

How White Workers Navigate Racial Difference in the Workplace: Social-emotional processes and the role of workplace racial composition

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Abstract

Research on racialized emotions and racialized organizations has begun to inform how we understand social interactions in the workplace and their implications for racial inequality. However, most research to date focuses on the experiences and coping strategies of racial minority workers, especially when confronted with instances of racial prejudice and discrimination. We extend research on racialized emotions in the workplace by mapping the stages of belonging/unbelonging white workers go through when they encounter instances of racial discomfort or perceived prejudice in the workplace. This is an important contribution to the study of race and work because existing research suggests the deleterious effects for people of color when white people experience negative emotions such as threat, fear, and anxiety in interracial encounters. Drawing on interview data with 56 white teachers in a metropolitan area in the U.S. Southeast, we document a process of racialized belonging. This is a process whereby white workers experienced varying degrees of surprise, confusion, frustration, and fear resulting from interracial – and some intraracial – experiences with coworkers as well as students. We note how the process is informed by racialized imprinting prior to workplace entry and followed by racialized emotions and racialized coping. Racial composition of the workplace also played a role, though the process looked similar across contexts. We argue that by accounting for white workers' prior life experiences as well as organizations' involvement in accommodating their emotional expectations, the way white workers behave when race becomes salient to them can be better understood and addressed.

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How White Workers Navigate Racial Difference in the Workplace: Social-emotional processes and the role of workplace racial composition

Research on the social experience of work repeatedly suggests that having things in common with coworkers tends to improve social support and feelings of belonging. Often, sharing social identities fosters the perception of having things in common (McPherson et al., 2001; Reagans, 2011). In their activities, coworkers can affirm their group identities (e.g., gender, class) through everyday rituals and banter, which safeguards their dignity at work (Hodson, 2001). Shared race, age, or immigration status can pave the way for effective collaboration (DiBenigno & Kellogg, 2014). In addition, the setting one works in can make experiences of belonging more accessible. For instance, the racial composition of the workplace can accelerate the formation of supportive social ties when there are higher proportions of one's own race represented (Sloan et al., 2013).

A related line of research on the social experience of work focuses on emotions in the workplace. Besides supportive emotional experiences with similar others, research has uncovered that occupational roles often require one to sympathize with customers or show deference to superiors. This emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) and reciprocal emotion management (Lively, 2000), respectively, maintains structures of inequality at work by solidifying status differences. Advances in this research point out that emotional inequalities in professional workplaces, like much of our understanding of what happens in organizations, are not race-neutral. That is, even when doing similar jobs as their white colleagues, Black workers must abide by “racialized feeling rules” whereby they suppress or manufacture their feelings to conform with expectations in their majority-white work environments (Wingfield, 2010).

What these lines of research have not addressed is what the social-emotional experiences of white workers are like in workplaces where they are the racial numerical minority, as

compared to the more common scenario of white workers in majority-white workplaces. A better understanding of each of these scenarios will underscore further how racialized feeling rules (Wingfield, 2010) operate – in this case, for white people. It is practically important to understand white people's distinctive emotions in race relations for the well-being of racial minority workers. Indeed, existing research suggests that when white people experience negative emotions such as threat, fear, anxiety, etc. as they encounter inter-racial differences between themselves and others, there are often deleterious effects and outcomes for people of color (Stephan & Stephan, 1984; Correll et al., 2007).

Drawing on in-depth interviews with 56 white teachers across majority-white and majority-Black workplaces, we identify a three-part social-emotional process that helps explain how white workers interpret and react to being racially different from their colleagues and/or students – or to becoming aware of their own racial group (Lewis, 2004). We theorize and demonstrate with data that, by accounting for white workers' prior life experiences as well as organizations' involvement in accommodating their emotional expectations, the way white workers behave when race becomes salient to them can be better understood.

BACKGROUND

To extend theory on racialized feeling rules (Wingfield, 2010) and racialized emotions (Bonilla-Silva, 2019) – that is, the emotional subjectivity that fits a group's location in the racial order – in the workplace, we synthesize relevant literature within the sociology of race and the sociology of work. We start by reviewing research on race and emotion in the workplace and the role of workplace racial composition. We then incorporate a second body of literature relevant to the topic, but seldom considered in studies of work: white people's racial identity and racial socialization.

Racialized emotions in work organizations

Organizational life and work arrangements are rife with emotion (Fineman, 2000). Early research on emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) and emotion management (Lively, 2000) shows that in especially service-oriented occupations, workers are often expected to do their work with a specific emotional feeling or display. Wingfield (2010) extends these theories to show how rules around the kinds of emotional expression that are and are not acceptable in workplaces are racialized; that is, the “normative feeling rules” pervasive in organizations are not race-neutral. For instance, displays of pride and arrogance are not received similarly across race, demonstrated by the finding that Black football players are penalized with lower compensation (whereas White players were not) when they celebrate touchdowns (Hall & Livingston, 2012). In addition, in the face of troubling and harmful racial dynamics in professional workplaces, the emotion management in which Black workers often engage includes amplifying pleasant emotions while concealing or staying silent about emotions of irritation, anger, and fear of adverse consequences (Wingfield, 2010).

Black workers appear to modulate their emotional responses to challenging race relations in the workplace, despite their frequent encounters with racially discriminatory treatment on-the-job (Bell & Nkomo, 2003; Fiske & Lee, 2008; Cha & Roberts, 2019) and in society as a whole (Leigh & Melwani, 2019; McCluney, Bryant, King, & Ali, 2017). Lacy and Harris (2008) propose that Black professionals level their expectations for positive race relations in general, given their reported pessimism about racial progress. For example, instead of expressing anger when slighted by white colleagues, Black respondents in Lacy’s study recounted such instances “matter-of-factly, as if what they endured happens routinely to Black people” (Lacy, 2007:110).

White workers’ emotional responses to moments when race becomes salient in their job are less well documented and understood, in part due to a prevailing assumption in both

organizations and research that white people's emotions are race-neutral – in other words, not something to be studied or articulated in racial terms (Ray, 2019). A handful of studies on white people in the workplace suggest that white people engage in affective processes at work that differ from workers of color. For instance, at a baseline level, Sloan et al. (2013) show that white workers report significantly fewer positive workplace emotional experiences and more negative ones than Black workers, even though they worked in jobs with more task variety and autonomy, had more social ties, and more perceived support. In a study of emotion work among school principals, Ispa-Landa and Thomas (2019) find that white women struggled to balance feeling supportive and being authoritative as a manager, whereas women of color did not. Not all emotions tied to “feeling race” are negative for white people, however; Bonilla-Silva (2019) implores scholars of race to document also feelings of pleasure produced by racial domination. Indeed, an ethnographic study of white men working at a baking company showed they used racial epithets in their workplace which, even if rooted in anxiety, they enjoyed with shared laughter (Embrick & Henricks, 2013).

In the present paper, we choose to further research on the emotional aspects of being racially different (from colleagues and clients) specifically among white workers. This holds promise to extend theory on racialized emotions; advance our understanding of racial dynamics in service-oriented occupations (Nelson & Vallas, 2021); as well as better inform numbers-based theories in organizational demography research (e.g., Kanter, 1977), to which we now turn.

Racial composition in the workplace

In recognizing the importance of emotional expressions in organizations in reinforcing racial inequality therein, Ray (2019) emphasizes that the expressions of people of color are limited by organizational routines and rules, while white people's expressions are prioritized.

This theory assumes a similar pattern regardless of the organization's racial composition. However, a robust literature on composition effects demonstrates that numerical representation of members in work groups also shapes social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (see DiTomaso et al., 2007 for a review). Drawing from studies of workplace social relations in predominantly male or female occupations, we learn that there are disadvantages on the structural and interpersonal level for female tokens (Kanter, 1977) but not for male tokens (Williams, 1992). Williams studied male teachers and nurses who comprised less than 15% of their occupation; Kanter's female sales workers also comprised less than 15% of their corporation. While these studies focus on extreme numerical minorities, or "tokens," Kanter postulates that even somewhat numerically imbalanced settings will generate degrees of intergroup tension, hampering the group that has lower representation (henceforth referred to as "numerical minorities"). Her approach to demography, described using "Xs" and "Os," is agnostic to status differences. In other words, according to classic compositional theories, the amount of representation of the numerical minority group can explain much about the social reception they will receive and barriers they will face, irrespective of status differences between groups.

However, other scholars argue that status positions in society (i.e., being the dominant group) and cultural schemas numerical minorities bring to the workplace create structures of advantage or disadvantage, more than their mere numbers (Choi, 2017; Turco, 2010; Williams, 1992). For instance, Williams found that male elementary school teachers did not face disadvantages in being hired or promoted, though they often had to cope with gender stereotyping from their female colleagues and prejudices from clients (i.e., students' parents). These obstacles are less severe than the structural barriers to success at work that Kanter (1977) documented among female tokens in a corporate setting, which included performance pressures,

out-group exclusion, and constricted role expectations from their male colleagues. Moreover, taking a cultural approach to studying composition effects, Turco found that employees' knowledge of sports references created gendered differences between Black men and white women for fitting into their majority-white leverage buyout industry, where they were both numerically tokenized groups.

Intersectional approaches to studying the numerical minority experience further elucidate how both race and gender are critical to shaping what that experience looks (and in some cases, feels) like. For example, white men who are numerically tokenized often still reap instrumental benefits, such as quick promotion (Williams, 1992); white women often experience social exclusion, sexual harassment, and a greater burden of emotional labor (Paap, 2006); Black men encounter obstacles to promotion and building professional networks (Wingfield, 2012); and Black women face sexual harassment, racial discrimination from colleagues and clients, and assignment to undesirable posts (Davis, 2016).

Following status-based research on composition effects, we might expect that white people working in workplaces where they are in the numerical minority might encounter more race-based stereotypes from colleagues and perhaps prejudice from their clients (i.e. students), but not material disadvantages in their work, compared to white people working in majority-white contexts (see also Nelson, 2019). We turn now to consider another source of white people's reactions to racial difference: a lack of prior experience with the stresses of being a numerical minority, which may prime them to react with dismay or "culture shock" when facing token-like experiences in the workplace and may stymie their development of emotional strategies to cope (Maume & Sebastian, 2007; Mueller et al., 1999; Renzulli et al., 2011).

The Development of racialized emotions

Before entering an occupation and during their upbringing, workers undergo racial socialization with lasting effects into adulthood (Hagerman, 2018; Lacy & Harris, 2008; Trawalter, Richeson, & Shelton, 2009). We aim to incorporate what is known about sources of white racial identity development (Helms, 1990) and racial/ethnic group identification processes (Fiske & Lee, 2008; Verkuyten, Drabbles, & van den Nieuwenhuijzen, 1999) more fully into understandings of white people's racialized emotions in the workplace. As such, we consider past stages of development in other institutions as relevant to our argument. Outside of work settings, individuals' prior and ongoing racial socialization in the contexts of family, neighborhood, and school have important implications for how they will interact with racially dissimilar others in other organizational contexts, such as the workplace.

