoiding or staying neutral on issues of race. If teachers decentered whiteness and the emotional safety of white students, all students would be empowered to engage in racial discourse in the classroom and social activism.

Visions for empowering pedagogy, specifically the positioning of racism and racial trauma in

taught texts, requires a change in teacher disposition. Teachers included narratives of racism and racial trauma to build empathy and allyship in white students, sidelining the emotional safety and learning of the Black students. Teachers need to shift focus away from misguided pedagogy that centered white students, and instead empower Black students to act against existing oppression.

6b. Black Student Epistemologies and Pedagogical Insight. For teachers to shift their dispositions, decenter whiteness, and ensure the psychological safety of Black students in racial discourse, they need to prioritize both the learning needs of Black students and listen to their experiences, perspectives, and guidance. If well-intentioned teachers lack efficacy or disposition to do so, they need to take guidance from their current Black students; prior trauma, lived experiences, and classroom culture are dynamic and contextual interacting variables that must be considered. Black students in ELA classrooms cannot be made to bear the burden and responsibility of providing counternarratives through their lived experiences; for this reason, the recommendations for practice describe the ways in which teachers can foster a classroom culture where students feel empowered and have the agency to voice their perspectives. A clear shared vision for pedagogy that looks towards the future emerged throughout the findings: teachers must move past narratives that equate race and racism and make space for individual agency over racialized identity.

6c. Endarkened Storywork. Students need a space to process and understand their own experiences and a platform to share their perspectives so that they can contribute meaningfully to future pedagogy. Participating in storywork allowed students to think through experiences, refine perspectives, and articulate visions for the future. The responsibility cannot be on students to speak up when they are being harmed by the pedagogy surrounding racial narratives and discourse. Teachers need to actively seek out and acknowledge students' experiences and perspectives, invite students to contribute, and then value and accept their guidance with an open mind.

7. **Effective Teacher Pedagogy in the ELA Classroom.** The participants' stories provided insight into effective pedagogy in the ELA classroom more broadly. Both positive and negative experiences with reading, tasks, and instruction contribute to visions for the future at the threshold of effective teacher pedagogy in the ELA classroom. The hallmark of ineffective teacher pedagogy surrounding the reading of texts was meaningless tasks singularly focused on compliance.

The purpose for reading outside of class—enjoyment and personal interest--was not reflected in the ELA classroom. Students found that pedagogy in the ELA classroom negatively affected their love of reading. Teacher instruction that valued individual perspective and interest were attributes of effective pedagogy in the ELA classroom. Having choice in topics and texts and agency over learning empowered students and made them feel valued as a person. Effective pedagogy was attributed to a teacher's

underlying disposition of genuine positive regard and was how teachers communicated that they cared about students as individuals and valued their perspectives.

Thinking with Theory

The primary research question was addressed by the participants' stories and findings to answer how Black student participants described and understood their experiences engaging in taught texts and teacher pedagogy in the secondary ELA classroom. Responsive *becoming questions* guided the initial analysis and presentation of prominent thematic findings to explore what counts as anti-racist education for Black students in the ELA classroom. Although the findings read as critiques of what teachers did in the classroom, the implications illustrate that much of anti-racist pedagogy lies in what they didn't do. In many cases the participants' recommendations for practice are as simple as asking students how they feel or making the purpose for reading explicit.

In the following section, I discuss the implications from *thinking with theory* to address the theoretical inquiry: *How can CRT and Racial Trauma Theory contribute to an analytical and responsive framework for anti-racist pedagogy?* I situate the principal findings in the context of the problem and purpose of the study to discuss implications for pedagogy from thinking with theory.

The following discussion is organized by the thematic topics of the findings. I discuss the theoretical findings and implications at the seams of 1) Critical Race Theory; 2) Racial Trauma Theory; 3) existing scholarship; and 4) emerging concepts. Due to the interrelated but distinct goals of the empirical and theoretical components of this project, I signal implications as apposite to research, practice, and theory within the thematic topics to illustrate connections to the sections that follow: recommendations for pedagogical commitments and teacher practice and recommended refinements to the pedagogical framework for Critical Race Trauma Reducing Pedagogy.

Teacher Conflation of Race

Although a critical attribute of an anti-racist ELA classroom is a curriculum that includes literary works that represent the full Black experience and readings of authentic storytelling (Johnson, 2022; Sarigianides & Borsheim-Black, 2019; Toliver, 2022) findings demonstrated that teachers selected titles and perpetuated racial discourse that singularly situated Black experiences in trauma and failed to acknowledge racism in white authored texts (Franzak & Noll, 2006; Freedman, 2020; Grinage, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Thomas, 2015; Toliver, 2022). Teachers conflated Black-authored texts and Black characters with books "about race" and often presented narratives that equated racism and racial trauma to a condition of Blackness.

CRTR Frame One: Race is a Social Construct is relevant to the implications for the positioning of taught texts and narratives. This frame addresses the ways in which race is a social construct. Further, it examines how Black identity is fabricated in its construction, how this construction enforces a simplified

collective Black identity, and how social participation in maintaining the resulting narrative informs Black experience (Best, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado, 2017). The use of precise language in participants' stories revealed the ways in which teachers constructed a fabricated and collective narrative of Black experience in the ELA classroom. The CRTR framework addresses the implications for practice.

Participant Language

Insight into students' experiential knowledge is an essential but missing feature in the field (Toliver, 2022). The significance of student voice was demonstrated in this study by situating findings in the participants' language and understanding of relevant concepts. Language is both interpretive and fluid, as are experiences and perceptions (Thomas, 2013, 2015; Williams et al., 2016). Researchers cannot assume that individual understanding of key terms can be generalized (Boylorn, 2020; Carello & Butler, 2014; Quiros et al., 2020; Simpson et al., 2007). In my analysis procedures I explicitly, attended to the ways concepts were understood and interpreted by the participants in context. Centering participants' descriptions of what it means to be "about race" and their use of language clarified and revealed the concepts teachers frequently confused, resulting in an oversimplified positioning of Black identity and experience.

Participants in this study understood and demonstrated in both their language and their critique of the construction of Black identity was that, ultimately, it is racism—not race—that drives and explains racial differences in experience and social outcome (Delgado, 2017). This discourse was absent from teacher literature instruction even when the classroom texts presented the opportunity. The social construction thesis can guide teachers in recognizing the conflation of race and racism in their own practices and then apply the frame to the literature instruction with students.

Implications for Research

Although participants had perspectives that differed from the teacher's, their experiences were bound to and limited by the narratives teachers introduced and excluded in the classroom. Their experiences were shaped by the way the teacher understood key terms such as race, racism, Black authors, Black characters, and Black experience as one simplified collective Black identity (Best, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado, 2017). The implication of these findings is relevant to the methodological commitments of anti-racist education research and teacher pedagogy. Teachers and researchers must prioritize and make accessible student language and perspective so that pedagogical implications are not bound to and limited by the teacher/researcher understanding of key terms and concepts. One of the central problems my study addressed was the positioning of Black authored texts and characters as a barrier to deeper meaning beyond race and racism. Because my study design unwaveringly centered the literacies that are embedded in Black students' everyday talk (Johnson, 2021; Johnson et al., 2017; Moore, 2018), I was able to present findings to demonstrate that this barrier to deeper meaning originated

from teacher conflation of race and Blackness. These findings fill a gap in the research that was highlighted in the literature and reinforce an essential attribute of anti-racist research methods: student voice.

Findings from existing scholarship were based on ethnographic observation of ELA classrooms to analyze racial discourse; missing was insight into students' thoughts during these experiences and their visions for the future (Brooks et al., 2022; Brooks & Hampton, 2005; Combs, 2022; Martin, 2014; Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Sosa, 2020; Thomas, 2013, 2015; Toliver, 2022; Williams et al., 2016). It is important to recognize the agency this denies participants in constructing stories about race (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

This dynamic was mirrored in the classroom, where teachers created and controlled the construction of Black identity in the reading of taught texts. What remained was a "representation of Blackness devoid of Black people" (Combs, 2022, p. 24). The physical integration of Black participants in ethnographic research is falsely equated with the social integration of their authentic, firsthand perspectives as authoritative knowledge (Combs, 2022). Similarly, findings in the current study revealed that the physical integration of Black authored texts and representations of experience were falsely equated with accurate and meaningful discourse about race and racism.

Language can be both empowering and unreliable in the co-construction and understanding of our realities, and truths are not universal, but local and contextual, so the pairing of a critical empirical investigation into the lived experiences of students with the theoretical foundation to inform pedagogy was an essential methodological commitment that rendered these findings and implications visible (Asghar, 2013). As the scholarship in the field demonstrated, "we have tried to put reconciliation before truth but when you do that, you don't really see what is really oppressing people and really what the problems are. We need truth before we can have reconciliation" (Combs, 2022, p. 9). For this reason, anti-racist pedagogy in the ELA classroom must position Black students' perceptions and language first and as the primary source of truth and knowledge to reveal discrepancies in teachers' foundational understanding and language (Neville, 2020).

Although the necessary inclusion of student voice is an argument often made in anti-racist education research literature, empirical studies that incorporate student voices and experiences are largely missing from the English Education scholarship (Simpson et al., 2007; Thomas, 2015; Williams et al., 2016) and empirical studies situated in CRT that I reviewed for this study did not focus on student's voice as a methodology, even though counter storytelling is a central tenet of CRT (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Brooks et al., 2022; Martin, 2014; Williams, et al. 2016). These implications for research provide insight into implications for teacher disposition and practice.

Implications for Teacher Disposition and Practice

I align the implications for practice with findings from the participants' stories by beginning with the implications for teacher disposition. Participants attributed effective pedagogy to underlying disposition, values, and goals. Understanding the ways in which race is a social construct is relevant to the implications for teacher conflation of race in the positioning of taught texts and narratives. This framing can guide teachers to examine the ways they understand a text as "about race," the language they use when introducing and describing the text to students, and the narratives produced about race, identity, and racism.

Teachers must begin by understanding race and races are "products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, and retires when convenient" (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017, p. 9). This allows teachers to interrogate their own conceptualization of race and the basis for this construction. *CRTR Frame One: Race is a Social Construct* can be reimagined as reflexive questions teachers can use to interrogate the narratives produced by their positioning of literature and racial discourse:

1. How do I contribute to a narrative of Black identity as objective, inherent, or biological?
2. What narratives about Black identity and experience am I constructing?
3. When am I enforcing a simplified collective Black identity and experience?
4. What narratives about race and racism does my pedagogy maintain and (re)produce?
5. When and how do I conflate race with Black identity?
6. How and when do I identify and discuss race, racism, and racial identity in white-authored texts? When analyzing white characters? Do I include or exclude whiteness in racial discourse surrounding Black authored texts?
7. What texts do I identify and position as "about race" and why?

I propose these reflexive questions as implications for disposition rather than practice.

First, reflexivity must be ongoing, contextual, and responsive. Second, reflexivity can be complex and illusive; it can be challenging to recognize how dispositions and constructions of race are operationalized in pedagogy and racial discourse. Finally, I position these reflexive questions as implications for disposition rather than practice because the goal is not to construct a new narrative of race and racialized identity to introduce into racial discourse. The outcome of this practice is to recognize and reject teacher agency over the construction of race and interpretation of experiences as racialized. As educators:

> "One of the best things that we can do for our students is to not force them into holding theories and solid concepts but rather to encourage the process, the inquiry involved, and the times of not

> knowing--- with all of the uncertainties that go along with that. This is really what supports going deep. This is openness." (hooks, 2003, p. 48)

The implications for practice that follow are intended to facilitate anti-racist methodological commitments as pedagogy to access and prioritize Black students' understanding and co-construct racial discourse.

Implications for Practice. If the physical integration of Black authored texts and representations of experience were falsely equated with accurate and meaningful discourse about race and racism, and the centering of participant language revealed these fundamental discrepancies in perceptions of what it means to be "about race," how do teachers access student understanding, co-construct racial discourse, and communicate individual student agency over racialized interpretations and perspectives? *CRTR Frame Three: Voice and Counter/storytelling* can be used to conceptualize the implications for practice.

Black students need opportunities to voice their individual counter/stories of perception. Because knowledge and insight cannot be prescribed, teachers can co-construct meaning by experiencing the phenomena in context. Through the polyvocal perceptions of Black students engaging in the literary representations of Black identity and experience in the ELA classroom, teachers can refine their own perceptions and responsive anti-racist pedagogy. When student interpretations are valued and valid, multiple ways of knowing can co-exist and give deeper insight into the lived experience of phenomena towards a goal of transformation and social justice. Teachers should interact with student insight and counter/stories, acknowledge their own assumptions, and set aside presuppositions to see past them (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012).

Endarkened Storywork and Black Counter/storytelling guided my study methodology and can contribute to a conceptualization of shared agency that attends to but does not conflate racism with collective Black identity and experience within the CRTR framing. Toliver (2020) describes how individual stories and perspectives can contribute to cultural knowledge about race, identity, and experience. By listening deeply to the language Black students' use in racial discourse and how they understand experiences as racialized, teachers can follow these threads and "uncover the covert patterns within the everyday talk and storytelling" of Black students (Toliver, 2020, p. xxvii). These patches and threads can then be connected to reading and talking about race in the literature and ELA classroom.

As I will discuss in the next section of thematic findings, a teacher disposition that embraces ambiguity and centers the voice and storytelling aesthetics of Black students during racial discourse is essential but insufficient. Findings from this study demonstrated that students felt bound to and limited by teacher agency over racial narratives both when they were provided and neglected. Implications for pedagogy include practices that provide opportunities and conditions for Black student engagement and equitable agency in racial discourse as described by the study participants' visions for the future.

The implications for teacher conflation of race and participant language are attended to in the responsive CRTR framework, specifically, *race as a social construct* and *counter/storytelling.* The reflexive questions to interrogate the narratives produced by the positioning of literature and racial discourse through a CRT lens are also a framework for reading and analyzing race in taught texts in the ELA classroom. Because society constructs the social world through a series of tacit agreements mediated by literature, images, media, and other scripts, the ELA classroom can be a space where students are offered the critical tools and critical stories to reject oppressive social constructs (Boler, 2014; Delgado, 2017). In the current study, the ELA classroom was the source of oppressive social constructs.

Equating Race, Racism, and Blackness

A review of the literature for this study suggested that teachers often incorporate Black-authored texts in the ELA curriculum as a catalyst for teaching about race and racism (Grinage, 2019b; Martin, 2014; Sosa, 2020; Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2015; Williams et al., 2016). Findings from this study demonstrated that teachers rarely incorporated Black-authored texts in the ELA curriculum, and when they did, they were exclusively positioned as a catalyst for representing race. Black characters were exclusively read through the lens of their racialized identity with no consideration for their diverse experiences, motivations, or humanity.

The social construction thesis in CRT is a useful lens for understanding how this practice maintains the insubordination of Black people through racial stereotypes that make the condition of racism and trauma appear appropriate and normal (Crenshaw, 1988). The study findings demonstrated that the ELA curriculum and individual teachers' additive inclusion of Black representation ultimately maintained racist ideologies.

Although recent critiques have focused on the exclusion of Black authors and voices in the ELA curriculum (Johnson, 2022; Toliver, 2022), the stories shared in this study demonstrated that students experienced the most harm from the inclusion of teacher selected Black authored texts. This underscores the problem I described in the introduction to my study purpose and rationale: *Teachers are mistaking a passive approach to race (such as including Black authored texts or including topics of race in their curriculum) for anti-racist pedagogy that explicitly calls out overt and covert racial structures in and out of the literature.*

When describing the ways teachers equated race with Blackness, a prominent theme emerged in participant stories: discrepancies in the way teachers positioned white-authored texts versus Black-authored texts. Conversations about race were relegated to Blackness, and conversations about Black characters were limited to racial identity. Participants found this treatment of Black characters dehumanizing because "we never just see them as a regular person" and "Black characters are being seen as not having a deeper meaning besides their Blackness." Black characters were exclusively associated

with racism and trauma, reinforcing a narrative that positioned racism as an inherent trait of Blackness rather than a product of whiteness.

Scholars have asserted that literature does not simply reflect race and racism in American society; literature has played a role in constructing race and racism in American society (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019; Morrison, 1992). The findings from this study, however, demonstrated that in the ELA classroom, more than the literature itself, teacher pedagogy attributed racism to Blackness and absolved whiteness. Anti-racist education requires teachers to deliberately challenge racist structures in curriculum and instruction; the participant stories revealed that teachers fell short in this regard even if that was their intention.

Racial discourse around taught texts resulted in the narrative that racism was a phenomenon that only existed when Black bodies were visible--- and only if the teacher had decided those Black bodies mattered. This was a problematic decision that furthered anti-Black narratives for all students who engaged with the literature and classroom dialogues. Racial Trauma has lingering repercussions on Black adolescents' experiences and internalized racial identities and the participants in the current study described trauma effects like those outlined in the scholarship (Brown & Brown, 2010; Carello & Butler, 2014; Freedman, 2020; Quiros et al., 2020; Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Toliver 2020, 2022),

Implications for Theory

Racial trauma is a product of a racist ideology of white supremacy (Kendi, 2017, 2019) that is based on skin color and cultural characteristics, which sets it apart from other complex trauma (Cénat, 2022). Whereas complex trauma impacts an individual, racist ideologies shape policy and permeate institutions, including educational systems and curriculum (Cénat, 2022). It is a trauma that is inescapable, and the victim can come to see their own racial identity as the perpetrator of the trauma. This study found that the positioning of literature and the surrounding discourse created the narrative that racial trauma was a product of Blackness rather than racist ideologies. The participants in this study made explicit that teachers were reinforcing the narrative that racial identity was the perpetrator of Black character's trauma.

Scholars in the field of Racial Trauma assert that internalized racism makes racial trauma even more complex because racialized individuals internalize the thoughts of the dominant group over that of the racial group that they belong to, leading to the reproduction of racist attitudes and behaviors (Bivens, 2005; Cénat, 2020, 2022). Participants demonstrated in their stories that they were resilient to and rejected the teachers' dehumanizing conflation of Blackness and trauma in classroom literature and discourse. However, they perceived that their white peers *would* internalize this narrative. Without the counternarrative of lived experience and insight, white students would accept the racist narratives teacher

pedagogy in the ELA classroom reinforced. The white students would then map these racist narratives on to individuals.

Through a CRT framework for literary analysis and instruction, teachers can evaluate how a socially constructed category produces real race effects for Black characters in literature as well as the Black students in the classroom (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Morrison, 1992). It was in these moments where real Black bodies in the ELA classroom took on the trauma of imagined Black identities in literature that these socially fabricated identities became very real in the participants' lived experiences.

Literature can reveal the ways in which white authors imagine Black experiences and fabricate Black identity, as well as the ways in which Black authors represent the experience of having a fabricated identity mapped onto their bodies (Johnson, 2022; Morrison, 1992). Teachers must enact explicitly anti-racist pedagogy alongside the taught texts for classroom literature to serve as a site of resistance and emancipation (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Johnson, 2022). The study findings demonstrated that these concepts were not only absent from teachers' literature instruction, but they failed to recognize the effect on their Black students' experience in the classroom.

The implications for literature instruction and the implications for trauma reducing pedagogy are addressed in the same CRTR frame. The CRTR social construction pedagogical frame attends to the effects of racial construction on individual identity, and how a fabricated Black identity and narrative becomes nonetheless real in the fabric of society (Mills, 1997). These findings and implications support my conclusion that an anti-racist pedagogical framework must integrate trauma reducing practices grounded in Racial Trauma Theory. At the time of this writing there have been no empirical studies in education research that have taken up Racial Trauma Theory generally or the established theoretical frameworks specifically. Absent from current CRT and Racial Trauma intersectional discourse are implications for the reading and teaching of literature. The participant stories shared in this work bridge the gap between analytical frameworks of Racial Trauma Theory and anti-racist pedagogy, with specific implications and recommendations for the ELA classroom.

Implications for Practice

Although discussions about race were confined to texts with Black authors and characters, participants expressed the need for teachers to address race in taught texts regardless of Black representation. Participants felt teachers "should be talking about race, even when there's not Black characters in the book" but "never had a teacher who went out of their way to say that the white characters were white and what that meant for them." By continuing to center white authored narratives as unracialized, even when they include overtly racist language and representations of Black characters, teachers were complicit in maintaining the implication that either racism was not real or that racism was only relevant to and a condition of Black bodies (Mills, 1997).

These findings emphasize the need for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to discussions about race in literature. Teachers must recognize the diversity of experiences within racial groups and acknowledge (without conflating or generalizing) the impact of the author's identity on the portrayal of characters and racialized themes. Because realities are socially constructed, they are subject to multiple interpretation; stories and counterstories can demonstrate the ways racial phenomena are interpreted differently based on the social positionality of a particular group (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Teacher understanding of these concepts are, again, essential but insufficient. They must make these concepts explicit and accessible to students when reading and talking about race in literature.

By understanding race as socially constructed through a CRT lens, teachers can examine the ways in which their positioning of literary Blackness and racial narratives maintain anti-Black ideologies. The implication is not that teachers should exclude Black representation from the curriculum, even when backdropped by racism and trauma, as a catalyst for meaningful racial discourse. Rather, a pedagogical framework is needed that positions powerfully written stories and narratives to correct systems of belief and categories by "calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity" (Delgado, 2017, p. 51). These findings reinforce the concept that anti-racist pedagogy is not achieved by the passive inclusion of Black authored texts and stories or by relegating racial discourse the visibility of Black characters (McCardle, 2017)

When viewed through a theoretical lens grounded in CRT and Racial Trauma Theory, participants experiences and perspectives corroborate the problem outlined in my rationale for the study: When educators lack lived experience with race and racism, an anti-racist pedagogical framework for literature instruction in the ELA classroom is critical (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Boler, 2014; Freedman, 2020; Johnson, 2022; Johnson & Neville, 2018; Martin, 2014; McCardle, 2017). Teachers need to have a deep understanding of why and how taught texts are positioned in the ELA classroom, and the efficacy to navigate texts and topics anchored in race and racism without potentially (re)traumatizing students or maintaining racist narratives (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Grinage, 2018; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Saleem et al., 2019; Thomas, 2013, 2015).

Teacher Agency Over Narratives

Agency featured prominently in the findings for this study and is a central aspect of the implications and responsive recommendations. Participants experienced teacher agency over racial narratives when teachers rejected student agency and counternarratives, intentionally excluded racial discourse, and lacked racial literacy. The perception that the teacher had absolute agency over classroom narratives about race meant students were subjected to racist language and anti-black narratives. Participants described lingering effects on their engagement in subsequent classroom discourse about race and identity formation.

When youth of color suffer racial trauma, many experience an attack on their sense of self and cultural identity (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Derrick described being "really affected" by being told he was wrong and suggested that teachers intentionally made him feel bad when he tried to voice his perspective in middle school. It was not until his 11th grade year in high school that he described feeling comfortable participating in racial discourse in the classroom again; until then he didn't "want to say anything because you feel like it's gonna happen all over again." After Akoye was subjected to racist language in 9th grade, she similarly described withdrawing her engagement in ELA classes: "freshman year, I think I spoke more in that class than I've done like sophomore and junior year in my English classes." After her junior year (and two consecutive years with the same ELA teacher), Akoye "didn't really talk in that class" and "the other Black students in the class tend to stay quiet as well."

Racial Trauma Theory was included as a theoretical lens in this study to provide a framework to better understand the impact of reading and teaching about race and racism in the ELA classroom, specifically the reading of both overt and covert racial traumas and traumatic events represented in taught texts. Findings demonstrated that teacher pedagogy coupled with their authority over racial narratives caused significant racial trauma for Black student participants, more so than the content of the texts. For many students of color, the school setting can be a source of distressing race-based incidents where "racially traumatic experiences at school can add new scars, exacerbate old wounds, and add an additional layer of complexity to a child's experience of the world" (Handford & Marrero, 2021, p. 4). Findings from this study highlight the importance of understanding trauma-informed and trauma-reducing practices as trauma perpetrated in school by the institution. Race must be integrated into all school-based trauma frameworks. Existing models fail to hold schools accountable for exacerbating trauma and neglect how racism induces trauma (Grinage, 2019a; Thomas et al., 2019).

