Racialized Students in White-Centered Race Pedagogy: Bridging The Learning Gap Towards

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## Abstract

This study examines the burden placed on racialized students to address race-related issues within social work education, highlighting that social work education is not meant for racialized students. Utilizing Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework, this research employs focus groups and interviews to understand the experiences of these students and to provide insights into what changes need to be made. Findings revealed that the responsibility for promoting racial justice often falls disproportionately on racialized students, while essential concepts to racial justice, such as solidarity, unity, and collectivization are largely absent from the curriculum. Furthermore, the findings highlighted that race pedagogy is shaped by whiteness. This study emphasizes the need for change in race pedagogy and social work education, one that is committed to deconstructing whiteness and the colonial agenda

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This study focuses on race pedagogy in social work education to examine its implications for racial justice. This study was influenced by my experience during my Bachelor of Social Work education, where my racial identity and knowledge were often minimized in the classroom.  I wrote and spoke about the labour that I, as a racialized student, experienced. This labour included teaching white educators and students about race-related issues while not receiving much of an education on race myself. It was not until the second semester of my graduate degree, when I enrolled in a class with a racialized professor and only two other racialized students, that I felt like I was genuinely learning about race. It was invigorating, freeing, and exciting to be able to speak about race in relation to the curriculum every week so naturally. Initially, when creating this study, I was focused on examining the labour and the burden that I felt was placed on racialized students in social work to teach white students and educators about race. When reviewing the literature on race social work education, I found limited research that directly discussed the labour of racialized students. Instead, much of the existing literature on social work education and race discusses the emotional complexities for racialized students in a predominantly white classroom. Where racialized students in various social work programs were often invalidated, experienced discrimination, and diminished (Stevenson, 2022; Rios et al., 2022). However, some studies with racialized participants briefly discussed their attempts to mitigate issues with race pedagogy by using their own knowledge (Davis & Mirick, 2021; Mbakogu et al., 2021; Razack, 2001; Stevenson, 2022). With this, I wanted to validate that labour is placed on racialized students and to understand how this affects students' own learning experiences. Specifically, how taking the role of an educator may prevent racialized students from learning about race and racial justice.

Critical race scholars emphasize solidarity and collective action in racial justice (Dobbie & Richards-Schuster, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Mbakogu et al., 2021; Mutamba, 2014). As represented in other literature surrounding social work education, the experiences of racialized students illustrated that they were often isolated in the classroom, indicating that unity did not exist for them. I sought to explore how race pedagogy could better foster a sense of unity and solidarity for racialized students within the classroom, as I felt in that course.

With this, this study heavily utilizes the principles of Critical Race Theory to explore how social work education could better employ tools for racial justice. Moreover, I aimed to examine how social work education teaches principles surrounding Critical Race Theory. I also aimed to analyze what is needed for solidarity, mutual learning, and collaboration within the classroom, and the possible benefits for racialized students. Additionally, I sought to better understand the directions of learning in social work education, to explore if and how they are geared towards white students, and how to better foster mutual learning in the classroom. Accordingly, I used the narratives of racialized students to identify the gaps in race education. I hoped to use their knowledge to shape how social work education and race pedagogy could move towards both better supporting racialized students and racial justice. The knowledge from the participants provided tangible suggestions to go beyond what is currently taught in race education and has largely shaped the future implications of this study.

**Research Question**

What insights do the experiences of racialized social work students offer about race pedagogy, and what are the implications for these students and the broader pursuit of racial justice?

## Theoretical Framework

This thesis will utilize Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a foundational framework and will influence the development and articulation of the thesis in examining the learning dynamics of racialized social work students. This examination seeks to uncover the framework's ontological and epistemological origins and how this research, including its research questions, data, and analysis, will utilize the theory's foundation to examine race and racism within social work education.

## Theoretical Assumptions

*Key Tenets*

Critical Race Theory holds many key tenets that will be used throughout this paper to justify the use of the theory to inform this research. First, CRT believes race to be socially constructed rather than a biological difference (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), where "the social construction thesis holds that race is a social invention that is constantly changed and manipulated based on the needs of the white dominant group…" (Daftary, 2018, p.443). This theory argues that racism is not confined to some policies or practices but rather is entrenched in our systems (Lynn et al., 2013). Race inequalities are claimed to be "invisible or unrecognizable, making it even more difficult to eradicate" (Daftary, 2018, p.443). Critical Race Theory is interested in how metanarratives or dominant discourses, such as the denial of racism (Lynn et al., 2013) or epistemic privilege (Fricker, 2017), are typically concealed and used to maintain racial hierarchy (Lynn et al., 2013). Here, Critical Race Theory seeks to expose the ways in which race is embedded and interacts with our systems and institutions (Daftary, 2018; Lynn et al., 2013). Furthermore, Critical Race Theory critiques liberalism with its view that "embraces colorblindness, neutrality of the law, and incremental change; however, CRT asserts that these

formal conceptions of equality only remedy the most blatant forms of discrimination" (Kolivoski et al., p. 270). For this reason, to understand race and racism, an understanding of history and current social contexts are needed to unpack the way racism is prevalent in our structures by identifying underlying processes that uphold racial hierarchies (Lynn et al., 2013).

With this, Critical Race scholars tend to use "non-traditional methods of research such as narrative approaches and storytelling as a means to challenge the existing social construction of race (Ladson-Billings 1998), and to "open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414). Non-traditional methods may value other ways of knowing and being that are not commonly highlighted in mainstream research (Daftary, 2018) and offer insights into acts of resistance that may inform implications for change (Johnstone & Lee, 2021). In addition to non-traditional research methods, Critical Race Theory highlights the importance of the unity of people in a way that honours differences to lead collective action (Daftary, 2018). One voice cannot represent the complexity of all the experiences of racialized people; however, a combination of experiences can call out the intertwined needs of groups and peoples and provide an avenue to resist with others for the common goal of liberation (Daftary, 2018). This departs from Eurocentric norms of individualism and sees problems as interconnected, highlighting the need for collaboration. Unity also ties in with the principle that action-oriented goals that provide tangible tools are critical in social justice rather than simply documenting injustices (Daftary, 2018). It is here where history, storytelling of collaboration, and resistance can be used as an approach to racial justice (Johnstone & Lee, 2021).

*Ontological and Epistemological Origins*

Critical Race Theory emerged from Critical Legal Studies as racial inequalities across various structures remained in the United States despite the enactment of Civil Rights laws

(Daftary, 2018). Critical Race Theory is formed from the groundwork laid by Derrick Bell which interrogates how legal systems are shaped by economic and social factors (Lynn et al., 2013). Bell's work questions the neutrality of law as they are impacted by these facets (Lynn et al., 2013). While Bell in his writing of *Race, Racism, and American Law,* does not directly label or coin Critical Race Theory, his work on race and law influenced the development of the framework (Lynn et al., 2013). As a result, it has manifested in various fields to provide a critical perspective in examining issues of race and racism, privilege, and oppression. Ontologically, Critical Race Theory argues that race is socially constructed and has implications for individuals and systems (Lynn et al., 2013). This theoretical framework explores how race is understood, constructed, and maintained, and how it shapes the world around us. Critical Race Theory examines ways of knowing, arguing that knowledge is not objective but shaped by power (Lynn et al., 2013).

With this, Critical Race Theory conceptualizes power as a part of whiteness and privilege. Critical Race Theory argues that whiteness is viewed as a neutral identity (Brown & Jackson, 2013) that holds epistemic privilege (Fricker, 2017). Cheryl Harris (1993), a critical race scholar, writes that whiteness is an intangible property interest where the law and systems have historically protected white people. Here, race is not just a social construct but, rather, has real-world consequences (Harris, 1993). Critical Race Theory draws from standpoint theory, which suggests a person and their experiences, including their knowledge, are shaped by their identity to understand how power is maintained (Rodriguez et al., 2022).

Epistemologically, Critical Race Theory draws from Critical Theory, Critical Legal Studies, and Postmodernism to shape its rejection of Positivism (Lynn et al., 2013; DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2021). The criticism from Derrick Bell on Critical Legal Studies led Critical Race Theory to highlight the importance of interrogating how institutions uphold racism

(Closson, 2010). Similarly, Critical Theory and its examination of power and knowledge, serve as a tool to expose dominant narratives with a focus on uncovering how knowledge is shaped by historical and current social facets (Closson, 2010). With this, Critical Race Theory works to understand forms of racism and oppression that are hidden. Because race and knowledge are believed to be socially constructed in contrast to positivism, which suggests that there is objective knowledge, Critical Race Theory largely assumes that racism is ingrained within social systems, institutions, and policies (Daftary, 2018). It works to understand racism at different levels and how these levels interact.

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) builds off Critical Race Theory with her work on intersectionality and uses the theory to view how intersecting forms of identity create complex experiences of oppression based on our social location and positionality. As Critical Race Theory posits, there is no singular way of knowing; different narratives are needed to uncover the construction of knowledge around race. Consequently, Critical Race Theory argues that the lived experiences and narratives of marginalized folks are needed to understand and challenge racism (Daftary, 2018). Counter-narratives provide sources of knowledge that are different from traditional ways of knowing that can disrupt meta-narratives, including discourses of racial hierarchy (Daftary, 2018; DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2021; Delgado, 1989; Fricker, 2017; Johnstone & Lee, 2017). This key tenet of Critical Race Theory helps center and validate the perspectives and knowledge of racialized folks, offering a more nuanced understanding of how race operates in our structures. It additionally provides a holistic approach to social justice as it acknowledges differences in experiences. Both ontological and epistemological foundations give Critical Race Theory a framework to analyze power and race and consider racial oppression and racial exclusion to be deliberate (Daftary, 2018).

**Critical Race Theory and Postsecondary Education**

Critical Race Theory argues that dominant discourses are embedded in our institutions, and education is not exempted from this. As CRT is interested in examining how race interacts with systems of power, it can provide an avenue for structural analysis by examining the historical contexts of education and hidden forms of racial hierarchy. Critical Race Theory may support the clarification of the challenges in post-secondary institutions by deconstructing how race operates in education. Additionally, it can aid in revealing how post-secondary institutions or contexts may reproduce dominant discourses by analyzing how educational practices can perpetrate inequalities. In relation to this thesis, the application of CRT requires an examination of social work pedagogy, specifically, how knowledge is constructed and delivered and who it may benefit. Critical Race Theory can build on established research that argues education is not made for everyone (Mbakogu et al., 2021) and examine how social work pedagogy maintains this in classroom spaces. Utilizing the core tenet of centering racialized experiences, counter-narratives may provide insights into any potential gaps in the learning experience and speak to the limitations of the teachings around race and racism. Furthermore, the tenet of being action-oriented may challenge educational institutions to actively address systemic oppression and implement practices that support the learning of race and racism.

**Application of Critical Race Theory in Research**

*Critical Race Theory in Research Questions*

The research questions aim to explore these interactions in the context of education (Lynn et al., 2013). Existing research argues that educational institutions uphold a colour-blind approach, and social work education is not exempted from this (Mbakogu et al., 2021). It is found that curriculum, teaching methods and assessments can often fail adequately to account for race (Hosken, 2018; Mbakogu et al., 2021). Overlooking race in this way can maintain whiteness in education through its teachings and practice by assuming neutrality (Closson, 2010; Mbakogu

et al., 2021). Whiteness defaults white people as "unmarked and unnamed" (Badwall, 2014, pg.5). Accordingly, social work education standardizes whiteness, by centring and validating white knowledge while dismissing the role that race plays in whose knowledge is viewed are credible (Closson, 2010; Fricker, 2017; Mbakogu et al., 2021). The failure to account for race can lead to a lack of critical consciousness and reflexivity that positions race and our identity as unimportant (Badwall, 2014; Closson, 2010). With this, social work education can be seen as departed from issues of racism rather than complacent thus hiding the pervasiveness of racism (Closson, 2010; Hosken, 2018; Mbakogu et al., 2021).

