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# “I FELT SEEN”: A MIXED-METHODS INVESTIGATION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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# “I FELT SEEN”:
# A MIXED-METHODS INVESTIGATION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By

Caiti Siobhan Griffiths

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Ellen L. Usher, Professor of Educational Psychology

Lexington, Kentucky

2021

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

"I FELT SEEN":
A MIXED-METHODS INVESTIGATION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Instructors' beliefs and behaviors shape students' learning environments (Bandura, 2007). Culturally responsive teaching can make instruction more relevant and supportive to historically marginalized students (Gay, 2000, 2018). Instructor support and care for students are important to undergraduate persistence (Tinto, 1986, 1993). However, White postsecondary instructors may not feel prepared to use culturally responsive teaching (Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Sue et al., 2009). This study used a sequential mixed-methods design to examine postsecondary instructors' self-perceptions, and students' lived experiences, related to culturally responsive teaching. In Fall 2020, instructors ($N = 99$) rated their self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching on a six-point scale ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.91$). Racially and ethnically minoritized undergraduates ($N = 9$) were recruited using purposive sampling from the courses of instructors who reported high self-efficacy. Qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews indicated that students perceived their instructors as highly caring and capable. Instructors incorporated students' racial identities into curriculum and displayed willingness to challenge discrimination. Even as the COVID-19 pandemic challenged learning and instruction, students perceived their instructors as creating supportive and motivating learning environments. This research offers a student-focused interpretation of how pedagogy can be culturally responsive to racially and ethnically minoritized undergraduates.

KEYWORDS: Culturally Responsive Teaching, Postsecondary Education, Instructor Self-Efficacy, Student Perceptions

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05/03/2021
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# “I FELT SEEN”:
# A MIXED-METHODS INVESTIGATION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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# "I Felt Seen": A Mixed-Methods Investigation of Culturally Responsive Teaching in Postsecondary Education

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Students' behaviors and perceptions can be influenced by the learning environments their instructors shape. This is illustrated in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which posits that human functioning is a result of reciprocal relationships between environmental variables, cognitive factors, and behavior. Learners' sociopolitical contexts also shape their educational experiences; students' intersecting identities (gender, race, class, language) and the culture in which they learn (comprising values, traditions, politics, and more) influence how they navigate their education and are served by education professionals (Nieto, 1998). When schools shifted to online instruction in March of 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, instructors were forced to rapidly adapt their pedagogy and students faced new demands on their learning. At the same time, a national reckoning with systemic racism in the U.S. underscored the importance of racial justice and equity in American education. These environmental contexts call for increased attention to how historically marginalized students can best be taught in higher education.

One pedagogical reform created to support students of color and ethnically minoritized students is culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000, 2018). In culturally responsive teaching, students are taught "to and through" their frameworks of culture, knowledge, and values (Gay, 2018, p. 36). However, instructors in postsecondary education might not be prepared to teach students through this pedagogy (Heitner & Jennings, 2016). Little research has examined culturally responsive teaching in higher

education, both in face-to-face classrooms and online (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020). The norms of education delivery are shifting and will continue to evolve in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has cast more light on the need for enhancing online pedagogy (Rapanta et al., 2020). In the present study, I investigated culturally responsive teaching in higher education by examining postsecondary instructors' self-perceptions and historically minoritized students' perceptions of their instructors' teaching and support. Through this research, I aimed to reveal how culturally responsive teaching might make postsecondary instruction and learning more equitable for students.

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory positions human behavior, environments, and personal factors (e.g., cognition, affect) in a triadic and reciprocal relationship. Each of these factors influences and is influenced by the others, such that individuals' beliefs about themselves are inherently related to both their own behavior and external forces. One important self-belief is self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), or one's belief in their ability to behave in a certain way to reach a desired outcome. Within social cognitive theory, self-efficacy beliefs can influence motivation, such that feeling highly self-efficacious for a given task can be predictive of subsequent success in that undertaking (Bandura, 1982). Furthermore, as social cognitive theory positions personal and environmental factors as reciprocal influences upon one another, self-efficacy can influence and be influenced by individuals in one's environment (Bandura, 1997). In the context of education, research has shown that teachers' self-efficacy in their instruction

can influence students' motivation and achievement (see Zee & Koomen, 2016, for a review of relevant research).

Some researchers have examined self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching within the context of preservice K-12 teaching. For example, Siwatu (2007, 2011) found that preservice teachers felt confident in their ability to form caring relationships with students, but less efficacious in knowing about and incorporating students' cultural identities into their pedagogical approach. In postsecondary settings, researchers have shown that White college faculty members often struggle with how to talk about race in class (Phillips et al., 2019). White instructors' racial consciousness, or their understanding "about their racial assumptions, biases, privilege, and the racialized nature of the world" (Haynes, 2021, p. 1), can shape their students' learning environments; for example, an instructor with a high racial consciousness might intentionally make their curriculum more relevant to racially minoritized students' culture (Haynes, 2021). From a social cognitive perspective, individuals' functioning is influenced by their surrounding "social conditions and institutional practices" (Bandura, 2002, p. 270). Therefore, it is important to study not only instructors' self-beliefs about their teaching, but also how students' learning is shaped by the social conditions of their education.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

In educational psychology, using a framework of critical race theory can be useful for exploring dynamics of race in schooling in myriad ways, including in examining the influence of Whiteness and highlighting the perspectives and voices of minoritized individuals (DeCuir-Gunby, 2020). Critical race theory asserts that racial prejudice and White superiority are inherent and structural in American institutions, such as education

(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) also conducted work to examine highly successful teachers of African American children and discovered that the teachers recognized, affirmed, and encouraged the sociocultural identities of their students. Ladson-Billings' (1995) work identified three primary features of culturally relevant pedagogy: academic development and success, teachers' support for and knowledge of students' cultures, and competence in critiquing social injustice for transformational education. These tenets set the foundation for Geneva Gay's (2000) work.

Geneva Gay (2000, 2018) conceptualized culturally responsive teaching based on the framework of Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally responsive teaching aims to improve instruction for racially and ethnically minoritized students by using their "cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives … as channels for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002, p. 106). The pedagogy was conceptualized in response to disparities in achievement between White middle-class students and racially and ethnically minoritized students (especially Black and African American students), students whose first language is not English, and students from lower socioeconomic status.

Despite the origins of this pedagogy focusing on disparities in achievement, culturally responsive teaching is not a deficit model. Rather, the pedagogy seeks to address an enduring deficit in instruction. Teaching has long been culturally responsive to the characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of White, middle-class, English-speaking students (Irvine & Armento, 2000). By contrast, teachers rarely invoke the "funds of knowledge" that historically marginalized students hold, such as their cultural knowledge, values, and skills, in the classroom (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). Changing

teaching practices to include culturally responsive teaching can empower students who have been marginalized by the Eurocentrism of American education (Gay, 2018).

***Defining Culturally Responsive Teaching***

Gay (2018) has identified eight attributes of culturally responsive teaching. First, culturally responsive teaching *validates* students' "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles" (Gay, 2018, p. 36). Instructors develop caring relationships with students, include and affirm students' funds of knowledge, and challenge racism and discrimination in the classroom. Second, culturally responsive teaching is *comprehensive*, meaning teachers help students maintain their racial and ethnic identities, develop community, and encourage their success, and *inclusive*, meaning that it is applicable across the development of the learner and can benefit both minoritized students and White students. Third, culturally responsive teaching is *multidimensional*: it can span dimensions of teaching (e.g., curriculum, assessment, subject areas) and include "a wide range of cultural knowledge" (Gay, 2018, p. 39). Additionally, culturally responsive teaching is *empowering*, such that students' self-beliefs, including academic beliefs, are nurtured.

Next, culturally responsive teaching is *humanistic*. The pedagogy should encourage students to "acquire knowledge of self and others" (Gay, 2018, p. 44) and to be culturally responsive in their own lives, relationships, and friendships. Gay (2018) also describes culturally responsive teaching as *emancipatory*, or, disruptive to the traditional teaching approaches that center Whiteness. According to Gay (2018), social justice and inequity should be discussed in the classroom, and students should be supported in becoming activists in their own right. Gay's (2018) theory also envisions teaching as

*transformative*, in that academic success is supported alongside development of cultural identity. The final tenet of culturally responsive teaching asserts that it is an *ethical* teaching practice and should be the *norm* for education (Gay, 2018).

***Benefits of Culturally Responsive Teaching for Students***

Through offering caring, empowering, and emancipatory instruction for historically marginalized students, culturally responsive teaching can support students' academic motivation and achievement. Several studies have shown that including curriculum with cultural relevance to students of color and other minoritized students (e.g., immigrants, English language learners) can improve students' engagement, enjoyment of learning, and academic achievement (Dimick, 2012; Martell, 2013; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). Although many studies of culturally responsive teaching include small sample sizes or case studies, Chun and Dickson (2011) examined culturally responsive teaching in a sample of nearly 500 Latinx middle school students. The researchers identified a positive relationship between culturally responsive teaching and students' academic self-efficacy, which suggests that the pedagogy can support students' motivation and achievement.

***Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy***

Recently, scholars have proposed a revised theory known as culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogy "requires that [teachers] support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Culturally sustaining pedagogy, then, does not only acknowledge cultural distinctions (i.e., teachers are not only knowledgeable about

minoritized students' cultural experiences), but also actively develops students' critical consciousness. In the present study, the survey item guiding participant selection was derived from Gay's (2000, 2002, 2018) work, thus the primary theoretical framework used was culturally responsive teaching.

# CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although culturally responsive teaching was conceptualized with primary and secondary education in mind, the tenets of Gay's (2018) pedagogy are important to consider in the context of postsecondary education. In this section, I first describe the impact of individuals' racial and cultural identities on their educational experiences, first broadly and then in the context of postsecondary education. Then, I review relevant literature on culturally responsive teaching in postsecondary education, including both instructors' self-efficacy and students' perceptions of the pedagogy.

## Students' Racial and Cultural Identities

Many students face cultural discontinuity between their home environments and their lives at school. The cultural values, language, and customs of students of color and ethnically minoritized students may be minoritized by the dominant, mainstream culture of Whiteness to which students are expected to assimilate (Tyler et al., 2006). In American public education, White norms such as individualism and competitiveness are ingrained in the school experience (Tyler et al., 2008). However, Black and Latinx students might have cultural values outside of White norms, such as communalism and collectivism (Tyler et al., 2008). In some cases, Black students who successfully code-switch between their sociocultural norms and the norms of Whiteness are more successful in school (Anderson, 2000), but the cognitive burden of reconciling one's racial identity with their academic identity in a context that is unsupportive of their race can negatively affect academic motivation (Chavous et al., 2004). Both cultural and racial identities can play an important role in shaping students' experiences as they navigate educational contexts, such as postsecondary education.

## Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Postsecondary Education

Higher education scholars have pointed to myriad ways in which postsecondary education is rooted in, and contributes to the persistence of, oppression of Black, Indigenous, and other minoritized people (Patton, 2016). Recent research illustrates present-day manifestations of racial and ethnic inequity in higher education. Racially and ethnically minoritized students perceive and experience college less positively than do White students, even when they are attending the same university (Espinosa et al., 2019; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Black and Latinx students face systemic and daily discrimination on college campuses and are less likely to complete a college degree than are White and Asian students (Harwood et al., 2018; NCES, 2019). Furthermore, the vast majority of higher education instructors are White: in 2017, just 13% of faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions were Black, Latinx, or multiracial (NCES, 2020). However, Latina and Black women represent the fastest growing populations of college graduates (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). As these students are likely encounter mostly White faculty, who might not feel prepared to discuss race and culture or challenge racism in their classes (Mayo & Larke, 2010; Phillips et al., 2019; Sue et al., 2009), it is important to examine White instructors' confidence for pedagogies that disrupt racist norms in the classroom.

### *Whiteness in Postsecondary Education*

It is possible that when instructors are not prepared to guide conversations around culture or challenge discrimination in the classroom, students of color and ethnically minoritized students might be negatively affected both academically and personally. The curriculum of theories, texts, and information widespread in higher education "operates

with a disposition toward ‘canon’ knowledge and information that … [ensures] Whiteness remains embedded, regardless of subject matter” (Patton, 2016, p. 320). Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that undergraduate students of color observed “the silencing of topics related to racism and racial injustice” in classrooms (p. 16), and the omnipresence of Whiteness in their course materials. Solorzano and colleagues’ (2000) exploration of the racialized experiences of Black undergraduates depicted such microaggressions as being asked to speak on behalf of one’s race in class discussions, especially when a student is the only person of their race in the room. When students continually encounter environments that privilege Whiteness, and in which racial microaggressions are perpetuated against them, they may face “racial battle fatigue” (Franklin et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2007). Black and Latinx students might have to expend considerable energy to cope with such environments, which can negatively affect their academic performance (Franklin, 2016).

Postsecondary faculty can also play a positive role in historically marginalized students’ college experiences. Positive relationships with faculty (e.g., seeing faculty as approachable and understanding) are significant positive predictors of learning for students across racial and ethnic groups, including Black, Latinx and White students (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). Further research has linked Black students’ academic engagement and self-concept with their perception of caring relationships with faculty (Beasley & McClain, 2020). It is important to further investigate how confident instructors feel to engage in pedagogy that intentionally conveys both individual care and academic support for racially and ethnically minoritized students.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching in Postsecondary Education**

There is a large body of higher education research examining pedagogies intended to make schooling more equitable for historically marginalized students, including hooks' (1994) engaged pedagogy, Yosso's (2002) critical race curriculum, Grant and Sleeter's (2011) multicultural teaching, and more. Therefore, although little published higher education research specifically uses Gay's (2000) framework of culturally responsive teaching (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020), there is research on related pedagogies that contain similar practices to those in culturally responsive teaching. Patton (2016) described the need for such pedagogies (particularly referring to those rooted in critical race theory) to disrupt racist norms in postsecondary curriculum and classroom experiences for racially marginalized students.