Racial trauma is a form of race-based stress that refers to reactions to real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination (Comas-Díaz, 2019) and occurrences of racial trauma can be categorized in two main ways: major racial trauma and everyday trauma (Carter, 2007; Metzger et al., 2018; Saleem et al., 2020). In academic settings, everyday trauma can include openly racist remarks by classmates and teachers, witnessing the persistent use of racial epithets (Tynes et al., 2015), and a sense of rejection based on skin color (Cénat, 2022).

This theoretical perspective mirrors precisely the experiences participants described in their stories. In addition, Derrick experienced major racial trauma *("This is really bad. Really bad, and so discretion is advised. This is a very deep topic and it happened to me, and I don't speak to a lot of people about it…*") and Akoye experienced vicarious racial trauma (*racist remarks and students "being really racist" but "no one will check that"*) in their school settings. The enduring, pervasive effects of racial discrimination can lead to trauma symptoms (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019) and vicarious exposure to racial

discrimination can cause trauma symptoms like those of direct racist acts toward an individual (Quintana & McKown, 2008).

Participants described the effects of racial trauma, which are similar to PTSD, in their stories. This included hypervigilance to threats and avoidance (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Although like PTSD, racial trauma is unique in that it involves ongoing individual and collective injuries due to exposure and re-exposure to race-based stress. (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Although the participants described their racial trauma in the ELA classroom as a result of teacher pedagogy and disposition, Racial Trauma Theory can provide insight into the reason the participants' trauma effects (hypervigilance, avoidance, and silencing) continued in subsequent ELA classrooms, years after the initial trauma event: The subsequent taught texts, representations of racial trauma, and dehumanizing racial discourse were culminative injuries and re-exposures to race based stress.

Racial trauma must be understood as a complex trauma because the "post outlined in PTSD cannot fully describe racial trauma because BIPOC individuals continue to consistently live through societal oppression" (Cénat, 2022, pp. 667-678). When racial trauma goes invalidated and students have no perceived safe space to process the encounter, these ongoing distressing experiences can culminate into further traumatization (Saleem et al., 2019). When describing their school based racial trauma participants said, "I don't feel like I got to talk to anybody" and "I'll never talk to a teacher about a problem that I have." All three participants shared that our storywork was the first time they had processed and disclosed some of their experiences.

Implications for Practice

The theoretical framework for complex racial trauma (CoRT) (Cénat, 2020, 2022) emphasized that all trauma-informed care provided to BIPOC individuals should integrate an anti-racism framework, which starts by providing a safe space, free from any kind of racial discrimination. The CoRT framework asserts that no teacher, classroom, or curriculum can prevent and heal racial trauma without an explicitly anti-racist and trauma-reducing framework like the one investigated and refined in this study. "It is important to be clear: Racist settings cannot provide anti-racist care" (Cénat, 2022, p. 682).

Teachers must go beyond simply recognizing, supporting, and caring for students who have experienced trauma. Educators must also recognize and abolish curriculum and practices that perpetuate trauma (Johnson, 2022; Love, 2019). Findings from this study demonstrated that racial trauma is something being actively done to the students in the ELA curriculum, not something they passively have, with sustained effects.

Delineating White Ideology from Racialized Identity

To feel comfortable exercising agency over racial discourse in the classroom, the opportunity needed to be made explicit by the teacher, ultimately reinforcing that the teacher's perspective "about

race" was the only available narrative. Teachers act as conduits through which the ideology and values of the dominant social groups are transmitted to the students (Freire, 1970; Solórzano, 2013).

From a perspective of Freirean pedagogy, Solórzano and Yosso developed five tenets specific to CRT in education to demonstrate how CRT names racist injuries, identifies their origins, and seeks remedies for the injury (2002).

Relevant to the implications for these findings is insight into pedagogy that challenges the dominant ideology. Teachers used literature to justify racist language, perpetuate anti-black narratives, and reject Black students' agency in the ELA classroom. Examples included calling the use of the N-word educational, rejecting lived experience based on "what the book says," and fabricating the content of a novel to obscure racism. This tenet of critical race methodology in education challenges privilege, rejects "objective" racial discourse, and exposes practices that silence and distort Black epistemologies.

In the context of this study and the findings, these implications focus on and critique teacher agency over racial narratives; this must not to be conflated or read as *white* teacher agency. Findings from the study demonstrated that while Akoye and Derrick experienced racial trauma in the ELA classroom that silenced and rejected their perspectives and identities, they both had transformative experiences of healing and empowerment which they attributed to the disposition and pedagogy of their teacher at the time.

Each participant considered how an experience may be different if they had a Black teacher. Grinage (2014) demonstrated that engaging in anti-racist pedagogy as a Black teacher is not without its own challenges. It was challenging for a Black teacher to disrupt students' colorblind ideologies because they thought race was only being discussed because of the teacher's personal agenda. When students do not talk about race in the ELA classrooms of their white teachers, this narrative is compounded. Grinage found it difficult as a Black teacher to challenge his white students' perspectives or address white supremacy, whereas white teachers may not feel hesitant to confront their white students. The author discovered that he had just as much of an unwillingness to make his white students uncomfortable as white teachers in the research did (Grinage, 2014).

As this study corroborated, many students of color are taught by white teachers and as a result most of the findings about classroom race talk and teacher pedagogy are inherently about white teacher pedagogy (Grinage, 2014). This does not mean that the problem of teacher agency over racial narratives or the reproduction of dominant ideologies is singularly or inherently a problem of white teacher agency. White teachers cannot excuse themselves from attempts at anti-racist pedagogy. In fact, it was essential in the findings of this study to examine the specific ways teachers provided healing and empowerment during racial discourse; future research should examine how effective teachers came to develop this identity. Further, participants argued that the demographics of a space should not excuse teachers from

anti-racist pedagogy; white students do not often see white anti-racist role models (Grinage, 2014). A pedagogical framework like the one described in this study is meant to support all teachers as they develop dispositions and efficacy for emancipating pedagogies.

Participants pushed back on the conflation of race as a Black-white binary and an indicator of internalized identity, both in the literature and in their social worlds. The findings and implications in this study honor the participants and the classrooms where they found healing by doing the same and not conflating and qualifying harmful teacher agency over racial narratives as a condition or practice of white teachers or mapping this perception onto their stories.

Derrick shared that his teacher gave students multiple narratives and perspectives, gave students the agency to form and articulate their own perspectives, and demonstrated that he valued those perspectives. Melget described her (white) ELA teacher at the time of the storywork as giving students agency to introduce racial discourse into the classroom and curriculum. The relevant implication is that just as teacher agency had the power to reject and traumatize, pedagogy that promoted student agency empowered and healed.

In *Endarkened Storywork*, Toliver (2020) described the role of white co-conspirators and educators in anti-racist work, which she calls the dream facilitators:

> "Some are at a point where they are willing to teach Endarkened children to access dreams on their own… Each of these requires risk in a society that refuses to center our stories, but we need their help. We can't do it alone… We wish there were more, but you know how that goes. Some of them are scared...We get that, but sometimes, we wish they'd put the Endarkened children first." (p. 154)

These study findings and recommendations can offer a third space where teachers, regardless of racial identity, can explore their identities and construct perceptions of anti-racist and trauma-reducing pedagogy free from limiting racial ideologies of dominant discourse. The recommendations for anti-racist and trauma reducing pedagogy shared here center Black students' visions for future pedagogy, and embedded in these recommendations are the teachers that helped them facilitate their dreams.

Mandated Curriculum

Mandated curriculum was a significant interacting variable that highlighted individual teacher agency over racial narratives. Participants recognized when teachers were uncomfortable teaching mandated texts that represented race and racism and that they feared offending students during racial discourse. Recent trends in ELA curriculum and policy, such as mandated curriculum, contribute to the significance and urgency of these findings (Brown & Brown, 2010; Johnson & Neville, 2018; McCardle, 2017). Racial Trauma Theory is a necessary lens for understanding the implications of exposing students to narrative and academic trauma in classroom spaces because students do not have the option to remove

themselves from ongoing and mandated curricular trauma. Teachers may feel they do not have the agency to reject racist narratives in the ELA mandated curriculum, even when they perceive they do not have the self-efficacy to navigate tense topics surrounding race (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Boler, 2014; Freedman, 2020; Johnson, 2022; Johnson & Neville, 2018; Martin, 2014; McCardle, 2017).

Although the district and the schools the participants attended all had the same mandated ELA curriculum, each had vastly different exposure to racial discourse and representation of Black authors and characters in their ELA classrooms. This further indicates a need to consider the implications of individual teacher agency over racial narratives through the texts they include, exclude, and the intentional positioning of race in literature. Because the mandated ELA curriculum is available on the school district's website, I was able to identify the participant experiences based in teacher selected texts and topics outside of the mandated ELA curriculum. Findings demonstrated that teachers selected Black-authored texts outside of the ELA curriculum as a catalyst for racial discourse. This resulted in both positive and negative outcomes for Black students in the classroom.

In 9th grade, Akoye experienced racial trauma during the teaching of mandated curriculum, both because she found the white authored representation of racism uncomfortable, and because her teacher insisted on using racial slurs. Akoye's 10th and 11th grade ELA teacher (she had the same teacher both years) incorporated Black authored texts outside of the mandated ELA curriculum, but rather than healing, Akoye's experience compounded her existing academic racial trauma. More than the text itself, a teacher's pedagogical choices can be the most damaging source of microaggressions and vicarious traumatization (Spears, 2014) and mitigating racial trauma is challenging because racial wounds occur within a sociopolitical context and on a continuing basis, and unfortunately, classroom spaces can be a stage where racial wounds are reopened or ignored (Grinage, 2018; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011).

Derrick's teacher, however, incorporated CRT and related contemporary issues in his ELA class, a concept that had been prohibited by the school district. The teacher provided readings about the theory and paired them with articles expressing conflicting viewpoints about teaching CRT in schools. The readings were used as anchor texts for students to develop discourse and argumentative writing. Derrick and other Black students found the theory and fugitive pedagogy empowering and healing (Givens, 2021). It made Derrick "feel connected more to English. And it made me wonder why some schools don't teach that."

Scholarship in the field explored using works of literature to demonstrate instructional frameworks using tenets of CRT while acknowledging the complications that arise from both CRT bans and mandated curricula that restrict teacher autonomy (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Johnson & Neville (2018; McCardle, 2017). Derrick's teacher simultaneously subverted CRT bans, subverted mandated curriculum, taught rhetoric and writing, changed Derrick's perception of ELA class, empowered him

through theory, and healed his racial trauma surrounding racial discourse in the classroom. Here is how Derrick describes the classroom instruction that effected significant growth:

> "With Critical Race Theory specifically--- We read these pages about what it was and how it should be taught. And then we read the versus, like why some people think it shouldn't be taught. And he kind of let us decide...He did it right…He was comfortable talking about it. He wasn't trying to go around the issue. He did it better than any other teacher I've had."

I reinforce Derrick's experience here to demonstrate alternatives to using Black authored novels as catalysts to racial discourse. Participants in this study preferred to read and learn about race and racial issues from informative texts and first-person accounts.

I also highlight this powerful pedagogy for teachers who may be apprehensive about "teaching Critical Race Theory" and subsequently reject a pedagogical framework grounded in CRT. The CRTR framework I propose here focuses on the reading of fictionalized representations of Black experiences in literature because that is the location of the problem and purpose of this study. Embedded in the framework are the pedagogical maneuvers described above: a critical lens for the literary analysis of race, multiple viewpoints and perspectives represented across texts, and autonomy over personal meaning making.

For teachers who are apprehensive about using the framework with students for literary analysis, the refined CRTR framework I put forward serves a dual purpose. It is first a framework for teachers to develop anti-racist practices and dispositions surrounding text selection, positioning of literature, and facilitating racial discourse. The same framework can be used with students as a lens for literary and textual analysis explicitly or implicitly. In the recommendations for practice, I highlight specific examples of the ways in which this framework can be operationalized as instruction, but it can be used as a teacher centered framework for anti-racist and trauma reducing pedagogy alone.

While it is important to incorporate multicultural texts, mandated and/or traditional curriculum requires that teachers adapt and adopt a critical approach to the texts already present in the classroom (McCardle, 2017). Initially, findings from this study appeared to support the inclusion of a pedagogical framework that would offer committed anti-racist ELA teachers a tool to subvert mandated curriculum in their literature instruction for the following reasons: 1) Participants' critique of existing pedagogy and visions for the future called for anti-racist racial discourse in the teaching of all texts, not just those with representation of Black characters and experiences; 2) reading and talking about race using CRT as an instructional framework and theoretical lens was described as effective and empowering; and 3) study participants described uncomfortable and neglectful racial discourse surrounding mandated literature and teacher efficacy. This reinforces the implication that anti-racist pedagogy is not relegated to the teaching of Black authored texts and must attend to the racism present in canonical texts.

Ultimately, the findings from this study did not provide evidence to support a universal endorsement of subverting mandated curriculum, which risks reinforcing passive and even harmful attempts at anti-racist pedagogy through text selection. Although existing frameworks for Critical Race English Education (CREE) requires teachers to reject school-sanctioned curriculum that relies only on required texts and literacies (Johnson, 2018), the findings from this study suggest a need to explore more nuanced implications; teacher pedagogy and agency over the narratives produced are inextricably linked interacting variables on the experiences Black students have within and outside of mandated literature. The implications from these findings must address both the navigation of mandated curriculum and representations of race and the choices teachers make when rejecting the mandated curriculum.

Research reviewed for this study found that teachers conceptualized anti-racist pedagogy by incorporating Black authored texts into the existing curriculum (Ambrosia et al., 2021). Working to construct an anti-racist text selection process for teachers, the researcher noticed several patterns. These patterns are reflected in the stories participants told in this study: the only people of color represented in the "diverse" curriculum were Black and all the texts centered on tragedy, racism, death, and injustice (Ambrosia et al., 2021).

Critique of ELA literature is often aimed at traditional or mandated texts but the findings of this study and existing scholarship demonstrated that even when teachers are in an environment where they have the agency and intentions to enact their evolving visions for anti-racist pedagogy, it is essential that teachers and researchers continue to reflect on and refine these choices.

Implications for Research

While text selection processes grounded in anti-racist pedagogy are useful, student voices need to be included in this evaluation process. Researchers and educators should prioritize student experiences and visions for the future in the evaluation of classroom literature. According to the Developmental and Ecological Model of Youth Racial Trauma (DEMYth-RT) high school-aged students (15-18) have an increased understanding of advanced forms of racism exposure to racial discrimination, and the ability to make meaning of racial encounters (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Galán et al., 2022; Saleem et al., 2019). Findings from this study corroborate this perspective.

The implications of these findings require an expansion of the claim made in DEMYth-RT: because high students have insight and capacity for meaning-making, they are capable of envisioning and articulating effective anti-racist pedagogy. Several studies reviewed for this research noted the importance of text selection in anti-racist pedagogy, but empirical classroom data demonstrating the effects of intentionally selected literature for students was missing from the scholarship. The current study and storywork address this important gap and related implications. It is imperative that researchers access students' perceptions of and experiences with taught texts, both mandated and teacher selected, to grow

our understanding of the complex and dynamic interacting variables of text, talk, and pedagogy.

Intentional Exclusion of Racial Discourse

When teachers overlooked, rejected, and neglected racial discourse, it was seen as an intentional pedagogical maneuver. Intentional avoidance of meaningful discussion about race and racism was attributed to teacher discomfort with the topic. Additionally, teachers were interpreted as making intentional pedagogical decisions to exclude racial discourse based on perceived demographics of the classroom, specifically the visibility of white students. Teachers neglected literary representation of racial issues seen as irrelevant to white students or they avoided the topic to protect the emotional safety of white students who might "feel bad" engaging in racial discourse.

Implications for Practice

Racism is impossible to address when it goes unacknowledged, so by avoiding texts and topics that are racialized teachers contribute to maintaining society's narrative about race. Contemporary racial inequality is reproduced through practices that are subtle, institutional, and appear to be nonracial, such as excluding representations of racism and racial trauma in classroom literature (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). Because all individuals are in a racialized society with racialized implications, no literature is free from the effects of race. By avoiding texts that directly address racial tensions, teachers are not rejecting the topic of race and racism in their classroom; rather they are rejecting, devaluing, and discrediting Black voices, Black narratives, and Black ideologies on race.

Racial Literacy and Awareness

The conflation of Blackness as both inclusion and exclusion criteria for "about race" was attributed to teachers' lack of racial literacy or awareness. Participants described these experiences in two distinct ways. Either teachers neglected to acknowledge race or racism because they didn't recognize it, or they accepted it. A lack of racial literary was attributed to the fact that teachers were seen as not thinking about race at all unless they had decided a text was about race. Acceptance of racism was evidenced by teachers ignoring or failing to address racist comments in the classroom and teachers using racist language themselves.

Although participants recognized interactions as racialized, they did not voice their concernment because acknowledging, facilitating, and redirecting productive classroom discourse on the topic of race was seen as the responsibility of the teacher. Students did not have the agency to voice their interpretation of the text as racialized unless the teacher had already asserted that the text overall was about race(ism). Existing scholarship suggested that Black students do not speak up when everyday racism occurs in the classroom because they do not want to be seen as angry or emotional (Boylorn, 2011) and that speaking up could prompt white students to say something racist (Grinage, 2019b). This rationale, however, was not reflected in the findings for this study. Participants in this study did not voice their racialized

interpretations because they did not perceive they had the agency or opportunity, and it was not their responsibility.

The pressure to educate others, particularly a teacher, on demand was an undesirable burden (Boylorn, 2011; Grinage, 2014; Simpson et al., 2007). Further, participants in this study confirmed what other studies in the field had posited: the way Black students talked about race outside of class was completely different from the conversations they had in class about race (Boylorn, 2011). Findings from the storywork demonstrated that the topics teachers selected to center conversations about race in the classroom did not reflect the topics that were a part of Black students' everyday consciousness. Additionally, teachers' approach to literary analysis of Black characters hyperbolized the significance of race in their interpretation of their everyday experiences, and the amount of attention they gave to race when reading outside of school. The participants did not engage in the emotional labor of counternarrative or introducing racial discourse when it went unnoticed in the text.

Implications for Theory

A CRTR pedagogical lens can be useful in the context of these findings and implications, specifically the ways in which teachers participate in the social maintenance of damaging racial narratives. Reading stories has the power to either maintain or shift the fabricated narrative of Black experience (Delgado, 2017) and teachers can unknowingly participate in maintaining damaging racial narratives by failing to acknowledge when instances of Black trauma in fiction are products of society's participation in dehumanizing narratives. Further, racial trauma often goes unacknowledged in classroom experiences when teachers lack the rapport to discuss racial topics due to their own bias and discomfort. Teachers may fail to acknowledge that racial events such as those represented in literature can in fact be traumatic, invalidating Black student's perceptions and experiences of racial trauma (Saleem et al., 2019). These findings and implications validate the need for an anti-racist trauma-reducing pedagogical framework grounded in CRT and Racial Trauma Theory. This framework can guide teachers in recognizing classroom dynamics and provide a framework for literary analysis.

Self-Efficacy in Racial Discourse

Teacher agency over racialized narratives shaped student experiences and perceptions despite initial interpretation of a text as racialized. The lack of acknowledgment or validation from the teacher caused Black students to doubt the efficacy of their own interpretations of a text or interaction as racialized. When students perceived the narrative provided by the teacher to be an accurate reflection of race in a text, particularly when teachers neglected to acknowledge issues of race, students accepted the narrative that race and racism were not important. This demonstrates the importance of prioritizing the experiences and anti-racist literary imagination of Black students in frameworks for trauma reducing pedagogy.

Experiences with racial trauma are often misperceived, dismissed, or unacknowledged in the classroom (Helms et al., 2012). Particularly overlooked experiences of racial trauma include humiliating and shaming events and witnessing racial discrimination, both potential tensions when engaging Black students in racist narratives in a public classroom space, and particularly when lack of acknowledgment effects their own self-efficacy (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Without a depth of understanding of CRT and its features, trauma-informed educators risk invalidating the uniqueness and scope of the racial trauma inherent in schools and curricula.

Implications for Practice

Internalized racism is a consequence of racial trauma that Bivens (2005) defined as the process by which racialized individuals internalize the thoughts of the dominant group over that of the racial group that they belong to, leading to the reproduction of racist attitudes and behaviors. While participants in this study did not internalize racist ideologies, they did doubt the efficacy of their own interpretations of a text and interactions as racialized. As a result, they refrained from calling out racist interpretations in taught texts in the classroom. There were moments of retelling in the storywork when participants were hesitant to say that something they experienced as racialized in the classroom was valid; the fact that they definitively *experienced* everyday racism was not always seen as evidence or validation that it was.

The silencing effect of their self-doubt allowed racist attitudes and behaviors in the literature and classroom to remain invisible or reproduce, but not because participants themselves internalized and reproduced the racist attitudes. The DEMYth-RT model can address this gap in current pedagogy when combined with a CRT perspective on the historical nature of racism proposed in *CRTR Frame Two: Racism is Systemic and Rooted in History*.

Parents may provide personal and historical explanations of racism that contradict the color-blind, post-racial, or absent narratives about race teenagers encounter from teachers and curricula (Saleem et al., 2019). This coincides with increased literary representation of racism and racial violence in the ELA curriculum, creating a particularly tenuous time for the effects of racial trauma (Saleem et al., 2019). When analyzing literature in the ELA classroom, a pedagogical frame that explicitly confronts the systemic nature of racism can bring to light the often invisible and covert ways in which racism informs Black experiences. Teachers need to acknowledge that systemic racism and representations of racism in literature can be as traumatizing as overt racist acts (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019).

The attention CRT gives to modern-day systemic racism's roots in history is not to enforce the perpetual trauma of history on Black identities. Acknowledging this background can help students better understand the experiences represented in literature, as well as their own experiences and participation in these systems and become advocates for their own social justice. As a tool for literary analysis this framing allows students to acknowledge that although the means and modes of Black subjection may

have changed, the fact and structure of the subjection remain (Sharpe, 2016). My theoretical framework considers that experiences of bearing witness to racial shaming and discriminating events as a racial trauma extend to the reading of race-based narratives, especially in the public space of a classroom community, and within the hierarchy of a teacher-student dynamic.

Race Talk/Talk About Race

Race talk featured prominently throughout the participant stories as a concept and as a lived experience. Participants described race talk in the classroom in terms of the narratives produced as well as their participation in talking about race. Race talk was embedded with and in other prominent thematic findings such as demographics, prior trauma, taught texts, and teacher pedagogy. Studies in the reviewed literature utilized classroom spaces, and particularly ELA classrooms, as a setting and/or context to analyze the ways in which people talked about race (Boylorn, 2011; Grinage 2014, 2019a, 2019b; Sassi & Thomas, 2015; Simpson et al., 2007; Sosa, 2020; Thomas, 2013, 2015; Williams et al., 2016).

Race talk is broadly defined as public attempts to negotiate the complexity of the concept of race (Williams et al., 2016). Scholars in the field of education refined this definition to include risky dialogue, dilemmas, and conflicts that are inherent to talking about race and racism (Grinage, 2014; Sosa, 2020; Thomas, 2013, 2015; Williams et al., 2016).

Silence During Race Talk

Toni Morrison (1992) said that "in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse" (p.9). In both the current study and the literature, the most prominent feature of Black students' engagement with classroom race talk was silence and disengagement. However, a significant pattern found in this study was missing from the scholarship. The findings from the literature described silence during race talk as Black students shifting to silence during race talk through disengagement in response to an interaction. Finding in my study demonstrated that staying silent during race talk was the default. Participants didn't withdraw engagement from race talk, they withheld participation.

This detail is significant in terms of the ways in which Black students exercise agency and resistance during race talk. Participants were not submitting to being silenced by the teacher, students, or discourse in the class; they engaged in an empowered politics of refusal. Participants knew they had valuable insight and perspective but did not consider their participation in race talk meaningful for their personal learning.