Critical Race Theory argues that colorblindness maintains racial hierarchy by ignoring the experiences of racialized people, hindering the ability to address racism within our structures altogether. Because Critical Race Theory highlights the use of history in understanding injustices (Lynn et al., 2013), we can apply this tenet to better understand gaps in education. Particularly, this research is interested in responsibilization. Neoliberalism emphasizes self-governance and responsibility regardless of social contexts; "this process of 'responsibilising' citizens also succeeds in 'irresponsibilising' governments and institutions" (Liebenberg et al., 2013, p. 1007). Responsibilization thus refers to the process of attributing people's struggles to their actions and behaviour, irrespective of how they are situated in the world (Liebenberg et al., 2013). Throughout history, we see patterns where addressing issues of race and racism are often taken up by racialized folks, as race is often not understood or adequately addressed as a systemic problem (Badwall, 2014). This research seeks to understand if this occurs in education. Specifically, if racialized students take up the responsibility of teaching about race. Furthermore, this research also aims to explore the implications of the responsibility taken up by racialized students. Additionally, as race is not taught adequately, it begs the question of who education is made for. This theoretical framework is relied upon to unpack these questions by using lived

experiences to expose what meta-narratives shape discourses of race in education. The nature of this research and the questions it will ask focus on examining underlying assumptions and practices in social work education in a way that recognizes history, structural inequalities, and power hierarchies.

*Critical Race Theory in Research Methods*

The principle of unity supports the chosen research methods for this thesis. Critical Race Theorist scholars argue that our relationship with one another as racialized people is complex and hidden as a consequence of power (Mutamba, 2014). Our history has shown that there has been solidarity between racial groups, which has been a form of resistance to whiteness (Mutamba, 2014). To avoid perpetuating harm, we, as racialized people and social workers, need to be able to reflect on our relationship and history with one another (Mutamba, 2014). Because power is argued to be linked to whiteness, efforts that challenge power often face suppression (Mbakogu et al., 2021). We see this in revolutions, our resistance, and in our own field (Mutamba, 2014; Mbakogu et al., 2021). As the tenet of unity in Critical Race Theory highlights, "the combination of shared experiences into one voice enables the entire group of oppressed peoples of colour to benefit from it, as there is greater power and ability to effect change in larger numbers" (Daftary, 2018, p. 445). Western discourses align with individuality (Mbakogu et al., 2021). In social work, individuality is present across various sectors as it links to neoliberalism, deflecting blame, and the pursuit of responsibilization (Mehrotra & Gooding, 2022). Education is not exempt from this (Mbakogu et al., 2021). Racial groups are often separated intentionally through metanarratives that push the notion that our struggles are different rather than intertwined (Mutamba, 2014). Preventing the collectivization of our experiences that could be used to support one another. As Shah & Grimaldos (2023) write, "Collectivizing, moving from I to we, necessitates the sharing of stories, the sharing of power,

and the sharing of wisdom. Collectivizing situates disconnected, individual experiences within a larger socio-political and historical analysis." (p. 62) In social work, the process of individualization and colour blindness fails to see how our struggles exist and are connected with one another.

This tenet informs the research methodology, which consists of a focus group and interviews. In the focus group, I aim to create an environment that challenges social work pedagogy to learn if racialized collaboration and unity are a part of mainstream education. The mix of methods is intentional and interrelated. The focus groups will be used to learn about the participant's experiences in the traditional classroom setting. This includes asking about how they learned about race and racism and their role in the classroom. The group provides participants with the chance to collaborate, and build off one another. The interviews will then aim to learn if the direction of learning is different in a group of racialized folks than it is in a traditional social work classroom that is typically dominated by white students (Mbakogu et al., 2021. As Badwall (2014) suggests, in traditional social workspaces occupied by white workers, responsibility is placed on racialized workers to mitigate or deal with issues surrounding race. Critical Race Theory allows for the examination of responsibilization and how that might look different in a space consisting of racialized folks. It will also provide insight into how learning occurs if responsibility is shared. Essentially, the focus group is utilized to see if there is an existing problem with current social work pedagogy and how learning occurs, and the interviews are meant to establish the benefits of unity and solidarity.

In support of the theory, through unpacking metanarratives that maintain power and whiteness, we can stray away from individualism. This research aims to respond to questions that uncover whether solidarity occurs in traditional classrooms and how the focus group, specifically connecting with racialized social workers, aids in their ability to collectivize knowledge.

Additionally, this research seeks to understand how their learning benefited from unity. By collectivizing knowledge, racialized folks are able to challenge dominant narratives or "scripts of whiteness" (Badwall, 2015, p. 1) in a way that allows for a more nuanced understanding of race and what needs to change. By employing this methodology, the research aims to understand how learning may help us understand the importance of collaboration in the learning process.

*Justifying Theoretical Framework*

Critical Race Theory connects to each question posed in this research and supports the goal of decentering whiteness. Data collected is anticipated to provide counter-narratives that can be used to inform and shape social work pedagogy. As the theory argues that dominant discourses maintain systemic gaps (Daftary, 2010; Lynn et al., 2013), disrupting these narratives serves as a tool to decenter whiteness. It will uncover any potential gaps in traditional modes of learning and offer different avenues for the teaching of race and racism. Critical Race Theory for this reason connects to the research questions I have articulated as it emphasizes the importance of disruption. Current social work pedagogy is not sufficient in addressing issues of race and racism (Badwall, 2014; Gooding & Mehrotra, 2021; Mbakogu et al., 2021). For this reason, Critical Race Theory is compelling to my research as it allows me to understand the underpinnings of the experiences of learning for students. This theory will aid in speaking to prevailing narratives about race and how it can be made to be more productive.

Additionally, it provides a framework for examining discourses around inclusion and exclusion. While exclusion that relates to the disparities of financial barriers experienced by racialized folks in access to education or having low access to support for education (Hosken, 2018) are commonly looked at, there are other facets of exclusion and inclusion that are also disregarded. Here, exclusion is accounted for as participation. As literature speaks to, exclusion in education can look like racialized folks being allowed in spaces but are not able to contribute

in the same way white folks fully or meaningfully are able to (Badwall, 2014; Mbakogu et al., 2021). Critical Race Theory will support establishing a problem in what we count as inclusion by providing tenets to unpack the data/findings in how we understand definitions of exclusion and inclusion.

*Implications for Data Analysis*

Aligned with Critical Race Theory, social, political, and historical contexts will be used to understand data. First, a key feature of Critical Race Theory is interest convergence. Interest convergence, as written by Bell (1980), suggests that racial justice often happens when the interests of racialized folks align with dominant groups. Here, there is an emphasis on coalition building in order for change to occur (Bell, 1980). The findings of this research will consist of lived experiences of racialized students and will provide insights into how race is discussed in social work education and whose educational journey is being served. Interest convergence can be used to understand how race and racism are learned and taught in the classroom. Interest convergence would suggest that topics or discussions surrounding race may only be discussed if they align with the interest of the dominant (white) group. Because this theory argues that dominant discourse is embedded in our knowledge, teaching and learning are a part of this. With this, we can use Critical Race Theory and interest convergence to understand how meta-narratives impact education on race. Ladson-Billings (2020) argues that Critical Race Theory views school curriculum as a mode designed to uphold the "White supremacist master script" (p.18). As education exists within this realm of whiteness and serves the dominant group, race, and our learning of it, is not omitted from this process. Here, Critical Race Theory highlights the importance of uncovering whose interests are served within education. Current research finds that discussions around race often lack depth and critical analysis, making it intangible (Badwall, 2014; Mbakogu et al., 2021). The existing education on race is argued to serve the interest of

white folks by fulfilling the need to talk about race for basic inclusion and performative equality (Mbakogu et al., 2021). With this, Critical Race Theory can be used to analyze the findings to examine how the interests of white students and racialized students may not be aligned, whose interests are valued, and how racialized students respond to whiteness in education.

Additionally, data analysis will use Critical Race Theory to identify pragmatic strategies that could be applicable to education, as this theory promotes action-oriented approaches that reach beyond just writing about racial disparities (Daftary, 2018). While the research questions already seek to gain implications for education, the analysis will also look for ways to translate experiences in a way that identifies acts of resistance and hopes to provide ways for education to steer away from traditional ways of learning and what is currently taught.

**Limitations of the Theoretical Framework**

It is essential to recognize that while the group will only include racialized folks and will utilize Critical Race Theory, it is not free from whiteness. As the theory highlights, whiteness and racial hierarchy are embedded in our institutions, our language, and our practice (Daftary, 2018) and will be in this research. Social work as a profession is not free from these constraints, nor is it free from the work that we do. While this research aims to mitigate these imbalances by uncovering dominant discourse, it will never be able to entirely depart from colonial and neoliberal notions because of what the institution is rooted in. For this reason, the use of Critical Race theory should also work with post-colonial perspectives and Indigenous epistemologies. Additionally, it is common for Critical Race Theory to focus solely on race while ignoring how race intersects with different parts of our social location. While intersectionality has been built on Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, 1989), the theory is able to be complicit in the same issues that intersectionality aims to avoid. For instance, Johnstone & Lee (2021) highlight how Indigenous women have been misunderstood while holding the identity of both being Indigenous

and being a woman. Here, the authors share the limitations of Critical Race Theory, for seeing issues only as a race problem and Feminist Theory, for only seeing issues as a gender problem (Johnstone & Lee, 2021). While this research will mainly use Critical Race Theory, I hope to pull from different frameworks, like intersectional feminism and postcolonial theory, to inform my research. However, as Critical Race Theory has shaped my methodology and research questions, parts of identity that the participants have may not come out, even if it would impact the findings. For instance, class struggles and racialization or how this is a gendered field. While understanding that it can be difficult to look at every part of identity, this poses a limitation. Further research can be done to mitigate this where intersectionality is more closely looked at. Additionally, any parts of identity that participants are brought up can be analyzed in the findings. However, they would be the ones to discuss it themselves, and perhaps, because we sometimes are not able to contextualize our experiences, there is a possibility that other parts of their identity will not be brought up directly.

This research is intended to establish that there is a problem with the direction of learning, something that has not been entirely looked at before. It will provide tangible implications for future work that will be shaped by participants who know their own experiences. While this theory will pull from other epistemologies, Critical Race Theory, with its ontological and epistemological origins, provides this research with a framework that can help uncover hidden structural inequalities in social work education and the learning process. Through its tenets, this theory will guide and support the research's questions, analysis, and future implications.

**Literature Review**

This literature review explores existing research on social work education in relation to race and racism in order to gain insight into the learning process for racialized social work students. This review will explore how race pedagogy impacts the experiences of racialized students, the inclusion and exclusion of racialized students in learning, and the need for mutual learning, unity, and collaboration for racialized students. The literature will be examined to set a foundation for this research and to better understand what questions are left unanswered.

**Connecting Social Work Education to Social Work History**

As Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong write, "Starting points matter." (2018, p.437). It is difficult to understand issues of race and racism in social work education without acknowledging and understanding the historical racist roots of social work. The history of Indigenous, racialized and/or immigrant people in social work to a great extent is omitted (Badwall, 2014; Fortier & Hon-Sing Won, 2018; Park & Kemp, 2006; Wright et al., 2021). Early social workers, in the participation of practices of charity and moral reform (Badwall, 2015), played a significant role in the process of enforcing norms to frame racialized folks as 'others' in need of assimilation with the aim of building a singular national identity (Jeffery, 2002; Fortier & Hon-Sing Won). Nation-building refers to constructing a sense of identity amongst citizens, involving the regulation of marginalized peoples to fit a homogenous identity (Jeffery, 2002; Badwall, 2014; Lee & Ferrer, 2014). With this, knowledge and ways of being that do not fit this identity are seen as in need of control. The goals of nation-building are argued to remain in current social work practice (Fortier & Hon-Sing Won; Lee & Ferrer, 2014) as social workers are placed as actors of virtue, generosity and 'good' (Badwall, 2015), who aid in the process of nation-building or as Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong (2018) discuss, 'civilizing' who fall out of this identity. Nation-

building positions white individuals, along with eurocentric norms, as morally superior, justifying the control over racialized peoples. With this, whiteness operates as the standard.