Of the published literature that specifically examines culturally responsive teaching in higher education, most works are theoretical in nature and argue why or how the pedagogy can be implemented in college classrooms. For example, Larke (2013) described the "D2 and E2 Approach" (p. 40), which describes how postsecondary instructors can integrate culturally responsive teaching by "developing" an understanding of multicultural education, "designing" their courses with tenets of culturally responsive teaching, "engaging" their students, and "evaluating" course and student outcomes (p. 40). Such a course might include readings from diverse authors, discussions about cultural identities, and assignments related to culture that are equal in importance to other assignments (Larke, 2013). Other scholars have theorized that culturally responsive teaching might be more challenging in the context of virtual postsecondary instruction, as online instruction may decrease opportunities for individualized instruction (Smith &

Ayers, 2006). Student-teacher interaction and cultural inclusiveness can be important factors of student success even when teaching online (Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2017; Yeboah & Smith, 2016), thus it is important to study how teachers can support their students equitably in both face-to-face and virtual learning.

Some scholars have examined culturally responsive practices in higher education more precisely. In an ethnographic study of culturally relevant pedagogy, Castillo-Montoya (2019) interviewed faculty and students in sociology classes at a postsecondary Hispanic-Serving Institution. The instructors, who were selected because they already displayed culturally responsive teaching behaviors (e.g., student-centered teaching, being knowledgeable of social and political issues) intentionally connected course content to students' cultural backgrounds and made opportunities for discussion and disclosure of students' own identities. Students appreciated learning about diverse perspectives through their peers and ultimately felt their learning and engagement was deepened by such opportunities Castillo-Montoya (2019).

A swell of recent research has examined culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education to bolster STEM persistence of historically marginalized students. Researchers have explored how to incorporate culture, race, and social justice within subjects such as genetics, ecology, and anatomy (Favero & Van Hoomissen, 2019; Harris et al., 2020; Sparks et al., 2020). O'Leary and colleagues (2020) also detailed the effects of culturally responsive teaching workshops for faculty. After attending multiday instructional workshops, faculty reportedly gained greater understanding of cultural backgrounds and barriers to access for underrepresented students. These instructors also made changes in

their pedagogies, such as setting ground rules for respect and increasing communication with students.

***Instructor Self-Efficacy for Culturally Responsive Teaching***

According to social cognitive theory, if one does not feel confident in their ability to accomplish a task, their motivation to do so may be reduced (Bandura, 1982). For example, if instructors are not confident in their ability to discuss culture, race, and social justice in their courses, they might not incorporate culturally responsiveness into their curriculum in that way. It is worthwhile, then, to better understand postsecondary instructors' self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching. To date, teachers' self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching has largely been studied in the context of pre-service teachers (Siwatu, 2007, 2011). This work has shown that pre-service teachers, who were mostly White and female, felt confident in their ability to form caring relationships with students, but less so in their ability to incorporate students' cultural identities in curriculum (Siwatu, 2011).

Less attention has been given to postsecondary instructors' self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching. Heitner and Jennings (2016) developed an assessment of online instructors' culturally responsive teaching and examined the gaps between faculty's knowledge and practice. The authors found that faculty members highly valued culturally responsive teaching but were not confident in their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching practices or their ability to meet the needs of diverse students. Similarly, Maruyama and colleagues (2000) surveyed 1,500 interdisciplinary college faculty members about their perceptions of teaching practices that "best serve minority students" (p. 10). The authors found that a minority of instructors discussed race and

ethnicity in the classroom and that non-White instructors felt more prepared than White instructors to teach diverse classes (Maruyama et al., 2000). The survey items used by Heitner and Jennings (2016) and Maruyama and colleagues (2000) provided the foundation for items examining postsecondary self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching in the present study.

***Student Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching***

Thus far, I have discussed social cognitive theory in the context of teachers' personal beliefs and behaviors. The third factor of social cognitive theory, one's environment, is where instructors and students interact. Learners' beliefs and behaviors are, in part, influenced by their environment, which can be shaped by their teachers' beliefs and behaviors (Bandura, 2007). For example, a student's affect (a personal factor) might inform a teacher's behavioral response, which in turn shapes the environment in which the student learns. Students' perceptions of their learning environments can also provide important information about the quality of teaching and learning (Wallace et al., 2016). For example, through focus groups with historically minoritized undergraduates, including Black and Latinx students, Chesler and colleagues (1993) identified instances of both marginalizing and validating teaching behaviors from students' perspectives. The authors emphasized that instructors may be aware of racial exclusion in the learning environment but also feel a "lack of comfort, skill, or experience" to adequately address or challenge such inequity (Chesler et al., 1993, p. 5). This work highlights the important distinction between supporting instructors' pedagogical knowledge and their confidence to deliver a given pedagogy; in turn, students' perceptions may provide a window into the learning environments shaped, in part, by their instructors' confidence.

Although little research has examined how postsecondary students perceive culturally responsive teaching, a number of studies have focused on students in their final years of high school (Chicoski, 2019; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2017). For example, students pointed to examples of teachers who de-centered and examined their own cultural identities, promoted social justice and amplify voices of oppressed groups, and intentionally included students' cultures (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2017). Students also described ineffective teachers, whom students perceived as disregarding students' personal values (e.g., social justice) or neglecting to address discrimination or racism in the classroom (Chicoski, 2019).

The relationship between instructor pedagogical choices and student perceptions has also been studied in higher education research. One of the primary theories of college student development, Tinto's (1986, 1993) theory of college student persistence, highlighted the importance of faculty interactions on students' college experiences and persistence. Braxton and colleagues (2013) extended Tinto's work to describe how student perceptions of their instructors' interest in and caring for students can influence student persistence. Importantly, student perceptions of racial discrimination at their university are also influential in their persistence (Braxton et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important for both short-term and long-term student success to identify how postsecondary instructors can create equitable and supportive learning environments for racially and ethnically minoritized students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this thesis study was to examine postsecondary instructors' self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching and the perceptions of their historically

marginalized students. The vast majority of postsecondary instructors are White (NCES, 2020), and research indicates they may not feel confident in their ability to serve the needs of racially and ethnically minoritized students (Heitner & Jennings, 2016). However, instructors who feel more confident to use culturally responsive teaching might also be perceived by their students as caring, supportive, and empowering (Gay, 2018). To investigate the extent to which culturally responsive teaching was visible in the postsecondary classroom, and to offer a student-informed perspective on how such pedagogical behavior can support historically marginalized students, I sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do postsecondary instructors rate their self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching?
2. How do racially and ethnically minoritized students describe their experiences learning in classes taught by instructors with high self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching?
3. What perceptions do racially and ethnically minoritized students hold about culturally responsive teaching?

# CHAPTER 3. METHOD

## Design

This research took part in two phases using an explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). I followed the participant selection variant of this mixed methods design; quantitative data were used to select participants for qualitative inquiry, which was given greater emphasis in the study. Specifically, in Phase 1 (Fall 2020), I analyzed instructors' survey responses about how confident they felt in their ability to use culturally responsive teaching methods. I then identified instructors with high self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching. In Phase 2 (Spring 2021), I recruited racially and ethnically minoritized undergraduate students who had been enrolled in classes taught by the high-self-efficacy instructors identified in Phase 1. I conducted semi-structured interviews with students to learn about their experiences and perceptions in the instructor's class, the instructor's culturally responsive teaching practices, and students' perceptions about how they could be better supported. This study was part of a larger investigation of undergraduate teaching and learning during the Fall of 2020.

## Phase 1: Quantitative

### *Participants*

Instructors currently teaching undergraduates at a public land-grant university in the southeastern U.S., which is also a predominantly White institution (PWI), were invited to participate in an online survey about their experiences with teaching and learning in the fall semester of 2020. The quantitative phase of the study focused on survey responses from instructors who volunteered and consented to participate. The instructors who agreed to participate ($N = 99$) were mostly White and female (see Table

3.1 for instructor demographics). The average age of instructors was 44 years old (*SD* = 11.45) and the average years of teaching experience was 13 years (*SD* = 9.75).

Instructors distributed an accompanying student survey to students in their class or classes (*N* = 8,524); however, not all students consented to participate. Although the student survey was not the focus of my quantitative investigation, the survey included a question asking students about whether they would be willing to be contacted for possible participation in a follow-up interview, which I made use of in Phase 2. A total of 4,085 students consented to be interviewed, 953 of whom were students of racial or ethnic minority groups (see Table 3.2). Student ethnicity for sampling was collected from university records. However, in writing about the interviewed students, I refer to students' self-identified race and ethnicities, which they verbalized in the interview.

***Instrumentation***

On the broader teaching and learning survey, five survey items asked instructors to rate how confident they felt in using culturally responsive teaching practices (see Table 3.3 for a list of items). Three of the five items were adapted from Maruyama and colleagues' (2000) work; two items were adapted from scales used with college faculty to examine culturally responsive teaching (Heitner & Jennings, 2016). All items used the same response options ranging from 1 (*Not at all confident*) to 6 (*Completely confident*). Each of these items also aligned with Gay's (2018) tenets of culturally responsive teaching (see Table 3.3).

Given that items were adapted for use in this study, I next investigated whether the five items could be constructed into a composite variable of self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching. I examined dimensionality using exploratory factor

analysis (EFA) in SPSS 27. EFA allows the researcher to "identify the factor structure or model for a set of variables" (Bandalos, 1996, p. 389). I first examined correlations between each of the five items (see Table 3.4 for correlation matrix). A principal axis factoring analysis yielded only one factor with an eigenvalue greater than 1, in accordance with Kaiser's (1960) criterion for retaining factors with eigenvalues above 1. Factor 1 (eigenvalue of 3.61) comprised all five items and accounted for 72.15% of total variance. Further, in accordance with Hinkin's (1998) recommendation for judging factor loadings above .40 as meaningful, all five items loaded on to this factor with loadings between .70 and .89. The Cronbach's alpha for the five items was .90, which is above the .80 threshold recommended for psychological research (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011). As all five items were judged to represent a unidimensional construct of self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching, I created a composite variable representing an average of participants' ratings on the five items.

***Data Analysis***

To address my first research question, I examined descriptive statistics, comprising means and standard deviations, of instructors' self-ratings on the composite self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching variable. I also examined descriptive statistics by demographic variables, including race and ethnicity, gender, and academic status (e.g., graduate student, assistant professor, full professor). Finally, I used statistical tests to examine whether there were significant differences by gender and number of years of teaching experience.

### *Participant Selection*

I used the Phase 1 analysis of instructor self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching to guide purposive participant selection Phase 2. To reach the target number of students for qualitative interviews, I first recruited students from instructors who rated their self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching the highest of the full sample (a score of 6.00), then continued recruiting from instructors with the next highest scores. In total, I sent 46 recruitment emails across 15 instructors' courses. Three instructors taught courses in STEM. The 15 instructors' self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching scores ranged from 6.00 to 5.20. Two instructors were White men and the rest were White women; their course subjects included mostly social sciences, visual arts, communications, and the humanities.

My recruitment yielded nine students across six instructors, all of whom were White women. The instructors included one tenured faculty member, two tenure-track faculty members, one non-tenure-track faculty member, and two staff instructors. One instructor taught an academic orientation course for first-year students; the other instructors' fields of study included social sciences, health sciences, visual arts, and foreign language. Most of the instructors had more than 20 years of teaching experience, but none had more than 1 year of experience teaching in an online setting (see Table 3.5 for further demographics). The average self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching score across the six instructors was 5.67 ($SD$ = 0.26).

## Phase 2: Qualitative

### *Purposeful Sampling Procedures*

According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018), an explanatory sequential study design gives the researcher the opportunity to use quantitative data to guide purposeful sampling for subsequent in-depth qualitative investigation to provide a rich narrative of lived experiences. The quantitative survey results of postsecondary instructors in Phase 1 enabled me to purposefully recruit students from the courses of instructors with the highest self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching.

I based sampling for Phase 2 on the following eligibility criteria. First, students had to have been enrolled in a Fall 2020 class with a White instructor who reported having high self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching. Second, only students from classes with 50 or fewer students were considered. These inclusion criteria enabled me to focus on students' experiences with White instructors who make up the majority of higher education instructors whom students, including racially and ethnically minoritized students, will encounter (NCES, 2020), but also might be less comfortable with or confident in culturally responsive teaching (Mayo & Larke, 2010; Phillips et al., 2019; Sue et al., 2009). I also focused on relatively small-sized classes (<50), where students and instructors might have more opportunities to form relationships. As culturally responsive teaching can be implemented across disciplines (Gay, 2018), I did not impose discipline-based inclusion criteria.

I ranked White instructors who taught classes with 50 or fewer students by their mean self-efficacy scores from Phase 1. I then sent recruitment emails to eligible students in those courses. Eligible students included those who had completed the Fall 2020

survey, indicated they were interested in a follow-up interview, and were identified by university records as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Multi-Racial. Although I planned to prioritize Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino students and for my sample to be evenly balanced by gender, the only students who responded to recruitment emails were Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina female students.

***Participants***

I sent interview recruitment emails to a total of 46 undergraduates from 15 instructors and 20 classes. Of these, 37 students did not respond and nine indicated interest in being interviewed by completing online consent, all of whom I ultimately interviewed. All nine students who indicated interest and were interviewed were identified by university records as female students and no student disclosed a gender identity other than female in the course of the interviews (see Table 3.6 for further student demographics). Four women were the only student from their course to consent to interview. I interviewed two students from the social sciences/humanities course and three students from orientation course. The orientation course was also a part of a living and learning program, meaning students and instructor had more contact with one another (e.g., through external meetings or programming) than other students might have had with their instructors. All courses were taught using virtual learning to some degree – two were held entirely online, and the remaining four were hybrid, with some in-person and some online class sessions.

