The Trump Effect and the Damage Done: A Mixed Methods Study Exploring Sociopolitical Hostility and Teacher Responses in Language Classrooms

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THE TRUMP EFFECT AND THE DAMAGE DONE:
A MIXED METHODS STUDY EXPLORING SOCIOPOLITICAL HOSTILITY
AND TEACHER RESPONSES IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Literacy, Language, and Culture

by
Stephanie Madison Schenck
May 2020

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ABSTRACT

Immediately following the 2016 election, teachers reported a previously-unseen level of animosity from their students mimicking the rhetoric of President Trump, often verbatim. The combination of racial, ethnic, religious, and bias-motivated bullying and language has been referred to as the “Trump Effect” in the media and among educators (Nygreen, Lazdowski, & Bialostok, 2017). While teachers in all subject areas may have the potential to address this dehumanizing rhetoric, this study focused on foreign/world language (FL) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), which are areas that have not been thoroughly explored as a particularly important and relevant site for change in which to address the problem.

Following a mixed methods explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), the first phase employed a nationwide survey of K-12 FL and ESOL teachers from a variety of teaching contexts and demographics. The results show that teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school combined with their beliefs in a social justice pedagogy were significant predictors of taking action in the classroom. Then, qualitative follow-up interviews shed light on the actions that were ultimately taken. These actions were labeled: Classroom permeability and possibility; curricula as safe harbor; and discursive approach to social justice pedagogy. Key implications of the study include the need to dismiss the notion of “neutrality” in teaching and, instead, embrace teaching as a form of resistance.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Arlo, whose sweet grin helped me start every single writing session. Tía loves you.
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I am so grateful to so many people who have helped me through this doctoral process. It has been a long road, and I needed all of you to make it.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2016, I was beginning my 10th year of teaching high school Spanish. I prided myself on an intentional daily emphasis on cultural and linguistic diversity in my classes, as I had done for years. I believed my students were all, as a result, open-minded, tolerant, and excited about the Spanish-speaking world.

The day after the 2016 presidential election, I came to school with a heavy heart. I hadn’t been able to sleep at all the night before. Then in my first class of the day, bright and early at 8:15 am, I noticed a girl in the front row wearing a red Make American Great Again hoodie. She beamed as she said, “Señora, guess what! We ain’t gotta take your class no more! Trump’s president and he’s gonna build a wall and kick out all the Mexicans! We’re finally allowed to speak English again!” I stood there, stunned. I wasn’t sure what to say. As I pondered my options, I noticed that in her row, three seats back, sat a 15-year-old boy from Mexico, ironically placed in Spanish I to fulfill his foreign language graduate requirements. I had met his parents, who spoke no English, and they were lovely. This boy, hearing the conversation happening at the front of the room, sat there with his head bowed. It was a transformative moment for me. Within five minutes of the new school day after Trump became president, I was feeling the effects. I asked myself, “Is this what it’s going to be like now? The hatred for Spanish-speaking people is going to translate to problems in my class?” And so it was.

Background and Purpose

The political landscape of the United States has experienced a sharp increase in
polarization and hostility in recent years. Many point to President Donald Trump’s combative rhetoric as one of the reasons for greater incivility and anger in public discourse (Antonio, 2019; Ivie, 2017; Jamieson & Taussig, 2017; Lewis, 2017; McGranahan, 2019; Ott & Dickinson, 2019). While it is true those with both left and right political views frequently operate in an echo-chamber, the problem is that President Trump’s rhetoric in particular has sparked enthusiasm amongst dangerous hate groups such as white supremacists (Burston & Twine, 2019; Gomez, 2018; Perry, 2018; Sanchez, 2018; Steen, 2019). This type of rhetoric commonly comes in the form of dehumanizing language that, when consistently used in the larger public discourse, contributes to overall hostility and anger (Smith, 2011). The link to white supremacy groups is not hard to make when considering that dehumanizing language is known to be effective at fostering hatred (Utych, 2018).

In addition to the ubiquitous hostile rhetoric, the sociopolitical climate also continues to focus heavily on the perceived threat of immigrants, as evidenced by a number of high-profile decisions in the Trump administration. Some notable examples include the Muslim Ban which limited travel from Muslim-majority countries (ACLU, 2017); the large-scale separation of migrant children from their parents (Linton, Kennedy, Shapiro, & Griffin, 2018); and the political battle to build a border wall with Mexico (Gramlich, 2019). The underlying message behind these decisions, amongst others, is that immigrants are to be feared, as they are at best a drain on society and at worst dangerous criminals. This positioning of immigrants in a negative light has also positioned students from immigrant or minority communities in much the same way in
their schools. In fact, simply waving signs or chanting the name “Trump!” has become shorthand for anti-immigrant or racists sentiments; it has been seen repeatedly with high school sports teams taunting their opponents who have a large representation of nonwhite players (Cook, 2017; Shulman, 2016). It is not an issue, then, of whether or not political hostility and dehumanizing language is present in our country, but how it is influencing schools. As Pennycook (2016) stated, we cannot ignore the “permeability of the classroom walls” (p. 33). What happens outside the classroom will inevitably be tied to what happens inside the classroom.

Immediately following the 2016 election, teachers reported a previously-unseen level of animosity from their students mimicking the rhetoric of President Trump, often verbatim. A well-publicized survey by the Southern Poverty Law Center of more than 10,000 teachers, administrators, and counselors demonstrated the impact of the election was profound. Ninety percent of educators said the election had a negative impact on their students and believed the impact would be long-lasting (Costello, 2016). The combination of racial, ethnic, religious, and bias-motivated bullying and language has been referred to as the “Trump Effect” in the media and amongst educators (Nygreen, Lazdowski, & Bialostok, 2017).

In 2017, as it became clear teachers would be dealing with this “Trump Effect” for some time, a second nation-wide survey of approximately 1,500 educators was administered by UCLA’s Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access. This survey, along with follow-up interviews, revealed more of what was found during the survey during the election cycle. Hostility, anger, bullying, anxiety, and fear were commonly
found in classrooms, and students were closely, if not exactly, mimicking the
dehumanizing words of President Trump as a way to belittle and harass their peers
(Rogers et al., 2017). This aggressive student behavior is not occurring in isolated
incidents. In June 2017, journalists reviewed news reports of more than fifty instances of
students directly quoting President Trump to bully their classmates, chanting, for
example, “Build that wall!” at their Latinx classmates or leaving goodbye cards on the
desks of Latinx students with a message about deportation and the phrase “Make
America Great Again! Adios!” (Samaha, Hayes, & Ansari, 2017). By 2018, there were
hundreds of incidents in the news (Vara-Orta, 2018), not only related to Latinx
immigrants, but also swastika graffiti on school grounds (e.g. Guerra, 2018; Panaritis &
Whelan, 2016; Wilson, 2019) and ongoing harassment of Muslim students (e.g. Brennan,
2018; Fadel, 2018; Noguchi, 2017). In 2019, research demonstrated that even students at
universities have experienced increased anxiety stemming from sociopolitical hostility
(Albright & Hurd, 2019). In February 2020, journalists found that the use of President
Trump’s rhetoric to harass peers in schools has persisted to this day (Natanson, Cox, &
Stein, 2020).

Teachers, however, are in a position to serve as a first line of defense against hate
speech and hostility in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Pollock, 2017). Drawing
on the work of Dunn, Sondel, and Baggett (2018), the purpose of this mixed methods
study was to understand how different contextual factors influenced language teachers’
actions as they attempted to mitigate the impact of sociopolitical hostility as well as
discern the actions that were ultimately taken. The population of the study was
foreign/world language (FL) teachers and English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) teachers, as the sociopolitical rhetoric has targeted both students in these classrooms and speakers of the languages teachers are attempting to teach. In the first, quantitative phase of the study, nationwide survey data were collected from language teachers online through Qualtrics\(^1\). In the second, qualitative phase, selective follow-up phone interviews were conducted to further explore the types of actions teachers took to mitigate sociopolitical hostility.

**Significance of the Study**

Social justice takes different forms depending on the context, and a comprehensive look at language teachers in a variety of geographic areas and school contexts can help shed light on what actions teachers have taken in the years of Trump’s presidency. Not all options for action are available to all teachers (Dunn et al., 2018), and learning more about what actions are possible can help inform teacher preparation programs at the university level as well as in-service teacher professional development. In addition, this study aims to contribute to the scholarly dialogue investigating how teachers attempt to enact a critical or social justice pedagogy, helping to break the trend in research that frequently blames K-12 teachers for their own lack of success (Pittard, 2015). Even though a social justice approach to teaching can be enacted in any subject area (Adams & Bell, 2016), there is little empirical research specifically on language teachers (Wassell, Wesely, & Glynn, 2019). This lack of research is problematic, as there

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\(^1\) The survey for this paper was generated using Qualtrics software. Copyright © 2019 Qualtrics. Qualtrics and all other Qualtrics product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of Qualtrics, Provo, UT, USA. http://www.qualtrics.com
continue to be calls for “a more reflective, interpretive, historically grounded, and politically engaged [language] pedagogy” (Kramsch, 2014, p. 302).

Findings from this study will also provide insight into the factors that perpetuate the notion of “neutrality” in schools. Administrators and district policy often encourage teachers to stay “neutral” when polarizing topics arise in the classroom, resulting in students from dominant groups feeling emboldened to exhibit bullying behaviors towards their less privileged classmates (Journell, 2016). This “neutral” stance inadvertently signals the teacher’s agreement with the side of the aggressor instead of support for the targeted, as research suggests teachers can encourage bullying behaviors by ignoring or dismissing the behavior, or inhibit bullying behaviors through “empathy scaffolding, brief individual coaching sessions with students involved in bullying situations, and emotion regulation” (Swearer & Espelage, 2010, p. 8). Even so, school districts continue to allocate resources, time, and energy to anti-bullying programs with varying degrees of success (Huang, Espelage, Polanin, & Hong, 2019; Jones & Augustine, 2015; Rawlings & Stoddard, 2019). Ignoring the power of teachers to serve as a first line of defense against bullying behaviors that stem from sociopolitical hostility does a disservice to all students. Therefore, this study also aims to help inform the decisions of administrators and policymakers who may not fully consider the implications of requiring “neutrality” from teachers.

**Research Questions**

In this research study, an explanatory sequential mix methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) was used to understand the following:
1. What is the relationship between language teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school, their beliefs on social justice, their sense of agency, and the actions they take?

2. How do language teachers attempt to mitigate dehumanizing beliefs and practices in the current sociopolitical climate?

3. How do the quantitative results and qualitative findings combine to provide an enhanced understanding of teachers’ actions in a hostile sociopolitical climate?

The first research question addressed the quantitative phase of the study through analysis of survey data. Prior research on sociopolitical hostility stemming from the 2016 election cycle and subsequent Trump presidency have explored influencing factors in teachers’ decisions to engage in actions of resistance (Dunn et al., 2018; Sondel, Baggett, & Dunn, 2018). Therefore, this research question examined how these previously-identified factors correlated with teachers’ actions. The second research question addressed the qualitative phase and was answered by follow-up interviews. These interviews further illuminated the results from the large-scale survey findings by providing more in-depth explanation and context to teachers’ experiences and actions. Finally, the third question in this mixed methods design compared the quantitative results with the qualitative findings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how language teachers take mitigating action when faced with sociopolitical hostility in schools and classrooms. In other words, do teachers have to witness bullying behaviors in order to act in resistance? Are beliefs in the promotion of empathy and social justice enough to influence action? Does a sense of autonomy and support help dissuade teachers from adopting a stance of “neutrality”? And
what do teachers actually do when sociopolitical hostility appears in their classroom? Taken together, the responses of the teacher participants helped shed light on these issues and provided hope that teachers are not powerless in the midst of hostility, but rather can and do take action in difficult circumstances.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined.

- **Sociopolitical context** “takes into account the larger societal and political forces in a particular society and the impact they may have on student learning” and “considers issues of power and includes discussions of structural inequality based on stratification due to race, social class, gender, ethnicity, and other differences; it also includes the relative respect or disrespect accorded to particular languages and dialects” (Nieto, 2001, p. 56). In this study, the sociopolitical context refers to political rhetoric stemming from the 2016 election cycle that is racist, sexist, xenophobic, or otherwise dehumanizing in nature. The societal context refers to the aggressive actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the behaviors of American citizens towards vulnerable groups named in political rhetoric, and the fear, anxiety, and trauma caused by the policies and decisions of President Trump.

- **Experiences** are the extent to which teachers have seen, heard, or otherwise witnessed: students mimicking the rhetoric of President Trump to insult, mock, or ridicule another student; derogatory remarks or behaviors towards immigrants, Muslim Americans, students from the LGBTQ community, or other vulnerable
groups; and/or students experiencing an increase in stress, anxiety, fear, or concern for their well-being or that of their family (Rogers et al., 2017). In this research context, these behaviors could merely be an easily-accessible form of bullying, but they may also be reflective of racist, sexist, or xenophobic beliefs held by students. Regardless of motivation, these behaviors and beliefs, as observed by teachers, are the focus of this study.

- **Social justice beliefs** is the extent to which teachers identify with a social justice approach to teaching that “challenges, confronts, and disrupts misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes,” provides emotional resources to students such as “a belief in all students’ ability and worth,” draws on students’ talents and strengths including “their languages, cultures, and experiences,” and creates an environment that “promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change” (Nieto & Bode, 1998, p. 12). In this study, social justice beliefs refer to how teachers conceptualize their own role as an agent for change through the pedagogical decisions they make in the classroom. If teachers believe they should take action as previously listed, they are considered to be in alignment with a social justice approach to education.

- **Teacher agency** for social justice operates “within the complex interrelations of teachers’ individual and collective sense of purpose, competence, scope of autonomy and reflexivity” and includes “meaning making of their present structures (roles and resources) and cultures (relational and ideational contexts)” (Pantić, 2015, p. 765). Specifically, teacher autonomy in the current study
considers “levels of collaboration and collective agency for social justice,”
“perceptions of school cultures and principal’s leadership,” and “broader
education policy and socio-cultural contexts” (p. 766). In addition to teachers’
perception of support from administration and colleagues, this study also
considers fear of complaints from parents and what teachers do when their belief
in a social justice pedagogy conflicts with official policies or directives.

- **Action** in alignment with social justice beliefs (Nieto & Bode, 1998) and a
pedagogy of hope (hooks, 2003) can take place with individual students and in
whole-class contexts. For teachers, “both exercises in recognition, naming the
problem but also fully and deeply articulating what we do [emphasis added] that
works to address and resolve issues, are needed to generate anew and inspire a
spirit of ongoing resistance” (hooks, 2003, p. xiv). Such actions include but are
not limited to: challenging students who make racist, sexist, or xenophobic
comments; developing lesson plans to address specific social justice or
sociopolitical topics; and changing lessons in the middle of class to create
teachable moments. This study focuses on teacher action to create change and
enables teachers to both empower their disempowered students and encourage
critical reflection in their privileged students.

**Outline of the Chapters**

In Chapter Two, I demonstrate the complex and overlapping nature of language
through the lens of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and language socialization theory, as well
as establish how language is reflective of community membership, power dynamics, and
identity. I first examine language in practice and distinguish between language learning and language as a practice in communities. These perspectives are situated within a larger sociopolitical context in which political rhetoric and dehumanizing rhetoric can reify inequitable social systems and cause harm to vulnerable groups. Following this overview of language, I then review the research on how sociopolitical hostility stemming from political rhetoric has impacted schools, students, and teachers spanning from the 2016 presidential election cycle to present day. The body of research demonstrates there was, in fact, a significant impact on schools in many places and students’ trauma has been reflected in their behaviors. I then examine language classrooms as a site for change to mitigate these impacts. Finally, I describe how bell hooks’s (2003) pedagogy of hope serves as a framework for understanding teaching as resistance in hostile sociopolitical contexts. I argue that the “neutral” stance many teachers purport to take is little more than a myth, while also foregrounding the possibility for people to change and the possibility for a more humanizing approach to education for both students in dominant and marginalized groups.

I approached Chapter Two in alignment with bell hooks’s perspective on theory. She explained that academics from dominant groups often set the standard for what are considered serious theoretical frameworks. As such, hooks (1991) stated:

There seems to be a direct connection between white feminist scholars turning towards critical work and theory by white men, and the turning away of white feminist scholars from fully respecting and valuing the critical insights and theoretical offerings of black women/women of color. (p. 4)
The contributions of marginalized women and women of color are often relegated to a lower tier of importance or ignored altogether. When their contributions are acknowledged, they may be appropriated and rewritten in more “academic” language. Indeed, one of the many uses of academic theory is “the production of an intellectual class hierarchy where the only work deemed truly theoretical is work that is highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read, and containing obscure references” (p. 4). With these considerations in mind, I chose to foreground the work of women, particularly women of color, throughout the chapter with an emphasis on understandable clarity.

The structure of Chapter Two reflects hooks’s (1991) belief that theory is not intended to remain in the abstract, but rather should inform action. In other words, it is important to identify and name the ways in which society perpetuates inequitable structures, but it is also important to act to disrupt, challenge, and dismantle these structures. This approach is often associated with feminist theory that seeks to “engage in a critical process of theorizing that enables and empowers” (p. 8). Indeed, “feminism was a practice long before it was a theory” (MacKinnon, 1991, p. 14). The relationship between theory and practice should thus be fluid and actionable. With this understanding, I approached the review of literature first with an in-depth examination of the importance of language and the problem of dehumanizing rhetoric, and then reviewed how teachers can act in resistance.

In Chapter Three, I first explain why an explanatory sequential mixed methods design was appropriate for this study. I then provide the method for the first phase which employed a quantitative approach with survey data. I explain survey distribution
procedures to ensure a sample representative of all fifty states. Then, I outline how the survey instrument was developed and the factors the survey was intended to measure. Following data collection, I explain how statistical analyses were conducted and the statistical assumptions. Reliability and validity are also addressed. The second, qualitative phase begins with a description of participants and the selection procedure. Then, I describe the interview procedure and outline how ethics were considered in the process. Data analysis is followed by establishing the assumptions of the qualitative method and explaining issues of trustworthiness. Finally, the third phase of the study involves the integration of data from the quantitative survey and qualitative findings using a mixed methods approach. In this phase, I describe assumptions of the mixed methods approach and conclude with a summary of the chapter.

Chapter Four provides the findings from each of the three phases of the study. First, in the quantitative phase, descriptive statistics of participant demographics and survey items are presented. Next, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity show the data were suitable for a factor analysis. Then, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) results are presented, followed by a hierarchical linear regression. Following these results, an overview of interview participants is presented in the second, qualitative phase. Then, the themes and connections that emerged throughout the coding and analysis process are explained. Finally, the third phase integrated selected findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases to determine areas in which the data were aligned and areas in which the findings diverged.
Finally, Chapter Five presents an overview of the findings of the study and explains how the study provides a deeper understanding of how language teachers take action for social justice and what factors predict such action within the context of a hostile sociopolitical climate. The research questions are addressed for each of the three phases and the chapter concludes with limitations and implications of the study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

They’re too young to have gone through what they’ve gone through, and what they’ve seen. And to come here and have to face other kids persecuting them, throwing that in their face, like, that they don’t know English, they’re not from here, or they need to go back…. Just, to come so far from a violent place and come somewhere that’s safe and then still feel not safe.

— Annabelle, K-12 ESOL teacher

When considering the challenges facing teachers and students during the past few years, it is difficult to ignore the larger context and historical roots that illustrate why the current sociopolitical climate is particularly damaging. The rhetoric associated with this sociopolitical climate is hostile and dehumanizing towards many vulnerable groups, with immigrants receiving constant negative attention. While this type of hostility is not a new phenomenon, the current iteration is occurring in an age of social media with an around-the-clock news cycle. As a result, the rhetoric is inescapable with schools, students, and teachers feeling the effects.

This review begins with an overview of language in practice. First, the review explains the difference between language learning and language as a practice in a community. It then outlines the inseparable relationship between language, identity and power. Then, the review explains some of the reasons the current political rhetoric is different than straight-forward disagreement about politics and policy due to the fact it is steeped in dehumanizing language. Next, the review explores current research to establish the ways in which sociopolitical hostility impacts schools, students, and teachers. Student trauma is one such impact. While all subject areas may have the
potential to address dehumanizing rhetoric, this review also explains why language classes, both foreign/world language (FL) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), are areas that have not been thoroughly explored as a particularly important and relevant site for change in which to address the problem. The overarching theoretical frameworks focus on teaching as resistance and the possibility for change; while teachers have frequently reported attempting a stance of “neutrality,” that stance is not helpful for moving the needle towards a more humanizing, just, and equitable reality for students. After exploring the myth of neutrality, the review demonstrates how white people, and all people in dominant groups, can change, as well as how teachers can address both students from dominant groups and students from marginalized groups in the classroom. A summary of the literature review concludes the chapter.

**Language in Practice**

In order to understand how teachers respond to hostile rhetoric in the language classroom, it is important to consider the nature of language, of learning additional languages, and political rhetoric as a type of language. While language is understood as a means of communication, there are questions of what it means to be a member of a speech community, how one is positioned within the speech community, who gets to speak, and whose words carry authority. In this section, I will explore how all language is not equally valued and the context of how language is used matters a great deal.

One of the theoretical lenses applied throughout the section is a critical perspective of language. A critical approach to language is “to assume, from the start, that language is never neutral, never simply a ‘means of communication’” and “takes for
granted that language use is always loaded with issues of power, hierarchy and
dominance, as well as contestation, resistance and transformation” (Alim, 2010, p. 207).
Seemingly innocuous topics, such as teaching and learning in a classroom, can be
problematized when viewed through this lens. Even though a critical perspective of
language “resists definition because power manifests itself differently in different
contexts,” what remains constant is its “social justice agenda and its commitment to
social action, however small it be, that makes a difference” (Janks, 2010, p. 40).

From a feminist perspective, language is recognized as reifying power structures
within a patriarchal society that “reflects primarily the interests, perspectives, and
experiences of men” (Wood, 2008, p. 325). Patriarchal ideology is harmful not only to
women, but also men who diverge from the social norms established by those in positions
of power. As stated by bell hooks (1991), a debt of gratitude is owed “to the many
women and men who dare to create theory from the location of pain and struggle… as a
means to chart new theoretical journeys” as their work “charges and challenges us to
renew our commitment to an active, inclusive feminist struggle” (p. 11). Thus, feminist
theory serves not only to name and critique inequities, but also to enable and empower
the disenfranchised (MacKinnon, 1991).

In critical feminist theory, the critique is broad; subordinated groups operating
within the dominant masculine, heteronormative structures of society find their
experiences, knowledge, and language often hold little value. Yet, “when critical theories
and feminist theories intersect, the result is theories that identify, critique, and seek to
change inequities and discrimination” in order to “reform patriarchal ideologies that give
rise to asymmetrical rights, opportunities, roles, and material circumstances” (Wood, 2008, p. 206). This perspective centers on practical impacts and pragmatic actions to mitigate the oppressive reality of those in subordinated positions (hooks, 2003). In alignment with this overarching critical feminist theoretical orientation, the research and theoretical contributions of women, particularly women of color, are given prominence throughout this review of literature in resistance to the dominating work of white men in academia (hooks, 1991). Attention to power dynamics and positioning within the structures of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is essential in critical feminist theory, as is attention to word choices that reify this power and positioning (hooks, 1995; Lippi-Green, 2012; Weedon, 1987). As such, the section foregrounds the voices in academia that are often dismissed as being insufficiently academic.

**Language Learning**

From a linguistics perspective, language can be broken down into an array of components. In the words of famed linguist Lourdes Ortega (2014), researchers in the language sciences seek to “provide an accurate and complete description of language at all its levels, such as sounds (phonetics and phonology), minimal grammatical signs (morphology), sentences (syntax), meanings (semantics), texts (discourse analysis) and language in use (sociolinguistics, pragmatics)” (p. 2). The study of language acquisition, particularly second language acquisition (SLA), has a long tradition of examining these linguistic pieces in great detail (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). There are entire subfields of research dedicated to everything from pronunciation (e.g. Elliott, 1995; Major, 2001) to how to define the term “native speaker” (e.g. Canagarajah, 1999; Llurda,
For classroom teachers, an understanding of what language is and how it is learned is important not only in obvious areas such as FL or ESOL, but in all subject areas (Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Students labeled as English Language Learners and those who are speakers of non-standard dialects benefit when teachers understand how to best support their language and literacy development in academic settings.

Traditional SLA research has focused on language learning as an internal, cognitive process in which the learning takes place within the mind of an individual, a flash point brought to the forefront by Firth and Wagner (1997). This view shapes how interlocutors, or participants in a conversation, are positioned. For example, Krashen (1985) believed input is the driving force behind language acquisition, while Swain (1985) proposed students must be given the opportunity to provide output in the target language as well. As a result, interlocutors are seen as providers of input and feedback, not merely partners in building a conversation. The Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1981, 1996) examined how these types of interactions lead to language development through the negotiation of meaning. When students notice a gap in what they want to communicate and what they are able to communicate, they modify their language production in order to make themselves understood, ultimately leading to learning (Long, 1981, 1996; Gass & Mackey, 2006; Pica, 1994).

On the other end of the spectrum lies a sociocultural view of SLA that positions interlocutors as co-constructers of meaning (Lantolf, 2000). As the name implies, the emphasis is on the social aspect of learning in which students learn alongside and from one another and the teacher. Interlocutors are viewed as supporting one another in a
meaning-making attempt, not solely as providers of input and output (Donato, 1994; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Thorne & Lantolf, 2006). Thus, from this perspective, the use of language is a socially constructed and contextually situated practice. Based on Vygotsky’s (1978) theories of learning, the importance of social interaction cannot be overstated. Not only applicable to language acquisition, Vygotsky proposed, “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people..., and then inside the child” (p. 57). In other words, all learning takes place first in a social context before becoming internalized within the individual. Children learn these norms of cultural and linguistic practices from interacting with others in their home, community, school, and other social groups. The social knowledge is how the individual knowledge comes to be. Interlocutors, in this view, do not merely serve as transmitters of input. They serve as a partner in the learning process.

For language teachers, the sociocultural perspective has led to an increased focus on proficiency and communication over mechanics separated from meaning. Renowned scholars in FL education Judith L. Schrum and Eileen W. Glisan (2016) assert “students need more than grammatical or linguistic knowledge alone to function in a communicative setting” (p. 15). As they contend, a memorized list of words and verb conjugations means little if a student doesn’t know how to put them together to make meaning in a specific communicative context. The dominant language professional organizations in the United States, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2015) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
International Association (TESOL, 2006), both released national standards reflective of this communicative approach to language teaching. More importantly, perhaps, language teaching has shifted its emphasis from strictly language acquisition to the reason for language acquisition, which is to “communicate for social, intercultural, and instructional purposes within the school setting” (TESOL, 2006, p. 1) and be able to “interact with cultural competence and understanding” (ACTFL, 2015, p. 1). A sociocultural view of languages naturally leads to a focus on the purpose of language, which is, in short, to communicate with others.