While Critical Race Theory largely informs the framework of this thesis, it's important to note the significant influence of Indigenous scholars in understanding the importance of history. The telling of history, including whose knowledge and stories are told and hold credibility, is influenced by whiteness (Fricker, 2017; Smith, 1999). Corntassel and T'lakwadz highlight that

"The nation-state of Canada offers a very different version of history that those of Indigenous nations—one that glosses over the colonial legacies of removing Indigenous peoples from their families and homelands when enforcing assimilationist policies, all of which were intended to eradicate Indigenous nations" (2009, pg. 138).

Furthermore, settler colonialism has shaped and built social work in a multitude of ways; however, the impacts of settler colonialism on social work have been largely erased from education (Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong, 2018). Similarly, social work has erased the history of other racialized people by either ignoring or misrepresenting experiences, including experiences of colonialism and imperialism (Park & Kemp, 2006; Wright et al., 2021). The power involved in creating narratives while simultaneously preventing some narratives from existing is vital to imperialism (Said, 1994).

While some aspects of history are taught in social work education, it is found to be distorted or minimized, providing a false sense of its impacts on marginalized people (Badwall, 2015; Wilson et al, 2023; Wright et al., 2021). It is argued that the erasure of history serves as a tool for whiteness by suppressing the role that white supremacy plays in the struggles of

racialized people (Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong, 2018; Wright et al., 2021)—attributing our struggles as a personal fault rather than the result of whiteness.

For this reason, social work education is a branch of colonial power. This includes the absence of history when teaching social work by omitting knowledge and experiences altogether or misrepresenting historical events (Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong, 2018; Wright et al., 2021). Failure to account for race in education holds a neutral position on race inequity (Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong, 2018). A position that is believed by those in power to be detached from the ongoing and historical injustice and erasure of racialized people. Furthermore, without discussions on settler contexts, the history of canada and the intertwined experiences of racialized people are simultaneously erased. The avoidance of history is a deliberate mechanism to deflect blame and responsibility so that those with power can maintain it by situating struggles as personal rather than as a consequence of white supremacy and privilege (Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong, 2018).

While social work education, its teachings, assessments, and practices have shifted over time, Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong (2018) argue that its objectives of control and white supremacy remain relatively the same despite the changes that have been made. Wright and colleagues (2021) assert that censoring history coincides with colour blindness. It is not that history is not told; it is what is not included. In education specifically, historical distortions are used within social work education to maintain racial hierarchy (Wright et al., 2021). Where the experiences of racialized people are frequently not meaningfully included in race pedagogy, providing a false sense of how inequality has manifested into what it is today (Olcoń et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2021). Race pedagogy refers to the educational approach, practices, and teachings of race in education. The exclusion of various perspectives of our histories is calculated, where the dominant group controls and produces narratives highlighting their own agenda (Wright et al.,

2021). With this, social work and social work education reproduce systems of power by upholding meta-narratives through the erasure of racialized experiences and knowledge (Wright et al., 2021). Racial hierarchy is further maintained by the erasure of forms of history, like storytelling and oral histories (Smith, 1999). In social work education, forms of history, like ones that deviate from dominant narratives, are excluded (Fortier & Hon-Sing Won, 2018). It further diminishes the strides that racialized people have made as a result of their resistance and their contributions to social change (Olcoń et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2023; Wright et al., 2021). Consequently, the erasure of history fails to provide discourses of race that stray from whiteness. Rather, whiteness shapes how race pedagogy is shaped and delivered. With this, racial justice involves reshaping and understanding history beyond what is seen as legitimate (Corntassel & T'lakwadzi, 2009; Smith, 1999). In line with Critical Race Theory, history will be used to situate this research's findings to uncover how whiteness and colonial violence continue to operate in education.

**Racial Justice and Solidarity**

The suppression of history includes our histories with one another as racialized people (Mutamba, 2014). Racial justice, conceptualized by Valls (2018), emphasizes the importance of accurate historical knowledge in connecting our everyday experiences to their social contexts. Our histories are argued to be purposely concealed to prevent us from collectivizing our experiences and resisting our oppression with one another (Mutamba, 2014). Critical Race Theory highlights solidarity as a vital aspect of racial justice and resistance (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Crucial to this thesis is the notion that liberation, or our freedom, cannot be achieved alone or by the hands of our oppressors (Freire, 1970). Solidarity entails recognizing the complexity and differences in our identities and experiences to identify commonalities in our

collective struggle (Dobbie & Richards-Schuster, 2018; Mutamba, 2014). Solidarity does not mean finding likeness across different experiences but understanding the connected nature of each of our unique struggles (Dobbie & Richards-Schuster, 2018). The erasure of history means that our interactions with one another as racialized people and methods of solidarity and resistance are hidden (Mutamba, 2014). It is difficult for people to fully comprehend the challenges they face without understanding the historical, political and social contexts in which they are bound (Dobbie & Richards-Schuster, 2018). These contexts are concealed through the erasure of history but may be uncovered through solidarity (Dobbie & Richards-Schuster, 2018; Mutamba, 2014), Here, solidarity can be used to challenge how our struggles, despite their differences, are located within whiteness. With this, solidarity may be leveraged to critique how meta-narratives centred around whiteness shape our understanding of various issues by connecting and identifying the links in our experiences.  It further allows people to come together and connect their advocacy, and as Mbakogu and colleagues (2021) suggest, strength in numbers can be a powerful tool in resisting racial injustice. This can create the disruption that is needed to deconstruct whiteness.

Solidarity can also be employed to deconstruct whose knowledge holds and does not hold privilege by providing validity to otherwise dismissed knowledge (Mbakogu et al., 2021; Mehrotra & Gooding, 2022; Rios et al., 2023). For this reason, solidarity is a key theme in this thesis to better comprehend how the experiences of racialized students are interrelated. Accordingly, I aim to unpack how education serves the dominant group by promoting counter-narratives through utilizing collective voices.

**Current Race Pedagogy**

The following section of this review examines the existing literature on race pedagogy and social work education to identify how racial justice is discussed and applied in education and what requires further exploration.  In relation to the omission of history, the erasure of resistance, both current and historical resistance, has to do with intangible social work practices that do not work to mitigate racism (Olcoń et al., 2019). As resistance is deliberately hidden in order to maintain racial hierarchy (Wright et al., 2021), education fails to grasp how change is possible. An empirical study by Olcoń and colleagues (2019) looks at how social work students learn about race and ethnicity and found that many social work programs failed to address racial inequity meaningfully (Olcoń et al., 2019). Olcoń and colleagues (2019) find that this gap is caused by a lack of consensus on what actually constitutes diversity education. Without a proper understanding of how race should be included in education, for instance, dismissing historical significance, students do not receive an adequate understanding of racism and how it interacts with our systems (Olcoń et al., 2019). Overlooking critical aspects of race, like how power is maintained through social work, race pedagogy is not able to provide a sufficient understanding of how race is prevalent in our social work interactions (Davis & Mirick, 2021; Olcoń et al., 2019). Furthermore, a lack of unified understanding of race fails to prepare students to engage in issues surrounding race (Olcoń et al., 2019). This thesis is particularly interested in how current race pedagogy prevents racialized students from grasping what is needed for racial justice.

In addition, it was found that social work education has avoided overt discussions around race and racism and instead has drawn attention to concepts such as inclusivity, diversity and cultural competency (Stevenson et al., 2022). While these are important concepts, this sparks the question of whether these concepts are a result of a genuine commitment to race equity or a response to pressures to talk about race (Olcoń et al., 2019; Stevenson et al., 2022). The

avoidance of explicit discussion around racism reflects a broader issue of confronting history. In part, collective action surrounding systemic racism exposed shortcomings in social work (Stevenson et al., 2022). Increased public pressure has led many social work areas, including education, to enact damage control by including more concepts surrounding race (Stevenson et al., 2022). While there has been an increase in a focus on racial justice, race scholars argue that there still needs to be accountability in social work education to ensure meaningful anti-racist action (Olcoń et al., 2019; Stevenson et al., 2022). The heavy focus on 'race justice' in these cases is thus distinct from anti-racist action as there is a lack of commitment to resistance. Although there has been an increase in anti-racist language, there have not been substantial changes in race-pedagogical approaches that challenge dominant ideologies (Olcoń et al., 2019; Stevenson et al., 2022). Joseph (2022) discusses the "uncanny" dissonance between recognizing racism is prevalent in the field and the complicity with the reproduction of racism. While various social work areas work to include diversity and inclusion ideologies (Stevenson et al., 2022), the superficial commitment fails to grasp the persistence of racial issues in social work. This dissonance creates an "uncanny" feeling that the profession is constantly surprised by racial topics as it has not confronted the extent to which its practices and teachings are entrenched in racial hierarchies (Joseph, 2022).

The effectiveness of race education will be explored later in this thesis to better understand how this impacts racialized students and their learning. Furthermore, it will situate the gaps in race pedagogy in historical contexts to comprehend the role of power in shaping race education.

**Inclusion and Exclusion of Learning**

Epistemic injustice also shapes students' learning experiences and is what Fricker (2017) describes as the silencing or misrepresenting of one's knowledge and contributions. As illustrated in literature, this injustice has been used throughout history to silence and suppress racialized people (Fricker, 2017). Hosken (2018) finds that social work education follows the dominant norms by mainly valuing the contributions of white scholars, teaching and appreciating methods and policies made by and for white people and dismissing the existing contradictions in social work (Hosken, 2018). Consequently, dominant narratives are centered and reinforced in education by heavily relying on teaching perspectives formed through a eurocentric lens (Hosken, 2018). This informs how race is taught. Furthermore, Davis and Mirick (2021) underscore how racialized people are technically allowed in spaces to participate but are not able to meaningfully contribute their knowledge. For instance, Razack, in their study around racialized students, found that "some students risked being labelled as angry and problematic when they introduced and addressed issues" (Razack, 2001. p, 226). This draws evidence that racialized students need to conform to the expectations of their institutions. Here, students prevent themselves from questioning the status quo of their agency (Razack, 2001).  Seemingly, students face barriers when attempting to further their education as they are not seen as a valuable and integral part of the learning process. Important to this thesis is how students are able to build their knowledge if they and their knowledge are seen as illegitimate.

Interestingly, Razack (2001) briefly discusses that racialized students often feel that they take up the responsibility of mitigating issues around racism or "felt they had to be the voice for all minorities" (p, 228). Similarly, a participant in Stevenson and colleagues study found that they felt like they had to teach white students about race but were not compensated or even recognized for their efforts (2022). This speaks to how students may take up an educator role in

this education. However, these authors do not delve into an extensive analysis of this issue. Instead, their studies underscore a need for further exploration, which this thesis seeks to address. The pressure to fill in gaps in learning also leads to the question of whose educational interests are being served. If racialized students are finding that there are gaps in the education of race, what is currently being taught may be serving the interest of the dominant group as there seems to be the recurring theme of ensuring white students and teachers' needs are met. This thesis will build on why the responsibility may shift to racialized students to address issues of race. Stevenson and colleagues (2022) study also described the "whitewashing of course content" and several discussed content that was geared toward supporting white students and workers and ignoring the needs of students of colour. (p. 425). Consequently, white knowledge is prioritized in education through the erasure of other ways of knowing (Hosken, 2018). Questions or ideas that challenge the dominant group are often met with opposition (Hosken, 2018). Hosken (2018) argues that this maintains existing power structures by teaching concepts that align with the agenda of whiteness. Often, social work education does not address the needs of racialized students as the knowledge education (re)produces constantly undermines the knowledge they possess (Davis & Mirick, 2021; Rios et al., 2023; Hosken, 2018). This thesis hopes to reveal how the implications of exclusion in education on racialized students and their ability to learn and implement strategies toward racial justice.