According to university records, six of the nine students were Black or African-American, and three were Hispanic or Latinx; however, several students' self-

identifications of their race and ethnicity, shared in the course of the interviews, differed from university records. All three university-identified Hispanic or Latinx students, and one Black student, identified as being of "mixed" race or ethnicity, and several described their race and ethnicity in addition to their nationality. One student identified herself as "half-Black and half-White" and referred to herself as a both Black and a woman of color; one student identified as Hispanic and/or Latina and as Mexican American; one student considered herself Hispanic but not a person of color and as Cuban American; one student identified herself as passing as White, but not a White person, and as Mexican and German. One Black student stated that her family was Jamaican, and two Black students were immigrants from African countries, including Congo and Ghana. Three Black or African American students did not elaborate on their ethnic backgrounds.

***Interview Protocol***

Interviews were conducted with two aims: first, to understand how students perceived their instructors' teaching, supportiveness, and pedagogies related to cultural diversity; and second, to explore students' more general opinions of culturally responsive teaching. Analysis of these interviews was guided by a social constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), in which the "views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals" (Creswell, 1998, p. 65), in addition to the positionality of the researcher and power imbalances that exist, are prioritized in the analytical process.

I aimed to gather students' perceptions about their instructor (who rated their self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching as relatively high) and how their instructor supported, motivated, and included students in the classroom, in addition to whether

students would like to see culturally responsive content in their coursework of other. To develop interview questions, I examined other research on culturally responsive teaching (Chicoski, 2019; Dickson et al., 2016; Williams, 2018) and consulted with members of my research lab. After initial questions to establish rapport between myself and the student, I asked how their personal identities, including race and ethnicity, related to their feelings of being supported, affirmed, and academically successful in the course from which they were recruited.

The interview questions aligned with the goals of Gay's (2018) culturally responsive teaching (see Table 3.3). Further, these questions inquired about students' personal factors ("What aspects of your cultural background are most central or important to you?"), their experiences and behaviors ("How well do you feel this professor motivated you to succeed?"), and their perceptions of the educational environments created by their instructors ("Did your teacher discuss topics such as social justice or politics in class?"). Therefore, I could analyze data in the contexts of culturally responsive teaching and the framework of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). In asking students to reflect on the most salient parts of their cultural identities, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, and more, I worked to ensure students had agency in describing what cultural identities were most meaningful to them. Although culturally responsive teaching speaks specifically to culture, students' race and ethnicity are primary facets of Gay's pedagogy (2018).

I first conducted a small-scale pilot study to refine the interview protocol. In the pilot study, I interviewed two Black undergraduate students to evaluate proposed interview questions' clarity and relevance to the study's purpose. Both of these interviews took place

with Black undergraduates with whom I already had relationships through my research and teaching experience as a graduate student. After the conclusion of these interviews, I asked both students to reflect on our conversations and the questions I had asked so that I could further clarify my protocol. I subsequently revised the wording of several questions for clarity and eliminated one question that appeared to yield redundant answers. I also added one question to ask students about how important their race was to them; this question enabled me to better understand students' own positionality and relationship to a core component of cultural responsiveness (Gay, 2013). The final semi-structured interview protocol consisted of 15 questions with additional probes (see Table 3.7)

***Interview Procedure***

I conducted one semi-structured interview with each consenting participant to investigate students' perceptions of and experiences with culturally responsive teaching. This project was approved by the Institutional Review Board and all students were provided with informed consent prior to meeting for interviews. As this research occurred during a global health pandemic, I conducted all interviews online through the video-enabled virtual meeting service Zoom. Interviews were held for 25 to 45 minutes (the average interview length was 30 minutes). I recorded an audio file of all Zoom interviews and transcribed the interviews verbatim. First, I used the transcribe feature in Microsoft Word to generate a transcription from the audio file of each interview. Next, I edited each generated transcript while listening to the audio recording to ensure the conversation was transcribed verbatim.

### *Data Coding and Analysis*

I took a grounded theory approach to inductive coding, which occurred in two cycles. First, I examined each participant's narrative individually. Then, I synthesized codes across participants (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For first cycle coding, I used in vivo coding, which is appropriate "for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). I used the qualitative coding software MAXQDA for all analyses. As I examined each transcript line by line, I used in vivo coding to identify the words and phrases spoken by the participants that appeared to convey information relevant to my research questions. I used these words and phrases as labels for initial codes (e.g., repeated instances of students using the word "understanding" to describe their instructor led to the code "Being Understanding/Supportive"). By coding each individual's words and phrases according to how they are spoken, I maintained integrity of the student's original expressions (Saldaña, 2013).

This coding occurred in an iterative process. After I completed in vivo coding of the first several interviews, I created a document in which I organized the in vivo codes into meaningful groupings for each participant and wrote short memos and descriptions of coding groups. I continued working on both tasks until I had completed all in vivo coding and all meaningful grouping. As I identified clusters in a single transcript, I compared new codes across other participants' transcripts to "assess comparability and transferability" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 217). Therefore, this iterative process was simultaneously informed by the individual interviews and the sample as a whole.

For second cycle coding, I synthesized the meaningful groupings across the participants to articulate a unified coding scheme using focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). During focused coding, I examined meaningful groupings of each individual in comparison across individuals to develop clusters, which ultimately comprised my primary coding themes (Saldaña, 2013). These themes included Identity, Fall Semester Context, Instructor of Interest, Course of Interest, and Culturally Responsive Teaching. In particular, the themes of Instructor of Interest and Course of Interest aligned with both parts of my second research question (i.e., How do students perceive their Instructors? Do students' perceptions align with their instructors'?), whereas the theme of Culturally Responsive Teaching aligned with my final research question (i.e., How do students perceive culturally responsive teaching?). I then produced a first version of a completed codebook with categories and subcategories for interpretation.

Next, I began applying the codebook across all nine interviews to assess fit. At this step, I wanted to ensure that my prior process of in vivo coding chronologically (i.e., coding each interview in the order of which the interviews occurred) did not result in the first interviews having more influence on the coding guide than the final interviews. For this reason, when I began applying my codebook to the interviews, I worked backwards, beginning with the ninth interview and concluding with the first interview. During this process, I evaluated whether I needed to create new codes or to revise or eliminate current codes.

Once I refined the codes, I progressed to assessing intercoder agreement as a measure of reliability. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended using check-coding to examine reliability of the analysis. After I completed first- and second-cycle coding, a

trained second coder in my lab (who is familiar with the study) used the coding guide I create to code 13 randomly selected pages of transcribed interviews (equal to 10% of total interview pages). I attempted to examine our rate of agreement on applied codes in MAXQDA. However, this proved to be challenging, as the second coder and I were "unitizing the same text in different ways" (Campbell et al., 2013, p. 303). Although the second coder and I reached close to 100% agreement on which codes should be used across the 13 pages (i.e., she applied one additional code in her transcript than did I), our textual highlights (i.e., unitization of data) were slightly different, which lowered the computed agreement rate. We reviewed the codebook together to discuss any codes that the second coder found unclear or in need of refinement; no major changes were needed. For these reasons, I next employed a different method of intercoder reliability.

Following the method that Campbell and colleagues (2013) recommended for coding exploratory and lengthy qualitative interview data, I randomly selected a new set of 6 pages of interviews (5% of the total pages) and coded the pages in Microsoft Word by highlighting meaningful units and applying codes to each of those units in commenst. I then saved a new version of the document in which my highlighted units remained but my applied codes were deleted; the second coder then applied the codes she thought were appropriate to each highlighted unit. In this way, my second coder and I were able to analyze the exact same units of text. I then calculated our intercoder agreement by comparing the number of units that we coded with the exact same code. The second coder and I agreed on 84% of codes applied to the units in these pages. No more changes to the codebook were made; the final codebook comprised the five primary coding themes and 50 subcodes (see Appendix).

***Saturation***

In qualitative research, recruitment for a study reaches saturation when data collection yields no new themes or information (Morse, 1995). Narrowing my focus to students who were both female and racially or ethnically minoritized made the point of data saturation clearer than if my sample comprised more racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. In regard to race and ethnicity, research examining minoritized undergraduates at PWIs has identified shared experiences among Black and Latinx students, including the importance of positive faculty interactions (DeFreitas & Bravo Jr., 2012), feelings of cultural incongruity (Rischall & Meyers, 2017; Thelamour et al., 2019), and microaggressions in academic spaces (McCabe, 2009; Reynolds et al., 2010). In terms of gender, female Black and Hispanic/Latina individuals may similarly experience multiple forces of oppressions based on their intersecting gender and racial or ethnic identities (Crenshaw, 1991), particularly in education (Alemán, 2018; Harris & Patton, 2019). Through examining the experiences of an all-female sample of Black and Latina/Hispanic undergraduates, I expected to find similarities and shared experiences in the qualitative data, which could serve as evidence of theoretical and inductive thematic saturation (Saunders et al., 2017).

Theoretical saturation is indicated by evidence of a theoretical category occurring in the data repeatedly (Saunders et al., 2017). To evaluate for theoretical saturation throughout my data collection, I wrote researcher memos after each interview. Memoing allows the researcher to "study [their] emerging data" by making a record of reflections, connections, and comparisons, prior to and during the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2006, p. 80). In my own memos, I articulated how the data emerging from each new

interview related to, or differed from, prior students' interviews. As I reflected that I was receiving little to no new information once I had completed nine interviews, I concluded that I had reached theoretical saturation.

Inductive thematic saturation is achieved when analysis of new data yields no new codes or themes (Saunders et al., 2017). I evaluated my data for this second form of saturation during in vivo coding, which I conducted iteratively throughout the interview phase (in other words, I coded completed interviews in the same weeks in which I conducted new interviews). In particular, when I reached my eighth and ninth interviews, I found that I did not need to generate any new codes, although I did refine and expand existing codes. For example, my definition for the code about students' Culture grew to include language (Student 8) and food (Student 9), but I did not need an additional code to capture those salient parts of students' cultural identities. In Charmaz's (2006) constructivist version of grounded theory methodology, no specific number of participants is recommended; rather, the emphasis is on the researcher's determination that "gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of [one's] core theoretical categories" (p. 113). As I felt I had reached theoretical and inductive thematic saturation with nine participants, I chose to cease sampling students.

### *Positionality and Validity*

**Positionality.** In all research, reflecting on the researcher's and participants' identities and contexts is critical for "improving the quality and validity of the research and recognizing the limitations of the knowledge that is produced, thus leading to more rigorous research" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 275). My position as a White woman

likely influenced the interview data produced by my participants and how I analyzed their narratives. I have been an undergraduate, an academic coach, and a teacher at the institution in which this research was conducted, but my identity as a White person means I have likely had different experiences at this school than the students I interviewed. In particular, I never questioned whether I would read works by or hear perspectives of people with similar cultural and racial identities to me. I have never experienced targeted discrimination or microaggressions based on my race or considered my race as a factor in whether I belonged or felt valued. These are commonplace experiences that students of racial and ethnic minorities might face at PWIs and that relate to the conversations I had with students in this study (Espinosa et al., 2019; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

My postsecondary experiences have been particularly formative in the development of my racial identity: in line with Helms' (1990) model of White racial identity, I entered college in the pseudoindependence stage, with an understanding of White privilege but without a sense of personal responsibility. In my second year, one of my instructors discussed how gifted magnet education can perpetuate racial inequity by enrolling almost exclusively White students in programs that are physically located in schools serving high proportions of students of color; such "voluntary desegregation" results in intensified racial "resegregation" (Staiger, 2004, p. 161). I realized that I had attended such a program and that I had never reflected on or questioned my own role in that racial inequity. At that point, I entered Helms' (1990) immersion stage, in which I sought to educate myself on racial inequity in education and in other contexts large and small (e.g., our government; my own social relationships). Now, I believe I have reached

the point of emersion (Helms & Cook, 1999) and working toward the autonomy stage (Helms, 1990) by interrogating my own racism and other forms of oppression, engaging in anti-racist activity, and attempting to improve my effectiveness in such work. I believe work to conduct this study in an anti-racist manner was supported by this progression, but also that this study supported my development toward other facets of autonomy, including being more knowledgeable about racial, ethnic, and cultural differences.

**Validity.** In the present study, I used self-disclosure of my own positionality and experiences to help establish validity in two ways. First, I provided students with an opportunity to "get to know the interview" by sharing an introductory video of myself before we met for interviewing (Morse, 2015, p. 21). As I hold both insider and outsider status in relationship to students' own positionalities, I might occupy a space between those statuses (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Therefore, it was important that I did not "retreat to a distant 'researcher' role" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61), and that I introduced my "personal role into the research relationship" to give participants the opportunity to decide if they trusted me enough to share their personal experiences (p. 62). In the introductory video, I first described my position as a graduate student and an alumna of the university the students currently attend. Then, I explained the purpose of the overall study and my particular interest in how students of different backgrounds might have different experiences in school and that it is important to me to learn the lived experiences of students.

The second way I used self-disclosure was by selectively sharing my personal experiences with students during interviews. In the first interview I conducted, the student told me, "You can ask me anything." This came after I had asked the student

about her cultural identity, in which we discovered that we both had extended family internationally that we were unable to see and which left a "burden on [our] heart." Her words signaled to me the potential for using selective disclosure to connect with students on a personal level (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), rather than as a researcher, which could help build trust between us. At the same time, I recognize that our reasons for being unable to see family members – mine, in Ireland, and hers, in Congo – are likely different because of political and social crises in Congo, a reality about which I knew little prior to meeting with this student.