Even though a communicative approach to language teaching is recommended by professional organizations and scholars in the field, it has “never really, in practice, abandoned a view of communication that prizes information sharing over mutual understanding” (Kramsch & von Hoene, 1995, p. 337). Language teaching through the lens of critical feminist theory further problematizes the approach. Critical feminist theory seeks to examine power, positioning, and identity, which, in this study, is inextricably tied to the languages of the classroom (hooks, 1991, 2003; MacKinnon, 1987; Norton Pierce, 1995). By using the communicative approach, teachers “have become adept at designing task-based activities that require students to exchange information” without considering the “social reality of the language classroom [which] is defined precisely by the tension between a multitude of psychological, social, political, moral, and linguistic oppositions in conflict with one another” (Kramsch & von Hoene, 1995, p. 337). In other words, communicative activities intended to practice grammar and
vocabulary may aid in linguistic development but fall short of the broader goals of creating change for greater equity and equality.

One of the detrimental consequences of separating the communicative approach to language teaching from the power dynamics of the classroom is that teachers miss the opportunity to engage in critical language education to disrupt, rather than perpetuate, existing power structures and positioning of students. For advocates of this approach, “it is essential that critical language education not only opens the door to new sources of knowledge and understanding, but that it also involves investigation of whose knowledge has historically been privileged, whose has been disregarded, and why” (Norton & Toohey, 2004, p. 15). By not engaging in a critical approach, teachers can inadvertently marginalize their native speaker or heritage language students. Guadalupe Valdés (2000) defined a heritage language learner as an individual who has been “raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (p. 1). The dialects and language proficiency levels of these students vary widely (Valdés, 2005). When heritage language students are asked to speak and write in the FL classroom (common activities in a communicative classroom), they may find the legitimacy of their language is questioned (Harklau, 2009). In addition, mixed classrooms of heritage speakers of Spanish and native-English-speaking students are becoming more common as the Latinx population in the United States reached a record 59.9 million in 2018 (Flores, Lopez, & Krogstad, 2019). As a result, Spanish teachers in particular are a population of interest to researchers. Language teachers typically do not report beliefs supporting what
is known as a “subtractive” perspective (Cummins, 1986), in which heritage language students replace their home language and cultural practices with those of the dominant culture, but rather tend to support an “additive” perspective in which home language maintenance is encouraged (Lacorte & Canabal, 2005; Potowski & Carreira, 2004; Yagata, 2019). Yet beliefs and practice are not always in alignment. For example, studies of white, native-English-speaking high school Spanish teachers revealed that even though these teachers claimed to support the linguistic maintenance of their heritage language students, in reality, they constantly corrected and chastised these students for their “non-academic” or non-standard Spanish (Harklau, 2009; Randolph, 2017). These actions are in direct contrast to an emphasis on communication over accuracy and hinder language acquisition just as much as they hinder the recognition of power dynamics and positioning.

**Language as Practice in Communities**

There is a difference between language as a learnable entity, such as Spanish, English, Arabic, etc., and language as a marker of membership in a community in daily life. While the two are not mutually exclusive, language as a social practice is much more than discourse patterns; it is a way for people to situate themselves and their identity.

Instead of viewing cultural practices and language practices as separate entities, researchers view the two as deeply interconnected with each influencing the other. Succinctly put, “One of the major ways in which culture manifests itself is through language” (Kramsch, 1996, p. 85). The conceptualization of the social construction of culture through language has long been the realm of researchers in sociolinguistics,
linguistic anthropology, and broader cultural studies (e.g. Gumperz, 1982; Halliday, 1973; Hymes, 1963; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). These interdisciplinary influences contributed to the development of language socialization theory that includes “an analytic focus on speech, writing, gesture, images, music, and other signs as primary means and endpoints of the socialization process” in addition to “an ethnographic sensibility that accounts for the socializing force of these semiotic resources in terms of enduring and shifting socioculturally meaningful practices, events, situations, institutions, relationships, emotions, aesthetics, moralities, bodies of knowledge, and ideologies” (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011, p. 10-11). In other words, language and literacy learning occur through linguistic and social interactions indicating membership in a community. While sociocultural theory, briefly outlined in the description of language learning above, has had a major influence on language socialization theory, the two are not synonymous. Both “have a social, cultural, interactional and cognitive orientation to language learning” and “appreciate the importance of culturally organized activities and interactional routines in meaning-making and learning (including learning about language, culture, the structure of activities themselves, social status and hierarchy and social order, and other content)” (Duff, 2007, p. 312). Yet language socialization theory focuses less on mental representations of linguistic systems and more on the cultural significance of particular linguistic structures, in addition to a greater emphasis on sociopolitical processes in language and literacy learning and the ways in which multiple identities are performed in different contexts. As both sociocultural and language socialization theory span multiple
academic disciplines, the distinctions are primarily in the degree to which various constructs are applied in different contexts.

There are myriad ways of illustrating language socialization theory in real-world situations. Social norms, for instance, are the product of groups of language users in a particular cultural context (Kramsch & Widdowson, 1998), with the linguistic enactment of politeness (Kasper, 1990), interactional practices at the dinner table (Blum-Kulka, 2012), and the gendered norms encoded in the linguistic system (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992) as examples of how language instantiates culture. These practices determine behaviors such as how one accepts a compliment or how frequently men interrupt women when they speak. By establishing cultural patterns of communication, language shapes how members of the community are viewed, how they view themselves, and whether they abide by or challenge the established norms.

One of the most famous, and influential, studies presenting an integrated view of language, literacy, and cultural practices is the groundbreaking ethnographic work of Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words* (1983). She found “patterns of language use in any community are in accord with and mutually reinforce other cultural patterns” (p. 344). Starting at a young age, children are socialized into ways of speaking, reading, and writing that reflect their lived realities within a cultural context. Heath explored these lived realities in three communities in the southeastern United States: Roadville, a white working-class community that long worked in the textile mills; Trackton, a black working-class community that traditionally farmed the land, but had shifted to work in
the textile mills; and the townspeople, the mainstream, middle-class group comprised of both black and white families linked by their social and professional affiliations.

The language practices of the Trackton residents contributed to a culture that valued interpersonal relationships, linguistic dexterity, and contextual adaption. Carried on hips or sitting in laps, “Trackton babies are in the midst of nearly constant human communication, verbal and nonverbal. They literally feel the body signals of shifts in emotion of those who hold them” (Heath, 1983, p. 74-75). Believing this type of modeling was sufficient for linguistic development, Trackton adults did not speak to young children any differently than they would with other adults, foregoing “baby talk” for direct commands and behavior or speech corrections. As a result, these children learned that a quick wit and a sharp tongue would go far in terms of social acceptance by others in the community. Creativity and entertainment in speech acts were rewarded with attention and praise from both adults and other children. By extension, the literacy practices of Trackton community were also public and social. For example, the acts of “reading the newspaper across porches, debating the power of a new car, or discussing the city’s plans to bring in earthmoving equipment to clear lots behind the community, produce more speaking than reading, more group than individual effort” (p. 200). Children witnessing these behaviors quickly learned the link between print text and social interaction, acts that maintained the ever-important interpersonal relationships of the community.

In contrast to the animated social context of Trackton, residents of Roadville experienced language, literacy, and culture as a set of behaviors to be executed in ways
deemed appropriate by the community. A Roadville baby was brought home from the hospital to a “world of colorful, mechanical, musical, and literacy-based stimuli” with the ultimate goal of establishing “a routine of eating only at certain times of day, sleeping through the night, and taking a morning and afternoon nap” (Heath, 1983, p.116-117). Young mothers were warned not to spoil their babies by holding them too much and babies were to be picked up only when their crying reached a certain level of intensity. “Baby talk” was a common and expected practice by adults, particularly women, in Roadville. A high tone of voice and a sing-song intonation was often accompanied by directions to “see” different objects, later with a follow-up command to “say” the name of the object as the child began to respond verbally. These children learned that compliance with adults’ requests to repeat, name, or otherwise communicate would be rewarded with attention and continued interaction with the adult. The culture of compliance and appropriateness was echoed in the literacy practices of Roadville. Greeting cards and thank you notes were considered signs of good manners, and reading was considered something everyone “should” do, even though few actually did. One consistent practice, however, was the reading of bedtime stories to small children. Much like adults in Roadville asked babies to “see” or “say” different objects, parents asked their children questions such as “What is it?” by pointing to pictures in the book. In this practice, emphasis was on children providing the answer the adult expected.

While the children of Trackton and Roadville learned the norms of language and literacy practices of their respective communities, these practices were not always aligned with those of the townspeople or of school. For townspeople, interactions with babies
were conversational in nature, with interlocutors frequently pausing as if awaiting the infant’s response. Much of the physical environment included an abundance of print text, including reading material for both the children and adults in the household. Verbal interactions, too, often reflected the topics and information derived from texts, as children were asked questions about the content of the stories and were encouraged to imagine stories of their own. As a result, “the children of the townspeople learned the distinctions between contextualized first-hand experiences and decontextualized representations of experience” (Heath, 1983, p. 256), a practice that was later transferred seamlessly to the norms of school. Social behaviors such as providing an extended answer to a question and relating texts to other situations or events continued throughout school, work, and social contexts as the children grew up.

Unsurprisingly, the children of the townspeople often had a better experience at school than did the children of Trackton and Roadville. Roadville children could name objects on command, but struggled to offer an extended narrative as a response to questions by adults or link the material in books to other contexts. Trackton children could create links between multiple events or stories, yet this ability was developed through witnessing verbal and nonverbal interactions, not naming discrete features. Roadville children, accustomed to a strict schedule, adapted well to the structure of school, while Trackton children, accustomed to flexibility, struggled when told it was time to stop one activity and start another. The multitude of examples of the way the three groups of children were socialized into their respective communities through
language and literacy practices were made clear when the children attempted to enact these practices in the context of school, with varying degrees of success and failure.

Drawing on the lessons from Heath’s (1983) foundational text on language and literacy socialization, it is clear that linguistic practices represent more than mere speech patterns, serving as markers of membership in a community with all the cultural practices that membership entails. Yet when an individual interacts in multiple languages and, by extension, multiple cultural contexts, these markers of membership in a community become much more fluid and dynamic. For FL and ESOL teachers, an extension of this understanding lies in second language socialization theory. Second language socialization shares many of the same principles of language socialization theory, but with “the added complexity of dealing with children or adults who already possess a repertoire of linguistic, discursive, and cultural traditions and community affiliations when encountering new ones” (Duff, 2006, p. 310). Viewing language as a marker of membership in a discourse community has implications for language teachers who must consider not only grammar, vocabulary, and communicative competence, but also the situated, cultural practices in the communities of native speakers (Kramsch, 1996). For example, when an English-speaking literacy teacher attempted to learn Spanish, she reflected, “One of my students told me that even though it was important for me to learn Spanish, it was more important for me to understand what it represented: the values, the meanings, the relationships it established” (Sparks, 2002, p. 66). When a teacher dismisses or ignores students’ language and literacy practices, it is also a dismissal of the community from whence they came. On the other hand, validating and supporting
students’ language and literacy practices humanizes the learning process and provides opportunities to create links instead of divisions between the home and school contexts.

**Language, Identity, and Power**

Language not only indicates membership in a particular group, but also one’s standing in a social hierarchy. Sociocultural and language socialization theory both acknowledge this positioning as part of the overarching language and culture connection. Yet sociocultural theory must be extended in new theoretical directions as issues of power and identity within social structures are often only tangentially addressed instead of centrally situated. Lewis, Enciso, & Moje (2007) recommend the intentional inclusion of “poststructural, cultural, feminist, critical race and discourse theories to inform our understanding of the social, cultural, mental, physical, and political” (p. 2). That is to say, the perspectives of marginalized groups must be included to fully explore how individuals shape identities, navigate positioning in a community and in the broader society, and enact language and literacy practices for different purposes. A single theoretical framing of language, identity, and power is insufficient.

In this section, I demonstrate how multiple theoretical perspectives show language is inexorably linked to power. Beginning with individual interactions, linguistic exchanges are reflective of the authority and positioning of each interlocuter. From a poststructural perspective, “language is seen as central to the circulation of discourses - systems of *power/knowledge* that define and regulate our social institutions, disciplines, and practices” (Norton & Morgan, 2013, p. 1). Everything from the degree of deference to the prestige of the language itself indicates how the speakers are positioned in relation
to one another, the context of the exchange, and the broader society. Bourdieu (1991), for example, viewed language as a form of symbolic power, as “it is rare in everyday life for language to function as a pure instrument of communication” (p. 502). In other words, it is difficult to separate linguistic practices from the context in which they are used and as signifiers of cultural capital and authority. Just as language instantiates culture, language also reifies systems of power.

As linguistic exchanges on the individual level establish power dynamics, the same is true of entire language systems through the normalization of disempowering language and the subsequent consequences. When viewing language as a system of power, a feminist perspective illuminates how misogynistic terminology and gendered discourses associated with women contribute to the actual disempowerment of women. Influenced by poststructural principles (e.g. Bourdieu, 1991; Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1980), feminist scholar Chris Weedon (1987) asserted the “meaning of the existing structure of social institutions, as much as the structures themselves and the subject positions which they offer their subjects, is a site of political struggle waged mainly, though not exclusively, in language” (p. 38). For example, in a patriarchal society, the way women’s speech is trivialized as “gossip” serves to demean and disempower women (Baron, 1987). Yet from a linguistics perspective, speech acts labeled as gossip are also considered forms of information exchange and a way to build social bonds (Besnier, 2009). Disempowered people can use gossip as a way to learn what is happening around them, understand the temperament and behaviors of those in power, and leverage this knowledge as a means of self-protection. Even so, gossip associated with women is still
largely considered petty and is mainly viewed with contempt (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). In short, when men’s speech is characterized as “talking shop” and women’s speech is demeaned as mere “gossip,” the function of the speech act becomes secondary to the positioning of the speech participants.

Gendered discourses, while ubiquitous, are not the only discourses that are used for disempowerment. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) outlined how race is a constant thread woven throughout every social institution in the United States as our society is structured to privilege white, male, upper class, heterosexual norms. These norms are viewed as the standard against which all other ways of being are measured, particularly in the context of a standard language ideology (Milroy & Milroy, 1985). Standard language ideology is defined as “a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and… is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class” (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 64). This ideology serves as a rationale for discrimination against marginalized groups based on their speech patterns or accent (Fairclough, 1989). In the United States, the stigmatization of the linguistic practices of black Americans, commonly known as African American Vernacular English, is particularly salient. For example, when calling a landlord to inquire about renting a property, a prospective tenant speaking with a black-sounding accent is far less likely to be shown the property than a prospective tenant speaking with a white-sounding accent (Purnell, Idsardi, & Baugh, 1999). In the workplace, job applications with white-sounding names are 50% more likely to receive a callback than black-sounding names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). A single linguistic
clue is sufficient for the actual disempowerment of black Americans (Kraus, Torrez, Park, & Ghayebi, 2019). Like discourses associated with misogyny, discourses associated with racism demonstrate how the interconnected nature of language and power uphold systems of domination.

As language establishes one’s positioning within social structures of power, it also situates one’s identity as a speaker of the language. Drawing on Weedon’s (1987) poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, and power, Norton (Norton Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2000, 2013) conceptualized identity as multiple, a site of struggle, and continually changing across time and space. She characterizes the mutable nature of identity as “produced in a variety of social sites, all of which are structured by relations of power in which the person takes up different subject positions” (Norton Pierce, 1995, p. 15). In other words, a complex social identity shifts according to one’s positioning in different social structures. Language practices associated with this positioning will also shift accordingly. The field of applied linguistics has been exploring this interconnectedness of language, identity, and power for quite some time (e.g. Block, 2007; Kramsch, 2009; Lin, 2007; Miller & Kubota 2013). When one is faced with the opportunity to learn an additional language, for example, it represents more than simply the acquisition of a new lexicon and grammatical structures. Learning another language requires learners to navigate their identity as a speaker of their first language, a learner of the second language, and consider how these positionalities shape motivation and opportunity to participate in each context (Norton Pierce, 1995).
To illustrate how language and power shape identity in multilingual contexts, Ana Celia Zentella’s (1997) extensive ethnographic study *Growing Up Bilingual* documents the linguistic lives of a community of Puerto Ricans living in New York City. Deeply immersed in the community of *el bloque* (“the block”) with twenty families and their thirty-seven children for more than a decade, Zentella followed five girls from childhood through young adulthood. She explored the languages and dialects of *el bloque* and observed how the ability to speak Spanish, English, or “Spanglish” was a source of pride in some situations and shame in others. By examining the intricate social connections and linguistic repertoires of *el bloque*, she sought to understand “a stigmatized group’s attempts to construct a positive self within an economic and political context that relegates its members to static and disparaged ethnic, racial, and class identities, and that identifies them with static and disparaged linguistic codes” (p. 13). The complex linguistic practices required dexterity and intuitiveness reflective of a sophisticated understanding of how language works, for whom, and under what conditions. Yet these same linguistic practices profoundly impacted the identity and social positioning of the five girls as they began to understand how their language and culture was disparaged in broader society.

Zentella described the community members’ fluid linguistic maneuvers between standard and non-standard Puerto Rican Spanish, Puerto Rican English, African American Vernacular English, Hispanized English, and standard New York City English as an integral part of social interaction. For the girls, “the frequent interspersal of sentences and words from both languages was the primary symbol of membership in *el*...
and reflected the children’s dual cultural identification’ (Zentella, 1997, p. 79). This code switching, or moving between languages and dialects, positioned the girls in different ways. For example, Paca, one of the girls in the study, frequently cared for young children and used different languages to emphasize a point or command obedience. She used these linguistic maneuvers “as if to make up for the lack of power associated with her young age, tiny frame, and anemic health” (p. 103). Her conflicting identities as a young girl and as a caregiver were mediated by her linguistic choices. On the other hand, Isabel, another girl in the study, was placed in special education classes in elementary school and was considered language-disabled, even though she later tested out of special education and rejoined mainstream classes. This labeling negatively affected her identity as a student and as a participant in speech communities, as she frequently enacted code switches intended to “ensure her addressee’s attention and keep the conversational ball in her court” (p. 106). Attempts to reclaim the narrative of her disempowered positioning were reflected in her code switches intended to appeal to others and demonstrate her linguistic capabilities.

As the girls in the study continued through school, their Spanish usage decreased as English came to dominate their lives. The weakening linguistic tie to their community is unsurprising. While the idealized “balanced bilingual,” a phenomenon in which a person is equally adept in two languages, has largely been discounted, a degree of home language maintenance still connects the speaker with their community and reifies their identity as a participant in that community (Valdés, 2001). In the U.S., however, “by the fourth generation, most individuals of immigrant background will have become
monolingual English speakers” (p. 43). Language maintenance is seldom a priority and language-minoritized students are expected to learn English as quickly as possible, while monolingual English-speaking students are encouraged to add multiple languages for possible social and financial benefits down the road (Kubota, Austin, & Saito-Abbot, 2003; McCollum, 1999; Muro, 2016; Valdés, 1997).

When looking at language classrooms, such as ESOL in which students learn English or Spanish in which heritage language students are learning “standard Spanish,” the implications for negotiating one’s identity can be profound. As mentioned above, teachers often promote linguistic achievement only of a “standard” or “academic” variety, as opposed to validating the home language practices of multilingual students. This marginalization is particularly damaging, because “when an individual is asked to reject their own language, we are asking them to drop allegiances to the people and places that define them” and in doing so we “demand of people that they suppress or deny the most effective way they have of situating themselves socially in the world” (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 66). Disempowerment can manifest in many ways. The positive associations with language as an indicator of membership in a community are challenged when the terminology embedded in the language, the prestige assigned to different languages and dialects, and the way individuals internalize disparagement all contribute to one’s identity and social positioning.

**Political Rhetoric**

While language is reflective of membership in a community, as well as one’s position of power and identity, political rhetoric bears all of these hallmarks of language
while also serving a specific function. The function of political rhetoric is “the public cultivation of emotion” conducted in such a way that the “government may attempt to influence citizens’ psychology directly” (Nussbaum, 2013, p. 20). For the purpose of this paper, rhetoric is operationalized as a particular type of political language used to incite fear and shape emotional responses of the public. Political rhetoric is language that comes from people in positions of power.

Social norms dictate the positioning of speakers, yet the language used by those in positions of power reflects more than simply establishing authority. Speech acts of the powerful are perceived as more important, influential, and credible than the speech acts of those in subordinate positions. Feminist and legal scholar Catharine A. MacKinnon (1987) stated “the beliefs of the powerful become proof” (p. 164). The positioning of the speaker bestows a sense of weight and gravity to the words they say and write, regardless of whether or not the utterance is grounded in fact. West (2012) summarized this position by noting “powerful and respected members of society get to do more, say more, have their words count for more, than do the powerless” (p. 244). The privileged status of these speech acts serves to influence others and shape the social and political environment, further cementing the status of the speaker himself.

The influential nature of political rhetoric from powerful people can shape the emotions of citizens in disparate ways. It can influence public perception and framing in the media during political campaigns, both positively and negatively, according to the intent and word choices of the speaker (Abramson, Aldrich, & Rohde, 2007). For example, Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign was marked by rhetoric that generated
emotions of hope amongst the public (Atwater, 2007). The tactic was successful, as he won two elections with this rhetorical framing. Yet political rhetoric can also cultivate fear, “making danger salient where it really exists, but also constructing the perception of danger where it does not” (Nussbaum, 2013, p. 322). In the wake of 9/11, for example, an analysis of speeches by President George W. Bush demonstrated the rhetorical construction of an Arab enemy, portrayed as animalistic terrorists and leading to a wave of hate crimes against Arab-Americans (Merskin, 2004). These perceptions of Arab-Americans persist to this day, demonstrating “how easy it is to sow the seeds of fear, how difficult it is to change fear’s architecture once destruction is accomplished” (Nussbaum, 2013, p. 333). When a speaker’s words hold authority by virtue of his position of political power, the general public is more likely to believe the threat of danger and subsequently perceive others from a place of fear.

When the fear cultivated by political rhetoric has a racial component, public tolerance of what is considered acceptable has shifted over time. Scholar Tali Mendelberg described a model of racial priming based on the extent to which the racial cue is explicit or implicit (2001). Subtle, implicit cues in coded language, such as equating “welfare” with people of color, have traditionally been accepted by the public in political speeches or advertisements and often benefit the candidate. Yet overt, explicitly racist language in which the speaker clearly names a group such as “blacks” or “African Americans” has largely been rejected by the public. Implicit messages allow for a political candidate to deny racial undertones of a statement, while also allowing voters to identify with the racist sentiment without categorizing themselves as a racist person. This
subtlety matters, as Mendelberg found racist messages were “communicated most effectively when no one noticed its racial meaning” (p. 4). On the other hand, a series of experiments using manipulated news articles and advertisements found the opposite to be true (Valentino, Neuner, & Vandenbroek, 2018). Researchers embedded an implicitly racist frame to newspaper articles, such as critiquing the Affordable Care Act by stating, “Why is it that we suburbanites play by the rules, go to work and have insurance, and then the city people want the rest of us to foot the bill for their health care?” (p. 762). They embedded an explicitly racist frame to the same story by quoting a candidate who said, “Why is it that the white Hartforders seem to play by the rules, go to work and have insurance, but Black people want the rest of us to foot the bill for their health care?” A third, non-political story about the Winter Olympics was included as a control. To the surprise of the researchers, they concluded “many citizens recognize racially hostile content in political communications but are no longer angered or disturbed by it” (p. 757). As the study used data from 2010-2012, researchers proposed President Obama’s election may have contributed to many white people’s perceived marginalization which, in turn, set the stage for public acceptance of President Trump’s overtly hostile and racialized campaign rhetoric.

Not only has public tolerance of what is considered acceptable shifted over time, but the way racialized rhetoric is employed by politicians has also changed in recent years. Implicit racism in coded language has been referred to as a “dog whistle,” an apt metaphor to illustrate how “modern racial pandering always operates on two levels: inaudible and easily denied in one range, yet stimulating strong reactions in another”
Dog whistles are characterized by subtlety and allow the speaker plausible deniability to charges of racism. Yet, in recent years, the subtlety of dog whistles has been replaced by more openly racist rhetoric. Political rhetoric now utilizes a linguistic device known as a \textit{racial figleaf} characterized as “an utterance made in addition to an otherwise overtly racist one, that serves the function of calling into question the racism of the speaker and the utterance,” and uses the metaphorical term \textit{figleaf} as it “provides a small bit of cover for something that is unacceptable to display in public” (Saul, 2017, p. 98). Instead of masking a racist sentiment in carefully coded language, the speaker makes a blatantly racist statement and provides an addendum to make the statement appear as though it wasn’t racist after all.

The use of figleaves normalizes racists beliefs and attitudes that would once have been characterized as too explicit to be accepted by the general population. For example, in his speech announcing he was running for U.S. president on June 16, 2015, then-Candidate Trump famously said, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best…. They’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime, they’re rapists, and some, I assume, are good people” (Time, 2015). After the bold claim that Mexicans are rapists, he provides a figleaf that there are also, perhaps, “good people.” This linguistic maneuver allowed Candidate Trump, and those with whom the sentiment resonates, to assert he does not believe \textit{all} Mexicans are rapists, nor does he have a problem with Mexicans in general; he is merely pointing out the people Mexico “sends” are problematic. In another campaign speech on December 7, 2015, Candidate Trump called for “a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's
representatives can figure out what the hell is going on,” followed by the caveat, "I have friends that are Muslims. They are great people -- but they know we have a problem" (Johnson, 2015). Similar to the statement about Mexicans, this form of political rhetoric explicitly names a specific group, constructs the perception of danger, and elicits emotions of fear, while also offering evidence the speaker, personally, does not have any racist beliefs due to the fact he has “friends that are Muslims.” This type of rhetoric shifts the perception of what is and is not considered racist and what sort of speech is acceptable in public discourse.

The positioning of the speaker offers authority and, by extension, permission for others to emulate these types of speech acts. There are a multitude of instances to illustrate how the sentiments behind racial figleaves in political rhetoric have been appropriated and adopted by the general population. A Latino man and his mother, for example, were doing yardwork in California when a woman accosted them, yelling “You’re all illegal. Go back to Mexico” (Vales, 2018). When the man asked why she hated them, she replied, “Because you’re Mexicans.” He told her they were honest people and she said, “Yeah, rapists. Even the president of the United States says you’re a rapist.” In another example, a man physically attacked a female employee at an airport in New York when he saw her hijab (Mele, 2017). He said, “Trump is here now” and “he will get rid of all of you,” a reference to President Trump’s statements about banning or removing Muslims from the United States. By naming targeted groups (Mexicans, Muslims) instead of obscuring in euphemisms or dog whistles, these examples illustrate how the explicitly racialized nature of political rhetoric has become more mainstream. This type
of language is considered offensive by many, yet the impact goes beyond mere offense. In a panel discussion with CNN anchor Jake Tapper, comedian Trevor Noah explained, “It’s affected versus offended…. It’s easy to get caught up in things that offend people and not the things that affect people” (2019). There are tangible consequences when specific groups are targeted by name in the political rhetoric of the powerful. The figleaves offered to mitigate the racist nature of the statements have not shielded the targets from harassment and violence. For those who identify with the sentiments behind the figleaves, the appropriation of terminology and enactment of sociopolitical hostility and harassment persists.