**The Experiences of Racialized Students**

Lived experiences are often utilized in research to better understand the barriers racialized students face. Much of the existing literature focuses on the impacts of social work education, as it links to whiteness, on racialized students. As presented in these studies, this directly impacts the way racialized students view themselves in their education. For instance, a

study conducted by Mehrotra and Gooding (2022) found that students who felt that there was a

lack of meaningful learning experience related to race emotionally withdrew from their

education.  It is also commonly found that racialized students experience racism from their

educators or other faculty members and frequently had to navigate these issues on their own

(Mbakogu et al., 2021; Stevenson, 2022; Rios et al., 2023). With this, a burden is placed on

racialized students to address issues of racism in the absence of academic or faculty intervention

(Stevenson, 2022). Frequently, concerns were ignored or invalidated (Stevenson, 2022; Rios et

al., 2023). If racialized students did not address issues of racism themselves, for various reasons

like negative backlash or the minimization of their experiences, these issues would go largely

unnoticed by their white peers or faculty, leaving students to essentially advocate for themselves

(Davis & Mirick, 2021; Stevenson, 2022; Rios et al., 2023). Those who experienced

microaggressions in their social work education also experienced a sense of isolation, impacting

their learning experience (Rios et al., 2023; Davis & Mirick, 2021). Current race pedagogy

upholds the notion that issues of race and racism are not significant. This is reflected in the

experiences of racialized students who found it difficult to connect and apply their own

perspectives, knowledge, and viewpoints to their practice (Mehrotra & Gooding, 2022). This

seemingly contributes to the production of whiteness, where racialized people are limited in how

they contribute to their practice. This further aids in the process of race neutrality, where race is

not seen as a part of our experiences and the institutions we learn and work within, and thus, it

does not need to be talked about. The processes of race neutrality present how minimization of

non-dominant experiences can occur in education. In this context, these studies offer insight into

the emotional complexities involved in social work education in relation to racial identity. This

thesis is curious to learn how the consequences of emotional intricacies impact the education

racialized students receive. Furthermore, given the experiences of racialized students that have been documented, I am interested in learning how social work education facilitates tenets of racial justice.

**Mutual Learning, Unity, and Collaboration for Racialized People**

Critical Race Theory highlights the importance of mutual learning, unity and solidarity. As the experiences of racialized students are constantly being dismissed, collaboration, and thus unity, may not occur in the classroom. This thesis builds on how this impacts the learning of racialized students, particularly how they are able to understand race and the uses of solidarity. The need and urgency for racial solidarity is illustrated by Mutamba (2014), who defines inclusion within the colonial state as problematic and violent. With this, inclusion serves as a tool to further the colonial goals through the legitimization of colonial systems, promoting disunity between racialized people (Mutamba, 2014). Seeking for our knowledge simply to be included in education also produces harm. A common theme highlighted in literature around social work education and race is the issue of tokenization where aspects of race are added into parts of the curriculum with a lack of change in the structure of social work education. (Mehrotra & Gooding, 2022). This involves a transformation in education that dismantles whiteness in its policies and practices and goes beyond mere inclusion (Mbakogu et al., 2021).

This thesis is interested in how this transformation can be benefited by the knowledge of racialized students. Mutamba (2014) emphasizes the need to understand our history with one another and how our struggles are related. As education on race is argued to lack depth (Stevenson, 2022), this creates the question of how racialized folks are able to understand and connect struggles around race that are beyond their own experiences and identity.  If students are placed in positions to educate their white peers and teachers about race and racism (Davis &

Mirick, 2021; Rios et al., 2023; Stevenson, 2022), how are they able to learn about critical concepts around race themselves? Mutamba (2014) provides a powerful standpoint on social change and will be used to better understand how we can form solidarity in education. Mbakogu and colleagues (2021) specifically emphasize how collaboration and collective action are necessary to dismantle whiteness within education as they argue for collective knowledge-building as a tool to mitigate educational disparities (Mbakogu et al., 2021). This further highlights the need for racialized people to learn and work with one another. However, given the current state of social work education, I argue that the principles of Critical Race Theory, and thus the tenets of racial justice, are not being taught or employed in race pedagogy.

The goal of this thesis diverges from the pursuit of inclusion within traditional paradigms. It is not to get some or parts of our knowledge that we hold as racialized people to a position of privilege. But rather, aims to dismantle that our knowledge needs to be included in dominant perspectives to be considered important. Where students can come together with their similarities and differences and find commonalities in their collective struggle to challenge the dominant ideologies in their education, it hopes to promote the notion that there is no one way of knowing in order to dismantle the existing hierarchy of knowledge.

Mutual learning may deepen the understanding of solidarity by encouraging students to navigate the tensions between differences (Cook-Sather et al., 2023). For this reason, this thesis is interested in unpacking how solidarity can be used to deepen the understanding of race for racialized students. As the literature notes, racialized students who take up educational roles are teaching rather than learning (Stevenson, 2022; Razack, 2001). How can solidarity be formed if mutual understanding is not occurring? As discussions around race are often not productive or shut down (Hosken, 2018; Mbakogu et al., 2021; Stevenson, 2022; Razack, 2001), it is critical to

understand what can be done to change this. This research hopes to see how solidarity can be used to provide a shift in the classroom in how learning occurs. Additionally, it aims to provide a better foundation for how solidarity can be formed amongst racial identities.

Existing literature highlights that there is an issue with race discourses in social work education that racialized students seem to attempt to alleviate themselves. This may have consequences for their own learning. The established studies point to the need for collaboration to do a multitude of things, like mitigating epistemic injustice and allowing collective resistance. I argue that similar methods can be used to better understand the learning process of racialized students and to better the education of race in social work. Past research points out the problem of racialized students seemingly teaching race in order to fix race pedagogy in social work education. This research aims to strengthen the evidence that the responsibility is shifted onto racialized students to take up education on race and the implications of that on their own learning. Additionally, how racialized students can further racial and social justice through collaboration and solidarity. I hope to prove that social work education attempts similar purists of individualism, disunity, and whiteness by preventing racialized students from learning about race and racial justice.

**Methodology**

**Reflections On the Chosen Methodology**

This research follows the principles of narrative inquiry, which focuses on understanding stories and experiences within social, historical, and political contexts (Fraser, 2004). Under a neoliberal worldview, the experiences and knowledge of marginalized groups are often seen as separate from these contexts (Gooding & Mehrotra, 2021). The choice to use narrative inquiry was informed by Critical Race Theory, which argues that dominant discourses shape our institutions (Ladson-Billings, 2020). Narrative inquiry aids in the process of forming counter-narratives that can discredit the harmful discourses around race that are held and perpetuated by whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 2020; Lynn et al., 2013). White supremacy is dependent on institutions, such as education, to silence, dismiss, and erase racialized people who hold counter-narratives that challenge whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 2020). The significance of dominant discourses, in relation to this research, is that they are able to form a constructed idea of what race and racism are, guided by notions of whiteness. This is done through the denial of the reality of racism in our institutions (Lynn et al., 2013).

There are two things that I continued to grapple with when creating this research study. One, having to legitimize that there is a problem with social work education, and two, the issues of inclusion and exclusion. Narrative inquiry in research can provide an avenue to deconstruct notions of whiteness by providing evidence of other ways of knowing (Stavrou & Murphy, 2021). It is, essentially, providing validity to racialized people in legitimate streams of knowledge. By legitimate streams of knowing, I mean that research, a tool of whiteness, dictates what is seen as credible. Thus, the lives and voices of racialized people seemingly need to be a part of legitimate streams of knowledge to be deemed remotely credible. This research is not

exempted from reproducing similar notions of whiteness by asking racialized participants to prove their experiences and knowledge by being written in this manner.

I also recognize the issue of how narrative inquiry is sometimes utilized to include or integrate the experiences and knowledge of racialized people in dominant ways of being or knowing. This may lead to further issues where research aims to incorporate marginalized knowledge into institutions and systems that have continuously and historically excluded them (Wright et al., 2021). For this reason, my use of narrative inquiry must be explicit. My goal with using lived experiences is not to include them in existing frameworks or mainstream ways of knowing but, rather, will be used to challenge discourses which misrepresent race and racialized people. It is important to highlight that this research is not simply just a lesson for white teachers or students, nor is it asking for the inclusion of our knowledge in education. Instead, it is evidence of the need for racialized folks to engage with one another and a tool to do so. To be included in mainstream education or dominant ideologies means limiting our knowledge to certain boundaries that adhere to whiteness by being a part of something that has these constraints of what is legitimate and illegitimate.

Narrative inquiry is commonly used to understand, write, and document the experiences of racialized folks in social work education (Stavrou & Murphy, 2021). The narratives gained from this research study will be used to examine how whiteness is prevalent in race pedagogy and its impacts on the learning of racialized students. With this, narrative inquiry guides this research in appreciating the experiences that have been actively removed from education. While being able to provide my research with knowledge that explores this research question, it simultaneously allows this research to confront whiteness and racism in social work by highlighting the resistance of racialized students that are otherwise hidden (Mbakogu et al.,

2021). The lived experiences and narratives that are a part of this study will act as a catalyst for challenging and rejecting the discourses that maintain marginalization by locating their narratives in historical, political and social contexts. While it is expected that the narratives gained from this research will speak to the emotional complexities of being a racialized student, it aims to draw a connection between these experiences and the learning of race justice, specifically how racialized students are able to conceptualize and implement tools of solidarity. Through this, sharing lived experiences does not merely become a tool of inclusion but rather a way and strategy for disruption in education.

As discussed in the theoretical framework section, Critical Race Theory has primarily influenced the chosen methodology and methods of this thesis. Much of the existing literature on social work education and race focuses on the experiences of racialized students and the emotional complexities involved with it and inadequate preparedness for students to work in the field. Literature on racial justice points to the importance of collective action and solidarity. This thesis is interested in using narrative inquiry to better understand how solidarity and mechanisms attached to solidarity, such as collaboration and mutual learning, occur in social work education to uncover if race pedagogy aligns with Critical Race Theory.

**Eligibility Criteria**

The chosen methods for this study include a focus group followed by one-on-one interviews with four participants. Initially, the eligibility criteria asked for participants who had graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) from McMaster University within two to five years and who identified as racialized. This criterion was set in hopes that participants would have had a chance to reflect on their BSW experience while still being able to remember specific aspects of their experience. The eligibility criteria were soon amended as I had only received two

participants. The amended criteria asked for participants who had graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work from McMaster University within ten years and who identified as racialized. While the amended criteria called for students who have graduated within the past ten years, all the participants in this study have graduated within the past five years and were able to account for their BSW education. Participant recruitment included a research poster and emailing people who fit the criteria. I had chosen only to include past students from McMaster University as it was likely that most of the participants would have graduated from this institution, reflecting my primary network of contacts. The group of four confirmed that responsibilization occurs within the classroom and provided me with insights into issues with race pedagogy.

**Recruitment**

The research poster was circulated amongst BSW alumni through an email list as well as on social media. Both the focus group and interviews were facilitated virtually. The one-on-one interviews were conducted within two weeks following the focus group to ensure the discussions remained clear in participants' minds. Ethics approval was given on May 23, 2024, and recruitment was completed on May 25, 2024.

An honorarium of $40 was provided to participants for completing each step of the research study. It is essential to recognize and value the knowledge and the time of racialized folks who participate in research. Offering honorariums serves as a tangible acknowledgment of the expertise and lived experiences that participants bring to the study. Additionally, providing honorariums may help to promote equity in research practices, particularly within communities that have historically been exploited in academic research (Gehlert & Mozersky, 2018). The honorarium hoped to provide a sense of reciprocity and mutual respect between me as the researcher and the participants.

**Methods – Focus Group & Interviews**

The focus groups and interviews were conducted virtually over Zoom Video Communications. Based on the eligibility demographic, it was expected that not all participants would have been located in the same geographical region for reasons such as post-graduate employment. For better recruitment engagement, it was advertised that the focus group and interviews would be held virtually. I researched various meeting platforms to see which one's participants would most likely be comfortable with and to ensure that they were secure for privacy reasons. While most potential participants would likely have had access to technology to join this study, given the demographic, it did exclude any potential participants who did not have internet or technology access. However, a virtual platform also allowed me to reach more participants. The focus group was conducted, and four interviews occurred shortly after. Both the focus group and interviews were audio-recorded on Zoom and then deleted soon after it was transcribed as data with the use of pseudonyms.