Many of the existing studies relied on classroom observations to suggest Black students responded to race talk with either silence or evasion, but without access to participant perceptions through narrative inquiry, these findings are limited in their implications for the goals of the current study and a responsive pedagogical framework. Overwhelming, participants in the current study withheld participation in race talk by staying silent. When race discussions did occur in their ELA classroom,

participants described the unequal distribution of power, both socially and structurally, and teacher-controlled boundaries about the topics that could be addressed. Perspectives about personal disclosure, white students' capacity to understand Black experiences, and the environment created by the teacher during race talk all contributed to silence during race talk.

Implications for Theory

Scholars suggest that the enduring, pervasive effects of racial discrimination can lead to trauma symptoms (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). This may include suffering in silence or accepting racist narratives when discussing literary racial trauma in the classroom space (Liu, 2019; Thomas, 2013) because as Derrick illustrated, "you think it's going to happen again." Traditional trauma-informed models fail to hold schools accountable for exacerbating trauma and neglect the ways in which racism induces trauma (Grinage, 2019a; Thomas et al., 2019). Further, current trauma informed models fail to consider non-disruptive but nonetheless observable behavior such as suffering in silence. CRT has an integral role in theoretical frameworks that explicitly attend to the unique nature of Racial Trauma and the effects described here.

Racial microaggressions and the cumulative effects of racial trauma are overlooked in part because of the invisibility of racial trauma's historical roots and the institutional and systemic pervasiveness of racism (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Galán et al., 2022). *CRTR Frame Two: Racism is Systemic and Rooted in History* which addresses the pervasive, systemic, and historic nature of racism is necessary to understand and make visible the resulting racial trauma. I argue that these thematic findings demonstrate implications for the CRTR social construction frame and justify an extension of Racial Trauma Theory's current understanding of the invisibility of racial trauma. Racial trauma is invisible to most of society not only because of its historical roots and systemic racism, but because it has become embedded in the social construction of race (Menakem, 2017).

As I discussed in previous sections, teachers conflate literary Blackness with racism and trauma and this narrative is mapped onto the bodies of the Black students in the class. Racial trauma is not seen as the product of racism but a normative condition of socially constructed Blackness, rendering it invisible in trauma informed pedagogical frameworks. This is the same construction of Black identity as bound to trauma that is actively reproduced in the positioning of classroom literature and discourse in participants' stories. For the purposes of this study, the implications for trauma-reducing pedagogy must include *CRTR Frame One: Race is a Social Construct* in addition to the historical and systemic nature of racism. Future research situated in the current theoretical frameworks for Racial Trauma (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Galán et al., 2022) should consider the social construction of race as well.

Interacting Variables in Experiences with Race Talk

Williams et al. (2016) described and analyzed classroom dialogue or "race talk" as a type of

narrative/counternarrative exchange in action. Participants in this study did not describe teacher attempts to shift the direction of race talk. In fact, participants specifically noted the lack of facilitation on the part of the teacher during race talk, even when white students dominated the narratives and Black students collectively stayed silent. The narrative inquiry Boylorn (2011) conducted to understand Black students' experiences in the classroom may offer insight into connecting threads in the current study.

Storywork participants did not explicitly attribute their silence during race to the silence of other Black students in the class, nor did they describe being influenced by collective silence. Interestingly, participants demonstrated in their storytelling aesthetics that they were aware of the number of Black students in the classroom during the experience and that the other Black students were silent as well. Akoye and Melget both included the specific number of Black students in the room and what they were doing in their stories about staying silent during race talk, and they both began their story with this detail. Derrick also described what other Black students were doing in the classroom during race talk, both when they participated and when they didn't.

In Boylorn (2011), Black students from the same class were interviewed together about their experiences with race talk in the mixed-race classroom. Participants shared that Black students know when everyday racism is happening in the classroom and they collectively grow silent but ready; if one Black student decides to participate in a race-talk conflict, the other Black students automatically engage as well and take up their argument no matter what it is. It is possible that Melget and Akoye would have similarly engaged in race talk if other students did, especially in a conflict, but that assumption cannot be made based on the experiences they shared. It is possible that their silence was also an act of solidarity, but again, participants did not explicitly note this dynamic.

Implications for Research

Derrick described being in a class where Black students were speaking openly and expressing themselves, but this did not prompt him to similarly engage. However, the findings in Boylorn (2011) and Melget and Akoye's stories were in mixed race classes and Derrick was in an all-Black class, so collective "racial bonding" through silence may be contextually relevant to mixed race classes where Black students are more vigilant of the potential threat of everyday racism (Boylorn, 2011). Akoye did say she would be more likely to talk in class if she saw more students that looked like her. These threads provide thresholds to future lines of inquiry.

Other studies found that Black students were frustrated that teachers failed to recognize their silence during race talk as a communication of their trauma and discomfort (Grinage, 2019a). Derrick's teacher was able to shift his perspective by recognizing his silence and demonstrating that he valued his perspective and insight. This is the only instance of a teacher acknowledging and responding to silence during race talk in the shared stories.

A significant limitation in the studies that shared findings for race talk was missing student perspective; most were ethnographic, and the researchers did not speak with student participants directly to explore their interpretations of the classroom interactions. Future studies must include narrative inquiry to gain an understanding of participant meaning making when narratives about race authorized by the teacher are counter to student interpretation during race talk. My study addresses this gap and provides insight into participants' subjective experiences during race talk and the interrelations of setting level factors such as demographics and teacher facilitation of race talk (Williams et al., 2016).

Race Talk and Disclosure

This study found that because taught texts represented a singular narrative about race and Black experience, providing a counter narrative during race talk to disrupt the narrative would require disclosure of participants personal lived experiences. Rather than disclose, they remained silent. Black students in ELA classrooms cannot be made to bear the burden and responsibility of providing counternarratives through their lived experiences (Boylorn, 2011). One coping trauma response Black students employ in predominantly white spaces is to make themselves racially innocuous to avoid further racial trauma (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Toliver, 2022).

Researchers found that the academic burden of being Black in mixed classes with race talk prompted Black students to pretend not to care about every day or overt racism to avoid the topic altogether (Boylorn, 2011). As the participants' stories in this study demonstrated, however, their silence was not a performance of neutrality. The burden was the inherent nature of personal disclosure to counter a collective socially constructed narrative of Blackness presented by the teacher. Additionally, even when participant insights were not counter to the current race talk, their input could be perceived as disclosure because other students had received the narrative that Black identity and experience is universal. Implications for these findings are addressed in the participants' visions for future.

Risky Race Talk: Purpose and Pedagogy

Teacher pedagogy created a classroom environment where Black students did not feel comfortable participating in race talk, and where they perceived race talk was meant to benefit white students in the room. Race talk was seen as a misguided and unproductive exercise in white empathy and allyship which participants attributed to intentional teacher pedagogy and purpose, not the white students themselves. Participants were sidelined as participant observers in the learning of white students since the racial discourse they were witnessing did not reflect their reality, interpretation, or the purpose for race talk described in their visions for the future. In the typical race-critical classroom, "the educational needs of students of color are marginalized in favor white students' education, belying the intention to be anti-racist" (Leverette, 2022, p.34).

Empirical research in trauma studies argued that teachers should not ignore the silence of Black students during race talk, especially when the (misguided) purpose for the race talk was white empathy (Carello & Butler, 2014). Researchers found that educators who used trauma narratives to invoke empathy viewed the students' trauma response of silence as evidence of effective teaching (Carello & Butler, 2014). Using trauma narratives to invoke empathy was found to be a risky pedagogical practice, especially for Black students. In ELA classrooms where racial trauma narratives are used as mirrors to the Black experience, students may not have the mental maturity needed to separate their identity from the traumatized characters and educators don't have the clinical background to understand this risk.

Addition studies found that educators assumed that trauma can and should be used to "shock students into feeling 'appropriate' responses to atrocity" (Carello & Butler, 2014, p.164), a risky pedagogy that centers whiteness. In addition to traumatizing Black students in the class, when educators conflate trauma with learning, they risk white students responding, not with empathy, but with pity, guilt, shame, and disassociation to avoid these feelings (Carello & Butler, 2014).

Other studies described the ways whiteness was operationalized by white students to create barriers during race talk as: resisting learning, denying culpability in racism, claiming ignorance, and seeking empathy (Grinage, 2019b; Simpson et al., 2007; Sosa, 2020). Participants in my study gave minimal attention to descriptions of the actions and behaviors of white students during race talk in their stories. Participant stories focused on their own experiences, perspectives, and the features of teacher pedagogy.

The stories shared by participants in Toliver's (2020) storywork with Black girls shared similar features with the participants in my study. Toliver found that Black student stories gave whiteness "some attention because it exists, but they never dwelled on it, turning their attention to each other and to themselves" (p. 152). Storywork gives Black students an opportunity to center themselves in imaginative landscapes and "create visions of themselves within stories that consistently ignored or erased them" (p. 152). The storytelling aesthetics of the participants in this study demonstrate what the classroom looks like when white students "are decentered for once" and "anything can be possible" (p. 152).

Participants in this study exclusively attributed barriers and successes in race talk to teacher pedagogy. Even when barrier to race talk were made visible by white students, the participants understood it as, ultimately, evidence and product of teacher pedagogy. The teacher's purpose setting for race talk and positioning of literature allowed white students to escape authentic consideration of the pervasiveness of racism; teacher's lack of efficacy facilitating productive race talk resulted in white students not taking the topic seriously; and the teacher was responsible for upholding whiteness, not white students. Participants concluded that teacher efficacy and effective pedagogy during race talk could transform student disposition and create a classroom environment where Black students felt comfortable

participating and white students took race talk seriously. These perspectives align with the threads of teacher agency and disposition found throughout the findings and implications.

Despite the extensive findings in the literature examining white students and their role in race talk, Black students in this study didn't dedicate much attention to what white students were doing in the classroom or why. In Chapter 3, I described my methodological commitment that *(Only) Black Stories Matter* in this study. I arrived at the methodological decision that the perceptions and experiences of Black students, and only their perceptions and experiences, were needed to answer what counts as anti-racist pedagogy for Black students. This reflects my perception that a focus on whiteness is an unnecessary and unproductive imposition on the goals of the study. In alignment with this commitment and the story telling aesthetics of the participants, finding from the scholarship that focus on technologies of whiteness during race talk are not considered in my implications for future pedagogy.

However, participants dedicated *significant* time and detail in their stories describing what teachers were doing: exactly what they said, what they didn't say, and the context in which they said it. Participants were able to give direct quotes as to what teachers said and their inner monologues in the moment. Akoye described my own words and actions in her Interview Reflection, and I can confirm--what she described was *exactly* what I said, word for word, and exactly when and why I said it…and the interactions she described occurred at least three months prior to the interview. They spent as much time or more sharing their interpretations of teachers' actions, choices, motivations, intentions, and underlying beliefs. The questions Akoye and Derrick asked each other during their stories were to co-construct understanding and make meaning of teachers' actions.

Implications for Practice

Interacting variables of student disposition, demographics, and school culture shaped perspectives on participating in race talk but ultimately it was teachers' actions when reading books written by Black authors that impacted decisions to participate in race talk or not. Findings from the storytelling aesthetics and attention to teacher pedagogy may have implications for the effects of racial trauma, which include hypervigilance and the threat of harm, real or perceived (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Galán et al., 2022). The degree of recall, detail, and precision in the participants' stories about teachers, as well as explicit references such as "You know, my ears perked up. I was like, *oh, okay what are you gonna say about this*?" and "especially what the teacher has to respond about what they said" may illustrate a state of vigilance in the ELA classroom directed at the teacher during racial discourse. These story aesthetics share features with trauma testimonies (Davis & McTier, 2023).

Reading Black student storywork with a trauma testimony analytical framework may advance an understanding of Racial Trauma and its effects in the classroom. This research could inform inclusive trauma reducing pedagogy in the field of anti-racist education. Finding from studies that use a trauma

testimony analytic framework to understand racial trauma in participants' stories could then be imported as a literary analysis rubric in the ELA classroom for reading representations of race and trauma, like the goals of this study. These threads offer new lines of inquiry as well as further refinement of the CRTR pedagogical framework.

At the time of this writing, the effects—both positive and negative—of exposure to literary trauma in the classroom for Black students are unknown because no empirical research has been published outside of clinical disciplines (Carello & Butler, 2014) and at the intersection of trauma, the ELA classroom, and race (Quiros et al., 2020).

Evaluating the complexity of classroom race talk from the perspective of Black students suggests a disheartening and seemingly insurmountable barrier. Opportunities to engage in meaningful racial discourse were largely absent. Teacher pedagogy and the positioning of taught texts prompted Black students to disengage from race talk in the classroom when it was introduced through taught texts. As a result, white perspectives dominated the discourse, reproducing racist narratives and maintaining superficial perspectives about race. When teachers introduce the topic of race in the classroom, even as a well-intentioned attempt at anti-racist pedagogy, they risk ultimately providing a platform for a fabricated and collective social construction of Black identity to reproduce.

Looking at the missing and deficit examples from the student stories presents a dilemma when thinking about classroom conversations about race. If both staying silent about race as well as talking about it is equally damaging in the public space of a classroom and within the hierarchy of a teacher-student dynamic, how can educators reconcile this issue? (Grinage, 2014). The findings from this study offer a lens through which to evaluate and conceptualize productive classroom race talk: teacher pedagogy. Implications for teacher pedagogy and race talk are discussed in the participants' visions for the future.

Speaking Up During Race Talk

Silence and "staying quiet" during race talk was the default for Black students and active engagement in race talk was described as a choice to "speak up," "speak out" and "speak my/their/his mind." Participants only spoke up during race talk when the teacher pedagogy created the required conditions for them to feel that their perspective was valued. The hallmarks of effective pedagogy and speaking up during race talk in the participants' stories were: 1) teacher pedagogy and disposition that valued equitable participation and individual perspectives and 2) teacher efficacy when talking about race. Specific teacher pedagogy was a primary catalyst for changes in perception and participation in race talk.

The positioning of texts, the purpose for reading, and diverse representation were interacting variables within and with teacher pedagogy. Studies that demonstrated race talk success in the literature shared an important feature: segregated demographics. Across the literature, in mixed-race classes, Black

students primarily stayed or became silent and evaded race talk; in segregated spaces, Black students engaged in open and complex dialogues about race and racism (Boylorn, 2011; Brooks et al., 2022; Brooks & Hampton, 2005; Grinage, 2018; Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015).

There are several interacting variables and possible implications to consider within the context of this study. In the next section I discuss connecting threads and possible seams between the findings and theory. I describe this discussion as *threads and seams* rather than *implications* as a reminder to keep the participants' lived experiences and perspectives at the center of all conclusions and recommendations. Per my framework for reflexive praxis (see Appendix D), this method ensures implications are not based on assumptions.

Threads and Seams for Future Research

Derrick's successful race talk experience was in a predominantly Black school and classroom. He explicitly described maintaining his silence and vigilance in this demographic space until teacher pedagogy and disposition acted as a catalyst. Derrick also had prior racial and academic trauma in school and ELA classroom specifically. He described the other Black students in his class in the same way the literature described Black students in segregated space: engaged in open dialogue and expressing their perspectives freely (Boylorn, 2011; Brooks et al., 2022; Brooks & Hampton, 2005; Grinage, 2018; Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015). Demographics and existing racial and academic trauma should be considered as interacting variables in future anti-racist and trauma-reducing research for the ELA classroom.

Akoye and Melget described almost identical unsuccessful race talk experiences: they were one of three to five Black students, none of whom participated in race talk, and white students in class dominated the conversation with no meaningful teacher facilitation. Akoye went on to have a successful race talk experience her senior year, which she attributed to teacher pedagogy and text selection, but her existing racial trauma and healing should be considered to better understand the conditions of successful race talk. The Summer Storywork provided Akoye with an opportunity to confront and process prior racial trauma. In Akoye's interview one year later, after the Summer Storywork and her successful experience with race talk, she shared that participating in this study motivated her to share her views as a Black student:

> "Up until you interviewed me, I was aware of my sometimes discomfort or my reservedness in my past ELA classes but I didn't know how to formally put together what I was feeling and why. The interview allowed me to articulate how I felt and allowed me to reflect on how it has impacted my performance ---my interactions, my work, my participation-- in my ELA classes. This experience has given me the courage to point out and speak up when situations like that happen. Bringing acknowledgment to people by bringing different perspectives into the picture can allow growth. I'm glad that I was able to share my experiences."

The participants' stories offer threads to follow in future research to consider how educators go about not only reducing future racial trauma but healing existing racial trauma. An experience with positive teacher pedagogy and successful race talk may have been the healing event, but it is worth exploring the interacting variables of demographics in Derrick's story and testimony in Akoye's.

Empowered Spaces

In the discussion of the findings, I highlighted teacher and student disposition as well as overall school cultural climate as variables that shaped engagement in race talk in the participants' stories. In the literature reviewed for this study, just as frequent as *race talk*, and often hand in hand, *safe spaces* emerged as a theme, both as the phenomena under study and as emergent findings and implications (Grinage, 2014; Boylorn, 2011; Simpson et al. 2007). The participants in my study did not explicitly describe or reference "safe spaces" in their stories, but I did not want to neglect possible connections and implications. I considered the findings from the thematic topic *race talk and disposition* and the findings for *safe spaces* outlined in the literature for emerging threads and seams.

The participants attributed their comfort engaging in the topic of race and racism in the classroom to their perception of the general disposition of the teacher and other students. They made inferences and predications about teacher efficacy during race talk based on the actions and dispositions they observed in contexts other than race talk. Dispositions such as open mindedness, care, interest, effective response to racism, cultural humility, and inclusivity were noted as positive teacher dispositions. Overall school cultural climate was described positively as free from stereotypes, valuing individuality, open to free expression, and intolerant of all identity-based discrimination and microaggressions. Participants also described negative school climates where racism and racist remarks were ignored, Black bodies were under surveillance, identity was policed, and students didn't have anyone they could trust to talk to about their experiences.

Researchers in the field of anti-racist pedagogy and trauma-informed pedagogy have pushed back against current conceptualizations of safe space pedagogies where students are protected emotionally and intellectually from controversial issues in the classroom (Flenser, 2019) claiming educators should recognize that for certain pedagogical goals, some students are going to be "unsafe" in the classroom (Leverette, 2022; Menakem, 2021). Researchers continue to debate: *Who are we trying to keep safe and what do we think they need to be kept safe from?* (Jolly, 2011).

Based on the participants' descriptions of the teachers and setting dispositions that made successful racial discourse possible, I suggest a reframing of this question for anti-racist and trauma reducing pedagogy: *Why do educators need to decide what is safe for students, and why don't students have agency to keep themselves safe?* The traditional framing positions educators as the creators and protectors of student safety. Based on the participants descriptions of positive disposition and visions for

the future, a safe space for anti-racist and trauma reducing pedagogy is one where Black students have autonomous and equitable agency over racial narratives. Students are not exclusively kept safe by the educator; rather they are safe to protect themselves.

I arrived at this framing by considering the dispositions that created conditions for productive, inclusive learning. Open-mindedness, care, and interest were descriptors of teachers that all related to the findings for student agency in racial discourse. Storywork offered participants' agency to tell their stories, but a disposition of cultural humility and inclusivity provided a space where Akoye felt safe to use her agency:

> "I was like, *okay, like, I feel safe if I were to talk to her about my experience. I would feel unjudged…* Like when I saw that, from the beginning, I thought *I would feel safe around her*. And I think that's what a lot of teachers lack. It's like when they're always like, 'oh, feel safe, feel free to talk to me'… but they don't really show it in their actions."

Unsafe spaces occurred when Black students did not have agency over racial discourse or their racialized experiences. Visible racism was ignored and even endorsed, which communicated a disposition that would be unsupportive of claims of less obvious racial harm. Unsafe spaces denied students the agency to confront or disclose racial trauma because they didn't have anyone to talk. All three participants described performing Blackness in school settings in a way that denied them agency over their identities.

The literature argued that safe spaces referred to spaces for white students to examine their own racial identity. Assuming only white students need to examine their racialized identity reinforces the narratives that Black racialized identities are collective and fixed. Additionally, Black racialized identities are examined, analyzed, and subjected to white gaze in the public space of the ELA classroom and literature, and white identities are not, as the findings of this study have demonstrated. Genuine discussions about race are compromised in the name of maintaining safety for white students and the "white gaze acts as a pedagogical method of surveillance" (Grinage, 2014, p. 92).

The research also identified literature as a safe space to explore the topic of race and racism, including trauma novels with representations of racial violence (Brooks et al., 2022; Brooks & Hampton, 2005; Grinage, 2018). The authors claimed that using books to study the complexity of racism was safer than encountering racism (Brooks et al., 2022; Brooks & Hampton, 2005). Again, this perspective inherently centers white student safety who have the privilege of not encountering racism firsthand. The implication is not that white students shouldn't explore the topic of race and racism through literature; rather it must be explicit that the outcome will not be equitable insight into what it is like to experience racism firsthand.

Implications for Practice

The conditions required for Black students to have agency over their racialized experiences does not imply the spaces must be *unsafe* for white students. A safe space to explore topics of race and racism for all students to a productive and social justice end is one that aligns with the study participants' definition of discourse about race: racial theories, issues, and lived experiences that are not bound to Blackness or racism. This pedagogical approach is a safe space for all students because they have agency over the narrative of their individual racialized identity. The definition of psychological safety in safe classroom spaces from the literature may be useful in the implications for responsive pedagogy. Psychological safety is the sense that one's identity, perspectives, and contributions are valuable, despite the experience or possibility of discomfort within a learning setting (Williams et al., 2016).

In the thematic findings for my study, the interacting variable that effected whether participants' felt their identity, perspectives, and contributions were valuable were teacher and student agency over racial narratives. The discomfort came from the lack of agency to introduce counternarratives, not exclusively the content of texts or the topic of racism.

Additional findings from the literature in terms of safe spaces support and contribute to my reframing of safe spaces as *empowered spaces*. Empowered spaces are ones where Black students have agency over racial narratives responsive to their lived experiences and perceptions. Educators can foster a sense of psychological safety for Black students by shifting out of neutral and embracing an affirmative action pedagogy that privileges marginalized voices and creating a space that allows, uniquely, the unheard to be heard (Boler, 2004; Falter, 2018; Grinage, 2014). This description reflects the spaces where the participants felt safe to engage in racial discourse and have their voices heard, including Storywork for this study.

Facing racial injury is a necessary component of anti-racism and can create moments of healing for Black students (Grinage, 2019a, 2019b) but they must be given the agency and opportunity, not just to speak during race talk, but to be heard during race talk. The counternarratives they provide must be safe from rejection from the teacher. Empowered spaces for Black student agency require a teacher disposition that understands a pedagogy of discomfort is a necessary for teachers to improve their ability to teach about traumatic subjects (Grinage, 2019b).

Melget noted that teachers avoided race talk in the classroom because it is an "emotional topic", but she had the desire to engage in racial discourse in the classroom even if it meant "hearing some problematic things." Because racism is irrational classroom discussions cannot rely on rational exchanges; teachers and students need to make room for the emotional investments, and even traumatic emotions, that occur when discussing race (Boler, 2014; Grinage, 2014). Melget recognized that this is the only way students have to opportunity to hear each other's perspectives and even change each other's

minds. Again, true discourse and learning requires that absolute agency over racial narratives is not the one presented by the teacher.

Boler (2014) argued that the obligation of educators is not to guarantee a space that is free from hostility, but rather to challenge oneself and students to critically analyze any statement made in a classroom, especially statements that are rooted in dominant ideological values. This provided the structure and serious classroom disposition Melget envisioned for meaningful and productive race talk with the explicit goal of student learning and growth. The classroom space is one of the few opportunities where speakers can be held accountable for offensive speech and beliefs, where the targets of racism can speak back and develop critical agency, and students can learn to come to grips with the strong emotions that come with discussing race (Boler, 2014; Grinage, 2014).

In response to study findings that described the relationship between disposition and race talk and the implications for the concept of safe spaces from research in the field, critical agency and affirmative action pedagogy should be considered in the conceptualization of empowered spaces for anti-racist pedagogy. Additionally, attributes from Toliver's description of the Harbor in *Endarkened Storywork* can ensure the vision for empowered spaces aligns with the anti-racist methodological commitments of this study.