**Dehumanizing Rhetoric**

Much like racialized political rhetoric, dehumanizing rhetoric is used to cultivate fear and a sense of danger amongst the public. The two types of speech are often intertwined and are sometimes indistinguishable from one another, as “dehumanization feeds on racism; without racism, it probably couldn’t exist” (Smith, 2011, p. 8). The difference is political rhetoric does not always lead to cruelty and suffering, while dehumanizing rhetoric is marked by the natural consequences of cruelty and suffering that come from its employment. Dehumanization occurs when “denying uniquely human attributes to others represents them as animal-like, and denying human nature to others represents them as objects” (Haslam, 2006, p. 252). The denial of the humanity of others is largely accomplished by the repeated words used to describe a particular group. These words can set the stage for subsequent physical violence, but that is not a necessary condition for dehumanization to occur. In the words of Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison,
“Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge” (2001, p. 419). The language itself causes harm, in addition to other forms of harm that may ultimately be manifested.

Historically, dehumanizing rhetoric has been effective at fostering hatred towards a particular group (Utych, 2018). One of the most extreme and oft-cited examples of dehumanizing language was by the Third Reich in Nazi Germany. Jewish people were referred to as Untermenschen (“subhuman”) and “vermin” so frequently, it became the backbone of the argument that Jewish people were not “fully” human, thus ushering in the barbarity of the Holocaust (Smith, 2011). Another example was the Rwandan genocide in 1994 when the term “cockroach” was used in reference to the Tutsi population that was subsequently slaughtered (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Indeed, “through the metaphors we choose and reiterate, we ‘make’ enemies” (Steuter & Wills, 2010, p. 153). To be clear, not all dehumanizing language ultimately leads to the horrific outcome of genocide. Yet dehumanizing language does allow for cruelty, oppression, violence, and injustice with a range of impacts. The following sections demonstrate instances of dehumanization throughout the history of the United States and the link to hostile rhetoric used today.

One of the most conspicuous examples of dehumanization in the United States is the enslavement of African Americans. The language of slavery in the American South in the 1800s frequently used animalization as a primary form of dehumanization, such as “beasts of burden,” “cattle,” or “dogs” (Jacoby, 1994). Positioning enslaved people as less than human allowed slave owners to absolve themselves of any moral misgivings
In the early 1900s, comparisons of African American people to “apes” began to appear in popular culture, a comparison research suggests is still present in the minds of Americans to this day (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008). These comparisons were made explicit in the media and in the public discourse during the presidency of Barack Obama in reference to both President Obama and First Lady Michelle (Apel, 2009; Parks & Heard, 2009; Wingfield & Feagin, 2012). Comparisons to animals serve to deny one’s humanity, justify denial of human rights, and negate the need to proffer human dignity.

In addition to animalization, there are other ways dehumanizing rhetoric positions individuals and groups as less than human. For example, objectification, animalization, and sexualization of women all go hand-in-hand (Morris, Goldenberg, & Boyd, 2018; Tipler & Ruscher, 2019). One of the most ubiquitous animalistic terms for women is “bitch,” a word for a female dog, but also used in reference to women in a great variety of situations (Anderson, 1999). This term is so pervasive, even efforts to reclaim the word as a badge of honor has been problematized by scholars who struggle to separate the dehumanization of the term with the potential for empowerment by women who appropriate and use the term in new ways (Ergun, 2008). The dehumanization of women is also strongly tied to sexualization. It comes as no surprise that in addition to “bitch,” terms such as “slut” are also commonly employed in order to reduce women to a sexualized object (Sobieraj, 2018). As dehumanizing language is the first act of violence that ushers in other forms of violence, the consequences for women can be severe. For example, research suggests men who indicated a strong association between women and
animals or objects were positively correlated with a willingness to sexually harass women and a stronger rape proclivity (Rudman & Mescher, 2012; Vasquez, Ball, Loughnan, & Pina, 2018). The violence encoded in the language can and does lead to physical violence against women.

Much has been written on the connection between dehumanizing rhetoric and anti-immigrant sentiments (Costello & Hodson, 2009; Epps & Furman, 2016; Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013; O’Brien, 2003; Utych, 2018). This particular type of rhetoric is not new in the United States. In the early 1900s, immigrants were described in dehumanizing language comparing them to conquering hordes and diseased organisms coming to “contaminate” the American people (O’Brien, 2003). The terminology has persisted throughout the years with more recent studies demonstrating that while anger and fear are common emotions elicited through anti-immigrant discourse, another emotional response is disgust stemming from the fear of “contamination” (Hodson & Costello, 2007; Utych, 2018). In addition, much of the broader societal discourse now centers on whether immigrants are “legal” or “illegal.” These terms are unique in that they imply a person’s entire existence is “illegal” and thus criminal, an implication not typically extended to other crimes or situations. Research suggests individuals who used this type of dehumanizing language in reference to Latinx immigrants are more likely to believe they are deserving of harsh treatment such racial profiling, deportation, or separation from their family (Hoops & Braitman, 2018; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). In this case, it is difficult to disentangle political rhetoric from dehumanizing rhetoric which results in sociopolitical hostility and harassment.
The rhetoric of the current sociopolitical climate echoes the dehumanization of the past with examples found in President Trump’s Twitter activity. In reference to immigrants, he tweeted, “Democrats are the problem. They don’t care about crime and want illegal immigrants, no matter how bad they may be, to pour into and infest our Country, like MS-13. They can’t win on their terrible policies, so they view them as potential voters!” (Trump, 2018b). The terminology about immigrant “contamination” that has existed for decades is reflected in President Trump’s view that immigrants “pour into and infest” our country. In addition, he has often engaged in animalization and has proudly referred to MS-13 as “animals.” For example, he tweeted, “Fake News Media had me calling Immigrants, or Illegal Immigrants, “Animals.” Wrong! They were begrudgingly forced to withdraw their stories. I referred to MS 13 Gang Members as “Animals,” a big difference - and so true. Fake News got it purposely wrong, as usual!” (2018a). In addition, the dehumanizing language of the President has not been limited to immigrants. In reference to his firing of White House staffer Omarosa Manigault-Newman, an African American woman, he tweeted, “When you give a crazed, crying lowlife a break, and give her a job at the White House, I guess it just didn’t work out. Good work by General Kelly for quickly firing that dog!” (2018c). As previously mentioned, the term “dog” has its roots in slavery.

As dehumanization has become more normalized in political rhetoric, people from marginalized and racialized groups have experienced abuse in a variety of ways. Citizens have participated in dehumanizing acts, such as the volunteer, unauthorized border patrol in New Mexico that “post near daily videos showing members dressed in
camouflage and armed with semi-automatic rifles holding groups of migrants, many of them Central American families seeking asylum, until U.S. Border Patrol agents arrive to arrest them” (Hay, 2019). Federal agents have participated in dehumanizing acts due to President Trump’s implementation of a family separation policy that persists to this day (Gonzales, 2019), despite a court order that came after “images of children in cages, leaked recordings of border agents mocking crying children, and other news of the extent and impact of the administration’s policy prompted a public outcry” (Human Rights Watch, 2019). With such extreme and well-documented actions, members of marginalized communities do not need to necessarily experience violence to live in fear of violence.

By extension, students from vulnerable and racialized groups have also experienced targeted abuse and violence in schools. As Pennycook (2016) stated, we cannot ignore the “permeability of the classroom walls” (p. 33). He explained “there is often a tendency to view classrooms as isolated spaces; classrooms are ‘just classrooms’” and suggests “by contrast, that classrooms are sociopolitical spaces that exist in a complex relationship to the world outside” (Pennycook, 2000, p. 90). That is not to suggest the outside world dictates what happens in a classroom; rather, it is difficult to separate a sociopolitical climate that impacts students, their families, and their communities from a school environment in which the name “Trump” has become shorthand for racist sentiments (Cook, 2017; Samaha et al., 2017). The problem is while some students are the target of dehumanizing rhetoric, other students identify with the racist sentiments and support the dehumanizing rhetoric. In language classrooms in which
students are asked to navigate their identity, their sense of place in social hierarchies, and their allegiance to their community beliefs, there exists ample room for sociopolitical hostility to escalate and intensify these loaded identity issues.

**Impacts of Sociopolitical Hostility**

During the 2016 election cycle, educators and researchers alike were alarmed at the unusual level of vitriol and hostility in sociopolitical discourse with many wondering how this climate would impact schools. Instances of students using the words of President Trump to bully peers have been in the news media hundreds of times since the 2016 election (Vara-Orta, 2018). According to the Centers for Disease Control, bullying is defined as “any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths… that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated” and can result in “physical, psychological, social, or educational harm” (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014). Moreover, the government website stopbullying.gov now considers bullying an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), which is “a potentially traumatic event that can have negative, lasting effects on a person” (Bullying as an Adverse Childhood Experience, 2017). This section reviews research on the ways in which the sociopolitical climate has permeated the classroom and the impact this climate has had on schools, teachers, and students.

**Research on Hostile Rhetoric in Schools**

A widely-publicized, open and closed question survey of 10,000 K-12 teachers and faculty members by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) during the 2016
presidential campaign found that 90% of respondents said the election had a profoundly negative impact on students (Costello, 2016). On the one hand, students who were pro-Trump would wield his name and rhetoric as an insult to their Latinx, LGBTQ, and Muslim peers. On the other hand, students who felt that President Trump’s speeches were targeting them specifically reported feeling terrified. According to the report, “over 2,500 educators described specific incidents of bigotry and harassment that can be directly traced to election rhetoric. These incidents include graffiti (including swastikas), assaults on students and teachers, property damage, fights and threats of violence” (p. 4). During this time, the word “Muslim” was so persistently tied with terrorism in the national discourse that leaders in the U.S. Department of Education made a statement and encouraged schools to take extra steps to protect their Muslim students as they are obligated to do under federal civil rights laws (Blad, 2016). While the SPLC survey demonstrated widespread and consistent patterns in student behaviors, it was not a scientific or peer-reviewed study and was not intended to be a representative sample. Furthermore, respondents included teachers, administrators, and counselors, but the report did not include a clear breakdown of grade levels or subjects, making it difficult to understand where, how, and under what conditions bullying linked to hostile political rhetoric took place.

In 2017, another nation-wide survey of 1,535 educators was administered by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access with 35 selective follow-up interviews (Rogers et al., 2017). This survey included secondary math, social studies, and English teachers. The teachers reported similar
responses to those in the 2016 SPLC study in terms of the greater sociopolitical discourse having a profound effect on their students. In this study, three primary themes emerged: The national discourse “heightened student stress and concerns about their well-being and the well-being of their families”; the “polarized and bellicose dynamics of the national political environment ‘spilled into’ classrooms and other school spaces”; and “national political rhetoric that personalized political conflict, challenged norms of civility, and inflamed social divisions prompted some students to target vulnerable classmates” (p. 28). As the sociopolitical climate “spilled into” classrooms, teachers witnessed negative emotional and academic impacts on their students from targeted groups; 44% of teachers reported students’ concerns about their well-being and that of their families impacted their attendance and ability to focus. In several cases, teachers reported students dropping out of school entirely. Furthermore, researchers found differences according to the racial population of schools. Predominately white schools had become more aggressive environments for racial and religious minorities and other vulnerable groups with greater instances of polarizing, derogatory, or contentious comments in class. In contrast, teachers in schools with predominately students of color saw increased stress, anxiety, and concern for safety among their students, in addition to increased absenteeism. This study echoes the findings of the 2016 SPLC survey and provides more clarity in participant selection and data collection, even though it is also an institutional report as opposed to a peer-reviewed study.

Vulnerable students can include students from a wide variety of disenfranchised and disempowered groups. However, immigrant students have seen the most tangible
impacts of the current sociopolitical climate. A nation-wide survey of 3,600 K-12 teachers from primarily Title I schools, many with large Latinx populations, explored the impact of harsh immigration rhetoric and policies of the Trump administration on schools (Ee & Gándara, 2019). Nearly 85% of respondents reported the real and perceived threat of ICE deeply impacted their immigrant students due to constant fear; 80% reported emotional and behavioral problems among their immigrant students. In addition, more than 60% of respondents saw increased absenteeism as students often hid at home for days at a time due to threats of immigration raids by ICE. As parents often missed work to hide as well, hunger was an ongoing problem for these students. In schools, the emotional impact was evident as researchers described how “the empty seats are a reminder to everyone in the class that some of their classmates are missing. It is clear that both teachers and students experience grief as though a classmate has died, when all of a sudden the student is no longer there and no one knows what has happened to him or her” (p. 19). In contrast to the SPLC (Costello, 2016) and UCLA (Rogers et al., 2017) study, researchers also analyzed survey data with a series of cross-classified multilevel models in addition to descriptive statistics. Results showed the percentage of white students in a school was a highly significant predictor of higher levels of impact of immigration activities ($\beta = .172, p < .001$), as bullying of immigrant students was more common in those schools. These findings support the UCLA (2017) assertion that predominately white schools had become more aggressive environments for minority students.

The responses to these surveys paint a picture of what has been happening as a result of the sociopolitical climate in recent years. However, it is possible the sampling of
teachers who were willing to participate in these studies influenced the results and the “Trump Effect” on bullying hasn’t actually been as dramatic as it appears. Moreover, even if students are appropriating the words of the president as a form of bullying, the problem could be a shift in how bullying is enacted as opposed to an increase in frequency. To answer this question, a study by Huang and Cornell (2019) examined school climate surveys administered to 155,000 seventh- and eighth-grade students in Virginia in 2013, 2015, and 2017. Researchers hypothesized students in areas that voted Republican in the 2016 election would have greater exposure to statements emulating or celebrating the political rhetoric of President Trump, resulting in increased bullying at schools. Mapping the 2017 survey responses onto election poll results, researchers found schools in areas that supported President Trump did, in fact, experience an increase in bullying (18% higher), particularly because of race or ethnicity (9% higher). Moreover, researchers found a 10-percentage point increase in voters supporting President Trump was associated with a 5% change in teasing at school because of race/ethnicity and an 8% change in bullying victimization. The 2013 and 2015 surveys did not demonstrate a significant difference in bullying in areas that voted Republican or Democrat. This study offers correlational evidence of sociopolitical hostility increasing, as opposed to solely changing the nature of, bullying in areas where President Trump’s dehumanizing political rhetoric is most likely to be embraced. Correlation does not equal causation, however, and more research is needed to determine a causal link between the words and behaviors of political leaders and bullying in school.
Examining this issue from the students’ perspective, a 2017 qualitative study analyzed open-ended written responses from 562 Latinx adolescents in Southern California to understand how they were experiencing political rhetoric that frequently targeted immigrants (Wray-Lake et al., 2018). The results were consistent with previous research; students reported experiences of marginalization and racism, feelings of anger at how they were portrayed in the media and, specifically, feelings of disgust at the words of President Trump himself. Researchers also found a cross-cutting theme of students’ recognition of injustice in the way they were portrayed in political rhetoric and the subsequent racism they experienced. As in the UCLA study (Rogers et al., 2017), students also reported fear and anxiety due to “a perceived lack of safety in the current immigration climate” which often “manifested in hyper-vigilant behavior such as avoiding public spaces, being afraid to go outside, or refraining from speaking their native language in public” (Wray-Lake et al, 2018, p. 200). Even though findings are consistent with prior research, the sole data source for this qualitative study was open-ended written responses. The lack of follow-up interviews or attempts to triangulate data could have contributed to missed opportunities to understand nuance or complexity in the themes and codes established by researchers.

In 2018, a study of sixth grade Latinx English Language Learner (ELL) students in Los Angeles, California used qualitative data and participation in the arts to understand children’s experiences with the perceived threats of President Trump’s immigration stances (Vega, 2018). Data collected between 2015 and 2017 included over twelve hours of observation, pre- and post-evaluations, theatre performances, art projects, journal
entries, and interviews with students, parents, teachers, and administrators. All of the ELL student participants were in a class for recently-arrived immigrants. Findings were consistent with similar feelings of anger, fear, and anxiety as seen in other large-scale studies, yet this study also demonstrated how immigrant students felt a sense of responsibility to enact practices of resistance and to create change in the future. For example, in a self-portrait drawing exercise, one girl named Marla draw herself as a police officer. In the picture, she also drew President Trump’s face crossed out in red. The researcher reflected that the “image powerfully suggests that to Marla, stopping Trump is part of her future identity equally important to her as becoming a police officer when she grows up” and noticed how “Donald Trump takes up space and importance in her personal life, so much so that she must include him in her self-portrait” (p. 132). Even though the students mentioned President Trump in class on a weekly basis and were keenly aware of his rhetoric, policies, and the potential impact on their families, the artistic endeavors of the classroom allowed the students to mitigate some of their fear by envisioning ways his power could potentially be limited. As much of the research on the “Trump Effect” on schools has focused on the damage done, this study offers a glimpse of hope and demonstrates ways teachers can change the narrative by empowering students through artistic expression.

Even though teachers can serve as a first line of defense against cruelty and bullying (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Pollock, 2017), researchers cannot ignore the challenges teachers have been facing in taking action. To understand what teachers’ responses have been to hostility in the broader sociopolitical discourse, Dunn et al.
(2018) conducted a nationwide survey of K-12 teachers across multiple subject areas in 2016. Specifically, they wanted to understand how the local context, the national sociopolitical climate, and teachers’ sense of agency influenced their pedagogical decisions and actions. A survey with open-ended questions was completed by 724 K-12 teachers across 43 states. Teachers reported issues such as student attitude and age-appropriateness as influencing factors in their actions, but they also felt that:

- their pedagogical choices were affected by the contexts of their school and/or district, including (a) parental stances on the election, (b) support (or lack of support) from fellow teachers, (c) their perceptions of the administrative stance (support, discouragement, or uncertainty), and (d) direct administrative communication or explicit policies (for or against). (p. 456)

Researchers did not, however, establish consistent patterns based on states or regions of the country, suggesting a wide variety of contextual factors influencing teachers’ pedagogical decisions. Moreover, researchers found many teachers choose to take a “neutral” stance of avoidance and did not participate in political discourse with their students. The researchers noted that in their attempts “to remain neutral, teachers are, in fact, enacting the opposite of neutrality—choosing to maintain the status quo and further marginalizing members of certain groups” (p. 465). Other teachers purposefully ignored the official policies and perceived outside pressures to remain “neutral,” and instead, used their class as an opportunity to discuss heated sociopolitical topics and bring a new perspective that their students may not encounter in their home or community. These
actions occurred even with teachers who reported a diminished sense of autonomy and agency at their school. Finally, researchers suggested:

    future research may consider the individual and demographic factors that shaped teachers’ pedagogical decision making in the wake of the 2016 presidential election. Specifically, how did their prior experiences, beliefs, and values inform what and how they chose to teach? (p. 468)

In other words, what is still unknown is the degree to which teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in the classroom, their beliefs on teaching for social justice, and their sense of agency and autonomy influence the actions they ultimately take.

Overall, both qualitative and quantitative research have contributed to the body of knowledge examining the “Trump Effect” in recent years. However, as with all research, there are limitations. The SPLC study (Costello, 2016), ACLU study (Rogers et al., 2017), and study of schools with large Latinx populations (Ee & Gándara, 2019) all used large-scale surveys of teachers to understand how the sociopolitical climate was impacting students, but limitations of survey data include self-reported responses, self-selected participants, and data which can be difficult to triangulate. Huang and Cornell (2019) corroborated the surveys’ findings, but correlational data does not establish a causal link between sociopolitical hostility and bullying. Qualitative studies with student participants, such as with Latinx adolescents (Wray-Lake et al., 2018) and sixth grade ELL students (Vega, 2018), further support assertions that the “Trump Effect” has been real, damaging, and, at times, traumatic for students. However, the Latinx adolescent students participated in a written survey without follow-up interviews, and researchers
missed the opportunity to ask clarifying questions to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of students. The sixth-grade ELL students were not followed over time, making it unclear whether or not their participation in the arts helped mitigate the “Trump Effect” long-term or only helped them to process their emotions during the class. Finally, Dunn et al. (2018) conducted an open-ended survey immediately after the 2016 election not only to determine its impact on students, but to understand how teachers responded. They identified several factors influencing teachers’ pedagogical choices, primarily their experiences, beliefs, and sense of agency, but did not determine how these factors were related. As a result, research is needed to explore the extent to which these factors influence teacher action, and what actions are being taken by teachers.

**Student Trauma**

While teachers grapple with what is to be done about sociopolitical hostility, students from marginalized or targeted groups have experienced anxiety, fear, and trauma. Trauma occurs when a child “feels intensely threatened by an event he or she is involved in or witnesses” (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.). The event can be anything ranging from bullying at school to violence in the home. The common thread between the varying types of trauma is the fear of harm, either psychological or physical. Research suggests childhood trauma, including peer victimization or bullying, negatively affects the physical and mental health of adults later on (e.g. Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2015; Hébert, Langevin, & Daigneault, 2016; Mersky, Janczewska, & Topitzes, 2017). For students who have experienced fear for their families or for their
own safety, there is potential to experience trauma as a result of the rhetoric in the broader sociopolitical discourse and the bullying in schools that mimics the discourse.

According to Sondel et al. (2018), the potential for political trauma caused by the 2016 election was influenced by several key factors. The researchers determined the primary factors included: President Trump’s “history of allegations and lawsuits for engaging in racist business practices and sexual violence against women” prior to being elected; anxiety caused by then-Candidate Trump’s campaign promises, such as “deportations of undocumented people” and “‘banning’ Muslims”; the “offensive discourse used by the president and many of his supporters” when describing women and immigrants; and reports that “hate crimes against women, people of color, and religious minorities spiked throughout and immediately after the campaign” (p. 176). Because students may experience trauma as the result of dehumanizing political rhetoric, the researchers asserted “it is unacceptable to avoid these issues or remain neutral,” as neutrality involves “avoidance and normalization of political trauma, or asserting that every viewpoint, including those that endorse oppressive views and challenge basic human rights, deserve equal weight in the classroom” (p. 183). In response, the researchers developed a pedagogy of political trauma that “serves the democratic and emancipatory purposes of education while simultaneously alleviating and/or mediating trauma caused by events in the political sphere” (p. 179). The pedagogy of political trauma outlines three ways teachers could mitigate the traumatizing “Trump Effect” on their students. First, researchers suggest responding with socio-emotional pedagogy which includes providing comfort to students, creating opportunities for processing, and
protecting safe spaces. Second, teachers can cultivate students’ civic knowledge and capacities by teaching about official policies and elections, and promoting civic dispositions through an emphasis on kindness, tolerance, and perspective-taking. Third, teachers can support students in activism and resistance by analyzing issues of equality, teaching about activism and social movements, and engaging with direct action alongside students. Through this three-pronged approach, teachers can take actions which mitigate the political trauma experienced by their students while integrating the strategies as part of an over-arching social justice approach to teaching.

A case study of a white fifth-grade teacher and her class of predominately Latinx and African American students illustrated how a pedagogy of political trauma can be enacted (Payne & Journell, 2019). The teacher taught Social Studies and English Language Arts for two classes of 48 total students. Using data from the 2016-2017 school year, researchers analyzed field notes from classroom observations, audio-recordings of student discussions, teacher interviews, and student artifacts. They sought to understand how the teacher addressed students’ anxiety stemming from political rhetoric while simultaneously furthering their knowledge of election procedures and how a system of checks and balances operates. The day after the 2016 election, for example, the teacher first offered students the opportunity to process and discuss the election results. She reassured them their school and community were safe and they were loved and valued, addressing the socio-emotional aspect of a pedagogy of political trauma. Following the second tenant of a pedagogy of political trauma, she then provided counter-evidence to the students’ fears to demonstrate President Trump could not single-handedly enact all of
his campaign promises, developing their civic knowledge and understanding. Finally, the teacher focused students’ attention to the actions within their control, such as speaking up when they heard racist or sexist remarks from classmates, to make activism more accessible and concrete. Throughout these lessons and activities, researchers saw evidence of classmates showing empathy and caring for one another. However, the teacher encouraged students to engage in “appropriate” discussions when viewing videos of President Trump’s speeches without first unpacking how “appropriateness” or “civility” are racialized assumptions and constitute a different, not superior, set of communicative and social practices. In spite of these limitations, the enactment of a pedagogy of political trauma served to mitigate some of the anxiety and fear students expressed as a result of President Trump’s political rhetoric and election. Future research should continue to investigate how teachers enact a pedagogy of political trauma, particularly in secondary contexts that have yet to be explored as well as contexts such as language classrooms in which the course content is often closely tied to sociopolitical discourse.

A pedagogy of political trauma supports students who have experienced anxiety, fear, or trauma while also educating students who repeat the rhetoric and behaviors that causes this fear. In order to encourage empathy and address a socio-emotional pedagogy for students exhibiting aggressive or bullying behaviors, teachers can also introduce previously unconsidered perspectives through counter-narratives. Drawing on critical race theory, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define a counter-narrative “as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the
margins of society)” (p. 32). These stories may be personal, first-hand encounters; retelling the stories and sharing the experiences of others; or composite stories that tell the experiences of groups of people through compilation of various data sources. This is not to say counter-narratives are fictionalized; rather, they are stories grounded in real-life experiences. Teachers don’t have to necessarily have lived through every experience personally in order to share, uplift, and amplify the experiences of others. The sharing of counter-narratives is one way teachers can challenge hostility they may witness from their students by offering a humanizing and empathetic perspective on the topic at hand (Goodman, 2011; Milner & Howard, 2013).

Language Classrooms as a Site for Change

As all of the different aspects of language are present in foreign/world language (FL) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, language teachers are an especially important, yet under-researched, population. These subject areas reflect the obvious perspective of language as a learnable entity, but also language as membership in a community and language as reflective of power and identity. Indeed, researchers of language education have sought to understand how teachers incorporate issues of power, privilege, identity, and equity into their curriculum and instructional practices for quite some time (Glynn, Wesely, & Wassell, 2018; Osborn, 2005). In the current sociopolitical climate, these issues continue to be particularly salient in the language classroom.

Hostile and dehumanizing political rhetoric is often targeted toward the students who are in language classes. For example, ELL and Latinx students have been of particular interest to researchers seeking to understand experiences of the “Trump Effect”
(Ee & Gándara, 2019; Vega, 2018; Wray-Lake et al, 2018). Yet, ELL students are not isolated in their ESOL classroom, and FL classes often have a mix of native-English-speaking students and students who are native or heritage speakers of another language, particularly Spanish (Burgo, 2018). Moreover, a study of rural FL and ESOL teachers demonstrated how both dealt with “discriminatory stereotypes about racial, ethnic, and linguistic difference that permeated their work with students and colleagues” and both positioned themselves in resistance to “dominant ideologies and educational policies and constructed themselves as agents of change in the classroom, the school, and the community at large” (Fogle & Moser, 2017, p. 73). The racialized nature of Spanish often portrays both ELLs and heritage learners negatively (Flores & Rosa, 2015) and language teachers have reported problems in their classes when the Spanish language is equated with immigration as a whole (Acheson, Taylor, & Luna, 2016). Latinx teachers of Spanish find themselves navigating aggressive behaviors and attitudes from students, parents, and colleagues because of both their own racialization and the subject they teach (Okraski & Madison-Schenck, 2020).

It is not only teachers of Spanish and ESOL who are included under the language teacher umbrella. For example, teachers of German must contend with repeated instances of Swastika graffiti and teachers of Arabic must contend with Muslim-Americans being equated with terrorism (Samaha et al., 2017). In all of these classroom spaces, students navigate their own identities (Norton Pierce, 1995) and membership in their communities (Heath, 1983) which may have strong feelings about the language, and, by extension, speakers of the language. Students may feel empowered or disempowered according to
the prestige of the languages being learned and their positioning in the social structure of
the classroom (Lippi-Green, 2013; Norton & Morgan, 2013). Nonetheless, teachers who
are “advocates of critical approaches to second language teaching are interested in
relationships between language learning and social change” (Norton & Toohey, 2004, p.
1). When dehumanizing political rhetoric permeates the walls of language classrooms,
this study seeks to understand how teachers position themselves in resistance.