The focus group hoped to establish that there is a problem with race pedagogy, specifically, the role of racialized students in social work education. It also aimed to identify some of the processes that impact the learning of race. I chose to do a focus group instead of solely conducting interviews to provide an avenue for the participants, as racialized people, to collaborate. The focus group allowed me to analyze the dynamics between the participants as racialized (past) students and compare it to their educational experience. The focus group provided insight into how the participant viewed their own in relation to the other participants. The justification of the focus group is linked to the interviews—the interviews aimed to better understand the dynamics that support and allow for learning. The interviews allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences in the focus group, specifically, being in the group of

other racialized people. With this, the interviews acted as a collaborative analysis session that was guided by questions that asked participants about their experience and thoughts on the focus group. The interview aimed to gain the participants' insights on the differences or similarities they felt in being able to discuss ideas with racialized students versus the traditional classroom setting, where whiteness takes up the space (Mbakogu, 2014).

**Data Collection**

The findings largely use direct quotes from the participants in line with Critical Race Theory, which argues that the testimonies from racialized people can be used to deconstruct racial hierarchies (Daftary, 2018; DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2021; Delgado, 1989; Fricker, 2017; Johnstone & Lee, 2017). The focus group ran for around an hour and a half, while the interviews took a maximum of 40 minutes. The focus group allowed me to see if there were any benefits to having racialized people discuss their experiences, particularly how collaboration aids in the learning process. As the literature highlights, racialized students are often isolated in their education (Brockbank & Hall, 2023; Rios et al., 2023; Davis & Mirick, 2021). With this, I hoped that providing a space for the participants to gather would promote peer support and aid in the sharing process (Mbakogu, 2021).  I was also interested in whether the participants could draw parallels in their differing experiences. By doing so, they could use their experiences to inform the implications for social work education together in a way that addresses their unique issues with race pedagogy.

*The focus group questions are as follows:*

1. Reflecting on your educational experience, how do you perceive the coverage of race and racism, and are there aspects you feel were inadequately addressed?

2. Thinking about the discussions about race and racism in the classroom, please share your thoughts on the dynamics between you, as a racialized student, and your white peers. Have there been instances where you felt constrained in fully expressing your thoughts or sharing experiences due to a potential lack of understanding among your white peers about racial issues?

3. Can you provide insights into when discussions around race and racism occurred during BSW education? For instance, were they solicited by the instructor, initiated by students, or a combination of both?

4. Can you share your experiences regarding discussions about race and racism within the classroom, particularly in terms of how these topics were addressed and who contributed to the dialogue?

5. How do you perceive the level of open and constructive dialogue about race in the classroom, and do you believe there are any barriers hindering the creation of a constructive environment for such discussions?

6. How did you experience the process of connecting your identity and understandings of race with those of other racialized individuals in your classrooms?

7. While learning topics around race and racism, how have your peers contributed to your understanding of race and were you given opportunities to learn?

8. Within educational settings, do you feel discussions about race and racism sufficiently engage all students, or do you notice any disparities on who gets to learn about these topics?

9. How can social work education better create an environment that allows for a more balanced and mutual exchange of knowledge among students from different racial backgrounds?

The interviews, given that the participants could reflect on their experience in the focus group allowed me to grasp the importance of collective learning, something that is often hidden through individualization (Mutmba, 2014). This provided me with evidence that collaboration among racialized people is valuable. As a past BSW student myself who identifies as racialized, I enjoyed the conversation that took place in both the focus group and interviews. While the participants shared that they felt validation from getting to share and discuss their experiences with other racialized folks, I similarly felt that my experiences were being legitimized.

*The interview questions are as follows:*

1. What has been your experience of expressing your thoughts and opinions in a focus group setting?

2. How does this experience compare to sharing your thoughts in a classroom setting?

3. Did you sense peer support or solidarity within the group? If so, could you describe the dynamics of this support and explain the factors that allowed you to perceive and experience it?

4. Can you identify any instances during the focus group where you were able to connect and link your personal experiences and knowledge to those in the focus group?

5. How did the collective contributions within the focus group discussions impact your understanding of race and racism?

6. How did the learning dynamics within the focus group, specifically through interactions with your peers, shape and broaden your comprehension of the importance of solidarity in race-related issues

7. How is your learning experience different or similar to your experiences in a conventional classroom setting?

As mentioned, I audio-recorded both the focus group and interviews to transcribe and use as my data. Zoom created a transcription with the audio recording, which I later conducted fidelity checks. After the transcriptions were corrected and altered to include pseudonyms, I deleted the audio file. To organize the data, I used *MAXQDA*, which allowed me to code the data into three main themes.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data pulls from the reflections of Maiter & Joseph (2016), as they discuss the issue of accepting data without an examination of power. Dangerously, analysis that does not locate data in historical, social or political contexts

> "can also (re)institute the acceptance and ordering of Western/ Eurocentric knowledge and methods as dominant/superior to Indigenous or other colonised and subordinated forms while serving to reconstitute the pervasiveness and dominance of whiteness."
> (Maiter & Joseph, 2016, p.15)

To interpret the data, I must situate the narratives of the participants in historical contexts Without doing so, I risk viewing the data as something that is based solely on an individual experience rather than a reflection of ongoing systemic oppression. For this reason, I will speak to the employment of white supremacy in reproducing racial hierarchy (Lynn et al., 2013) to better understand why the experiences of the participants are occurring. Additionally, I will use

the principles of Critical Race Theory in centring the experiences and knowledge of my

participants to inform the implications of this study (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2021;

Delgado, 1989; Daftary, 2018; Johnstone & Lee, 2017).

**Findings**

## Overview of the Participants

This research involved four participants with varying practice experiences and interests in social work. All the participants shared similar frustration with their undergraduate experience and faced tensions between their identity and education. Each participant in this study was assigned pseudonyms for privacy. The participants were given the option to choose their own pseudonyms or be given one by me. The pseudonyms used throughout this research are Kay, Noah, Aya, and Mia. All participants are past Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) students who have graduated from McMaster University within five years. The data has been transcribed to change the participant's real names to their assigned pseudonym. All the participants have different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. While the racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds of each participant were gathered, they will not be shared in this research paper to maintain anonymity. Any names mentioned by participants, such as the names of faculty members, will be anonymized as requested by participants.

## Summary

Much of the data fall into three themes: The Tensions between Race Pedagogy and Racial Identities, Responsibilization and "Emotional Labour", and the Absence of Race Education for Racialized Students. As discussed in the theoretical framework section, deconstructing power, coloniality, and whiteness is significant to Critical Race Theory. Narratives from the participants will be shared to uncover how racial hierarchy operates within race pedagogy. The Tensions between Race Pedagogy and Racial Identities will provide evidence of an existing problem with race pedagogy and social work education. It will also examine how this problem unfolds in current discourses of race and its impacts on racialized students.

It is important to note that certain findings are not discoveries but rather evidence of a repeating problem in social work education. The findings provide in-depth evidence of how whiteness is operationalized and maintained in social work curricula. The findings illustrate explicitly that race pedagogy is white-centered. After establishing an existing problem with race pedagogy, I will use the findings to examine how responsibilization occurs in social work education and speak to emotional labour. Here, I will discuss the role of racialized students in the classroom. I will then move on to the final theme, which seeks to unpack how issues with race pedagogy affect how racialized students learn about race and race justice. The discussion section of this thesis sheds light on how these issues prevent the mobilization of race justice in social work to provide a nuanced perspective into what changes need to be made in education. Furthermore, I will examine how current race pedagogy is a tool for colonial violence and whiteness.

**The Tensions Between Race Pedagogy and Racial Identities**

The people who participated in this study shared various experiences where they struggled to align their values for race justice with their education. To better understand how issues of race pedagogy impact racialized students and, consequently, racial justice, I first need to uncover how these challenges are occurring. There were two common issues that the participants shared their frustrations with. First, a problem they defined as "basic learning", and second, the issue of externalization. Both contributed to what they felt was a misrepresentation of how racial issues exist within current contexts, thus erasing the existing prominence of race-related problems altogether. Although the participants were in different classes, cohorts, and held varying experiences, they were able to draw commonalities together in the focus group. Moreover, the focus group allowed the participants to discuss their experiences and knowledge.

Here, the focus group acted as a guided conversation, where the participants built off each other's contributions.

*Basic Learning*

To begin the focus group, I asked the participants how they perceived the coverage of race and racism in their education. A recurring theme throughout both the focus groups and interviews was the belief that the teachings on race and racism were "basic." The participants found that the education on race lacked depth and often did not connect with the field of social work. Instead, race pedagogy illustrates race and racism as something that is departed from the work that we do rather than being embedded. The participants shared various instances in their education where they felt that racism was minimized either by educators, white students, or the curriculum. "Basic" was first brought up by Noah who shared a reflection based on his experience in a second-year course:

> …We were going through pictures of examples of cultural appropriation or appreciation. And we had to decide, is it appropriation or appreciation… there is a picture of like Madonna in Dreadlocks … And I was so shocked at the fact that, like this basic level of understanding was being covered in class. Because I'm like, why are you even in this program if you can't even have that surface level of what like race and racism and that kind of stuff plays a role in our society.

The participant mentioned that this was a second-year course on anti-oppressive practice, and while they understood it was an introductory course, their frustration built as they felt that education on race and racism did not go beyond this "baseline" knowledge. Seemingly, race pedagogy held the notion that racial justice could be accomplished by just adjusting our practice. For instance, if students refined from engaging in things like cultural appropriation, racial

injustice would be eliminated. Noah's experience highlights that racism is not seen as rooted in the work we do, but rather, is something that we can avoid by tweaking our practice. All the other participants also commented that the teachings of race were basic. To better understand what "basic" meant to them, I asked them to elaborate. Noah expanded and said:

> When we say basic, I think it's like the standard of what we should  know going into the program rather than what we should be learning.

Noah and Aya shared examples of different courses that had a constant emphasis on cultural humility and cultural competency when teaching about race. Essentially, race pedagogy, through solely concentrating on these concepts, disguises how race truly operates currently in the profession where "good" social workers can practice tolerating differences in cultures without challenging how racism systemically operates. Additionally, these concepts are argued to be "surface level" as they are often spoken about as something social workers should be doing without getting into the details of what that actually means for practice. Aya explains:

> I kind of wish somebody would have just been like, why are you not already doing this like when we're talking about cultural humility in class… When I think of what is a basic conversation, I think it's really like what Noah said, these basic values and ideas that people should already have before getting into the program.

The participants found that "basic learning" posed a couple of issues. One, many students are not adequately prepared to address the problems of race within the classroom and in their practice, like field education. And two, when race was talked about, there was a heavy focus on topics such as intersectionality and cultural competency however, it often lacked depth. For instance, the participants explained that educators commonly said to use these concepts but failed to teach how to apply them. Consequently, participants noticed that race-related concepts were thrown

around as buzzwords without understanding how to apply them to their education in the field. With this, the teachings of these concepts are described as "surface level," such as advising students to use these concepts but failing to teach them pragmatically and tangibly. Kay described:

> I'm not saying we don't talk about race and racism in social work because we do, but we're not even surface-level. We're like below surface level, like there's so much to like to unpack, and talk about and begin to like, learn and understand.

They shared that their frustration grew as this problem continued past introduction courses and was present in their third and fourth-year courses. Consequently, education on historical and current racial inequality was missing. Even more so, the participant's experiences highlight that steps toward racial justice were absent from their education. The participants shared many occasions where they felt that social work education did not provide an adequate education on race and its prevalence in the work social workers do. This ties into the next issue of externalization.

*Externalization*

All the participants expressed that race and racism were often externalized in the classroom. In this thesis, externalization refers to the processes that promote the notion that racism is an issue that exists exclusively outside of education. This includes how race was conveyed in the curriculum, how educators viewed race and racism, and the participant's own experiences. For instance, Aya felt that externalization was exemplified in various social work courses where many courses dedicated one week or lesson plan to race. Aya shared:

> I think having that compartmentalization of topics like one week focused on this group and one week focused on another group. It doesn't allow for like a full intersectional

perspective… for example, if there's a week where we're focusing on a racialized client, it's still a one-dimensional way of viewing them, because there isn't a consideration of how these individuals are also gonna occupy like multiple different intersections, but it kind of just like hops from like group to group and just checks off boxes… the way race was talked about in actual coursework was like an an externalized experience. Like something that's outside of the classroom and outside of people's experiences in the room.