It is also important that I contextualize the presentation of what I observed in student interviews by reflecting on how I constructed those observations. One way in which I reflected on my knowledge construction for this project was in researcher reflection memos after each interview. In addition to using memos to identify points of saturation, I used them to reflect on the relationship that I felt I formed with each student during our conversation and the interactions that formed my understanding. For example, my experience with relating to the first student bolstered my confidence in using self-disclosure in future interviews to help build trust. I also used memos to reflect on my interviewing techniques and noted how I could improve to be both a better interviewer and respectful in my place as a White person asking about racialized experiences.

Finally, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) also emphasized the importance of researchers examining their motivation: "Is the aim to construct knowledge, advance the researcher's career, further the specific goals of the research participants … and is this an ethically appropriate purpose?" (p. 275). In this study, I aimed to co-construct a depiction of the experiences and perceptions that historically minoritized undergraduate held about

their education. As a postsecondary instructor myself, and a future higher education professional and educator, I am committed to this work because I wish to improve the experiences of the students whom I serve and will continue to serve.

***Consultation***

In conceptualizing this study, I sought the expertise of several scholars at my university who were also White women engaged in research with marginalized communities. First, I discussed with a member of my committee, Dr. Johnson, the ethical implications of conducting a research project, as a portion of obtaining my graduate degree, focusing on the experiences of students whose racial and ethnic communities have been historically marginalized in higher education. This conversation helped me to articulate my motivations for engaging in such research; it was not my aim to profit (in this case, by receiving a Masters degree) from the fact that racially and ethnically minoritized students have experienced discrimination in higher education, rather, it was my aim to do work that helps make higher education better for those students by improving the teaching of White instructors. We also discussed how to form trusting relationships with marginalized individuals as an interviewer (e.g., providing an introductory video of myself) and I frequently returned to her work with indigenous women in Peru as an exemplar of reflexive research (Levitan & Johnson, 2020).

Further, I consulted with a fellow graduate student who researches the experiences of Black male adolescents in school. As a White woman herself who has conducted interviews with students of color, she advised me further on the critical importance of establishing trust and care with students in addition to preparing me to face challenges in doing so. We also discussed interviewing techniques to prevent replicating

students' trauma, such as not pushing students to share experiences beyond their level of comfort with doing so. Finally, this work was supported from conception to finalization by my advisor and committee chair. Dr. Usher's writing on the role of Whiteness in motivation research was an important reference as I reflected on both my motivations for and my position within this research (Usher, 2018).

**Table 3.1**

*Full Study Instructor Demographics and Self-Efficacy for Culturally Responsive Teaching*

| Demographic | *n* (full sample *N* = 99) | Composite Self-Efficacy for CRT | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *M* | *SD* |
| Gender | | | |
| Female | 73 | 4.74 | 0.91 |
| Male | 24 | 4.63 | 0.91 |
| Prefer not to answer | 2 | 4.90 | 1.56 |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | |
| White | 79 | 4.65 | 0.93 |
| Black/African American | 5 | 5.48 | 0.46 |
| Asian/Asian American or Pacific Islander | 5 | 4.36 | 0.57 |
| Hispanic/Latinx | 3 | 4.47 | 0.61 |
| Native American | 2 | 4.70 | 1.27 |
| Other | 2 | 6.00 | 0.00 |
| Prefer not to answer | 3 | 5.07 | 1.14 |
| Years Teaching | | | |
| 0-9 | 45 | 4.73 | 0.87 |
| 10-19 | 24 | 4.44 | 0.99 |
| 20-29 | 18 | 4.90 | 0.86 |
| 30-39 | 8 | 4.80 | 1.00 |
| 40+ | 2 | 4.20 | 0.57 |
| Unknown | 2 | 6.00 | 0.00 |
| Instructor Status | | | |
| Full Professor | 14 | 4.40 | 0.97 |
| Associate Professor | 16 | 4.96 | 0.75 |
| Assistant Professor (tenure-track) | 23 | 4.65 | 0.92 |
| Assistant Professor (non-tenure-track) | 3 | 5.33 | 0.61 |
| Lecturer | 21 | 4.55 | 0.94 |
| Part-time Instructor | 4 | 4.95 | 1.11 |
| Post-doctoral Scholar or Fellow | 3 | 4.80 | 1.22 |
| Graduate Student | 7 | 4.77 | 0.83 |
| Other | 7 | 4.77 | 1.10 |
| Prefer not to answer | 1 | 6.00 | - |

*Note.* Scores for Self-Efficacy for Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) had a possible range of 1.00 (*Not at all confident*) to 6.00 (*Completely confident*).

**Table 3.2**

*Demographics for Surveyed Students Who Indicated Interest in Interviews*

| Demographic | Interested Students ($N$ = 8,058) |
|---|---|
| Gender | |
| Female | 2,732 |
| Male | 1,351 |
| No answer | 2 |
| Race/Ethnicity | |
| White or Caucasian | 3,036 |
| Black or African American | 323 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 299 |
| Asian | 164 |
| Multi-Racial (two or more races) | 161 |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 3 |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 3 |
| Unknown | 96 |

**Table 3.3**

*Adapted Survey Items and Relationship to Culturally Responsive Teaching*

| Item Origin | Adapted Item | Alignment with Gay (2018) |
|---|---|---|
| | *"How confident are you that you can …"* | *"Culturally responsive teaching is …"* |
| Heitner & Jennings, 2016 | Challenge stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination that arise | "challenging racial and cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression" (p. 37) |
| Heitner & Jennings, 2016 | Include more perspectives related to racial and ethnic diversity in your course materials | "using cultural knowledge of racially and ethnically minoritized cultures, families, and communities to guide curriculum development … [and] instructional strategies" (p. 37) |
| Maruyama et al., 2000 | Allow a variety of perspectives to be shared | "[to tap] into a wide range of cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions, and perspectives" (p. 39) |
| Maruyama et al., 2000 | Talk about social and political issues | "[to include] cultural competence, critical social consciousness, political activism, and responsible community membership" (p. 39) |
| Maruyama et al., 2000 | Talk about racism | "challenging racial and cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression" (p. 37) |

**Table 3.4**

*Correlation Matrix for Culturally Responsive Teaching Survey Items*

| Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Challenge stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination | - | | | |
| 2. Include more perspectives related to racial and ethnic diversity in course materials | .62 | - | | |
| 3. Allow a variety of perspectives to be shared | .62 | .69 | - | |
| 4. Talk about social and political issues | .60 | .67 | .50 | - |
| 5. Talk about racism | .63 | .75 | .57 | .84 |

**Table 3.5**

*Demographics for Instructors of Interviewed Students*

| Instructor | Students Interviewed (*n*) | Field of Study | Teaching Status | Teaching Experience | Self-Efficacy for CRT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instructor 1 | 1 | Social Sciences/Humanities | Tenure-track faculty | 20-30 years | 6.00 |
| Instructor 2 | 1 | Foreign Language | Tenure-track faculty | 20-30 years | 5.60 |
| Instructor 3 | 1 | Health Sciences | Staff instructor | 20-30 years | 5.60 |
| Instructor 4 | 3 | Orientation | Staff instructor | 0-10 years | 5.60 |
| Instructor 5 | 2 | Social Sciences | Tenured faculty | 20-30 years | 5.40 |
| Instructor 6 | 1 | Visual Arts | Non-tenure-track faculty | 10-20 years | 5.20 |

*Note.* All instructors of interviewed students self-identified as female. Scores for Self-Efficacy for Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) had a possible range of 1.00 (*Not at all confident*) to 6.00 (*Completely confident*).

**Table 3.6**

*Demographics for Interviewed Students*

| Participant | Self-Identified Race, Ethnicity, and/or Nationality | Undergraduate Status | Major | Course of Interest |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student 1 | Black, Congolese | Junior | Humanities | Social Sciences |
| Student 2 | Black, African American | Freshman | Natural Sciences | Orientation |
| Student 3 | Hispanic, Mexican and German | Freshman | Social Sciences | Orientation |
| Student 4 | Black or African American | Freshman | Social Sciences & Humanities | Orientation |
| Student 5 | Hispanic or Latina, Mexican American | Senior | Health Sciences | Health Sciences |
| Student 6 | Black, Mixed-Race | Junior | Natural Sciences | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| Student 7 | Hispanic, Cuban | Sophomore | Natural Sciences & Humanities | Foreign Language |
| Student 8 | Black, Ghanaian | Freshman | Health Sciences | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| Student 9 | Black, Jamaican | Junior | Communications | Visual Arts |

*Note.* All students interviewed self-identified as female.

**Table 3.7**

*Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Student Interviews*

| Interview Questions | Probing Questions |
|---|---|
| So first, I'd love to get to know you a little better. Can you tell me a little about yourself? | Major, year |
| Next, I want to ask you about your cultural background. There are many aspects of one's cultural background that may be important to them, including (but not limited to) race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, religion, disability or ability status, and body size and shape. Some things may be more central or important to one's identity as a person than others. What aspects of your cultural background are most central or important to you? | To what extent is your race important to you?<br>Thank you for sharing. Do you have any questions for me before we jump into the next question? |
| So tell me about how the fall semester was for you. | What went well for you in the fall semester? |
| I want to get a sense of what this class was like. How was [CLASS NAME]? | How was this class delivered in the fall? Was it a required class for you?<br>What were the students like in this class? Compared to other classes you've taken, how diverse was this class? |
| Now let's talk a little bit about how you interacted with your instructor of this class. How supported did you feel in this class? | What did this instructor do, if anything, to make you feel supported?<br>How does that compare to the amount of support you've felt from other professors? |
| How well do you feel this professor motivated you to succeed? | Can you tell me about another time when you felt a professor motivated you to succeed? |
| Some research says that teachers should use examples and content in class that are relevant to students' cultural backgrounds. Think about your class lectures and discussions – can you tell me about a time they included examples or content relevant to your cultural background? | What stood out to you?<br>How did this make you feel?<br>If no, can you tell me about a time when another professor used examples or knowledge relevant to your cultural background in class? |
| Now think about your course readings for this class – can you tell me about a time that your readings were relevant to your cultural backgrounds? | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Are there any other ways this instructor incorporated your cultural background into this class? | |
| Did your teacher discuss topics such as social justice or politics in class? | If yes, how was that experience?<br>If no, do you think they should? Why? |
| Sometimes you can become aware of, or "feel", stereotyping or prejudice in the room. For example, maybe you can feel that people in a room think men are smarter than women. What types of stereotypes did you feel existed in this class? | If no, how do you think your instructor would have handled such a situation? |
| Now let's talk about more blatant prejudice or discrimination. Did you ever see this occur in this class? How did your instructor handle it? | |
| To what extent did you feel seen by this instructor? How much did this instructor know about you as a person? | Do you think that most students in the class felt the same way as you?<br>What do you wish your instructor had known about you as a person? |
| What changes could be made to help you be successful in classes like this (particularly if classes are conducted online)? | |
| So we are coming to the end of the interview questions I have prepared. What else would you like me to know about your experience in this class? | |

**Table 3.8**

*Instructor Self-Efficacy for Culturally Responsive Teaching*

| Self-Efficacy for CRT ($N$ = 99) | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|
| Composite SE for CRT | 4.71 | 0.91 |
| Include racial/ethnic diversity in course materials | 4.80 | 0.99 |
| Allow a variety of perspectives to be shared | 5.00 | 0.82 |
| Talk about racism | 4.43 | 1.28 |
| Talk about social and political issues | 4.57 | 1.33 |
| Challenge stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination | 4.78 | 0.91 |

*Note.* Scores for Self-Efficacy for Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) had a possible range of 1.00 (*Not at all confident*) to 6.00 (*Completely confident*).

# CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The purpose of this thesis study was twofold. First, in Phase 1, I sought to quantitatively examine how postsecondary instructors rated their self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching. Second, in Phase 2, I qualitatively investigated the perceptions of racially and ethnically minoritized students from the classes of instructors with high self-efficacy.

## Phase 1: Quantitative

### *Instructor Self-Efficacy for Culturally Responsive Teaching*

My first research question examined how postsecondary instructors responded to five survey items related to their confidence in using culturally responsive teaching methods (see Table 3.8). Instructors reported the strongest confidence in their ability to "Allow a variety of perspectives to be shared" ($M$ = 5.00, $SD$ = 0.82). Instructors felt the least self-efficacy in their ability to "Talk about racism" ($M$ = 4.43, $SD$ = 1.28).

Instructors' mean self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching ranged from relatively low (2.60) to the highest possible score of 6.00. On average, instructors rated self-efficacy as relatively high ($M$ = 4.71, $SD$ = 0.91). Female instructors ($n$ = 73) rated their self-efficacy ($M$ = 4.73, $SD$ = 0.91) slightly higher than male instructors ($n$ = 24, $M$ = 4.62, $SD$ = 0.90); however, there was no significant statistical difference between genders, $t(95) = .52$, $p = .60$. When examining by race and ethnicity, White instructors' ($n$ = 79) average self-efficacy was equal to 4.65 ($SD$ = 0.93). On average, Black/African American instructors ($n$ = 5) rated their self-efficacy as 5.48 ($SD$ = 0.46) and Hispanic/Latinx instructors ($n$ = 3) rated their self-efficacy as 4.47 ($SD$ = 0.61; see Table

3.1 for full results by demographics). The uneven size of racial and ethnic groups in this sample prevented testing for statistical significance of differences between such groups.

I also examined instructors' self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching by their academic status and number of years of teaching experience. Only three instructors described their academic status as assistant professor (non-tenure track), but they rated their self-efficacy the highest of any status group ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 0.61$). The next highest average rating came from associate professors ($n = 16$), whose average self-efficacy score was 4.96 ($SD = 0.75$). Full professors ($n = 14$) rated their self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching, on average, the lowest of any academic rank ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.97$; see Table 3.1 for full results). Instructors with 20-29 years of teaching experience rated their self-efficacy the highest of any group ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.00$), whereas instructors with the most experience in this sample (40 years or more), rated their self-efficacy the lowest ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.57$). However, an ANOVA revealed no significant difference between groups by years of teaching experience $F(5, 93) = 1.56$, $p = 0.18$.