**Teaching as Resistance**

Activist bell hooks developed a *pedagogy of hope* (2003) that serves as one of the
central theoretical frameworks of this dissertation to understand how teachers attempt to
mitigate dehumanizing comments or behaviors that stem from sociopolitical hostility.
Drawing on poststructural theory (Norton & Morgan, 2013; Weedon, 1987), critical
feminist theory (hooks, 1991, 2000; MacKinnon, 1987), and social justice pedagogy
(Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2001), a pedagogy of hope posits that teaching is political and can
be an act of resistance to dominant ideologies. hooks acknowledged that “teachers who
care, who serve their students, are usually at odds with the environments wherein we
teach. More often than not, we work in institutions where knowledge has been structured
to reinforce dominator culture” (2003, p. 91). Even so, a pedagogy of hope centers on the
possibility for change. Under this framework, change requires educators and students
alike to undergo shifts in their thoughts and, equally as important, shifts in their actions.
Developing a deeper understanding of inequitable political and societal structures is a
crucial part of the process. Students from disenfranchised or vulnerable groups need
teachers to serve as advocates and position themselves in resistance to dominant
ideologies and social structures that perpetuate their disempowered positioning. Students from privileged groups need teachers to guide their thinking and help foster understanding of the dominant ideologies and social structures from which they have benefitted. Engaging in resistance is not only the work of the disenfranchised. As hooks explained:

By making the personal political, many individuals have experienced major transformations in thought that have led to changing their lives: the white people who worked to become anti-racist, the men who worked to challenge sexism and patriarchy, heterosexists who begin to truly champion sexual freedom. (p. xiii)

Dominant social structures, when named, examined, and understood, can then be challenged and dismantled. This practice also applies when ubiquitous political rhetoric brings these structures and power dynamics to the forefront, both in and out of schools. Pennycook’s (2000, 2016) notion of the permeability of classroom walls illustrates how classrooms are not just classrooms but are situated in a broader sociopolitical context. As sociopolitical hostility permeates classroom walls, students from the dominant culture can become cruel and hostile towards those from targeted groups. Yet naming this problem is only one part of the equation; a pedagogy of hope demands examination of the actions teachers have taken in response. Indeed, “serving students well is an act of critical resistance. It is political” (hooks, 2003, p. 90).

**The Myth of Neutrality**

Enacting a pedagogy of hope and viewing teaching as resistance are not universally embraced ideals. Teachers from privileged or dominant groups continue to
insist that “teaching is a politically and ideologically neutral activity and that classrooms are, and should be, isolated from the politics of the school, district, state, country, and world” (Balderrama, 2008, p. 40). Parents, administrators, and community members also maintain the traditional notion that “neutrality is the only morally appropriate approach for teachers to take when broaching political or social issues in their classes” (Journell, 2016, p. 6). Yet, education is not a neutral enterprise; by the very nature of the institution and the privileging of cultural norms of the dominant group, educators are involved in a political act, whether or not they intend to be (Apple, 2004; Anyon, 1980; Giroux, 2001). More precisely, “teaching is political in the sense that power and privilege—through decisions about funding, curriculum, class size, testing, tracking, and other matters of policy and practice—exacerbate rather than ease social class and race inequalities” (Nieto, 2006, p. 1). Moreover, schools are not insulated from the politics of the country (Pennycook, 2000), particularly during times of an intense sociopolitical climate. As teachers, “all our silences in the face of racist assault are acts of complicity” (hooks, 1995, p. 19). Whereas a pedagogy of hope foregrounds action to mitigate harm to vulnerable students, the opposite is also true; teachers’ purported neutrality, silence, and inaction in response to dehumanizing comments and behaviors signal implicit agreement with the underlying message.

When students from privileged or dominant groups attend school, they are already positioned by the larger sociopolitical world to be given more leniency and clemency than their classmates from vulnerable or marginalized groups (George, 2015). This positioning stems from power dynamics that are reified in language; the terminology and
linguistic choices by those in positions of power serve to uphold inequitable social structures in which dominant and marginalized groups operate (MacKinnon, 1987). More specifically, hooks (2003) described how language used in mass media messages is an effective and powerful force to perpetuate negative stereotypes of marginalized or vulnerable groups. By merely walking through the doors of the school, students are already positioned in disparate ways. Moreover, even if the school were a truly neutral space, students do not abandon their identity and the societal contexts that shape that identity.

There are myriad examples of the ways in which students from dominant and marginalized groups are portrayed differently in the mass media. For instance, when Brock Turner was convicted of rape, news headlines often led with the fact he was an accomplished swimmer at Stanford. The excessive sympathy extended to him points to a “tendency to let historically dominant agents get away with murder—proverbially and otherwise—vis-à-vis their historical subordinates” (Manne, 2017, p. 201). In this case, the interruption of a white heterosexual male’s swimming and academic career was portrayed as the real tragedy. On the other hand, 12-year-old Tamir Rice was shot dead by police for playing with a toy gun in a park. An analysis of online news coverage revealed the African American child was portrayed as “a noncompliant and threatening subject” and the police were portrayed as “reacting out of concerns for public safety” (Stone & Socia, 2019, p. 330). This framing is consistent with research that African American boys are more likely to be perceived as older, less innocent, and more responsible for their actions than their white peers (Goff, Jackson, DiLeone, Culotta, &
DiTomasso, 2014). The language used to describe individuals from dominant or marginalized groups contributes to the overall perception and stereotypes of all people from that group, including students.

As hooks (2003) reiterates, school is not a neutral space. One of the consequences of the negative portrayal of vulnerable or marginalized groups in the mass media is systematic and pervasive shame, directly influencing students’ educational experiences. This shame can be dehumanizing and traumatic, further perpetuating the subordinate positioning of those being shamed. What’s more, “a pervasive sense of shame is the ongoing premise that one is fundamentally bad, inadequate, defective, unworthy, or not fully valid as a human being” (Fossum & Mason, 1986, p. 5). In the current sociopolitical context, hostile and dehumanizing political rhetoric has been amplified in the media and shown to permeate classroom walls, in some cases extensively. Teachers opting for a stance of neutrality and silence can be damaging for students who witness their teacher’s lack of support. Teacher neutrality is particularly salient for Latinx students who have heard Mexicans called “rapists” by then-Candidate Trump (Time, 2015) or Muslim students who have witnessed the implementation of a “Muslim ban” because of, as Candidate Trump described, the “dangerous threat…by people that believe only in Jihad” (Johnson, 2015). In addition, women, African-Americans, and members of the LGBTQ community have also been disparaged publicly by President Trump’s rhetoric (Sondel et al., 2018). When this rhetoric appears in the mass media and students feel shame as a result, a pedagogy of hope demands that teachers consciously choose not to remain neutral, but to openly position themselves as supporters and advocates for their students.
Shame is not only a barrier to learning; shame dehumanizes. As hooks explained, “There can be no better place than the classroom, that setting where we invite students to open their minds and think beyond all boundaries to challenge, confront, and change the hidden trauma of shame” (2003, p. 103). Teaching, therefore, cannot be considered neutral. Teachers either position themselves in resistance to dominant structures that harm vulnerable students or perpetuate these structures through silence.

**White People Can Change**

A pedagogy of hope can empower vulnerable students who have been disempowered, yet those are not the only students in the classroom who can experience transformation. Indeed, “to successfully do the work of unlearning domination, a democratic educator has to cultivate a spirit of hopefulness about the capacity of individuals to change” (hooks, 2003, p. 73). The work of cultivating change in students from white, middle-class, heterosexual, or other dominant groups can be a delicate balance. However, it is also important to note that “white-supremacist thinking can be taught by teachers of any race” (p. 79). When people in marginalized groups align their notion of success with appropriateness, obedience, and other social norms—without examining who benefits from these behaviors—they can unwittingly contribute to inequitable systems that privilege the dominant group.

Even though hooks (2003) is unwavering in her belief that individuals can change, she does not proclaim the work is easy. Taking a straightforward or direct approach to introduce the issues of inequitable social structures is not always helpful. Reflecting on her experiences attempting a straightforward approach, hooks noted,
“When people feel directly threatened (as in ‘You are labeling me as a racist or sexist’) they simply shut down or become crazily defensive” (p. 107). Stopping the conversation before it really begins does not help individuals to shift their mindset or embrace diverse viewpoints. On the other hand, it is not only the person in need of transformation who struggles with these conversations. The teacher, too, has to avoid the tendency to view people from dominant groups as a threat to be feared or an enemy to be avoided.

Recognizing the counterproductive nature of this type of thinking, hooks expressed her own challenges when addressing such individuals and reflected, “When I demonize them or see them as only and always capable of being enemies, I become part of the problem and not part of the solution” (p. 75). Dismissing an individual with the label of “sexist” or “racist” does not allow for anyone to move forward or change.

Acknowledging the difficulties of the work does not mean the work can be ignored; the ramifications of change towards a more just and equitable society affect all groups and all must be involved in the process. Yet, it is still important to recognize what is being asked of those from the dominant group. As Norton Pierce (1995) explained, identity is mutable and depends largely on power relations and positioning. When one’s identity is tied to the language, culture, beliefs, and practices of a community that embraces a white, middle-class, heterosexual, patriarchal dominant culture, a degree of vulnerability is required to relinquish the more powerful positioning and eschew cultural norms. Recognizing this vulnerability, hooks (2003) asserted:

To ask folks to change, to surrender their allegiance to white supremacy, then to mock them by saying that they can never be free of racist thinking is an
abomination. If white folks can never be free of white-supremacist thought and action, then black folks/colored folks can never be free. It is as simple as that.

(p. 57)

It is possible to both recognize and affirm the work of individuals in privileged positions to resist and challenge systems of domination while also critiquing the systems of domination that enabled their privilege in the first place. Criticism of social structures does not equate to criticism of individuals. Indeed, racist or sexist thinking is not permanent or immutable, as hooks has witnessed firsthand “how easy it is for individuals to change their thoughts and actions when they become aware and when they desire to use that awareness to alter behavior” (p. 39). The challenge, then, is to determine what mechanisms help make this awareness possible.

Conversations and the exchange of ideas are hallmarks of a pedagogy of hope and can establish a point of entry for raising awareness without demonizing students from the dominant culture. For hooks, one point of entry is “the sharing of personal narratives to remind folks that we are all struggling to raise our consciousness and figure out the best action to take” (2003, p. 107). A personal narrative can also create trust and deescalate tensions. The importance of trust in the context of facilitating difficult conversations cannot be overstated. In a dialogue with hooks, Ron Scapp explained how trust “allows folks who usually hesitate before speaking or remain silent to begin to address their own prejudice or habitual reactions. They engage in critical dialogue” (p. 108). By establishing an environment in which people engage in an exchange of ideas, there is then an opportunity to offer counter-narratives to challenge their thinking. That is not to
suggest educators should adopt a “neutral” tone or treat all perspectives as equally valid. When a student’s perspective is grounded in the dehumanization or oppression of others, teachers can and should position themselves in resistance. Still, as hooks has explained, dismissing or refusing to engage with those who hold dehumanizing beliefs is in contradiction to a pedagogy of hope. A pedagogy of hope centers on the possibility for change. It does not describe a possibility for change without struggle.

**Consciously Choosing Both/And**

The power dynamics, community beliefs, and cultural practices of students from each end of the social hierarchy can be vastly different. However, a pedagogy of hope does not position these two groups at odds with one another. In fact, “either/or thinking is crucial to the maintenance of racism and other forms of group oppression. Whenever we think in terms of both/and we are better situated to do the work of community building” (hooks, 2003, p. 37). When people from privileged or dominant groups are provided with new information about systems of inequity, they often experience feelings of fear, guilt, anxiety, or discomfort resulting in defensive or dismissive responses. Yet when people are willing to entertain new ideas and consider the perspective of others, they often frame their experience as healing, freeing, or liberating (Goodman, 2011). Similarly, when people from vulnerable or marginalized groups are able to name the structures that establish social hierarchies, they can then recognize how their positioning is not an individual failing. Indeed, change can occur when individuals are able to understand how their own internalization of dominant narratives does not mean they, personally, established the inequitable system of domination in which they live. In other words,
teachers should recognize how students from both groups can experience transformation when they are provided the opportunity to examine, understand, and challenge systems of domination.

Transformation stemming from thoughtful reflection on new perspectives and new information is not only the work of students. Teachers are often among the “most reluctant to acknowledge the extent to which white-supremacist thinking informs every aspect of our culture including the way we learn, the content of what we learn, and the manner in which we are taught” (hooks, 2003, p. 25). Dismissing the perspectives of others is a common reaction for people from privileged or dominant groups. Individuals from these groups “may avoid situations they fear will challenge their self-concepts,” which is important to understand, because “most people believe that they are good and caring” and therefore “are often concerned that they will find out how prejudiced they are or feel badly when they realize their role in perpetuating the oppression of others” (Goodman, 2011, p. 60). Avoidance, however, does not contribute to growth or change. As a result, teachers’ transformation is not compatible with a stance of “neutrality” as it perpetuates their own unenlightened status. For transformation to occur, teachers must engage in thoughtful reflection, as many have been “challenged as educators to examine the ways in which we support, either consciously or unconsciously, existing structures of domination. And we have all been encouraged by democratic educators to become more aware, to make more conscious choices” (hooks, 2003, p. 45). These conscious choices, then, can inform action. Teachers can choose to remain “neutral” when hostile sociopolitical rhetoric is repeated in the classroom, but that is a decision to avoid.
resistance of the dominant structures that serve to disenfranchise, disempower, and shame vulnerable students. Teachers can also choose to engage their students in difficult conversations, address students from privileged groups in a nonthreatening manner, and support the socioemotional well-being of students experiencing fear or trauma. When working with students from such disparate groups, adopting a both/and approach is fundamental for approaching teaching as resistance.

A pedagogy of hope emphasizes that conscious choices, reflection, and understanding occur alongside concrete action. Action is the mechanism by which change is manifested, as awareness and understanding are important, but insufficient on their own. Underscoring how the two are intertwined, hooks (2003) explained:

Both exercises in recognition, naming the problem but also fully and deeply articulating what we do that works to address and resolve issues, are needed to generate anew and inspire a spirit of ongoing resistance. When we only name the problem, when we state the complaint without a constructive focus on resolution, we take away hope. (p. xiv)

In the context of sociopolitical hostility in schools, there are numerous problems to name. However, a pedagogy of hope dictates that the next steps include action. As such, this study seeks to contribute to the scholarly dialogue by providing an enhanced understanding of teacher action when addressing students from both privileged and marginalized groups through the lens of teaching as resistance.
Chapter Summary

This review of the literature demonstrated the complexity of language in different contexts and for different purposes. Throughout the chapter, the research and theoretical contributions of women, particularly women of color, were foregrounded in alignment with an overarching critical feminist theoretical orientation (hooks, 1991). These perspectives informed the argument that viewing language learning exclusively through the lens of linguistics is insufficient; the interconnectedness of language, identity, and power cannot be ignored (e.g. Block, 2007; Kramsch, 2009; Lin, 2007; Miller & Kubota 2013). The possibility for change and a focus on action, particularly in language classrooms, were also recurring themes throughout the chapter that reflect a critical feminist theory approach (Norton & Toohey, 2004).

Learning another language can have implications for identity negotiation (Kramsch, 1996; Norton Pierce, 1995) while language practices in communities signal membership and reflect cultural norms (Heath, 1983; Kramsch & Widdowson, 1998). Language also reifies power dynamics and positioning by the use of words that, for example, diminish women or demonize people of color (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Mendelberg, 2001). In addition, language reifies power when dominant or privileged groups determine which languages and dialects are the social norm (Fairclough, 1989; Lippi-Green, 2012; Milroy & Milroy, 1985). When people in positions of power engage in dehumanizing political rhetoric, their words are perceived to carry authority and thus grant permission to citizens to not only repeat what they hear,
but also enact violence against those named and demonized in public statements (MacKinnon, 1987; Merskin, 2004; Nussbaum, 2013; Vales, 2018).

As schools operate within, not distinct from, the sociopolitical structures of society, dehumanization in the public sphere affects students and teachers in the classroom (Pennycook, 2016). The problem is not only the bullying behavior of students (Samaha et al., 2017; Vara-Orta, 2018) or trauma stemming from fear and anxiety (Vega, 2018; Wray-Lake et al, 2018); teachers, too, face a host of problems enacting a pedagogy of hope. Like students, teachers are not immune to the emotional impact of seeing empty desks when their students skip school to hide from ICE (Ee & Gándara, 2019). Often, teachers have not received guidance on what actions to take, even if they want to position themselves in resistance to the sociopolitical hostility and subsequent trauma (Sondel et al., 2018). Language teachers, both FL and ESOL, are a particularly important population due to the fact that their subject areas reflect the issues associated with language learning and identity, as well as the sociopolitical issues that affect speakers of different languages.

The review concludes by examining what actions might be taken by teachers to address the problem of dehumanization in a hostile sociopolitical climate (hooks, 2003). Teaching is a political act, regardless of claims to the contrary (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2001; Nieto, 2006). Yet teachers are fearful of parents or administrators who might complain if they address contentious sociopolitical issues, thus considering a “neutral” stance the safest option (Journell, 2016). At the same time, there are multiple groups to be considered within a classroom context. A social justice approach to education enables
teachers to both empower their disempowered students and encourage critical reflection in their privileged students (hooks, 2003). A belief that white people and those in other dominant groups can change is paramount to maintaining a hopeful view of the power of education. This pedagogy of hope is in alignment with critical feminist theory in that they both maintain a pragmatic focus on action in order to create change. In the next chapter, I apply these principles to the methodology employed in this research study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

I think that teachers absolutely have a moral obligation to create change within society and the reason is because we say things like, “We’re creating equitable educational experiences for all students.” But really, we can’t do that until we remove a lot of systemic barriers within society as well.

— Juanita, K-5 Spanish teacher

The impact of dehumanizing political rhetoric on schools, teachers, and students in the United States has been well-documented (e.g. Ee & Gándara, 2019; Samaha et al., 2017; Vara-Orta, 2018), but what has not been explored is how language teachers, specifically, have experienced the consequences of this type of hostility in their own classrooms or how it has informed their practice. The purpose of this mixed methods study was, first, to determine how different factors influenced language teachers’ actions as they attempted to mitigate the impact of sociopolitical hostility and, second, to understand the actions that were ultimately taken. The population of the study was foreign/world language (FL) teachers and English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) teachers in the United States due to the fact sociopolitical rhetoric has targeted both students in these classrooms and speakers of the languages teachers are attempting to teach. This chapter describes the research design and methodology employed in this study, participants in each phase, development of instruments, and analytical procedures.

Research Design

Mixed methods design is a useful approach to answering research questions by using both quantitative and qualitative data, as "neither qualitative nor quantitative methods are sufficient, by themselves, to capture the trends and details of a situation"
One of the purposes of using different methods is for one approach to aid in the development of another (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Therefore, I chose a mixed methods explanatory sequential design that occurs in two distinct yet interactive phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The first phase of this design involved the collection and analysis of quantitative survey data, which then influenced the participant selection and development of semi-structured questions used during qualitative interviews. This design is commonly used in mixed methods, as the “quantitative survey approach best fits the need to understand the views of participants in an entire population” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 7), while the “qualitative methods typically provide interpretive resources for understanding the results from the quantitative research” (Morgan, 1998, p. 369-370). In addition, research designs involving surveys and surveys with follow-up interviews were used by other researchers who have explored the impact of our sociopolitical climate on schools with both teacher and student participants (Costello, 2016; Dunn et al., 2018; Ee & Gándara, 2019; Rogers et al, 2017; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Thus, mixed methods research represents an appropriate methodology for the current study as it is consistent with other prominent studies on the topic.

All research has a philosophical foundation, yet mixed methods research requires a plurality of philosophical paradigms to shape the theoretical lens, methodological approach, and data collection of the study (Alexander, 2006; Greene, 2007; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2017). In this study, philosophical assumptions stem from pragmatist epistemologies which are problem-centered, pluralistic, and real-world oriented (Creswell
Pragmatism emphasizes practical solutions to answering questions, with room allowed for a constructivist and postpositivist lens aligned with different parts of the research design. It is not uncommon for some aspects to require distance and impartiality, such as with a quantitative survey, and some to require closeness and subjectivity, such as qualitative interviews (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In accordance with this pragmatist worldview, the current study aligns with an ontology that recognizes both singular and multiple realities through quantitative and qualitative research questions, as well as an axiology that represents multiple stances as a researcher attempting to answer the questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). These philosophical assumptions were also reflected in the poststructural (Norton & Morgan, 2013; Weedon, 1987), critical feminist (hooks, 1991, 2000, 2003; MacKinnon, 1987), and social justice (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2001) theoretical underpinnings that guided the study. Just as a pragmatist epistemology is pluralistic in nature, so, too, are principles of these critical theoretical orientations. Finally, these philosophical perspectives influenced the methodological approach and data collection of the study. Indeed, “no one would argue that a single method—or collection of methods—is the royal road to ultimate knowledge” (Lincoln et al., 2017, p. 138) and mixed methods “often will provide the most informative, complete, balanced, and useful research results” (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 129). With this in mind, the study utilized quantitative data that required researcher objectivity and expanded upon survey results through in-depth qualitative interviews, requiring researcher subjectivity. Plurality, again, guided the selection of methods and data collection for this study.
For the purpose of this study, pragmatism not only established epistemological, ontological, and methodological stances, but also served as an additional paradigm. While it is true that part of the appeal of pragmatism is “the practical demands of the problems are primary” (Greene et al., 1989, p. 257), it should not be dismissed as merely a strategy for answering questions. Indeed, “pragmatism presents a coherent philosophy that goes well beyond ‘what works’” (Morgan, 2014, p. 1051). Drawing on Dewey’s (1997) model of inquiry, a pragmatic paradigm posits that the purpose of research is not only to contribute to scholarly conversations in academia, but also to contribute to the betterment of the human condition. Research centering on human rights, equity, and dignity can then be applied to create change, such as making research accessible for public education, informing social policy, and contributing to community transformation (Denzin & Giardina, 2010). Reducing mixed methods research to methodological choices “leaves little space for issues connected to empowerment, social justice, and a politics of hope” (Denzin, 2010, p. 420). Moreover, another tenet of a pragmatic paradigm is the continual interaction of beliefs and actions as opposed to a commitment to an abstract set of philosophical principles. Much like bell hooks’s pedagogy of hope (2003) in which reflection and action operate in tandem, a pragmatic focus on action “leads to questions about what difference it makes not only to acquire knowledge one way rather than another (i.e., the procedures we use), but to produce one kind of knowledge rather than another (i.e., the purposes we pursue)” (Morgan, 2014, p. 1049). In other words, examining the social and political dimensions of research requires a distinction between pragmatism as practical methodology and pragmatism as paradigm.
The current study included decidedly social and political dimensions aiming to determine how different factors influenced teachers’ actions while describing the actions ultimately taken in the context of a hostile sociopolitical climate. In other words, when vulnerable students were dehumanized and students from dominant groups emboldened, the study sought to understand what was done and why (Dunn et al., 2019; Huang & Cornell, 2019). Additionally, this study followed Creswell and Plano Clark’s (2017) recommendation for mixed methods researchers to develop three types of questions: a quantitative question, a qualitative question, and a mixed methods research question. The reason was “this subdivision highlights that results from the quantitative and qualitative datasets are both important and that the two datasets will be combined or integrated in a study” (p. 165). With this recommendation in mind, I developed the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between language teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school, their beliefs on social justice, their sense of agency, and the actions they take?
2. How do language teachers attempt to mitigate dehumanizing beliefs and practices in the current sociopolitical climate?
3. How do the quantitative results and qualitative findings combine to provide an enhanced understanding of teachers’ actions in a hostile sociopolitical climate?

These questions reflected my pragmatic stance in both methodological considerations and philosophical paradigms that not only documented teachers’ actions but will inform
future action and advocacy when the results are made public and accessible to teachers, administrators, and policy-makers.

To answer these questions, a mixed methods explanatory sequential design was used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The first phase of this design was the quantitative strand (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). To begin, I developed the data collection instrument following recommended best practices in survey item and scale construction (Dillman, 2011; Chyung, Roberts, Swanson, & Hankinson, 2017; Peterson, 2000). Items were developed using prior research on sociopolitical hostility and teacher action (Dunn et al., 2018). Items included teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility, their beliefs on social justice, and their sense of agency and autonomy. The six-week field period (Lambries, 2008) and online distribution (Stern, Bilgen, & Dillman, 2014) maximized participation. Finally, statistical analyses were conducted and results then informed the next phase of the study.

The second phase was the qualitative strand (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The quantitative results guided the participant selection and interview protocol development (Greene et al., 1989). Seven participants were selected for a semi-structured phone interview. The qualitative phase sought to understand the experiences of teachers and sociopolitical hostility in relation to the actions they decided to take. Contextual factors, such as the demographics of the school, shaped the experiences of students and, consequently, the experiences of teachers (e.g. Ee & Gándara, 2019; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Rogers et al., 2017). In addition, survey results demonstrated a belief in social justice pedagogy along with personal experiences with hostile incidents at school was
predictive of teacher action, more so than the teachers’ sense of autonomy. As a result, interview questions addressed perceptions of a teachers’ role in society and what actions can be taken in the classroom to promote critical thinking and social justice. The responses were transcribed and coded by the researcher.

The third and final phase of an explanatory sequential study was the integration of data from both the quantitative and qualitative strands (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). In this study, integration consisted of expanding on the survey results with qualitative interviews, connecting the quantitative results with the qualitative data collection, displaying the results that link the survey results with the qualitative research questions, and interpreting the survey results with information from participants who could best illuminate and expand on the results. Figure 3.1 depicts the model developed to design and implement the mixed methods study.
Phase I: Quantitative Approach

Quantitative research is associated with a postpositivist philosophical perspective (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This paradigm aligns with an ontology that views “reality as singular and independent from the researcher,” an epistemology that requires “distance and impartiality,” and an axiology that encourages researchers to “use checks to eliminate bias” (p. 37-38). Quantitative methods are reflected in these philosophical beliefs. One such design is nonexperimental or descriptive research that seeks to “answer research questions about the current state of affairs, identify factors and relationships among them, and create a detailed quantitative description of phenomena” and therefore provide “a snapshot of the feelings, opinions, practices, thoughts, preferences, attitudes,
or behaviors of a sample of people” (Kalaian, 2008, p. 728). Surveys are one common example of nonexperimental quantitative design to address these types of research questions.

**Participants**

Institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to the start of data collection. Participants were made aware their responses would be confidential and they would not be contacted for follow-up interviews unless they volunteered to provide their contact information at the end of the survey. The population of the study was all K-12 language teachers in the United States and the sample included teachers using non-probability methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The Qualtrics survey was distributed nationwide through social media to seek “‘true-volunteer’ samples by placing adverts in public spaces for potential participants to view and respond to if they wish” (Hewson, 2017, p. 66). In addition, snowball sampling was used, a method that begins with “a small pool of initial informants to nominate other participants who meet the eligibility criteria for a study” and “is a useful way to pursue the goals of purposive sampling in many situations where there are no lists or other obvious sources for locating members of the population of interest” (Morgan, 2012b, p. 815-816).