Visions for the Future

Explicitly and through their storied lived experiences, participants gave insight into their inclinations towards future racial discourse in the ELA classroom and visions for successful pedagogy. The goal of this study is to refine a theoretical framework for anti-racist pedagogy grounded in CRT and Racial Trauma theory that is responsive to and constructed by the experiences, perspective, and visons for the future of Black students. In the previous discussion sections I used a method of thinking with theory to analyze the study findings and consider the ways in which CRT and Racial Trauma theory can guide responsive pedagogy. The participants explicit visions for the future that they shared in their stories are implications for pedagogy on their own.

Black students do not need theoretical frameworks to understand their experiences, tell their stories, or envision effective pedagogy. For this reason, and in alignment with the methodological commitments of Endarkened Storywork, explicit participant visions for the future are presented as autonomous, primary sources of knowledge and implications for practice. Endarkened Storywork alignments provide context for this methodological commitment.

Explicit Visions for the Future and Implications for Practice

Endarkened is meant to refuse limitations on how research should be conducted and written, and "chooses to liberate the mind by allowing space for different truths about reality" (Toliver, 2022, xvii).

Endarkened Storywork is a way of communicating that the discourse will be culturally responsive and aligned to Black-centered epistemologies (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021; Toliver, 2022).

Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic that honors the speculative thinking of Black people (Ambrosia et al., 2021; Leverette, 2022; Toliver, 2022). Afrofuturism refers to the "ethical responsibility of researchers to focus upon the words of our participants, not only as a means to better understand our historic and current world, but to better situate inquiry for what the future world and future research could look like" (Toliver, 2022, xxi).

Finally, Critical Race theorists believe that student stories as a methodology in education research serve several functions. Not only can student's voices expose the reality of their education experiences, but they can illuminate new possibilities for the future (Combs, 2022; Lynn & Dixson, 2021; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

In the next section I present the participants' explicit visions for the future in their own words as autonomous and primary implications. I then engage in a discussion of the contexts surrounding their visions for the future and implications for future pedagogy by following the threads and seams of their lived experiences and perspectives.

Representation of Racism and Racial Trauma in Taught Texts

"It's always Black trauma…We don't ever see the happy part of life… the books that we could be reading."

"It's a trauma to the Black students sitting in that classroom, to always have being Black represented in this traumatic way. It might almost be better to not have it at all."

"And we should be talking about race, even when there's not Black characters in the book, you know. I've never had a teacher who went out of their way to say that the white characters were white and what that meant for them."

"It takes on uncomfortable topics and themes. I think that it should be retired."

Participants believed reading about race and racism had a place in the ELA classroom, but teachers needed to move past singularly representing Black experiences as trauma as a catalyst for racial discourse. Racial trauma often goes unacknowledged in classroom experiences when teachers lack the rapport to discuss racial topics due to their own bias and discomfort. Teachers may fail to acknowledge that racial events such as those represented in literature can in fact be traumatic, invalidating Black student's perceptions and experiences of racial trauma (Saleem et al., 2019).

Findings suggested that reading representations of racism and racial violence in classroom literature was potentially traumatic to Black students in three distinct contexts: 1) If Black students had experienced the racial trauma depicted in the literature. The traumatic effects were compounded if Black students were subjected to race talk where their peers discussed and analyzed the traumatic experience of

the Black characters in the text. 2) Even if Black students had not experienced the racial trauma represented in a taught text, repeated exposure to literary racial trauma as a singular narrative of Blackness was a form of trauma for Black students. 3) Conflated narratives of Blackness extended beyond the text onto society's perceptions of a collective and socially constructed Black identity with material effects on individual racialized identity and lived experience.

Scholars noted that vicarious trauma is an especially prevalent source of Racial Trauma for Black people, especially teens and adolescents (Galán et al., 2022). Vicarious trauma occurs from exposure to and the witnessing of acts of racism and racial trauma on other people of color, including literary representation and discussion about racially stressful and traumatic incidents (Bor et al., 2018; Galán et al., 2022). Considering the content of commonly taught canonical texts in the ELA classroom and YAL which depict police brutality against Black bodies, educators must be aware of and attend to the vicarious racial trauma caused by bearing witness to racial violence as reported by teens and adolescents (Galán et al., 2022).

Research in the field argued that trauma narratives that are central to or embedded in taught texts can provide healing and transformation for students when coupled with a trauma-informed pedagogy that reduces harm and promotes healing (Carello & Butler, 2014; McGhee & Stovall, 2015; Williams et al., 2016). Specifically, when we consider Black-authored narratives of traumatic lived experiences, educators can honor these testimonies by including them in their classroom discourse (Freedman, 2020; Grinage, 2018). Scholars at the intersection of Trauma Theory and narrative pointed out a key ethical dilemma when bearing witness to literary acts of violence in the context of a classroom: "Should we, as teachers, aim to bring our students, especially Black and other silenced literary voices, to such moments of crisis for pedagogical purposes? And if so, what is the responsible way to teach narratives with trauma at their center?" (Spear, 2014, p. 56; see also Jolly, 2011).

In concert, CRT, Racial Trauma Theory, and Literary Trauma suggest two ends of a spectrum to consider: 1) If literature allows us to access and heal trauma, then racial trauma narratives have a place in the anti-racist trauma-informed ELA classroom; and 2) Exposure to representations of racial trauma, even in literature, is a form of vicarious trauma, and due to the cumulative nature of Racial Trauma, racial trauma narratives do not have a place in the anti-racist trauma-informed ELA classroom. The authentic experiences and perspectives shared in this study at the intersection of race, trauma, literature, teacher pedagogy, and classroom discourse suggest revisions to the current perspectives:

1) The purpose of literary representations of racism and racial trauma in the ELA classroom is not to heal existing trauma. The purpose is learning, personal growth, and empowerment. This comes from teacher pedagogy and positioning of narratives. 2) The representations of racial trauma in literature are not inherently traumatic to Black students; assuming that they would be maintains the conflation of

racism and Black identity. The cumulative racial trauma comes from repeated exposure and singular representation of Black experience, and the complex nature of a trauma that is inescapable in the classroom and society.

Implications for Practice

These texts can be included in the ELA curriculum, but they cannot be the only representation of Black experience and identity. Further, Black characters needed to be read and discussed beyond racialized identity and consider diverse experiences, motivations, and humanity not bound to Blackness as a defining characteristic. The discourse surrounding these texts needed to be serious, equitable, and empowering. Teachers should incorporate non-fiction and discuss race and racism as a topic, not a condition of Blackness. The "social construction" thesis is one of the basic tenets of CRT and is built upon the fact that "race"—as a way to categorize or classify humans—is defined, measured, and experienced in demonstrably different ways both across and within societies over time (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Because the social construction of race and the resulting Black experience is dynamic over time and place, this frame provides an analytical throughline from early American literature to contemporary YA novels.

Incorporating a pedagogical lens for literary analysis based on the tenets of CRT can provide teachers with a framework for teaching and discussing race and racism in literature as a topic, not an identity. Intentionally anti-racist literary analysis is in a reciprocal conversation with the goals of CRT; literature provides access to experiences that expose the ways racial construction operates in America, and CRT provides a lens to understand these tensions in literature.

CRT states that people of different races have radically different experiences as they go through life, and engaging in experiential stories can help us understand what life is like for others (Delgado, 2017). Participants argued, however, only talking about race in the context of fictional texts and Black characters prevented the white students in the class from having to consider racism as a real lived experience or broader contemporary issue. Teachers must be explicit that reading about Black characters' experiences with racism and trauma is to be taken seriously but not conflated with the same understanding that comes from actual lived experience.

Counternarratives and Black Joy in Taught Texts

"If I did have a teacher that was open to selecting Black authored texts that were not trauma, but like, were joy, you know, that's something that I would want to read in the classroom. Because only reading a book about Black trauma and the part of the Black---the bad part about being Black--- that's only what other people see."

"I want to see Black joy, I want to see the good parts of being Black."

"The conversation we should be having about you know, race in classrooms isn't just, hey, let's read some books with Black characters. The conversations I wish I could be having are positive ones. Like if we had to read a book, and there was a lot of Black characters, it would be… I would hope it would be like, oh, this person went on to be a lawyer or doctor. Instead, it's more just, you know, they got shot. Or, you know, overcoming their Blackness."

The participants shared concerns about the limited narrative representation of Black experience and identity made available in the ELA classroom through taught texts. Much of the concern was focused on the ways these narratives would be accepted more broadly and mapped into a universal conceptualization of Blackness. The concern was not only that teachers had a narrow, stereotypical view of race and Blackness, but that this narrative would be subsequently adopted by the students in the class.

Participants shared similar visions for taught texts that represented Black joy and success, not just for themselves, but as a counter-narrative to racism as a defining characteristic of Black identity and experience. Taught texts can map a narrative of Blackness onto individual identity that reproduce the narrative teachers create about Black characters in taught texts. Teacher pedagogy can obscure the humanity of Black characters and students, maintain society's negative perceptions of Blackness, and position Blackness as something to overcome. It is not history alone that keeps perpetuating Black trauma; continually presenting content from a lens of racial conflict with no counter narrative sends the message that this is the only experience Black students face (Sharpe, 2016).

Implications for Practice

Representations of racism and racial trauma in taught texts that represent Black characters are important narratives and can be a catalyst for serious discussions of race and racism. The ELA classroom should include serious discussion of these issues, but teachers must make clear that they are not representative of all Black experiences, and they must include counternarratives in the literature. While literature can provide an anchor for reading race as a social construct and confronting the impact of a violent racist past on Black experiences, Black joy and Black love must exist in the space simultaneously (Johnson, 2022; Toliver, 2022). This approach mitigates the risk for teachers to perpetuate the damaging narrative that Black bodies are inherently bound to trauma or that they are to blame for ongoing trauma (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Counterstories are not counterstories simply because they are told by people of color; they are counterstories because they challenge dominant narratives (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). Many narratives about the Black experience are about struggle and participants desperately needed visions of Black people thriving (Toliver, 2020).

A text does not need to be saturated with racial violence towards Black bodies and identities to be harmful to Black students; the absence of Black joy and diverse ways of knowing has a negative effect as well. Trends in the research and ELA curriculum take hostage insight into how Black students'

experiences might be different if they were provided with texts and pedagogy with positive representations of Black life and identity. The current trends in taught texts, even those selected with anti-racist intentions, send the message to Black students: your stories aren't worth much if you don't bleed on the page for us (McKinney, 2020).

Missing entirely from the literature relevant to this study were empirical studies that examined students' experiences with classroom texts that represented Black joy, success, and empowerment. Scholars in the field have insisted that the ELA curriculum tells a singular story of Black pain and suffering that needs to be countered with a love of Blackness, but there have yet to be empirical studies that can help educators understand and refine this pedagogical future. Teachers will need guidance when it comes to teaching and talking about Black joy. Future research will need to couple theoretical inquiry with empirical project to design a pedagogical framework for selecting and teaching narratives of Black joy and success that is responsive to and co-constructed by Black students in the ELA classroom.

Participants believed that the current and singular representations of Blackness in literature and society are intentional. Systemic racism controls the narratives about race that then impact individual teacher perceptions but "that doesn't excuse you from doing your own research." Teachers may not understand or may choose not to acknowledge that the absence of Black authors in commonly taught classroom literature is not a coincidence, nor is it a coincidence that Black representation in classroom literature has been additive in nature (Combs, 2022; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Johnson, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The responsive pedagogical frame outlined in my theoretical framework requires that teachers either: evaluate and dismiss literature that serves to privilege a white supremacist narrative or attend to the racial structures represented in the literature explicitly through a CRT lens (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019; Johnson, 2022). Teachers must include both windows and mirrors in literary representations of race.

The tenets of Critical Race Theory included in this analytical framework provide a theoretical basis for transforming instructional practice responsive to the findings and visions for the future described in this study: Teachers can contribute to the work of dismantling damaging narratives by (a) rejecting racist texts in the classroom; (b) using an anti-racist, trauma-reducing pedagogical framework to expose racist images and ideologies in these texts; (c) including authentic counternarratives in their text selections with an anti-racist agenda; and (d) including titles that consider shifts towards agency in identity and Black joy.

This must be integrated with trauma reducing practices grounded in Racial Trauma Theory. I propose that an anti-racist trauma reducing pedagogical framework extends not only to the experiences of students in the classroom but the reading of literature. Just as this study calls for teachers to name racism

in taught texts, they should explicitly name racism as the trauma that it is as part of literary analysis. Failing to explicitly name race and racism as a real and valid source of traumatic injury and violence, maintains a colorblind ideology towards experiences of trauma (Cénat, 2022). This current definition, and therefore the best-intentioned trauma-informed practitioners, may fail to perceive racialized experiences of oppression as sources of trauma. Failing to include experiences of racism as part of the trauma narrative presents a monolithic narrative about what is and what is not trauma and its effect (Quiros et al., 2020).

A trauma-informed approach from a critical race lens makes space for the voice of counternarratives (Quiros et al., 2020). Currently, trauma-informed practices in educational spaces are established to respond to the needs of some but not others. Without a commitment to recognizing Black students' existing racial trauma and the sources of racial trauma embedded in the curriculum, current trauma-informed practices "do nothing to move an organization towards anti-racism" (Quiros et al., 2020, p.164). Teachers in the ELA classroom can contribute to operationalizing visions for the future discussed here and answer the call for intersectional pedagogy from trauma theorists by including Racial Trauma Theory in literature instruction and analysis surrounding issues of race and racism.

The Impact on Individual Identity

"Maybe it's because of that statistic. I don't want to fit into that. That's what has made it so hard for me." "Race or stereotypes wouldn't matter. No one would have to fit in or act a certain way. They could be here without the pressure of feeling like you have to be a specific way."

Threads emerged across and within the stories and perspectives participants shared about their own individual racialized identity and their perspectives on the narratives produced and reproduced in ELA texts and teacher pedagogy. Participants felt they could only be understood as Black in school settings if they performed Blackness in a prescribed way because they had no agency to counter the narratives reproduced in the classroom and society. Like the narrative teachers created in taught texts, any failure, lack of ability, or misstep was automatically attributed to their Blackness, and it was their responsibility to overcome their Blackness.

In the CRTR pedagogical framework proposed in my theoretical inquiry, I attend to the concept of a *collective black identity* in the social construction of race. This frame has significant implications for the findings of the study in terms of the impact classroom literature and pedagogy has on individual identity. The purpose of the *collective black identity* feature is to attend to Black experiences that are specifically situated the social construction of race and imagined Black identity that has resulted in a simplified "collective Black identity" (Mills, 1997). Scholarship in CRT acknowledged that contemporary Black experience has historical roots in enslavement and the continued navigation of life *in the wake* (Sharpe, 2016). However, authors such as James Baldwin (2012) and Stephen Best (2018) pointed out

that these narratives can collectively root Blackness in the horror of enslavement with no clear exit or room for divergent identity. It is imperative that teachers choose literature that provides a space to understand the social construction of a collective Black identity and disarticulate individual students from this fabricated, collective model of Blackness (Best, 2018).

Implications for Practice

A pedagogical framework is needed to acknowledge and navigate the implications of a traumatic model of collective black identity in literature while also facilitating a process for selecting texts that provides freedom from the constraints of a Black identity that can only be collectively understood as it is situated in white violence. Ultimately, it is racism—not race—that drives and explains racial differences in experience and social outcome, a discourse largely absent from literature instruction even when the classroom texts present the opportunity (Delgado, 2017).

Racial Trauma research argues that the classroom and literature can have a significant influence on either positive or negative racial identity formation (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Galán et al., 2022). While teachers may only consider race and racism when it is explicitly addressed through literature and classroom discourse, perceptions of racial identity influenced all aspects of the participants' school experience. Counternarrative through a trauma-informed lens emphasized the importance of looking at the many stories that make people who they are and how they perceive their experiences of trauma. (Quiros et al., 2020).

Literature read through this frame can illuminate the ways in which an oppressive collective Black identity still exists in society today, but that the individual has agency and autonomy in defining their own authentic identity and their unique experience of Black joy-- because of, not in spite of-- their Blackness (Love, 2020). Through a CRT and trauma-informed lens for literary analysis, representations of Blackness can be read as backdropped by but not fundamentally bound to trauma.

Toliver (2020) suggested that speculative fiction as a specific method of storytelling created space for people of color to envision possibilities for a world beyond the one in which we currently live. This is essential in a field that is saturated with counterstories that critique existing constructions of race and oppression but provide minimal opportunities for Black students to voice and define a responsive call to action. Participants in this study argued that the purpose for reading and talking about race in literature must be to empower students and speculative fiction should be considered in responsive anti-racist pedagogy in the ELA classroom.

Authentic Narratives and Lived Experience

"I love to hear about other people's perspectives and how they think about it because maybe it's different."

"I rather it be about someone's real story in a whole book. It means that it meant that much to them to put it in a book for everyone to read it."

In addition to narratives of Black joy and narratives that countered a collective Black identity, the participants expressed a reverence and need for authentic first-person narratives of lived experience. Teachers must include authentic narratives of lived experience in the texts they read about race and racism and the classroom must be a space where these narratives are seen as valid and authoritative. Without these conditions, participants would not disclose their lived experiences, even though they knew they held valuable insight. Lived experience were seen as a source of authoritative knowledge and insight on Black identity and issues of race and a more valid source of understanding than literary understanding.

Implications for Practice

CRTR Frame Three: Voice and Counter/storytelling is relevant to these findings and implications for pedagogy. Because Black students in ELA classrooms cannot be made to bear the burden and responsibility of providing counternarratives through their lived experiences (Boylorn, 2011) teachers must highlight authentic Black counter/stories in the curriculum.

It was uncomfortable listening to narratives about Black experiences when they were produced by white people with a sense of authority or understanding, both in literature and in classroom race talk. Affirmative action pedagogy is a response to the ways in which systemic racism manifests at the level of classroom discourse (Boler, 2014). It privileges minority voices in the anti-racist classroom and seeks to ensure teachers bear witness to marginalized voices in classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting dominant voices (Boler, 2014). The author argued that classrooms are unique spaces where marginalized and silenced voices can respond to ignorant expressions rooted in privilege, white supremacy, or other dominant ideologies. Unlike other public spaces where students may encounter racism or threats of racial violence, the classroom is one of the few public spaces in which Black students can respond and be heard (Boler, 2014). While an anti-racist curriculum must include the literary counterstories and testimonies of marginalized voices, affirmative action pedagogy must *privilege* the testimonies of marginalized student voices in the classroom (Boler, 2014). This perspective aligns with the goals of the responsive pedagogical framework.

The Purpose for Reading and Talking About Race

"I would want to read a book like that in a classroom environment where we were reading about race or discussing race and racism. I would love to do that…I like to hear about other people's perspectives. I'm wanting to hear what they have to say and I want them to hear what I have to say. Maybe we could learn something from each other. Or maybe one of us can change each other's minds."

"I would also love to have some serious topics but we never have actual… it's either never a serious topic or it's very neutral. Or it's about the negative. It's very negative. It's never just a super serious topic that we should actually get into. We should all think about it. We should explain it and speak our minds."
"The fact that I get to hear other people's opinions about it and hear what they have to say… It really interests me and I like learning. I don't have an opportunity to truly know what other people think about the topic. It never really gets brought up at school. So it's like… I get to hear a side of me that I've never heard before."

The purposes for reading and talking about race in the classroom were: for Black students' own learning and growth, to provide diverse representation, to consider broader social issues, and to empower students to make changes to their world. The teacher must make the purpose for reading and talking about race explicit, especially when narratives include representation of racism and racial trauma. Students must be provided with opportunities to learn about diverse issues and perspectives on race as well as diverse racialized experiences.

Implications for Practice

CRT is a useful vehicle to have explicit conversations about race, racism, and whiteness in the context of trauma narratives (Quiros et al., 2020). Understanding the ordinariness of racism is one of the first steps in trauma-informed practice from a CRT lens. The aim is to move beyond a color-blind framework to acknowledge racism as a trauma. The trauma-informed version of this tenet expands beyond the framework of race and racism as a narrowly defined issue for people of color to also include whiteness (Quiros et al., 2020). This framing can provide the equitable access to personal learning and growth on topics of race and racism the participants described in their visions for future pedagogy. Trauma novels by themselves cannot solve racial problems, but when used as a type of critical literacy in the ELA classroom, students can envision racial justice and bring about social change (Grinage, 2018).

The teacher should not set the purpose for reading and talking about race on the demographics of the students in the class. Assumptions should not be made about the racial literacy or lived experiences of individual students based on race or which texts and topics will be windows and mirrors. Visions for future pedagogy must include equitable access to personal learning and growth on topics of race and racism and diverse representation in taught texts that are not bound to Blackness or racism.

Toliver offered new visions for the future that align with the implications for pedagogy put forth by the participants in this study (2018). Based on Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors, which argued that books should offer mirrors to reflect readers' multilayered and complex identities, windows to show readers real and imagined worlds, and sliding glass doors to enable readers to enter creative worlds using their imaginations, Toliver recommended Speculative Fiction as powerful mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990; Toliver, 2018).

For Black girls specifically, speculative fiction must be considered in the curriculum by teachers who will respond to the new pedagogical visions put forth by this study. To analyze which mirrors and windows were used to analyze Black adolescent female representations in fiction books, Toliver conducted a meta-analysis of studies between 2000 and 2017 that included research into the representation of Black girls in fiction novels (Toliver, 2018). Toliver found that all the selected books depicted Black girls combating negative beliefs about their physical appearance, race and racism, and stereotypical images. Of the books representing high school age Black girls, all included topics such as teen pregnancy, abuse, racism, and criminal activity (Toliver, 2018). Missing from the narratives about Black Girlhood were stories of hope, imagination, and diverse futures.

Visions for future pedagogy must include equitable access to personal learning and growth on topics of race and racism and diverse representation in taught texts but based on the available literature at the time of Toliver's study, Black girls stand to be excluded from future anti-racist pedagogy in the ELA classroom, even when using an anti-racist framework.

For this reason, a CRT frame for intersectionality and principles from Racial Trauma frameworks that include a gender-based intersectional lens should be included in a responsive pedagogical framework. Galan et al. (2022) put forward a theoretical model that recognized how racism interacts with other types of oppression like sexism. They drew on critical race theories of intersectionality to suggest that experiences of racism may vary by gender (Crenshaw, 1991). Implications from Toliver (2018) demonstrated that this theoretical perspective encompasses reading about representations of race and racism in the ELA classroom.

Just as the causes of and effects of racial trauma are gendered experiences, responsive recommendations for future pedagogy must consider and be inclusive of gender. Based on the stories shared here, it is beyond the scope of the current study to make specifically responsive refinements to the CRTR framework based on analysis from a lens of intersectionality. The stories can be revisited and future storywork can be conducted with an intentional and explicitly intersectional CRT lens and Intersectional-Contextual model for Racial Trauma Theory from Galan et al. (2022) analytical framework so that more nuanced implications, recommendations, and refinements can be made to the CRTR Pedagogical Framework.

The Purpose for Diverse Representation

"I like anything that has to do with race…Like the fact that they dealt with racism before. It doesn't matter what race they are, just what they dealt with and how they dealt with it that has to do with their identity and who they are."

"I would still like to have diversity [in taught texts]. Because I want to see representation. If I was mainly reading books by a white author or developed mainly around white people, you know? It's like, well, why

aren't we reading other books? You know? Like, what's different about those books? And what's the reason why we aren't reading them?"

"I just think that having more books with more representation… because I find that when we do read books by Black authors about the Black experience, I think … like the only thing that we see about the character or like the main characteristic about the character that we're talking about, is them being Black. We never just see them as a regular person."

The implications for the purpose of reading and talking about race apply to the purpose for diverse representation in the ELA classroom. Participants recognized that for teachers the purpose of including Black authored texts in the ELA classroom was singularly as a catalyst for talking about racism. Findings demonstrated that the purpose for including diversity in taught texts should not be limited to the representation of Black characters and experiences. Black students want to read and talk about diverse experiences that are inclusive of identities beyond just a Black-white racial binary.

Implications for Practice

Along with diverse representations of identity and experience there must be a significant change in teachers' current pedagogical approach to diverse texts. Akoye recognized that without a change, teachers will reproduce the same harmful practices on other minority groups when they misteach literature written by minorities and minority representation. Unless diversity in taught texts provided representations of racialized experiences beyond racism and trauma and a shift in pedagogy, "it might almost be better to not have it at all." Additionally, it is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them, so educators should not map the pedagogical framework proposed from the findings of this study onto other minority groups (Freire, 2005). This would oversimplify minority groups into a collective *other* that centers and reinforces whiteness as the default.