While intersectionality is spoken about in social work education, it lacks implications in the curriculum. Here, racism was taught as an isolated experience rather than being woven throughout the curriculum. This method of teaching race often separated identities and their experiences instead of seeing them as related. For this reason, the participants felt that they were not taught how to view social problems intersectionally despite the concept being heavily mentioned in race pedagogy.  In reference to the importance of intersectionality, Aya continued by saying:

> If that sort of lens is not drawn through a course, like from point A to point like Z, then people are not going to care to have those conversations unless they already cared beforehand. If the goal [is to] teach people how to have an open and constructive conversations, that needs to be drawn through the course and not just be something that is touched on.

Accordingly, Noah found race was removed from the classroom, where it was instead treated as a problem confined to the outside world and as something that has limited relevance to what is taught in social work. With this, racial issues are minimized by portraying it as an inconsequential issue that is not a part of our everyday lives, undermining its profound impact on individuals and communities. To demonstrate this point, Kay shared an incident where she wrote

a paper on the global south and got criticism from the professor, saying that the topic was too far removed from the class, making it unrelatable. Hence, race was constantly externalized in their experience.

Some of the participants attempted to bridge this gap in learning by utilizing their lived experiences and knowledge in the classroom. This included their own experiences and their knowledge of historical and current racial injustices. Aya found when folks share their experiences, she is able to actualize what she is learning. However, all the participants shared that the majority of the people in their classes were white, and when sharing their knowledge on race-related issues, participants were often dismissed and/or met with silence by their white students and educators. Mia communicated an incident when she spoke up about race in the classroom:

> … it wasn't kind of like an open conversation. It was kind of just faced back with like a lot of white guilt, and then apologizing. And then 'sorry that happened to you' and [it] doesn't make the most comfortable environment for me, cause you know they don't have that shared experience. And it kind of just feels like I'm storytelling to them.

This discouraged Mia from contributing further as she was met with silence on something that was personal to her. In addition, the participants shared how they had difficulty challenging racism due to fear of negative consequences. Noah spoke to a specific incident in a class that involved a student of colour commenting on race, which led to a white male student confronting them during a break. The white student attempted to sue the professor and school as they felt discriminated against because of their race and sex. Noah shares:

I think that's when it like really hit me like, I'm not safe in the space to have these

conversations and to be like, open about it, knowing that there are students out there,

social work students that could pull shit like this or pull stuff like this on me.

Discussions of race-related issues are vital; however, the participants highlight that they are not

happening productively. These discussions are often shut down or prevented because they are

seen as irrelevant to what is being taught. With this, some of the participants discussed

withdrawing their participation in these classes as their contributions were continuously met with

a lack of engagement or fear of the repercussions of speaking up.

Race-related issues connect deeply with the lives of the participants as racialized people.

However, the externalization of race injustice from the classroom and social work as a profession

left the participants feeling frustrated with their education. Moreover, the participants note that

many of the folks who access social services are racialized. Many of the people the participants

work with are also often people within their own communities. These issues are intertwined and

conflated with their identity and pose an issue on their moral values where race issues felt like

they lacked importance in the classroom. With this, teaching solely "basic" concepts ignores the

realities of racism. This is not to say that these concepts are unimportant, but rather, are used as a

tool to avoid talking about race in a meaningful way.

**Responsibilization and "Emotional Labour"**

A blaring consequence of basic learning and externalization is the process of

responsibilization. All the participants spoke to issues surrounding the emotional labour of being

assigned work that is specifically race-related or harbouring the burden to fill in the gaps in race

pedagogy. Participants shared that they often took on the role of being an educator in their

classroom. Mia recalls experiences where she was frequently the only racialized person in a

classroom and spoke about having to take on the responsibility of dealing with race-related issues in group work:

> If I'm in a group of just white women specifically, they would kind of just turn to me right away, assuming that I have a lot to say, or like pushing me to share my experience when I may not feel the most comfortable doing so.

This places the labour on Mia to address issues surrounding race and assumes that she is more qualified to do so while also assuming that she would want to take up the responsibility. In Mia's experience, the white students failed to take any responsibility for learning and engaging in racial justice. In the focus group, Kay was the first to discuss the issue of emotional labour and later conceptualizes it in her interview as being given the work to address issues that are seen as related to your own identity. In relation to race, Kay found that frequently, it did not matter if a racialized person was a part of the same racial group; the work was nonetheless given to them to address racial inequity. This supposes that a racialized person is both willing and better able to work with race-related subjects. Kay later shares that her white peers do not "put in the work' yet expect their racialized peers or colleagues to do so.

This problem is also exemplified in those who contribute to discussions of race and racism within the classroom. The participants found that the same few racialized students would lead discussions on race. Frequently, there was a lack of engagement from white students and educators. For instance, Noah expressed that when racialized students would share their lived experiences, the professor would not be able to apply it to a learning opportunity but rather exclusively provide racialized students with sympathy. The educator would then quickly move on to another topic. While sympathy may be helpful for some, it can also invalidate lived experiences by reducing them to mere misfortunes rather than recognizing them as valuable

knowledge. This overlooks the importance of situating these experiences within the context of what is being taught and current societal issues. Kay states:

> There was never acknowledgement towards the racialized students and the bravery of being able to speak on their experiences and share something so personal to the rest of the class that would actually contribute to everyone else's learning… It becomes hard emotionally, because everything is personal, no matter what we do in social work, everything becomes personal at some point. When we're doing such personal things it gets pretty heavy. And then it becomes emotional labour because the labour is emotional.

According to the participants, racialized voices are often only desired when white people want to pass on the labour. With this, the contributions of racialized students are both constantly demanded and overlooked.

All the participants agreed that the white educators these students had were unable to facilitate learning around race adequately. This includes "basic learning" and being unable to situate systemic racism within current contexts. With this, racialized students took up the labour of teaching of race. Kay recalled the few times they had a racialized professor and found that those classes were the only classes where race was woven throughout the course, and an intersectional approach was genuinely taken by the professor even if the course was not explicitly focused on race. Kay argued that we should not only rely on racialized professors to facilitate dialogues around race, as all social justice topics and courses can be related to race. This raises an interesting point on how white professors can better facilitate discussions on race in a way that goes beyond what is currently being taught.

**Absence of Race Education for Racialized Students**

These experiences significantly demonstrate an issue with race pedagogy in social work education. All four participants and their stories highlight a critical and covert issue that prevents the mobility of race justice. To better understand what racialized students are learning in relation to race, I asked them to reflect on their experience with race pedagogy. Mia simply stated:

I feel like I'm not learning anything new.

All the participants concluded that their learning on race was limited and largely transpired outside of the classroom, where they were able to connect with other racialized students or in roles in their community. Kay shared:

I feel like most of the actual, impactful, meaningful discussions I've had have been with one-on-one discussions with racialized profs, or like in smaller groups outside of the classroom. I don't think honestly any of my in-class discussions have been revolutionary or at least meaningful to how I see like education and race and racism.

Accordingly, some participants sought alternative methods to connect with other racialized students to expand their understanding of race beyond the classroom. One of the participants mentioned a club, United in Colour, which allowed racialized students to connect with one another. Most of the participants were not a part of this club as they did not know the group existed or were unable to join due to time constraints. As a result, opportunities to connect with other racialized students to discuss what they were or were not learning or to share their thoughts and knowledge were limited. The participants all commented that connecting with other racialized students was something that they wished had happened in their undergraduate education. For instance, Aya shared:

I don't think I connected with that many people, unfortunately. That's something that I

wish that I had. Even when I did my MSW, I specifically sought out a program, a stream

of study in the program where I knew that there were going to be more racialized students

that I could connect with there. And I did end up having that experience. But it is

something that I feel kind of sad about that I didn't have like throughout my BSW.

The limited opportunity to connect led the participants to feel that they could not share their

experiences and thus knowledge. To gain insight into why the participants felt like they were not

able to form connections in their classroom, I asked how the focus group differed from their

experience in the classroom. All four participants shared that they were a lot more comfortable

talking about race with other racialized people than they were in the classroom, where white

people mainly occupy the space. Mia explained:

> … white voices throughout my BSW were a lot louder in that sense. And they were a lot
>
> more outspoken. And you know, I don't fault them for that at all. But it was kind of
>
> hearing similar things again, and again, and not really hearing from a lot of the racialized
>
> individuals in my class. So that definitely impacted my learning. I was able to kind of
>
> have that open conversation with racialized individuals [in the focus group] rather than
>
> white individuals.

The participants shared various factors that impacted their comfort in the classroom. Noah shared

that he was worried about sharing his thoughts about race due to how others may react. At the

same time, Noah felt like he should not have to put in effort to educate those in his class but

instead should receive education on race. Mia also shared that she felt secluded in the classroom,

where she restricted when she shared her views and knowledge.  In comparison to the classroom,

Kay found that the focus group allowed for comfort as the other participants had similar

experiences or had genuinely listened to her. Kay spoke about the issue of power in what she

called the "colonized classroom." She explains that the professors have the power to facilitate conversations. With this, how race is taken up in the classroom is in part dependent on the facilitator.

*Solidarity Does Not Exist in The Classroom*

It is evident that racialized students are not learning about race in productive, tangible and meaningful ways in the classroom. As discussed in the literature review and theoretical framework section, key practices, such as solidarity, mutual learning and collaboration, are needed to move toward racial justice. Central to this thesis is the idea that our struggles with systematic inequality are intertwined, and so must our approach to liberation. I specifically focused the interview portion of the data collection on this principle to understand how the participants, as racialized people and students in social work, view themselves in relation to race justice. Furthermore, how social work education has shaped their understanding and knowledge of racial justice. The interviews also provided insight into how solidarity can form in the focus group, where all the participants are racialized, versus the traditional classroom, where whiteness dominates. Because racialized students are often isolated in the classroom, along with their experiences and knowledge, there are limited opportunities for racialized students to connect with one another.  When asked to reflect on their experience in the focus group, Noah found that although the participants all had different stories, they were able to connect their experiences. With this, they all experienced validation and support. The participants felt that factors such as comfortability and peer support aided in how they contributed to the discussion. In contrast to the focus group Kay shared:

> When I compare the moments where I was thinking about race-related issues, let alone
> addressing them on my own, it was so overwhelming to the point where I was like, I'm

just gonna shut down, not gonna even deal with it. And that did kind of impact my

participation and my motivation in classes.

This points to how collaboration and support are needed to tackle racial injustice. All the

participants experienced having to navigate these complex issues themselves in their educational

experience. Additionally, the dismissal of racialized students when sharing their knowledge

prevented the participants from experiencing support. Furthermore, the labour placed on

racialized students to take on race-related topics prevented collaboration and, rather, placed

expectations on these students to navigate racial issues on their own. Kay added:

It [the focus group] showed me that you need the support to like to address these topics

… you need that sense of solidarity and genuine understanding, in order to talk about race

related issues, and start to address race related issues.

Noah also expressed:

I definitely believe that peer support and solidarity would aid in the learning process … I

think we'd oftentimes learn more from each other than we think we do. and I think we all

actually bring in so much value into the classroom, but because of power, dynamics and

hierarchies and the way that we're situated within classrooms, we don't get to have that

experience with each other… Peer support plays a huge role in the learning process, and I

don't think I had enough of it in my BSW. But I would definitely say, without a doubt, it

would have enhanced my learning process in my BSW.

This highlights what is needed to address and promote racial justice. All the participants

speak to isolation in their BSW experience. While race pedagogy, coupled with "basic learning"

and externalization, poses problems in what is being taught, the separation of racialized students

produces another problem. As the participants shared, they felt they missed out on connecting

with their peers. Mia shared her experience in a class around race, racism and racialization and found that was one of the only classes where she was able to learn from other racialized folks about race. This class was not mandatory for all BSW students, and not all the participants took this course, which the participants noted was odd as race has many implications for any of the work we do.