During survey data collection, high response rates can reduce the risk of bias (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008). In the current study, some teachers may have chosen to participate because they were interested in the topic or because they had strong feelings about the topic, yet nonresponse bias remains a risk in all survey data collection (Villar, 2008). Therefore, teachers from a variety of settings were invited to participate in order to
encourage a diverse range of perspectives and better illustrate the experiences of teachers and students in language learning contexts. Teachers from all types of schools, such as charter, dual language, private, or public, were included in the call for volunteers, as were teachers from grade levels K-12. While FL teachers are in a unique position to teach languages that have been disparaged in the sociopolitical discourse, contributing to my interest in this population, prior research indicated ESOL students were particularly impacted by sociopolitical rhetoric, thus warranting the inclusion of their teachers (e.g. Ee & Gándara, 2019; Vega, 2018). In addition, the majority of FL programs in the U.S. are in secondary schools, and ESOL and bilingual teachers comprise a small percentage of the K-12 workforce as only 20 states required a special certification distinct from a general educator license (Education Commission of the States, 2014; Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011). Thus, the population of language teachers in the U.S. was small enough to warrant a combination of language learning contexts.

There were 671 participants who completed at least one section of the survey. The 614 participants who completed all sections were included in analysis. All 50 states and the District of Columbia were represented. Responses were grouped by nine geographic divisions as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau (1995) (see Figure 3.2).
Figure 3.2. Number of survey participants by geographic division.

Note. Division 1: New England (n=47); Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont; Division 2: Mid-Atlantic (n=66); New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania; Division 3: East North Central (n=70); Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin; Division 4: West North Central (n=68); Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota; Division 5: South Atlantic (n=150); Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, District of Columbia, West Virginia; Division 6: East South Central (n=75); Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee; Division 7: West South Central (n=55); Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas; Division 8: Mountain (n=38); Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming; Division 9: Pacific (n=42); Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington; Other (n=3); Teachers currently out of the country.

Instrument

Quantitative data were collected using a researcher-developed survey (see Tables 4.3 and 4.4 for survey items). Similar to an exploratory sequential design in which qualitative findings inform question development for a subsequent quantitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), findings from a qualitative, open-ended survey determined variables for the current study (Dunn et al., 2018). To clarify, a variable is something that varies in value as opposed to a constant, which does not vary in value. Variables that cannot be observed are also known as latent variables, factors, or constructs (Hancock, 2004). Definitions must be assigned to these latent variables for the purposes of a specific study. In addition, latent variables “such as attitudes, feelings, and
motives are valuable because, in the context of a well-reasoned theory, they have the potential to explain a wide array of behavioral processes using a relatively small number of constructs” (Hoyle & Duvall, 2004, p. 301). In this study, “variables” and “constructs” refer to items on the survey before analysis, while “factors” are determined after analysis. These variables included teachers’ experiences (items 1-8, divided into two parts such as 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, etc., totaling 16 items), social justice beliefs (items 10-20), sense of agency (items 22-30), and the actions they took (items 32-39). In addition to these 36 items, 12 demographic questions were included for a total of 56 close-ended questions. There were also optional open-ended items with text boxes at the end of each of the four sections.

Item development was guided by recommendations for best practices in survey research. Peterson (2000) recommended survey items be “brief, relevant, unambiguous, specific, and objective” (p. 50). Therefore, the survey used as few words as possible in each item and each item served a specific purpose. Words or phrases that may be subject to interpretation were clarified. For example, “sociopolitical issue” was followed by the examples “immigration, climate change;” “changing a lesson” was followed by “teachable moment;” and “promoting social justice” was followed by “equity, kindness, tolerance.” Items were written to be specific, but not too specific, and the survey avoided words such as “always” or “never” in addition to making sure the item addressed only one topic at a time. Some survey items were worded negatively to avoid acquiescence response bias in which participants default to agreement or positive answers (Holbrook, 2008). However, as negatively worded items can be easily overlooked, these items
emphasized words such as “not” in the statement and were grouped together (Chyung, Barkin, & Shamsy, 2018). In addition, questions worded about personal perspectives are often answered differently than questions that pertain to a larger societal group, and both types were included in this survey for more balanced responses (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Yet, when a shift in context occurs, one question can affect the responses for subsequent questions (Dillman, 2011). Social desirability can also affect responses, as participants answer according to what they think will portray them in the best light, not what they truly think (Callegaro, 2008). Therefore, participants did not have the possibility to revisit previous questions on this survey to prevent social desirability changes. Finally, the survey went through several rounds of revisions in an attempt to ensure each item was as objective as possible and would be acceptable to teachers from all political affiliations and beliefs. These revisions included input from in-service K-12 language teachers, doctoral students, professors, and people outside of academia (Dillman, 2011).

Participants clicked Likert scale radio buttons for all sections, with the exception of the section regarding the frequency of participants’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school or classroom. These items were measured with a slider scale in order to provide more precise answers. Research suggests most people prefer slider and radio button formats equally, and both formats result in similar validity and reliability (Bosch, Rebilla, DeCastellarnau, & Weber, 2019), although slider scales can more difficult for some participants (Chyung, Swanson, Roberts, & Hankinson, 2018). Slider scales were measured from 1-5, with 1 “Never happened” and 5 “Happened a lot” while
all other items on the survey were measured on a 6-point Likert scale. When a researcher wants to ensure participants make a choice or an option of “neutral” is either not applicable or not helpful, an even number of forced-choice categories is appropriate (Peterson, 2000), although no more than six options is recommended (Dillman, 2011). Moreover, there is concern “respondents may use a mid-point as a dumping ground when they are responding to survey items that are unfamiliar to them, or items that are ambiguous or socially undesirable” (Chyung et al., 2017, p. 17), further explaining the decision for a 6-point scale. In addition, research suggests response scales should be presented in ascending order (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, Never Happened to Happened a Lot) as opposed to descending order, as descending response scales are more susceptible to the primacy effect in which respondents default to the option at the beginning, or left side, of the response list (Chyung, Kennedy, & Campbell, 2018). Therefore, all items in the survey were presented in ascending order. Finally, the issue of missing data and incomplete surveys is a challenge for researchers. If all items require a response to proceed, the data will be more complete and avoid data missing at random; on the other hand, requiring a response may result in a “breakoff” in which data are missing after a certain point in the survey (de Leeuw & Hox, 2008). The required response option, with the exception of optional text boxes for elaboration, made sense because the variables were grouped and completion of one section could still provide usable data.

Data were collected via an anonymous online Qualtrics survey. As many online surveys are answered on a cell phone as opposed to a computer, I avoided matrices or
other question formats that would be difficult to navigate on a small screen (Stern et al., 2014). The field period, or the time frame when data were collected, was six weeks between September 1 and October 12, 2019 (Lambries, 2008). As “the purpose of the survey is directly related to the field period that is established,” I chose six weeks to accommodate the varying start dates of schools across the country (p. 278). To maximize responses, I made the survey available through a variety of sources (Fowler, 2013). The link was distributed through social media, Special Interest Group (SIG) email lists and message boards from various professional organizations, and through personal and professional contacts. The survey link was posted to state, regional, and national FL and ESOL organizations on Facebook and Twitter as well as personal accounts. The survey link was shared, retweeted, reposted, and copied to emails; I was aware of some of these instances and others I was not. Examples include: The Critical and Social Justice Approaches SIG of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages message board; the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese newsletter; the American Association of Teachers of German listserv; the Alabama-Mississippi Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages Facebook group; and the Southern Conference on Language Teaching Twitter account. States that had few responses after three weeks were contacted by email through their state-level FL and ESOL professional organizations to request their assistance with survey distribution by email or social media, such as the Foreign Language Association of North Carolina, in addition to state-level FL and ESOL coordinators, such as the ESOL coordinator for the state of Oklahoma. Finally, the survey link was emailed to personal and professional contacts
across the country, who then, in turn, forwarded the email to their own contacts, such as former colleagues, practicing K-12 teachers, university professors, and former college classmates. Due to the nature of distribution, it is impossible to determine the number of individuals who were reached to establish a response rate.

Variables

A multitude of influences shape teachers’ actions in the classroom on a daily basis (Pine, 2009). Drawing on prior research, the variables that influence action specifically due to sociopolitical hostility are the focus of the current study. Dunn et al. (2018) collected data immediately following the 2016 election to understand how teachers’ pedagogical decisions had been affected. They concluded that overlapping and competing variables shaped teachers’ decisions with three being particularly salient, including: Teachers’ experiences with students from different demographics and these students’ reactions to the rhetoric and proposed policies of President Trump; beliefs on whether teachers should be politically neutral or should engage in the active resistance of racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia; and teachers’ sense of agency and autonomy in relation to colleague and administrative support, official policies and directives, and parental influence. While researchers were able to establish that these contextual variables were influential, they did not determine how they are related.

As a result, the four critical variables of interest for this study are teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility (as indicated by incidents in their school or classroom), teachers’ beliefs on their role in enacting a social justice pedagogy (as indicated by responses to prompts of what teachers should and should not do in the
classroom), and teachers’ sense of agency and autonomy (in relation to parents, administration, and colleagues) as they relate to action (in terms of social justice) within a sociopolitical context. For this study, the sociopolitical context “takes into account the larger societal and political forces in a particular society and the impact they may have on student learning” and “considers issues of power and includes discussions of structural inequality based on stratification due to race, social class, gender, ethnicity, and other differences; it also includes the relative respect or disrespect accorded to particular languages and dialects” (Nieto, 2001, p. 56). Specifically, the sociopolitical context refers to political rhetoric stemming from the 2016 election cycle that is racist, sexist, xenophobic, or otherwise dehumanizing in nature. The societal context also refers to the aggressive actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the behaviors of American citizens towards vulnerable groups named in political rhetoric, and the fear, anxiety, and trauma caused by the policies and decisions of President Trump. Within this sociopolitical context, construct definitions are as follows:

- **Experiences** are the extent to which teachers have seen, heard, or otherwise witnessed: students mimicking the rhetoric of President Trump to insult, mock, or ridicule another student; derogatory remarks or behaviors towards immigrants, Muslim Americans, students from the LGBTQ community, or other vulnerable groups; and/or students experiencing an increase in stress, anxiety, fear, or concern for their well-being or that of their family (Rogers et al., 2017). In this research context, these behaviors could merely be an easily-accessible form of bullying, but they may also be reflective of racist, sexist, or xenophobic beliefs
held by students. Regardless of motivation, these behaviors and beliefs, as observed by teachers, are the focus of this study.

- **Social justice beliefs** is the extent to which teachers identify with a social justice approach to teaching that “challenges, confronts, and disrupts misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes,” provides emotional resources to students such as “a belief in all students’ ability and worth,” draws on students’ talents and strengths including “their languages, cultures, and experiences,” and creates an environment that “promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change” (Nieto & Bode, 1998, p. 12). In this study, social justice beliefs refer to how teachers conceptualize their own role as an agent for change through the pedagogical decisions they make in the classroom. If teachers believe they should take action as previously listed, they are considered to be in alignment with a social justice approach to education.

- **Teacher agency** for social justice operates “within the complex interrelations of teachers’ individual and collective sense of purpose, competence, scope of autonomy and reflexivity” and includes “meaning making of their present structures (roles and resources) and cultures (relational and ideational contexts)” (Pantić, 2015, p. 765). Specifically, teacher autonomy in the current study considers “levels of collaboration and collective agency for social justice,” “perceptions of school cultures and principal’s leadership,” and “broader education policy and socio-cultural contexts” (p. 766). In addition to teachers’ perception of support from administration and colleagues, this study also
considers fear of complaints from parents and what teachers do when their belief in a social justice pedagogy conflicts with official policies or directives.

- **Action** in alignment with social justice beliefs (Nieto & Bode, 1998) and a pedagogy of hope (hooks, 2003) can take place with individual students and in whole-class contexts. For teachers, “both exercises in recognition, naming the problem but also *fully and deeply articulating what we do* [emphasis added] that works to address and resolve issues, are needed to generate anew and inspire a spirit of ongoing resistance” (hooks, 2003, p. xiv). Such actions include but are not limited to: challenging students who make racist, sexist, or xenophobic comments; developing lesson plans to address specific social justice or sociopolitical topics; and changing lessons in the middle of class to create teachable moments. This study focuses on teacher action to create change and enables teachers to both empower their disempowered students and encourage critical reflection in their privileged students.

These constructs were used to develop the survey questions by including several of the word choices and concepts in each definition (see Table 3.1).
Table 3.1

Constructs and Example Survey Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Example survey items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>Q4. I have heard derogatory language or slurs about immigrants in my classroom / at my school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q5. I have heard derogatory language or slurs about Muslims in my classroom / at my school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q8. My students have expressed concern about what might happen to them or their families (such as with ICE, worries about deportation, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Q11. It is my job as a teacher to plan lessons that challenge students’ preconceived ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q12. It is my job as a teacher to present multiple perspectives on issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q16. It is not a teacher’s responsibility to address society’s problems. (reverse coded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Q25. I think parents at my school are likely to complain if they don’t like the topics I discuss in my classroom. (reverse coded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q26. My administration is supportive of classroom lessons or discussions that promote social justice (such as equality, kindness, tolerance, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q28. My colleagues and I agree on how sociopolitical topics should be addressed in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Q33. I have developed lesson plans specifically to address a social justice-related topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q35. I have changed a lesson plan due to a student making derogatory or hostile comments (i.e. “teachable moment”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q38. I have changed a lesson plan specifically to avoid the possibility of students responding with derogatory or hostile comments. (reverse coded)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quantitative Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted to answer the second research question: What is the relationship between language teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school, their beliefs on social justice, their sense of agency, and the actions they take?
Data downloaded into Excel from Qualtrics were exported and analyzed using SPSS data analysis software version 25.0 (IBM Corp, 2017). The data were cleaned by listwise deletion which involves removing respondents who did not complete the survey in its entirety. Among the multiple methods for handling missing or incomplete data, “listwise deletion is the least problematic” (Allison, 2002, p. 84). Descriptive statistics for participants and teaching contexts ensured diversity of responses. Descriptive statistics for each survey item included the mean and standard deviation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) (Kaiser, 1974) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1950) were conducted to show the data were well-suited for a factor analysis. The KMO tested the strength of relationships among items while Bartlett’s test of sphericity tested the overall significance of all the correlations within the correlation matrix (Pett, Lackey, & Sullivan, 2003). A varimax with Kaiser Normalization rotation was performed in an effort to produce a smaller number of important variables to simplify and facilitate interpretation (Foster, Barkus, & Yavorsky, 2005). Varimax is a type of orthogonal rotation method that assumes the factors in the analysis are uncorrelated (Brown, 2009). The goal of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was to provide a smaller number of latent variables for greater interpretability (Osborne, 2015). This test was conducted to establish factor structures. Sample size for an EFA should aim for 10 to 15 subjects per initial item, which for this study would be 360 to 540 participants (Pett et al., 2003). Cronbach’s alpha (1951) was used as the measure of internal consistency reliability as well as overall survey reliability. In the regression model, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to determine the
degree of the relationship between the factors (Kalaian, 2008). In addition, “the most common statistical methods used for prediction purposes are simple and multiple regression analyses,” which were also conducted (p. 728). When using multiple regression for prediction purposes, the minimum required sample size for four predictor variables is 440, which was met with the inclusion of 614 participants in the current study (Knofczynski & Mundfrom, 2008). A hierarchical linear regression was conducted in order to include multiple predictors in the analysis (Field, 2009).

**Statistical Assumptions**

For an EFA, an assumption of multivariate normality implies that all of the factors being considered and the linear combinations of those factors are normally distributed. In addition, the KMO test measured sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity checked the assumption of equal variances and factorability (Pett et al., 2003). An assumption of Cronbach’s alpha is the use of multiple items to calculate relatability as opposed to single survey items (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Therefore, the analysis was conducted using composite scores for each construct. The Pearson correlation coefficient \( r \) assumptions state the variables are normally distributed and the relationship under investigation is linear (Chao, 2018). Multiple regression analysis includes an assumption of normality in which all variables are normally distributed, an assumption of linearity that shows the relationship between the IV and DV is linear, and an assumption of homoscedasticity that shows the errors, or residuals, are normally distributed (Mertler & Reinhart, 2016). However, for sample sizes of 500 or more, even extreme violations of
the assumptions of normality have been shown to have nearly 95% confidence interval regression coefficients (Lumley, Diehr, Emerson, & Chen, 2002).

**Reliability and Validity**

When conducting quantitative survey research, reliability refers to the instrument providing consistent results, while validity establishes whether or not the responses accurately measured what the survey intended to measure (Litwin, 1995). A survey instrument could be considered reliable whether or not the results are valid. Internal consistency refers to how well a survey measures what it sets out to measure and is often expressed as Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient with 0.70 or more generally accepted as representing good validity (George & Mallery, 2003). The Pearson correlation coefficient, or r value, shows the strength of the linear relationship and is also considered to show a high level of validity when the coefficient is 0.70 or higher (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003). When designing the survey, items were assessed by individuals outside of academia to ensure understandability, or face validity, as well as by individuals with expertise for content validity (Litwin, 1995).

A threat to validity in online survey research is misreporting or response error (Dew, 2008). Misreporting occurs when participants are untruthful or inaccurate in their answers, either intentionally or unintentionally, which then limits the validity of conclusions that can be drawn from the data. As this survey was distributed online through Facebook, Twitter, and email, it is possible a person who is not actually a language teacher presented themselves as such, and it is also possible a language teacher answered questions inaccurately on purpose. The survey did not include a way to verify
teacher identity, such as requiring an email address or name of a school, to ensure true anonymity. However, due to the fact the survey was distributed primarily through Facebook and Twitter networks of teachers, as well as email through listservs and personal connections, misreporting did not appear to be an obvious issue.

**Ethics**

While there are many ethical considerations when conducting research, the key is “to consider the perspectives of everyone involved in the research process… and to keep in mind the principles of individual choice, honesty, and minimal risk” (Ritter, Kim, Morgan, & Carlson, 2013, p. 57). Ethical concerns begin with participant recruitment. Snowball sampling “poses a distinct risk of capturing a biased subset of the total population of potential participants because any eligible participants who are not linked to the original set of informants will not be accessible for inclusion in the study” (Morgan, 2012b, p. 816). Therefore, I contacted teachers from as many different geographic, contextual, and demographic populations as possible in an attempt to include a representative sample. Another ethical concern in survey research is how sensitive data is handled. IRB approval for this study stipulated personal information and survey responses be kept in on a password-protected computer and in the university-affiliated Google Drive, procedures which have been carefully followed. In addition, participants were made aware of these precautions and were also notified before beginning the survey they were free to abandon the study at any time without consequence, ensuring minimal risk of harm and emphasizing their personal choice in participation.
Phase II: Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is associated with a constructivist philosophical perspective (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Ontologically, “the constructivist researcher views reality as multiple and actively looks for multiple perspectives from participants,” in addition to an epistemology requiring “closeness and subjectivity” and an axiology in which researchers apply personal interpretations (p. 37-38). Following the explanatory sequential mixed methods design, survey responses contributed to the selection of participants and the development of the semi-structured interview questions. The interviews served to explain the quantitative data and offer more in-depth understanding of the ways in which teachers act for social justice in a hostile sociopolitical environment.

Participants

Participants for the qualitative phase of the study were selected from the pool of survey participants. In this phase, “the goals of the research emphasize an in-depth and highly contextualized understanding of specific phenomena, and such goals are well-suited to small sample sizes” (Morgan, 2012a, p. 799). Although there is not a universally-recommended number of participants, the decision of whom to interview in this small sample size should be guided by the research questions and purpose of the study (Beitin, 2012). The qualitative phase of this study addressed the second research question: How do language teachers attempt to mitigate dehumanizing beliefs and practices in the current sociopolitical climate? Considering that the research question sought to understand what actions have been taken, participants who reported taking no action, regardless of the reason, would not help answer the research question. However,
the quantitative survey results provided an understanding of the relationship between teacher beliefs and actions, including those who believe they should be neutral.

Qualitative research acknowledges “that reality is not an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality” (Merriam, 1998, p. 22), contributing to the decision to include multiple perspectives through purposive, or purposeful, sampling. Central to the success of purposive sampling is the inclusion of “information-rich cases” from which “one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2015, p. 53). To select information-rich cases, all quantitative and qualitative survey responses were displayed in Excel. Participants who included contact information to indicate interest in a follow-up interview were grouped together with all other survey participants dismissed from the selection process. Out of 614 survey respondents, 180 provided contact information.

First, a round of magnitude coding was applied to all open-ended responses provided by the 180 potential participants (n=463) (Saldaña, 2013). Magnitude coding is “a method that applies numbers or other symbols to data and even to codes themselves that represent values on a scale” (p. 63). Comments from each of the four constructs were coded on a scale of one to three according to evidence of a high level of alignment with the construct, a low level of alignment with the construct, or a mixed response. Eight participants who indicated high alignment with the constructs and specific evidence of acting for social justice were selected (see Table 3.2). Their coded responses were then compared to their quantitative answers to gain a more complete understanding of these individuals. Next, attribute coding noted each participant’s subject area, teaching context,
state, political affiliation, race, age, and gender in order to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives (p. 69). This round of coding demonstrated the need to include more participants from different geographic regions, teaching contexts, and demographics to ensure diversity of perspectives. Of the remaining 172 respondents, participants were selected due to high quantitative scores, indicating a greater likelihood of acting for social justice, as well as demographics not included in the original sample. An additional six participants were selected for a total of 14 possible interviewees. Of these 14, seven participants responded to an email request to set an interview time. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their privacy.
### Table 3.2

**Magnitude Coding Examples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Alignment</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences</strong></td>
<td>High - 3</td>
<td>“Within the past 4 years, I have observed a significant decline in overall student moral - leading to poor behaviors, low motivation and poor performance. I have witnessed students becoming more and more distressed as time goes on, specifically my Latino/a students. I believe the message that they receive from the Trump Administration is that they are unwanted, unloved and unworthy human beings. This in turn impacts their behavior in the classroom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beliefs</strong></td>
<td>High - 3</td>
<td>“For language teachers... It requires a willingness and an ability to be vulnerable to publicly make a lot of mistakes over and over again. And if students are being racist or sexist or homophobic or whatever then all the students in the class are not getting the same fair shot at learning. I am not willing to leave behind girls or students of color or a queer students or Muslim students or immigrant students so that means that sometimes I may need to challenge more privileged students, so they can learn (what they're in school to do) and so that their classmates can learn as well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agency</strong></td>
<td>Mixed - 2</td>
<td>“I am very discouraged due to the current social climate. I feel I can discuss sociopolitical topics with very few people including colleagues, friends or family because our experiences and opinions are so different. My observation is that many develop opinions based on the news outlets they watch and the like-minded people they talk to regardless of the facts and are defensive when the source is questioned. Respectful debate seems impossible. Thank you for exploring this topic.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
<td>Low - 1</td>
<td>“Generally, in world language we are not discussing controversial content.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n=463*
Interviews

After analyses of the quantitative data, questions for follow-up semi-structured interviews were developed (see Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews are used when “the researcher knows enough about the topic or phenomenon to identify the domain… but does not know and cannot anticipate all of the answers” (Morse, 2012, p. 197). As the topic was previously explored in the quantitative survey, trends in the data were noted as well as particularly impactful comments. Question stems, or prompts, were planned in advance with spontaneous probing questions to elicit further elaboration occurring during the interview in accordance with participant responses (Patton, 2015). Each interview was conducted over the phone and lasted between forty minutes and one hour during a two-week period in November 2019. The interviews were audiorecorded to capture material for data analysis and reporting, along with providing accurate direct quotes (Morgan & Guevara, 2012). Interviews were conducted individually, but there are pros and cons to such an approach. Individual interviews contribute in-depth data and may provide more truthful or robust answers than interviews conducted in groups; on the other hand, individual interviews can be time-consuming, and participants may alter answers in an attempt to impress the interviewer or present themselves in a more positive light (Beitin, 2012). With this in mind, care was taken to avoid leading questions.

Throughout the interview process, questions were often posed in an illustrative examples format to avoid leading questions that might produce a response bias (Patton, 2015). Illustrative examples were used to clarify a question or provide context for a question, while the question itself remained open-ended. For example, when asking about
perceptions of the role of a teacher to facilitate change in society, I would sometimes say, “On the survey, some people reported that a teacher’s job is strictly to teach the content and to try to remain as neutral as possible, while others had strong beliefs that if they didn’t work to improve society, nobody would. For you, what do you think about the role of a teacher?” By providing illustrative examples, participants could then choose to side with the “neutral” teachers, the “social justice” teachers, or provide a different response.

Even though leading questions were avoided, qualitative research allows the researcher to approach the study with closeness and subjectivity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). In addition, interviews generally produce more in-depth understanding when researchers “use their investigations and interviews to explore phenomena about which they have prior or current member-based knowledge” (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012, p. 103). In other words, the fact that I was a high school Spanish teacher during the 2016 election and experienced sociopolitical hostility in my own classroom means I have prior member-based knowledge of the phenomenon. Furthermore, through friendships with practicing teachers, I maintain current member-based knowledge of how the phenomenon has changed over the years since I left the classroom. This information was not necessarily withheld from participants during the interviews but was discussed if I was asked or if the topic came up organically. As my experiences with students expressing sociopolitical hostility were largely negative, I also shared the less-intense experiences of other teachers to offer a more balanced perspective and avoid response bias. Overall, my member-based knowledge served as a valuable asset as I conducted interviews, built rapport, and gained a greater understanding of participants’ experiences.
During each interview, analytic memos were recorded in a notebook by hand. Analytic memos are informally written notes that can address “future directions, unanswered questions, frustrations with the analysis, insightful connections, and anything about the researched and the researcher” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 42). While the participant was speaking, I wrote down quotes that were surprising or elaborated on their survey responses, responses that connected with those of participants from other interviews, and responses that aligned with the theoretical frameworks guiding the study. These analytic memos helped clarify my thinking as I reflected on how the response fit within the larger study. Indeed, the objective of researcher reflexivity is “thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see” (Mason, 2002, p. 5). This reflexivity was particularly important for this phase of the study, as elements from the quantitative phase and the qualitative phase were beginning to align throughout the interview process.

**Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis is “the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). This process occurs primarily through the coding of data. Coding should occur during the data collection period, not only at the end, and researchers should maintain a codebook with the name of each code, a description, and an example (Saldaña, 2013). With this in mind, I recorded my thoughts and
observations related to coding in my notebook of analytic memos first during the interviews and again during the transcription process. These notes later helped inform the development of the final codebook. Initial transcription occurred simultaneously during the interviews by putting the participant on speaker phone and turning on the Voice to Text feature in Google Docs. This method transcribed the interview with approximately 75% accuracy. In the second round of transcription, I listened to the recording, corrected mistakes, and properly formatted the transcript.

Transcribed interviews were coded using NVivo 12 for Mac (2018). Both inductive and deductive approaches to coding were applied to the data. This practice is not uncommon, as “many researchers who use software combine grounded approaches to coding with more deductive processes. Even those who are following a prescribed method, or working within a particular paradigm, often want to be able to incorporate an element of flexibility” (Silver & Lewins, 2014, p. 88).

