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The Racial Reckoning of a Chinese American Teacher During
the COVID-19 Pandemic

Alicia Luong

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Racial Reckoning of a Chinese American Teacher During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Master of Arts

Teacher diversity continues to receive increased attention in educational research, highlighting experiences of teachers of Color. Despite this attention, teachers of Color are rarely seen as contributors to educational research. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a distinct increase of anti-Asian hate crimes due to many people blaming the deadly virus and aftermath on all Asians. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of a Chinese American teacher in graduate school during times of heightened racial reckoning and unrest within the Asian American community. Using an autoethnographic approach, a timeline was constructed with events, later turning into memos, from three separate categories. One memo from each category was selected to develop into a vignette that was analyzed for overarching themes. Findings included the inextricable nature of the separate categories creating a metaphorical braid, the importance of validation, the internalization of the Model Minority Myth, and the delayed racial identity development as a result of Asianization. Understanding the lived experience in this study means to understand that teaching is a “whole person” job, the roles that allies and support structures have, and that racial identity is continuously developing. Possible implications from this study include creating intentional community groups for teachers of Color and teacher candidates of Color, and additional explicit opportunities for racial identity development in teacher preparation programs. This study may contribute to research focused on teachers of Color, specifically Asian American teachers, during times of racial reckoning and increased visibility. This study highlights the experience of an Asian American teacher in a field where the stories from Asian American teachers are often missing.

Keywords: Asian American teacher, teachers of Color, autoethnography, racial reckoning

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Among the chaos that often coincides with returning from lunch in an elementary school classroom, a few students in my class returned visibly distraught. While I may have been prepared to help with a playground incident, I could have never been prepared for what these students would share with me. “Someone on the playground said you’re the worst second-grade teacher because you’re brown!” shared a student. Perhaps she continued sharing the rest of this incident, but those words rang in my head over and over. And yet, despite the praises sung from parents and administration prior to this moment, these were the only words that I heard for the rest of that day, week, year, and years to come. While jarring, this experience, coupled with the response of “kids say the craziest things” from administration, caused much heartache that year as I questioned my capabilities of teaching simply because of my skin color. This recurring thought continues to challenge my confidence as I navigate teaching as a Chinese American teacher, in a predominantly White environment, particularly during recent heightened violence against Asian Americans.

The student population in K-12 schools in the United States has become increasingly diverse. As of 2020, the percentage of students identifying as White is below 50% and is expected to decrease to 43.8% by 2029 (Wang & Dinkes, 2020). Despite the number of racially diverse students increasing in schools, 79% of the teacher workforce consists of White teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). This lack of racial diversity within the teacher workforce may be perpetuating the continuous absence of teachers of Color (Gordon, 2002). Meaning, as students of Color see less of themselves in the teaching force, they may feel compelled to enter a different field, one where people of Color are more accepted and common.

Teacher diversity continues to be a growing topic throughout the nation with benefits for all students, regardless of their racial or ethnic background. For example, teachers of Color can serve as role models for students, especially if students of Color are able to see themselves in their teachers (New America, 2019). Additionally, many teachers of Color report wanting to create better educational experiences for their students of Color because of their own personal experiences as students (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). However, benefits are not limited to students, but extend to colleagues as well. Teachers of Color are able to share their experiences to help their colleagues understand some of the realities for their students of Color (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). There are many benefits to having teachers of Color, yet they are severely underrepresented in the teacher workforce.

Some school districts recognize the need for increased teacher diversity and have implemented policies to hire more teachers of Color (Burns Thomas, 2020). However, a difference in hiring policies does not address the attrition rate that is higher for teachers of Color than for White teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Some of the experiences that await teachers of Color as they enter the profession are discouraging and alienating. For example, existing studies suggest that some teachers of Color feel isolated (Kelly, 2007), questioned (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016), unwelcomed (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016), and overlooked (Montecinos, 2004). Endo (2015) reports that some Asian American teachers specifically feel tokenized, racially sexualized, and are assumed to be foreign. These experiences are not without consequences. For instance, researchers reported that some teachers of Color, including Asian American teachers, cope by leaving the profession entirely (Endo, 2015; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). It is important to move beyond hiring policies (e.g., Burns Thomas, 2020) and address the problems that teachers of Color face in the field.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a dramatic increase in anti-Asian hate crimes throughout the United States (Cost, 2021). Despite the support and solidarity shown by many members of society (Breuninger, 2021; Cost, 2021), it was still a turbulent time to be an Asian American in the United States. However, one result from this increased violence was an increase in Asian Americans sharing their experiences with racism. This was monumental as Asian Americans are often silenced within society due to various factors including the Model Minority Myth, which portrays Asian Americans as “model minorities” who have obtained the American Dream while simultaneously erasing their experiences with racism (Kim, 2012; Kim & Hsieh, 2022). The American Dream, in this context, is referring to the ideology that suggests that success is obtainable based on one’s hard work and perseverance (Alvarado, 2010). As part of this racial reckoning, it is important to expand the sharing of Asian American experiences in educational research.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers of Color are often missing from educational research, particularly as contributors (Montecinos, 2004). In 1993, Carter emphasized the importance of acknowledging teachers of Color as valuable voices to what is happening in the classrooms. Approximately 20 years ago, researchers added to this by examining the existing literature focused specifically on the experiences of Chinese American teachers and found that the field is utterly limited in this regard (Sheets & Chew, 2002). As recent as 2020, this absence of Asian American teachers’ experiences was yet again identified by additional researchers (Kim & Cooc, 2020). By including stories from a variety of teachers of Color, educational researchers can depict a fuller and larger picture of their lived experiences.

In times of heightened racial reckoning amongst the Asian American community (Rogers et al., 2021), it is important for Asian Americans to claim back the stories that were silenced (Rodríguez & Kim, 2019). This study will attend to the call for an expansion in literature surrounding the experiences of Chinese American teachers (Sheets & Chew, 2002). Change to improve teachers' experiences cannot be initiated if many experiences, particularly from the teachers of Color, are unshared. In addition to this, allowing the experiences from marginalized communities to remain unshared further marginalizes them as contributors to the field (Carter, 1993). Therefore, it is essential to centralize the experiences of Asian American teachers especially during a time of increased visibility (Rogers et al., 2021) for a community that often remains invisible in society (Kim & Hsieh, 2022).

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of being a Chinese American teacher during a time of heightened racial unrest and racial reckoning among the Asian American community. The aim of this work was to add to the limited literature regarding the experiences of being a Chinese American teacher and to further contextualize this lived experience with being in graduate school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Question

The research question for this study was, "What is the lived experience of a Chinese American teacher in graduate school at a predominantly White institution (PWI) during the COVID-19 pandemic?"

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

While the student population within U.S. public K-12 schools is becoming increasingly diverse (Wang & Dinkes, 2020), there continues to be a demographic mismatch between this and the demographics of the teacher workforce. The student population within U.S. public K-12 schools is becoming increasingly diverse while the demographics of the teacher workforce remains predominantly White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). While some districts are working towards hiring more teachers of Color (Burns Thomas, 2020), it is important to recognize the reasons for doing so. Additionally, the experiences of teachers of Color should also be acknowledged. Without the stories from teachers of Color, educational research would be missing stories from a particular and important community within the teacher workforce.

Throughout this review of literature, I use the term “teachers of Color” as many researchers (e.g., Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016) have used in their studies. However, I acknowledge that a more common and appropriate term in online spaces and educational research may be “racialized teachers” (Azzam, 2019), “minoritized teachers” (Spafford et al., 2006), or “Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) teachers” (Deo, 2021). I also acknowledge that these terms may be difficult for Asian Americans to feel included within as many Asian Americans struggle with an “in-between-ness” of races (Lee, 2018). Having considered all of this, I chose to maintain the terms that the original researchers used in their respective studies.

In this review of literature, I will examine the existing research regarding teachers of Color, particularly Asian American teachers. First, I will discuss the advantages of having

teachers of Color in schools and the benefits for the faculty and staff as well as the students. Next, I will review the literature regarding the identity of teachers of Color. As their identity is developed at the intersection of being a person of Color and being a teacher, research suggests that they draw on both identities in their teaching practice. Then, I will address the literature surrounding the experiences of teachers of Color and teacher candidates of Color. Finally, I will explore existing literature that focuses specifically on Asian American educators.

The Value of Teachers of Color

With the increasingly diverse student population in K-12 schools, teachers should be meeting the needs of all their students. However, as the teacher workforce remains predominantly White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021), it can be expected that Whiteness becomes the norm within many classrooms. Burciaga and Kohli (2018) found that teachers of Color have a chance to disrupt the norm by showing an alternative way to teaching. For example, a participant in that study recalled their experience as a student of Color and specific methods that helped them as learners. Remembering their own experience, this participant, now a teacher, openly allowed students to respond in Spanish or speaking without raising their hands. This allowed students to feel more comfortable in their classrooms, allowing a more holistic experience for learning. In this instance, a teacher of Color disrupted Whiteness as a norm by sharing their teaching style with the faculty while simultaneously benefitting their students.

It is not uncommon for teachers of Color to draw on their own experiences to influence their teaching practice. Due to their experiences as students of Color, some teachers identified having a relationality to students of Color, developing a relational accountability, or a “deep commitment to their relationships” (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016, p. 75), towards those students. For

example, one study focused on using Black male educators to improve the academic success and experiences of Black male students in Oakland, California (McKinney de Royston et al., 2017). Benefits from that work included positive influences in the lives of Black children, push back against racialized and hegemonic institutional structure of schools, and intentional caring relationships between teachers and students. Given their experiences as students of Color, these teachers felt motivated and equipped to make a difference for current students of Color.