In family-based racial socialization, white parents typically do not discuss race with their children (Scottham & Smalls, 2009; Hagerman, 2018). As a point of comparison, for Black parents, racial socialization is deemed important for survival, as parents prepare Black youth to “grapple effectively with racism” (Lacy & Harris, 2008:173) in scenarios that are potentially damaging to minority children's positive self-image and chances at success or dangerous to their safety and well-being. Conversely, white parents report they do not think about race when parenting (Hamm, 2001), think raising the topic of race with their kids is not necessary (Derman-Sparks, Phillips, & Hilliard, 1997), or raise the topic only in individual terms without acknowledging group-level privilege (Underhill, 2017).¹ Subsequently, in adolescence and adulthood, white people are unaccustomed to thinking about race as part of their culture (Lewis, 2004). As such, it may be shocking for white people suddenly to realize there is even a “white culture.” And, while not explicitly about race, white parenting strategies also prioritize white

¹ These findings are under the assumption of monoracial families, but research on multi-racial families suggests some similar patterns, such as that nonblack children tend to receive silent racial socialization (Rollins & Hunter, 2013).

children's emotional well-being in ways that bolster their status, such as by advocating for schools to change their policies or moving children to a private school (Warikoo, 2020).

In the contexts of neighborhood and school, white people's hyper-segregation from Black people conditions their emotions and views about racial groups, fostering a positive view of white people vis-à-vis Black people and normalizing behaviors of racial exclusion (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick, 2006). The discomfort of interracial interactions can induce stress as well, because they are more effortful than in-group interactions for both white people and racial minorities (Richeson & Sommers, 2016). Counter to these outcomes, attending desegregated schools as children is associated with having less fear of racial outgroups and more civic engagement (see Orfield & Lee, 2004 for a review), as well as greater intergroup sociability and lower intergroup prejudice – again, this holds for racial minorities as well as for white people (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Siegel-Hawley, 2020). Indeed, preadult integration experiences – if they apply to white young adults as they do to the Black young adults in Smith and Moore's (2000) study – follow people into adulthood, hastening interracial closeness and even slowing intra-racial relations.

Taken together, by including workers' past and concurrent racial contexts outside of the workplace in our study of racialized emotions in the workplace, we can more clearly see possible sources of the social-emotional expectations white workers bring to their employing organizations. These expectations are important because of their potential for reproducing racial stratification in the workplace, if organizations accommodate some racial groups' (i.e., white people's) expectations with opportunity for expression, and not others (i.e., people of color) (Ray, 2019).

CONTEXT, DATA AND METHODS

The Institutional Context of Schools

Public K12 schools in the US are a good setting for studying questions about racial relations in the workplace, including aspects of individuals' prior socialization and how these may relate to their emotions regarding race. Indeed, feelings are shaped by histories, which may be invisible if feelings are considered only as psychological states in isolation from their social and institutional roots (see Ahmed, 2004). Workers' own schooling experiences are relevant for understanding emotion in all lines of work, but especially in the occupation of teaching where prior school experiences serve as a form of secondary professional socialization (Lortie, 2002). And, relevant to race, schools are historic sites of racial segregation, starting with mandated "separate but equal" facilities, followed by integration orders – upon which white resistance, white flight, disinvestment from Black schools, and second-wave desegregation orders ensued. In this way, schools as persistently and largely segregated spaces are the product of racism and white supremacy (Gray, Johnson, Kish-Gephart, & Tilton, 2018; Orfield & Eaton, 1996). What it means to grow up in a society structured for white achievement, gains, and knowledge in a way that is perceived as race-neutral should be highly visible in a study of white teachers.

Against the backdrop of schools as local and racially segregated institutions, we add to studies that show how schools may be sites of racial domination or exclusion for their inhabitants. While the work of Cherng and Halpin (2016), Hardie and Tyson (2013), Lewis and Diamond (2015), and many others consider how feelings of (un)belonging matter for students' experiences and outcomes, especially in terms of student-teacher racial dynamics, we consider how they matter as work sites where racial inequality and white privilege are (re)produced among teachers in their relations with one another.

Further, for exploring questions of how racial composition affects white workers' experiences of or struggles with race relations, schools as workplaces provide organizational

settings where white people can be found in the numerical minority and people of color in the numerical majority. According to the 2015–16 National Teacher and Principal Survey administered by the US Department of Education, this is the case in about 10 percent of public schools. This is a unique opportunity for organizational researchers, as such demographic compositions are less common in other industries and rarely appear in existing organizational demography research.

Research setting and sample

Because this study examines the influence of workplace demographics on white workers' experiences of being demographically different, the first author purposefully selected work sites (i.e., schools) with varying demographics for inclusion in the study. The schools are all traditional public high schools from two spatially proximate school districts in one metropolitan area in the Southeastern United States. The research design features multiple sites ($n=5$) rather than only one majority-white site and one majority-Black site, because this allows for both across-type and within-type comparisons. Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the schools.

--- TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE. ---

Data collection

The first author conducted interviews with 56 white teachers from these five schools while spending one full academic year (2014-2015) in them. Participant selection occurred in two stages: first, volunteers to the study responded to the first author's announcement of the study at a beginning-of-year faculty meeting. Second, the first author recruited the bulk of respondents individually, after identifying ideal candidates using a case-pair matching method based on analysis of a complete list of school personnel and their demographic information. The author who collected data chose this selection approach (Nielsen, 2016) up front, because she thought about the importance of ensuring a balanced sample across schools, as well as samples

within schools that would minimize demographic differences between those who enrolled in the study as a whole and those who did not. All individuals approached agreed to be interviewed, a rare feat in qualitative research, but was likely facilitated by the first author's regular presence in the school buildings and her ease gaining access and navigating the spaces, having herself worked in one of the districts as a teacher three years prior to the study.² Moreover, her presence in the school buildings enabled her to interact with teachers not enrolled in the interview portion of the study during their regular work days, and conversations in passing with them supported the same insights emerging from the interviews. The matching strategy along with the multi-method approach, we believe, reduced potential selection effects.

The sample size reflects the number of teachers that needed to be recruited to have demographically equivalent teachers by about ten category combinations of age, years of experience, and teaching certification background (i.e., traditional or alternative certification) across the five schools. The resulting sample included n=10 teachers from School 1, n=10 teachers from School 2, n=13 teachers from School 3, n=14 teachers from School 4, and n=9 teachers from School 5.

Respondent race is operationalized based on teacher's race listed in state administrative files as well as respondent's own reports of their racial identity, which aligned in all cases. The interview sample's average of 4-9 years of experience in their school mirrors that of the sample population, and the sample's average age of 37 is slightly lower than the sample population average of 42.³ The interview sample is 25 percent male, slightly less reflective of the population

² The first author knew six of the respondents from when she was a teacher.

³ In all schools except Suburban Center High, where teachers over 50 years old are the largest group (40%), teachers in their 30's are the predominant group.

which is 40 percent male.⁴ Interviews included questions about respondents' daily work routines, whom they consulted for various needs and why, and their experiences working with colleagues and students from different demographic groups. Interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Because they revealed employees' own language around and interpretation of their lived experiences of being different – from when they first entered their workplace to the present – interview data were our primary data source. When treated as experts in their own culture and actions, informants in the research interviews provide rich data from the point of view of the ones living it (Spradley, 1979). In addition, by using a loosely structured interview, we elicited data-dense interviews which centered on respondents' accounts, where the interviewer's role focused on follow-up and clarification questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We had interviews with Black teachers (n=35) in the same schools, as well as ethnographic data, available as secondary data sources, which we used to verify and contextualize findings from the interviews with white teachers. This data was collected concurrently, as the first author shadowed those she interviewed, taking field notes as she observed their classroom instruction, ran workplace errands to the office, and attended staff meetings. Another data source was surveys, administered concurrently with interviews, which we use solely for information about teachers' racial identification, current and past social activities, and social class origins.

Research Sites

In addition to having distinctive demographic compositions, the organizational cultures in the five schools as they pertained to race varied. The leadership in the two schools with majority-

⁴ Because the research sites in this study were at the high secondary level, gender imbalance was less pronounced than in the teaching profession at large. For instance, in four of the schools, male representation was 40%–48%, and Suburban Center High was 30% male. We therefore focus primarily on race in our analysis, but note in our findings where intersections of minority status for white males are pronounced.

Black faculty – schools we are giving the descriptive nicknames of “Pride High [School]” and “Ready High” – was all Black, and they spoke to teachers about their responsibility to do their best job for the sake of the children. On the occasion that teachers would express being frustrated with difficulties reaching parents, administrators admonished teachers to take full responsibility for their students’ achievement and behavior. This pertained to race through coded language; the administrators openly acknowledged when addressing faculty that they were in a high-poverty urban district but that its problems were not so different from neighboring majority-white suburban schools’ – only that the urban schools’ problems gained more attention in local media. In both Pride High and Ready High, teachers reported seeing their school as “the Black school” in “the Black district.” One principal (in the school with 29% white faculty) also mentioned her support of students’ activity in a Black Lives Matter event. The other principal (in the school with 35% white faculty) felt it was important for the Black students in his school to have some experience interacting with white teachers so they would be prepared for higher education and work scenarios post-high school.

In the majority-white faculty schools, the organizational cultures as they pertained to race varied slightly. In the two schools with majority-white students (each with about 90% white faculty) – which we assign the descriptive names of Suburban Center High and Sunshine School, in reference to their location and the nickname teachers gave their school, respectively– white teachers would frequently mention the idea of “reverse racism” when discussing news events or the majority-Black urban school district with each other or the first author. In lessons to their students, they would refer to the city (which had an 82 percent African-American population) as a bad place to run a business or as having chaotic schools, compared to their suburb (which was

93 percent white). Teachers also used culture of poverty⁵ language when they discussed with one another their Black students (25 percent of the enrollment) – i.e., that the values of Black students’ segregated neighborhoods made it impossible for them to aspire for better educational outcomes. The Black students in their school predominantly came from a proximate town in the county, which as part of desegregation orders was incorporated into the school in 1991. This history of integration was nominal in the sense that Black students had their own buses and were primarily placed together in classes. In these two schools, upper-level leadership was majority-white.