**Phase 2: Qualitative**

In Phase 2, I aimed to elicit racially and ethnically minoritized students' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching through semi-structured interviews. I interviewed nine students from the courses of six instructors with the highest self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching (see Table 3.5 for instructor demographics). Detailed demographics of each of the nine students I interviewed, all of whom were female and identified as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latina, can be found in in Table 3.6. As mentioned previously, I will refer to participants by their self-identified race and ethnicities, as opposed to their race/ethnicity identified in university records; because of

this choice to observe students' self-identifications, I will use terms including Black, African American, Latina, and Hispanic. In writing about their characteristics and perspectives, I have intentionally worked to conceal the identities of my participants (including students and their instructors). I felt that maintaining confidentiality was an important responsibility for me as a researcher, especially in regard to the students in this study who hold historically marginalized identities.

I will present results for Phase 2 by first describing further details about students' identities and the contexts of their Fall 2020 semesters. Then, I will present students' general perceptions of their instructors. This will be followed by students' examples of their instructors' culturally responsive teaching behaviors more specifically. Finally, I will present students' perceptions of how those culturally responsive teaching practices shaped their educational experience and opinion of their instructors.

***Identity***

First, to gain a deeper understanding of each students' identities, I asked about their cultural background, which could include (but is not limited to) race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, and religion. Six students named nationalities that played important roles in their cultural identities, such as the significance of being knowledgeable about one's Cuban culture, the impact that being Mexican American has on one's family dynamics, and the importance of maintaining one's Ghanaian culture, such as in language and clothing, even while living abroad.

All students explained also that their race was important to them in some way. For some Black students, their race was tied to their ethnic heritage, such as being Jamaican or Ghanaian, with which they engaged through their cultural practices (e.g., food,

language). One student shared how meaningful it was for her to be attending postsecondary education as African American and as a child of a single mother. She said,

> I'm African American so it's a big deal for me to actually come to school and be in a big university. … I strived [in] high school get good grades and always be that student that's always on top of things to pursue this career … because you know we weren't always given that opportunity before now. So that's a big deal and it was definitely something in my family that wasn't always provided for us.

Although other students spoke about their academic identities as being "straight-A," "good students" who "take [their] schoolwork seriously," this was the only instance in which a student spoke about her race as a driving factor for her academic endeavors.

However, other students spoke about the role that their race or ethnicity play in how they are perceived by others in educational contexts. Four of the nine students described themselves as being from mixed racial and/or ethnic backgrounds, and all four discussed presenting or passing as White, particularly in academic environments. One self-identified Hispanic student shared that her race was not salient to her growing up but gained importance when classmates began "passing me as White and just like assuming things about me." Another Hispanic student shared an experience in which her school administration questioned her indication on a standardized testing form that she was Hispanic. One Black student, who also identified as mixed-race, spoke about the loneliness she has felt in both her hometown schools and the university, saying, "I notice [my race] a lot now that I'm here sitting in a classroom, I do sometimes feel like I am the only person of color here." These conversations helped situate these women's experiences within their particular racial and ethnic identities.

Other students spoke about the intersections of their race and ethnicity with other parts of their identities. For some, this meant that their race broadly "influences a lot of different factors in [their] life" or "shapes [their] identity." For others, race and ethnicity intersected specifically with certain identities, such as a being first-born daughter in a Latino family or being a Black member of the LGBTQ+ community. One student explained how her identity as a Black woman related with her bisexuality and her father's career as a police officer:

> So as far as me being a Black woman in America, it's important to me because there's a lot of struggles that other people in this country doesn't have to go through. Especially since my dad [is] an African American police officer and that in itself is a lot that plays into my identity in a way. Because I feel like … it's a balancing act between two different worlds and cultures. Especially for me to be a part of the LGBT+ community, because as somebody who's a part of the Black community, it's not … always as accepting as it can be. … I wouldn't say it affects me negatively, but it's a lot that I have to work through and find my own path for.

It was clear from these conversations that students both shared identities and experiences with each other and differed from one another because of their unique intersecting identities. Furthermore, as I interpreted their experiences and perceptions to answer my second research question, each students' unique positionality shaped, to some extent, the narratives they provided. In fact, in asking whether students observed pedagogy related to their cultural identities, most discussed examples related to their racial and ethnic identities.

### *Fall Semester*

Another important contextual factor for students' perceptions was the semester in which they were enrolled in the instructor's course (the Fall of 2020), during which many of their educational experiences were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The students generally reflected on their fall semester experiences in similar ways. Most expressed some combination of positive and negative feelings, although students' comments were twice as often positive than negative.

Students also discussed the impact of the pandemic on their in-person and online learning. For most, learning online lessened stress (e.g., students could learn on their own time, re-watch video lectures, and did not have to travel to and from campus), but there were also unique stressors associated with modality. In particular, students described having "less access" to their instructors and classmates in fully online courses. However, the impact of modality on culturally responsive teaching behaviors was not frequently discussed by students in this study. The context of learning online during the fall semester is important to understanding the lived experiences of these students, despite the minimal discussion of modality in reference to culturally responsive teaching behaviors.

### *Student Perceptions of Instructors*

**Positive.** When asked about the instructor of the course from which students were recruited, students described their instructors in primarily positive ways. Across the nine interviews, 96 excerpts about the instructor were coded positively, whereas the negative code was used only seven times throughout the nine interviews. Positive views were most often associated with communication with and support or understanding from the instructor. Students especially expressed that their instructor was approachable, available,

and proactive in communicating with students. In fact, six of the nine students reported meeting with their instructor outside of class time and the remaining three referenced one-on-one conversations that occurred during class time or via email exchange.

All nine students spoke about the instructor as someone with whom they felt they could discuss personal or academic challenges and/or someone who made it clear that students could do so. Four students experienced family emergencies during the course of the semester and explained that this instructor's response and support during that time surpassed their other instructors'. Another student recounted that their instructor "kept reaching out" when she noticed that the student was less engaged in class than usual. The instructor reportedly said, "I can tell something is going on. Do you want to talk to me about it?" The student was surprised, as no other professor picked up on her personal struggles; in reflection, she said, "I normally don't let [personal issues] show within my schoolwork, so I'm not sure what made me feel like I could in that class, but I did."

Students also identified ways that their instructors communicated support for the class of students as a whole. Four students recalled feeling supported when their instructors intentionally took time to "check in" with the class, whether in the first several minutes of a class session or through online announcements and group messaging. Three students (from three separate courses) recalled feeling supported when they encountered challenges in their coursework that necessitated extensions or opportunities to recomplete assignments – all three instructors were "understanding" and readily offered students accommodations. Such flexibility was especially valued by students when they faced challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as when one student was required to spend a week in a isolation housing after an exposure to the virus. These instances of

support were described across students regardless of their course modality; however, students in mostly online courses emphasized the importance of intentional and synchronous "check ins" from their instructors.

Students used a variety of words related to feeling cared for by their instructor, including "warm," "approachable," "understanding," and someone who "had our backs." In three separate interviews, students linked instructors' supportiveness to motherliness and femaleness (coded with Maternal/Femininity), using phrases such as, "it's like not wanting to disappoint your mom," "she was like a mother," and, "she's an older woman, and that's definitely a comforting presence to have." Another student described her instructor as "an angel," without whom the student would have likely "dropped the course." For this student, the requirements of the coursework became overwhelming (a sentiment she perceived other students to hold, too), "but even in that, she still made me feel like I could do it." Similarly, eight of the nine students linked the instructor's supportiveness to their motivation for the course. Initially, when asked how their instructor motivated them, two students said they were motivated only by their own intrinsic motivation. However, one later acknowledged that when her instructor offered her an extension, "it eased [her] anxiety to know" that she could take "mental health time" if she needed it, which, in turn, motivated her to keep working.

Student comments about the instructors' teaching abilities were also overwhelmingly positive. Of the 23 interview excerpts that mentioned teaching, 17 reflected positive views. Instructors were often described as "engaging" and "great" at explaining course content and guiding students through assignments. One student recalled how her instructor took time before each exam to "run us through exactly how

we had to go about [using the lockdown browser].” No other instructor explained their instructions in such detail as this professor did, which stood out to the student as she perceived most students had little experience with this kind of online testing precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. These positive qualities were also connected with students’ perceived learning, which students said was supported by instructors’ engaging lectures, clarity of instructions, and openness to questions.

**Negative.** Only two students described negative perceptions of their instructors. Both of these negative perspectives were related to instruction and course organization. First, one instructor planned for the semester to include both in-person and asynchronous video lectures; when the instructor did not provide the video lectures, the student reached out “almost every week” to no avail, which made the student “incredibly anxious.” Similarly, a different instructor was described by their student as “constantly changing” the course modality, in addition to being disorganized in class assignments. However, in both interviews with these students, they qualified these negative experiences with positive views on their instructors’ approachability, kindness, and support.

***Student Examples of Instructors’ Culturally Responsive Behavior***

Students spoke about their experiences with (or lack thereof) culturally responsive teaching by the instructors of interest. In particular, students recalled exposure to content in the course that was relevant to their own cultural identities or introduced those of others, which reflects Gay’s (2018) instruction that culturally responsive teaching “teaches students to know and praise their own and one another’s cultural heritages” (p. 37). However, as discussed previously, the students in this study spoke most often about their racial and ethnic identities when asked to describe their experiences with culturally

responsive pedagogy, although one student spoke explicitly about gender and sexuality identities. According to the students interviewed, conversations related to these aspects of cultural identities were discussed by four of the six instructors in this study; these instructors' course disciplines were in social sciences/humanities, foreign language, and orientation to college. The instructors whose students reported no content related to cultural identities taught courses in health sciences and visual arts.

In particular, racial and ethnic identities were discussed and connected to coursework in myriad ways by instructors. In the academic orientation course, the instructor could choose from a wide array of readings, videos, and podcasts intended to spark class discussion about cultural identities (including race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, ability status, and more). This instructor elected to show students a video of a TED Talk called "The danger of a single story," presented by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian author. The TED Talk describes the importance of understanding individuals and their cultural identities in the context of their many stories, rather than by stereotypes (Adichie, 2009). After showing her class this video, the instructor shared her own positionality regarding her race and other identities with the students. To the Hispanic woman enrolled in this class, hearing the instructor present her own cultural background made the situation feel that "it wasn't like her just learning about us, … we learned about her first and [she] showed it was a safe space." Students then shared their own cultural identities with the class in a way that felt "comfortable."

Similarly, in the social sciences/humanities course, students were assigned a research paper in which they chose an aspect of their cultural heritage and interviewed a family member about the topic. One student, who was Black and Ghanaian, called this

assignment "enlightening" and noted that it helped her learn new information about her identity as a Black and American woman. Furthermore, the course included content on Ghanaian culture, which was a positive surprise for the Ghanaian student, who added, "I think most students found something probably [in that course] that related to them." In another social sciences/humanities course, a Black woman, originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, shared that she enjoyed when they discussed African American Vernacular English (AAVE) because it "[brought] diversity in our way of thinking" and simply because she enjoyed the subject. She added that she also "learned about other people's cultural backgrounds," for example, when their course discussed Southern accents and stereotyping, which helped her gain "a new perspective."

Students also described instances when instructors discussed social justice or politics. Five students, across four courses, recalled such instances. Two of these examples were vague: the Latina student from the health science course (one of the two courses that did not discuss cultural identities) recounted that her instructor "briefly mentioned it, but it wasn't like her picking a side." A Black student from one social sciences/humanities course said, "We were going through elections, so a lot of my classes touched on that." However, these students did not recall the specifics of these experiences, nor how such instances made them feel.

Other recollections were more detailed. In the academic orientation course, two of the three students recalled talking about social justice: one African American student said her instructor "did a great job at integrating" issues of gender and racial equality, particularly through conversation on the Black Lives Matter movement, into class discussions. She also noted that her class's discussion on such topics were never "heated"

or argumentative. Another Black student from this course recalled a discussion about "native land" in the city in which the university is located, and that her instructor "made sure to mention that … the university acknowledges that the native land isn't ours, it's from Native Americans … this isn't our land, it's stolen land." However, the third student from the academic orientation course, a Hispanic student, recalled the class differently:

> No, we did not [talk about social justice or politics]. That was our first rule. I think it was the second day we met, everyone was like, "We're not going [to talk] about politics or anything, it's just a crazy world right now and we do not need to add that into this class."

Finally, the Hispanic student from the foreign language class said that her class commonly discussed both cultural identities and social justice, including womanhood, feminism, and gender equality, as topics of conversation for language practice. These topics were particularly relevant as the class was made up almost entirely of women. In the words of the student, "If we're gonna talk about something, we might as well talk about something that's worth our time."

***Student Perceptions of Instructors' Culturally Responsive Behavior***

In addition to soliciting students' examples of how instructors included culturally responsive teaching practices in their curriculum, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how such experiences shaped students' perceptions of their instructors and students' own feelings toward the instructor. I examined students' reported examples of culturally responsive teaching (e.g., talking about racial identities or social justice) for whether they also described the instructor in a positive or negative way. Almost all examples shared by students reflected a positive opinion.

**Positive.** In all nine interviews, students affirmed that they felt "seen" by their instructor. Students said their instructors knew who the student was as a person, ranging from familiar ("she remembered me," "I think she knew me well enough to probably tell you a little bit about me and how I am … as a student") to deep connections. In particular, the instructors of the orientation and social sciences/humanities courses were described positively by students recounting culturally responsive content. When the social sciences/humanities instructor presented content on Ghana, the Ghanaian student said that her instructor "nailed everything that she was talking about," such that the information rang true to the student's own cultural knowledge. The student added, "she understood me, she knew where I was from, she knew my culture and everything." For another Black student, she felt "seen" when her orientation instructor brought up race in the class and said, "I know that this could be uncomfortable for some people, but it's an important topic that we should talk about just so everybody is aware of what's going on in the world." Finally, five students explicitly said their instructor was knowledgeable of other students in the course. They recalled that their instructors knew students by name, could "describe them as a person," "[had] a good connection with who her students are," "[understood] where we're coming from," and "made everyone feel seen."