Teachers of Color have much to offer in education, to both their colleagues and their students, yet there continues to be a limited number of them. Some districts began implementing policies pushing administrators to hire more teachers of Color (Burns Thomas, 2020), yet this was done with the idea that teachers of Color were a panacea to all racial issues in the education system. In that study, administrators, at both the district and school level, were surprised to see that despite having teachers of Color, there were still racial issues within the schools. In 2020, a year of much racial unrest in the United States, students and alumni from K-12 schools took to social media to share their encounters with racism during their K-12 education (Lorenz & Rosman, 2020; Moore, 2020; Shah, 2020). Although teachers of Color have much to offer in education, it cannot be up to them alone to fix many of systemic racist issues that are occurring in K-12 schools across the nation. Additional work needs to be done to address the racialized realities of students in K-12 schools.

The Identity of Teachers of Color

There is much research supporting the development of teacher identity, particularly the experiences that help shape it. Kelchtermans (2018) suggests that teachers depend on aspects from multiple areas of their lives such as social, cultural, personal, and professional

experiences to develop their teacher identity. Rodgers and Scott (2008) listed four basic assumptions regarding the formation of identity:

- (1) that identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple contexts which bring social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation;
- (2) that identity is formed in relationship with others and involves emotions; (3) that identity is shifting, unstable, and multiple; and, (4) that identity involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through stories over time. (p. 733)

These four assumptions illustrate that teacher identity is complex, drawing on context, emotions, and change. For teachers of Color, this means that their identity is developed at the intersection of their experiences as a student of Color in schools, a person of Color in society, and a teacher of Color in the classroom.

As mentioned above, context is an essential part of teacher identity development (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Existing literature suggests that experiences as a person of Color play an important role in the teacher's identity development. For example, Lee (2018) found that Asian American educators drew on their racial background and identity when teaching. This also included them self-identifying strengths that came from being a teacher of Color to diverse students. One teacher in this study turned a student's curious question about race into a teaching moment to share their culture and background with her students. Similarly, Urrieta (2007) examined the identity production of Chicana/o educators. In that study, educators reported reflecting on their experiences as students of Color to shape their development as an educator. Both of these studies support the crucial role of context, both past and present, in the identity development of teachers of Color.

The second assumption focuses on the importance of relationships and emotions in teacher identity development. Teaching is an interpersonal profession where relationships and emotions are part of a teacher's daily practice. Zembylas (2010) discussed the need for teachers' emotions to drive an "ethic of discomfort" (p. 704) to learn and grow amongst a diverse student population where discomfort is an actively used as a step in individual and social transformation. In his study, the educators' fear of dissimilar students inhibited meaningful relationships with them. Therefore, this fear prevented incorporating other students' backgrounds to their teaching practice. In a study by Borrero et al. (2016), one teacher of Color shared how vulnerability with colleagues and students about their experiences as a person of Color helped them maintain their teacher identity. In such a relational profession, teachers need to be able to connect with others as part of their teacher identity development. Teachers of Color are often isolated, therefore unable to develop strong connections and relationships to foster identity development.

There are consequences when the environment that a teacher of Color is in does not nurture or welcome their developing teacher identity. These consequences not only affect their teacher identity but their personal identity as well. For example, Lee (2013) found that because of their experiences of being shut down for sharing racialized experiences, teachers of Color began to hide their racial identity. They referred to this as masking part of who they are to protect themselves from further negative experiences from their colleagues. If teachers of Color do not feel comfortable bringing their full selves into the workplace, how can they fully connect to their students? If they are not feeling welcome to share multiple aspects of their identity, are they truly there?

The Experiences of Pre-Service Teachers of Color

The experiences in teacher education shape the identity development of teacher candidates as they navigate between being a student and imagining themselves as teachers (Flores, 2020). It is important that teacher candidates' identities are nurtured and fostered during their teacher education programs. However, existing research suggests that teacher candidates of Color do not have the necessary nurturing experiences to foster a positive and healthy teacher identity.

In a review of research, Brown (2014) examined the existing literature regarding the recruitment and retention of teacher candidates of Color. Findings indicated that the challenges that preservice teachers of Color face are often affected by the culture of Whiteness dominating many teacher preparation programs. Some of the reasons that Whiteness shapes teacher education include the history of education (Apple, 2019), the norms for quality teaching (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016), or the demographics of teacher education programs (Cochran & Zeichner, 2009).

Not only are preservice teachers of Color the minority in programs that cater to Whiteness, they also report feeling isolated and overlooked. Montecinos (2004) found that many preservice teachers of Color felt multicultural education classes were contradicting. While the courses were designed to help preservice teachers work and teach diverse students in K-12 schools, much of the curriculum seemed to be directed towards White teachers. Some participants shared that they felt their experiences were overlooked or ignored. This experience was not limited to this study and was reiterated by additional preservice teachers of Color in a study by Navarro et al. (2019). These researchers found that after being recruited to teacher preparation programs, preservice teachers of Color did not feel valued or seen throughout the

programs. Some shared that they felt they were being taught as an afterthought in many courses. Despite recruitment efforts, not much is stopping the negative experiences that preservice teachers of Color are facing.

When teacher educators attempt to better the experiences for preservice teachers of Color, they are sometimes faced with backlash from faculty members and administration. In a study by Hayes and Fasching-Varner (2015), a teacher educator shared the experience of receiving consequences for advocating for their students of Color. After addressing a negative comment from a student to “drop the color crap,” this teacher educator was “verbally chastised by administration... [and] assigned a ‘helping committee’ of faculty designed to keep [them] in [their] place” (p. 107). Situations like this make it difficult for teacher educators to improve the experiences for preservice teachers of Color. Without their help and advocacy towards change in teacher education, the environment in which preservice teachers of Color are taught remains dismissive and the possibility for proper and healthy identity development within teachers of Color is often limited.

The Experiences of In-Service Teachers of Color

As these preservice teachers of Color graduate and enter the profession, their experiences do not seem to improve. They continue to be a minority in the workforce; therefore, the experiences do not differ much from their pre-service experiences. While attrition rates for teachers are high, the rate is even higher for teachers of Color (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Something is happening to teachers of Color that is driving them out of the profession at a rate 5% higher than their White colleagues (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

Oftentimes, teachers of Color are tokenized on their teams or in their schools resulting in many teachers of Color reporting that they have feelings of isolation. Kelly (2007) shared an

experience where a teacher of Color described feeling “pink poodle syndrome” and described it as “standing among a crowd of people and you are almost a mascot or a wild one” (p. 237).

When teachers feel like they stick out, it serves as an easy avenue to feeling watched by others or under a microscope. An additional result of being tokenized is that teachers of Color feel as if they are a monolith of all teachers that are of the same race, ignoring any possibility of within group variation. In fact, Souto-Manning and Cheruvu (2016) shared that some of their participants felt that they had to represent monolithic assumptions about all teachers of Color. As teachers of Color continue to be tokenized in their teams or schools, they carry a tremendous burden that can often lead to feelings of isolation.

In a profession that involves high engagement with people, teacher isolation is a common experience. These feelings are further perpetuated when there is a limited number of teachers of Color among the faculty. Gist (2017) found that many teachers of Color reported feeling isolated in their workplace. In this same study, teachers of Color also shared that they felt they were unable to escape a double bind, “a teacher’s need to reconcile oppositional tensions between personal ties and systemic ties that they have difficulty escaping” (Gist, 2017, p. 931). In other words, teachers are navigating through racialized tensions between how their race is perceived and how they want to be perceived, individually, on top of feelings of isolation. Teachers of Color have multidimensional experiences as they navigate their interactions and relationships with faculty members, administration, students, and parents.

Considering the environment for teachers of Color may not be nurturing to their identity, it is common for teachers of Color to feel a need to hide a part of who they are to protect themselves from negative experiences. Many teachers of Color report feeling like they are representing their entire race or always working to avoid stereotypical representations (Lee,

2013). In that study, teachers of Color shared that they masked their racial identity from colleagues and students or insisted on keeping their worlds separate from their professional lives.

Not only do some teachers of Color report feeling unwelcome to share their racial identity in their schools, but they also report physical and emotional burdens as well. Pizarro and Kohli (2020) found that many teachers of Color report emotional and physical exhaustion from being social justice oriented in their predominantly White schools. For example, they had a participant that included “example after example of everyday racism experienced over 6 years... [one teacher] shared with heavy heart that she was leaving her school and the students she loved because she could not take the disrespect anymore” (p. 969). Negative experiences such as these are pushing teachers of Color to leave the profession entirely, contributing to the higher turnover rate found by Ingersoll and May (2011).