In the third school in the study with majority-white faculty (81% white), Shifting High, the principal was Black as was most of the student population. The organizational culture was welcoming to the minority Black faculty to the point that they thought of the other majority-white schools in their suburban district as “too white” for them. The white teachers, conversely, often lamented their school’s demographic shift over the past 10 years, saying the student academic and behavior record was better before the student population changed from majority-white to majority-Black. In interviews, many white teachers from this school also voiced considerable conflict with their prior principal, who was also Black and was terminated for her alleged knowledge of teacher misconduct. Many white teachers felt that as their former teaching colleague, she should not have been promoted to principal. However, in interviews with Black teachers, white colleagues’ resistance to being led by a Black woman was cited as the problem.

Data Analysis

In very early stages of this analysis, our broad understanding of what the interview data contained were informed by writing descriptive memos about the first author’s experience of

⁵ The culture of poverty refers to the ideas of Oscar Lewis, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and others that poor children are socialized into behaviors that prevent upward mobility (Massey & Denton, 1994).

conducting the interviews.⁶ In the majority-Black settings, respondents seemed eager and comfortable talking about how racial differences mattered to them. In the majority-white sites, white respondents often immediately interpreted the question “how, if at all, do you see that race matters in this school?” as being about racism and race as a problem in their schools.

In our next step of analysis, we thoroughly coded all interview data. Transcripts were first analyzed using a combination of line-by-line coding to track general themes emerging from the data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2005) and protocol coding to track theoretical concepts of interest to the research project (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). MAXQDA software was used to manage all coded transcripts simultaneously and to make comparisons across compositional groups (i.e., schools). Initial open coding of all interview data was then narrowed to focus only on segments coded as relating to race. We printed out these segments and sorted them into groups by degree of respondent’s racial dissimilarity to others in their workplace. We looked within these groupings for patterns of experiences with race in the workplace. Through this exercise, we learned that white majorities spoke of being happier working in racially homogeneous settings, compared to their prior majority-Black workplaces. Both white majorities and white minorities reported difficulty with their emotional responses when race was a topic of conversation at work. While this analysis helped us see patterns by group, it failed to provide insight into a mechanism of how racial difference was shaping respondents’ social-emotional processes.

The next stage of analyzing the interview data involved developing a coding dictionary that dealt in more detail with respondents’ reports of, perceptions of, and emotional reactions to

⁶ Given the first author’s white racial identity – and as the only author that collected data – the candidness and honesty of responses from white respondents were likely increased due to interviewer effects.

race relations at work. We met frequently to develop second-order codes, reconciling cases of disagreement through discussion.⁷ Approximately 75 percent of transcripts were coded independently by both authors. From here, we entered “second-cycle coding” (Miles et al., 2014), working together to consolidate codes. Within the original collection of detailed “first-order codes,” (i.e., line-by-line codes) we pared down our list to those most relevant to race relations in the workplace. We noticed many teachers spoke of feelings of shock and threat as they described their early experiences in their workplace, and we followed this pattern to see if themes of surprise, discomfort, confusion, and the realization that one needed to learn a new organizational setting were found in other transcripts. Experiences they named as “shocking” or described as having the emotional undertone of threat thus emerged as major themes, around which we oriented our second-order codes. This stage of analysis involved linking codes into broader conceptual categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Below is a sample of our coding scheme with a data segment:

Data segment:	“Um, I-- for the first time here experienced the opposite version of racism. Like, I mean, I had a kid say when I, when we were talking about something, ‘Oh, I didn’t realize like white people had a tough time,’ and I was like, ‘What? No, bad stuff happens to everybody.’ (laughs)” (Nora, W-Min)
protocol code:	Work Practices \talk of race in the classroom
Line-by-line codes:	surprised; confronting stereotypes
second-order codes:	emotional shock \encountering stereotypes; strategies to cope with shock

⁷ Given that the author team consists of one author who identifies as White and one author who identifies as Black, the process of coding data included conversations about their respective experiences and opinions about privilege, whiteness, and oppression, which allowed for them to discern when their own experiences were clouding the integrity of the analysis. This accountability between co-authors allowed for a stronger analysis.

Following prior sociological research, we orient the emic term of “shock” around the analytic category of belonging. The feeling of not belonging is closely associated with new experiences felt as strange, uncomfortable, or out-of-balance when one has crossed social boundaries into an unfamiliar environment (Jack, 2019; Shore et al., 2011; Torres, 2009). We further described the extent to which people felt they belonged or did not belong as being racialized. As opposed to labeling issues of belonging around race as “racial belonging,” which implies a fixed or given social difference essential to groups with different skin tones, “racialized belonging” captures that this is a social-emotional process in which people “[impart] social and symbolic meaning to perceived phenotypical differences” (Omi and Winant 2015:111). Similarly, we noticed that feelings of shock were preceded by particular experiences and followed by behaviors teachers would use to cope, giving rise to an analytic category of “racialized coping.” Due to the temporal nature of the themes, we explored relationships between the emerging stages we saw in the data (i.e., imprinting *precedes or happens before* experiencing racialized emotions; experiencing racialized emotions *precedes or happens before* racialized coping, etc.). Overall, because our themes were demonstrating how “things evolve over time and why” (Langley, 1999: 692), we refer to our model as a process model.

Our investigation of belonging and coping also led us back to interview data and some survey data we had on these same teachers’ prior socialization experiences, to provide information on teachers’ preparation to grapple with issues of racialized belonging. As an additional check on patterns in the data, we also used a data comparison matrix as a form of data display (Miles et al., 2014).

FINDINGS

Recall that our research question asks what the social-emotional experiences of white workers are like in workplaces where they are in the racial numerical minority, as compared to the more common scenario of white workers in majority-white workplaces. Based on emergent themes in the data, we present the process of *racialized belonging*. Based on our interest in racial composition, we organize findings for how this process is experienced first by white numerical minorities, then by white numerical majorities. For each group, we outline three main themes of racialized belonging: *racialized imprinting*, *racialized emotions*, and *racialized coping*. For both groups of white workers, the major theme characterizing their most common obstacle to feeling a sense of belonging is concerns about their identities as white people and sometimes also their identities as teachers, which we align with the concept of identity threat.⁸ However, the particular emotional experiences associated with the identity threat differed between the two groups.

The Process of Racialized Belonging Among White Numerical Minority Workers

Racialized imprinting. White minorities' experience of racial difference in predominantly non-white workplaces (in our sample, n=20) derived partly from their prior experiences with race, an initial stage of belonging that we term *racialized imprinting*. We define this term as how one's past racial experiences bear on their present work.⁹ Interviewees' racial contexts prior to working in their current school, in the form of racial demographics of their prior school workplace (if applicable) as well as the high schools and colleges they attended (as reported in interviews), as well as information about their prior or current social activities in and outside of school and their social class origins (as reported in a survey administered in conjunction with this study), offer some insight into their preparation for intergroup relations. In

⁸ Identity threat refers to a group member's fear that others hold an animus towards one's group in a particular setting, or that one has a low or devalued status in a particular setting (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002).

⁹ This concept builds on terminology in race literature (Omi & Winant, 2015) and careers literature (see Bourmault & Anteby, 2020 for a review), respectively.

other words, each of these aspects of teachers' backgrounds conveys important information about their likely racial socialization experiences, against which their current reactions to being racially different can be better understood. Our interest in imprinting in particular, as opposed to socialization broadly, is that *imprinting* looks at working adults, and refers to transferring what was learned in one context to another.

Regarding the imprinting that we noted in the data, most white teachers in our sample occupied racially segregated social worlds prior to occupational entry characterized by upbringings in same-race high schools. Table 2 shows that white interviewees, whether they worked in minority-white or majority-white faculty settings, generally attended majority-white high schools (by student enrollment) growing up, and nearly all attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) of higher education. Most white people did not participate in Black-specific activities. Taken together, this means that white teachers generally lacked preadult integration experiences. In terms of integration experiences in adulthood, 40-55 percent of participants previously worked in schools with majority-Black or racially integrated student enrollment, moreso for white teachers currently working in majority-white faculty.¹⁰

In the interviews, some teachers made explicit links between their social pasts and their present work experiences. We present Hannah and Julie (W-Min)¹¹ as illustrative cases. A first-year teacher, Hannah said her anthropology major and volunteering in a low-income elementary school during her adolescent years prepared her for challenges in the classroom. Still, her

¹⁰ We also wanted to consider social class differences, as these play a role in the kinds of formative racial experiences White people have as youth (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003; Hagerman, 2018; McDermott, 2006). In our sample, about two-thirds of White people in both work settings had a middle-class background (i.e., had one or more parents with a Bachelor's degree).

¹¹ Each respondent is assigned a pseudonym, which we present along with a notation of that person's race and numerical status. "W" indicates a White teacher. "Min" indicates a numerical minority who is racially dissimilar from their coworkers; "Maj" indicates a teacher who is in the racial majority group, numerically. For example, a participant labelled "W-Min" is a White teacher who presently works in a majority-Black school context.

upbringing in a predominantly-white setting and attending a nominally integrated high school made teaching in a school with nearly all Black students a large adjustment:

I grew up in Nevada, born and raised. I went to public school my whole life. They were all, you know, primarily white neighborhoods. But when I got to high school, there was a lot of economic diversity and greater diversity race-wise. A lot of the Native kids would come to school at my school. Um, it was just a very mixed-race school, so it was weird coming here, to be honest. This is not a mixed-race school.

As we will show, Hannah later grappled with whether her goal of pursuing social justice through teaching at her school was “necessarily the best use of my talents.”

Prior interracial experiences respondents shared also pertained to white teachers’ parents’ choice of segregated school settings or their family’s enduring racist attitudes. For example, Julie (W-Min) had early childhood experiences in segregated white schools in the South until mandated integration occurred when she was in fourth grade. At first, her parents sent her to a private school. “But then we decided that was a mistake and my mom finished her degree, started teaching, and I went to school with her from then on out at a regular public school, that was probably half and half [white and Black].” Julie added on the topic of race, a few weeks later during an informal conversation with the first author, “Even in my family there is racism. One time a group of my former students from here [who are Black] ran up to me in a Wal-Mart parking lot, picked me up and whirled me around. My mother-in-law and husband were there and my mother-in-law was scared to death.”

Experiencing racialized emotions. Some time after racialized imprinting, people encountered racialized emotions in their current workplace settings. The extent to which white minorities experienced racialized imprinting informed how socially and emotionally prepared they were for race relations in their current workplace, in turn shaping how they experienced racialized emotions at work. In this second stage of the belonging process, which we term

experiencing racialized emotions, our respondents described feeling shock, rejection, surprise, strain, discomfort, and anxiety in instances of workplace race relations.

As numerical minorities in the workplace, white minority teachers described feelings of shock related to the experience of standing out or not being centered in the workplace (see Figure 1). For example, Tara (W-Min) commented that “I feel my whiteness during faculty meetings, where I’m one of a few white people. When it goes on and on and every time people chatter about stuff, it just really bothers me.” Tara did not explain whether she did not want to hear her Black colleagues speak, but the fact that she connected being white with the discomfort she feels at faculty meetings suggests that she thinks of race as a relevant factor. Several respondents also noted how older white teachers were often “exiled” to portable classrooms and got no response from the front office when they asked for help. These experiences among white minorities conveyed a sense of isolation and not feeling purposefully included among faculty.