First, a provisional round of structural coding from a deductive approach was conducted using “codes based on what preparatory investigation suggests might appear in the data before they are collected and analyzed” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 266). Structural coding is particularly well-suited for analysis of semi-structured interviews and studies with multiple participants as it focuses the codes specifically on answering the research question. In this case, not only were prior empirical studies considered during the development of the codebook, but also theoretical frameworks, the results of the quantitative survey, and analytic memos from the current study.
These a priori codes were revised as the study progressed and were ultimately condensed into five categories: Permeability, neutrality, beliefs, actions, and contexts. The codebook included the name of the code, a brief definition, a detailed definition that included theoretical foundations, guidance of when to use and not use the code, an example from a participant, and the total number of references from all participants (see Table 3.3). The “when to use” criteria were developed from the a priori codes that prior research, theoretical frameworks, quantitative survey results, and analytic memos suggested would be likely. For example, the “action” category was coded for instances of counternarratives, drawing cultural parallels, leveraging curriculum, providing facts and information, exploiting teachable moments, and engaging in teaching as a form of resistance to focus “action” specifically on the type of action being investigated in this study. Moreover, as the research question sought to understand how teachers take action, other codes considered their teaching context, their views of what action constituted a social justice approach, and how they perceived “neutrality” in order to gain a more comprehensive interpretation of their actions.
Table 3.3

Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Full Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Resistance to sociopolitical hostility and intention to facilitate change.</td>
<td>Critical feminist theories “identify, critique, and seek to change inequities and discrimination” in order to “reform patriarchal ideologies that give rise to asymmetrical rights, opportunities, roles, and material circumstances” (Wood, 2008, p. 206). This perspective centers on practical impacts and pragmatic actions to mitigate the oppressive reality of those in subordinated positions (hooks, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to Use</td>
<td>Instances of counternarratives, cultural parallels, leveraging curriculum, facts and information, teachable moments, and teaching as resistance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Not to Use</td>
<td>Instances of action avoidance or actions not intended to facilitate change.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>“I would show videos that were taken from newscast and stuff that showed for example, in Munich, the people in Munich welcoming trainfuls of refugees with food and toys for the kids and diapers and just volunteering all over the place and opening up their houses.” - Leslie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Full Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Social justice approach to teaching.</td>
<td>The extent to which teachers identify with a social justice approach to teaching that “challenges, confronts, and disrupts misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes,” provides emotional resources to students such as “a belief in all students’ ability and worth,” draws on students’ talents and strengths including “their languages, cultures, and experiences,” and creates an environment that “promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change” (Nieto &amp; Bode, 1998, p. 12).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to Use</td>
<td>References to teaching content versus teaching the whole child, supporting vulnerable students, or challenging the unexamined beliefs of students; reflection of the role of a teacher in society.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Not to Use</td>
<td>Pedagogical approach that focuses solely on content.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>“For some people, it is a, like, spiritual or moral obligation to do this. Ya know, for somebody who takes that, like social justice kind of gospel of Christianity, and is like, this is something that God wants me to do, that’s going to trump what your boss says. That’s not my motivation, but it’s just more of this like moral obligation and my moral obligation to do right for my kids is more important than whether or not their parents complain or whether or not my boss is going to get mad at me.” - Juanita</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Full Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Factors that support or hinder action within the school, community, and broader society.</td>
<td>The context “takes into account the larger societal and political forces in a particular society and the impact they may have on student learning” and “considers issues of power and includes discussions of structural inequality” (Nieto, 2001, p. 56).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to Use</td>
<td>Demographic information that is relevant to the type of actions teachers take, mentions of support or lack of support in enacting a social justice pedagogy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Not to Use</td>
<td>Irrelevant contextual information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>If [the teachers are] kind of like, upset that the kid’s in their room, like, why is this kid in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
here if they don’t speak English, how am I supposed to help them? I’m not going to go to them, because I feel like... they resent the child existing in their room, and so I don’t... trust them. - Annabelle

References
74

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Neutrality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief Definition</td>
<td>Viewing oneself as neutral, apolitical, or without opinion while in front of students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Definition</td>
<td>Neutrality is the “avoidance and normalization of political trauma, or asserting that every viewpoint, including those that endorse oppressive views and challenge basic human rights, deserve equal weight in the classroom” (Sondel et al, 2018, p.183). However, “to remain neutral, teachers are, in fact, enacting the opposite of neutrality—choosing to maintain the status quo and further marginalizing members of certain groups” (Dunn et al, 2018, p. 465). In contrast, “serving students well is an act of critical resistance. It is political” (hooks, 2003, p. 90). In this case, serving students well requires resisting the dominant narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to Use</td>
<td>Mentions of avoiding a neutral stance, embracing a neutral stance, or a conflicted response in which both are present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Not to Use</td>
<td>Responses related to neutrality in situations other than sociopolitical or social justice issues in education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>“That’s exactly what I’ve said to several of my colleagues, I said, ya know, you realize that not having a position is sending a very loud and clear message to your students? And it is. Whether that’s what they desire or not.” - Erin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Permeability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief Definition</td>
<td>Teachers’ knowledge of student behaviors that reflect hostile political rhetoric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Definition</td>
<td>The “permeability of the classroom walls” suggests “classrooms are sociopolitical spaces that exist in a complex relationship to the world outside” (Pennycook, 2000, p. 90). Permeability, in this case, is the extent to which teachers have seen, heard, or otherwise witnessed: students mimicking the rhetoric of President Trump to insult, mock, or ridicule another student; derogatory remarks or behaviors towards immigrants, Muslim Americans, students from the LGBTQ community, or other vulnerable groups; and/or students experiencing an increase in stress, anxiety, fear, or concern for their well-being or that of their family (Rogers et al., 2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to Use</td>
<td>Instances occurring in the classroom or elsewhere in the school related to the sociopolitical climate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Not to Use</td>
<td>Instances unrelated to the sociopolitical climate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>“I remember one time, [my Latinx] students went to a pep rally and they came back and they were very visibly upset. Kind of pacing and upset, saying students had been screaming at them, they needed to go back to their own country.” - Annabelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then, thematic analysis was conducted through theoretical coding. The analytic goal was to “develop an overarching theme from the data corpus, or an integrative theme that weaves various themes together into a coherent narrative” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 267). It is also important to note that “the code is not the theory itself, but an abstraction that
models the integration of all codes and categories” (p. 268). Examining the interrelationships of categories helped establish three themes: Classroom permeability and possibility, curricula as safe harbor, and a discursive approach to social justice pedagogy.

**Assumptions of the Qualitative Method**

A constructivist philosophical perspective allows researchers to operate with closeness and subjectivity, apply personal interpretations to data, and seek multiple perspectives from participants (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). At the same time, “constructivists openly acknowledge that researchers need to do a careful critical analysis of themselves and be sensitive to how their values and biases influence the research situation” (Mertens, 2018, p. 36). This reflexivity and self-awareness can then inform how the researcher proceeds to address issues of social justice through the types of questions asked and the consideration of whose perspectives are included. Indeed, “I want a discourse that troubles the world, understanding that all inquiry is moral and political” (Denzin, 2018, p. 2).

In the current study, the constructivist assumptions of qualitative research extended to the incorporation of critical frameworks and ethical responsibility to use research for change. As qualitative researchers have “an obligation to change the world, to engage in ethical work that makes a positive difference,” scholars are “challenged to confront the facts of injustice, to make the injustices of history visible and hence open to change and transformation” (Denzin, 2012, p. 85). With this assumption in mind, the qualitative phase of the current study was designed to understand how teachers act for
social justice within the context of a hostile sociopolitical environment. As a former teacher, I remember feeling defeated when I didn’t know how to address the racially-charged and xenophobic rhetoric that came up in my classroom. It was a matter of trial and error. Therefore, the findings from this study and the social justice actions of teachers will be shared not only within the realm of academia, but in practitioner journals and at practitioner conferences so the actions can be replicated by teachers who need guidance. To be clear, it is not only qualitative researchers whose work can inspire change in the world; a “call to arms…. is directed to all scholars who believe in the connection between critical inquiry and social justice. Our tent is large. There is room for everyone” (Denzin, 2018, p. 2). All scholars can consider who benefits from their work and the implications of ethical research.

**Trustworthiness**

In contrast to the statistical validity and reliability of quantitative research, the validity of qualitative research is not easily measured. Instead, “the term trustworthiness refers to an overarching concept used in qualitative research to convey the procedures researchers employ to ensure the quality, rigor, and credibility of a study” (Morgan & Ravitch, 2018, p. 1728). Data validation processes, therefore, must align with the qualitative assumption that reality is multidimensional and ever-changing. The researcher should “provide the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author’s conclusion ‘makes sense’” (Merriam, 1998, p. 199). In doing so, the author clarifies and explains the interpretations of the findings.
One way qualitative researchers promote trustworthiness is through data triangulation. Data triangulation “includes seeking out two or more forms of data from diverse sources to build more comprehensive interpretations of a phenomenon” and “methodological triangulation is typically seen as the use of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches” (Morgan & Ravitch, 2018, p. 1730). In this study, triangulation of data occurred through comparing participants’ quantitative responses on the survey with their interview responses. Responses included both open- and closed-ended survey items, as well as composite scores for different sections. Another strategy to increase trustworthiness is explanation of investigator’s position in regard to the study (Merriam, 1998). This positioning has been made clear throughout the study by acknowledging my member-based knowledge while also practicing critical reflexivity to ensure I noted findings that differed from the responses of other participants. In fact, “the qualitative researcher should expect to uncover some information through informed hunches, intuition, and serendipitous occurrences that, in turn, will lead to a richer and more powerful explanation of the setting, context, and participants in any given study” (Janesick, 2011, p. 148). Finally, trustworthiness is promoted when researchers are transparent and clear in their coding procedures (Saldaña, 2013). The hand-written analytic memos served as a record of my thinking as the codes developed, as well as the final codebook that was applied during NVivo coding.

**Ethics**

As qualitative research requires closeness with participants, instead of the objectivity and distance associated with quantitative research, there are particular ethical
issues to consider. These issues include the power dynamics of the researcher-participant relationship, the privacy and protection of participants, and an ethical responsibility to use research for change. In addition, researchers should remember that participants are offering their time and their stories, even when they have "other, more important things going on in their lives" (Merriam, 2002, p. 422). As such, care should be taken to reduce the possibility of harm.

In the current study, participants were assured they were free to participate or abandon the study as they chose. This assurance was issued in writing in the survey’s call for participants and verbally at the start of each interview. Even so, I was the one issuing these assurances, establishing myself as the one in charge of the interview process. Indeed, “power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of nonpowerful participants” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 46) and “different types of interview questions exercise power over interviewees to different degrees” (Wang & Yan, 2012, p. 240). In other words, when one person chooses the type of information the interlocutor is to share, there is an unequal distribution of power. On the other hand, power dynamics are fluid rather than fixed and qualitative research embraces such fluidity. Addressing this inherent power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee, I offered complementary responses and built rapport by emphasizing my group membership as an educator who experienced the phenomenon (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). In addition, when participants asked me questions, I answered fully and honestly, further reducing the power imbalance of the participant.
Each participant was interviewed over the phone and put on speaker in order to record the conversation with a digital recorder. However, “it is essential to address the ethical issues raised by audiorecordings that are especially important in research on sensitive topics or any other situation where recordings pose a threat to participants’ confidentiality” (Morgan & Guevara, 2012, p. 41). With this in mind, each participant was given a pseudonym and their geographic location was indicated with a region of the country, not the exact city or state, to protect their identity and privacy. In addition, IRB guidelines required disclosure of audiorecordings prior to the interview through a pre-written script. All participants verbally agreed to the recording, but if a participant had asked me to stop recording, I would have proceeded with the interview and taken notes by hand instead.

Another issue in conducting ethical research is considering who will benefit from the findings of the study. One might consider whether the publication of the results enhances the author’s career or the informant’s freedom (Reiman, 1979). In other words, the purpose of research should be to create change for social justice and improve the lives of others. It requires care for participants and those affected by the phenomenon under investigation. Indeed, “the true test of ethics of research with human beings is whether or not it forces the researcher to suffer with his subjects” (Klockars, 1977, p. 225). That is not to suggest researchers should abandon the rigorous protocols of qualitative research. Yet, “it is crucial to study a phenomenon that you are really curious about, that you care about, that you are passionate about. This interest will motivate and sustain you through the process” (Merriam, 2002, p. 423).
Researcher positionality is important not only in establishing the experiential orientation that stems from member-based knowledge, but also in establishing the political and philosophical orientations that shaped the research design (Lin, 2015). As a researcher, I approached data collection from a constructivist paradigm to ensure multiple perspectives and contexts were represented to fully explore the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). I believe in amplifying the voices of others, particularly teachers, who are constrained by their professional role and cannot always verbalize what is happening or share their feelings publicly. As such, I believe it is part of my responsibility as a researcher to place myself between these participants and those who will later read the research findings to protect their identity while honoring their stories and experiences. In addition, a pragmatic paradigm aligns with the overarching feminist and critical underpinnings guiding the study in that research is meant to contribute to the betterment of the human condition (Denzin & Giardina, 2010). Indeed, a feminist approach to qualitative research has been “to dismantle the smokescreen surrounding the canons of neopositivist research–impartiality and objectivist neutrality–which supposedly prevent the researcher from contaminating the data” (England, 1994, p. 243). Instead, my political beliefs reflect an emphasis on human dignity as well as a belief in a social justice pedagogy that centers on hope and change (hooks, 2003). I do not consider these beliefs as potentially “contaminating” the data, but rather acknowledge my own positionality in the research topics I chose to pursue and the research questions I sought to answer. If I did not believe change was possible and did not believe teachers can help create a more just society, I would not have developed the study as it is. With this positionality in mind,
I was careful to engage in continuous critical reflexivity to ensure I noted contradictory and surprising responses while also balancing my positionality as both a former teacher with member-based knowledge and as a current researcher with privilege and power (Patton, 2015).

**Phase III: Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Phases**

Mixing results from different methods can serve several purposes, including triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion (Greene et al., 1989). The current study fell under the categories of complementarity in which “qualitative and quantitative methods are used to measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon” (p. 258) and development in which “the sequential use of qualitative and quantitative methods, where the first method is used to help inform the development of the second” (p. 260). The goal was not only to use follow-up qualitative interviews to confirm the findings of the survey; rather, instances of mismatch between the quantitative survey and the qualitative responses contributed to a more thorough and rich understanding of teacher action and sociopolitical hostility.

**Participants**

The final research question in this study involved a more holistic look at the data. The question sought to determine: *How do the quantitative results and qualitative findings combine to provide an enhanced understanding of teachers’ actions in a hostile sociopolitical climate?* The results from the quantitative survey \( n=614 \) revealed that teachers’ beliefs in social justice and their role in facilitating change in society was most
strongly correlated with action. As a result, teachers who had high scores in both of those areas were selected for follow-up interviews. However, the combination of the quantitative results and the qualitative responses provided a more comprehensive view of the circumstances in which teachers work and the reasoning for their actions in the classroom. Some of the qualitative responses were surprising contrasts to the quantitative survey, while other responses provided more detailed nuance in alignment with survey results. The selection of the qualitative participants from the pool of quantitative participants helped provide more in-depth perspectives needed to fully explain the survey data.

**Assumptions of the Mixed Methods Approach**

An assumption of mixed methods research is the integration of data will provide a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon that quantitative and qualitative data alone would not capture (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). In this study, integration consisted of connecting the quantitative results with the qualitative data collection, explaining the survey results with responses from the interviews, and combining the findings to better understand the phenomenon under investigation. However, a threat to validity in an explanatory sequential design is the exclusion of surprising or contradictory quantitative and qualitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This threat was addressed by complementarity through analytic memos in the qualitative interviews in which I noted surprising responses, answers that contrasted with those of other participants, and reasons for participants’ survey choices that were not immediately obvious in addition to responses that aligned with overall trends in the quantitative data.
Data Integration

Merging the findings from quantitative and qualitative phases can serve different purposes. In this case, the merging was intended for complementarity in which “qualitative and quantitative methods are used to measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon” (Greene et al., 1989, p. 258). To visualize this complementarity, explanatory sequential designs are well-suited for a joint display in which the quantitative and qualitative results are presented side-by-side in a table or graph (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). In addition, joint displays are not merely a tidy way to present findings, but “the real value of joint displays is the analytic and integrative thinking that must occur to create the visual display and interpret the joined quantitative and qualitative information contained within the display” (Clark, 2019, p. 110).

While the fundamental elements of a joint display in an explanatory sequential design are the quantitative and qualitative results, there are no rules about what can and cannot be included. With this in mind, the display in the current study included critical feminist theory principles alongside the findings, as “theory can be an important organizing framework for the integration of different forms of data and results to draw conclusions that are substantively relevant” (Clark, 2019, p. 111). The purpose was to ensure the results were in alignment with the overarching theoretical frameworks guiding all parts of the study from the literature review to the final conclusions.
Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine how different factors were related to language teachers’ actions as they attempted to mitigate the impact of sociopolitical hostility as well as learn the actions that were ultimately taken. The mixed methods design reflects multiple philosophical paradigms as they relate to each phase of the study. The quantitative phase utilized a postpositivist perspective in which the survey was developed to be as impartial and unbiased as possible in order to draw conclusions about teachers across the country. The qualitative phase employed constructivist and pragmatic paradigms by acknowledging that multiple viewpoints shape reality with the understanding that the results can and should affect change for more equitable experiences in education and for a more just society. The mixed methods phase compared the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phase to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. In this chapter, I described the explanatory sequential mixed methods research design, including the participants, instruments, analyses, assumptions, reliability, and ethics for the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method phases. In the next chapter, I present the findings of each of the three phases.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

I think teachers are brave. And I think teachers are concerned about not just the content that they're teaching, but the whole person that each of their students is going to become.

— Leslie, high school German teacher

While teaching students a new language is a complex task, steeped in issues of identity, power, and positioning, teachers recognize the job of serving students well entails much more than content alone. Indeed, “serving students well is an act of critical resistance. It is political” (hooks, 2003, p. 90). In the classroom, language is inextricably tied those who speak it. Outside the classroom, language from those in positions of power is inextricably tied to a sense of gravity and weight (MacKinnon, 1987; Norton Pierce, 1995). When these issues collide, and the sociopolitical climate is juxtaposed with the school setting, the actions teachers decide to take can matter a great deal.

To better understand the actions teachers take and the practices they adopt, the current study follows an integrated approach from a pragmatic paradigm. The Phase I quantitative survey with responses by K-12 foreign/world language (FL) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers ($n=614$) was conducted for the purposes of understanding nationwide trends and to inform the development of the interview protocol. In Phase II, the qualitative interviews ($n=7$) provided in-depth responses that revealed what teachers do to take action for social change. The Phase III integration of quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrated the complexity and nuance of when teachers participate in social justice work. This chapter presents the findings from the
data collected during quantitative and qualitative phases of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

**Phase I: Quantitative Results**

In this section, the quantitative results are presented in the following order. First, descriptive statistics of participant demographics and teaching contexts are represented by frequencies and percentage distribution. Descriptive statistics of each survey item are represented by mean and standard deviation. Next, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity were conducted to show the data were suitable for a factor analysis (Bartlett, 1950; Kaiser, 1974). Then, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to determine potential latent variables within the survey for greater interpretability (Osborne, 2015). Finally, a hierarchical linear regression was then conducted using a multiple regression framework to determine which factors predicted action (Field, 2009).

**Participants**

Out of 671 participants who completed at least one section of the survey, 614 answered all questions in all sections. This outcome was not unexpected, as requiring a response may result in a “breakoff” in which data are missing after a certain point in the survey (de Leeuw & Hox, 2008). The data were cleaned by listwise deletion which involves removing respondents who did not complete the survey in its entirety. Among the multiple methods for handling missing or incomplete data, “listwise deletion is the least problematic” (Allison, 2002, p. 84).
The first phase of analysis was performed using SPSS to demonstrate the overall demographics and teaching contexts of the survey participants as indicated by the final 12 items of the survey (see Table 4.1). The teachers’ ages ranged from 20-30 to over 60 years with the age range mean=41-50. Gender distribution was 86.6% female (n=532), 10.9% male (n=62), 0.5% non-binary (n=3), and 2% preferred not to answer (n=12). Race and ethnicity distribution was 79.2% white (n=522), 12.6% Hispanic or Latinx (n=83), 1.8% black or African American (n=12), 2.1% American Indian, Alaskan Native, or Asian (n=14), with the remaining 4.3% responding “other” or preferred not to answer. The total number of responses for this item was n=659, as some participants selected more than one response. The political affiliation of the participants was 49% Democrat (n=301), 20.2% Independent (n=124), and 9.9% Republican (n=61) with 8.1% of the remaining respondents preferring not to answer (n=50), 7.3% with no political affiliation (n=45), and 5.4% selecting “other” (n=33). Examples of other political affiliations, as mentioned in the optional text box, included Working Families Party, Socialist, Libertarian, and Constitutionalist.
Table 4.1

*Number and Percentage Distribution of FL and ESOL Teacher Survey Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Prefer not to say</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>79.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latinx</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Prefer not to say</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n=614, except for Race/Ethnicity in which n=659* due to participants selecting more than one category.

The teaching contexts of participants was also addressed (see Table 4.2). Nearly half of the teachers taught Spanish (n=293, 47.7%), followed by ESOL (n=85, 13.8%), German (n=76, 12.4%), and French (n=57, 9.3%). In addition, 12.7% (n=78) taught multiple subjects, such as Spanish and math or French and ESOL. Other languages (n=25, 4%) included Latin, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Italian, Cherokee, and American Sign Language. In addition, language teachers often teach more than one grade
level at a time, which is reflected in the responses of the survey. The majority of respondents taught grades 9-12 in secondary schools ($n=378, 61.6\%$), followed by grades 6-8 in middle schools ($n=82, 13.4\%$) and K-5 in elementary schools ($n=61, 9.9\%$). However, $15.1\% (n=93)$ taught in a combination of elementary, middle, and secondary contexts such as K-8 ($n=15, 2.4\%$), 6-12 ($n=20, 3.3\%$), and K-12 ($n=58, 9.4\%$). Finally, all 50 states were represented with at least one response per state. The lowest response rates were from Delaware ($n=1, 0.2\%$), as well as $n=2 (0.3\%)$ reported from each of the following: Alaska, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Wyoming. The highest response rates were from South Carolina ($n=62, 10.1\%$), Alabama ($n=47, 7.7\%$), North Carolina ($n=31, 5\%$), New York ($n=30, 4.9\%$), and Oklahoma ($n=24, 3.9\%$). Responses were grouped by nine geographic divisions as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau (1995) (see Figure 3.2) to ensure both conservative and liberal parts of the country were included in an effort to reduce response bias.
Table 4.2

Number and Percentage Distribution of Participants’ Teaching Contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/ESOL</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 1: New England</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 2: Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 3: East North Central</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 4: West North Central</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 5: South Atlantic</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 6: East South Central</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 7: West South Central</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 8: Mountain</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 9: Pacific</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n=614

Descriptive Statistics

For survey items, reliability testing using Cronbach’s alpha (1951) revealed a whole scale reliability of $\alpha=0.833$. The original survey grouped items based on prior research (Dunn et al., 2018). These groups included teachers’ experiences (items 1-8, divided into two parts such as 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, etc.), beliefs on social justice pedagogy (items 10-20), sense of agency (items 22-30), and the actions they took (items 32-39).
Survey items regarding the frequency of participants’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school or classroom were measured with a slider scale in order to provide more precise answers (see Table 4.3). Slider scales were measured from 1-5, with 1 “Never happened” and 5 “Happened a lot.” On all items, teachers reported hearing insensitive remarks and derogatory language in their school, such as in the cafeteria, gym, or hallways, more frequently than in their own classrooms. Item nine was an open-ended text box with the prompt, “Are there any specific examples or stories you would like to share about the questions in this section?” These responses were not included in analysis but did contribute to the selection of participants for the Phase II follow-up interviews.
### Table 4.3

**Mean and Standard Deviation by Slider Scale Survey Item**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the past few years, I have heard...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 students being insensitive (such as calling a classmate a racially-charged slur, making fun of someone’s parents, etc.) in my classroom.</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 students being insensitive (such as calling a classmate a racially-charged slur, making fun of someone’s parents, etc.) at my school.</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past few years, I have heard derogatory language or slurs...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 about students of color in my classroom.</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 about students of color at my school.</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 about white students in my classroom.</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 about white students at my school.</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 about immigrants in my classroom.</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 about immigrants at my school.</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 about Muslims in my classroom.</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 about Muslims at my school.</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 based on gender in my classroom.</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 based on gender at my school.</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 based on sexual orientation in my classroom.</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 based on sexual orientation at my school.</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1 My students have expressed concern about what might happen to them or their families (such as with ICE, worries about deportation, etc.) in my classroom.</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 My students have expressed concern about what might happen to them or their families (such as with ICE, worries about deportation, etc.) at my school.</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n=614. The mean was calculated on a scale of 1 (Never happened) - 5 (Happened a lot).*

The remaining items were measured with a 6-point Likert scale with options ranging from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 6 “Strongly agree” (see Table 4.4). Higher scores were associated with, and supportive of, a social justice approach to teaching. Some items (*n=11*) were reverse coded in order for higher scores to remain in alignment with a social justice approach. Items 21, 31, and 50 were open-ended text boxes with the same aforementioned prompt, “Are there any specific examples or stories you would like to share about the questions in this section?” These responses were not included in analysis but also contributed to the selection of participants for the Phase II follow-up interviews.
### Table 4.4

**Mean and Standard Deviation by Likert Survey Item**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (Beliefs)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is my job as a teacher to...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. stay neutral in discussions about current sociopolitical events.*</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. plan lessons that challenge students’ preconceived ideas.</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. present multiple perspectives on issues.</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. intervene if a student is insensitive to another student in class.</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. challenge students who make claims about current sociopolitical events.</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. ask students about the sources of their information when they bring up opinions in class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. It is not a teacher’s responsibility to address society’s problems.*</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Teachers should not try to change a student’s mind about an issue.*</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Teachers should not try to change a student’s mind about an issue, even if the student is misinformed about the topic.*</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Promoting empathy is a teacher’s responsibility.</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Language teachers, in particular, have a greater responsibility in promoting empathy.</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (Agency)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22. I worry I will get in trouble with administration if I discuss social or political topics in class.*</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I don’t think anyone would care if I engaged in social or political discussions in class.</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I have been told by administration not to engage in discussions about social or political topics in class.*</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I think parents at my school are likely to complain if they don’t like the topics I discuss in my classroom.*</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. My administration is supportive of lessons that promote social justice (such as equality, kindness, tolerance, etc.).</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. My colleagues and I agree on how social justice should be addressed in class.</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. My colleagues and I agree on how sociopolitical topics should be addressed in class.</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. I have a network of colleagues outside of school that I can collaborate with on issues of social justice.</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. I have a network of colleagues outside of school that I can collaborate with on sociopolitical topics.</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (Action)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32. I have challenged a student who made racist, sexist, or xenophobic comments in class.</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. I have developed lesson plans specifically to address a social justice-related topic.</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I have developed lesson plans specifically to address a sociopolitical issue, such as immigration, climate change, etc.</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. I have changed a lesson plan due to a student making derogatory or hostile comments (i.e. “teachable moment”).</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. I do not consider what is happening in the news when creating lesson plans.*</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I have not used any social justice-related topics in my lesson planning.*</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. I have changed a lesson plan to avoid the possibility of students responding with derogatory or hostile comments.*</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I treat derogatory or hostile comments from students as a discipline issue.*</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n=614. The mean was calculated on a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) - 6 (Strongly agree). Items 10, 16, 17, 18, 22, 24, 25, 36, 37, 38, 39 were reverse coded.*
Exploratory Factor Analysis

A KMO test served as an indicator of the strength of the relationships among items by the partial correlation coefficient. When evaluating the size of the overall KMO, Kaiser (1974) stated the range of acceptable values is in the 0.90’s (optimal) to 0.60’s (acceptable). In this study, KMO>.80, indicating the data were well-suited for factor analysis. Bartlett’s test for sphericity compared the correlation matrix (a matrix of Pearson correlations) to the identity matrix. In an identity matrix, 1’s appear on the diagonal and 0's on the off-diagonal, implying there are no interrelationships among the items and thus not a good fit for factor analysis (Pett et al., 2003). In this study, Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2$ (741) = 12238.169, $p<0.005$) (see Table 4.5). These tests indicated it was acceptable to proceed with the analysis.