However, being a minority in the workplace is not limited to only negative experiences. In some studies, teachers of Color identified benefits that helped them as they weather these troublesome realities. Despite referencing “pink poodle syndrome” (Kelly, 2007, p. 237) as a result of tokenism, a teacher of Color shared overcoming the feeling of isolation through ideological work and heroic individualism; they were able to overcome burdens and match their beliefs with values for a positive purpose (Kelly, 2007). Some research has also demonstrated the resiliency of teachers of Color. In a study by Gist (2019), teachers of Color found healing and empowerment through the Teacher Testimony Project, “the creation of opportunities to organize and mobilize the voices of Teachers of Color through a social justice effort” (p. 33). In addition to these findings, teachers of Color also shared the benefit of coming together in an intentional community. Similarly, Borrero et al. (2016) also identified that an intentional

community was extremely valuable for teachers of Color, especially for those that are just beginning their careers. It is important that not only heart-wrenching stories of teachers of Color are shared, but stories of resiliency such as those mentioned above are included as well.

The Experiences of Asian American Teachers

Precisely 20 years ago, Sheets and Chew (2002) identified a dearth in educational research surrounding Chinese American teachers. In this same article, they asserted that the existing Chinese American teachers were being educated as if they were part of the dominant group and going to teach children unlike themselves. Instead of being prepared as they are, Chinese American teachers were being prepared as White, monocultural, female teacher candidates. Kim and Cooc (2020) reiterated these findings when analyzing educational research to examine the experiences of teachers in schools. While limited, the existing research suggests specific experiences particular to Asian Americans.

Asian Americans are often subject to invisibility, especially in education, when considered among other minoritized groups. This invisibility includes several areas such as: (a) K-12 curriculum (An, 2016), (b) educational research (Kim & Cooc, 2020; Sheets & Chew, 2002), and (c) the percentage of Asian American teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). This inescapable invisibility usually conveys to society that Asian Americans are “not legitimate members of the nation and have little place in the country’s history” (Rodríguez, 2019, p. 216). In fact, Goodwin (2010) highlights that curriculum in public K-12 schools colonizes many groups within the Asian American Pacific Islander community. These experiences illustrate Asianization or how Asian Americans are racialized in society. For example, Asian Americans are often categorized together into a monolithic group, and this perpetuates them as overachieving model minorities, perpetual foreigners, and yellow perils that

threaten American jobs. Asianization is a tenet of AsianCrit, a framework grounded in Critical Race Theory and informed by Asian American studies. AsianCrit, as Iftikar and Museus (2018) explain, accounts for “how White supremacy shapes the experiences of Asian Americans” (p. 940). Meaning, that because race is a social construction, the racialized experiences amongst Asian Americans are reinforced by economic, social, and political forces around. As a result of repeated messages of erasure and invisibility, “the consequences of Asianization on Asian Americans in education, as well as for our larger society, are sometimes quantifiable but are more often hidden in stories which Asian Americans are never asked to tell” (Kim & Hseih, 2022, p. 32). Thus, Asian Americans become trapped in a cyclical process of being invisible and being absent from educational research and curriculum.

The experiences that have been shared by educational researchers suggest that Asian American teachers face racism in both obvious and subtle ways. Endo (2015) found that many Asian American teachers face tokenization, racialized sexualization, and are often assumed to be foreign despite some being second generation immigrants. This study focused on racial microaggressions experienced by participant teachers, yet some of the stories included more obvious racialized experiences such as being critiqued on being outspoken for an Asian (Endo, 2015). Some teachers disclosed that a coping mechanism was eventually leaving the profession, echoing Pizarro and Kohli’s (2020) finding where teachers of Color were leaving based on their experiences. This also supports the higher attrition rate that Ingersoll and May (2011) found amongst teachers of Color in comparison to their White colleagues.

Some Asian American teachers have turned racialized experiences into learning experiences. Lee (2018) recalled turning a racialized question from a student into a teachable moment where she discussed how being Asian American feels like an in-between race from

Black and White. In another study, Asian American educators drew on their race and their coursework to influence their teaching practices (Philip, 2014). While the experiences of their participants were different, research illustrates that Asian American teachers are no exception to drawing on their identity and background to shape their teaching practice (Lee, 2018; Philip, 2014). For example, Chow (2020) shares a specific example of an Asian American participant that explained how their identities, meaning racial and religious, seem intertwined and actively inform her classroom discussions. Thus, it is important to recruit and retain more teachers of Color, not just Asian American teachers, as they bring in their diverse experiences to their teaching practices.

Summary

While there are studies that give insight to the importance of teacher diversity, there is limited research examining the experiences of teachers of Color (Carter, 1993), particularly Asian American teachers (Kim & Cooc, 2020). Having a diverse teacher workforce has benefits in several ways (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017), yet the experiences of many teachers of Color are negative (Gist, 2017; Lee, 2013; Navarro et al., 2019; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016), compelling them to leave the profession entirely (Endo, 2015; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Asian American teachers, a community that is often silenced under the pretense of the Model Minority Myth (Kim, 2012; Kim & Hseih, 2022), often find their stories unshared (Kim & Hseih, 2022; Rodríguez & Kim, 2019). To truly allow Asian American teachers to be contributors in educational research, it is important to address the paucity of stories from Asian American teachers found by several researchers (e.g., Kim & Cooc, 2020; Sheets & Chew, 2002). The increased violence during the COVID-19 pandemic against Asian Americans (Cost, 2021) has led to a racial reckoning amongst the Asian American community

(Rogers et al., 2021), prompting many people outside of this community to acknowledge and listen to the stories that need to be told.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

To address the lack of voices from teachers of Color working among an increasingly diverse student population, I chose to use an autoethnographic approach to explore the essence of the lived experiences of being an Asian American elementary teacher in times of heightened prejudice and increased violence (Yam, 2022). For some teachers of Color, the experiences are devastating with many referencing feelings of indifference, isolation, and exhaustion pushing them to leave the profession (Kelly, 2007; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). Sharing my own stories offers an additional narrative that may differ from existing perceptions of the dominant group, but I see this as a first step in bettering the experiences referred to in the existing literature and as an acknowledgement that these experiences do, in fact, exist. Therefore, the research question for this study was, “What is the experience of a Chinese American teacher in graduate school in a predominantly White institution (PWI) during the COVID-19 pandemic?”

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a method and a style of writing, derived from a series of various styles of writing and research (Denzin, 2014). Historically, autoethnography stemmed from various other writing styles, later becoming its own. Starting from biographical and autobiographical writing, this style emerged into ethnography. Eventually, this led to a new style of writing called writing culture where a group’s culture is written throughout a series of texts. A combination of these writing styles led to autoethnography. Defining autoethnography as both a text and a method, Reed-Danahay (1997/2021) describes it as “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context,” (p. 6).

To describe lived experiences, Denzin (2014) suggests that “the use and the value of the autoethnographic method lies in its user’s ability to capture, probe, and render the understandable problematic experience” (p. 36). Meaning, that the lived experiences and stories cannot stand on their own and depend on the researcher’s ability to write about it. Scholars have found autoethnographic methods helpful in navigating racialized experiences (Chavez, 2012; Truong et al., 2014; Vickery, 2021). By using this methodology, researchers are able to engage in deep reflective exercises surrounding their experiences.

The stories and moments in autoethnographic studies are referred to as “epiphanies.” Denzin (2014) defines them as “interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives... alter[ing] the fundamental meaning structures of a person’s life” (p. 52). There are four forms of an epiphany that Denzin (2014) lists: (a) the major event, (b) the cumulative/representative event, (c) the minor epiphany, and (d) those where meaning comes from reliving the experience. It is important that a researcher maintains a level of reflexivity while recalling and recording epiphanies as data. Oftentimes, this may be pausing during data collection to consider the researcher’s positionality during the process and how it can impact the overall study. In autoethnography in particular, this means holding oneself accountable as both the researcher and the participant. Epiphanies are essential to autoethnographic studies as they serve a data source while also exposing readers to possibly vulnerable moments for the researcher.

As with any methodology, autoethnography is subject to doubts of trustworthiness, validity, and reliability. Lather (2003) discusses the issues of developing trustworthy research in different areas of methodology, such as autoethnography, calling for an increase and change in developing trustworthy research for studies that do not necessarily align with traditional methods

of proving credibility such as triangulation and member checks. Catalytic validity is described as the degree in which the research inspires, prompts, and instigates readers to know the reality of others to better transform it (Lather, 2003). The purpose is “not only a recognition of the reality-altering impact of the research process itself, but also on the need to consciously channel this impact so the respondents gain self-understanding and, ideally, self-determination through research participation” (Lather, 2003, p. 191). While there are arguments concerning the trustworthiness of autoethnographic research, researchers have found it to be credible, especially when using catalytic validity (e.g., Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Starr, 2010).

van Manen (2016) suggests that experiences vary from person to person, therefore it cannot be assumed that the experiences of two people are the same. As these experiences differ, it is important that researchers acknowledge the variation within peoples’ lived experiences. An autoethnographic approach serves as a modality for readers to recognize the variety in experiences of people while also acting as a transformative experience for the researcher (Denzin, 2014). While the experiences of teachers of Color may be similar, there certainly is not a universal experience for all teachers of Color. Thus, an autoethnographic approach is best fit for my study as it aims to understand the essence of being an Asian American teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which anti-Asian rhetoric was increasing, while capturing the rare, unseen, and unheard moments of an individual person’s experience.

Theoretical Framework

An autoethnographic approach offers an opportunity for those living within the margins to center their stories and experiences (Chavez, 2012; Truong et al., 2014; Vickery, 2021). This study used Critical Race Theory as a framework to guide data collection and analysis. Chavez (2012) asserts that the combination of autoethnography and Critical Race Theory is the perfect

marriage. While teachers' experiences differ from person to person, experiences for teachers of Color may be drastically different than their White colleagues. It is important to acknowledge that race is a factor in shaping one's experiences with the world.