Emotions that stirred up questions of belonging for white teachers – feelings of rejection, surprise, and strain – surfaced when they interacted with teachers who mentioned race in the context of conversations about either work or topics outside of work. Several white minorities reported feeling uncomfortable with how their Black colleagues perceived them or how their colleagues of both races discussed race. For example, Doug (W-Min) explained:

Whenever there’s something like the Ferguson case [in] the news, that’s something hard for me. And I’ve talked with Coach Solomon because we’re both white males and so, to some of the faculty, they’re so dead-set on the ‘white men are still just as every bit of racist as they’ve always been.’

Doug’s repeated mention in the interview of being a “white guy” suggests that being white and male exacerbates his feelings of being perceived negatively by colleagues. However, discomfort in interaction, anxiety about colleagues’ assumptions, and a sense of rejection are social-

emotional dimensions of questioning one's racialized belonging that we noted in our findings for white men and women alike. As the same respondent noted:

I feel uncomfortable trying to have a conversation about things like that with some of my colleagues just because I don't want to come off—like I do have a different view than them for some of it and for others it's the same, but I don't want them to look at me and be like... [Author: 'Oh, he's in that group?'] Yeah. Just from straight off.

Alluding to “things like that,” Doug as well as about half of white minorities voiced feeling anxious when race-related local or national current events were mentioned in conversations with their Black colleagues. Such affective responses show that white minorities were concerned about being viewed as prejudiced, which posed a threat to their group identity.

White minorities at work also expressed discomfort with talking about race in instances where their colleagues (white and Black alike) said things about Black people that they found racist. For example, Cory (W-Min) described his shock when a white colleague said poor student behavior was due to race:

I was really shocked when my first year I was like talking to somebody at the bus line, [Mrs. Pippin (W-Min)]. [Earlier that day] I had emailed her, and I was in a bad mood because I'd had some kids who were acting up or something. We saw some kids acting up in the bus line, and I was really shocked to hear her say, 'I thought of it, and I hate to say it, but a lot of it comes down to race.'

For Cory, internal conflicts around belonging emerged with the shock he felt when confronted by the racial attitudes of members of his in-group. Such confrontations with bias from one's own group members confirms worries that their group is not only seen as, but is, prejudiced.

In addition to the emotional challenges of handling conversations about race at work, about a third of white minorities commented on issues of status loss either in terms of authority or views of themselves as good people. For instance, Amy (W-min) felt anxiety about her inability to control students' behavior in her classroom and described how working with a predominantly Black student population jeopardized her positive view of herself as a teacher. In an interview right after she quit mid-year, Amy recalled:

The district culture did not put any baseline of any personal experience that I have ever had, so I was totally unprepared. That you would have a classroom of 25 children and only three of them would follow directions consistently. I was not able to be successful there because I was not able to, for whatever reason, alter my norm.

Indeed, students were an important part of white minority teachers' experience of racial difference at work, generating feelings of threat about their identity as teachers. For Amy, teaching in a white-minority context was unlike anything she had previously experienced (see additional evidence in Table 3). White minority teachers were often surprised when their students pointed out cultural differences and felt rejected when students questioned their suitability for the job. Some white minority teachers struggled to understand their students' worldviews and life circumstances, which made them feel different – but also incompetent and overwhelmed – in their racial setting. For example, Hannah's (W-Min) racialized imprinting was such that she had never been in a segregated Black setting before. She met students' comments about race with surprise, such as on the day the first author visited Hannah's class. "When you came to observe me, they kept asking if you were my sister. And I finally said, 'What, just because she's white?' And they're like 'Well, we didn't say that.' I was like, 'That's what you meant.'" Such back and forths were typical in her classroom, with side conversations dominating class time. While she anticipated that entering teaching to "fight [her] own war" for civil rights would be challenging, she did not anticipate that she would "[get] here and not [be] that good at it."

In relationships with their students, most of whom were Black, white minorities felt that they could not communicate effectively. As Julie (W-Min) noted, "It was a culture shock to me. ... My kids would be fighting or doing something that they shouldn't be doing, and I'd have to go get somebody who could talk faster than I could. Because it would fluster me. I couldn't think what to say." Or, as Doug (W-Min) said, "There's only so much that I've found that I can connect with the students and have that understanding of where they're coming from." White

minorities' perceptions that they were not connecting with students or being received well in the classroom were warranted. For instance, Toni (B-Maj) reported in an interview that a Black student of a white teacher came to her and asked, "'How're they going to have a [white] person teaching us African American literature?' They kind of look at what your subject area is and your ethnicity to see if it matches. It's like they [students] don't trust your knowledge at all [if it doesn't]." In sum, we find that white minorities experienced various types of identity threats, primarily to their identities as white people, which also sometimes threatened their identities as teachers in their schools (i.e. their capability to do the work and whether or not they belonged in the school). They felt concerned about being perceived negatively and frustrated when they did not feel efficacious.

Racialized coping. The subsequent strategies white minorities used to deal with the threat they felt around their identities and belonging emerged as the third stage of the social-emotional process, a stage we term *racialized coping*. We noticed that when encountering discomfort or a sense of loss related to race, white minorities often responded by separating themselves from their colleagues' or students' views, a strategy we describe as "creating distance" (see Figure 1). For example, Ralph (W-Min) disliked how his Black coworker interpreted local news events as racial. Following these kinds of conversations, he explained that he sought out other coworkers who he knew more shared his views on current events—including a different Black colleague.

Ms. Seaborg [Black] and I were talking the other day, and something came up. You saw it in the news, Black fellow hung himself or whatever, remember that? So it becomes national news. So, she said something to me, that it might be racial. And I said, 'Well why do you think that? Why don't we wait until —' It's just like the President and the Attorney General came to Ferguson, came to these other places, should've never done it and made it worse than what it is. Look what they did with this Bergdahl, this army thing. And here, our president [Obama] and all treated him like he was a prisoner of war or whatever. Well, the guy did it himself. He walked off duty. You ask the Major down there [the JROTC teacher] and he'll probably totally agree with me, and he's a Black fellow.

Ralph limited these kinds of conversations with Ms. Seaborg, cutting them short, and instead found more in common with Major Regis, with whom he shared prior experience in the military and, he presumed, perspectives on current events. “I was in the military, ROTC, and I get along, y’know, fairly well with them [the JROTC teachers]. The Major has a few kids that I teach. So I’ll go to them and they’ll reinforce it [i.e., what I am teaching and telling the students].”

Interestingly, in cases where white minorities encountered the anti-Black sentiments of their fellow white colleagues, as in the example of the conversation between colleagues at the bus line, the respondents similarly managed the situation. Cory (W-Min) avoided deeper or future conversations with such a colleague:

[When she said that,] I just didn’t say anything. I know that like... some of the teachers have a more conservative, for lack of a better word, viewpoint than me. So I just don’t even get into some of those conversations.

This respondent, and other white people who acted similarly, avoided future contact with white coworkers they viewed as racist, and befriended only white coworkers they saw as not racist.

White minority teachers also created distance in their relationships with students, but they often did so in an assertive (e.g., attacking, arguing) rather than passive (e.g., avoidant) manner. These teachers coped with feelings of threat stemming from teacher-student interactions by verbally confronting what they saw as “racist” comments and defending themselves and/or their group. For instance, Elizabeth (W-Min) confronted a student’s comment that she found offensive by telling her student, “That’s not appropriate to tell a white person, you know. That hurts their feelings.” The Black student had told her when the air conditioning was off in her classroom, that she was torturing them as if the room were a slave ship. In another example, when accused of being an easier teacher than Black teachers, Tammy (W-Min) told her students, ““We teach the same thing. [That teacher and I] make copies together. There’s nothing that we do that they – that she doesn’t, like literally.”” Tammy’s quote shows how she thinks of her identity threat

experiences as a group-level issue among white teachers, referring to “we” and “they.” She responded to students by asserting herself as a hard, rather than an easy, teacher.

Even so, white minorities did not have a single clear coping strategy in cases of the perceived threat that came from relating to their Black students. For instance, sometimes they reacted by not mentioning it at work or crying after they left work. These forms of coping were not effective in helping them mitigate the shock, however, and sometimes resulted in burnout. Indeed, given patterns of overt or subtle avoidance observed among white people, they appeared to have networks that were not as useful in helping them cope with experiences of racial difference. This pattern held for nine white minorities in the sample. For instance, Bree (formerly W-Min) recalled, “For the first month or so, it was culture shock. And then for the next month it was, like, I really don’t wanna be here. This is awful.” She attempted to adjust by getting to know her students better, but in caring for their life situations, she felt she was “literally making [her]self sick worried about those kids.” By the time Bree felt herself able to connect with her students, she could not find a way to make her work sustainable, stating, “I would cry almost every day I left.” Colleagues she would turn to were all white and inexperienced in teaching, struggling themselves. In these ways, such attempts by white minorities to adjust to threats to their identities as white people and as teachers exacerbated the strain of their feeling a lack of belonging in their schools. Like Bree after she moved to Shifting High, we also did not observe such struggles even among brand new, inexperienced white teachers in the majority-white schools. To the extent that creating distance isolated white teachers from support and guidance, the coping contributed to recurring experiences of the same racialized emotions. We indicate these more fluid aspects of the social-emotional process in Figure 1. Table 3 provides further examples of each of the emotions and coping strategies associated with racialized belonging that white minorities exhibited in their interactions with colleagues and students. As Figure 1

summarizes, their process of racialized belonging included: *racialized imprinting* that usually involved growing up in majority-white spaces; *experiencing racialized emotions* such as shock, rejection, surprise, strain, discomfort, and anxiety; and *racialized coping* that included creating distance. We now turn to the social-emotional process of belonging observed among our white respondents who were in the numerical majority in their majority-white workplaces.

--- TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE. ---

The Process of Racialized Belonging among white Workers in the Numerical Majority

Racialized imprinting. White people working in majority-white faculty schools in our sample (n=36) mainly hailed from the same community as their colleagues and students. As Lydia (W-Maj), a lifelong resident of the neighborhood her school is situated in, reflected: “I’ve lived in Surrey [where Sunshine School is located] since I was 16 years old. I love Surrey, I’m just all Surrey, Surrey.” Lydia then offered a contrast to a prior school she worked in with a majority-Black student population. “And so Crest Point [where Shifting High is located] was like moving to New York, you know, it was like moving to a different city.” Lydia’s is an illustrative case showing how the racialized imprinting of white majority teachers prepared them for intra- and intergroup relations with colleagues and students that felt effortless to them in majority-white settings.