Teacher Pedagogy and Disposition

"And I guarantee, if he taught that class again, I put all my money on it, that they're all going to speak out. The first one who is going to speak up? It's going to be them, the ones who never felt like they could talk about it before."

"If you had a teacher that was like him, it would shift diversity, like out of the picture... Because he pushes everybody to talk, and he does it in a way that you don't even notice."

"I feel like, if you get it right, the race of the teacher doesn't make much of a difference. He was comfortable talking about it. He wasn't trying to go around the issue. I don't have a problem with a Black or white teacher teaching it, as long as they teach it right."

"That's why I'll never talk to a teacher about a problem that I have. Because I haven't seen one teacher that really meant it and acted upon those actions. Because a lot of kids in our school say a lot of out-of-

pocket stuff. And no one will check that. Or they will check it but it's not enough. They don't take the time to get this kid to stop and see what's wrong with what they're saying."

"The way the teacher is teaching changes everything and those kids that were acting a fool, don't act so foolish anymore, because they want to be doing it."

The most explicit visions for the future participants shared were for teacher pedagogy and disposition. Visions for future anti-racist pedagogy required the decentering of the learning needs of white students in pedagogical approaches to reading and talking about race in the classroom. Teachers centered whiteness in their pedagogy by protecting the emotional safety of white students during race talk. They did this through avoidance and neutrality and by including texts and narratives that consigned racism to the past and a condition of Blackness.

Implications for Practice

CRTR Frame Two: Racism is Systemic and Rooted in History, paradoxically, has relevant implications to these findings, specifically texts and narratives that consign racism to the past and a condition of Blackness. When analyzing literature in the ELA classroom, a pedagogical frame that explicitly confronts the systemic nature of racism can bring to light the often invisible and covert ways in which racism informs Black experiences.

Teachers must acknowledge race and racism in white authored texts, particularly when they include representations of Black experience and trauma. The CRTR framework proposed in this study should not be relegated to the reading of Black authored texts or the visibility of Black students. While CRT is a lens that is useful in some contexts more than others, anti-racism is not contextual (Goings et al., 2023). Anti-racist pedagogy is not an instructional strategy; it is a commitment to an organizing effort for institutional and social change that is much broader than teaching in the classroom. This study takes up CRT as a theoretical lens for refining a framework for anti-racist pedagogy to be used in all curriculum and instruction and in all demographic contexts.

Deprioritizing Whiteness

"I would want English teachers to teach Black authors and Black characters in a way that, like, acknowledges the reality of being Black in America but in a way that is positive and that is for Black students. Like for me to learn about and talk about."

"I think you need to have a value system and you do need to say you know, we're reading this book, and there's Black trauma in it and the reason we're reading it is because racism is present today and we're going to talk about it so that you guys feel empowered to do something about it. I think you should have a value system and you can't be like, Oh, the white kids are gonna feel bad."

Teachers adopted a misguided approach to social justice-oriented pedagogy by positioning narratives of racism and racial trauma as an attempt to build empathy and allyship in white students,

sidelining the emotional safety and learning of the Black students. Participants included many examples of the ways in which they interpreted teachers as both intentionally and inherently prioritizing learning and comfort of white students. In response to the participants' perspectives and based on my subjective interpretation of nuanced storytelling aesthetics, I describe their visions and recommendations for the future as *deprioritizing whiteness* rather than the more common *decentering whiteness* found in the literature.

Participants' visions for future pedagogy are best described as equitable and inclusive. They recognized that this meant teachers must stop prioritizing what they perceived to be the learning needs of white students in racial discourse. These findings have significant implications for intersecting visions for future anti-racist pedagogy and taught texts in the ELA classroom. The implications demonstrate why prioritizing whiteness is not effective and what deprioritizing whiteness looks like as a pedagogical commitment to achieve the purpose set out by the participants.

Implications for Practice

Literature reviewed for this study illustrated the need to deprioritize whiteness in anti-racist pedagogy. Previous studies have taken up CRT tenets as a framework for analyzing literature in the ELA classroom (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023). The goal of the study in Bedford and Shaffer (2023) was to evaluate the efficacy of a proposed CRT framework for reading about race through classroom literature with white preservice teachers (PST). They hoped to provide a safe space for white students to learn about race and understand the racialized experiences of Black characters in literature. Findings revealed that most white students still expressed uncritical colorblind beliefs. Their reflections demonstrated that they "clearly did not understand the concepts" even though the tenets and CRT framework had been explicitly taught and modeled (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023, p. 18).

I highlight this research to support my argument that an anti-racist framework for literature instruction must be paired with a pedagogical approach that does not prioritize whiteness. The framework offered here is not a tool for passive white empathy building and racial awakening. Additionally, findings from Bedford and Shaffer (2023) demonstrated that a CRT framework for literature was ultimately ineffective for white empathy building and racial awareness; all it provided was white emotional safety for race talk.

In the relevant studies that included student voice, Black students shared that race talk often resulted in tension in the classroom and they experienced this tension as a problem for which white students blamed them. They felt that white kids grew weary of talking about the plight of being Black, an experience they could not relate to or empathize with, causing an environment of discomfort, resentment, and guilt (Boylorn, 2011; Grinage, 2014; Simpson et al., 2007). Findings in the current study, however,

found *Black students* were weary of talking about the plight of being Black, and participants critiqued the over confidence white students had in their ability to relate to the experience of being Black.

Following these threads, implications for the current study should consider and anticipate possible shifts in dynamics described in the participants' stories. In the literature, Black students and white students were both participating in race talk. In the current study, it is possible that there was not this same tension because Black students were not actually participating in the racial discourse.

When teacher pedagogy deprioritizes the learning and emotional safety of white students and, hypothetically, Black students start to engage equitably in racial discourse, it is possible that shared tensions like the ones described in the literature arise once Black students are no longer silent. Much of the scholarship revealed that white students dominated conversations about race in the classroom, even when Black students silenced themselves in the discourse (Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Simpson et al., 2007; Thomas, 2013, 2015). It was only after conflict that white students felt attacked by references to white privilege and said they didn't think race was an appropriate topic for the classroom, even though they had previously dominated the conversation (Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Simpson et al., 2007; Sosa, 2020).

The comprehensive anti-racist and trauma reducing pedagogical framework presented here with the inclusion of empowering spaces *(née safe spaces)* as classrooms that facilitate critical agency has the potential to mitigate the condition and circumstances of this tension. Additionally, across the relevant scholarship, successful race talk in the classroom was not characterized by the absence of conflict, but by the consistent active engagement of Black students (Sassi & Thomas, 2015; Sosa, 2020). Even if conflicts arise, teachers cannot allow white perspectives to dominate and reproduce white supremacist perspectives about race. Even the best-intentioned attempts at anti-racist trauma-reducing pedagogy provide a platform for white supremacy to reproduce if teachers prioritize the emotional safety of white student or fear of conflict over pedagogy that empowers and actively engages Black students.

One of the biggest pedagogical errors teachers made when introducing race talk into the classroom was a pedagogical strategy of neutrality (Boler, 2004; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Falter & Kerkhoff, 2018; Grinage, 2019b; Johnson, 2017, 2018; Mosley, 2010). Effectively, teachers cannot be neutral and anti-racist at the same time (Grinage, 2019b). They must be willing to hear ignorant and racist talk and then take the opportunity to correct it (Boylorn, 2011), a disposition in action that built trust for the participants in this study. Ultimately, anti-racist pedagogy does not prioritize the development of white allyship; the goal of anti-racist pedagogy is to empower students to act against current racism and oppression (Leverette, 2022).

The recommendations for practice in this study and CTRT framework are inclusive of the learning needs of white students without marginalizing Black students. All students, regardless of racial identity, can take action against existing racist ideologies and systems of oppression. Attention to the

lived realities of bodies in the world and interrogation of their own racial identities are practices that allow students to think more broadly about race and justice (Leverette, 2022). For the race and justice focused classroom "transformation means students from different backgrounds and races coming together as part of their education to have deliberative conversations about the possibilities for a more just and equitable society" and understanding that their roles in creating this will vary depending on their social location and privilege (Leverette, 2022, p. 35).

When a classroom is organized by the educational needs of white students "a silent decision is made that the whole class is not yet primed for advanced academic explorations into race" (Leverette, 2022, p. 35). Educators should equally prioritize space for students of color to do their own growing and identity development, encouraging them to establish their own goals and abilities. Leverette (2022) incorporated theories and strategies from race, trauma, mindfulness, and anti-racist pedagogy scholarship to recommend specific practices for constructive conversations on race, identity, and justice in the antiracist classroom. I outline specific practices from Leverette (2022) that align with the findings and implications from this study in the recommendations for practice within the refined CRTR framework in a later section.

Black Student Epistemologies and Pedagogical Insight

"And maybe when teachers don't know how to do that, students can say, 'Hey, here's how you're going to do it. Here's what you're not going to say. Here's what's going to make me, like make your Black students not uncomfortable. Here's what's going to make them feel heard.' And putting that together. For them."

"I think the important part is saying [to the teacher]: 'Hey, it's an all-white class. And I know that we're talking about this for their benefit, but I'm here for it and I want to be part of that conversation.' I really feel like I should definitely have that because…The fact, again, that I haven't really had that much of an experience with racism. I feel like I still need to know more too."

"I can just be like, 'Hey, can we have some discussions or some books that have to do with positive outlooks?' You know, especially when people start saying like, you know, this is about Black teenagers in America, I would be like, 'well, hold on. Like, not me. Not, you know, like, let's not make it seem like this is the only experience.'"

"I think other schools can get there. I definitely see it…The change comes from the teachers."

This study found that it is not enough for teachers to have good intentions when reading and talking about race in the classroom. For teachers to shift their dispositions, deprioritize whiteness, and empower Black students in racial discourse, they need to listen to the experiences, perspectives, and guidance of Black students. There must be a change in teacher pedagogy, and changes to pedagogy require teachers with a disposition open to change. Black students must have the agency to voice their perspectives on text selection, representation, and racial discourse and teachers must have the disposition

to prioritize and accept their guidance. Naming one's own reality with stories can affect the oppressor and most oppression does not seem like oppression to the perpetrator (Lawrence, 1987) so teachers must be willing to listen and respond with an open mind.

CRT focuses research, curriculum, and practice on the experiences of students of color and views these experiences as sources of strength (Solórzano, 2021). A CTRT frame for counterstorytelling and narrative can serve as a pedagogical tool that allows educators to better understand the experiences of their students of color through deliberate and mindful listening techniques (Taylor, 2021).

Implications for Practice

The stories of Black students are muted and erased when they challenge dominant cultural authority and power (Ladson-Billings, 1998), so care must be taken to establish the conditions and relationships for students to be willing to share their perspective. Finding from this study demonstrated that trust was established and created the conditions for storywork when the participants were able to observe a consistent disposition of cultural humility and inclusivity and actionable response to discrimination when it occurred. As I asserted in previous sections, anti-racist pedagogy is not a contextually specific gesture; it is an enduring commitment and disposition, and students demonstrated that they are paying attention outside of explicit racial discourse.

Endarkened Storywork in the Anti-Racist Classroom

"I wanted to share my views as a Black student, especially knowing that I was not and will not be the only student that experiences this."

"I know that English teachers do not intentionally misteach books that take on the topic of race but it is something that does happen and needs to be talked about."

"This experience has given me the courage to point out and speak up when situations like that happen. Bringing acknowledgment to people by bringing different perspectives into the picture can allow growth. I'm glad that I was able to share my experiences."

Students need a space to process and understand their own experiences and a platform to share their perspectives so that they can contribute their Black student epistemologies and pedagogical insight meaningfully to future instruction. Participating in this storywork empowered participants to think through their visions for the future and provide explicit pedagogical guidance. However, the responsibility cannot be on students to speak up when they are being harmed by the pedagogy surrounding racial narratives and discourse.

Implications for Practice

Teachers need to actively seek out and acknowledge students' experiences and perspectives, invite students to contribute, and then value and accept their guidance with an open mind. Like the methodological commitments of my study, it is imperative that teachers who provide Black students a

space to process and understand their experiences do so with a "method of surrender" (Toliver, 2020). The teacher must prioritize the storytelling needs of the students and not the agenda of seeking pedagogical insight. Students may not explicitly articulate pedagogical guidance; storywork includes the word *work* because it requires that the story listener (the teacher) listen deeply to the stories and share in the imaginative labor of making meaning. Teachers should invite students to contribute their perspective without an expectation of reciprocity in terms of endorsement or engagement in subsequent racial discourse.

Toliver argued that including student voices in narrative inquiry is more than a methodological and epistemological choice to gain insight into a phenomenon; student voice in research is testimony and counterstory that calls for readers to bear witness to experiences and act (Toliver, 2020). While this includes the stories shared through qualitative research like the stories shared here, participants wanted their voices and pedagogical insights to be included in their current classrooms. Literature reviewed for this study agreed that student perspectives play a vital role in shaping practices that affirmed their ways of knowing, and the instruction that takes place in critical ELA classrooms should be shaped by the voices of students for whom classroom instruction is meant to benefit (Gordon, 2019).

While I fully support teachers investing in student perspectives and experiences in their classes to inform future pedagogy, and the findings of this study call for it, the circumstances under which student voice is elicited must be taken into consideration when evaluating the findings. Narrative studies in the field found that Black students perceived teacher authority to be a barrier to productive race talk. Recall the effect of Akoye's complex racial trauma: "And that's why I'll never talk to a teacher about a problem that I have. Because I haven't seen one teacher that really meant it and acted upon those actions."

The literature noted the importance of establishing a classroom culture that values listening to others, considering various perspectives, and making connections between theories/concepts, rather than evaluating *what* students think or critiquing their personal opinions (Simpson et al., 2007, Thomas, 2013). These classroom dispositions may create an empowered space of critical agency for students to share their perspectives with their current teacher. Boylorn (2011) interviewed Black students in her class after the course had commenced to mitigate these barriers. Teachers might consider a similar approach.

Ensuring Black students' stories and visions for the future are heard is not enough; educators who engage in storywork to refine their practice and empower Black students must act and respond in a way that directly benefit the storytellers. This call and response are critical attributes of Storywork, anti-racist research methods (Goings et al., 2023) and trauma reducing research methods (Petrone & Stanton, 2021).

I reference the methodological commitments of this study to remind teachers of their unique position of privilege. More than scholars and researchers, teachers have the agency and the access to engage in storywork through speculative fiction with their current students to make immediate

transformative change. I describe this recommendation as speculative rather than storywork because students should not be expected to disclose their lived experiences to teachers in order to have their perspectives valued as epistemological insight.

The findings from this study and the participants' visions for the future suggest that for the classroom teacher, anti-racist trauma reducing pedagogy starts with valuing and validating students' perspectives, inviting them to co-construct racial discourse through literature, accepting their guidance with an open mind, and implementing responsive pedagogy. According to the participants in this study, systemic change starts with the teacher. Anti-racist educators must renovate and transform the classroom while they and everyone else continue to inhabit it (Goings et al., 2023).

Fortunately, these methodological commitments in qualitative research can be imported by the teacher into the classroom simply by recognizing the everyday opportunities. Imagine how Akoye's experiences would have been different if, as Derrick suggested, her teacher had simply asked "Does anyone feel uncomfortable" or "How do you guys feel about it?" When Derrick wondered, "Do you think you would have spoken up and said, 'I don't want us to say this word?'" Akoye "would have been comfortable. Comfortable to say I was not comfortable with you saying the word. Or anyone else."

Educators must not burden Black students as "cultural experts" or "teacher's aides" in developing anti-racist pedagogy, but an empowered space that values student agency and insight inherently provides opportunities for Black students to voice and define a responsive call to action. Participants agreed that students should have the agency to voice their perspective to their teachers and teachers needed to have the disposition to accept their guidance.

Effective Teacher Pedagogy in the ELA Classroom

This study centers Black students as brilliant sources of epistemological knowledge and insight--and not just about being Black. The participants' stories provide insight into effective pedagogy in the ELA classroom more broadly. Participants used explicit language in their stories when describing interactions and perceptions as racialized. Their stories also included unracialized commentary on pedagogy and everyday talk. To conflate all aspects of their stories with their racial identities or assume that all shared experiences are inherently racialized would reproduce the practices critiqued in the findings of this study. For this reason, I present the recommendations for effective teacher pedagogy in the ELA classroom as autonomous and responsive implications without analysis through a race based theoretical lens.

Implications for ELA Teachers

The following are implications for texts, tasks, and pedagogy in the ELA classroom found throughout the participants' stories:

- Teachers should select texts for the ELA classroom that are relevant and interesting to students'

lives or allow students to select their own.

- Tasks associated with reading must be useful and meaningful to learning, not compliance, and the teacher must value and validate student effort.
- Reading should be positioned as its own meaningful learning activity.
- Tasks around reading should value individual perspective and meaning making.
- Taught texts should be read for enjoyment as well as curriculum.
- The purpose for reading outside of class—enjoyment and personal interest—should be reflected in the ELA classroom.
- Students need opportunities for choice and agency in topics and to find their own knowledge sources.
- Students need to be valued as valid sources of knowledge and insight.
- Teachers must communicate to students that they care about and are genuinely interested in them as individuals, value their perspectives, and are invested in their learning.
- Learning should be fun, entertaining, and educational.

Threads and Seams from the Literature

Findings from the scholarship validated the effectiveness of the participants' visions for ELA pedagogy within the race and trauma based theoretical frameworks inherent to the literature reviewed for this study. Power sharing (like agency and empowered spaces) was found to be a method for successful racial discourse in the literature. Power sharing in the classroom included acknowledging multiple viewpoints, providing space for the evaluation of different perspectives, and the chance to be heard. Effective practices from the research aligned with the attention paid to disposition in the current study: teachers must validate students' experiences, demonstrate that they understand their perspective, and show genuine investment in students as sources of knowledge (Grinage, 2014; Simpson et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2017).

Research suggested teachers work together with students to come up with "routines of agreement" if conflict does arise (Thomas, 2013). Select examples of routines of agreement from the literature align with the findings of this study, while others are pedagogical maneuvers the participants' critiqued. Routines of agreement such as following students' lead during classroom discourse and only talking about race in the context of the text (Williams et al., 2017) were examples of ineffective pedagogy in the participants' stories. However, examples such as allowing students to select classroom texts that shift away from narratives of racism and racial trauma when needed (Martin, 2014; Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Thomas, 2015) and the clear establishment of the purpose for addressing race (Simpson et al., 2007) aligned with the goals and visions shared in this study.

I began this chapter by returning to the context of this research and summarizing the principal findings presented in Chapter 4. I followed this with a discussion of the implications of these findings as they relate to theory, practice, and related scholarship. Implications for pedagogy and practice were situated in Critical Race Theory, Racial Trauma Theory, related scholarship, and participants' visions for the future. Ultimately, my goal within this study is to refine an anti-racist, trauma-reducing pedagogical framework to guide teacher practice, disposition, and approach to literature instruction in the ELA classroom, co-constructed by the lived experiences and visions for the future of Black students.

In the following section I summarize the recommendations for teacher practice based on the key study implications and visions for the future. This is followed by recommended refinements to the CRTR pedagogical framework to include implications for trauma reducing pedagogy as a result of this research. Finally, I demonstrate how implications for anti-racist pedagogy and trauma reducing pedagogy are addressed by the same CRTR frames and recommended practices to move towards a Critical Race Trauma Reducing Pedagogical Framework that can be used by teachers to inform practice and disposition and guide literary analysis in the ELA classroom and curriculum.

Recommendations for Anti-Racist Trauma Reducing Pedagogy

The study participants shared complex, intersecting, and insightful lived experiences and visions for the future, and every part of their stories matter. In Black quilting traditions, to chain piece a quilt, the artist does not cut the thread that connects the patches and creates the seams (Toliver, 2020). I followed the thread of the findings and implications, and I found that many of the seams of negative experiences and trauma in the ELA classroom could be unraveled if teachers made changes to their disposition and pedagogy in two key areas: taught texts and empowered spaces. In my summary of the implications for racial trauma I introduce the concept of *traumatic pedagogy and context.* I include implications for teacher educators and administrators.

The positioning of taught texts and literary Black bodies was a traumatic pedagogy that thread throughout the participants' classroom experiences, creating seams for race talk, trauma, silence—all the way to lived experiences and racial ideologies at a societal level. Pulling at the thread of text selection and positioning can unravel the patches of trauma and racism at the seams so they are no longer part of the quilt of experience in the ELA classroom. Akoye and Derrick both demonstrated this in their positive stories. Although teacher agency and pedagogy were pervasive themes in negative experiences, empowered spaces can be appliqued over to create a new vision for the future. I summarize the recommendations for practice in terms of taught texts and empowered spaces because they are inherently the recommendations for other areas of implication.

Recommendations and Visions for Taught Texts

Teachers can contribute to the work of dismantling damaging narratives by (a) rejecting racist texts in the classroom; (b) using an anti-racist, trauma-reducing pedagogical framework to expose racist images and ideologies in these texts; (c) including authentic counternarratives in their text selections with an anti-racist agenda; and (d) including titles that consider shifts towards agency in identity and Black joy. Additionally:

- Teachers must interrogate their own conceptualizations about race and racism and position Black authored texts in a more nuanced and humanizing way. CRT can guide teachers in reimagining the language and narratives they introduce into discourse and literary analysis surrounding taught texts.
- The purposes for reading about race in the classroom is for Black students' own learning and growth, to provide diverse representation, to consider broader social issues, and to empower students to make changes to their world.
- The teacher must make the purpose for reading and talking about race explicit, especially when narratives include representation of racism and racial trauma.
- Students must be provided with opportunities to learn about diverse issues and perspectives on race as well as diverse racialized experiences.
- Black characters needed to be read and discussed beyond racialized identity and consider diverse experiences, motivations, and humanity not bound to Blackness as a defining characteristic.
- Teachers should include Racial Trauma Theory in literature instruction and analysis surrounding issues of race and racism.
- Teachers must make explicit that it is racism—not race—that drives and explains racial differences in experience and social outcome. Teachers should incorporate non-fiction and discuss race and racism as a topic, not a condition of Blackness.
- Teachers must include narratives of Black joy and success as a counter-narrative to racism as a defining characteristic of Black identity and experience.
- In addition to narratives of Black joy and narratives that countered a collective Black identity, students need authentic first-person narratives of lived experience. Black students in ELA classrooms cannot be made to bear the burden and responsibility of providing counternarratives through their lived experiences. Teachers must highlight authentic Black counter/stories in the curriculum.
- Teachers will need guidance when it comes to teaching and talking about Black joy; a pedagogical framework for selecting and teaching narratives of Black joy and success that is responsive to and co-constructed by Black students in the ELA classroom is needed.

- Literature cannot be used to justify racist language, perpetuate anti-Black narratives, or advance white supremacist ideologies.
- While it is important to incorporate multicultural texts, mandated and/or traditional curriculum requires that teachers adapt and adopt a critical approach to the texts already present in the classroom.
- Racial trauma is cumulative and previous encounters with literary racial trauma must be considered.
- Teachers must not position narratives of racism and racial trauma as an attempt to build empathy and allyship in white students, sidelining the emotional safety and learning of the Black students.
- Reading about race and racism in the context of fictional texts and Black characters must include discourse on broader contemporary issue to empower students towards social justice.
- The teacher should not set the purpose for reading about race on the demographics of the students in the class. Students must have equitable access to personal learning and growth on topics of race and racism.
- Speculative Fiction can offer equitable access to windows and mirrors that are not bound to current mono-racial conceptualizations of race and experience rooted in the trauma of slavery.
- Educators should not map the CRTR pedagogical framework onto other minority groups. This would oversimplify minority groups into a collective *other* that centers and reinforces whiteness as the default.