Early critical race theorists such as Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman shared frustrations with other scholars on the slow progression of racial reform (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Thus, Critical Race Theory emerged as a separate entity of critical legal studies to account for the role of race and racism in society. Critical Race Theory asserts that racism is "so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). A strong component of Critical Race Theory includes storytelling from minoritized groups as it is common in law, while also providing context for understanding. In scholarship and educational research, stories can help communicate realities of oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998), understand marginalized stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000), and connect experiences of racism with institutional practices and social norms (Chapman, 2013).

Critical Race Theory utilizes five elements that impact perspectives, research methods and pedagogy. These five elements include, "(1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the importance of experiential knowledge; and (5) the use of interdisciplinary perspectives" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, p. 596). These elements apply to this study because I shared my experiential knowledge that consistently situated race and racism at the center of them. Additionally, some of the epiphanies in this study challenge the dominant ideology, particularly the Model Minority Myth.

Race and racism is a prevalent part of many experiences of people of Color. Existing literature supports that race is a central part in the experiences of some teachers of Color (Kelly,

2007; Lee, 2018; Navarro et al., 2019; Urrieta, 2007). Using Critical Race Theory as a lens helped me better analyze my experiences, particularly ones I have had because of my race. This lens kept my analysis situated on the central role that race and racism play in the experiences of a person of Color.

Context and Positionality

This study took place in the Intermountain West region of the United States. Over 90% of the population in this state identify as White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). In the school district where I taught, there were nearly 2,000 teachers but only 3% of them identified as non-White, and this was disproportionate in comparison to the number of students of Color (L. Ross, personal communication, August 11, 2021).

As the participant and the researcher in this study, it is important to acknowledge my background and positionality. I am a Chinese American woman who was raised by immigrant parents that escaped the downfall of Vietnam after the war. After spending time in refugee camps, my parents settled down in a city in the Northeastern part of the United States. My grandmother, who sponsored my mother as a teenager, worked in education for 30 years, specializing in Special Education. It was she that loudly celebrated my switch from engineering to education while I was in college. I moved to the Intermountain West region of the United States to attend college at a large, private, religious university. The undergraduate student body currently consists of 81% of students identifying as White while only 3% identify as Asian/Pacific Islander (Brigham Young University, 2022). While enrolled in the teacher preparation program, I was exposed to classmates from all over the country. However, it was extremely rare to find classmates similar to my racial background. After graduation, I was

offered a second-grade teaching position in the school where I had completed my student teaching experience.

Education and teaching were not always the career plan for me. While in high school, I had completed a work study in a local elementary school where I helped second grade students with their daily work. One day, a student I had been consistently working with had been having a hard day. After having him take a break, I asked him what was really bothering him. It turns out that this child had not eaten for almost an entire day. The world seemed to stop moving. Here, sitting before me, was a second grader who admitted his misbehavior was due to hunger. From this moment forward, I knew that I wanted to enter the teaching field to listen to the kids who many others had never stopped to listen to before. Throughout my years as a teacher, I have held on to this moment with this one student to remind me of the real reason I became an educator in the first place.

Currently, I am a graduate student at the same private, predominantly White, religious university that I attended for my undergraduate teacher preparation. The experience of working with many of the same professors that I had in my teacher preparation program has been eye opening. Discussions as a graduate student have been more open to inequities in education, and such conversations were rare to come by as a preservice teacher. These discussions have better equipped me to advocate for myself and my students when presented with inequities and injustice in education.

During my time in graduate school, there has been and continues to be a global pandemic causing tragedies in all aspects around the world. In the United States, former President Donald Trump frequently referred to COVID-19 as the ‘Chinese Virus.’ This term was quickly picked up by news media and many people around the world, suggesting that this deadly virus was man-

made in a lab in Wuhan, China (Rogers et al., 2021). The results of people using the term ‘Chinese Virus’ and believing that the virus that killed many people’s loved ones was made by people in China was devastating. During the last two years of the pandemic, many schools and businesses in the United States shut down, and there has been an alarmingly high increase of anti-Asian violence (Yam, 2022).

Data Collection

There are numerous experiences regarding my race and racism that have occurred throughout my life that are pertinent to this study. While these experiences may be significant, this study focused on epiphanies that occurred while I was in graduate school. This enabled me to deeply reflect and fully expound on the experiences that happened during this bounded period of time and to think about how these experiences were influenced by the context of teaching, graduate school, and the increased racial unrest during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To keep the epiphanies as natural and organic as possible, I collected teaching artifacts, plan books, pictures, journal entries, and emails to remind me of experiences that I have had throughout my years of teaching. Then, I constructed a timeline for the time that I was in graduate school, which was between March 2020 to April 2022. Next, I separated the timeline into semesters to better organize syllabi, assignments, and class notes. After I organized materials from graduate school, I gathered previous plan books, lesson plans, pictures, emails, and other teaching artifacts to elicit memories that would be applicable to this study.

Once all these materials were gathered and organized into the respective semester, I began to sift through the current events, syllabi, class assignments, class notes, plan books, lesson plans, pictures, emails, and other teaching artifacts. I went through current events first that were happening in the world, then through items that were relevant to graduate school, and

finally items that were part of teaching. Any item that elicited a memory that was applicable to the study was added to the timeline. A sticky note with the date and event was added to the timeline. For example, there was a sticky note in March 2021 that said “March 16, 2021, Atlanta Shootings where 6 Asian women were killed.”

After the timeline was fully constructed with the added items, I wrote one-paragraph memos to go along with each item that was on the timeline. This was important in creating a fuller story to these memories of being an Asian American teacher while in graduate school. I used Denzin’s (2014) five conventions (people as characters, a setting, an epiphany, an order of events, and a moral to the story) that define autoethnography as a methodology in studying human experiences to guide the memos. This meant temporarily reliving the experience in order to define particular details such as characters, setting, and order of events of the epiphany. Below is an example of a memo created, one that coincided with a colleague confrontation on March 29, 2021:

On March 16, 2021, Robert Aaron Long had a shooting spree across three different locations, killing 6 Asian women total. Police reports stated that he had a sex addiction and said he wanted to “eliminate temptation.” Yet the women he felt were the biggest temptation were Asian women. Perhaps the most baffling part was how the news sources shifted their wording once it was determined that this was because of a sex addiction. A sex addiction doesn’t involve murder. With police statements saying things like “He just had a really bad day,” it seemed as if the murder of these 6 Asian women was nothing more than just an unfortunate event.

Once I had compiled and written a memo for each of the events on the timeline, I picked one event from each category of my experience and wrote a vignette with more detail about the critical incident. Part of this required me to, again, relive the experience and add in more details to allow a fuller and more complete picture. I again went back to Denzin's (2014) five components when writing the vignettes. Some examples of this process involved including additional characters and contextualizing the setting.

Writing the vignettes was perhaps the most taxing step in comparison to the rest of the study. Meaning, that writing the vignettes required a lot of emotional work by having to relive the experiences. Painful moments that I thought were put in the past were now being re-experienced in order to gain additional detail to contextualize each moment. Re-experiencing these moments meant feeling the same unease of walking outside in fear of being physically attacked because of my ethnicity, shedding the same tears as I reheard the words "it's not just about Asian lives" again, and feeling the familiar insecurity of citizenship and belonging as I read over the assignment referring to some students as "boat kids." However, this vulnerability during this step of data collection allowed for a fuller, deeper vignette that encompassed all of the emotions linked with the critical incidents.

With many painful memories resurfacing along with the linked emotions, it was important to address this as a step in the study. After writing a vignette that recounted difficult experiences with such specific detail, I took a break from data collection and the overall study. For example, after writing about the Atlanta shootings, I took three days to remove myself from the study to resituate myself in the present. This step allowed me time to reflect on the influence past experiences have on present interpretations (Cutri & Whiting, 2015). I repeated this process

of taking time away from the study after writing a vignette to reflect on the past and where I was in the present.

Data Analysis

To analyze this data, I used thematic analysis, leaning on Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) definition as a guide. First, I coded each vignette, one at a time. To allow data analysis to be guided by the stories instead of using pre-existing codes defined outside of my own experiences, I did not use *a priori* codes. The codes were based on commonalities found throughout each vignette instead. For example, two phrases that were coded together were, "my class recognized my feelings and spoke out in solidarity" and "I confided in a close colleague who shared my same tears over the situation." Overall, there were 15 codes during this stage of analysis (see Appendix). Once the data were coded, I identified recurring ideas amongst the codes and grouped the codes into categories. For example, some codes were grouped together based on the reference to various emotions. These categories were then condensed into larger, overarching themes. With these overarching themes, I was better able to understand the structures that make up the lived experience. Because essences and phenomena cannot be "captured in conceptual abstractions" (van Manen, 1997, p. 79), using these themes was helpful in better understanding the experiences within the data.

To account for the role of race and racism in my experiences, I examined the data through a Critical Race Theory lens (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Meaning, I looked at the overarching themes within the data and referred back to the five tenets of Critical Race Theory by Solórzano and Yosso (2000). For example, the theme of the importance of validation was a result of how others valued my experiential knowledge. Similarly, the other two themes, the internalization of the Model Minority Myth and the delayed racial identity development as a

result of Asianization, requires the use of interdisciplinary perspectives, especially Asian American studies. It was from this examination that I solidified the overarching themes that aligned with Critical Race Theory.