Testifying to the continuity of racially segregated white spaces that most white teachers who taught in majority-white schools inhabited were the abundance of people they knew at work from their upbringings. For instance, Eric (W-Maj) felt fortunate to have connections to get hired. “I kind of lucked out [getting hired here] because the principal here had been a counselor at the school I grew up in the year after I graduated. So she knew my mother who was a teacher, and my sister who graduated after me.” Though he felt “lucky,” Eric’s professional contacts through his predominantly white childhood institutions was typical in the hiring stories of other

white colleagues in his school. Similarly, Lindsay (W-Maj) and Ramona (W-Maj) found friends easily in their majority-white workplaces, bridging past worlds to current worlds through their contacts. Lindsay recounts that she felt close to the white librarian at her school. “Mrs. Ingalls, she's from where I grew up. So I've known her. We share a lot of the same friends.” Ramona recognized the cultural backgrounds of the five white colleagues in her department and found quick acceptance there, though she later distanced herself.

The art department people, I started like going – I just kind of fell into going to lunch with them. And it was a pleasant experience until it got, the disagreements just became too much for me. My parents are ridiculously conservative and my sister is really conservative and I grew up in a really conservative home. But some of the, the language [my department members used] was so hateful toward the kids, toward other people, toward other people's decisions. ‘You know, well, she just needs to clean up her act, or yeah, she's pregnant again, or she's so this or that.’ I just couldn't take it. So yes, it was very easy at first as long as I had my group and I could go. You're kind of accepted within your group.

Like the cases of Hannah and Julie (W-Min), these respondents traced their present social experiences at work to their social pasts and lives outside of work, providing more evidence on the way *racialized imprinting* marks the beginning of the process of racialized belonging.

White majorities' prior workplaces – i.e., part of their *racialized imprinting* – emerged in the interviews as a powerful memory against which the respondents positively assessed their current work environment as a place where they felt more positive racialized emotions. About half of white majority teachers in the sample previously worked in a majority-minority school in which Black people were the numerical majority (by both teacher and student race), a pattern typical in k-12 teaching careers (e.g., Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). For example, Lydia (W-Maj), who worked in a school serving a majority-Black student population for 11 years, recounted with disgust how the basketball coach and principal, both Black colleagues, “made race – everything was race.” Recalling conversations with the coach, she said, “I always assumed he was – he is an idiot.” About the Black principal, she said, “She hired some terrible people.

The data entry person was Black and it's her hairdresser. I'm not making fun of people, but ...[that's] a really important job. Not a good job to hire a hairdresser. You know, stupid stuff."

Their prior experiences even functioned to bond them together in their current workplace. White majorities routinely referred to their prior majority-Black workplaces as "warzones" where they received "combat pay." Knowing "we have war stories," they would say to one another in the hallways, asking how their day is, "'Every day's a day in paradise [here]!'" (Barbara, W-Maj) or "'I'm good. Like, normal.' ... 'I love every day here.' So we do not take our jobs for granted here, that's for sure" (Gina, W-Maj). For erstwhile white minorities, re-integrating back into a majority-white setting was a welcome shock of less stress from having to be aware of race at work. In this way, racialized emotions from their prior school became imprinting for their process in their current school. That is, even though the typical order for the process of racialized emotions featured imprinting prior to emotions, emotions also could bring about new racialized imprinting. We indicate the fluidity of this process in Figure 1.

Moving into working in a majority-white context was also encouraged by family members, whose objections of their prior workplaces reflected hegemonic racial ideologies of majority-Black schools as unsafe or unfit for white teachers.¹² For example, Karen and Sarah (W-Maj) opted to leave teaching in schools with majority-Black student enrollment due to pressure from family members. Sarah said, "My family did not feel like I was safe, and I probably wasn't. There were a lot of break-ins and stolen cars and craziness like that." Bree (W-Maj), who grew up in Surrey as well, recounted that "I told my parents after I took the job at [Pride High]. And they were like, 'You, what?' They didn't want me to work out there." One year later, she changed her employer to Shifting High (see Table 1).

¹² These ideologies are coined "controlling images" by Collins (2000) and conceptually applied to workspaces by Flores (2017).

Experiencing racialized emotions. In their current workplaces, white majorities rarely questioned their racialized belonging with their colleagues and students. These white respondents perceived the racial climate in their workplace as a non-issue: something they simply did not think about. For example, at her current majority-white school, Lydia said the conversations with colleagues were free of these stresses, and the student composition made it so she “work[ed] less:”

[This school] is one color, one flavor here practically, you know. And it is weird, it is a different – You don’t hear the color stuff. Hardly. ...It’s named the Sunshine School. 9th grade, no driving, everybody wealthier people, the kids brilliantly smart. Actually, I make more money here. I work less.

Interpreting her current workplace as “weird” suggests that Lydia had to adjust to it even though it was a lower-strain job, so much so that teachers had nicknamed it “the Sunshine School.”

For the times when race became salient for white majorities, such instances brought about feelings of irritation, discomfort, confusion, fear, lament, and puzzlement. For example, Sam (W-Maj) worried about the appearance of partiality towards his students based on race.

Being a young white male, I have to be really careful as far as race. Nowadays the teacher can be with any race, and sex, and be... targeted by whatever, however. It’s always, you’ve just gotta watch your back. Just making sure that you’re not gonna be penalized in any way for showing any kind of favoritism.

This band teacher described having problems when he always awarded student of the month to his white and Hispanic students, and his Black students felt it was unfair. The instance embodied an identity threat because he feared it would call attention to him in a negative way – especially as a white male, which he here frames as a liability. However, Sam perceived he had the right to express his opinions and have control over how to discipline his Black students.

The movies where a white teacher goes into the Black community that’s very poor, that’s not at all what this is. But, I don’t care. If a child’s gonna act a certain way, then they need to be fixed. Somebody else might think something different, they’re entitled to their opinion. But I am too.

Similarly, Linda (W-Maj) and Nannette (W-Maj) felt free to communicate with their Black students in ways their Black students found offensive (e.g., see Shelley's quote in Table 3) – but that colleagues did not step in to redirect. The informal norms in these workplaces allowed for white teachers to assert their racial beliefs and views, some of which gave them license for domination over Black students, without reproof.

Racialized emotions among white majorities also included the experience of fear. Responding out of fear pertained sometimes to cross-race relations between teachers, such as Natalie, who said she was “afraid” of seeing her Black colleague who brought up the topic of race, and Ramona, who said that “everyone’s scared of saying the wrong thing” if race ever came up in conversation. It also arose in white teachers’ relationships with their Black students, who used the rule of thumb “you have to be careful what you say” in their communications.

Other instances of racialized emotions for white majorities included lament and puzzlement over the seemingly nonlinear nature of their white racial identity development. Mary reflected apologetically when asked about the role of race in her day-to-day work: “I hate – this is going to be horrible to hear and for me to say. But I can find myself being more racist than I ever was, since I've been teaching.” Mary explained that she found herself stereotyping her Black students as her hardest students and realized she had not recommended them for honors awards – and neither had almost any of her white colleagues. In another part of the interview, Mary recognized that her upbringing had been something to overcome in terms of feeling close to Black people. “I was in a world of ignorance before. Completely. Now I've worked with other, you know, Black colleagues. I mean, I had a Black friend that gave me help for my baby shower. And my dad was shocked when he saw the picture from it. That's how I grew up.” In Mary's account of how race affects her current work, her feelings of dismay with herself and discomfort with her family are relevant for how she feels about her students and colleagues, respectively.

Racialized coping. Similar to white minority respondents, when they experienced threat, white majorities mostly coped by creating distance from conversations (or people who talked) about race. Once again calling upon the case of the new entrant Natalie, whose Black colleague called her racist, in this stage of the social-emotional process she *avoided* interacting with him for as long as possible.

I actually was quite afraid to come out of my room for a couple of months. But slowly the other people would come in and introduce [themselves]. He and another male teacher that were on the hall, we ate lunch together every day. So it ended up being fine and then he ended up getting fired the next year for being brusque [disciplining a student]. So obviously that was just one of his... personality traits [laughs] but it did make for a long first year.

By delaying interaction with the Black colleague and only being around him in the presence of others, Natalie reduced her interactions with him. Furthermore, Natalie's comment is laden with stereotypes and assumptions about this Black employee's fit (i.e., due to his "brusque"ness and his "personality traits") that led to his dismissal – an action by organizational leadership that further affirmed her assertions of perceived threat and her subsequent avoidant strategies.

Similarly, Mary created distance by not taking any action to address her struggles with feeling racist and by justifying them partly by her past. Such avoidant forms of coping with the emotions can also perpetuate negative feelings of threat, further concretizing the emotions. We note this fluid or recursive aspect of this stage of the process in Figure 1, as our findings suggest the respondents stay in the same pattern of alternating between the emotions and coping stages.

Another racialized coping strategy among the white majority was colorblind reasoning – i.e., the stated belief that race does not or should not matter (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). While both white minorities and majorities expressed such a view, only for white majority teachers was this belief used as a strategy to cope with feelings of threat. This appears to be related to the fact that emotions of irritation and fear were unique to this group (see Figure 1). For example, Natalie (W-Maj), who described how she avoided her Black coworker, did not entertain or adjust to the

idea that her race was perceived as part of her political views, that it informed what she taught students, or that it shaped how she viewed her Black colleague. Natalie's coping strategy was prevalent among white majorities and reflected a colorblind ideology: i.e., "You wouldn't think that [race] should affect adults any."

To cope with fear, white majorities attempted to articulate expectations of their students in race-free terms and keep talk of race in the classroom lighthearted. For example, one choir teacher, Sarah (W-Maj), described her challenges getting her students, many of whom were Black, to interpret her criticisms of their singing in a way that would not offend them:

You just have to be careful what you say, and make sure that if you say something that, you let them know that there's nothing harmful or anything. And I wouldn't say that it was only just race. I think you have to be really careful about kids' self-esteem. For example, today I said, 'Now you all listen to what I'm saying. Now don't take it the wrong way, but now listen to the word that I'm going to use and then let me explain that word to you. You're singing very lazy.' They looked. I said, 'Now what I mean by that is you're not making your words precise. You're taking a long, leisurely stroll with your words and making them very Sunday afternoon, walk in the park. But it has to be like you're running a race.'

This teacher knew that what she wanted to convey to her Black students would be received as problematic, unless she vigilantly added disclaimers and gauged her students' reaction. In addition, Sarah engaged in colorblind rhetorical strategies when she explained that being "really careful" is about tending to kids' self-esteem, rather than "only just race." Similarly, Cyndi's (W-Maj) caution in keeping discussions of race with her Black students "very lighthearted" and not "heavy [or] heated" signals a hybrid strategy with creating distance, where white majorities maintained control by limiting discussion to topics they deemed safe (see Table 3). Several white majorities in the interviews mentioned the common occurrence of a Black parent calling a meeting with the teacher when teachers made a racially inappropriate comment towards their child. Audrey (W-Maj) described how administrators were supportive of teachers in these instances.