Recommendations and Visions for Empowered Spaces

In empowered spaces Black students have autonomous and equitable agency over racial narratives. Students are not kept safe by the educator; rather they are safe to protect themselves. Empowered spaces privilege minority voices in the classroom and ensure teachers bear witness to marginalized voices in classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting dominant voices. While an anti-racist curriculum must include the literary counterstories and testimonies of marginalized voices, empowered spaces must *privilege* the testimonies of marginalized student voices in the classroom.

Additionally:

- Teachers can establish empowered spaces by cultivating a classroom culture that values listening to others, considering various perspectives, and making connections between theories/concepts. These classroom dispositions may create an empowered space of critical agency for students to share their perspectives with their current teacher.
- Students must have the opportunity to hear each other's perspectives; true discourse and learning requires that absolute agency over racial narratives are not the one presented by the teacher.

- Teacher must challenge themselves and students to critically analyze any statement made in a classroom, especially statements that are rooted in dominant ideological values with the explicit goal of student learning and growth.
- For the classroom teacher, anti-racist trauma reducing pedagogy starts with valuing and validating Black students' perspectives, inviting them to co-construct racial discourse through literature, accepting their guidance with an open mind, and implementing responsive pedagogy. Systemic change starts with the teacher.
- Educators must not burden Black students as "cultural experts" or "teacher's aides" in developing anti-racist pedagogy, but an empowered space that values student agency and insight inherently provides opportunities for Black students to voice and define a responsive call to action.
- Ensuring Black students' stories and visions for the future are heard is not enough; educators must act and respond in a way that directly benefits Black students.
- Care must be taken to establish the conditions and relationships for students to be willing to share their perspective.
- Black students must be able to observe a consistent disposition of cultural humility and inclusivity and actionable response to discrimination when it occurs.
- Educators must foster a sense of psychological safety for Black students. Anti-racist pedagogy is not a contextually specific gesture; it is an enduring commitment and disposition, and students are paying attention outside of explicit racial discourse.
- The demographics of a space and the racialized identity of the teacher does not excuse teachers from anti-racist pedagogy. Students need to see white anti-racist role models.
- While Black students cannot be burdened with personal disclosure or engagement in traumatizing topics, white students cannot be allowed to dominate racial discourse.
- Teachers cannot ignore the silence of Black students during race talk.
- An empowered space to explore topics of race and racism for all students to a productive and social justice end is one that defines racial discourse as racial theories, contemporary issues, and lived experiences that are not bound to Blackness or racism.
- Empowered spaces are equitable and inclusive.
- Empowered spaces are not characterized by the absence of conflict, but by the consistent active engagement of Black students. Even if conflicts arise, teachers cannot allow white perspectives to dominate and reproduce white supremacist perspectives about race.
- Teachers cannot be neutral and anti-racist at the same time. They must be willing to hear ignorant and racist talk and then take the opportunity to correct it.

- Empowered spaces are inclusive of the learning needs of white students without marginalizing Black students. All students, regardless of racial identity, can act against existing racist ideologies and systems of oppression.
- Empowered spaces mean students from different backgrounds and races come together as part of their education to have deliberative conversations about the possibilities for a more just and equitable society and understanding that their roles in creating this will vary depending on their social location and privilege.

Implications for Teacher Education

Participants attributed effective pedagogy to underlying teacher disposition, values, and goals. I traced the thread of anti-racist pedagogy and trauma to taught texts and empowered spaces to conceptualize recommended teacher practices. The recommendations for pedagogy cannot, however, ignore the significant role disposition played in the participants' perceptions and visions for the future. The results of this research are relevant to teacher educators and administrators.

Systems and institutions of education must include curriculum, professional development, and evaluation of teacher and pre-service teacher attitudes and dispositions. Implications must be considered for disposition as well as practice. Reflexivity must be ongoing, contextual, and responsive. It can be challenging to recognize how dispositions and constructions of race are operationalized in pedagogy and racial discourse and teacher preparation programs must include frameworks for reflexivity.

Theories, solid concepts, and recommended practices like the ones presented here are essential but insufficient. Teachers must be encouraged to embrace the process, the inquiry involved, and the times of not knowing and be open to growth and change (hooks, 2003). For school administrators, this research found that the overall school disposition played a critical role in experiences in individual classrooms. Anti-racist and trauma reducing practices must be implemented, evaluated, and refined schoolwide.

Schools can adopt school wide programs like the C.A.R.E. Package for Racial Healing, which focuses on Cultivating Awareness, Resilience, and Empowerment for Black youth (Metzger, 2021). The C.A.R.E. Package includes tools and resources to help Black teens explore racial identity, racial socialization, relaxation, emotion regulation, cognitive coping, and behavioral strategies for coping with experiences with racial stressors in and out of school.

Between the Summer Storywork with Derrick and the time of this writing, Kelley High School started a school wide initiative in partnership with the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP). The school sent out a press release inviting community and family members to attend an information session to learn how the school is leading the way for restorative justice in the district:

> "IIRP provides our students and staff with the tools they need to effect change within their own lives as well as their schools, organizations, and communities. Restorative practices are used in

> schools to foster an equitable and positive school culture. By focusing on strengthening relationships and connections between individuals, both youth and adults, [Kelley High School] becomes a supportive environment for all students."

The framework includes prioritizing the needs of the school community; reducing and preventing harm; repairing harm and restoring relationships; and holding individuals and groups accountable for harm. The IIRP offers programs for graduate students in teacher education and professional development for K-12 schools through their Whole-School Change program (*International Institute of Restorative Practices*, 2024).

Implications for Racial Trauma and CRTR Framework Refinements

I summarized the recommendations for teacher practice based on the key study implications and visions for the future. In this section, I present recommended refinements to the CRTR pedagogical framework to include implications for trauma reducing pedagogy as a result of this research.

In Chapter One, I situated the study problem and purpose in CRT and Racial Trauma Theory. From CRT, I drew on several tenets, features, and associated scholarship to define analytical frames relevant to this discourse. The selected CRT tenets and their framing are intentionally designed to articulate and address the ways in which teachers fall short of anti-racist pedagogy in the secondary ELA classroom. Theories of racial trauma revealed that the same practices that undermine anti-racist pedagogy can be traumatizing to Black students. I argued that because racism and racial trauma are inextricably linked, the CRT pedagogical frames can be operationalized as both anti-racist and trauma reducing practices, moving towards a Critical Race Trauma Reducing (CRTR) Pedagogical Framework.

Theories of racial trauma are in their infancy. Racism has yet to be recognized as a traumatic experience, and despite advocacy from scholars in the field of trauma studies, racial trauma is not included in the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) because it does not meet the current criteria. For this reason, Racial Trauma Theory has yet to find a place in English Education research. Absent from the scholarship are empirical studies to evaluate and refine theories of racial trauma into trauma informed practice or pedagogy for the classroom. Additionally, there has been little empirical investigation to explore the use of CRT as a trauma-informed practice.

For this reason, the original CRTR frames proposed for this study provided rationale for the inclusion of Racial Trauma Theory, but without empirical findings, I was unable to make explicit if and how Racial Trauma Theory could be integrated to operationalize CRT as both anti-racist and trauma reducing pedagogy. One of the goals of this study was to refine a proposed pedagogical framework based on empirical findings to address the potential tensions of engaging students in the literary representation of racial trauma. I aimed to address a gap in the scholarship by analyzing common practices in the ELA classroom with a Racial Trauma Theoretical lens. The findings of this research support my conclusion

that anti-racist pedagogy and trauma-informed pedagogy are not only inextricably linked, when anti-racist pedagogy is missing, misguided, or deficit in the ELA classroom, Black students experience racial (re)traumatization.

Racial Trauma Theory: Insights and Conclusions

Participants in the current study described lasting trauma effects like those outlined in the Racial Trauma scholarship such as hyper-vigilance, avoidance, suffering in silence, and an attack on their sense of self (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Additionally, the experiences participants described in their stories in and out of the classroom mirrored theoretical perspectives of everyday racial trauma. Most prominent in the participants' experiences were: 1) openly racist remarks by classmates and teachers; 2) witnessing the persistent use of racial epithets; and 3) a sense of rejection based on skin color (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz, 2019; Saleem et al., 2019).

Findings from this study indicated that racial trauma was something actively done to students in the ELA classroom, not something they passively had, with sustained effects. The positioning of taught texts and resulting narratives in the ELA classroom were a primary source of racial trauma. Because racial trauma is caused by racism, real or perceived, the experiences participants described *must* be understood as not just falling short of anti-racist pedagogy but consequently inflicting racial harm. For example, Complex racial trauma is a product of a racist ideology of white supremacy that permeates society, including education policy and curriculum (Kendi, 2017, 2019). It is a trauma that is inescapable and the victim can come to see their own racial identity as the perpetrator of the trauma (Cénat, 2022). This study found that the positioning of literature and the surrounding discourse created the narrative that racial trauma was a condition or product of Blackness rather than racist ideologies. Not only is racial trauma inescapable for students in systems of education, but the texts in the ELA classroom reinforced the trauma effects on Black students' internalized racial identity.

In the next section I summarize the implications for Racial Trauma in terms of the pedagogy and context in which they occurred by introducing three analytical frames to the CRTR framework: 1) Literary Representation of Race; 2) Racial Socialization and Identity; and 3) Racism as a Trauma. I describe the frames as traumatic pedagogy and context to demonstrate that the same practices that undermined anti-racist pedagogy were traumatizing to Black students. Further, the recommendations for practice can be described within the three CRT frames: (1) race is a social construct; (2) racism is systemic and rooted in history; and (3) authentic voice and counter/storytelling. I adopt the participants' storytelling aesthetic of precise delineating language for key terms and concepts. The refined CRTR pedagogical framework is positioned as an analytical framework for anti-racist and trauma reducing text selection, racial discourse, literature instruction, disposition and pedagogy, both in the ELA classroom and in the context of narrative inquiry.

Traumatic Pedagogy and Context

For the purpose of refining the CRTR framework, the most significant and relevant implications for racial trauma can be understood as: 1) Literary Representation of Race; 2) Racial Socialization and Identity; and 3) Racism as a Trauma. I propose integrating these constructs as distinct but embedded frames within the existing CRTR framework. First, I summarize the Racial Trauma Frames and features followed by a description of the related theoretical perspectives and concepts from Racial Trauma Theory that explain the nature and effects of the racial trauma identified in this research. The features of the Racial Trauma Frames are described in terms of the related traumatizing pedagogy and context.

Racial Trauma Frame One: Literary Representation of Race

Reading representations of racial trauma or racism in literature was not inherently traumatic to Black students. Teacher pedagogy and damaging racial narratives surrounding taught texts were a source of trauma, more so than the content of the texts. Teachers used literature to justify racist language, perpetuate anti-black narratives, and reject Black students' agency in the ELA classroom. Trauma occurred in distinct pedagogical contexts. These contexts are introduced into the CRTR framework as features of *Racial Trauma Frame One: Literary Representation of Race:*

1. When Black students have lived experience with the racial trauma depicted in the literature, the traumatic effects can be compounded by anti-Black narratives and race talk.
2. Even if Black students have not experienced the racial trauma represented in a taught text, they can experience cumulative racial trauma from repeated exposure to a singular representation of Black experience as trauma. This includes across grade levels.
3. Racial trauma in the ELA classroom as a result of teacher pedagogy and disposition, however, subsequent representations of racial trauma and dehumanizing racial discourse are culminative injuries and re-exposures to race based stress.
4. Exposing students to narrative trauma in ELA classrooms is complex and compounded because students do not have the option to remove themselves from ongoing and mandated curricular trauma. Whereas the tradition understanding of trauma is as a distinct traumatic event, in the ELA classroom, the reading of anti-Black narratives in a novel is sustained over time.
5. Teacher agency over literary narratives about race meant students were often subjected to racist language and anti-black narratives in taught texts and race talk.

Racial Trauma Frame Two: Racial Socialization and Identity

Narratives extend beyond the text onto society's perceptions of a collective and socially constructed Black identity with material effects on individual racialized identity and lived experience. Classroom literature can have a significant influence on either positive or negative racial identity formation (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Galán et al., 2022). When students suffer racial trauma,

many experience an attack on their sense of self and cultural identity (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019).

The positioning of literature and the narratives produced through racial discourse were traumatic to Black students in the following pedagogical contexts:

1. Without the counternarrative of lived experience and insight, white students might accept the racist narratives reinforced by teachers and map them onto individuals in society, reproducing racist attitudes and behaviors.
2. Racial discourse around taught texts resulted in the narrative that racism was a phenomenon that only existed when Black bodies were visible. This was a problematic decision that furthered anti-Black narratives for all students who engaged with the literature and classroom dialogues with lingering repercussions on Black adolescents' experiences and internalized racial identities.
3. Whereas complex trauma impacts an individual, racist ideologies shape policy and permeate institutions, including educational systems and curriculum (Cénat, 2022). It is a trauma that is inescapable, and the victim can come to see their own racial identity as the perpetrator of the trauma. The positioning of literature and the surrounding discourse created the narrative that racial trauma was a product of Blackness rather than racist ideologies. This reinforced the narrative that racial identity was the perpetrator of Black trauma and Blackness was something they had to overcome. The response to trauma was to perform Blackness in the ways they perceived as acceptable, and any misstep would be attributed to their Blackness.
4. Participating in racial discourse required disclosure and testimony of racial trauma, either real or perceived, due to the simplified narrative of a collective Black identity bound to trauma.
5. Because taught texts represented a singular narrative about race and Black experience, providing a counter narrative during race talk to disrupt the narrative would require disclosure of personal lived experiences.

Racial Trauma Frame Three: Racism as Trauma

Teachers failed to explicitly call out overt and covert racial structures or acknowledge that racial events such as those represented in literature can in fact be traumatic, invalidating Black student's perceptions of racism and subsequent experiences of racial trauma. Failure to acknowledge racism makes it impossible to acknowledge and validate racial trauma. Racism students experienced as traumatic went unacknowledged in the following contexts:

1. In academic settings, everyday trauma included openly racist remarks by classmates and teachers, witnessing the persistent use of racial epithets and a sense of rejection based on skin color.
2. Vicarious exposure to racial discrimination caused trauma symptoms like those of direct racist acts.

3. Racism and racial trauma went invalidated, and students had no perceived safe space to process the encounter, and ongoing distressing experiences culminated into further traumatization.
4. Visible racism was ignored and even endorsed, which communicated a disposition that would be unsupportive of claims of less obvious racial harm.
5. Racial trauma was not seen as the product of racism but a normative condition of socially constructed Blackness, rendering it invisible in trauma informed frameworks.
6. Lived experience and insight as counternarrative to taught texts were explicitly rejected or ignored by teachers as invalid.
7. Literature was complicit in "constructing and reinforcing ideologies that disguise, deny, minimize, and justify racism" (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019, p.23) and teachers knowingly and unknowingly cosigned to racist ideologies by positing literature as objective and authoritative over racial narratives.
8. Teachers failed to recognize silence during race talk as a communication of trauma and discomfort.

Theoretical Perspectives and Concepts of Racial Trauma

The traumatic pedagogy and contexts identified in this study can be further synthesized and understood by the related theoretical perspectives and concepts from Racial Trauma Theory. The following theoretical concepts explain the nature and effects of the racial trauma identified in this research. These essential concepts must be integrated into the comprehensive CRTR Pedagogical Framework and the lexicon of anti-racist ELA classrooms and teacher.

Academic Trauma

Due to the context of this research, the theoretical perspectives and constructs described below must be understood as academic trauma. The school setting and teachers are the primary source of distressing race-based incidents. The CRTR framework holds schools accountable for exacerbating trauma and neglecting how racism induces trauma.

Complex Racial Trauma (CoRT)

Racial trauma must be understood through the lens of *complex trauma*, defined as the exposure to multiple, recurring interpersonal traumatic events over an extended period of time. Because racist ideologies shape policy and permeate educational systems and curriculum it is a trauma that is inescapable. When racial trauma goes invalidated and students have no perceived safe space to process the encounter, these ongoing distressing experiences can culminate into further traumatization (Cénat, 2022; Saleem et al., 2019)

Vicarious Racial Trauma

Vicarious trauma occurs from exposure to and the witnessing of acts of racism and racial trauma on other people of color, including literary representation and discussion about racially stressful and traumatic incidents (Bor et al., 2018; Galán et al., 2022). Vicarious exposure to racial discrimination can cause trauma symptoms like those of direct racist acts toward an individual (Quintana & McKown, 2008). Vicarious racial trauma can be caused by commonly taught texts in the ELA classroom by bearing witness to representations of racism and racial violence (Galán et al., 2022).

Internalized Racism

Racial trauma is a product of a racist ideology of white supremacy that is based on skin color and cultural characteristics, which sets it apart from other complex trauma. The victim can come to see their own racial identity as the perpetrator of the trauma. Even if Black students are resilient to and reject the dehumanizing conflation of Blackness and trauma in classroom literature and discourse, without the counternarrative of lived experience and insight, white students can accept the racist narratives reinforced in the ELA classroom. The white students would then map these racist narratives on to individuals in society, leading to the reproduction of racist attitudes and behaviors (Bivens, 2005; Cénat, 2020, 2022).

Race-Based Stress

Racial trauma is a form of race-based stress that refers to reactions to real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination, categorized in two main ways: major racial trauma and everyday trauma. Schools and teachers are consistently reported as a primary context for everyday trauma. In academic settings, everyday trauma can include openly racist remarks by classmates and teachers, witnessing the persistent use of racial epithets and a sense of rejection based on skin color (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz, 2019).

Developmental and Ecological Model of Youth Racial Trauma (DEMYth-RT)

High school-aged students have an increased understanding of advanced forms of racism, exposure to racial discrimination, and the ability to make meaning of racial encounters (Brown & Bigler, 2005). At this developmental time of increased autonomy, teenagers are more likely to witness or experience racial trauma in their community and have increased exposure to racial violence on social media. This coincides with increased literary representation of racism and racial violence in the ELA curriculum, creating a particularly tenuous time for the effects of racial trauma (Saleem et al., 2019).

Testimony and Disclosure

When engaging in racial discourse with students whose identity may be perceived as their source of trauma teachers must minimize suffering on the already stigmatized subject. Teachers cannot expect a traumatized individual to deal not only with their suffering but educate them as well by requiring testimony or disclosure of their lived experience (Jolly, 2011). Testimony of trauma in therapeutic

sessions is private and the participant has agency over the saturation and duration; a classroom setting is not anonymous and involves required coursework with grading penalties (Carello & Butler, 2014). Trauma may be endemic to our present political, social, and private worlds, but marching it into the classroom to be prodded, provoked, and endured does not transform trauma but "potentially recapitulates it" (Carello & Butler, 2014, p. 163).

Effects of Racial Trauma

The effects of Racial Trauma, such as hypervigilance to threats, avoidance, and suffering in silence are like PTSD symptoms, except Racial Trauma is unique in that it involves ongoing individual and collective injuries due to exposure (direct and/or vicarious) and re-exposure to race-based stress. These vulnerabilities result in a baseline of stress that is exacerbated by ongoing experiences of overt and covert racism (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019).

Hyper/Vigilance. The enduring and pervasive nature of CoRT creates a state of hypervigilance, which leads to elevated anxiety and mistrust. Students remain on high alert in the classroom where incidents of everyday racism are a real and likely threat. Black and brown bodies are expected to navigate social space in order to avoid the peril of violence—mental, physical, or otherwise (Combs, 2022).

Suffering in Silence. One coping trauma response Black students employ in predominantly white spaces or in response to racism and racial trauma is to make themselves racially innocuous to avoid further racial trauma (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Toliver, 2022). This may include suffering in silence or accepting racist narratives when discussing literary racial trauma in the classroom space (Liu, 2019; Thomas, 2013).

Racial Identity and Identity Performance. Classrooms and literature can have a significant influence on either positive or negative racial identity formation (Cénat, 2022; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Galán et al., 2022). Racial identity formation is especially salient during adolescents when perceptions of being a member of a disfavored group can exasperate insecurities (Masko, 2005). In order to minimize the risk of traumatization that comes from bearing witness to the testimony of trauma, students must understand that even if their experience and/or identity overlap with the victim, they are not the victim (Carello & Butler, 2014). In ELA classrooms where racial trauma narratives are used as mirrors to the Black experience, students may not have the mental maturity needed to regulate their responses in this way and educators don't have the clinical background to understand this risk.

Towards a Critical Race Trauma Reducing Pedagogical Framework

Tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) can provide a framework for including Black experiences in taught literature and understanding overt and covert racialized academic trauma. CRT as a pedagogical approach to teacher disposition, the topic of race and racism, and the reading of racial narratives is supported by the introduction of responsive Racial Trauma frames. The implications from this study and

the participants' visions for the future were used to refine and contextualize the CRTR frames. The findings of this research support my conclusion that anti-racist pedagogy and trauma-informed pedagogy are not only inextricably linked, when anti-racist pedagogy is missing, misguided, or deficit in the ELA classroom, Black students experience racial (re)traumatization. Reading the stories through a CRT and Racial Trauma theoretical lens in turn revealed that the same practices that undermined anti-racist pedagogy were the context and cause for racial trauma. Because of this, the implications for anti-racist literature instruction and the implications for trauma reducing pedagogy can be understood and addressed by the same CRTR frame(s).

I put forward a Critical Race Trauma Reducing (CRTR) Pedagogical Framework that can be used by teachers to analyze and inform practice and disposition and guide literary analysis and racial discourse in the ELA classroom and curriculum, illustrated in Figure 5.1. I present examples from the study implications and recommendations for responsive pedagogy within the framework to demonstrate how the CRTR framework can be operationalized as both anti-racist and trauma reducing pedagogy (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). A table demonstrating the integration of CRT and Racial Trauma as an analytical framework with responsive recommendations for practice can be found in Appendix I.

Emerging Theory and Future Research

Demographics and perceived demographics of a space played a significant role in how participants understood their experiences and perceptions. Although teacher pedagogy and disposition had the potential to mitigate the effects of demographics, it is important to explore and understand the ways in which Black students racialized spaces and racialize themselves within that space. The theoretical and analytical framework *Bodies Out of Place* put forward by Combs (2022) is useful in this discourse and future research may lead to further refinements of the CRTR Pedagogical Framework.

Combs (2022) argued that the embodied experience of most Black people in the United States is that of marginality or not belonging, maintained by dominant ideologies. When the subjugated adopt a similar view of themselves it facilitates the control of such bodies. Bodies Out of Place introduces concepts such as *blackout* and *captive body* to describe the modern-day project of social control over Black bodies. Black bodies may be welcomed into physical and social white spaces, but Black embodiment is not-- the authentic expression of cultural, ideological, or other messages about identity, consciousness, and belonging.