Using a metaphor of a camera, Belbase et al. (2008) suggest that autoethnographic methods have the advantage of being able to capture rarely heard stories. However, they cite a potential limitation that the “images may be overshadowed or emphasized with colour in the photoshop of an autoethnographer” (p. 88). Throughout the data analysis process, I consistently paused for personal reflexivity to think about the interpretations of the data as well as the themes that arise from the data analysis. This allowed for a more trustworthy analysis in which I could attempt to make clear instances that were not clouded by my own emotions from reliving the experiences.

Autoethnography does not consider the emotions as inappropriate or taboo in research (Denzin, 2014). The emotional work involved in autoethnography is seen as a strength of the methodology. Other research methodologies may claim emotional neutrality towards the subject of examination, and therefore, miss nuances and insights aptly afforded by an attention to emotion. In autoethnography, the consistent pauses for personal reflectivity served as an alternative avenue to traditional methods of triangulation.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The stories of teachers of Color are often absent in educational research. Maintaining this absence furthers a dearth of stories from a particular group within the teacher workforce. This study is aimed to lessen this scarcity of diverse voices in educational research and answer the question, “What is the lived experience of a Chinese American teacher in graduate school in a predominantly White institution (PWI) during the COVID-19 pandemic?” To answer this question, I used an autoethnographic approach leaning on the work of Denzin (2014) to examine three critical incidents related to my racialized experiences from graduate school, current events, and teaching.

In this chapter, I will share the findings from the data analysis using a three stranded braid (see Figure 1). First, I will explain the braid metaphor and its role in data analysis. Following this, I will share a critical incident in each of the three strands of the overall braid, highlighting touchpoints in which the critical incidents overlap. Then, I will metaphorically braid the incidents and strands back together to demonstrate the inextricable nature of these categories. Finally, I will discuss the overarching themes found during the data analysis stage.

Braid Metaphor

A braid is a structure consisting of two or more strands that are interlaced together. Typically, a braid is made up of three separate strands interwoven together. After a braid is complete, it is difficult to separate one strand from another without undoing the entire structure. Similarly, the complete structure would not look the same without one of the three strands. This metaphor is best suited in explaining the findings from this study because of the weaving nature of the strands within a braid. The braid enabled me to represent individual experiences, themes,

categories, and moments of convergence; the braid seemed best suited to represent the essence of my experiences.

The three categories used to place events on the timeline represent the three strands that make up the braided experience of being a Chinese American teacher in graduate school at a PWI during the COVID-19 pandemic. These strands were: (a) current events (Strand A); (b) moments in my career as an elementary school teacher (Strand B); and (c) graduate school discussions and assignments (Strand C). Seeing these categories come together as a braid complemented the intricacies of the overall experience (see Figure 1). The current events, assignments and discussions in graduate school, and moments in teaching all actively contributed to the complete experience. As previously mentioned, I will highlight instances in which these strands come together while also metaphorically unbraiding the experience to emphasize their separateness from each other. This will clarify the separate strands and how they converge to represent the overall experience of being a Chinese American teacher in graduate school at a PWI during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1

The Braided Strands of Participant's Experience



Note. The strands in figure above represent Strands A, B, and C in this study. These strands are inextricably braided together to portray the lived experience of a Chinese American teacher in graduate school at a PWI during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To thoroughly explain the braid of this experience, I will be sharing a critical incident from each strand in the data. These critical incidents were epiphanies during data analysis as there were multiple references to other events and categories. These touchpoints are key to understanding how these separate strands come together to shape the overall experience. Highlighting a critical incident seemed best suited to show the braided and interwoven nature of how events from each category came together and could no longer be separated without taking away from the overall experience. Boufoy-Bastick (2004) suggests using critical incidents to elicit a worldview of self-conceptualization and highlight cultural phenomena surrounding the researcher. I intentionally selected a particular critical incident for each category to illuminate my experiences as a Chinese American teacher in graduate school at a PWI during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will now review a separate critical incident in each strand (Strands A-C) while discussing touchpoints in which the critical incidents converge with one another.

Current Event Critical Incident: Processing the Atlanta Shootings

The critical incident for the category of current events was prompted by the shootings of six Asian women and two others in Atlanta, Georgia on March 16, 2021. *This evening, in Atlanta, Georgia, Robert Aaron Long, 21, has shot and murdered eight people, six of them being Asian women.* News stations all over the nation were reporting about this heinous shooting. However, perhaps the most sickening part for me was this man's confession that was shared by the Atlanta Police Department that evening. He confessed to these murders, sharing that he had a sex addiction and wanted to "eliminate the temptation" (Fausset et al., 2021). To this day, I still get chills thinking that if instead of Atlanta, what if this man had been in my hometown? The same hometown that my family lived where my beloved aunties worked in similar beauty salons?

Processing this event in the days to come proved to be extremely difficult. Numerous family members, across the country, reached out to each other to check in, especially since this felt a little too close to home for us. Perhaps it was just the occupations and race of these victims that scared us, but we all knew that it was much larger than this. Throughout 2020, the now former president, Donald Trump, had been consistently referring to the global pandemic, COVID-19, as the 'Chinese Virus.' As news stations created hysteria about the origin of COVID-19, spreading that it was man-made in a lab in Wuhan, China, many people began using the same term coined by the President of the United States (Rogers et al., 2021). A result of attaching a deadly pandemic that closed down schools and businesses to an ethnicity resulted in increased anti-Asian hate crimes, discrimination, and xenophobic acts. It was no wonder that many members of my family struggled to process this tragedy. Senseless acts against Asian

Americans across the United States were being committed every day, and we all began to question when, not if, our turn would come.

My cousins and I held a Zoom call for our family to gather safely and process the overwhelming feelings of fear, sadness, anger, and grief. We grappled with the complexities of being Asian American in the United States. This resulted in sharing stories of our uncomfortable moments of living through the fetishization of Asian women. We wept as we discussed the idea of being perpetual foreigners in a country where our parents worked up to three jobs to allow us the “American Dream.” As second-generation immigrants, we are the result and pride of multiple generations of familial struggle across continents. We were born here, we are fluent in English, we went to incredible colleges, we work in generous professions that give back to our communities. Yet, we *still* get asked “where are you from?” We cursed the myth of being a model minority and how often Asians are weaponized against other races, particularly the Black community. And finally, we contemplated how to help and protect our aging parents as Asian elders were a particular target of the increasing anti-Asian hate crimes. In instances like this, sometimes family serves as the perfect affinity group to process complex feelings.

Many members in my family reached out to me as I lived the furthest away from everybody. They offered advice on how to stay safe during these fearsome times for Asian American such as “Be aware of your surroundings. Try to travel in groups. Don’t stay out past dark. Keep your head down. Stay home as much as you can.” Yet, they, themselves, knew that they were incapable of protecting me, nor themselves, from these senseless acts against Asian Americans.

Shortly after the Atlanta shootings, there was a public outcry against the rising violence against Asian Americans. Organizations such as the NAACP and members of Congress

denounced this tragedy as well as the increase of anti-Asian violence throughout the nation (Cost, 2021). The newly elected President Biden and Vice President Harris shared statements of validation and solidarity for the Asian American community (Breuninger, 2021). The hashtags, #StopAsianHate and #AsianLivesMatter, began trending on social media (Cost, 2021). I remember thinking to myself, “Finally! People are starting to get it.” Until someone proved to me they did not.

Teaching Critical Incident: Colleague Confrontation

The critical incident in the teaching strand involved a confrontation from a colleague. This event actively drew on the previously mentioned Atlanta shootings, particularly the resulting and now trending hashtag, #AsianLivesMatter. Just weeks away from spring break, several colleagues and I were sharing our exciting plans. Plans included travel, family time, and much needed moments of relaxation. However, a discussion began about the controversy of using terms that some people determined offensive. “Just twenty years ago, I used to be able to say whatever I wanted! Now I’m supposed to feel guilty about visiting a plantation in the South? For *what?!?*” Mrs. Smith complained. “*Right?!?* Back then, I used to get in so much trouble for calling someone Black. *Now* we’re supposed to!” Ms. Jennings chimed in. They seemed pretty firm in their opinions on this matter. I decided that my lunch break was not set aside for me to educate people who seemed stuck in their ways. Because of this, I chose to leave the conversation. And boy, was that the wrong move.

Without my knowledge, someone had pointed out that I had left the conversation because these teachers had offended me. Thus, Mrs. Smith came to find me the following morning as I was walking into my classroom. She had come to apologize for offending me the day before. I calmly explained that I was not offended, but that I did not want to argue about something like

that on my lunch break. “I’m not racist, ya know!” Mrs. Smith began yelling. “Of course not. I never thought you were,” I patiently replied. *Since when did we start talking about being racist?* “Anyways, I’m sorry if I offended you. But I’m not sorry for having my opinions!” Mrs. Smith continued. “Like I can believe that all lives matter. It’s not just about Black lives. And it’s not just about Asian lives!” *Wait a damn minute.*

Just as I was starting to feel comfort because I had seen many friends and family using the trending hashtag #AsianLivesMatter, none of it seemed to matter anymore. Here I was, in the back corner of my classroom, getting told that it’s not just about Asian lives. It seemed as if Mrs. Smith had pulled this statement right off of a Facebook page from the All Lives Matter movement. In a time of heightened sensitivity towards Asian Americans, shouldn’t a teacher of her tenure level be more aware of what is happening in the world? It had not even been two weeks since the Atlanta shootings.