There have been times when teachers have inadvertently said something and a kid took it the wrong way and just figuring out where to go from there. There's a family here whose mother takes everything to be wildly racist when it's definitely not. But, with that it's one of those things that's understood though. All of the administration knows it and so they usually have, whenever there are meetings with this parent, they always have at least two administrators there just to defuse the situation because we know it's going to happen.

In this way, institutional norms and administrative practices in majority-white schools provided opportunities for white people to affirm their white identity and protected them from being perceived as prejudiced. The understanding among Audrey and her colleagues, as well as the administration, was that white majorities did not assign racial meaning to their comments and behaviors, and that Black parents such as this mother were too sensitive on racial matters and needed to be neutralized. As the respondents recount these stories, there are hints of pleasure present in their feeling right as well: they narrate themselves as reasonable, worthy of support, and vindicated. This institutional protection contrasts with the way Natalie's Black colleague did not enjoy the support of colleagues and administrators when his teaching practices came into question. In sum, instances of colorblind reasoning were ubiquitous among white majority teachers: thirty-one of the 36 white majorities in the sample expressed similar views, and further examples of colorblind reasoning appear in Table 3.

In summary, for white majorities (especially for those who had worked in spaces where they were once the minority), the relief created by not being a numerical minority and being able to maintain organizational privilege in the same way they maintain societal privilege gave them ease in interactions with students, parents, and coworkers. As Figure 1 summarizes, their process of racialized belonging involved: *racialized imprinting* that often included working in spaces where they were the minority but almost always included growing up in spaces where they were the majority; *experiencing racialized emotions* such as irritation, discomfort, confusion, fear,

lament, and puzzlement; and *racialized coping* that included creating distance and color-blind reasoning.

DISCUSSION

Scholars of emotions in organizations have begun to document the racialized dimensions of these emotions, with most focus on racial minority employees. However, a complete understanding of the ways social interactions – including the expression of and reaction to emotion – can produce racial inequality in organizations requires direct study and interrogation of how white people interpret, feel, and act in response to social encounters where race becomes salient. Endeavoring to answer these questions, we primarily show that white workers in our study experienced racialized emotions – which became pronounced when they perceived they were being “othered” at work – in ways that protected them from realistic and symbolic threats to their identities, permitted social avoidance, and excused disparaging comments to Black students and colleagues. Second, we show how white workers’ structural locations and background experiences (what we refer to as *imprinting*) shaped their experiences of racialized emotions. Third, we show that how teachers interpreted racialized events and reacted to racialized emotions varied somewhat by workplace racial composition. We found that coping with threat-related emotions around whiteness varied for white people in minority-white spaces versus majority-white spaces. That is, when triggered by feeling different, white people in the minority and the majority coped with threat-related emotions by separating themselves from intergroup relations or avoiding conversations about race. However, the emotion of fear and the coping strategy of colorblind reasoning was unique to white people in majority-white workplaces.

Our findings provide new evidence of a process driving white people’s interpretations of, emotions about, and reactions to, racial difference in the workplace, to which previous

quantitative studies only allude: issues of belonging related to feelings of threat-induced (or “culture”) shock. The process model that emerged from our inductive analysis outlines three stages through which white workers’ emotions build: from prior socialization, to current work event, to behavioral response to the event. By placing the starting point of analysis before the groups’ membership in their workplace organizations, we offer a corrective contribution to existing nonsymmetry research: it is not just the numerical minority experience that is different; rather, it is the overall historical and societal experience embedded in race that is different for white workers, as members of a social majority (often over-represented) group, than it would be for workers in minoritized (often, under-represented) racial groups. We found that white teachers made comparisons to their lives outside of work – as well as to prior workplaces – to help them grapple with their identities as white people. These comparisons of being in the minority to what they were used to (i.e., being in the majority) highlighted the meaning of their work and racial identity for them in new ways, usually represented by negative emotions and feelings of threat.

More specifically, the instances of worrying over identity that we document among white teachers are representative of identity threat, which arise when one feels devalued or disliked in a setting because of their social identity. In settings where their racial identity suddenly stood out to them because they were in the numerical minority, unlike any prior experiences they had had in their lives, respondents expressed newfound vigilance around their being white, feelings of inadequacy, and concerns about how their colleagues perceived them. Even in settings where they were the majority, white teachers were often vigilant about how they talked to their Black students, fearing they would be accused of discrimination. And especially in majority-white settings, some white respondents were protective of their self-esteem, insisting that race was not affecting them, their colleagues, or their students.

CONCLUSION

Below, we summarize three contributions that our findings make to the literature on race in the workplace. We magnify the emotional aspects of individuals' experiences of racial difference; suggest how the social-emotional process we found influences stratification processes in the workplace; and account for the role of prior experiences with race on workers' racialized emotions. We then offer directions for future research and conclude with recommendations for practitioners.

Racialized Emotions: Magnifying emotional aspects of white people's experience of racial difference in organizations

Prior research on racial composition in the workplace that attempted to compare the experience of white and Black numerical minority workers (i.e., the “nonsymmetry” approach) most often assumed that such a comparison could be made in parallel and rested on the premise that racial groups come to workplaces with the same level of skill and experience handling race relations (Mueller et al., 1999; Renzulli et al., 2011; Tsui et al., 1992). This represents a classic economic sociology approach, which divorces the study of race in workplaces from the pervasive racial inequality, racism, and white supremacy embedded in economic and social structures broadly (Hirschman & Garbes, 2020). In contrast, we propose a *process* and treat emotions as rooted in myriad institutions, structures of inequality, and personal history (Ahmed, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2019), which may be better equipped analytically to connect societal dynamics to workplace organizational dynamics, particularly dynamics around belonging.

As we built theory about this social-emotional process, we discovered that elements of group threat and belonging were involved – that is, beyond the kinds of social identity explanations used in nonsymmetry studies. For instance, we find that both white minorities and majorities described having social and emotional struggles with racialized emotions in the form of group threat, wherein they felt their collective identity was uncertain or at risk (Hogg, 2018;

Stephan, Ybarra, & Rios, 2009) within their organizations. Our findings also highlight how belonging – i.e., the relational and emotional work that should foster a sense of community (Creary, Rothbard, & Scruggs, 2021; Kuurne & Vieno, 2022) – is rife with racialized feeling rules that warrant attention in future research. In sum, while our findings of the negative emotions white teachers felt in being racially different align with broader research on workers' preference for and greater job satisfaction in organizations with racial composition similar to their own (e.g., Maume & Sebastian, 2007; Mueller et al., 1999), our findings on emotional processes further unpack their consequences for work groups.

Racialized Coping: Generating stratification in workplaces through avoidance

By illustrating how white minorities and majorities used avoidance not only to cope with shocks that triggered racial stress but also to build (or abstain from building) inter-group relationships, we offer empirical support for the concept of white fragility – i.e., low tolerance for feelings of discomfort around race (DiAngelo, 2011), coupled with potential outward expressions of anger (DiTomaso, 2013), anxiety (Hagerman, 2018), and leaving the situation as common behaviors exhibiting white privilege. Even as the minority in the workplace, white workers had the privilege of dealing with threat and shock by distancing themselves, which juxtaposes with how Black workers still engaged in emotional labor in those circumstances (Wingfield, 2010). This distancing extends Vallas' (2003) theorizing about racial boundaries at work: racial segregation within workplaces may not be solely about spatial boundaries, but also relational boundaries drawn by white people's avoidance behaviors towards marginalized outgroups. Moreover, that white people more aware of racial advantage may avoid interacting with white people who say racist things illustrates one perhaps overlooked way that racial ignorance persists. With an emphasis on the social-emotional underpinnings of avoidance

behaviors, we uncover empirical evidence for Mueller's (2020: 145) assertion that "people in power often have unique capacity and incentive to suppress knowledge and nurture ignorance."

Our study also advances research on stratification processes in organizational settings. As sites of social reproduction, schools have long been regarded an ideal setting for the study for stratification, but most of this research focuses on students (e.g., Lewis & Diamond, 2015). We, however, focus on teachers. By focusing on schools as workplace organizations, we provide empirical support for the tenet of racialized organization theory which predicts that white people's emotional expectations and subsequent ways of remedying violations of those expectations uphold a system of racial inequality in worker agency (Ray, 2019; Ioanide, 2015; Rabelo et al., 2020). Moreover, such remedies – which we conceive of as coping strategies – involving declining to help or associate with another group have the potential to reinforce racial inequality by fostering discrimination (Fiske, 2018).

Our findings concerning intragroup dynamics of racialized coping uncover additional implications for stratification, some of them tied to racialized emotions experienced positively by dominant groups in the racial order. For white majorities, we observed a pattern of intragroup protection, such that white principals backed white teachers who came under questioning by Black parents for the fairness of their teaching practices. These instances appeared to elicit first, discomfort among white teachers, but also pleasure to be vindicated and to recount the story. This calls attention to how racial domination can be upheld not only through negative, but also positive feelings (Bonilla-Silva, 2019).

Racialized Imprinting: Connecting past with present in the study of racial difference at work

We provide suggestive evidence that beliefs and feelings about racial matters imparted through family, neighborhood, and school racial contexts workers grew up in reverberate into adulthood (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003) – specifically, in the workplace. This insight is useful for

the study of race and racism in the sociology of work and organizational sociology. We show that numerical representation in one's current organizational context is one piece of the puzzle, as these settings provoke different issues of racialized emotions for workers, depending on how similar or different the racial composition of their current context is to those in the worker's past. These findings also extend studies of white identity and research on racial socialization across the life course. That white teachers in our sample, who mostly came from homogeneous white settings, used reference to their pasts to interpret their current social experiences at work differently depending on whether they worked in a majority-white or majority-Black context, offers insight into "the multifarious manifestations of the experience of whiteness" (McDermott & Samson, 2005:256).

Limitations and Implications for Organizations

This study has some limitations regarding generalizability. First, these data only reflect what was observed in two districts' traditional public high schools in one southern city in the U.S. and therefore should not be generalized to teaching jobs in other contexts, regions, sectors or school types (e.g., private, magnet, or charter schools). Compared to international settings, schools in the U.S. have a unique history of institutionalized racial segregation, and racial differences are likely more salient than, for example, ethnic differences. The history of the Southern U.S. also may limit generalizability to other regions of the U.S., where racial tensions in mixed-race schools are less prominent (see Hardie & Tyson, 2003 for a review) and such tensions between teachers may also be rarer. The absence of large third or fourth racial groups among teaching faculty also makes the South unique, as compared to the West (Flores, 2017). In addition, the teacher-student relationship may represent a unique type of hierarchical status relation that is not generalizable to other types of organizations where patients, customers, etc. are less enmeshed in the organization long-term. Even so, this study has documented how racial

dynamics between employees and clients transpire via white workers' emotions within an occupation (Nelson & Vallas, 2021). Future research on composition effects in teaching or other similar semi-professions (e.g., nursing, social work) could sample from a range of regions and sectors, and/or sample from settings with representation of more than two racial groups.