Table 4.5

KMO and Bartlett’s Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy</th>
<th>.808</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bartlett's Test of Sphericity</td>
<td>Approx. Chi-Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to determine the number of factor loadings required to explain the data, beginning with a scree plot. A scree plot is a visual plot “with the ordered eigenvalues (from large to small) of the sample correlation matrix in the vertical axis and the ordinal number in the horizontal axis” and the “number of factors suggested by the scree plot is the number of eigenvalues just before they taper
off in a linear fashion” (Hayashi & Yuan, 2008, p. 461). In this study, the scree plot started to level out after five factors (see Figure 4.1).

![Scree Plot](image)

**Figure 4.1. Eigenvalues of factors.**

The goal of the EFA was to “reduce groups of variables to conceptually important latent variables” (Osborne, 2015, p. 6). Five items (8.1, 8.2, 10, 20 and 39) did not load high enough and were excluded, making the total items $n=39$. Initially, 13 factors greater than one were extruded. For orthogonal rotation, “the most commonly used procedure is varimax, which maximizes the variance between the factors so that each factor tends to load high on a small number of variables and low on the others” (Foster et al., 2005, p. 78). Thus, a varimax with Kaiser Normalization rotation was performed to produce a
smaller number of important factors to facilitate interpretation. The obtained rotated component matrix demonstrating factor loadings is displayed in Table 4.6.

These analyses indicated that five factors provided the most interpretable solution. Eliminating items 8.1, 8.2, 10, 20 and 39, the five factors explained 47.4% of the variance. The first factor had an eigenvalue of 7.49 and accounted for 19.2% of the variance in the data. Factor two had an eigenvalue of 4.9 and accounted for a further 12.5% of the variance. Factor three followed with an eigenvalue of 2.46, accounting for 6.3% of the variance. The eigenvalues for factors four and five were 1.88 and 1.72, respectively, together accounting for a further 9.2% of the total variance.

Factor analysis of the items used in the current study indicated five factors as opposed to the four constructs that guided the survey’s development. The pattern matrix in Table 4.6 revealed factor one to consist of 14 items, including all of the sociopolitical hostility experiences items except those specifically about ICE. This factor was labeled Experiences and demonstrated a high internal consistency. The second factor consisted of six items, including all of the survey items related to the action construct with the exception of the item about teachers’ avoidance of specific topics in class. This factor was identified as Action and reflected a high internal consistency. Factor three contained six items related to teachers’ sense of autonomy and fear of reprimand, all from the agency construct section of the survey. This factor was labeled Agency. The remaining four items from this section of the survey did not load onto the Agency factor; instead, the item about teachers’ avoidance of specific topics in class did load onto this factor. The internal consistency of this factor was acceptable. The fourth factor was made up of
eight items, half of which were related to teachers’ beliefs about social justice pedagogy while the other half were related to collegial support. This fourth factor was called Social Justice Initiative and had an acceptable internal consistency. The fifth and final factor was made up of five items, all from the belief construct section of the survey and thus the factor was labeled Beliefs. This factor also had an acceptable internal consistency. Out of the 44 original survey items, the five that did not load onto a factor were: Q8.1) Student concern about ICE in the classroom; Q8.2) student concern about ICE in the at school; Q10) whether a teacher’s job is to remain neutral; Q20) whether language teachers have a greater responsibility in promoting empathy; and Q39) if derogatory or hostile comments from students were treated as a discipline issue.
Table 4.6

Rotated Component Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
<th>Factor 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1.1 Students being insensitive (in my classroom)</td>
<td>.745</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2.1 Slurs students of color (in my classroom)</td>
<td>.742</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1.2 Students being insensitive (at my school)</td>
<td>.732</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2.2 Slurs students of color (at my school)</td>
<td>.711</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7.1 Slurs based on sexual orientation (in my classroom)</td>
<td>.680</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7.2 Slurs based on sexual orientation (at my school)</td>
<td>.672</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4.2 Slurs about immigrants (at my school)</td>
<td>.665</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6.1 Slurs based on gender (in my classroom)</td>
<td>.663</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4.1 Slurs about immigrants (in my classroom)</td>
<td>.663</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5.1 Slurs about Muslims (in my classroom)</td>
<td>.636</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6.2 Slurs based on gender (at my school)</td>
<td>.630</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3.1 Slurs white students (in my classroom)</td>
<td>.585</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5.2 Slurs about Muslims (at my school)</td>
<td>.580</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3.2 Slurs white students (at my school)</td>
<td>.549</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q37 I have not used social justice lessons*</td>
<td>.797</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q33 Developed lessons for social justice</td>
<td>.796</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q34 Developed lessons for sociopolitical issue</td>
<td>.771</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q36 I do not consider the news in lesson plans*</td>
<td>.663</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q35 Changed lesson as teachable moment</td>
<td>.466</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q32 Challenged students' racist, sexist, etc. comments</td>
<td>.459</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q22 Worry about trouble with admin*</td>
<td>.785</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23 No one cares if I engage in discussions</td>
<td>.727</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q25 Parents likely to complain*</td>
<td>.650</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q24 Admin has said no discussions*</td>
<td>.639</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q26 Admin is supportive of social justice lessons</td>
<td>.455</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q38 Changed lesson to avoid possible hostility*</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q27 Social justice lesson agreement with colleagues</td>
<td>.642</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q28 Sociopolitical lesson agreement with colleagues</td>
<td>.637</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12 Present multiple perspectives</td>
<td>.537</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q30 Out-of-school colleagues - sociopolitical</td>
<td>.527</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q29 Out-of-school colleagues - social justice</td>
<td>.514</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13 Intervene when students are insensitive</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11 Plan lessons to challenge preconceived ideas</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14 Challenge students' sociopolitical claims</td>
<td>.384</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q18 Teachers not change misinformed opinions*</td>
<td>.806</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17 Teachers not try to change students' mind*</td>
<td>.772</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16 Not teacher's job address societies problems*</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q19 Promoting empathy is teacher's responsibility</td>
<td>.403</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15 Ask students about information source</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue: 7.498 4.908 2.462 1.882 1.727
Cronbach's alpha: .91 .82 .74 .71 .71

Regression Analysis

Residual and scatter plots indicated the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity were all satisfied prior to beginning the multiple regression analysis in order to determine which factor or factors correlated with Action (Mertler & Reinhart, 2016). First, the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r$) table was reported in Table 4.7. None of the correlations reached the $r=.70$ threshold of the Pearson correlation coefficient, which demonstrates a strong relationship (Hinkle et al., 2003). However, there was a moderate positive correlation between Beliefs and Action ($r=.425$, $p<.01$, $n=614$) and a moderate positive correlation between Social Justice Initiative and Action ($r=.394$, $p<.01$, $n=614$). Experiences and Action showed a weak correlation ($r=.255$, $p<.01$), and there was no correlation between Agency and Action ($r=.034$).

Table 4.7

*Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Matrix*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Experiences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Action</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.255**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.322**</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Social Justice Initiative</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.394**</td>
<td>0.219**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Beliefs</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.117**</td>
<td>0.425**</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.309**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed). n=614.*

A five stage hierarchical linear regression was conducted with Action as the dependent variable. Factors were entered in order of the EFA factor loadings using a stepwise method (Field, 2009). Experiences was entered at stage one of the regression.
Agency was added at stage two, and Social Justice Initiative was added at stage three. Agency was removed at stage four, leaving Experiences and Social Justice Initiative. Stage five added Beliefs to Experiences and Social Justice Initiative. The regression statistics are in shown in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8**

**Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Action**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
<th>ΔF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>.369</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>6.523*</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>42.545*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td>7.236*</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>9.95*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>3.154*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>.347</td>
<td>.240</td>
<td>6.234*</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td>.208</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>98.972*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.758</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Justice Initiative</td>
<td>.570</td>
<td>.371</td>
<td>9.948*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>.333</td>
<td>.230</td>
<td>6.365*</td>
<td>.455</td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.575*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Justice Initiative</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td>.378</td>
<td>10.489*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>5.821*</td>
<td>.544</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>76.602*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Justice Initiative</td>
<td>.435</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td>7.926*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td>.314</td>
<td>8.752*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n=614; *p < .001; Dependent variable: Action.

The hierarchical multiple regression revealed that at stage one, Experiences contributed significantly to the regression model, $F(1,613) = 42.545$, $p < .001$ and accounted for 6.5% of the variation in Action. Introducing Agency explained an
additional 1.5% for a total of 8% of variation in Action, and this change in $R^2$ was statistically significant, $F(2,612) = 26.558, p<.001$. Adding Social Justice Initiative to the regression model explained an additional 12.8% for a total of 20.8% of the variation in Action and this change in $R^2$ was significant, $F(3,611) = 53.531, p<.001$. Stage four removed Agency while Experiences and Social Justice Initiative remained, which explained 20.7% of the variation in Action and was significant, $F(2,612) = 80.064, p<.001$. Finally, the addition of Beliefs to Experiences and Social Justice Initiative in the regression model explained 29.6% of the variation in Action and this change in $R^2$ was also significant, $F(3,611) = 85.504, p<.001$. When the Experiences and Social Justice Initiative independent variables were included in stage three of the regression model, Agency was not a significant predictor of Action. The most important predictors of Action were Experiences, Social Justice Initiative, and Beliefs which explained nearly 30% of the variance.

**Summary of Quantitative Results**

The quantitative analyses sought to answer the first research question: *What is the relationship between language teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school, their beliefs on social justice, their sense of agency, and the actions they take?*

To answer this question, a series of statistical tests were conducted. First, Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed five factors as opposed to the original four variables in the survey design. Overall, the survey was reliable, and each of the five factors had a strong reliability. Correlation analyses revealed there was a moderate positive correlation between Beliefs and Action ($r=.425, p<.01$) and a moderate positive correlation between
Social Justice Initiative and Action ($r=.394, p<.01$). Experiences and Action showed a weak correlation ($r=.255, p<.01$), and there was no correlation between Agency and Action ($r=.034$). Regression analysis found that Agency did not help predict action. However, Beliefs, Experiences, and Social Justice Initiative were significant, $F(3,611) = 85.504, p<.001$ and explained 29.6% of the variance in Action.

Taken together, language teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school and their beliefs on social justice were shown to have the strongest relationship to actions in the classroom. Teachers’ sense of autonomy and fear of reprimand, known as agency, did not show a strong relationship with action in this particular study. These results suggest that teachers who both experience sociopolitical hostility and believe it is their job to act in resistance will, in fact, take action, even if the possibility of reprimand might be present.

**Phase II: Qualitative Findings**

In this study, the aim of the qualitative phase was to better understand the self-reported actions teachers have taken to promote social justice as a means of resistance to sociopolitical hostility, racism, and xenophobia. While the quantitative phase demonstrated the importance of teachers’ beliefs in a more just and equitable reality for students, the current section explored how teachers’ beliefs manifested in actions taken in the classroom. First, an overview of interview participants is presented, followed by the themes and connections that emerged throughout the coding and analysis process.

**Participants**

Using the results from the quantitative survey, purposeful sampling identified 14
information-rich participants, seven of whom responded to an email invitation for an interview. Of the seven participants, six identified as female and one, Brandon, chose not to identify gender. All grade levels were represented, as Juanita taught K-5, Annabelle taught K-12, Erin taught 6-12, and everyone else taught 9-12 at a secondary school. As in the quantitative survey, Spanish was the largest representation of languages with the qualitative participants ($n=4$), with one teacher of German (Leslie), ESOL (Annabelle), and French (Jennifer). The ages of three participants ranged from 20-40 (Annabelle, Brandon, and Juanita) and the remaining four ranged from 41-60+ (Erin, Leslie, Hazel, and Jennifer). In addition, three participants identified their ethnicity or race as white, while the rest identified as white/Latinx (Juanita), black (Erin), and white/other (Annabelle), while Brandon, as with gender, preferred not to say. Also reflective of the survey, the majority of participants ($n=4$) indicated their political affiliation as Democrat, while one selected Working Families Party (Juanita), one selected Independent (Jennifer), and one selected “none” (Brandon). The participants represented a range of geographic locations from across the continental United States with no two from the same state.
Table 4.9

*Interview Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Grade/Subject</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Political Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juanita</td>
<td>K-5 Spanish</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>New England</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>White, Latinx</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Working Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>6-12 Spanish</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>New England</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>9-12 German</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>9-12 Spanish</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabelle</td>
<td>K-12 ESOL</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>White, Other</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel</td>
<td>9-12 Spanish</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>9-12 French</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Themes**

The seven semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The 90 single-spaced pages of transcriptions were analyzed using NVivo 12 for Mac (2018), alongside the analytic memos that had been recorded by hand during the interviews. After reading through the transcripts several times, a round of structural coding resulted in five categories: Permeability, Context, Actions, Beliefs, Neutrality (see Table 3.3 for Codebook). The following round of theoretical coding (Saldaña, 2013) was intended specifically to address the research question: *How do language teachers attempt to mitigate dehumanizing beliefs and practices in the current sociopolitical climate?* Codes within each category were examined for connections and contradictions in order to form
a more complete understanding of teachers’ actions. Three themes emerged: Classroom permeability and possibility, curricula as safe harbor, and a discursive approach to social justice pedagogy (Figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2. Theme development.**

**Classroom permeability and possibility.**

Even though many maintain that schools and classrooms are “neutral” spaces, separate from the sociopolitical context, the actions that teachers take to promote social justice and mitigate hostility do not occur in a vacuum. (e.g. Apple, 2004; Anyon, 1980;
Giroux, 2001; Journell, 2016; Pennycook, 2016). As Nieto (2006) stated, “Teaching is political work, and it has always been so” (p. 9). As such, teaching can also serve as an act of resistance to dominant ideologies (hooks, 2003). This study revealed that the ways in which the hostile sociopolitical climate was reflected in the words and actions of students varied depending on grade level, subject area, and school environment, thus requiring different responses from teachers.

For younger students in elementary school, the sociopolitical rhetoric has remained abstract and not fully understood. However, this lack of comprehension does not mean students weren’t paying attention. For example, Juanita recounted clear evidence of this permeability at her school. Teaching in a Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) program, Juanita has made a social justice approach to teaching a fundamental part of her decisions and actions for more than ten years as a Spanish teacher. Her school is situated in a fairly affluent, liberal town in New England. At the same time, residents who support President Trump are present and visible to this day.

Juanita reported that students in her K-5 elementary school are often oblivious to politics with the exception of children who are undocumented or have an undocumented family member. In those cases, they ask teachers questions such as, “Will ICE come and get me?” In response, ICE employees who, in the past, have come to the elementary school to distribute information about legal issues associated with immigration are no longer allowed on campus. At the same time, students who are not affected by issues of immigration are not immune to the rhetoric associated with the dehumanization of
Hispanic and Latinx people. Juanita told the story of a day when one of her kindergarten classes was outside on the playground. She recalled:

There were some students playing together, none of the students were immigrants. But it was like, a diverse population of students. And they didn’t want to play with another student. So they decided to use the recess equipment to build a barrier and they kept calling it a Trump Wall.

Juanita acknowledged that her students didn’t really understand what a “Trump Wall” was. Nonetheless, the incident stood out in her mind as different than typical playground bullying, because “they used that same language that the President is to say, ‘There is somebody that we don’t want to play with and we’re gonna build a physical separation to keep this person out of our play.’” The permeability of the classroom walls (Pennycook, 2016) is evident in this example. The rhetoric in the sociopolitical environment did, in fact, impact students as young as five years old. Students who had no connection to immigration or ICE were still able to draw the conclusion that the border wall is intended for undesirable people.

After reflecting on the incident, Juanita returned to her social justice approach to teaching. She believed the students engaging in the behavior did not understand the xenophobic and racist sentiments behind the rhetoric, even though they recognized that “the wall” could be used as an insult. For Juanita, the first response was to give her students the vocabulary to discuss these types of topics in class. She recalled, “They don’t have the language to really talk about it, so then it’s like, so how can you really shift their thinking if they’re not talking about it or if they don’t have the language to talk about it.”
Subsequent lessons on stereotypes, identity, and treatment of others further provided students the framing they needed to understand why those words and behaviors were problematic.

While some teachers, schools, and districts insist that school is a neutral space, the example of Juanita’s kindergarten students demonstrate that it simply isn’t so. Nonetheless, her administrator addressed the incident by adopting an “anti-bullying kind of message and didn’t address how it is also anti-immigrant or how it is xenophobic or how it’s, ya know... It was just more of a, ‘Here at our school, we play with everybody.’” The juxtaposition of the administration’s avoidance of engaging with the underlying message of “the wall” and Juanita’s reframing of the incident as a possibility to promote student growth is precisely what bell hooks (2003) referred to in a *pedagogy of hope*. hooks acknowledged that “teachers who care, who serve their students, are usually at odds with the environments wherein we teach. More often than not, we work in institutions where knowledge has been structured to reinforce dominator culture” (2003, p. 91). The administrator’s attempt to maintain neutrality at the school level while Juanita leveraged the incident as an opportunity to provide appropriate language modeling at the classroom level exemplify how serving students is not, in fact, a neutral endeavor.

Serving students well not only requires decisions about how to approach the issue of neutrality, but also requires a belief in the capacity of individuals to change and regain a sense of human dignity. Critical feminist theory seeks to examine power, positioning, and identity while naming pragmatic actions to mitigate the oppressive reality of those whose dignity has been diminished (hooks, 1991, 2003; MacKinnon, 1987; Norton
Pierce, 1995). When a hostile environment causes this type of harm to students, teachers are in a position to act in resistance.

At the high school level, students have understood the hostile sociopolitical rhetoric more clearly than those in elementary school, and behaviors have manifested in different ways. Another interview participant, Annabelle, reported first-hand experience with these behaviors. She has taught K-12 ESOL for about ten years in the rural Southeast. She travels between several elementary, middle, and high schools each day but sees all of her students at least once per week. The school district is situated in a community in which “a lot of people buy into the rhetoric, like, ‘these illegal immigrants coming in, stealing our jobs, people are coming in and having babies in here, so they can stay.’” Within the schools, this attitude is sometimes reflected by adults. Annabelle reported that high school counselors can marginalize or ignore students who are in ESOL classes, and say things like, “‘This kid, they’re 17, they don’t know any English, they’re probably not going to pass their state test,’ and so they don’t really want to spend a lot of time on them. They’re just going to do the bare minimum.” Students are therefore diminished in the eyes of some of the adults in the school, contributing to their disempowered positioning. Interestingly, Annabelle recalled that this attitude is typically reserved for Spanish-speaking students as opposed to her ESOL students who emigrate from other countries.

The sociopolitical rhetoric that has contributed to a negative view of immigrant students has not been limited to the adults in the school. Annabelle also noticed the way that other students speak to her ESOL students outside of the classroom. For example,
she said one day, “students went to a pep rally and they came back, and they were very visibly upset. Kind of pacing and upset, saying students had been screaming at them, they needed to go back to their own country.” Moreover, she has heard snippets of similar conversations and comments in the hallways, just enough to give her an idea of how her students are being treated. In Annabelle’s context, the sociopolitical rhetoric has permeated the classroom walls in several ways. Adults in positions of authority and other students in the school have sent the message, both publicly and privately, that these Hispanic students should “go back to their own country.”

Even with all of the hostility facing Annabelle’s students, she acknowledged that she can take action to help mitigate the damage done to their identity and sense of self-worth. These instances offered the possibility for change and empowerment. Indeed, within a pedagogy of hope, students from disenfranchised or vulnerable groups need teachers to serve as advocates and position themselves in resistance to dominant ideologies and social structures that perpetuate their disempowered positioning (hooks, 2003). As a result, Annabelle now takes a proactive approach to provide a sort of inoculation against the hostility she knows her students are likely to encounter. When she registers immigrant students at school, she first asks them, “Why are you here?” She listens to their story, asks about their journey of getting to the U.S., validates their feelings, and affirms that they do, in fact, belong here in the U.S. She said she reminds students, “‘I'm here, I support you, I want you to succeed,’ ya know, I might name some other people in the school that I know are like, love all the kids at school, no matter what.” Empowering her students before they face hostility and cruelty is one possible
action when the rhetoric has permeated the school walls. In addition, Annabelle stated that “belief is powerful” for students who have been diminished. She tells students, “You have to believe in yourself more than you believe what these other people are saying to you. You have to believe that you do have a right to an education, don’t ever let anybody tell you that you don’t.” A pedagogy of hope centers on the capacity of individuals to change, and in this case, the change occurs by teachers acting in resistance to dominant ideologies and acting in support of their most vulnerable students when the sociopolitical hostility is reflected in the words and actions of those in the school.

When sociopolitical hostility is reflected in the words and actions of adults, teachers may feel they have to tread lightly to avoid professional clashes that could cost them their job. Yet when the hostility is reflected in the words and actions of students, teachers, especially language teachers, have many more possibilities for action. Within any school, the power dynamics, community beliefs, and cultural practices of students from each end of the social hierarchy can be vastly different. Students from dominant groups and students from subordinated groups coexist in many classes and spaces throughout the day. However, a pedagogy of hope does not position these two groups at odds with one another. In fact, “either/or thinking is crucial to the maintenance of racism and other forms of group oppression. Whenever we think in terms of both/and we are better situated to do the work of community building” (hooks, 2003, p. 37). When teachers see instances of hostility that has permeated the school walls, the possibility for action is not solely in support for the students who have been targeted.
In a town of about 40,000 people in a largely conservative northwestern state, Hazel has been a high school Spanish teacher for about ten years. She teaches grades 9-12 in an International Baccalaureate (IB) program, a program that aims to develop students’ intercultural, emotional, and social skills in addition to an academically rigorous curriculum. This program is optional and not all students in the school participate. She described her school as predominantly white with few students of color and few immigrant students and believes that hostility from students, adults, and community members stems from fear rather than first-hand experience.

Having taught at the same school for a decade, Hazel has noticed a change in students’ behaviors in recent years. She recalled, “Like we’ve seen it in the news, there’s been an emboldening of ‘I’m just gonna say that I think America should be for Americans and Christians,’ ya know.” This emboldening has led to displays of the confederate flag and white supremacy symbols in various classes and on campus. Regarding the confederate flag, Hazel remarked, “I do think that the kids, there are kids that definitely associate it with white supremacy. You know. ‘America for the white people.’” However, like Juanita and Annabelle, Hazel then used this information to inform her classroom instruction. She stated:

I feel like I can talk about a lot of those things from a cultural perspective instead of a political perspective. And I think that makes kids think about it less as, you know, when you can talk about Honduras and talk about the fact that the gang problem is so bad there that you're either working for the gang or you pick up
your child and walk them to the border of the United States. I think that makes them think twice about what they would do in the same situation.

By noticing the uptick in white supremacist symbolism on campus, Hazel intentionally focused on the stories and experiences of immigrants from a humanizing perspective. In her case, she was addressing students from the dominant group, which at her school was primarily white, Christian, and conservative. When people from privileged or dominant groups are provided with new information about systems of inequity, they often experience feelings of fear, guilt, anxiety, or discomfort resulting in defensive or dismissive responses. With this in mind, Hazel chose to address the increase in white supremacy symbolism on campus by contextualizing the stories of Latinx immigrants. The language of sociopolitical hostility facilitated opportunities to present new information in a humanizing frame.

While Annabelle focused her efforts on encouraging and empowering her ESOL students who had been the target of hostility at school, Hazel focused on students from dominant groups who were seeing, and perhaps participating in or empathizing with, white supremacy ideology. Yet both of these teachers were working to help their students notice inequalities, name the structures and reasons, and reflect on themselves and their own beliefs. Students from both groups benefit from this approach, albeit in different ways. As Juanita mentioned, an important part of a social justice pedagogy is providing students the vocabulary and language they need to understand these issues in the first place.
Indeed, examples from teachers have demonstrated time and time again that the hostile sociopolitical rhetoric from 2016 to present day has certainly permeated the classroom walls. Yet these teachers not only named the problem, but they worked to create change. These examples demonstrated how instances at school provided an impetus for action, shifting sociopolitical hostility into possibility for transformation.

**Curricula as safe harbor.**

School curriculum is often thought of in terms of official standards and objectives, positioned as a neutral guide to daily classroom instruction. Parents, administrators, and community members frequently insist that “neutrality is the only morally appropriate approach for teachers to take” (Journell, 2016, p. 6). Yet teaching is a political act that is always intertwined with issues of power and privilege with the official curriculum a central element (Nieto, 2006). As narrowed curriculum and scripted lessons have been a mainstay of education in the United States for decades, teachers often feel their ability to make professional decisions in the classroom has been diminished (Ravitch, 2013, 2016). However, in the current study, teachers leveraged the official curriculum as a way to engage in social justice topics while providing a sense of protection from potential reprimand.

A Spanish teacher in New England, Erin has taught grades 6-12 at an independent day school for 14 years. She embraces the notion that the curriculum can be leveraged for social justice pedagogy. As the only African American interview participant, Erin provided keen insight into how issues of neutrality are misguided, unhelpful, and even harmful to students. She reflected that “teaching Spanish, you know, affords a lot of
opportunities to be non-neutral. I think that a lot of the things that I teach, you really can't take a neutral position.” On the other hand, she stated that her colleagues in language education are not always eager to take a firm stand. She reported that colleagues say things like, “Oh I don’t want this to be a political discussion, I only came here to get some ideas of how to teach verbs.” In response, she has told them, “Ya know, you realize that not having a position is sending a very loud and clear message to your students?” And it is. Whether that’s what they desire or not.” With this perspective, Erin has found ways to use the official curriculum to engage her students in critical thinking, deeper understanding, and reflection while engaging with sociopolitical topics.

The official curriculum for novice language students is often centered on daily life, school, and other topics likely to be familiar to students. Erin explained that at first glance, it might be difficult to imagine pairing these curricular goals with a social justice approach, especially considering the linguistic resources at the students’ disposal. However, she believes the curriculum can be shaped to move beyond the basic requirements. In one of her early units, she said, “We talk about food and food scarcity, so a unit on food can be used to talk about what people eat in Latin America, what people eat in indigenous communities, you know, growing your own food as opposed to going to the supermarket.” This framing shifted the lesson beyond a vocabulary list and grammar points to a series of questions about why people eat what they do and the inequitable distribution of resources.