Not too long ago, my family and I were questioning when, not if, our turn would be to face anti-Asian violence. I never would have predicted then that my time would be now and in the form of what felt like verbal assault. She knew exactly what she was saying. She even specified that it was not just about Asian lives to me, the only Asian American teacher in the school. But, I still questioned whether perhaps I misunderstood her. After all, would she really want to hurt me like this after all of these years? As part of my thesis research, I had read countless stories of teachers of Color being questioned and gaslit in their workplaces. And here I was...gaslighting myself.

Following this conversation, I confided in a close colleague who shared my same tears over the situation. Her anger about this confrontation spoke volumes. This anger was shared among friends and family members as they helped me understand what had happened and what

to do next. The general consensus was that this teacher had crossed a line and needed to be reported. I was devastated that I was in the shoes of many of the teachers of Color I had read about for my thesis research in graduate school. Reading about these tragic stories is one thing. However, experiencing the feelings of inferiority, insecurity, and isolation took me to a whole new level.

The following morning, I met with the school principal to formally report the situation. I shared what had happened, contextualizing this moment in the world that we are in. I brought up the Atlanta shootings, the dangers of being Asian American during the COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing anti-Asian hate crimes, and how this teacher chose to specify that it was not just about Asian lives to the only Asian teacher in the school. The principal sympathized with me that this was such a hard time and that this teacher had, in fact, crossed a line. She assured me that she would talk to Mrs. Smith about the situation. That evening, the principal called me to discuss how she had addressed the situation. Mrs. Smith repeatedly told the principal that it was never her intention to hurt me. My principal and I then started discussing that sometimes impact outweighs intentions. The principal then asked me if I would like to pursue this further to which I declined as I was content with how she had handled the situation. I never imagined that I would end up having stories similar to the teachers of Color that I read about in dozens of research articles for graduate school. And yet, here I was.

Graduate School Critical Incident: Cohort Discussions

This final critical incident, from the graduate school category, consisted of assignments from professors and the research articles I had been reading about in preparation to write my thesis regarding the experiences of teachers of Color. Events in graduate school played an active role in preparing me to speak up in the colleague confrontation and in processing my emotions

and feelings surrounding the Atlanta shootings. Having been in graduate school for a year, at the time during the previous critical incident, the groundwork had been laid where I felt equipped and capable of standing up for myself in moments of injustice.

During this semester in graduate school, I was taking a class where the final project was a presentation on our analysis of a data set provided by the professor. The class was separated into groups that would meet each week to analyze data together. One week, we were assigned to code several interviews and present any immediate themes in class. Right before the Atlanta shootings, we had to code an interview where the participant referred to her refugee students as “boat kids” while contemplating their socioeconomic status. *Boat kids... I haven't heard that one before.* This reference made me uncomfortable as my parents were from some of the countries that this participant mentioned. It made me wonder and saddened me to think about how many teachers dismissed my parents while they were in school because they were boat kids. This pervasive thought echoed in my mind as I attempted to finish the assignment.

As my group came back together to discuss the codes that we found in the interviews, I mentioned the participant's comment referring to her students as boat kids. They validated my discomfort while helping to name the code that we had found. As a group, we shared this with our professor, addressing the racist undertones in the interview and how it can impact a researcher. I was so grateful that they heard me and stood behind me. Perhaps this experience was microscopic in hindsight, but that moment felt monumental where my classmates recognized my feelings and spoke out in solidarity.

Shortly after this, I was taking a different course where we picked articles from the assigned reading list to present on and lead a class discussion. Coincidentally, the article that I had to present on was “Curriculum as a Colonizer: (Asian) American Education in the United

States Context” by A. L. Goodwin (2010). Part of this article talked about a hidden model minority curriculum, which my cousins and I just cursed a few weeks prior in our family Zoom call. It summarized the distress that I felt during the colleague confrontation where I felt that I needed to keep my head down in order to avoid calling attention to myself even in times of injustice. It was this same idea that convinced me that I was not the right person to be presenting on this article. Instead of seeing my lived experience as a testament to the realities of being an Asian American in the U.S. education system to further support the ideas presented in the article, I felt that it might be better to share the article factually rather than add in personal anecdotes.

However, a classmate shared that reading this article helped her understand my comments from previous semesters about the dangers and weaponization of seeing Asians as a model minority. We had been in graduate school together for a year at this point, and I was glad that someone had actually heard me in all of those classes we had taken together.

Braiding the Strands Back Together

Now that these strands have been metaphorically unbraided in these critical incidents, it is important to put them back together. While separating out the individual categories and accounts of the overall braided experience, I highlighted moments in each section that referred back to another categorical strand. These moments of convergence indicate that although the events were happening at different times, in different places, and with different people, they were still connected. To remove one experience would diminish the magnitude of the others.

For example, the Atlanta shootings were prevalent in the colleague confrontation and in graduate school discussions. In the colleague confrontation, Mrs. Smith quite literally stated the opposite of what some news outlets were sharing by saying, “It isn’t just about Asian lives.” In graduate school, the validation from the classmate during the article discussion was comforting

in a time where realities of Asian Americans were being questioned. Without the Atlanta shootings, it is difficult to imagine that Mrs. Smith would have chosen the words that she did and that the comment from a classmate would have meant as much as it did.

Conversely, to separate graduate school from the overall experience minimizes my ability to properly discuss and process the events. Graduate school, particularly the first year, helped me understand moments of injustice and how to identify them and address them. This knowledge from graduate school was clear in the colleague confrontation as I discussed the magnitude of Mrs. Smith's actions with my principal and in how I helped with my family while they processed the Atlanta shootings and feelings of insecurity. Seeing these separate incidents as part of the overall braided experience supports the understanding that teaching requires the whole person rather than parts of our lived experiences.

Overarching Themes

Recounting the critical incident vignettes and reading them from a researcher perspective provided an opportunity to identify themes surrounding my experience as a Chinese American teacher in graduate school at a PWI during the COVID-19 pandemic. The three overarching themes within the vignettes are the importance of validation, the internalization of the Model Minority Myth, and the late racial identity development as a result of Asianization. These overarching themes were a result of data analysis and using the braid metaphor to clearly understand the data.

The Importance of Validation

Throughout the vignettes, there were several instances where validation was mentioned or celebrated. Across experiences in graduate school, in current events, and in the colleague confrontation, validation prevailed as perhaps the most obvious theme among the three. This was

also prevalent in each situation despite it being a positive or a negative racialized experience. Thus, validating lived experiences is important, especially from communities that are minimized or silenced.

In each experience, validation of my lived experiences came from others around me. During the aftermath of the Atlanta shootings, I felt that there was validation coming from the media as well as friends and family using the trending hashtags, #StopAsianHate and #AsianLivesMatter. In this vignette, there was a moment where I wrote “Finally! Someone gets it!” Validation in this moment meant that people were finally acknowledging the dangerous reality of being an Asian American during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the discussions in graduate school courses, validation came from classmates. In one class, classmates stood by my side while calling out racist undertones in assignments that we were given. In another class, validation came from a classmate who vocalized her understanding after remembering my previous comments and pairing that with an academic journal article about Asian Americans in the U.S. education system. In an academic setting, this validation signified that not only did peers acknowledge my perspective, they now had academic articles to support what I had shared. In the colleague confrontation vignette, numerous friends and family members shared my frustration while sympathizing with me. However, the most impactful was my coworker in whom I had confided and who shared my tears. “Her anger about the confrontation spoke volumes.” To this day, her response still speaks volumes and has helped in creating a safe and nurturing environment during a difficult time. This coworker valued my experiential knowledge, which is the fourth component of Critical Race Theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000).

Validating the experiences of marginalized communities is an important step in bettering these experiences. Historically, people from marginalized communities are unable or

uncomfortable sharing their stories, therefore limiting the existing narrative in many circumstances. In education, where teachers of Color are already lacking, the narrative surrounding teaching experiences is often based on those from White women. However, given the existing literature, it is clear that the experiences of teachers of Color can be vastly different from those of their White colleagues. Therefore, validating these realities for teachers of Color serves as a powerful initial step in bettering these experiences.

Internalizing the Model Minority Myth

Historically, Asian Americans have been part of a narrative outside of their control, the Model Minority Myth. This idea suggests that Asian Americans are the ideal minority group in comparison to other minority groups. Based on the selective economic and academic success of a particular ethnic group, Asian Americans have been deemed the model minority, particularly based on their ability to attain the American Dream. However, the damaging aspect of this narrative is that it pits minoritized groups against each other, using the success of a particular ethnic group within the Asian American population to degrade other minoritized communities. Additionally, it often suggests that Asian Americans do not experience racism, erases any variation among Asian American subgroups, and consistently positions Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners, reminding them of their history. The Model Minority Myth is damaging to many communities and is often used to push a particular image among Asian Americans.

Within the Model Minority Myth, it is implied that in order to be successful Asian Americans must “speak accent-free English; adopt European names, American food preferences, clothing styles, and other white middle-class markers; work hard and not challenge authority; and practice particular stereotypical Asian cultural factors” (Kim & Hsieh, 2022, p. 6). Throughout the vignettes, it became clear that many of these implied requirements were

internalized in how I approached each situation. I will focus particularly on the implied requirement of not challenging authority. Throughout my life, I had been taught to never challenge authority and to bite my tongue, no matter the circumstance. This lesson became evident in the vignettes as I reflected on moments of injustice and my reaction to them.