Another consideration for evaluating the generalizability of our findings pertains to their historical context. We know from research on mega-threats that societal events that are identity-related can spillover to affect employee emotions and behaviors in the workplace (Leigh & Melwani, 2022). Our study was conducted August 2014 through May 2015. While pre-dating the “summer of racial reckoning” in the US in 2020 following the police murder of George Floyd, this time frame included salient broader societal events of racial violence against Black Americans: Eric Garner’s killing by a police officer on July 17, 2014 in New York City and Michael Brown’s killing by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014. In addition, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was gaining in prominence during the year of study. These and other race-related news events were referenced in interviews by about one-third of white minorities and a quarter of white majorities in this study. None of these mentions conveyed that white participants were affected by social desirability bias – e.g., the need to say things that were performatively anti-racist. Indeed, several mentioned “diversity fatigue” around talking about Ferguson and race at all. Nor were they outspoken advocates in the BLM movement. We thus expect that had we conducted the study in recent times, that we would observe similar kinds of responses as we did here. Future research could expand on how mega-threats affect how whiteness is experienced in organizations.

Our findings have implications for managing diverse and inclusive organizations. When processes such as emotions are no longer considered race-neutral, Eurocentric worldviews of racial diversity become clearer (Nkomo, 1992). We observed the case of organizations where

white employees' emotions and coping strategies were unconstrained. The negative effects of these feelings and actions on the well-being and inclusion of Black students, teachers, and other staff members are alluded to in our findings, including when white teachers required Black students not to express sentiments that could hurt white people's feelings or when white colleagues ostracized a Black colleague from their own social circle at work. Learning how to reverse these patterns at an organizational level by encouraging organizational members to interact more constructively across racial differences may be challenging to individuals, but doing so can help build positive, generative relationships in workplaces, including between employees and service recipients (McKay et al., 2011; Hekman et al., 2010).

To aid the development of white employees' engagement strategies for coping with the race-based shock they experience at work, workplaces could institute and incentivize voluntary programs that include active learning approaches to diversity equity and inclusion (Roberson, Moore, & Bell (2022). Indeed, none of the teachers in these schools underwent Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) or race-related professional developments during the year of study, and none were mentioned in the research interviews. It could be that this was before DEI gained attention in k12, starting around 2016 (e.g., Stiepleman, 2022). Another consideration is emphasizing belonging as a lever for positive change in organizations, which is increasingly a focus in diversity programs and initiatives in other industries (Creary et al., 2021). To this end, our findings provide guidance for organizational leaders and allies, such that their programming around belonging should be assessed in terms of whether it fosters a perpetuation of whiteness. That is, does the community being crafted (a) protect white organizational members from feelings of threat, anxiety, and discomfort and (b) perpetuate the racialized feeling rules shown in our findings (such as avoidance of difference, etc.)? And, is progress being made in the extent to

which the sense of community felt in their organization integrates ways of being and expressing emotion that do not require similarity with, or adherence to, white racialized emotions?

Besides training, another avenue for positive change within schools and the teaching profession includes creating school district environments that support occupational activism – i.e., workers’ enactment of their jobs in ways that advance social justice (Cornfield et al., 2019). Coley and Schachle (2023) found that among teacher union members in one state, walk out activities sparked further DEI work in their home schools. Here, we propose that occupational activism could redress workplace dynamics through creative ways of consciousness raising among white teachers, from race-conscious white teachers themselves in micro-level interactions with their colleagues. This approach might sidestep the null effects and backlash associated with many external training interventions (e.g., Kalev et al., 2006).

We also recommend that organizations examine how they can address dynamics likely to produce stratification in their workplaces. For instance, in their distancing strategies, even if not intentionally, white people declined to help Black colleagues and students, failed to address the anti-Black attitudes of their white peers, and advanced racially exclusionary social networks. Our findings suggest that these schools need an overhaul of organizational practices that promote bias to foster white people’s pro-social exchanges with outgroups as an organizational norm and expectation. Perhaps then, the importance of soft skills – i.e., “the motivation and ability to interact well with customers and coworkers” (Moss & Tilly, 1996) – which are often used in assessing candidates for jobs, promotion, and awards – will no longer be invisible for white employees, who prior research suggests have the benefit of employers assuming they have them. To this end, drawing on evidence of what works to reduce biased hiring behaviors in workplaces (Kalev et al., 2006), introducing some forms of accountability to leaders and employees to address exclusionary behaviors could be an effective intervention for reshaping organizational

norms. For instance, Mary's recognition that she and her white colleagues had been systematically omitting Black students from academic award nominations could be addressed and remedied by having procedures in place where teachers audit themselves (or their departments) on the racial composition of nominations and awardees and make this information visible to organizational leaders and members. In addition to this, prioritizing the formation of diverse school boards could be helpful to promote organizational practices that uphold equity (Cook & Glass, 2015)

Our findings also point to policy recommendations at a higher level. That white people tended to experience strong emotional responses to moments when their racialized belonging was in question, regardless of their representation in the workplace, suggests inadequate desegregation in workplaces (as well, perhaps, in the schools they attended). Thus, we recommend that school districts, and other workplaces attempting to desegregate, ensure they advance those efforts and avoid viewing them as "fulfilled" once some nominal level of representation is reached.

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Figure 1. The social-emotional process of racialized belonging, by numerical representation

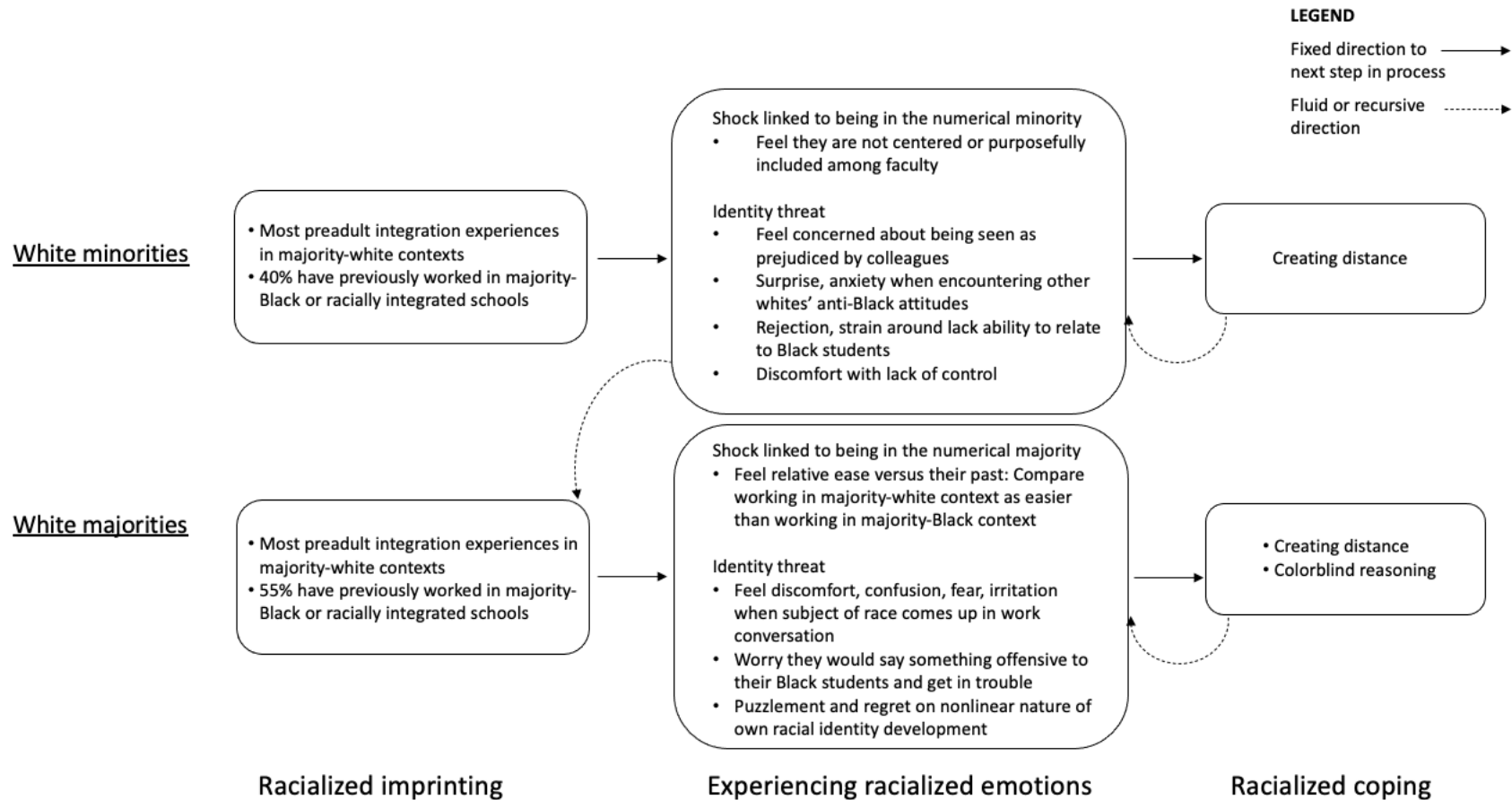


Table 1. School demographics

	District	Total teachers*	% white: Black teachers	% white: Black students	% low-income students**	Race head principal
Pride High	Urban	89	29: 69	1: 99	100	Black
Ready High	Urban	93	35: 58	3: 97	100	Black
Suburban Central High	Suburban	97	90: 10	70: 25	18	white
Sunshine School	Suburban	40	92: 8	70: 28	23	White
Shifting High	Suburban	67	81: 15	25: 65	59	Black

Notes.

Racial percentages may not add up to 100 due to other-race teachers and students not listed here.

* Teachers includes all full- and part-time teachers, tutors, instructional specialists who work in the building full-time, and classroom teachers who work across two schools. Excludes Academy Leaders in the urban schools (n=2), replacement teacher who quit within two weeks and could not be interviewed (n=1), ISS (in school suspension) class monitor (n=1), and district-level employees not formally assigned to the school (n=2).