Instructors were also viewed positively by students when they were "prepared" to talk about race and ethnicity in class. The orientation course instructor was described by one Black student as clearly "taking time out of their day to actually do research and know the history" of a topic pertaining to race that they discussed in class. The instructor also "directed [questions about race] towards everybody," rather than only "to the African American students," which stood out to the student in contrast to her experiences

in other classes. She added that other instructors might "indirectly point you out and expect you to just know the topic and know the history of the topic" when talking about race in class. Further, when the student had questions about the conversation her orientation class was having about race, her instructor "didn't take it as a way of, 'Oh well, you're Black so you should know all of this.' It was just more so as her taking it as me being a student."

Students also discussed the ways their instructors created "safe" spaces to have conversations about cultural identities. No student reported having witnessed any kind of discrimination or prejudice in the course of interest, and all said their instructor would have handled it with a "direct" and/or "quick" response. All three students in the orientation course said that when they learned about individuals' cultural backgrounds, including their race, ethnicity, and other identities, their classmates were "actively listening" and were "open to" and "understanding of" individuals' identities and beliefs. One way they fostered this respectful environment was through co-creating "ground rules" for conduct within the course. At the beginning of the semester, the instructor "made it clear that she wanted our classroom … to be one of support and one where nobody felt uncomfortable or unsafe." The instructor did this by providing guidelines for "appropriate" behavior in the class and inviting students to add to the list. One Black student said this made her feel "safe" because it signaled to her that her instructor would "actually do something about it if something like [a microaggression or discrimination] was to ever happen."

The idea of setting "ground rules" to address disrespect or discrimination also arose organically in other interviews (i.e., I did not ask students whether their instructor

set such rules, rather, I inquired what informed students' opinions about their instructors' responses to discrimination). According to a Black student in the social sciences course, her instructor "really set the tone in the class for us to be kind to each other and understanding … and we even made up rules in the beginning of class." Similarly to the orientation course, students in this class co-constructed ground rules with the instructor, who "made it known that … the class environment was not gonna make room for [prejudice or discrimination]." When reviewing the syllabus with the class, the visual arts instructor "made it clear if you were disrespectful, 'I will remove you from the Zoom and we'll have a conversation.'" The student said she had heard other instructors make similar expectations clear, but never "so serious" as the instructor of interest.

Although students in the remaining classes did not report that their instructors set "ground rules" in their course, they all imagined direct and resolute responses from their instructors if discrimination were to occur in the class. Those students said their instructors would have "shut it down quickly," "confronted it," and "resolved it," all phrases that were echoed by other students, too. It was clear that students felt their instructors played an important role in establishing learning environments that supported safe and respectful conversations surrounding cultural identities.

**Negative.** However, one student stood out in her contrasting opinion of content related to cultural identities in the classroom. This Hispanic woman wished that such topics were invoked less often in her foreign language class (and in other foreign language classes at the school):

> I feel like a lot of the [foreign language] classes that are at [this university] are geared towards talking about those issues, talking about race and culture and

> different backgrounds, LGBT. … I almost feel like in some of the [foreign language] classes we could do it a little less, because when I'm having normal conversations in [this language], I need to know those vocabulary words more than I need to know very intense words about like, "Let's talk about racism right now in [this language]." … I'm not trying to say in any means that they're not important to talk about. I just feel like I also need the other stuff.

Of all the students interviewed in this study, this young woman was the only to express a desire for less discussion of cultural identities and social justice in her course. In fact, the student recalled one assignment in which she and the instructor disagreed about a statement the student made related to gender equality, which the student said was an example "of where beliefs come in in a bad way."

One student, a Hispanic woman in the orientation course, described a change she wished her teacher had made regarding content in class related to identities. This student thought that her instructor should have broadened their class discussion on cultural identities to include a more meaningful personal reflection assignment:

> If we talked about culture and identity, I think we should have done like a paper, or done something to like really like talk about us. … But I felt like we talked about like a lot of broad things and we never like kind of got down to like the specifics. … And I feel like that would have been really helpful for this class, to like actually get more out of it.

Although this comment displayed a somewhat negative perception of how culture and identity were included in course content, it was in direct contrast to the previous students' wish for less of such content. This varied response was also reflected in students'

discussions of culturally responsive teaching at a more general level, which is reported in detail next.

***Student Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching in General***

Finally, in exploring how culturally responsive teaching was demonstrated by their instructors, students also remarked on such pedagogy at a more general level. Although it was not an interview question I had prepared, many of the conversations I had with students led to a discussion of whether they would like to see culturally responsive content (i.e., discussion about racial identities or social justice) in their other courses. Students' opinions on this matter were mixed. Only the Hispanic student who felt there should be less content related to cultural identities in her foreign language course, felt that such content should also "probably not" be discussed in other courses. Five students, four of whom were Black or African American, said that conversations and content about racial and cultural identities. In particular, two Black women spoke about the importance of "educating" oneself and others on such topics. One student said,

> I just think that the United States has a history of not telling the full story with a lot of things, and the more the full story is told, the more knowledgeable people are. So you have to talk about the good and the bad, and that's how you can come to truthful outcomes.

However, seven of the nine students stated that culturally responsive content should be included only if it is relevant to course content. For example, the student who advocating for "educating" oneself and others also said, "if it is something that is related to the topic at hand, then I believe you should always talk about it. But if we're in math and we're talking about trapezoids, why are you bringing it up?" This qualification was

even mentioned by four of the students who said culturally responsive content should be included in other courses. Students said that it should not "be inserted by force, or just to be able to talk about it," and that "if it is important to someone … it should be relevant to them for them, [so they] understand it. But if it's not something that you need to understand for that subject … I feel like it's not necessary."

In particular, students indicated that some subjects might be more conducive to culturally responsive content than others and pointed specifically to STEM courses, including physics, chemistry, math, and ecology ("For example, you're learning compounds in chemistry, like how are you gonna relate that to culture?"). Several students mentioned biology as a subject that might be easier to relate to culture, such as learning about the history of a field of study. One student recalled a previous biology instructor who taught about "melanin production" which enabled her to see "the biological component behind race" and reinforced that race is a social construct. Another student referred to an online community page for biology students that shares information about "Black History Month, Pride Month, … and [gives] some of the background history" and "is covering the fact that the biology classes themselves [are] not able to spend time on social issues." However, the same student gave reason for why cultural diversity should not be discussed in biological sciences:

> Biology is one of the things that connects us as all being the same … if you have a bias against somebody for a different skin color, well, here's all the biological mechanisms that happen inside of both of you. … You're the same. And so I feel like the fact that it doesn't [talk about social issues] is a good balance with the classes that do.

Finally, some students spoke about the risk associated with discussing cultural and racial identities, social justice, or politics in a classroom setting. Students recognized that these conversations might result in confrontation or disrespect, although no student recalled such an instance occurring in the courses of interest to this study. However, one student, a Black woman, described an experience when another instructor discussed the Black Lives Matter movement in class. An older man in the class "kept saying Trayvon Martin's name incorrectly over and over and over again," even when students corrected him, and this student perceived that the instructor "didn't really know what to do" in response. In contrast, the response of her White peers in the class surprised the student, who said that the "willingness of the White people to speak up and defend the movement and correct that older gentleman" stood out to her. She added that her class was able to have a conversation about the Black Lives Matter movement and the importance of saying Trayvon Martin's name correctly, and that such a response "was just never something that happened" in her prior school experiences.

**Integration**

By employing an explanatory sequential design, I achieved integration in this study at both the methodological and interpretation levels. First, I integrated the data methodologically by using quantitative data collected in Phase 1 to inform the sampling approach for qualitative data in Phase 2 (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). This connection between both datasets is intended to "achieve more meaningful explanations" than considering either dataset alone (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018, p. 234). Therefore, the second form of integration, in which I analyzed the results of both phases collectively, enabled me to answer part of my second research question, which asked whether

instructors' self-efficacy aligned with students' perceptions, or, whether their self-efficacy was reflected in culturally responsive teaching behaviors perceptible by their racially and ethnically minoritized students.

The nine interviewees in this study were students in the Fall 2020 courses of six instructors who had high self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching. Recall that in Phase 1, the six instructors rating their self-efficacy for addressing five distinct elements of culturally responsive teaching. I took several steps to integrate teachers' ratings in Phase 1 with students' perceptions in Phase 2 data to see whether each element of culturally responsive teaching was apparent in their students' recollections. First, I calculated the six instructors' mean item-level self-efficacy ratings. Second, I matched the most relevant codes that emerged from the interview data with each of the five self-efficacy items. Third, I examined whether each instructor's student(s) discussed evidence of these culturally responsive teaching behaviors. It should be noted that two instructors had multiple students participate in the study; the four others were matched with only student's perspective. Finally, I pulled illustrative quotes from students' interviews that were related to each culturally responsive teaching behavior.

The integrated data can be found in Table 4.1. Each row gives the alignment between the culturally responsive teaching behavior, the instructors' mean self-efficacy ratings, and the relevant coding category from Phase 2 interviews. Rows are ordered from the teaching behaviors about which instructors felt most to least confident. For example, as the first row indicates, instructors were most confident ($M = 6.00$) in their ability to include diverse racial and ethnic perspectives in course materials. This was also evident in student interviews, which aligned with the code "Culturally Responsive Content." The

Culturally Responsive Content code appeared in the transcripts of students from five of the six instructors' courses (in this case, all but the visual arts course). For instance, one student recalled, "I did learn about other people's cultural backgrounds as well." The remaining rows in Table 4.1 follow the same pattern.

Integration revealed that each of the five culturally responsive teaching behaviors reflected in the survey items were evident to students who were interviewed. This suggests that instructors' self-efficacy did align with their students' perceptions. However, closer examination shows that not every student observed every behavior. That is, not all students perceived, remembered, or were prompted to recall their instructor performing each of the five culturally responsive teaching behaviors. This does not necessarily mean that an instructor did not engage in the teaching practice (e.g., talk about racism) at some point in the course, but it is meaningful to note that all but one instructor displayed particular culturally responsive behaviors in ways that were memorable to their student(s).

Two other culturally responsive behaviors, talking about racism and about social and political issues, were described by the students of all but one instructor. For example, students recalled their instructors discussing the Black Lives Matter movement, gender inequality, and indigenous land acknowledgement. Four instructors were also perceived to hold certain stances regarding social justice, such as being a feminist or believing race to be an "important topic that we should talk about just so everybody is aware of what's going on in the world." Again, the only instructor who did not discuss Social Justice/Politics in some way was the visual arts instructor. Her student explained, "I don't

think like … the race thing that's, like, important to me was relevant to the content we were going over."

These instructors rated their confidence in their ability to challenge discrimination in the classroom the lowest of all five items ($M = 5.00$), though their average score was still moderately strong. Despite this item garnering the lowest self-ratings, all six instructors were perceived by their students as willing to challenge discrimination in the classroom by way of quick and direct response. Three of the instructors (the orientation, social sciences/humanities, and visual arts instructors) were described as setting "ground rules" in some fashion, which students felt helped create a "safe" environment. Students of the same three spoke on how their instructor cultivated a respectful environment in their classroom experiences (e.g., "She really just, really valued being respectful in class at all times,"), which was also evidenced by every student's report that no discrimination occurred in the courses of these instructors.

**Table 4.1**

*Integration of Instructor Self-Efficacy with Student Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching*

| Instructor Survey Items and Average Score ($n$ = 6) | Corresponding Qualitative Codes | Instructors Whose Student(s) Discussed Code (out of 6) | Illustrative Quotes |
|---|---|---|---|
| *"How confident are you that you can …"* | | | |
| Include more perspectives related to racial and ethnic diversity in course materials ($M$ = 6.00, $SD$ = 0.00) | Culturally Responsive Content | 5 | "I did learn about other people's like cultural backgrounds as well."<br><br>"She talked about some of the cultures in Ghana, which was surprising." |
| Allow a variety of perspectives to be shared ($M$ = 5.67, $SD$ = 0.52) | Respect/Disrespect | 3 | "Everyone was just open to everyone else's beliefs and understandings"<br><br>"Everyone felt pretty like open minded and just really respectful and kind" |
| Talk about racism ($M$ = 5.67, $SD$ = 0.52) | Social Justice/Politics | 5 | "We definitely did talk about like Black Lives Matter" |
| | Social Justice Stance | 4 | "[She] brought up [race], and she was just like, 'I know that this could be uncomfortable for some people, but it's an important topic that we should talk about just so everybody is aware of what's going on in the world.'" |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Talk about social and political issues (*M* = 5.50, SD = 1.22) | Social Justice/Politics | 5 | "[She] made sure to mention … that the native land isn't ours, it's from Native Americans." |
| | Social Justice Stance | 4 | "I could tell she was very socially minded" |
| Challenge stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination that arise (*M* = 5.00, *SD* = 0.63) | Discrimination – Direct/Quick Response | 6 | "She would have like shut it down quickly because she … seemed like … she's going to stand up for others and also you know she, she just doesn't seem like the person to let it slide like, talk about others and discriminating." |
| | Setting Ground Rules | 3 | "We even had a contract about … how we would deal [with discrimination]. … For example … let's say if somebody was being disrespectful in breakout room, how do we deal with that? And most of us had agreed that we would talk to the person, maybe off-camera or like off, off like on private or send them a message." |
| | Respect/Disrespect | 3 | "She really just, really valued being respectful in class at all times." |

*Note.* Scores for Self-Efficacy for Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) had a possible range of 1.00 (*Not at all confident*) to 6.00 (*Completely confident*).

# CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis was to examine postsecondary instructors' self-efficacy for, and their undergraduate students' perceptions of, culturally responsive teaching. Through a sequential, mixed-methods study, I investigated how self-efficacious university instructors felt in their ability to perform five culturally responsive teaching behaviors. Further, I examined racially and ethnically minoritized students' perspectives through interviews with nine young women who had been enrolled in the classes of high-self-efficacy instructors. Finally, through integration of the quantitative and qualitative data, I evaluated the extent to which instructors' self-beliefs, and their students' perceptions, aligned.

## Instructor Self-Efficacy for Culturally Responsive Teaching

I measured postsecondary instructor self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching by averaging five self-report items related to Gay's (2018) tenets of the pedagogy. Overall, the 99 postsecondary instructors in this study felt relatively confident in their ability to perform five teaching behaviors related to culturally responsive teaching. Of the five behaviors, instructors felt most confident to allow for "a variety of perspectives" shared and to "include more perspectives related to racial and ethnic diversity" in their course curriculum. However, even for the behavior with the lowest average self-efficacy rating, talking about racism, instructors felt "Somewhat confident." Prior work (Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Siwatu, 2011) has found that instructors view culturally responsive teaching as important but have lower confidence in their knowledge of how to incorporate cultural diversity. In comparing instructors' self-efficacy for each of the five behaviors, instructors in this study felt the least confident to talk about racism

and social or political issues, which is consistent with other research on postsecondary instructors (Maruyama, 2000; Phillips et al., 2019).

Importantly, though, instructors' self-efficacy ratings may not necessarily translate to practice of culturally responsive teaching. Social cognitive theory emphasizes the relationship between self-perceptions and behavior (Bandura, 1986); thus, it is important to investigate both whether instructors felt confident to use a pedagogy and whether they did so in practice. By examining instructors' behavior through their students' reported perceptions, one can triangulate the personal, behavioral, and environmental factors within social cognitive theory. The student interviews in this study provided real-life example of how culturally responsive teaching was visible in the postsecondary classroom.

**Student Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

In line with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, the students interviewed in this study described how their instructors' behaviors shaped students' educational experiences. The students' perceptions of their instructors were overall positive, with only two students describing any significant negative aspects of their instructor's behavior. Despite some research indicating that culturally responsive teaching might be more challenging to perform in online environments (Smith & Ayers, 2006), students in this study described culturally responsive teaching behaviors from instructors teaching online, face-to-face, and in hybrid environments. It was important to investigate examples of how instructors displayed these culturally responsive behaviors, and how their students perceived those behaviors. Evidence of how students' perceptions aligned with each of Gay's (2018) eight tenets of culturally responsive teaching is presented next.

Gay's (2018) tenet that culturally responsive teachers are *validating* was reflected in students' perceptions the most often. In particular, students felt that their instructors cared for them as individuals. Instructors developed caring relationships with their students through consistent communication, making themselves available outside of class, and providing extensions and accommodations on class assignments for students in times of need. Although this study did not measure how students' perceptions of their instructors related to their academic outcomes, caring relationships have been shown to positively influence learning, grades, and academic self-concept for both historically marginalized students and White students (Beasley & McClain, 2020; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Tovar, 2014).

All but one instructor validated students' racial and ethnic identities and funds of knowledge outside of the traditionally White canon (Patton, 2016) in some way. Most often, instructors invited students to reflect and share on their own racial and ethnic identities through class discussions (e.g., talking about diversity of cultural identities; a lecture presenting on culture in Ghana) or assignments (e.g., writing about an important aspect of one's cultural heritage). These examples are similar to Larke's (2013) guidance for teaching culturally responsively in higher education, which included incorporating culture into course topics and creating assignments related culture that are treated as important to the course. Castillo-Montoya's (2019) investigation of postsecondary faculty members also reported similar findings wherein instructors related content to cultural diversity and encouraged discussion of cultural identities. It is important to state that although students in the present study were asked about how their cultural identities were incorporated into their classes, most students spoke explicitly about their racial and ethnic

identities. Students in this study did not discuss cultural values such as communalism (Tyler et al., 2008); rather, their interpretations of cultural identities focused most strongly on their racial and ethnic identities and how those identities shape their experiences, such as being a Black woman in higher education. Nevertheless, the pedagogical decisions made by the instructors in this study to discuss and teach about racial, ethnic, and other cultural identities also reflect instructors being *humanistic* by giving students opportunities learn from and about each other.

Students' perceptions of their instructors' handling of conversations about race and other cultural identities also point to *validating* behaviors. Students were confident that their instructors would challenge discrimination in the classroom, a response they were not confident that all their instructors would be willing to take. One student emphasized this contrast when she described how other instructors might "point out" Black students and expect them to speak on behalf of their race in class; undergraduates in similar research have echoed this experience of tokenization (Solorzano, et al., 2000). Students in the present study added that conversations about race might also bear a risk for discrimination from their peers, especially against Black students. But in validating, including, and empowering students' racial and ethnic identities, instructors shaped a learning environment in which students felt safe.

A common *emancipatory* action among instructors in this study was to establish ground rules around respect and discrimination, a pedagogical practice emphasized in some culturally responsive higher education workshops (O'Leary et al., 2020). A few instructors made more explicit statements regarding their own social justice stances by talking about topics such as racism or feminism. A majority of the instructors were also

*emancipatory* by including course content that decentered Whiteness or discussed social justice (e.g., acknowledging native lands, discussing culture in Ghana, learning about AAVE). These behaviors are similar to those exhibited by culturally responsive teachers in other research in high school and college (Chicoski, 2019; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2017). For some courses, such subjects were *normative*, in that the instructors discussed cultural identities frequently and as a natural part of the content, whereas in others, students referenced one particular lesson when cultural identities were the focus of the discussion. Participating in culturally responsive teaching workshops (O'Leary et al., 2020), or becoming acquainted with comprehensive strategies for including culturally responsive content (Larke, 2013), might benefit such postsecondary instructors with only a beginning understanding of how to apply the pedagogy in their own teaching.

Although not all instructors in this study were perceived as teaching about students' specific cultures, several gave students opportunities to reflect on, share, and even research their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. In these instances, instructors were *comprehensive and inclusive* by teaching in ways that supported students' maintenance of their racial and ethnic identities alongside their academic growth and helped to develop community. Most students described positive interactions and feelings of trust and respect with their peers in the courses, and eight of the nine students described how their instructor contributed to their motivation for academic success.

These experiences also point to instructors being *empowering* as they supported students, such that they nurtured students' academic beliefs (e.g., "[My instructor] made me feel like I could do it … So that gets me encouraged."). This connection between supporting students' cultural and academic identities alike are often measured in research

on culturally responsive teaching by examining students' academic achievement and self-concept (Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2017; Martell, 2013; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010; Yeboah & Smith, 2016). Due to the nature of this qualitative investigation into students' experiences, this research includes only anecdotal and subjective evidence regarding students' academic outcomes. Whether their instructors shaped *transformative* educational experiences for students by supporting their academic achievement might be investigated further using quantitative measures such as grades. However, the student's reported experiences of connecting cultural identities and academics in this study further illustrate social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986): instructor support for students' personal factors, including their cultural backgrounds, may also support their academic behavior, such as performance and persistence.

Students' examples of instructor cultural responsiveness gave some evidence of a *multidimensional* approach. Instructors across social sciences, humanities, foreign language, and academic orientation courses were reported as performing culturally responsive behaviors, including sharing diverse perspectives or talking about racial or ethnic diversity; thus, there was some degree of diversity in subject area. Further, instructors took differing approaches to how they included culturally responsive content, such as assigning research papers or prompting class discussion. However, of the 15 instructors whose courses I sampled for student interviews, no students from STEM courses consented to interviews, thus narrowing the scope of the interviews.

Interestingly, about half of students in this study were natural sciences or health sciences majors. They noted that content related to cultural and racial identities might not have a place in STEM courses, despite the recent surge of research on culturally

responsive teaching in those fields (Favero & Van Hoomissen, 2019; Harris et al., 2020; Sparks et al., 2020). In the words of one student, "[in STEM] there's no way to diversify your content. It's literally just like science." However, a couple of students suggested that there may be ways to "diversify" STEM content, for example, by discussing the history of scientific concepts or the sociocultural implications of melanin production. Most of the students did not recall such connections made in their STEM courses to date.

It was difficult to ascertain from these interviews whether instructors were *inclusive* such that their culturally responsive behaviors benefitted both racially and ethnically minoritized students and White students. In this work, I felt that it was important to prioritize the experiences and viewpoints of students who have been historically marginalized and minoritized in education. For this reason, I excluded students who were identified as White by university records for recruitment. Although several students who were identified as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latinx by the university self-identified as mixed-race and/or passing or presenting as White, each student spoke of how their racial and ethnic identities set them apart from their White peers. Further research in undergraduates' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching should explore similar questions among White students to identify how *inclusive* this pedagogy might be perceived at the postsecondary level.

**Alignment Between Instructor and Student Perceptions**

In using a sequential mixed-methods design in this study, I aimed to examine how instructors' confidence for using culturally responsive teaching might shape their students' learning environments, and further, shape students' perceptions. Therefore, I sought to integrate instructors' self-perceptions with students' perceptions. In line with

social cognitive theory, this investigation revealed that instructors who felt highly confident in culturally responsive teaching were perceived similarly by their racially and ethnically minoritized students. Although students' perceptions in this study must be evaluated in the context of potential biases (see Limitations section below), each student provided evidence of their instructors' cultural responsiveness in some manner. Further, within students' perceptions were examples of all five culturally responsive teaching behaviors assessed quantitatively in Phase 1. Such real-life examples included allowing for sharing of diverse cultural backgrounds, talking about social justice, and including racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in course materials.

Students' perceptions of their instructors' behaviors, including those that are caring and those that perpetuate discrimination, are important to student persistence (Braxton et al., 2013; Tinto, 1986). It is meaningful, then, that every student described their instructor as understanding, supportive, and someone who would address discrimination if it arose in the classroom. Further, instructors formed these supportive relationships with students even in the context of fully virtual, hybrid, or masked and socially distant in-person learning. In these ways, the results of this study emphasize the potential for caring, validating, and empowering instruction, through meaningful inclusion of students' cultural identities in the classroom, to support historically minoritized students at the postsecondary level. It stands to reason, then, that postsecondary instructors who feel low self-efficacy for their ability to teach in culturally responsive ways should be intentionally supported in developing their knowledge base and confidence to do so.

## Limitations and Future Directions

This study was limited, in particular, by potential participant and researcher biases. Self-selection bias likely influenced sampling and recruitment in both phases of this work. In Phase 1, instructors were invited to opt into the study, which might have resulted in a (mostly White and female) sample of individuals who were interested in being part of research examining their teaching perceptions and practices, whereas instructors without such interest might not have opted in. Instructor recruitment also used some convenience sampling, which might have influenced the types of instructors who participated (e.g., field of study). Furthermore, instructors might have experienced social desirability bias while completing the survey, as they knew their responses, even if confidential, were being collected by researchers within the university at which they work. This could be why the overall ratings of instructor self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching were fairly high in this sample.

In Phase 2, student recruitment for interviews was also likely influenced by self-selection bias. I recruited from the subsample of racially and ethnically minoritized students who had already indicated they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview after the survey. I did not intend to interview only female students and only Black and Hispanic students; however, only students of those identities responded to recruitment emails and consented to participate in an interview. All nine of the student participants had generally positive views of the instructor of focus in the interview, which could mean that students with less positive views were less willing to discuss their perspectives and, therefore, did not consent to be interviewed. Furthermore, my identity as a woman, and my position as a researcher at the same university in which students

took these instructors' courses, could have influenced students' level of comfort with communicating with me about their experiences. It should be noted, however, that only students who responded to recruitment emails were invited to watch my introductory video (which featured my face and voice), and no student declined an interview after that opportunity to get to know me better. Finally, although all nine of these students identified as women, their perceptions of their instructors were rarely explicitly tied to students' own gender. It is possible, however, that this line of questioning might reveal different results if replicated with a sample of racially and ethnically minoritized undergraduate men.

Although taking a qualitative interviewing approach provided an in-depth examination of these nine students' experiences, this approach is limited in breadth and cannot convey an entirely unbiased picture of culturally responsive teaching in the postsecondary context. In future research, it would be beneficial to interview instructors, too, or to observe instructors' class sessions for evidence of culturally responsive behaviors. Further, although in this work I interviewed only students of instructors with high culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy, future research with students whose instructors feel less confident might reveal important distinctions. Such research could shed more light on pedagogical behaviors on which instructors should be trained to best support their historically marginalized students.

**Conclusion and Implications**

In undertaking this study, I aimed to examine how postsecondary instructors' self-efficacy and behaviors shape the environments in which students learn. Further, I sought to integrate instructors' self-perceptions with their students' lived experiences to gain a

deeper understanding of culturally responsive teaching at the postsecondary level. I found that postsecondary instructors in this study felt moderately self-confident for culturally responsive teaching. Further, I discovered that White instructors with the strongest self-efficacy for this pedagogy were perceived as especially supportive and understanding by some of their Black and Hispanic students. Most of these instructors included content related to cultural identities in their class, for some, because cultural identities were relevant to course content, whereas for others, because the instructor deemed cultural identities an important topic to discuss. When they were given the opportunity to share and learn about cultural identities, the Black and Hispanic students in this study mostly felt heard, safe, and enjoyed the experience. However, not all students felt that conversations about cultural diversity were necessary or appropriate in their coursework, especially in fields related to science and math.