Black bodies are welcome in a space "as long as there are not too many of them" such as to "threaten the perception of the space as a white space" and if they "do not disturb or challenge the normative sensibilities or practices" of the space (Combs, 2022, p. 13):

> Although the [institutional] norms [in white social spaces] are white, they are rarely marked as such. Consequently, racially biased institutional norms are wrongly defined as race neutral and

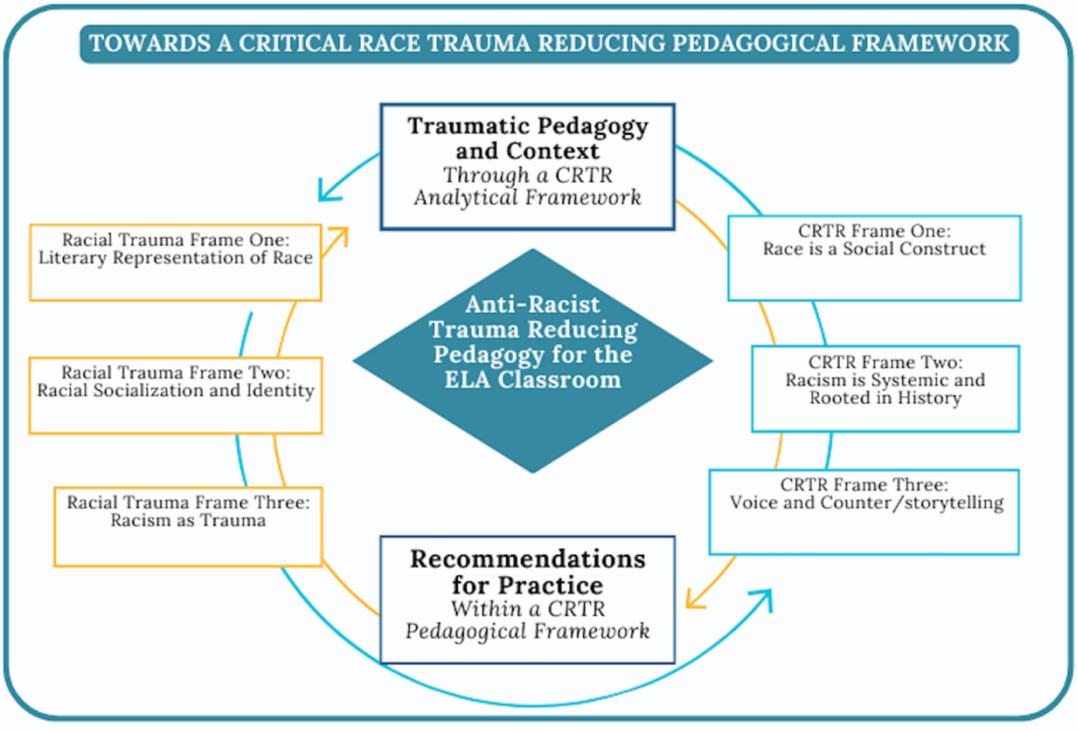


Figure 5.1 Towards a Critical Race Trauma Reducing Pedagogical Framework

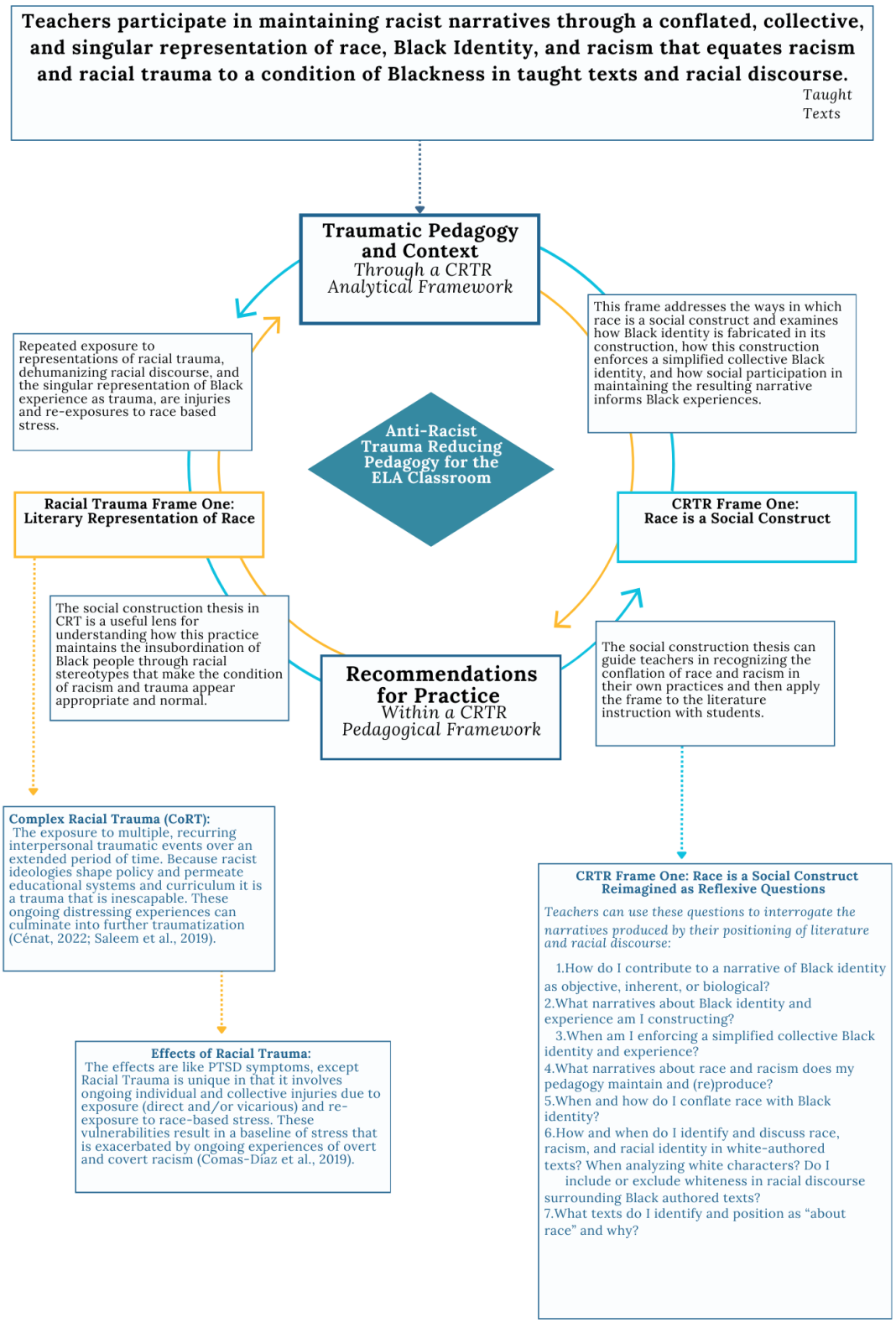


Figure 5.2 CRTR Framework in Context

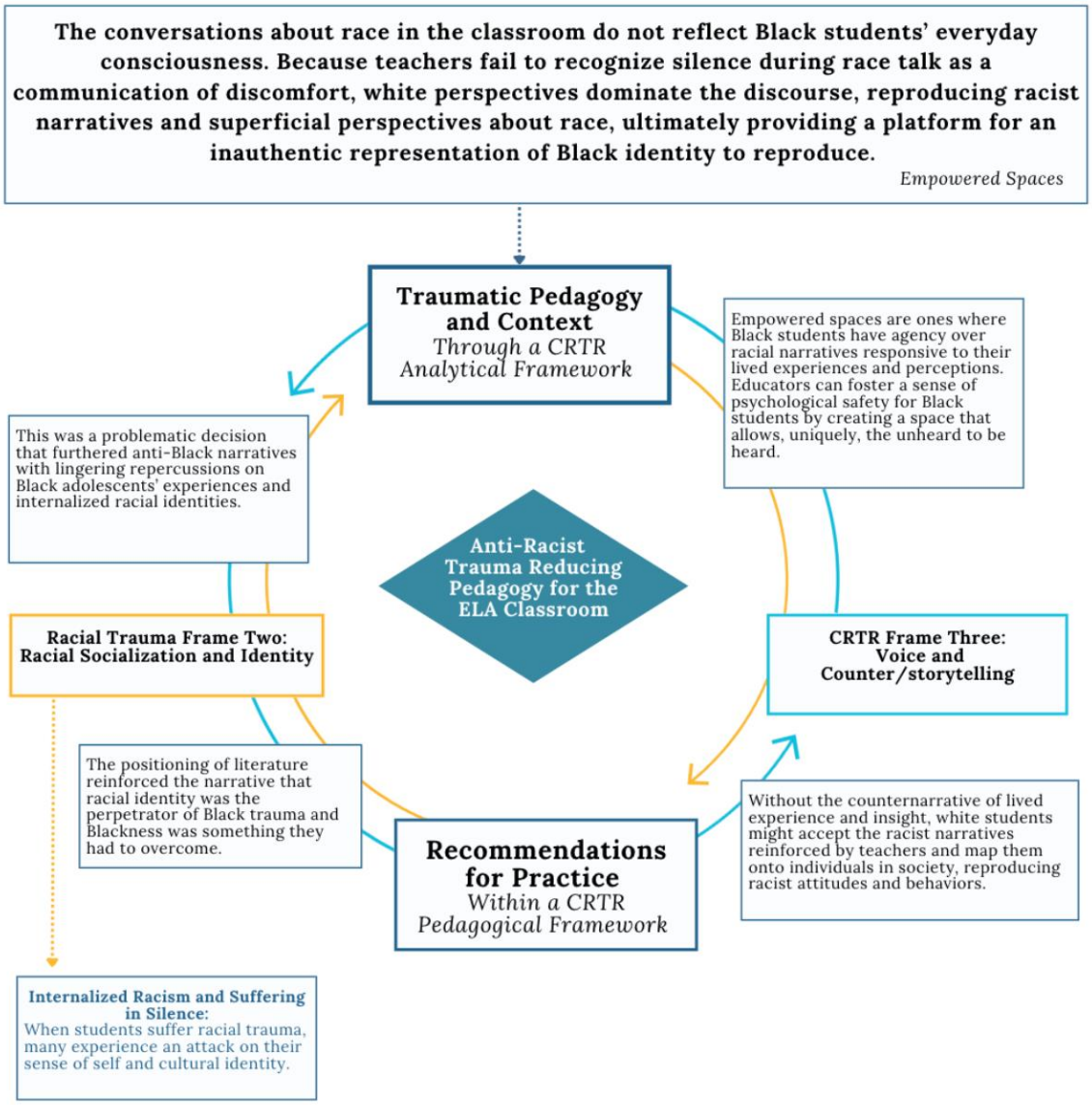


Figure 5.3 CRTR Framework In Context

> merely characteristic of the institution itself (e.g., the appropriate way to act in school), masking inherent institutional racism. (Combs, 2022, p. 13)

This theory may help explain why Black students described schools and classrooms as all-white, erasing their own Black body, even when this was not *literally* true. The school was all-white, even with them in it, because the institutional ideology was white, and they had to either adopt normative practices or make their bodies innocuous through silence and identity performance.

Like the CRTR framework, Bodies out of Place (BOP) is both a theory and a method, and it shares essential features with the current study. As a theoretical framework, BOP acknowledges the existence of the problem, and as a method it offers an approach for analyzing the collective attitudes and beliefs emanating from society that act as a constraint on others (Combs, 2022). BOP embraces counter-storytelling as a tool to resist dominant narratives, make the lived experience of the marginalized visible, and allow subjugated groups to tell their own stories about their own lives from their own perspective. As a lens for analysis, BOP is attentive to reading counternarratives for context, especially place, language, and intersectionality. All these interacting variables were noted in the implications of the study as critical lenses for future research and analysis.

BOP also includes attention to the ways in which violence against Black bodies gets obscured by the roots of violence in white supremacy. The refined CRTR frame Racism as Trauma is in conversation with this perspective (Combs, 2022). As I mentioned in the study implications, the physical integration of Black representation in taught texts and racial discourse is being mistaken for the inclusion of Black students' embodied perspectives and experiences. While it is beyond the scope of the current study, BOP has a place in both anti-racist and trauma reducing pedagogical frameworks and future research should examine the possible integration.

Future research should also include an intersectional analytical framework for understanding the relationship between intersectional, specifically gendered, racial trauma and implications for representation in taught texts and trauma reducing pedagogies.

Trustworthiness

Throughout the description of the study methodology, I aimed to map myself and my subjectivities within the research to make transparent my influence on the scope and focus of the storywork. I engaged in planned member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexive praxis at multiple stages of the research. One question in my reflexive framework warrants further disclosure and discussion: how my identity and experiences shape my alignments, decisions, and interpretations throughout the research. My own liminal identity and my perception of liminality as a valuable third space insight influenced my research methods, particularly my interview protocol. In my reading and analysis of the storywork I recognized and interpreted themes related to liminal identities in the reading of

literature, the description of empowered spaces, and visions for the future. Because of the significant role liminality plays in my own identity and racialized experiences, I didn't not name or map this construct into my findings and implications. By disclosing this perspective and presenting the full stories as they were told, I hope to make visible potential blind spots or misguided rigorous sight.

Conclusion

In Chapter Five, I presented the implications for practice and proposed a refined CRTR Pedagogical Framework based upon my findings from Chapter Four and thinking with theory. The recommendations for practice were guided by the participants' visions for the future within a Critical Race and Racial Trauma framework for anti-racist and trauma-reducing pedagogy. Teacher can use the framework to interrogate their current disposition and practice, guide future instructional decisions, and as a framework for literary analysis when reading representations of race and racism in the ELA classroom. I suggested future lines of inquiry and refinements to the CRTR framework to consider demographics and intersectionality as interacting variables. The next step in this research is to present the study findings and proposed framework to my assembled Community Member Cohort for further refinement and plans for dissemination. This aligns with anti-racist research methods and trauma reducing methods in education that require the researcher to engage in responsive activism as a result of the research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Search Terms and Exclusion Criteria

Study Features	Ontology	Methodology	Context	Epistemology	Related Phenomena/Variable
Search terms	Critical Race Theory Anti-racist or anti-racism (anti racist, anti-racist) and ● Identity ● Representation ● Pedagogy ● Practice Culturally relevant and pedagogy or practice Culturally responsive and pedagogy or practice	Reading literature or fiction or novel or narrative Literature instruction Pedagogy Literary or literature and analysis Curriculum Taught text Text selection	Secondary or high school ELA English language arts or ELA or subject English or school English Classroom English Education	Student and ● Experience ● Perspective ● Perception ● Voice ● Narrative inquiry	Trauma Trauma Theory Racial Trauma Racial Violence Academic Trauma Trauma novel Literary trauma Trauma informed
Exclusion criteria	No explicit race orientation	Children's literature; Discipline practices; Linguistics	Elementary, University, ESL or ELL; Specific non-ELA setting (i.e. Social Studies, Social Work, Medical)	Teacher Education. Pre-Service Teachers (only); Teacher perspective (only) without student implications, Centered in implications for white students	Delivery of services in a therapeutic setting; Trauma informed school/discipline practices

Appendix B

Search Process, Results, and Inclusion

All searches ran through ERIC and Education Source were duplicated in APA PsycInfo. If 0 results or no new results were found in APA PsycInfo, I did not include the search in the table.

Database	Search Terms	Results
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(critical race theory) and (English education)	39 results 4 met criteria for inclusion
APA Psyc	(critical race theory) and (English education)	1 result (met criteria)
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(critical race theory) and (English language arts or English or ELA) and (classroom)	14 results 1 met criteria
APA Psyc	(critical race theory) and (English language arts or English or ELA) and (classroom)	2 results No new (already included)
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(critical race theory) and (English language arts)	12 results No new (already included)
APA Psyc	(critical race theory) and (literature instruction)	8 results No new (already included)
APA Psyc	(critical race theory) and (race) and (trauma)	35 results 2 met criteria for inclusion (new)
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(critical race theory) and (trauma) and (literature or fiction or novels or narrative)	14 results 1 met criteria for inclusion (new)
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(critical race theory) and (trauma) and (English language arts or English or ELA)	18 results 2 met criteria for inclusion (new)
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(anti-racism or antiracism or antiracist or anti-racist) and (literature) and (instruction or teaching or pedagogy)	3 results 3 met criteria for inclusion (new)
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(race) and (literature instruction) and (student experiences or perceptions or perspectives or voice)	7 results No new (already included)
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(race) and (literature) and (English language arts or English or ELA)	12 results 1 met criteria for inclusion (new)
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(student experiences or perceptions or perspectives or voice) and (race) and (classroom)	23 results 3 met criteria for inclusion (new)
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(anti-racist) and (reading) and (pedagogy or practice)	10 results 3 met criteria for inclusion (new)

ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(race talk) and (literature or literacy) and (classroom)	10 results 1 met criteria for inclusion (new)
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(trauma informed or trauma-informed) and (English language arts or English or ELA)	No new results
ERIC & Ed. Source combined	(trauma) and (literary analysis)	No new results
Google Scholar	Blackcrit and related articles	23 results 3 met criteria for inclusion
Google Scholar	anti-racist English education	43 results 9 met criteria for inclusion
Google Scholar	race in the ELA classroom	*Reviewed first 200 results, 21 studies already identified, no new results met criteria*
Author Search with related articles		
Google Scholar	● April Baker Bell (1 met criteria, already included) ● Lamar Johnson (2 met criteria, already included) ● Justin Grinage (4 met criteria, new) ● Michael Dumas (1 met criteria, new) ● Stephanie Toliver (3 met criteria, new)	
Search term combinations that produced results, none met criteria for inclusion		
ERIC & Ed. Source combined APA PsycInfo	● (anti-racist or anti-racism) and (literary analysis) ● (anti-racism or antiracism or antiracist or anti-racist) and (literature or fiction or novels or narrative) and (instruction or teaching or pedagogy) ● (anti-racism or antiracism or antiracist or anti-racist) and (English language arts or English or ELA) ● (Black students) and (ELA classroom) and (student experiences or perceptions or perspectives or voice)	
Search term combinations that produced no results across databases		
ERIC & Ed. Source Combined APA PsycInfo	● (critical race theory) and (racial trauma) and (literature or fiction or novels or narrative) ● (Black students) and (ELA or ELA curriculum or ELA classroom) and (student experiences or perceptions or perspectives) ● (trauma informed) and (literature or fiction or novels or narrative) and (instruction or teaching) ● (trauma informed) and (reading or novels)	

Appendix C
Empirical Studies with Deductive Coding

Reference	Citation	Theoretical or Empirical	Race, Trauma, or Both	Theoretical Perspective	Literature (instruction, response to)	Student Voice	ELA Classroom
Boylorn, R. M. (2011). "Black kids'(BK) stories: Ta (l) king (about) race outside of the classroom." Cultural Studies? Critical Methodologies 11(1): 59-70.	Boylorn, 2011	empirical	race	Stories as Theory		**Student Voice**	
Brooks, W., and G. Hampton (2005). "Safe discussions rather than firsthand encounters: Adolescents examine racism through one historical fiction text." Children's Literature in Education 36: 83-98.	Brooks & Hamilton, 2005	empirical	Race	Reader Response Theory	**Literature**		**ELA Classroom**
Brooks, W. M., et al. (2022). "Reading, Sharing, and Experiencing Literary/Lived Narratives About Contemporary Racism." Urban Education 57(6): 1059-1078.	Brooks et al., 2022	empirical	Both	**CRT Explicit**	**Literature**		
Byrd, C. M. (2016). "Does culturally relevant teaching work? An examination from student perspectives." Sage Open 6(3): 2158244016660744.	Byrd, 2016	empirical	Race	Culturally relevant teaching		**Student Voice**	
Gordon, C. T. (2019). "Trusting Students' Voices in Critical English Education." Journal of Language and Literacy Education 15(1): n1.	Gordon, 2019	empirical	Race indirect	critical pedagogy	**Literature**	**Student Voice**	**ELA Classroom**
Grinage, J. (2014). "Reterritorializing Locations of Home Examining the Psychopolitical Dimensions of Race Talk in the Classroom." JCT: Journal of Curriculum Theorizing 30(2): 88-102.	Grinage, 2014	empirical	both	Empirical Race Trauma	**Literature**	**Student Voice**	**ELA Classroom**
Grinage, J. (2019). "Endless Mourning: Racial Melancholia, Black Grief, and the Transformative Possibilities for Racial Justice in Education." Harvard	Grinage, 2019a	empirical	both	BlackCrit		**Student Voice**	**ELA Classroom**

Educational Review 89(2): 227-250.							
Grinage, J. (2019). "Reopening Racial Wounds: Whiteness, Melancholia, and Affect in the English Classroom" English Education 51(2): 126-150.	Grinage, 2019b	empirical	both	racial melancholia		**Student Voice**	**ELA Classroom**
Ispa-Landa, S. and J. Conwell (2015). "“Once you go to a white school, you kind of adapt” black adolescents and the racial classification of schools." Sociology of Education 88(1): 1-19.	Ispa-Landa & Conwell	empirical	Race	Racial Socialization Theory		**Student Voice**	
Martin, J. L. (2014). "Critical race theory, hip hop, and Huck Finn: Narrative inquiry in a high school English classroom." The Urban Review 46: 244-267.	Martin, 2014	empirical	race	**CRT Explicit**	**Literature**	**Student Voice**	**ELA Classroom**
Masko, A. L. (2005). "“I think about it all the time”: A 12-year-old girl’s internal crisis with racism and the effects on her mental health." The Urban Review 37(4): 329-350.	Masko, 2005	empirical	both	**CRT Explicit**		**Student Voice**	
Sassi, K. and E. E. Thomas (2008). "Walking the talk: Examining privilege and race in a ninth-grade classroom." English Journal: 25-31.	Sassi & Thomas	empirical	race	Race Talk	**Literature**	**Student Voice**	**ELA Classroom**
Shaffer, M. J. B. S. (2023). "Examining Literature Through Tenets of Critical Race Theory: A Pedagogical Approach for the ELA Classroom." Multicultural Perspectives 25(1): 4-20.	Shaffer, 2023	empirical	Race	**CRT Explicit**	**Literature**		**ELA Classroom**
Simpson, J. S., et al. (2007). "“I would want you to understand it:” Students’ perspectives on addressing race in the classroom." Journal of intercultural communication research 36(1): 33-50.	Simpson et al., 2007	empirical	race	Race Talk		**Student Voice**	

Sosa, T. (2020). "“That Sure is Racist”: Classroom Race Talk as Resistance." Education and Urban Society 52(7): 1039-1065.	Sosa, 2020	empirical	race	Race Talk	**Literature**		**ELA Classroom**
Thomas, E. E. (2013). "Dilemmatic conversations: Some challenges of culturally responsive discourse in a high school English classroom." Linguistics and Education 24(3): 328-347.	Thomas, 2013	empirical	race	Culturally relevant teaching	**Literature**		**ELA Classroom**
Thomas, E. E. (2015). "" We Always Talk About Race": Navigating Race Talk Dilemmas in the Teaching of Literature." Research in the Teaching of English: 154-175.	Thomas, 2015	empirical	race	Race Talk	**Literature**		**ELA Classroom**
Toliver, S. (2020). "“I Desperately Need Visions of Black People Thriving”: Emancipating the Fantastic With Black Women’s Words." Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy 64(3): 323-332.	Toliver, 2020	empirical	race	Afrofuturism	**Literature**		
Toliver, S. (2020). "Can I get a witness? Speculative fiction as testimony and counterstory." Journal of Literacy Research 52(4): 507-529.	Toliver, 2020	empirical	race	**CRT Explicit**		**Student Voice**	
Toliver, S. R. (2018). "Imagining new hopescapes: Expanding Black girls’ windows and mirrors." Research on Diversity in Youth Literature 1(1): 3.	Toliver, 2018	empirical	race	Bishop (1990)	**Literature**		
Toliver, S. R. (2022). Recovering Black storytelling in qualitative research: Endarkened storywork. Routledge.	Toliver, 2022	empirical	race	Indigenous Storywork, womanism, feminist epistemology	**Literature**	**Student Voice**	
Williams, J. D., et al. (2016). "“Can we say the n-word?”: Exploring psychological safety during race talk." Research in human development 13(1): 15-31.	Williams et al., 2016	empirical	race	**CRT Explicit**	**Literature**		**ELA Classroom**

Appendix D

Framework for Reflexive Praxis

Guiding Questions	Specific Methodological Reflexive Considerations
How does my identity and experiences shape my alignments, decisions, and interpretations throughout the research? **How does whiteness shape my alignments, decisions, and interpretations throughout the research?** **How are my choices of methods and intentional positioning responsive to my understanding of my researcher identity?**	How have I communicated my identity to participants? Am I interpreting data through the lens of my own ideologies in a way that obscures participant meaning making? Did I ask the necessary follow up and/or clarifying questions to ensure my interpretation isn't based on assumptions? Am I conflating shared understanding and shared experience in my reading of participant stories? Reflexive Questions for Engaging Identity in Race and Social Justice Work (Leverette, 2022)

Corresponding Reflexive Activities

1. **Peer Debriefing:** I have two peers that have agreed to engage in peer debriefing during the data analysis and findings phase of the research. One is currently a teacher and instructional coach in a predominantly Black high school, self-identifies as Black, and has two children currently in school. One is a scholar who engages in qualitative research with Indigenous populations. They have been invited to read through interview transcripts, read my initial data analysis, and then engage in peer debriefing to discuss anything I may have missed, misinterpreted, and points of clarification.
2. **Community Member Cohort:** I currently have assembled a cohort of seven community member stakeholders who have agreed to engage in refining the pedagogical framework and plans for next steps including dissemination of future research. Community members will determine their roles within the project including whether they would like to engage anonymously or be included as co-authors on potential publications that result from the work. The cohort consists of educators in different schools within the district, administrators, University of Tennessee faculty, and parents.
3. In previous iterations of the research I shared the interview transcripts with the participants for review prior to analysis so that they could add, amend, or clarify.