First, beginning with the vignette about the Atlanta shootings, the internalized aspect from the Model Minority Myth was present in how my family and I showed our outrage, fear, and grief surrounding the tragedy. For example, rather than openly discussing it with therapists or friends or sharing about it on social media, we opted to hold a private Zoom meeting. Publicly, we were biting our tongue in times of grief rather than calling out the hate crime for what it was. Additionally, in this situation, a comment that a family member had told me was to “keep your head down” to protect myself as the anti-Asian hate crimes increased across the United States. Again, this advice further perpetuates the quiet, meek image often portrayed for Asian Americans. In graduate school, I was unwilling to speak up alone about the discomfort that I felt during the coding assignment, especially if it meant discussing this with the professor. Instead, I followed a similar pattern that many Asian Americans follow which is keeping quiet about injustices or frustrating situations. This pattern also continued in the colleague confrontation where I was ready to figuratively turn the other cheek to maintain the peace. Instead of challenging authority, the tenured and more experienced teacher, I questioned my own reality and minimized my own experiences to maintain the same image that many people expect from Asian Americans.

The Model Minority Myth is harmful, however, internalizing it leads to much more damaging results. A result of internalizing the Model Minority Myth is convincing oneself that it is true. With this understanding comes the idea that perhaps racism against Asian Americans is

not real and that anything that is done that is not aligned with the Model Minority Myth is simply the individual's fault. Thus, internalization of the Model Minority Myth leads to heightened pressure with minimal room for failure or missteps as well as denial of racialized experiences. Denying the centrality of race and racism, which is common amongst Asian Americans that internalize the Model Minority Myth contradicts the first tenet of Critical Race Theory which is the centrality of race and racism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000).

Delayed Racial Identity Development as a Result of Asianization

As previously mentioned, Asianization is a part of the AsianCrit framework, describing the particular ways that Asians are racialized in society (Kim & Hseih, 2022). One particular result of the erasure and invisibility of Asian Americans is late racial identity development. As part the Model Minority Myth, Asian Americans are implicitly told to erase markers linking them to their Asian cultural identity. Kim and Hseih (2022) found instances in various studies where Asian Americans were “distancing from one’s Asian heritage, feeling racially invisible or diminishing the importance of one’s racial identity, shame toward Asian cultural identity, and late racial identity development” (p. 19). This late racial identity development as a result of Asianization was prevalent in the vignettes from this study.

Fortunately, much of the coursework in graduate school created opportunities for me to grapple with my racial identity which had previously been ignored. Essentially, graduate school set the groundwork for more in-depth racial identity development that otherwise may not have happened. However, many Asian American educators may not be in graduate school and have this opportunity. At the time of the Atlanta shootings, I had been in graduate school for about a year. I had opportunities to grapple with many of the difficult concepts that my family was just beginning to learn about such as the Model Minority Myth, perpetual foreigner, yellow peril, and

so forth. Yet, despite the multiple opportunities to thoroughly flesh out my thoughts in an academic setting, it was still clear that I had difficulty processing my emotions and realities throughout the events discussed in the vignettes. For example, during the colleague confrontation, I was in shock about what I had experienced even though academic literature suggested that this was a common experience. Being unable to process these feelings and accept the reality after each event supports notions related to my late racial identity development.

In each of the vignettes, the events rattled my comfort and security in my racial identity when it was emphasized for me. Meaning, that I struggled with accepting the reality when my racial identity was specified by someone or something other than myself. In the Atlanta shootings, news outlets were focusing on the race of the victims, and this aligned with how I self-identified. In the colleague confrontation, I felt that Mrs. Smith was specifying Asian lives because of how I identified. Additionally, in graduate school, I felt pushed to discuss my own racial identity because of the content that was presented to me. In each instance, I was not prepared to discuss my racial identity but felt forced to do so because of the circumstances. Perhaps if I were more comfortable with my racial identity and had openly acknowledged it throughout my life previously, these events would not have impacted me the way they did. Yet, as a result of Asianization and consistent pressure to mask my Asian identity, I was slightly ignorant of how prevalent my racial identity was in my life.

Summary

The metaphorical braid was an effective way to conceptualize and understand the interrelated nature of the three categories (current events, teaching, and graduate school) and their representative critical incidents. Additionally, the three overarching themes were consistent throughout the vignettes, despite the different settings and people that were involved. Thus, the

reality of being a Chinese American teacher in graduate school at a PWI during the COVID-19 pandemic included the themes of the importance of validation, the roles of allies and support structures, and continuous racial identity development. This reality provides a context to better understand how my own lived experience may contribute to greater understanding of the experiences of other teachers of Color.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

There continues to be a discrepancy between the demographics of the student population in K-12 public schools and the teacher workforce (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021; Wang & Dinkes, 2020). With this comes an absence of stories from teachers of Color (Carter, 1993), especially Asian American teachers (Kim & Cooc, 2020), which limits narratives surrounding teacher experiences. However, the existing research regarding the experiences of teachers of Color suggests that many face racialized experiences in their teacher preparation programs (Brown, 2014; Montecinos, 2004; Navarro et al., 2019) and in the workplace (Borrero et al., 2016; Gist, 2017; Kelly, 2007; Lee, 2013). This study aimed to highlight the experiences of a Chinese American teacher in graduate school at a PWI during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this section, I will discuss the findings from this autoethnographic study, share implications for this work, address any limitations, and suggest areas for future research.

Teaching is a “Whole Person” Job

The findings from this study support the idea that teaching is a holistic job, meaning that a teacher draws on several, if not all, areas of their lives to influence their teaching practice (Chow, 2020). An important ideal in education is for teachers to educate the whole child rather than just the side of the child that teachers see in their classrooms (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). This same ideal should extend beyond students and towards the human beings that are teaching the students. Osguthorpe (2008) asserts that teachers have a “moral and professional obligation to present an accurate picture of themselves to their students. There is a kind of social contract at work here that requires teachers to be what they convey— to be who they say they are” (p. 292). Thus, it is important that teachers’ experiences, particularly outside of the classroom, are

acknowledged in order to portray an accurate and authentic image of themselves to their students.

In this study, a braid metaphor was a powerful tool to portray the inextricable nature of the separate strands, or areas of my overall experience. When examining the critical incidents in their separate strands, there were numerous moments of convergence where critical incidents from other strands were referenced. Thus, understanding a teacher's experience is much like understanding a braid and how separate areas contribute to the overall experience. Teachers draw on their background as part of their teaching practice (Chow, 2020). Limiting their background and what they are experiencing outside of the classroom walls would paint an inaccurate picture of who they are.

Roles of Allies and Support Structures

An overarching theme in the findings of this study focused on the importance of validation from various allies and support structures in different aspects of my life. Colleagues, friends on social media, family members, and/or classmates in graduate school all served as allies, offering support in difficult experiences. This is similar to the work of Gist (2019), finding solidarity in intentional communities while also affirming the racialized realities for many teachers of Color. Despite working in a profession filled with people, feeling isolated is not an uncommon experience for teachers of Color (Borrero et al., 2016; Kelly, 2007; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016), particularly those that are tokenized at their schools (Endo, 2015; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). As the only Asian American teacher at my school, the findings from this study echo previous studies that suggest the importance of developing allies (Utt & Tochluck, 2020).

Additionally, it is important that support structures are put in place to affirm and nurture the identities of teachers of Color. Upon admission to graduate school, I was introduced to

several teachers of Color in my cohort who greatly improved my experiences in graduate school and overall life as a teacher. This intentional community served as a support structure in graduate school, as suggested by Gist (2018), that had benefits for my teaching experience as well. Much like Gist (2018) suggests, a lack of support structures for teachers of Color raises the question of whether schools value the retention of teachers of Color. It is important to incorporate support structures (Cutri et al., 1998) filled with allies for teachers of Color to heal (Gist, 2019), feel affirmed and supported (Borrero et al., 2016; Navarro et al., 2019), and share their stories that are often silenced (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016) or erased (Rodríguez & Kim, 2019).

Continuously Developing Racial Identity

Kim (2012) defines racial identity as “a person’s identification with membership in a socially designated racial group” (p. 139). This racial identity is important, particularly as some Asian Americans accept and reject their racial identity in lieu of their ethnic identity (Kim, 2012). However, Asian Americans are subject to Asianization (Iftikar & Museus, 2018), which often pressures Asian Americans to mask their racial identity (Kim & Hseih, 2022). Masking, or hiding one’s racial identity, was a common term used by participants in a study by Lee (2013). Consistent masking of one’s racial identity can often lead to internalizing invisibility and erasure (Kim & Hseih, 2022). If Asian Americans continue to hide parts of who they are, they accept that their racial identity is unimportant.

However, as unimportant and invisible as some Asian Americans might feel, their stories, including those involving their careers as teachers, are important to share. The lack of Asian American experiences in educational research (Kim & Cooc, 2020; Sheets & Chew, 2002) may be due to never being asked to share experiences (Kim & Hseih, 2022), feeling the need to silence themselves because of an absence of representation in curriculum (Rodríguez & Kim,

2019), or because of the Model Minority Myth (Kim & Hseih, 2022). Yet, like Rodríguez and Kim (2019), this study is intended to reclaim my experience as an Asian American woman and teacher. Conducting this study not only answers the call from Sheets and Chew (2002) for more studies around Chinese American teachers, which was published twenty years ago, but it does so in a time of racial reckoning for Asian Americans in times of heightened violence (Cost, 2021).