The experiences of participants in this study were further contextualized by worldwide health crises and movements for racial justice. The Fall 2020 semester presented unprecedented challenges to both teaching and learning as instructors and students alike navigated new norms – synchronous and asynchronous virtual classes, masked and socially distanced in-person interactions, holding classes on days when sociopolitical tensions were extreme. It is meaningful, then, that several students described these instructors as the most supportive and caring of all their teachers during the fall semester. In particular, instructors intentionally incorporated students' cultural identities into coursework, made themselves highly available to students and supported students in times of need, and made racially and ethnically minoritized students feel confident that their instructor would challenge discrimination in the classroom. Even

when students had personal crises, academic challenges, or felt overwhelmed by the demands of the class itself, they felt motivated by their instructors to persist.

These findings suggest that postsecondary instructors feel confident in their abilities to include diverse perspectives in their courses but may need support to incorporate culturally responsive teaching in other ways. Professional development workshops, which have been well-received by STEM instructors, and comprehensive pedagogical strategies, might help instructors build course curriculum and expectations from a culturally responsive foundation (Larke, 2013; O'Leary et al., 2020). By teaching "to and through" their students' cultural identities (Gay, 2018, p. 36), postsecondary instructors have the opportunity to make their racially and ethnically minoritized students feel "seen," "supported," and "motivated," even when faced with personal, academic, and global challenges.

APPENDIX

Codebook for Qualitative Analysis of Student Interviews

| Parent Code | Subcode | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| Identity | Nationality | Student names/talks about their country of origin | "I'm originally from Ghana" |
| | Personal/Family | Student describes facet of their personal identity, such gender, sexuality, religion, body size/shape, their hometown/state (not nationality), or family-related identity (e.g., siblings); NOT related to race/ethnicity | "I identify as straight and female"<br><br>"I'm the oldest child" |
| | Race/Ethnicity | Student describes/talks about their race and/or ethnicity | "I'm Hispanic"<br><br>"I'm mixed" |
| | →Passing/ Presenting | Student describes their relationship with passing and/or presenting as White and/or the tone of their skin color | "I pass as White but I'm not White" |
| | Academic | Student describes academic identity, such as grade level, major, achievement, future career, or other academic characteristics | "I'm a 4.0 student"<br><br>"I'm a procrastinator" |
| | Culture | Student describes/talks about their family's culture (this might include language, food, practices, etc.) | "everything I do is from the culture that I was raised in back home in Ghana, like what we eat, the clothes you wear and everything" |
| Fall Semester Context | Semester - Positive | Student describes positive aspect or perspective of fall semester | "That semester went well for me" |
| | Semester - Negative | Student describes negative aspect or perspective of fall semester | "I really struggled with time management" |
| | Modality | Student talks about modality in reference to experience during fall semester; NOT | "I liked having my classes online" |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | specific to the course of interest | |
| | Fall Semester - Other | Student talks about something else notable about the fall semester context | "I enjoyed having personal time" |
| Course of Interest | Course - Positive | Student describes the course of interest in a positive way. NOTE: this code will be used widely and will likely be double-coded | "this was just a really good class" |
| | Course - Negative | Student describes the course of interest in a negative way. NOTE: this code will be used widely and will likely be double-coded | "I disliked it" |
| | Modality | Student describes the modality of the course of interest | "It was hybrid" |
| | Peer Diversity | Student talks about the diversity of their peers in the course of interest were (e.g., in terms of race, gender, major, etc.) | "I definitely saw more students of color"<br><br>"lots of people with different majors" |
| | Learning | Student references their perspective on their learning experience in the course of interest. NOTE: this is NOT in reference to what they learned (e.g., “we learned about grammar”) but how they learned (e.g., “it was a really good learning environment for me) | "And there were so many serious moments that like have such a big outcome on how we how much we learned in that class." |
| | LLP-related | In talking about some aspect of the course of interest, student references the LLP that their course was a part of (this is only for interviews regarding UK 101) | "we all knew each other from the LLP" |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Culturally Responsive Content | Student describes content in the course of interest that was culturally responsive (e.g., “we talked about stereotypes”) and/or relevant to their culture (e.g., “it was interesting to learn about my culture”) and/or other individuals' cultural identities (e.g., “I learned about other people’s cultural backgrounds as well”). Can include social justice (will be double-coded) | "we talked about culture"<br><br>"it brings diversity in our way of thinking" |
| No Culturally Responsive Content | The student indicates that there was no culturally responsive or relevant content in the course of interest | "No, we never talked about that" |
| Peer Interaction | Student talks about peer interaction in the course of interest | "there was a lot of interacting with other classmates" |
| Assignment(s) | Student talks about an assignment or assignments in the course of interest | "the whole class is focused on like a real, like a research paper" |
| Respect/ Disrespect | Student talks about respect (and/or open-mindedness) or disrespect (and/or closed-mindedness, prejudice) in the course | “we need to respect each other”<br><br>“we were all very open” |
| Social Justice/Politics | Student describes discussing or learning about social justice or politics in the course of interest | "We definitely did talk about like Black Lives Matter" |
| Would Change - Interactive/In-person | When describing the change they would like in the course of interest, the student describes a change related to being more interactive (i.e., interacting with peers, being in-person) | "I wish it was more in-person"<br><br>"I wish we interacted with our classmates more" |
| Would Change - Course Content | When describing the change they would like in the course of interest, the student | "I wish we talked more about …" |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | describes a change related to course content | |
| | Would Change - Other | When describing the change they would like in the course of interest, the student describes some other change (not related to content or interaction) | "It could have been more organized" |
| | Course of Interest - Other | Student describes something else notable about the course of interest | "I wish I could take it again" |
| Instructor of Interest | Instructor - Positive | Student describes the instructor of interest in a positive way. NOTE: this code will be used widely and will likely be double-coded | “I really liked her”<br><br>“she’s very engaging” |
| | Instructor - Negative | Student describes the instructor of interest in a negative way. NOTE: this code will be used widely and will likely be double-coded | “she was disorganized” |
| | Feeling Seen/Heard/ Understood | When discussing the instructor of interest, student describes feeling seen, heard, understood in who they are as a person, or known in another way by the instructor. NOTE: this is different from the instructor being understanding of a student’s situation | “she understood my culture”<br><br>"She noticed I was having issues" |
| | Being Supportive/ Understanding | Student describes supportive, understanding, and/or caring behavior from instructor. NOTE: this is different from the instructor understanding who the student is as a person (i.e., making the student feel understood) | “I felt supported”<br><br>"she was really understanding"<br><br>“she would help” |
| | Communication | Student describes communication with the instructor (e.g., email, Canvas, meeting on Zoom or in person) NOTE: not about clarifying assignments | "she was very available by email" |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Teaching | When discussing the instructor or the course of interest, student refers to some aspect of the instructor's teaching, such as clarity or grading | "she was great at explaining things"<br><br>"I really liked her as a teacher"<br><br>"she wasn't very clear on some things" |
| Maternal/ Femininity | When discussing the instructor of interest, student uses describes them in maternal and/or feminine words | "it's like not wanting to disappoint your mom"<br><br>"she's an older woman so that's comforting" |
| Social Justice Stance | When discussing the instructor of interest, student talks about the instructor's explicit or implicit opinions or stances related to social justice | "I could tell she was very socially minded"<br><br>"she's a big feminist" |
| Accommodations/ Flexibility | When discussing the instructor of interest, student describes receiving accommodations and/or flexibility from the instructor regarding coursework | "she gave me an extra day"<br><br>"she was willing to give me leeway" |
| Motivation - Internal | Student describes feeling motivated internally, rather than by professor | "my motivation comes from internal pressure from me" |
| Motivation - From Instructor | Student describes feeling motivated by the instructor and/or the instructor's actions | "she made me feel like I could do it" |
| Discrimination - Direct/Quick Response | In describing how the instructor would handle discrimination in the class, the student says the instructor would respond to it directly and/or would resolve it quickly; might also include "shutting it down" | "she would handle it quickly"<br><br>"she would shut it down" |

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| | →Setting Ground Rules | Student describes how the instructor made it clear to the class that discrimination would not be welcome or tolerated, usually in the form of setting “ground rules” or expectations in the first week(s) of class | “she listed out rules”<br><br>“we had a contract about how we would deal with it” |
| | Comparison to Other Instructors | Student compares the instructor of interest to other instructor(s) | "My other professors didn't do that" |
| | Instructor of Interest - Other | Student describes something else notable about the instructor of interest | "whenever she did have questions for the class, it wasn't directed to the African American students, i t was directed towards everybody." |
| Culturally Responsiv e Teaching | Example | Student describes an example of culturally responsive/relevant content outside of the course or instructor of interest | "in my bio class we talked about race" |
| | In STEM | Student talks about culturally responsive/relevant content specifically in the context of STEM courses or subjects | “it’s different being a STEM major like there’s no way to diversify your content”<br><br>“in the math, science classes I take, you usually wouldn’t talk about stuff like that” |
| | Respect/ Disrespect | Student talks about respect and/or disrespect (might also include open-mindedness, offending) when encountering culturally responsive/relevant content outside of the course or instructor of interest | “I think a majority of the classes, like when they do talk about stuff like that, they say, you know, respect others” |
| | Amount | Student talks about culturally responsive/relevant content in terms of how much they have experienced or would | “not necessarily like a whole lecture, but like just some parts of it representing |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | like to experience outside of the course of interest | parts of my culture”<br><br>“I almost feel like in some of the Spanish classes we could do it a little less" |
| Relevance | Student talks about culturally responsive/relevant content in terms of how relevant is (might also include how it “fits”) to the content to the subject/course they're studying outside of the course of interest | “Chemistry is kind of hard, but I think biology is a really great like subject to put stuff in”<br><br>"I would totally understand if like there are some like subjects where it's like, you know, there's no way you can correlate the two” |
| Should be included in courses | Student indicates their belief that content relevant to culture should be included in courses in general | "Yes, if it's relevant." |
| Should not be included in courses | Student indicates their belief that content relevant to culture should not be included, or should be included less, in courses in general | "I'd say probably not" |
| Culturally Responsive Content - Other | Student describes something else notable about culturally responsive/relevant content outside of the course or instructor of interest | "whenever you're talking about race, especially when you have teachers or professors, they kind of like indirectly point you out and expect you to just know the topic and know the history of the topic. And that's different from a professor taking time out of their day to actually |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | do research and know the history of it." |
| Other | Student describes something else notable that doesn’t fall into the other categories | "I think that that's really important and that's something that's lost in like larger lecture classes" |

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VITA


# Caiti S. Griffiths

Department of Educational, School, & Counseling Psychology
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## EDUCATION

**Master of Science (MS), Educational Psychology** **Expected May 2021**

University of Kentucky
Thesis: *"I Felt Seen": A Mixed-Methods Investigation of Culturally Responsive Teaching in Higher Education*
Chair: Dr. Ellen L. Usher
University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY

**Bachelor of Arts (BS), Psychology** **May 2019**

Minor: English
Social Science Research Certificate
Summa Cum Laude Honors
University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY
Education Abroad: National University of Ireland, Galway (2018)

## ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

**Graduate Assistant, UK 101 Academic Orientation** **June 2020 – present**

Transformative Learning
University of Kentucky

**Teaching Assistant, UK 125 Developmental Reading & Writing** **June 2020 – Dec. 2020**

Transformative Learning
University of Kentucky

**Graduate Assistant, Academic Coach** **Aug. 2019 – May 2020**

Transformative Learning
University of Kentucky

**Graduate Research Lab Member** **Aug. 2019 – present**

P20 Motivation and Learning Lab
PI: Dr. Ellen L. Usher
Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology
University of Kentucky

**Graduate Assessor** **Oct. 2019**

PI: Dr. Laura Bryan
Lewis Honors College
University of Kentucky

**Undergraduate Honors Thesis Research Assistant** **2017 - 2019**

Early Childhood Lab
PI: Dr. Elizabeth Lorch
Department of Psychology
University of Kentucky

## PUBLICATIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS

DiGiacomo, D. K., Goldstein, B. L., **Griffiths, C. S.,** Usher, E. L., & The Student Voice Team of Kentucky. Coping with COVID-19 in Kentucky: Youth experiences and perspectives. Manuscript in preparation.

Usher, E., Golding, J. M., Han, J., **Griffiths, C. S.,** McGavran, M. B., Brown, C. S., & Sheehan, E. A. (in press). Psychology students' motivation and learning in response to the shift to remote instruction during COVID-19. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology. https://psyarxiv.com/xwhpm/

## PRESENTATIONS

**Griffiths, C. S.,** Han, J., Staykova, G., & Usher, E. L. (2021, March 6). *Culturally responsive teaching in higher education: Do instructors' and students' perceptions align?* [Paper presentation]. Spring Research Conference, Louisville, KY.

**Griffiths, C. S.,** Abell, V. A., Hargis, L. E., DiGiacomo, D. K., & Usher, E. L. (2020, March 7). *First-year undergraduates' lay theories about learning* [Paper presentation]. Spring Research Conference, Cincinnati, OH.

**Griffiths, C. S.,** Hayden, A., & Lorch, E. P. (2019, April). *Measuring self -efficacy through a narrative comprehension intervention for children at risk for ADHD* [Poster presentation]. UK Psychology Honors Research Symposium, Lexington, KY.

Lorch, E. P., Hayden, A., **Griffiths, C.,** & Almasi, J. (2019, March). *Differential effects of comprehension and social problem solving interventions for children at-risk for ADHD* [Poster presentation]. Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Baltimore, MD.

**Griffiths, C.,** Jodts, J., Hayden, A., & Lorch, E. P. (2019, February). *Narrative self-efficacy following a comprehension intervention* [Poster presentation]. Posters at the Capitol, Frankfort, KY.

## HONORS & AWARDS

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|---|---|
| James Miller Award for Undergraduate Honors Thesis | May 2019 |
| Undergraduate Certificate in Social Science Research | May 2019 |
| Undergraduate Summer Research and Creativity Grant | May 2018 |
| Psychology Scholar | 2015 – 2019 |
| Otis A. Singletary Scholarship | 2015 – 2019 |