**Low-income measured by eligibility for federal free or reduced-price lunch. Because some states, including this one, began receiving federal fundings to subsidize foodservice in whole districts rather than on an individual student basis, we also report statistics prior to this change. In school year 2011-2012, Pride had 83%, Ready had 72%, Suburban Center had 17%, Sunshine School had 22%, and Shifting had 51% of students who were free or reduced price lunch eligible.

Table 2. Background experiences of teachers: Preadult integration experiences, prior work context, social activities, and social class origins

	White people in numerical minority,	White people in numerical majority,
	W-MIN (n=20)	W-MAJ (n=36)
<i>Preadult integration experiences</i>		
Attended majority-white high school*	70%	70%
Attended majority-Black high school*	15%	0%
Attended racially integrated high school*	15%	30%
Attended PWI	95%	100%
Attended HBCU	5%	0%
<i>Prior work context</i>		
Majority-white school	60%	45%
Majority-Black school	20%	20%
Racially integrated school	20%	5%
Some combination of the above (≥ 2 schools)	0%	30%
<i>Social activities as an adult, Mean (SD)</i>		
n of General activities (range 0-5)	2.17 (0.35)	2.19 (0.15)
n of Cultural activities (range 0-6)	2.33 (0.27)	2.17 (0.26)
n of Student extracurriculars (range 0-5)	1.28 (0.23)	1.42 (0.18)
n of Black-specific activities (range 0-3)	0.28 (0.11)	0.11 (0.05)
<i>Social class origins</i>		
Below middle class (no parent with BA)	35%	30%
Middle class (1+ parent with BA)	65%	70%

Notes. Percentages rounded to nearest 5%. “Racially integrated” refers to schools with at least 30% representation of a numerical minority group. For social activities as an adult, “General activities” includes five items about past/current participation in a fraternity or sorority; college athletics; a local church; teacher’s union; or the Junior League. Cultural activities includes six items about attending a live performance of rock, country, rap, classical music, or theater/dance, or visiting a museum in the past year. Student extracurriculars includes seven survey items about involvement in student sport, academic, student council, or religious clubs, or behavior support, homecoming/prom, or other teacher leadership committees. Black-specific activities include three items about past/current participation in a Historically Black fraternity or sorority, HBCU, or attending a sporting event at an HBCU in the past year.

*Data on high school attended missing for 19 respondents (7 W-MIN, 12 W-MAJ).

Table 3. Patterns of racialized emotions and racialized coping, by demographic group

Pseudonym	Group	Emotions or Coping	Illustrative example
Renee	W-Min	Emotions: Being in the numerical minority: Not centered	I think there are definitely times where I feel like members of the staff regard me differently because I am a white woman. They would never be ugly about it or anything like that, but there are jokes and events and things like that where it's just assumed that, you know, it's not something that we're involved in. Maybe like the [HBCU] game where everybody's like wearing their – I mean, tons of people at this school are from one HBCU. And I think just like – just some – I don't even know, just maybe some cultural things.
Ralph	W-Min	Emotions: Being in the numerical minority: Not centered	I see some of the, the Black teachers hollering at the kids getting down on their level and I don't like that. But, it works for them but it wouldn't work for me.
Tammy	W-Min	Emotions: Being in the numerical minority: Not centered	I think a lot of teachers often feel like we [white women] just want to hang out with each other and nobody else. ... I wanted to make sure that I wasn't only trying to be the little clique – Which is hard, because those were the teachers that I knew the best.
Simon	W-Min	Emotions: Being in the numerical minority	I noticed that – I mean, just walk outside and look at bus duty. You'll see most of the time little clusters of little white teachers standing there talking and little clusters of little Black teachers standing there talking. ... I don't know if it's just commonality of interest, culture, whatever, I don't see as much interaction here between – I see some racial divides, definitely. I absolutely see that here.
Karen	W-Min, formerly	Emotions: Identity threat	My girlfriend and I were two of maybe four [white teachers, the rest were Black teachers.] We cried [once], because the [other teachers] were truly at the beginning ugly [to us]. They were like 'Oh, y'all don't know anything. Y'all are just young white girls. Y'all have never—.' I had just moved here, and I'm thinking, gosh, y'all don't even know me.
Henry	W-Min	Emotions: Identity threat	[Sometimes] students [will] say a racist remark to get a rise out of someone. But, like, amongst teachers I've never [heard] race talked about. [AUTHOR: Why is that do you think?] Because it's uncomfortable to talk about it. You don't want to be labeled as racist.
Nora	W-Min	Emotions: Identity threat	For the first time here I experienced the opposite version of racism. I had a kid say when we were talking about something, 'I didn't realize [that] white people had a tough time. I thought bad things never happened to y'all.' [I said,] 'No, bad stuff happens to everybody.' I've had kids come in and shut down immediately because I was a white teacher. ... They make comments, but you can tell when they've been basically told you're the enemy.
Norbert	W-Min	Emotions: Identity threat	As far as me personally, I don't see it [race mattering in school]. And as far as on a school level, I don't see it on a school level. On a district level, it's kind of obvious ... you don't see many white administrators.
Amy	W-Min	Emotions: Identity threat	In my last class, I have a couple students in there who keep me from being able to teach anything. Teaching has challenged a lot of things that I used to think before I actually taught. Maybe I am a hypocrite now because before I used to think what others thought about these students was racist. I used to think that white people held stereotypes about Black kids, who do this, that, and the other. And now that I'm on the inside, now that I see how hard it really is to teach kids in this environment.” (fieldnotes 9-16-14)
Brittany	W-Min	Coping: Creating distance	There's this one teacher who I just don't want to be around because he's made kind of like racist comments about the kids. Just like, he has this sort of attitude like he just, he's too good for here and he can't wait to leave. That kind of attitude I just don't like. So, I avoid people like that. ... Mr. Solomon [W-Min] is racist, because he uses the N-word and would only break up student fights to show his masculinity.
Tara	W-Min	Coping: Creating distance	I think there may be some teachers here that are more standoffish and not willing to mingle with people of another race. (AUTHOR: How can you tell that?) Like [by not] going to the break room or something. Our little group, it's me and Mrs. Leder [who is white] and a bunch of Black people. And we fit in just fine, like, nobody has a problem with us being there.
Doug	W-Min	Coping: Creating distance	I understand my students are Black and I'm a white male from the South, so. Also teaching history where I teach slavery and the Civil War, [I have to let them know that] I'm not a racist white guy but also letting them know that I'm their teacher and there are policies we're going to have to follow. ... I've had to come at them like, 'Guys if I was truly racist I wouldn't be here working. I care about y'all. This is just something that we have to teach.'
Julie	W-Min	Coping: Creating distance	Julie (W-Min) tells Toni (B-Maj) that “I don't know if the students would take the book <i>A Time to Kill</i> or <i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> well from me.” So Julie “tends to stay away from Black literature.”

Pseudonym	Group	Emotions or Coping	Illustrative example
Mary	W-Maj	Emotions: Being in the majority and issues of race	Every one of the [students] that won my subject area award were white. All white. ... I think that's something that needs to be addressed in our country, I really do. I think that they [Black students] feel like they're not as good as the ones that are from Surrey [i.e., white students]. I've heard one of my students say, well, we're not as smart as -- and they'll use that term. I'm like what are you talking about?
Candie	W-Maj	Emotions: Being in the majority and issues of race	Our faculty's not incredibly diverse, but I feel like we value diversity even if we ourselves aren't very diverse. We don't talk a whole lot about race. I taught at [my previous school] the year President Obama got elected. And I was one of maybe five Caucasian people in the whole school building. ... I felt, there was a lot of ethnic discussion, a lot ... things that I wasn't comfortable discussing.
Raymond	W-Maj	Emotions: Being in the majority and issues of race	[Previous schools I worked in were] about, I would say about 70 white, 30 Black [students]...[or] 40 white, 60 Black. And it was a lot of tension between the Blacks and the white people. It's rural, there was a lot of racial tension there. ... [Here], it's a comfortable balance. In the majority, there are different cultures in the [white] majority. Y'know, the preppy kids, [the] grungy [kids].
Jamie	W-Maj counselor	Emotions: Being in the majority and issues of race	This is one of the best places I've ever worked. You get to be yourself. You get to express your opinions and you don't get in trouble. You can make a mistake and you're just human. Whereas some places, you can't make a mistake. (AUTHOR: Why is that? Why is it more forgiving?) I think it's maybe the culture of this particular little town. Because everybody, most of the people who live in Surrey are professional people. And I guess, it's not as judgmental. And then there are many of them who have graduated from here who have come back as young teachers.
Nancy	W-Maj	Emotions: Identity threat	I tell [my students] up front that just because they use the N-word in this book [<i>Of Mice and Men</i>] does not mean that I should ever hear you saying it. And then I'll have the one yo-yo who sits and under his breath says [it]. I always dread it.
Cindi	W-Maj	Emotions: Identity threat	We talked about [race in my class] a lot last year. Kids would look at each other and say, "Such and such actin' white." I'm like, "How does one act white?" ... They said, "The way you talk [and] dress. The way you present yourself to authority figures." It was very confusing to me.
Ramona	W-Maj	Emotions: Identity threat	It's really taboo [to discuss race with teachers of the opposite race]. Everyone's scared of saying the wrong thing.
Ramona	W-Maj	Emotions: Identity threat	I struggle finding plays that they can relate to and I struggle finding common ground when it comes to teaching, and I feel like at [this school] that we just ignore it.
Matthew	W-Maj	Coping: Creating distance	[In the teaching profession,] you're gonna have white teachers who don't necessarily care to do anything over and above for someone not white. And I've seen that a bunch of times. ... I don't think you ever have teachers who necessarily discuss that. Uh, I think it's one of those ugly things that exists that we would just as soon ignore.
Raymond	W-Maj	Coping: Creating distance	If I heard somebody making a negative statement [about race], I would just try to distance myself and try to stay away from 'em.
Cindi	W-Maj	Coping: Creating distance	[When] we talked about race in my class... we had a very lighthearted [conversation], and it didn't get heavy [or] heated.
Shelley	W-Maj	Coping: creating distance	"[My work friend] Linda [W-Maj] showed me a comment she made on a student's paper. Next to where the student wrote in an essay, 'Only a Black person could understand,' the teacher wrote, 'Isn't that racist?' The parents came in and had a meeting with her and everything. She showed it to me and asked me what I thought. I thought, "Writing it in the form of 'isn't this' implies that it is. A wrote out a whole paragraph about what I would say about it. But I have my husband read over things I would send and he says, 'That's slander, that's condescending.' And I didn't send it—he saves my job. Anyway, I thought, 'That's not my job to deal with that. I don't teach AP language.' I think Linda was just taken aback."
Sally	W-Maj	Coping: Colorblind Reasoning	I guess being a teacher, I don't see all those races ... Even with adults, I mean, they're just an adult. ... So, I don't pay attention to it I guess.