Figuratively “unmasking” my racial identity throughout this study allows for thorough and continuous development. However, it should be noted that the critical incidents mentioned in this study somewhat unmasked my racial identity, whether I was ready to engage in the process for not. Either way, honestly accepting my racial identity during difficult times for Asian Americans (Rogers et al., 2021) led to more personal growth and development, particularly my developing racial identity.

Implications

There are implications for both research and practice from this study. In practice, these implications extend to both school settings and teacher preparation programs. While these implications certainly will not eliminate racialized experiences for teachers of Color, it can help inform and possibly alleviate some of the difficulty that comes with them. The first implication from these findings is creating intentional community groups for teachers of Color and teacher candidates of Color. Encouraging teacher preparation programs to include more opportunities for identity development, particularly racial identity, is another related implication of this work. Creating intentional communities for teachers of Color and teacher candidates of Color aligns with the first overarching theme of the importance of validation. Having a group that can empathize not only validates racialized experiences but combats feelings of isolation that several researchers (Borrero et al., 2016; Gist, 2017; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020) found in their studies.

Intentional communities for teachers of Color can be healing and affirming, where teachers can find solidarity amongst each other (Gist, 2019). These intentional communities can be created in numerous settings such as in teacher preparation programs, graduate programs, school districts, and so forth. Having an intentional community for teachers of Color and teacher candidates of Color allows them to turn to their peers in times of racialized distress instead of internalizing those feelings. The importance of having a supportive community was evident in this study through my peers in graduate school courses, my friends and family during tragic current events for Asian Americans, and colleagues during the confrontation with another coworker.

Another implication of this work involves creating more opportunities for identity development, particularly racial identity, in teacher preparation programs. Lee (2013) found that many teachers of Color mask their racial identity in the school setting to protect themselves. Kim and Hsieh (2022) add to this finding by asserting that masking one's racial identity could also be a part of Asianization. While there are outstanding factors that push one to mask their racial identity (Shrake, 2006), it is possible that masking may be less common if teachers of Color were more comfortable with their racial identity. In a synthesis of studies including AAPI teachers, Kim and Cooc (2020) found a common theme from participants wishing for more opportunities to examine their own racial identity and engage in conversations about inequality. By having more of these opportunities in teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates of Color have a chance to examine their own racial identity development while all teacher candidates, regardless of race, can openly and deeply engage in conversations about educational inequalities and inequities. Many of the conversations and assignments in graduate school helped me understand my own racial identity better; however, that opportunity is not always available to other teachers

of Color. This helped me in processing better many of the events that were placed on the timeline.

While it is the hope that these implications can inform and improve the experiences of teachers of Color, I acknowledge that these implications serve as one out of many avenues to create better experiences for both teacher candidates of Color and teachers of Color. It is important that action is taken to better these experiences as research continues to show that there is a lack of teachers of Color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021) and a higher attrition rate among teachers of Color (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Additionally, by structurally supporting teachers of Color, it can open the avenues of communication from many silenced communities such as Asian American teachers.

Future Research

This study aimed to add to the scarcity of literature regarding the experiences of teachers of Color, especially Asian American teachers in a time of racial reckoning. A continued lack of stories from Asian American teachers further silences a population that is often characterized by silence and invisibility. By reclaiming our own histories and experiences as Asian Americans (Rodríguez & Kim, 2019), we are able to dismantle harmful stereotypes. Additional research surrounding the experiences of teachers of Color, particularly Asian American teachers, will continue to be necessary as they continue to be a part of the teacher workforce. For example, this study could be replicated with other Asian American teachers who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, similar studies with a variety of teachers of Color during the COVID-19 pandemic would be beneficial to understanding the impact of setting, as there was a lot of racial unrest in the Summer of 2020. This would add to the findings from this study, inform the field, and center the experiences of teachers of Color.

Limitations

This study is meant to add to the existing research surrounding the experiences of teachers of Color. While this study has implications of how to improve practice and research, it is not without limitations. Limitations were considered in the design of this study and measures were taken to address limitations throughout the course of this work. This study used autoethnographic methods, which some researchers have pointed out has limitations (Lather, 2003). With this approach, I served as both the researcher as well as the participant in the study, and this may raise concerns regarding subjectivity. To address this concern, I took consistent pauses throughout data collection and analysis for moments of reflection. This allowed me allotted time to remove myself as the participant and resituate myself as the researcher. Belbase et al. (2008) compare using an autoethnographic approach to using a camera where the pictures may be overshadowed or emphasized by the photographer. I drew from this comparison in my approach to this work and see the autoethnographic approach as a process that allowed me to capture the rare, unheard, and often unseen moments of being a Chinese American teacher in graduate school at a PWI during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another limitation is the emphasis on one person with only their specific experiences. This study cannot speak for all Asian American teachers or teachers of Color during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the findings from this study are based on existing literature that involves different participants of varying races, in different locations, in different time periods, and in different stages of their careers. Researchers have shared similar ideas regarding the holistic nature of teaching (Chow, 2020), the importance of validating experiences from minoritized groups (Carter, 1993), the internalization of the Model Minority Myth (Kim, 2012; Kim & Hsieh, 2022), and delayed racial identity development as a result of Asianization (Kim & Hsieh,

2022). Personally, I was able to benefit from reading the existing literature about the experiences of other teachers of Color, despite the difference in racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Conclusion

Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic as an Asian American woman proved to be a multifaceted experience. Utilizing the inextricable nature of a braid, the findings from this study inform questions regarding the experiences of a Chinese American teacher in graduate school during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to understand that teaching is a whole person job, the need for strong allies and support structures for all teachers of Color, and the continuous development of racial identity, particularly in times of racial reckoning. Implications include intentional communities for teachers of Color to nurture and affirm their realities and additional, explicit opportunities for identity development, particularly racial identity development, in teacher preparation programs. Sharing my own experiences as a Chinese American teacher in graduate school during the COVID-19 pandemic allows me to “[find] community in shared truths, and [fight] for recognition of our unique experiences as Asian Americans and as individuals” (Kim & Hsieh, 2022, p. 33). Examining our own lived experiences and those outside of ourselves and our socially constructed groups is a step towards increased acceptance, empathy, and understanding.

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APPENDIX

Methodology Tables**Table A1***Methodology Steps*

Step Number	Action
Step 1	Determine the time period of the study
Step 2	Gather artifacts (plan books, syllabi, class notes, lesson plans, current events articles from different categories to place events on the timeline.
Step 3	Create a physical timeline of the time period for the study
Step 4	Sift through artifacts to elicit memories associated with the artifacts. Place events on timeline. Events should be color coded by category.
Step 5	Write one paragraph memos for each event on the timeline
Step 6	Pick one memo from each category to expound into a vignette
Step 7	Code each vignette on at a time, looking for commonalities
Step 8	Identify recurring themes amongst the codes
Step 9	Collapse codes into categories
Step 10	Condense categories into overarching themes
Step 11	Look over overarching themes using a Critical Race Theory lens

Table A2*Data Codes*

Code	Description	Example
Emotions	References to various emotions such as grief, anger, sadness, relief, etc.	“Mrs. Smith repeatedly told the principal that it was never her intention to hurt me.”
Solidarity	References to people showing solidarity in times of racism	“my classmates recognized my feelings and spoke out in solidarity.”
Social Media	References to hashtags, Twitter, and Facebook	“The hashtags, #StopAsianHate and #AsianLivesMatter, began trending on social media”
Self Gaslighting	References to questioning my own reality and understanding of event	“But, I still questioned whether perhaps I misunderstood her”
Needing to Teach Others	References to feeling the need or having to teach others in times of racism about the impact of racism	“I had to present on was “Curriculum as a Colonizer: (Asian) American Education in the United States Context” by A.L. Goodwin (2010)”
Freeze as a Trauma Response	References of freezing as a trauma response during critical incidents	“And it’s not just about Asian lives!” <i>Wait a damn minute.</i> ”
Hearing Me	References to other people hearing me when I shared my reality	“I was so grateful that they heard me and stood behind me”
Fear	References to fear of violence and discrimination	“Not too long ago, my family and I were questioning when, not if, our turn would be to face anti-Asian violence.”
Family	References to family members	“what if this man had been in my hometown? The same hometown that my family lived where my beloved aunties worked in similar beauty salons. “

Code	Description	Example
Talking to People	References to talking to people during or immediately after critical incidents	“Following this conversation, I confided in a close colleague who shared my same tears over the situation.”
Anger of Allies	References to speaking up in moments of injustice and racism	“Her anger about this confrontation spoke volumes.”
Flying Under the Radar	References the unspoken need to fly under the radar or be invisible to society and those around me	<i>“Be aware of your surroundings. Try to travel in groups. Don’t stay out past dark. Keep your head down. Stay home as much as you can.”</i>
Singling Out a Particular Community	References to other people singling out a specific community, the Asian American community	“She even specified that it was not just about Asian lives to me, the <i>only</i> Asian American teacher in the school.”
Intent	References on the intent behind the racism	“Mrs. Smith repeatedly told the principal that it was never her intention to hurt me.”
Staying Silent	References to staying silent rather than speak out against injustice	“I chose to leave the conversation.”