*Moving Forward - Resistance*

At the end of the focus group, I asked the participants how social work education could move towards a more balanced and mutual exchange of knowledge. Aya shared the benefits of guest speakers utilizing lived and practical experiences. Similarly, Noah found that assigned reading should also include blog posts or videos that stray away from traditional methods of learning in academia, such as journal articles. Kay also argued:

> …. I think the school can like start with, as simple as it is, just acknowledging that they're not meeting this niche or this need… You can't have that balance or that mutual understanding, if, like one side isn't ready to acknowledge that they're not providing proper education for, like their students.

Mia highlighted the need for faculty members to continue their learning. Kay later shared how she was often met with rigidity from faculty who were unwilling to change their practice. She talks about what is needed to create change and says:

> Obviously, in order to create change and to address any type of issue you need to be uncomfortable with the fact that you know these issues exist, and something needs to be done about it. But then, in order to like, go from the uncomfort, the discomfort to actually like doing something about it, addressing it, talking about it, changing curriculums,

whatnot, the the support needs to be there… We have the strength to go past the

discomfort to the actual implemented change and address issues.

This is demonstrated by Noah's experience with a course as he highlights solidarity as a key

aspect of resistance. He recalls an experience where together, people utilized their discomfort

with a course to shift how and who is delivering the course.

Evidently, all these experiences illustrate the emotional complexities involved in being a

student who is also racialized in a program that believes it is largely equitable. As the

participants exemplify, the learning of race and racial justice is limited for racialized students.

This has implications on how justice is actually mobilized and begs the question, of who race

pedagogy is made for and what purpose does it serve? The discussion position of this thesis will

look to understand this.

**Discussion**

**Summary of the Findings**

The focus group and interviews aimed to understand the limitations of race pedagogy in social work education using the narratives of racialized students. I sought to engage students in a discussion regarding how they view their education on race to better understand how social work education controls and prevents our movement toward racial justice.

Significant to this thesis are the underpinnings of Critical Race Theory in recognizing how racial hierarchy operates in higher education. The findings in this study represent an ongoing production of the oppression of racialized people within a caring profession. This study's discussion will unpack how racialized students' experiences in social work education discourage the learning of key principles, such as solidarity and collectivization, and thus racial justice. Furthermore, it will situate "basic learning" and "externalization" in historical contexts and the ongoing issue of colonial violence. I will examine how emotional labour ties both responsibilization and race neutrality as it links to individualism. Lastly, the findings uncovered the tactical prevention of solidarity through current race pedagogy. Following the examination of these themes, I will discuss the reflections and limitations of this study. Here, I draw from the voices, knowledge, and resistances of the participants to shape future implications for social work education.

**Issues with Race Pedagogy**

The participants felt that race and racism were seen as external to the classroom, indicating that race does not have relevance in social work. This is due to the reported overuse of "basic teaching" and "surface level concepts", where concepts like intersectionality and cultural

humility were used repeatedly in the curriculum to teach about race. However, the participants

reported that race education in this way lacked tangibility in real-life practice as these concepts

were simply mentioned as something students should do rather than teaching what it means to

employ these ideas. For this reason, the participants believed race education to be inadequate.

Additionally, dedicating one week or lecture topic to race failed to see racism as intertwined in

social work's policies and practices.  Despite the influence of race on our structures, the

participants in the focus group shared that "basic learning" may be prevalent to meet the learning

needs of the many white students who enter the program. While other researchers have discussed

the barriers to education regarding race more in-depth, this also points to issues concerning who

is getting into social work in higher education (Hosken, 2018).

The nature of racial hierarchy can explain "surface-level" education as it ensures that

racial injustice is hidden (Daftary, 2018; Lynn et al., 2013). While the facilitation of these

concepts may be necessary for students who are unfamiliar with them, the participants

communicated that education on race typically did not go beyond the described introductory

level throughout their undergraduate education. Teaching "basic" diminishes the role racism

plays in the work we do, thus hiding the historical and current oppressive efforts of our practice,

ensuring that racism remains. Here, the reliance on these concepts is successful in masking

racism and how it truly functions. As Razack and Jeffery write,

> "Critiquing culture discourse as a strategy to avoid talking about complicity and the
>
> maintenance of domination through construction of difference is not to say that cultural
>
> elements are not significant in relations between social worker and client… Dominelli
>
> (1988) claims that multiculturalism is a euphemism disguising racism. As she says,

"racial inequality has not disappeared because white people understand better the

customs, traditions, and religious activities of ethnic minority groups" (p. 2)." (p.269).

Reliance on cultural humility, coupled with the false employment of intersectionality and anti-

oppressive practice, renders current education on race ineffective. For instance, the strategy of

including race as a weekly topic fails to grasp how racism is embedded in anything that we do.

Rather, it sees race as ostracized from our experiences and, consequently, much of the work we

do in this field while simultaneously hiding the efforts of whiteness by doing so. Accordingly,

education cannot truly be intersectional as it isolates race from what else is being taught.

The participant experiences draw attention to the fact that many white educators do not

understand race's role in social work. This is representative of the participants' experiences when

discussing race with their white educators and is demonstrated when the participants and their

knowledge are continuously shut down, provided with sympathy, or faced with repercussions. I

grappled with understanding if educators' actions in ignoring and dismissing their students were

intentional. Evidently, some white educators seemed unwilling to change their practice or even

unwilling to engage in conversations surrounding race, while other educators were more prone to

talk about basic concepts. The participants also noted that some white students were more

willing to discuss race than others but were unsure how to add to the conversation. Despite their

intentions, it is evident that social work education is not urging racial justice. This only illustrates

the need for critical education on race and racism.

*Situating the Findings in (Re)Productions of Racism*

The issue of basic learning and externalization that the participants share can be tied to

the historical use of race neutrality and colourblindness. As O'Connor (2002) writes

"The overall thrust of that philanthropic agenda has been to neutralize race as a political and economic as well as a social and cultural issue. This has been accomplished by various interventions that diminish the significance of racism as a source of inequality; that obscure the roots of racial inequality in political economy and in "mainstream" society and culture; and that treat racism as principally a problem of individual-level attitudes and discriminatory actions, rather than as a structurally rooted and perpetuated phenomenon" (p.56)

Race neutrality perpetuates the notion that similar treatment of everyone will result in equality (O'Connor, 2002; Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong, 2018). Historically, the erasure of racial violence has been used to avoid responsibility for the injustices perpetrated by those with power (Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong, 2018). The participant's experiences with race pedagogy are evidence of similar efforts. Consequently, race pedagogy inhibits critical racial justice as it limits students' understanding of race and its role in our structures. Fabricating racial injustice as something that can be solved by being a good social worker and treating service users fairly rather than recognizing racial inequity (Olcoń et al., 2019).

*The Absence of History*

The participants' experiences in their social work education highlight a critical missing aspect of racial justice: the significance of history. The focus of "basic" concepts entails that the history of racialized people is missing. This poses two problems. One, emerging social workers may not understand the role of racism, colonialism, and imperialism on racialized service users and two, resistance and the collective action of racialized people are hidden. There is a recurring issue of blaming racialized people, both in Canada and else in the world, for not only their

struggles (Razack, 2008; Joseph, 2017) but also the struggles of all people (Bauer, 2021). The absence of history subsequently erases oppression, thus cleaning the hands of oppressors (Joseph, 2017; Razack, 2008; Wright et al, 2021). Racism thrives within the field of social work. Without history, we are unable to understand why these struggles occur and how to navigate them, leaving social workers susceptible to attribute oppression to self-deficiency. Furthermore, the erasure of history prevents the teaching of past resistance and collective action, which can be linked to the intangible education that is currently taught. Here, students are not taught how racial justice is possible and by what means.

Under the view of whiteness, resistance in any form is unconventional. Through the erasure of history, social work education hides certain forms of resistance and employs "surface-level" methods of attending to racism, preventing the learning of racial justice mobilization. Here, education devalues collective action as a powerful tool in social change by concealing historical solidarity and its use in justice (Daftary, 2018). As the participants share the current state of race pedagogy, social work education seems to favour resistance in palatable forms. Collective action that is emotional, extreme, and violent is viewed as immoral and illegitimate through a western lens and has framed resistance as harmful (Tausch et al, 2011). Social work education follows this view, thus maintaining white supremacy by concealing these forms of resistance that are associated with racial liberation. Therefore, how we can acceptably learn and perpetuate resistance is enveloped in white supremacy. Learning and honouring resistance can teach students what can be done (Olcoń et al., 2019). For this reason, race pedagogy must recognize history as a valuable form for knowledge in order to deconstruct dominant discourses around social change.

**"Emotional Labour" and Responsibilization**

The participants revealed their role in education, not just as students, but as educators in race and racism. The use of lived experiences from students is common in social work education as a way to link what is being taught to real life (Stevenson, 2022; Rios et al., 2023). As a result, racialized students often used their lived experiences to fill in the gaps in race pedagogy. However, these participants found that the use of lived experiences in relation to race was usually met with a lack of engagement from other students and educators. With this, the participants found that lived experiences were not supplemented with knowledge from the educator. Thus, the contributions made by racialized students were not appreciated and largely went unrecognized. Historically, social work education has neglected the contributions of racialized social workers (Olcoń et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2023; Wright et al., 2021), which have simultaneously erased the counter-narratives and knowledge that stray away from whiteness. Furthermore, white students and white educators often passed on the labour of discussing race-related issues. Accordingly, racialized students took up the burden of teaching or doing the work enveloping anything race-related within their classrooms. The use of counter-narratives to shape race pedagogy is vital to race justice, however, the pressure placed on racialized students to constantly use their voice creates harm. As Kay highlights, "It becomes emotional labour because the labour is emotional." Failing to understand how race pedagogy, both what is currently taught and what is absent, is an emotional and personal issue. Yet, as the findings illustrate, the externalization of race within the classrooms drives the notion that race and racism are disconnected from classrooms, as well as the people in them. Making race out to be insignificant and, consequently, the identities of racialized students as unimportant.

*Race Neutrality*

Passing on the labour in this way to racialized students demonstrates race neutrality, where white educators and/or students believe that they should not speak about race (Brockbank & Hall, 2022). This shifts the responsibility of education onto racialized students, who are uncompensated (Brockbank & Hall, 2022) and who themselves are paying for their education. Once again, a colour-blind approach maintains the notion that race is external to the classroom, where educators and emerging social workers are not impacted by racial hierarchy and instead uphold normative discourses that hide systemic racism (Lynn et al., 2013; Scherf, 2017). Passing the microphone to those with lived experiences is crucial; however, placing all the labour onto racialized students, who are often the only racialized people in a class or group, becomes a burden. It additionally confines their knowledge to topics of race rather than the other skills they could offer. Consequently, epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2017) prevails as racialized students are limited in how they can contribute to the learning environment.

Freire (1970) asserts our oppressors will not lead our liberation. I grappled with this idea and the labour of racialized students. While the oppressed will not lead our liberation (Freire, 1970), the act of assigning labour to racialized people means that those in power dictate what the labour is and looks like. For instance, racialized students who get assigned tasks that are race-related are constricted in what they can talk about. The participants, in sharing their emotional experiences within the classroom, illustrated that they were often disregarded when speaking about race-related topics that were more concealed, like talking about topics concerning the "Global South." Rather, race pedagogy in adhering to certain topics, like cultural competency, dictates what knowledge is legitimate. So, while labour is demanded in the classroom, what

discourses are permissible and what are not is shaped by whiteness. Labour that falls out of normative race pedagogy is thus frequently discouraged through the actions of white students and educators, such as dismissing racialized students, low grading or white guilt. Our participation and labour are therefore tokenistic as they are often only accepted if they are conventional to dominant discourses. Seemingly, this labour that is frequently demanded in education is largely unproductive to race justice as it is bounded by whiteness. This process of assigning labour becomes responsibilization as it places the burden on individual students to address issues of race and racism. It does not encourage collaboration but instead, forces racialized students to conform to the standard of whiteness when educating others concurrently while hiding their knowledge. Furthermore, it teaches white students to pass on the work and neglects the use of unity in social justice.