How does the visibility of and others' perceptions of my racialized body shape the way participants, research partners, and readers align with and engage in the research process and products?	How do others respond when I share the research? What kind of questions do they ask?
Corresponding Reflexive Activities 1. Peer Debriefing 2. Community Member Cohort 3. NCTE 2023 Conference Presentation	
How will I know if the study methods and researcher/participant positioning are aligned with anti-racist and trauma-informed research methods?	Anti-Racist Research Framework as Rubric (Goings et al., 2023) Trauma-Informed Research Rubric (Petrone & Stanton, 2021) Accidental Autoethnography through analysis of artifacts produced during and after the research.

Principles for Anti-Racist Research (Goings et al., 2023)

Principle	Approach
1. Racism is embedded in structures, policies, and procedures that maintain the status quo.	Researchers must address racism at structural and policy levels. Potential targets for change include research team composition; journal peer review and publishing practices; grant review panels and processes; and funding agency priorities.
2. Antiracist research seeks to dismantle racism.	Scholars must use inclusive research methods that avoid replicating racial biases against BIPOC in the data they yield. Research should address how to intervene in or mitigate structural and policy factors that contribute to inequities. Potential targets for change include research processes (e.g., research questions, participant recruitment, measure selection, data collection processes, manuscript production, dissemination of findings).
3. Antiracist research centers BIPOC experiences.	Scholars must acknowledge structural racism's powerful role in shaping BIPOC people's outcomes and strive to empower BIPOC to identify and change the racist structures affecting them. Scholars must also recognize that the people studied are the experts in knowing their own experiences and needs.
4. A marginalized racial identity often intersects with other marginalized identities.	Researchers must recognize how marginalized identities based on racialized group, ethnicity, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and other attributes intersect and privilege or disadvantage their target populations in different contexts.
5. Antiracist research foregrounds the importance of self-knowledge.	Researchers must acknowledge their own positionality (e.g., unearned benefits that come from white privilege, high socioeconomic class, heterosexuality, maleness, citizenship, ability, religion, and other attributes) in relation to the groups they study and society as a whole. Researchers must be aware of the limitations of their own perspectives and embrace diverse teams that include individuals with differing perspectives.
6. Antiracist researchers practice what they preach.	Researchers' personal actions should be consistent with their antiracist work. Potential targets for change include making microlevel changes in one's own life; actively using one's influence to transform racist systems, policies, and procedures; spending time in the communities where research takes place; and using research findings to create and support policies that give BIPOC communities access to needed services.
7. Antiracist research involves scientific empowerment, not scientific colonization.	The primary aim of research should be to improve marginalized people's lives, not to enrich the researchers' lives and research. Researchers must engage in research with populations that they appreciate and value; they should not take more from a population than they contribute or exclude the target population from the research process.
8. Antiracist researchers prioritize community engagement of the target population.	Research should be conducted collaboratively with communities. Researchers should strive to become integrated into the communities they study by learning about the communities' histories and helping community members organize and advocate for needed change.
9. Antiracist research uses team science to benefit from diverse perspectives.	Social work scholars should create interdisciplinary teams and seek out opportunities to be members of interdisciplinary teams while bringing their antiracist research perspective to the team.
10. Antiracist research is concerned with sharing findings with those who support and oppose liberation, social justice, and reduced inequity.	Researchers must ensure that study findings are appropriately interpreted, applied, and disseminated. The meaning and utility of study findings should be evident to all stakeholders, and all should be able to access findings. An opportunity for change is including members of the target community on the research team.

Appendix E

Interview Protocol Artifact

Endarkened epistemology encourages participant agency in constructing their own narratives (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). My interview protocol does not include scripted questions; rather I introduce a variety of topics and invite participants to share the thoughts, memories, and stories that those topics inspire.

The following table provides examples of introducing topics, absent from language that frames the discourse in race or trauma, and responsive story listening questions. *From July 2022 interview transcripts (UTK IRB-23-07501-XP).*

Example topics to incite storytelling			
Early memories of books and reading, family reading culture	**Favorite books, positive reading experiences**	**Recollections of books or reading in school**	**Stories and experiences in ELA classrooms**
Tell me about your relationship with reading. What kind of books did your Granny have in your library? Oh, I know what book you're talking about. You read a lot of fantasy it sounds like. How did school make you change the way you feel about reading?	*Tell me about books that you loved, that stayed with you.* Was it assigned to you in school, or did you read it on your own? How did that book come to you? Would you like to read books like that in class, or would you rather read them on your own? I'm glad that was a positive experience for you. What do you think your teacher did that made you start talking in class?	*I'd like to hear about the books you remember reading because they were assigned in school.* Is there something the teacher could have done to make that experience different or better for you? How did your teacher present teaching this? Did she present it as a book about race and racism? How did it make you feel when he said that?	*Let's talk about the English classes you have been in.* No, that makes sense. Can you say more about not liking it? What did the teacher do when that happened? So maybe you can think aloud about this. What I do know about you is that you love poetry and you like spoken word poetry. You also like to read, and you read different types of books on your own. And so, you have these things that you like, that you value, but then you don't like English class. Right? So maybe you can talk through that connection.

Appendix F

IRB Artifacts



April 20, 2023

Leia Kristin Cain, PhD
UTK - University Wide - Higher Education Admi

Re: UTK IRB-22-07306-XP
Study Title: Mapping Anti-Racist Pedagogy through Endarkened Storywork

Dear Leia Kristin Cain:

The UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application for the above referenced project. It determined that your application is eligible for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1), categories (5) and (6). The IRB has reviewed these materials and determined that they do comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval by the IRB of your application (version 1.1) as submitted, including:

Documents Stamped:

- Mapping Anti Consent (English) - (Version 1.0)

That have been dated and stamped IRB approved. You are approved to enroll a maximum of 2 participants. Approval of this study will be valid from 04/20/2023 to 04/19/2026.

Any revisions in the approved application, consent forms, instruments, recruitment materials, etc., must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, re-approval of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior written approval of the IRB.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
1534 White Avenue Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax orb.utk.edu

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE KNOXVILLE

May 16, 2023

Judson Crandall Laughter,
UTK - Coll of Education, Hlth, & Human - Theory & Practice In Teacher Education

Re: UTK IRB-23-07501-XP
Study Title: Mapping Anti-Racist Pedagogy through Endarkened Storywork

Dear Judson Crandall Laughter:

The UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application for the above referenced project. It determined that your application is eligible for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1), category (7). The use of children as subjects is approved under 45 CFR 46.404, in that it involves no more than minimal risk. The IRB has reviewed these materials and determined that they do comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval by the IRB of your application (Version 1.2) as submitted, including:

Documents Stamped:

- Permission for Research Participation of a Minor (English) - (Version 1.1)
- Assent to Participate in Research (English) - (Version 1.1)
- Verbal Recruitment Scripts (1) - (Version 1.0)
- Mapping Interview Guide - (Version 1.0)

Documents Acknowledged:

- IRB letter to access participants - (Version 1.0)

That have been dated and stamped IRB approved. You are approved to enroll a maximum of 4 participants. Approval of this study will be valid from 05/16/2023 to 05/15/2024.

Any revisions in the approved application, consent forms, instruments, recruitment materials, etc., must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, re-approval of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may

Interview Guide

Mapping Anti-Racist Pedagogy Through Endarkened Storywork

The participants and the Co-PI (Jessica Schwind) will engage in unstructured interviews. I will ask them about their experiences with reading, with ELA class, and with teachers.

I will begin the dialogue by stating the purpose of my study. I will confirm their consent to audio record the interview for transcription purposes. If they do not consent to the interview or audio recording of the interview, or they have changed their mind, we will stop immediately.

The participants are all known to the Co-PI so introductions are not needed, but time will be allowed for checking in and casual greetings.

The interview protocol is intentionally unstructured to allow participants to tell their stories, rather than answer researcher questions. Possible guiding statements to facilitate the dialogue are:

- Tell me about your relationship with reading or books growing up.
- Tell me about some of your favorite books.
- Tell me about your experiences in English classes/classrooms.
- Tell me about the books you remember reading in English classes.
- Tell me about your experiences with teachers in your English classes.

The guiding statements are meant to provide participants the space to choose the stories they wish to share and to choose the parts of their identity they wish to share through their stories.

At the end of the interview, I will thank them for their time and participation. They may use my phone number or email address to reach out to me if they have any questions or would like the opportunity to clarify or add to their stories.

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-23-07501-XP
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 05/16/2023

Appendix G

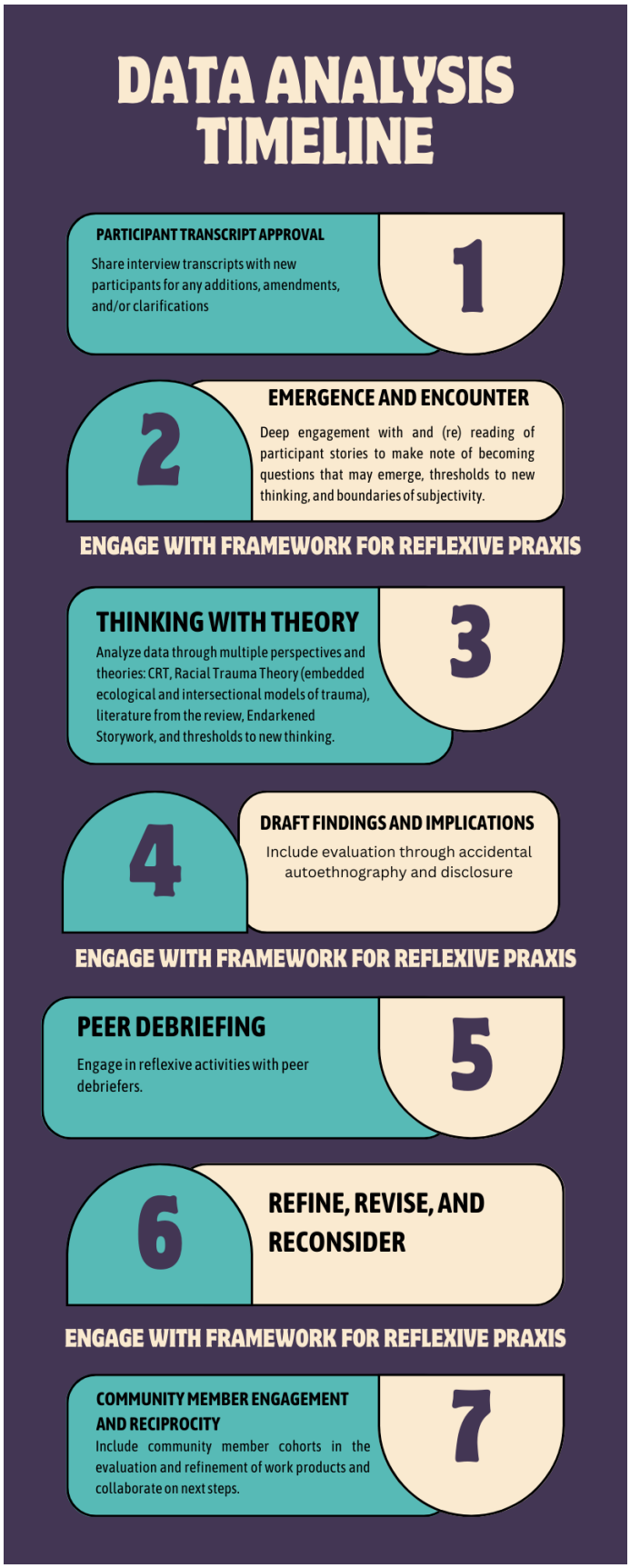
School Profiles

Data reflects the 2022-2023 school year, retrieved from the state department of education website and the individual school websites.

Name	Demographics	Description	Who/When
Savannah Academy	**Students** 574 enrolled 82% white 8% Hispanic 9%Black 6% Asian	A Public Magnet High School in a commercial setting, application only, with no zoned population. If the number of students who apply for Savannah Academy exceeds the number of available seats, a geographic lottery is used to determine which students receive a transfer. There are no additional weights for gender, race, socio-economic background, or previous academic history.	Melget, 10th grade (at the time of the study)
Hunter High School	**Students** 1525 enrolled 66% white 12% Hispanic 25%Black 19% Multi-race	A public high school in a residential setting. Of the high schools in the district, student demographics at Hunter most closely reflect the demographics of the school district.	Melget, 9th grade Akoye, 9-12 grade
Kelley High School	**Students** 656 enrolled 9% white 91% Black/His 86% Black only 5% Hispanic <1% American Indian Pacific Islander, Asian	A public high school in an urban setting. Kelley High School has the highest enrollment of Black students (91%) in this district. The second highest enrollment is 31%. Kelley is the successor to two formerly racially segregated schools. The two schools were combined in 1968 to form the integrated Kelley High School. Following the merger, many white students transferred to other high schools, leaving Kelley as a predominantly Black school.	Derrick, 9-12 grade
School District	**Students** 67% white	A school district located in a mid-sized Southeastern city. The district includes 13 public high schools. At the time of the study, there was one public charter school	All participants, K-12

	12% Hispanic 17%Black 3% Asian <1% American Indian Pacific Islander **Teachers** 92% white 14% Black	serving grades K-8 and one public magnet academy for grades 9-12.The charter and magnet school are by application only and are not included in the district schools zoned for attendance. At the time of the study English Language Arts teachers in the districts were mandated to use a specific adopted curriculum and instructional program meant to align with the state tested academic standards. The state's department of educations described the mandated scripted curriculum as a set of core instructional materials including activities and textbooks. Teachers are prohibited from teaching or providing alternative or supplementary texts without submitting a request that was then subject to the administrative procedure for review and selection of materials established by the director of schools.	

Appendix H


DATA ANALYSIS TIMELINE
PARTICIPANT TRANSCRIPT APPROVAL
Share interview transcripts with new participants for any additions, amendments, and/or clarifications
1
2
EMERGENCE AND ENCOUNTER
Deep engagement with and (re) reading of participant stories to make note of becoming questions that may emerge, thresholds to new thinking, and boundaries of subjectivity.
ENGAGE WITH FRAMEWORK FOR REFLEXIVE PRAXIS
THINKING WITH THEORY
Analyze data through multiple perspectives and theories: CRT, Racial Trauma Theory (embedded ecological and intersectional models of trauma), literature from the review, Endarkened Storywork, and thresholds to new thinking.
3
4
DRAFT FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS
Include evaluation through accidental autoethnography and disclosure
ENGAGE WITH FRAMEWORK FOR REFLEXIVE PRAXIS
PEER DEBRIEFING
Engage in reflexive activities with peer debriefers.
5
6
REFINE, REVISE, AND RECONSIDER
ENGAGE WITH FRAMEWORK FOR REFLEXIVE PRAXIS
COMMUNITY MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AND RECIPROCITY
Include community member cohorts in the evaluation and refinement of work products and collaborate on next steps.
7

Appendix I

Towards a Critical Race Trauma Informed Framework for Anti-Racist and Trauma Reducing Pedagogy

When educators lack lived experience with race and racism, an anti-racist pedagogical framework for literature instruction in the ELA classroom is critical (Bedford & Shaffer, 2023; Boler, 2014; Freedman, 2020; Johnson, 2022; Johnson & Neville, 2018; Martin, 2014; McCardle, 2017). Teachers need to have a deep understanding of why and how taught texts are positioned in the ELA classroom, and the efficacy to navigate texts and topics anchored in race and racism without potentially (re)traumatizing students or maintaining racist narratives (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Grinage, 2018; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Saleem et al., 2019; Thomas, 2013, 2015).

Findings and Implications within a CRTR Framework		**Recommendations for Practice within a CRTR Framework**
CRT: Race is a Social Construct	**RTT: Literary Representation of Race**	**CRTR Frame One: Race is a Social Construct**
Teachers participated in maintaining racist narratives through a conflated, collective, and singular representation of race, Black Identity, and racism in taught texts and racial discourse. The positioning of literary Blackness was pervasive and predictable: Black characters were exclusively read through the lens of their racialized identity with no consideration for their diverse experiences, motivations, or humanity. Through a CRT framework for literary analysis and instruction, teachers can evaluate how a socially constructed category produces real race effects for Black characters in literature as well as the Black students in the classroom. It was in these moments where real Black bodies in the ELA classroom took on the	Repeated exposure to representations of racial trauma and dehumanizing racial discourse and the singular representation of Black experience as trauma, are culminative injuries and re-exposures to race based stress. Exposing students to narrative trauma in ELA classrooms is complex racial trauma because students do not have the option to remove themselves from ongoing and mandated curricular trauma the reading of anti-Black narratives in a novel is sustained over time. Racial trauma is invisible to most of society not only because of its historical roots and systemic racism, but because it has become embedded in the social construction of race.	The social construction thesis in CRT is a useful lens for understanding how this practice maintains the insubordination of Black people through racial stereotypes that make the condition of racism and trauma appear appropriate and normal. The social construction thesis can guide teachers in recognizing the conflation of race and racism in their own practices and then apply the frame to the literature instruction with students. This allows teachers to interrogate their own conceptualization of race and the basis for this construction. The reflexive questions to interrogate the narratives produced by the positioning of literature and racial discourse through a CRT lens are revisited as a framework for reading and analyzing race in taught texts in the ELA classroom. Because the social construction of race and the resulting Black experience is dynamic over time and place, this frame

trauma of imagined Black identities in literature that these socially fabricated identities became very real in the participants' lived experiences.		provides an analytical throughline from early American literature to contemporary YA novels.
CRT: Racism is Systemic and Rooted in History Either teachers neglected to acknowledge race or racism because they didn't recognize it, or they accepted it. Teacher pedagogy created a classroom environment where Black students did not feel comfortable participating in race talk, and where they perceived race talk was meant to benefit white students in the room. Racial discourse did not reflect Black students' reality, interpretation, or their purpose for race talk. Ultimately, it is racism—not race—that drives and explains racial differences in experience and social outcome, a discourse largely absent from literature instruction even when the classroom texts present the opportunity	**RTT: Racism as Trauma** Racial trauma is not seen as the product of racism but a normative condition of socially constructed Blackness, rendering it invisible in trauma informed pedagogical frameworks. Failure to acknowledge racism makes it impossible to acknowledge and validate racial trauma. Teachers failed to call out overt and covert racial structures or acknowledge that racial events such as those represented in literature can in fact be traumatic, invalidating Black student's perceptions of racism and subsequent experiences of racial trauma. Literature was complicit in constructing and reinforcing ideologies that disguise, deny, minimize, and justify racism and teachers knowingly and unknowingly cosigned to racist ideologies. Visible racism was ignored and even endorsed, which communicated a disposition that would be unsupportive of claims of less obvious racial harm. Racism	**CRTR Frame Two: Racism is Systemic and Rooted in History** The pervasive, systemic, and historic nature of racism is necessary to understand and make visible the resulting racial trauma. Without a commitment to recognizing Black students' existing racial trauma and the sources of racial trauma embedded in the curriculum, current trauma-informed practices do nothing to move an organization towards anti-racism. The attention CRT gives to modern-day systemic racism's roots in history is not to enforce the perpetual trauma of history on Black identities. Acknowledging this background can help students better understand the experiences represented in literature, as well as their own experiences and participation in these systems and become advocates for their own social justice. As a tool for literary analysis this framing allows students to acknowledge that although the means and modes of Black subjection may have changed, the fact and structure of the subjection remain. Teachers must evaluate and dismiss literature that serves to privilege a white supremacist narrative or attend to the racial structures represented in the literature explicitly through a CRT lens.

	and racial trauma went invalidated, and students had no perceived safe space to process the encounter, and ongoing distressing experiences culminated into further traumatization.	Literature read through this frame can illuminate the ways in which an oppressive collective Black identity still exists in society today, but that the individual has agency and autonomy in defining their own authentic identity and their unique experience of Black joy-- because of, not in spite of-- their Blackness.
CRT: Authentic Voice and Counter/Narrative Participants experienced teacher agency over racial narratives when teachers rejected student agency and counternarratives, intentionally excluded racial discourse, and lacked racial literacy. The topics teachers selected to center conversations about race in the classroom did not reflect the topics that were a part of Black students' everyday consciousness. The participants did not engage in the emotional labor of counternarrative or introducing racial discourse when it went unnoticed in the text. Participants knew they had valuable insight and perspective but did not consider their participation in race talk meaningful for their personal learning and were frustrated that teachers failed to recognize their silence during race talk as	**RTT: Racial Socialization and Identity** Narratives extend beyond the text onto society's perceptions of Black identity with material effects on individual racialized identity and lived experience. When students suffer racial trauma, many experience an attack on their sense of self and cultural identity. Without the counternarrative of lived experience and insight, white students might accept the racist narratives reinforced by teachers and map them onto individuals in society, reproducing racist attitudes and behaviors. This was a problematic decision that furthered anti-Black narratives with lingering repercussions on Black adolescents' experiences and internalized racial identities. Racist ideologies shape educational systems and curriculum. It is a trauma that is inescapable, and the victim can come to see their own racial identity as the	**CRTR Frame Three: Authentic Voice and Counter/Narrative** A CRT theoretical frame can be used to examine the ways Black authors authentically represent experiences of racism and racial trauma caused by the real-world white imagination. This is in line with CRT's emphasis on authentic storytelling, narratives, and counter-narratives to understand Black experiences. Counternarratives are needed at a societal level due to the singular, dehumanizing narratives reproduced through textual representations. Empowered spaces are ones where Black students have agency over racial narratives responsive to their lived experiences and perceptions. Educators can foster a sense of psychological safety for Black students by creating a space that allows, uniquely, the unheard to be heard. Educators should prioritize student experiences and visions for the future in the evaluation of classroom literature. According to (DEMYth-RT) high school-aged students have an increased understanding of advanced forms of racism and the ability to make meaning of racial encounters; they are capable of envisioning and articulating effective anti-racist pedagogy.

a communication of their discomfort. White perspectives dominated the discourse, reproducing racist narratives and superficial perspectives about race, ultimately providing a platform for an inauthentic representation of Black identity to reproduce.	perpetrator of the trauma. The positioning of literature reinforced the narrative that racial identity was the perpetrator of Black trauma and Blackness was something they had to overcome. Participating in racial discourse required disclosure and testimony of racial trauma, either real or perceived, due to the simplified narrative of a collective Black identity bound to trauma. Because taught texts represented a singular narrative about race and Black experience, providing a counter narrative during race talk to disrupt the narrative would require disclosure of personal lived experiences.	Only talking about race in the context of fictional texts and Black characters prevented the white students in the class from having to consider racism as a real lived experience or broader contemporary issue. Teachers must be explicit that reading about Black characters' experiences with racism and trauma is to be taken seriously but not conflated with the same understanding that comes from actual lived experience. Teachers must include texts that represent Black joy and success as a counter-narrative to racism as a defining characteristic of Black identity and experience. While literature can provide an anchor for reading race as a social construct and confronting the impact of a violent racist past on Black experiences, Black joy and Black love must exist in the space simultaneously. This approach mitigates the risk for teachers to perpetuate the damaging narrative that Black bodies are inherently bound to trauma or that they are to blame for ongoing trauma. Counterstories are not counterstories simply because they are told by people of color; they are counterstories because they challenge dominant narratives. Many narratives about the Black experience are about struggle and participants desperately needed visions of Black people thriving.

Vita

Jessica Michelle Schwind was born in Corpus Christi, Texas on November 17, 1982. She earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Writing and Cultural Studies form Louisiana State University in 2006 and a Master of Science in Teacher Education in 2010 from the University of Tennessee. Prior to returning to UT to pursue her Ph.D., she taught high school English and worked as a Literacy and Intervention Specialist. She began her graduate studies in 2021 with Dr. Judson Laughter as her advisor. Dr. Laughter also served as her internship supervisor during her Master's program eleven years earlier. In addition to supervising teacher candidates in the field, Jessica has taught reading education, special education, and teaching in secondary schools at the graduate and undergraduate level to current and prospective teachers. Jessica will graduate with a Ph.D. in Theory and Practice in Teacher Education with a concentration in Teacher Education and a specialization in English Education, and a Graduate Certificate in Qualitative Research Methods in May 2024.