To better understand this issue, I turn to Freire's (1970) idea on conscientization. Conscientization is the process of strengthening critical awareness of the world around us through learning and unlearning to reveal how power operates and emphasizes dialogue between people to disrupt meta-narratives (Freire, 1970). However, responsibilization reinforces systems of oppression by defining and controlling what issues are and how they should be addressed. Conscientization challenges this approach by promoting justice that is shaped through collective engagement rather than placing the burden on individuals (Freire, 1970). Hence, liberation does not come from imposing ideologies, or in this case responsibility, onto the oppressed but rather, action surrounding racial injustice must come from our own process of conscientization (Freire, 1970).  Here, unlearning and learning through dialogue promotes critical consciousness that dismantles how we understand and mitigate racial issues in a way that does not center whiteness

*Historic Relevance*

It is critical to recognize the alikeness of the labour of racialized people in both historical and current exploitation, slavery and indentured labour. The use and inclusion of racialized people have been a method of sustaining the colonial agenda (Mutamba, 2014) and the findings of this study highlight a reproduction exploitation. Important, to this thesis is how the knowledge of racialized people is used to further white supremacy while simultaneously minimizing our contributions. For instance, the false co-opting of intersectionality minimizes the intentions of the framework and the contributions made within the framework. Evidently, this becomes exploitation as the work of a Black woman is used to conceal the pervasiveness of racism, exploiting the framework to make education appear "progressive" when the employment of the framework is superficial.

**Absence of Race Education for Racialized Students**

The participant's counter-narratives expose race pedagogy as a fraudulent method of racial justice. Noticeably, the findings reveal who social work education is made for. In relation to "basic learning" and "emotional labour," the participants found that they largely did not receive education about race and, thus racial justice. This includes education on race-related issues or tools for racial justice. In relation to interest convergence (Drafty, 2018), race pedagogy is aligned with the interest of the dominant (white) group as education is tailored towards white students, maintaining racial hierarchy through minimizing racial inequality. White fragility further shapes the interest of white educators and students as they can cause a "conspiracy of silence" of racial order that encourages "comfort, naiveté, and innocence, while people of color continue to live quiet lives of desperation, attempting to speak, but having their voices unheard

or silence" (Sue, 2016 p. xv; Evans-Winters, & Hines, 2019). While we are physically allowed to

be in white-dominant spaces, like social work, it is evident that our interests as students who seek

to learn are not being fulfilled.

The erasure of the participants' experiences reflects a border systemic issue of silencing

the knowledge of racialized people (Daftary, 2018; Lynn et al., 2013). Similar to existing

literature on social work education and race, this study highlighted the emotional complexities of

racialized students who often felt isolated and found difficulty challenging whiteness in their

education (Brockbank & Hall, 2023). Consequently, the actions of white educators and students

limited how and when racialized students discussed race-related issues within the classroom.

These racialized students were thus constricted in how they participated in the learning

environment as the experiences of the participants represent epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2017),

where the fear and constant rejection they often experienced in the classroom, silenced their

knowledge. As a result of isolation, these participants were not able to form a sense of solidarity

with other students, let alone other racialized students in the classroom. By solidarity, I mean that

racialized students often kept their knowledge, specifically on race, to themselves as their

knowledge was repeatedly discouraged through the various means the participants shared.

*Prevention of Racial Justice*

Post-secondary institutions remain embedded in oppression (Ladson-Billings, 2020;

Mbakogu et al., 2021). The tools used to uphold white supremacy within social work education

are representative through the experiences of the participants. The participants were isolated, and

their identities were silently erased as they were considered irrelevant. Critical Race scholars

argue that isolation is a tactic to prevent racialized people from collectivizing their experiences

and knowledge as white supremacy operates through the division of people (Daftary, 2018; Mutamba, 2014; Shah & Grimaldos, 2023). As a participant from Shah & Grimaldos (2023) study shares, "systems are really afraid of a critical mass of people. They try to isolate you. They try to corner you so that they can then silence you and shut you down. So, we need to do the opposite." (p. 62). While the participants highlight their own experiences with isolation, the continuous censoring of racism in social work education similarly hid the uses of solidarity. With this, the individualism approach in social work, which does not see our experiences of oppression as intertwined, impacted how these racialized social work students learned about social and racial justice. It is here where race pedagogy hides our histories of imperialism, forced dispersion and colonial violence by not utilizing the accounts of history and experiences from racialized people.

Instead, the reliance on "basic learning" and "externalization" separates us and our struggles. This further conceals the use of solidarity beyond the classroom as a tool for social justice. Existing literature highlights the necessity of solidarity and collectivization toward racial justice. It is not only that racialized students are unable to connect their experiences with one another but social work education lacks discourses that encourage collectivization amongst various marginalized groups. Consequently, the participants struggle with seeing injustice as something that can be mitigated as they often feel like they have to navigate issues on their own. With this, racial justice is prevented as the primary tools, such as the mutual exchange of knowledge, unity, solidarity, and collectivization (Daftary, 2018; Mutamba, 2014; Shah & Grimaldos, 2023) are repeatedly hidden in the curriculum and prevented through the actions of educators and students.

**Moving Forward - Implications for Social Work Education**

*Educators and Students*

While this study only includes students from McMaster University, other existing

literature on the experiences of racialized students highlights a repeating problem. As the

participants share, educators must be able to expand their understanding of racial justice and be

able to facilitate discussions around race. This includes learning and teaching history,

encouraging dialogue between students, and understanding that social issues are truly

interconnected. Racialized students should not be carrying the labour of teaching about race and

racism. Those who want to share their knowledge should be compensated and roles around

revising curriculum should be created. Curriculums should utilize the knowledge of those

marginalized even if they are unconventional such as blog posts, oral histories and op-eds.

With this, there needs to be an emphasis on race justice and what that truly looks like. Resistance

should hold validity in our classrooms to show what can be done. It is additionally not enough to

simply allow racialized students into white-dominated spaces and classrooms. Our inclusion will

be limited if we are not permitted to contribute in the ways we want to. Schools of Social Work

must keep their educators accountable by having discussions and taking action in a way that

places pressure to create change.

The differences between the focus group, consisting of participants of different

marginalized racial identities versus the traditional classroom that centers whiteness, provide

insights into what is needed for solidarity to occur within the classroom. A key difference

between the focus group and the traditional classroom was the prevalence of effort from each of

the participants, where they felt that racialized students aimed to understand and discuss race-

related issues in comparison to their white peers and educators. This illustrates the necessity to

have spaces where racialized folks can collaborate, as other existing literature has highlighted

(Mbakogu et al., 2021). However, it is possible that solidarity and peer support would benefit the

classroom as well by highlighting the interconnectedness of all social injustices. For

intersectionality to be employed, we must constantly think, discuss, and challenge how we view

social problems. Here, all students must learn the importance of situating any struggles within

the context of other struggles.

*Honouring The Knowledge of Racialized People*

Social Work practice and education must utilize and share the advancements of racialized

people. As Wright and colleagues write

"In shining a light on the value of the written word as a characteristic of White

Supremacy, it is clear that dismantling racism requires social work to assess how BIPOC

pass down information and conduct historical assessments that support the discovery of

various peoples' contributions to the advancement of the social welfare movement."

(2017, p. 287-288)

Those who have roles in social work education must critically analyze what we value as

knowledge. The knowledge of racialized people cannot be confined to research that is peer-

reviewed or adheres to certain policies or procedures (Wright et al., 2017). For this reason, this

thesis will not discuss solely suggestions for future research but rather how to move forward.

*The Field*

Tenets of Critical Race Theory also relate to other frameworks like Critical Disability

Justice and Anti-Colonial Theory (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Huang et al., 2024). These

principles have powerful uses in mobilizing social justice, however, this research highlights that students are not learning about the uses of solidarity, collectivization and collaboration. This impacts students directly; however, more exploration can be done to better understand how this impacts the field. For instance, in direct practice with service users or community work. Furthermore, social work practice could benefit from learning about solidarity within the field by encouraging dialogues that share tools and methods that promote collectivization. Currently, there is a reliance on symposiums and conferences to collaborate however, there are barriers to sharing knowledge, such as fees and overall exclusivity to non-professionals. While this research is specifically focused on race, constructing solidarity beyond differing racial identities is critical for social justice. This includes disability, economic, gender, sexual orientation health equity etc. Justice is not possible alone. While this research did not specifically focus on collective action, it is a critical principle of Critical Race Theory (Mbakogu et al., 2021). A deeper exploration of how social work students learn and employ tenets of collective action could better speak to barriers preventing the mobilization of race justice.

*A Critical Understanding of Solidarity and Collectivization*

While this research is focused on understanding how solidarity is prevented by white-centered social work education, there is also attention needed to recognize and dismantle the racism that is prevalent within our activism toward racial justice. Collectivization is complicated and made to be difficult as even our activism can be shaped by whiteness. The colonial agenda fears the collation between various racialized individuals and utilizes tools of whiteness to prevent it (Mutamba, 2014) We see this with attitudes towards scarcity, self-preservation and survival, all of which hold validity given the push for individualism in a neo-liberalistic society

(Cook, 2001). Critiques on collectivization and the belief that racial solidarity does not and cannot exist are legitimate as there has been repetitive harm done to the oppressed by the oppressed (Mutamba, 2014; Ross et al., 2014). The prevalence of Anti-Blackness, Xenophobia, Islamophobia and Anti-Indigenous forms of racism must be recognized in all activism capacities, including education, in order for solidarity to occur. Collective consciousness calls for recognizing our own bias when working collaboratively in order to transform how we understand justice (Freire, 1970). If we can talk about solidarity, we can then uncover whiteness and racism in our activism and how racialized people are constantly plotted against one another. We need not to fear our biases but rather be willing to unlearn and learn. What became evident with the findings is the need for racialized people to navigate the tensions and struggles of collectivization. This involves not expecting others to automatically become entrenched in a social cause, cause but rather, making space for other identities to exist in our causes in a way that recognizes nuanced needs and perspectives. Furthermore, uncovering the impacts of racism in our activism highlights the contributions and historic relations of various racial groups (Mutamba, 2014; Ross et al., 2014).

**Limitations**

The four participants were of various racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds. With a small sample size, all identities and experiences could not be represented in this study. Additionally, all the participants have graduated within 5 years from the same institution. This limits the diversity of experiences within race pedagogy and is not generalizable to all racialized social work students. However, based on other existing literature that looks at the experiences of racialized social work students, the transferability of these findings does seem possible.

The online format could have restricted some potential participants from joining the study. The use of audio recording also could have prevented potential participants from being a part of this research due to fear of privacy breaches. Furthermore, the focus group setting may have prevented potential participants from joining as they may not have been comfortable sharing in group settings or fear privacy breaches. All of which impacted who joined this study and whose voices were represented.

The research questions did not directly account for other identity aspects, like gender, sexual orientation, disability, and/or class, unless the participants disclosed information themselves. Intersectionality does play a role in our experiences, and as this research was focused on race, the findings could have been limited by the lack of exploration of other identities.

*Bias*

As a racialized social work student who has done both their Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work at McMaster University, I hold biases that have influenced this research. While my own experiences have provided me with insights into the gaps in race pedagogy, I hope that I used the narratives of the participants to shape this research. I do not believe that my experiences and knowledge are a limitation, as I understand the importance of recognizing the contributions of racialized voices.

**Concluding Remarks**

As a social work student, this research aimed to navigate the complexities I faced throughout my educational journey. This thesis sought to explore the limits of race pedagogy using the narratives of racialized students by utilizing their perspectives on social work education. As discussed, the inclusion of racialized students in social work education is not enough to be anti-racist. The contributions of racialized people, including those that are deemed unconventional, must be recognized in education. In teaching others, racialized students do not often learn about race themselves, meaning that there is limited opportunity for them to link their experiences to one another and form critical connections that are needed for racial justice. For this reason, race pedagogy is white-centered as it is engulfed in whiteness.

To dismantle white supremacy in social work education, our histories need to be shared, and our knowledge must be considered valuable. Social work education needs to teach history, solidarity, unity, collaboration, and collective action as tools for racial justice and social change as a whole. This thesis is not asking for parts of experience or knowledge to be shared but rather to be fundamental in social work education to shape how we view and enact social justice.

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