With older students in her Spanish IV class, she doesn’t teach about other countries from a tourism perspective or focus solely on holidays, which she considers
common approaches to culture teaching. She said, “One year, I taught about the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic during the thirties and forties and fifties, a lot of students weren’t aware.” In addition, she said, “We talked about the Dirty War in Argentina and all the people that went missing, episodes of the government coup.” These topics focused on the dehumanization of people in other countries and the historical context for the events that transpired. While her official curriculum may have required her to address cultures in Spanish-speaking countries, it was her decision to provide a historical lens to the lessons. As a result of her approach, she said she has never had a parent or student complaint when discussing social justice or sociopolitical topics.

Erin was one of the participants to most clearly describe how the curriculum can be used to support a social justice pedagogy in the language classroom. Acknowledging that neutrality is largely a myth, Erin saw teaching as a series of choices that sent a message to students. Indeed, teachers must engage in this type of thoughtful reflection, as many have been “challenged as educators to examine the ways in which we support, either consciously or unconsciously, existing structures of domination. And we have all been encouraged by democratic educators to become more aware, to make more conscious choices” (hooks, 2003, p. 45). By combining established curriculum with a critical approach, Erin’s conscious choices were intended to facilitate a deeper understanding of inequitable structures in a variety of contexts.

Leveraging curriculum for a social justice approach not only lies in explicit culture lessons, but also in the daily activities of the classroom. Under this framework, change requires educators and students alike to undergo shifts in their thoughts and,
equally as important, shifts in their actions. Even though hooks (2003) is unwavering in her belief that individuals can change, she does not proclaim the work is easy. Taking a straightforward or direct approach to introduce the issues of inequitable social structures is not always helpful, thereby making the curriculum an important tool in the process.

Leslie has been a high school German teacher for 17 years in a large, suburban high school in the mid-Atlantic region. Due to the high number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses, it is considered one of the best schools in the area. The community is mostly liberal, though Leslie pointed out, “I was called into the principal's office last year [2018], because one of my students complained that I had said something negative about Donald Trump. And I know two kids of mine went to the inauguration.” As a result, Leslie has been cautious to use her curriculum as a form of protection from complaints and the risk of reprimand from administration.

In one example, Leslie leveraged her curricular goal of verbal interaction to engage with her German students. Every Monday, students meet in small groups and ask each other what they did over the weekend. When they asked their teacher what she did over the weekend, Leslie responded with, “‘Oh, I went to a protest’ or, you know, that stuff comes up and then when I see them at the airport [also attending a protest of travel restriction from majority-Muslim countries], then we'll talk about it the next day.” By using a common activity that is appropriate for her curriculum, Leslie was able to insert examples of how to take action for social justice in the midst of sociopolitical hostility without explicitly naming or explaining these actions.
Leslie has also used the curriculum to challenge dominant social structures and normalize people who have traditionally been marginalized. In the unit about families and communities, she said:

I have a PowerPoint with vocabulary and I'll have pictures about a family and I will show, you know, same-sex parents in my slideshow and I won't even really say anything about it, but I'll just have that instead of the traditional mom and dad. Or, I'll include vocabulary like, you know, partnership or same-sex marriage and we'll talk about it.

By including images of same-sex parents and vocabulary for partnerships, Leslie is still meeting the curricular standard of the assigned unit, yet she does so in a way that disrupts the dominant narrative of what constitutes a family. She acknowledged that she did not make a big deal out of her decision to include the image and vocabulary as a strategy to avoid issues with her conservative students. Aligning the lesson with the curriculum provided Leslie with a sense of safety when she has previously felt fearful of reprimand from parents or administrators.

Conversations and the exchange of ideas are hallmarks of a pedagogy of hope and can establish a point of entry for raising awareness without demonizing students from the dominant culture. For hooks, one point of entry is “the sharing of personal narratives to remind folks that we are all struggling to raise our consciousness and figure out the best action to take” (2003, p. 107). As Leslie used her Monday morning conversation activity to address the verbal proficiency standard of her curriculum, she also shared her own weekend activities to model what social justice action might look like. When she chose to
use images of same-sex couples in her unit about families, she both validated her students who have same-sex parents while also normalizing this type of family structure for students from dominant cultures. In both instances, relying on the official curriculum is what gave Leslie a sense of safety and confidence in her social justice approach.

National and state standards are another way teachers have protected themselves from potential reprimand beyond the day-to-day curricular decisions. Like official curriculum, standards are goals established by people in positions of power that are meant to determine what teachers do in the classroom, (Ravitch, 2013, 2016). Yet standards can also provide just enough leeway for teachers to enact a social justice pedagogy while still following these official standards. Should complaints arise, teachers can point to the standards that are determined by people too powerful for parents’ complaints to reach.

A high school French teacher in the northern part of the Mountain region, Jennifer has worked in public education for 22 years. Even though the community is considered rural, there are approximately 1,500 students enrolled at the high school. Talking about her student demographics, Jennifer said, “At least 60% speak Spanish and English, for many of them Spanish is their first language. I have way more Hispanic last names in my classroom than I do Anglo or non-Hispanic European last names.” She noted that the approximately 50% of the community is Hispanic and 50% is white/non-Hispanic, and while she thought most people were content with the demographics in the area, she said, “I think that certainly we have Anglo people who are not comfortable with that.” At school, immigration is a salient topic affecting many students who either emigrated from other countries or are the children of those who did.
Jennifer noted that even though her students mainly expect to learn how to speak French in her class, the state and national standards address more than linguistic goals. As for her state, “Our [standards] are specific enough to put us on a path, to give us guidance, but they’re broad enough to give us a lot of choices in how we flesh them out” and as a result, she said, “I feel like I can truly be honest in honoring the standards and still be doing some of this work... Empathy, cultural intelligence, those kind of things.” However, in her situation in which many students come from deeply conservative belief systems and many students come from an immigrant background, the sociopolitical rhetoric about immigration affirms the beliefs of one group while demonizing students from the other. As a result, she leans heavily on the official standards to encourage social justice principles that both acknowledge her immigrant students while fostering critical thinking and deeper understanding for her students from the dominant group. She reflected:

National foreign language teacher standards talk about understanding between cultures, and so we’ve got permission from our states to address the issue and if it's a little bit… if we’re a little bit under the radar, as long as we're not stepping on parents’ toes, or as long as we're respecting parents’ opinions, even if we’re not supporting them, I think we have, foreign language teachers have a real opportunity that math and science teachers don't.

By having explicit standards that mention culture, comparison, and community, teachers don’t have to make the case for why they engage in such lessons; they can simply point to what they are directed to do by mandates from state and national organizations.
Jennifer uses these standards as a way to protect herself from potential complaints while also effectively fostering an environment that promotes human dignity, social justice, and understanding.

Juanita, the elementary Spanish teacher in New England, also discussed how standards can be leveraged to facilitate social justice embedded within intercultural lessons. Moreover, school or district mission statements and organizational goals can also be mentioned to further bolster the argument that these types of lessons are not only appropriate, but necessary. Juanita said:

If you have somebody who says like, “Oh my job is just to teach language” like how you argue that. And I would say, “Well no, my national standards say that I should also be teaching for intercultural competence” right? So in terms of a social justice approach, I think you can kind of do something similar and you can say, you know, our school mission says that we’re trying to create equal opportunities.

However, school mission statements and district goals may not be enough to facilitate change in the ways these teachers might hope. Erin discussed how her school and district often brought up the words “equity” and “social justice” in official declarations, yet individual action was often the bare minimum. Regarding the shallowness of these social justice mandates, Erin said:

Honestly, I think that people generally want to believe that they're good and decent people. And I think that even your Trump supporters, I think that they want to believe that they're good and decent people, because I think that for
people, the worst thing that anyone could be called is a racist. And I think that most people don't want to be known as that and so, if they feel that they're upholding a mindset where, you know, you don't say those words and you be nice to those people, I think that they feel that that's... that their job is done. But you know, but that's problematic in and of itself, because many times, these individuals who believe that haven't really done a whole lot of self-examination, so, the social justice mindset, and it's everywhere, I mean, you can't open up a document without seeing the words equity or social justice. I think a lot of it, unfortunately, goes unexamined.

Indeed, a critical feminist framework requires both identification of the problem and intentional action to mitigate the problem. Official mission statements or declarations in documents without corresponding action only provide the illusion of addressing the problem. However, when teachers do engage in reflective action for social justice and name the mission statement or official declaration as their reasoning, the mandates that are so often used to restrict teachers’ professional decision making and autonomy transform into protection from complaints and potential reprimand.

While teachers can and do leverage official curriculum, standards, and mission statements as a way to protect themselves from potential reprimand, these benchmarks can only be met by those who put forth the effort to do so. When Juanita saw the kindergarten children “building a wall” on the playground, her district treated it as a bullying incident, not an opportunity for deeper reflection. Erin, too, noted how her language teacher colleagues rejected the notion that it was their responsibility to do more
than the minimum and refused to weave in social justice principles throughout their courses. On the other hand, Leslie has, in fact, faced reprimand for engaging in sociopolitical discussions that were critical of President Trump and his policies, yet she continues to enact a social justice pedagogy that she now keeps closely aligned with official curriculum. Jennifer, in a school comprised of Hispanic and white students, has preemptively avoided complaints and reprimands by intentionally keeping her standards at the forefront when she engages in sociopolitical topics. These teachers have worked to facilitate change as they all agreed racist or sexist thinking is not permanent or immutable. Indeed, hooks has witnessed firsthand “how easy it is for individuals to change their thoughts and actions when they become aware and when they desire to use that awareness to alter behavior” (p. 39). Yet fear of reprimand is a powerful deterrent for teachers who wish to challenge racist or sexist thinking (Wassell, 2019). Official curriculum, standards, and mandates can offer protection as a safe harbor, shifting tools of control into tools of transformation.

**Discursive approach to social justice pedagogy.**

Schools are not a neutral space and teaching is a political act; nonetheless, teachers in the current study struggled to negotiate the idealized concept of neutrality and the pedagogical choices they made within a social justice framework. As teachers, “all our silences in the face of racist assault are acts of complicity” (hooks, 1995, p. 19). The same is true when sexism or xenophobia is present in the classroom. Whereas a pedagogy of hope foregrounds action to mitigate harm to vulnerable students, the opposite is also true; teachers’ attempted neutrality, silence, and inaction signal implicit agreement with
underlying messages of hostility or dehumanization. With this in mind, teachers in the current study reported their own actions in facilitating change in an indirect, discursive approach that gave the appearance of neutrality when, in reality, the choices were deliberate and purposeful.

Of all the participants, Brandon was one of the most adamant that teachers should be “neutral” and never let their personal opinions be known. Brandon has taught high school Spanish for about 10 years, but it is his third year at his current school, a small Title I school in the Southeast. The students who attend the school are those who do not have transportation to other schools offered in the “school choice” context of the area. The student population of the school is about 80% African American, 20% Hispanic, and a very small percentage of white students. Brandon mentioned that 90% of students at the school do not read on grade level and few students attend college. Of those who do attend, few are able to successfully complete a college degree.

Brandon explained that the sociopolitical rhetoric has indeed had an impact on his students in recent years. Deportation and ICE are constant concerns for his Hispanic students, and students who have U.S. citizenship position themselves as superior to those who do not. Nonetheless, he said, “It's not my job and it's not any teacher's job to try and shape political or social opinions” and he tells his students, “My job is to give you the facts and help you reach your own conclusions.” However, he also shared instances of activities designed to facilitate perspective taking, empathy, and challenging stereotypes. Thus, his actions were not a neutral presentation of facts, but intentionally designed within a social justice framework. In one lesson example, he shared, “The machismo one
and issues concerning domestic violence always get a good response, I hate to say a “good” response, but spark lively debates, because those are something that every single student, black, white, or Hispanic, has experienced.” Knowing his students and the challenges many of them faced, Brandon said he tried to inspire a “light bulb moment” in which students not only were able to examine a harmful stereotype of another culture, but also critically reflect on “machismo” within their own culture. As he reflected, “It exists in every culture and has for thousands of years.” With this in mind, Brandon said he tried to give his students the vocabulary to name and discuss the issue that many students took for granted as simply a part of life.

Out of all the cultural topics Brandon could have chosen, he elected to discuss a stereotype associated with Latinx culture and explore how the issue is pervasive across many cultures. He did not directly state his own opinions about the stereotype, but rather facilitated a discussion in which the students could name the problems associated with hyper-masculinity. Moreover, this type of hyper-masculinity can be seen in the current sociopolitical climate in the U.S., with President Trump famously saying, “You know, I’m automatically attracted to beautiful - I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything.” followed by the comment, “Grab ’em by the pussy. You can do anything” (Makel, 2016). Exploring practices that are reflective of a patriarchal, male-dominant belief system across different cultural contexts can help students dismantle stereotypes while also facilitating reflection of their own culture.
Just as Brandon adopted an indirect, discursive approach to a lesson grounded in social justice principles, so, too, have other teachers addressed students in a similar non-threatening manner. Within a critical feminist framework, engaging in resistance is not only the work of the disenfranchised, but also those in positions of power and those from dominant groups. Indeed, “to successfully do the work of unlearning domination, a democratic educator has to cultivate a spirit of hopefulness about the capacity of individuals to change” (hooks, 2003, p. 73). The work of cultivating change in students from white, middle-class, heterosexual, or other dominant groups can be a delicate balance. Reflecting on her experiences attempting a straightforward approach, hooks noted, “When people feel directly threatened (as in ‘You are labeling me as a racist or sexist’) they simply shut down or become crazily defensive” (p. 107). Thus, a discursive approach to social justice pedagogy can be a helpful framework for action.

In the current study, teachers espoused taking a “neutral” stance because they believed directly stating their opinions in front of students was unlikely to encourage critical thinking or examination of belief systems. On the topic of immigration, for example, Jennifer said she does not discuss the situation in the United States with her French class. Instead, she stated she talked about immigration from Africa to France. She recounted:

Just the fact that I talk about immigration from Africa to France, and why, why would a person, why did somebody leave their home and their family and emigrate to a really strange culture? What makes people do that? So just the kind of questions I ask, just the kind of choice, what I choose to expose kids to inside
that huge universe of language, you know, when I choose culture things, just the types of things I choose.

Jennifer acknowledged that facilitating discussion through probing questions has proved helpful for her, as students started to understand the complexity of immigration, how one is given refugee status, and the difficult situations people face both in their home country and upon arrival in a new country where they hope to find safety.

Similarly, Leslie’s German class does not delve into the immigration policies and practices of the Trump administration. She said her students know what is happening in the sociopolitical context, including child separation at the border and ICE raids at workplaces. Yet in class, her students are provided with a counter-narrative of refugees receiving a warm welcome when they arrived in Germany. She said:

I would show videos that were taken from newscast and stuff that showed for example, in Munich, the people in Munich welcoming trainfuls of refugees with food and toys for the kids and diapers and just volunteering all over the place and opening up their houses.

Leslie noted that her students were quick to make the connection that this approach was far different than the approach in the United States. While both Jennifer and Leslie believed in preserving the human dignity of immigrants and refugees, they did not openly state this belief. Instead, students were the ones to bring up issues of respect, kindness, support, and empathy along with reasons why people leave their homes and what options are available to them in a crisis.
Immigration was a central issue in Annabelle’s ESOL class, as many of her students had emigrated from other countries. However, she perceived her rural community held hostile attitudes towards immigrants, which caused her to feel anxiety about being too straight-forward with her beliefs. At the same time, she wanted to empower her students and let them know she was on their side. One way she was able to accomplish this task from an indirect approach was through her selection of reading material. She explained:

We do read biographies about important people and a lot of people that we read about have done something significant as far as advancing the rights of people, or, they worked in some, maybe they were an educator or a political activist or politician, and so then that’s kind of we, we talk about their ideas and what they did and how they changed society and the effect that that had. I think that's an important part of language education.

Annabelle mentioned that she often reminded her students that they deserve to be in school and they deserve to live in safety, regardless of what other students or teachers might say to them. She stated she was deliberate in her efforts to encourage them and paid special attention when students felt hopeless. Her strategy was to remind them that they, too, could facilitate change in society, just as the people in the biographies they read, and they had every right to aim for that goal. Focusing on the biographies of others helped Annabelle feel secure in reassuring her students without the risk of reprimand from administrators or counselors who did not always agree that these students should be enrolled at their school.
As Norton Pierce (1995) explained, identity is mutable and depends largely on power relations and positioning. When one’s identity has been demonized in the public sphere, a disempowered positioning may be mitigated by teacher support and guidance to regain a sense of human dignity. At the same time, when one’s identity is tied to the language, culture, beliefs, and practices of a community that embraces a white, middle-class, heterosexual, patriarchal dominant culture, a degree of vulnerability is required to relinquish the more powerful positioning and eschew cultural norms. A critical feminist framework recognizes this work alongside the restoration of human dignity for those in disempowered positions. As hooks explained:

By making the personal political, many individuals have experienced major transformations in thought that have led to changing their lives: the white people who worked to become anti-racist, the men who worked to challenge sexism and patriarchy, heterosexists who begin to truly champion sexual freedom (p. xiii).

Using a discursive approach to encourage and facilitate change can be an effective practice for teachers working with both disempowered and dominant groups of students. While teachers in the current study attempted to remain neutral in their words, their responses suggested they were not neutral in their pedagogical decisions, including the resources they chose, the topics of discussion, and the social justice lessons they developed. Students, then, might have an opportunity to experience transformation while minimizing threats to their identity and avoiding a defensive stance. A discursive approach to social justice pedagogy aligns with a pedagogy of hope; the belief in the
capacity of individuals to change guides the actions of teachers, and the relentlessness of this hope sustains the actions of teachers.

**Summary of Qualitative Findings**

The qualitative phase of the study was designed to answer the second research question: *How do language teachers attempt to mitigate dehumanizing beliefs and practices in the current sociopolitical climate?* This question was addressed by the themes that described teacher practices: Classroom permeability and possibility, curricula as safe harbor, and a discursive approach to social justice pedagogy. Even if teachers did not have a specific incident to address, the hostility in the broader sociopolitical context was enough to inspire lessons with a social justice lens. Moreover, teachers often took action with great care so as to protect themselves from possible reprimand. Teachers also took action in ways that allowed students to grapple with new information that might challenge, disrupt, or potentially broaden their worldview. This research question was predicated on the assumption that teachers did, in fact, take action for social justice. The data revealed this to be the case; language teachers have noticed the sociopolitical hostility and have addressed it in their classrooms in order to facilitate change and work towards a more just and equitable society.

**Phase III: Mixed Methods Integration**

While the quantitative data suggested that beliefs, experiences, and a social justice initiative predicted action, the qualitative data revealed that teachers do not always take action in a straight-forward, direct manner. The actions teachers take depend on context, student demographics, and the social justice lesson the teacher wants to impart.
Nonetheless, looking at the quantitative data and qualitative findings together demonstrated areas in which teachers might grapple with some of the issues associated with a social justice pedagogy.

**Integration of Quantitative Results and Qualitative Findings**

In the current study, integration of the quantitative results and qualitative findings was intended for complementarity in which “qualitative and quantitative methods are used to measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon” (Greene et al., 1989, p. 258). The main points of integration were selected by focusing on some of the guiding principles of the overarching critical feminist theoretical frameworks. This strategy was chosen in order to narrow down and organize findings while also ensuring close alignment with theory while analyzing data.

As seen in the joint display Table 4.1, teaching as a form of resistance to dominant narratives is one of the critical feminist principles guiding the study. This principle was addressed in the survey item, “It is not a teacher’s responsibility to address society’s problems,” with the majority of teachers selecting “Somewhat disagree,” “Disagree,” or “Strongly disagree.” The fact that most of the language teacher participants felt like it was a *responsibility* to address society’s problems, as opposed to merely an option, reflected a spirit of resistance. However, it is also possible that teachers were not in complete agreement about what, exactly, constituted problems in society. With this in mind, interview participants were asked how they viewed the role of a teacher. In the example in Table 4.10, Juanita described how a teacher’s moral
convictions and social justice beliefs often led to action. In her own case, she said she would be willing to take action she believed to be morally right, even if there was a risk for reprimand, as she felt like her moral responsibility to her students was paramount. Taken together, both the quantitative and qualitative results shed light on the fact that teachers who believe it is their job to engage in a social justice pedagogy that resists dominant narratives can, and often do, take action.

Central to critical feminist theory are the possibility for change and the avoidance of a neutral stance that defaults to the side of the dominant and the powerful. Yet these issues were sometimes difficult for teachers to articulate. The word “neutrality” appeared to elicit strong reactions, both for teachers who said they attempted to stay neutral and those who felt it was morally inappropriate to do so. Nearly 60% of teachers indicated on the survey that neutrality in classroom discussions was part of a teacher’s job. Indeed, interview evidence supported this view, as participants such as Brandon clearly stated their alignment with this belief. On the other hand, the joint display mentions Erin, who believed that adopting a neutral stance was for teachers who did not want to take a stand. Ultimately, the issues of neutrality were reconciled when it became clear teachers reported taking action for social justice in their pedagogical decisions, even if they do not directly state their opinions on sociopolitical topics.

Throughout the study, the word “action” was in reference to actions for social justice, actions meant to facilitate change, and actions meant to encourage critical thinking, among other purposes. Both the pragmatic paradigm and the critical feminist theoretical underpinnings demand such action for more equitable experiences in
education and for a more just society. With this in mind, the survey question in which teachers were asked if they should challenge a student’s preconceived ideas resulted in 95% agreement. Challenging a student, however, was not necessarily as aggressive as it might appear. Asking questions, facilitating reflection, and helping students “think twice” are all ways to challenge students without demonizing or alienating those facing new information that conflicts with their preconceived ideas. As Hazel explained, simply asking students what they would do if faced with a desperate situation is a start to deeper conversations and understandings. Overall, teachers largely agreed that challenging students’ thinking was an important part of the job, particularly for those working within a social justice framework.

Finally, following a critical feminist perspective, teachers should first be able to recognize and name the problems facing their students. In the current study, the focus was sociopolitical hostility that has caused harm to students and has contributed to a combative environment both in and outside of school. Second, teachers should be reflective in the actions they can take in order to address the aforementioned problems. In the survey, the overwhelming majoring of teachers agreed it was their responsibility to promote empathy. Empathy is one, but by no means the only, way in which teachers engaged in a social justice pedagogy. As Leslie’s example indicates, teachers who consider the whole child, not just the student learning content, are teachers who take care to encourage things like empathy. Humanizing the classroom space after noticing the needs of students is part of the work of teaching as resistance and teaching for change.
### Table 4.10

**Mixed Methods Joint Display**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Feminist Theory</th>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>% Agree / Disagree</th>
<th>Interview response</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching as resistance</td>
<td>“It is not a teacher’s responsibility to address society’s problems.”</td>
<td>91% Disagree</td>
<td>“My moral obligation to do right for my kids is more important than whether or not their parents complain or whether or not my boss is going to get mad at me.” - Juanita</td>
<td>Belief in a social justice pedagogy is more influential on teachers’ actions than a diminished sense of agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth of neutrality</td>
<td>“It is a teacher’s job to stay neutral in discussions about current sociopolitical events.”</td>
<td>58% Agree</td>
<td>“There definitely is a preponderance to be politically neutral. And it’s like, well, gee, you know, you must sleep really well at night since you’re not really delving too deeply into the things that are happening.” - Erin</td>
<td>Teachers struggle with the notion of neutrality and demonstrate a social justice orientation through discursive approaches instead of direct statements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate change</td>
<td>“It is my job as a teacher to plan lessons that challenge student’s preconceived ideas.”</td>
<td>95% Agree</td>
<td>“When you can talk about Honduras...I think that makes them think twice about, you know, what they would do in the same situation.” - Hazel</td>
<td>Teachers encourage critical examination of beliefs to help students grow and transform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming and addressing problems</td>
<td>“Promoting empathy is a teacher’s responsibility.”</td>
<td>98% Agree</td>
<td>“It’s not just teaching Spanish or German or whatever... [we’re here] just to simply give them a reason to think twice about being cruel to others. Our goals are not just that our kids can speak Spanish...there’s more to being a teacher than just the content.” - Leslie</td>
<td>The role of a teacher is to humanize the learning process through reflective actions when hostility and cruelty are demonstrated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: n=614; Agree = Strongly agree, agree, and somewhat agree; Disagree = Strongly disagree, agree, and somewhat agree.*
The development of the joint model display addressed the third research question: *How do the quantitative results and qualitative findings combine to provide an enhanced understanding of teachers’ actions in a hostile sociopolitical climate?* The enhanced understanding emerged through complementarity in which survey items aligned with or were further illuminated by interview responses. Teachers’ actions in a hostile sociopolitical climate were aligned with a belief in social justice, a desire to facilitate change in society, and a focus on facilitating change in students. Challenging students in such a way as to allow room for uncomfortable reconciliation of old beliefs and new information is something teachers did out of a moral sense of what is right and out of an obligation to care for their students’ overall wellbeing. Ultimately, the results demonstrated that language teachers have, indeed, taken action in recent years, even when these actions were difficult to articulate or when teachers faced conflicting emotions and beliefs within themselves. Teachers have shown they are brave, and they continue to do the work of promoting a more equitable and just reality for their students with a spirit of hopefulness.

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to determine how different factors correlated with language teachers’ actions as they attempted to mitigate the impact of sociopolitical hostility as well as understand the actions that were ultimately taken. At the national level, this examination included the development and administration of a predictive model that could possibly explain which factors were associated with teacher action for social justice. At a deeper level, this study used follow-up interviews to understand teachers’ actions in their school and classroom.
The quantitative results demonstrated that a combination of language teachers’ beliefs in a social justice pedagogy with their experiences with sociopolitical hostility is predictive of taking action. Even though agency was not a significant predictor of action, the follow-up interviews revealed that teachers’ actions for social justice were conducted with layers of protection from retribution, suggesting an uneasiness with their professional freedom and autonomy. Taken together in the integration phase, the critical feminist theoretical framework helped organize findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases to gain a broader view of the actions teachers profess to take.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

And, you know, to me, as the saying goes, all teaching is political.

— Erin, 6-12 Spanish teacher

Conducting a study that focuses on harm caused to students has been a challenge, not in methods development or data analysis, but in the emotional toll it has taken as teachers shared their stories. I will never forget how my heart sank to the floor when one of my students gleefully announced Trump had won the 2016 election and deportations would begin while the child of immigrants kept his head bowed three seats behind her. While each language teacher in the study has a unique story to tell, the underlying message has been the same; when teachers believe in a social justice pedagogy that might mitigate sociopolitical hostility, actions will be taken in the best way they know how.

The current study is unique in that it focuses specifically on foreign/world language (FL) teachers and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers. While teachers in all content areas might engage in a social justice pedagogy, the issues associated with the current sociopolitical climate make language classes particularly well-suited to address the problems. This chapter discusses how each of the three phases of the study satisfactorily addressed the research questions with a FL/ESOL teacher population. The chapter also enumerates the limitations the study and future implications.

In this explanatory sequential mixed methods study, each phase informed the next to fully explore the phenomenon under investigation. The data included: A quantitative survey with 614 FL/ESOL teachers; semi-structured follow-up interviews with seven
teachers; and a joint display examining theoretical principles alongside quantitative and qualitative findings. This study was designed to answer the following three research questions:

1. What is the relationship between language teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school, their beliefs on social justice, their sense of agency, and the actions they take?
2. How do language teachers attempt to mitigate dehumanizing beliefs and practices in the current sociopolitical climate?
3. How do the quantitative results and qualitative findings combine to provide an enhanced understanding of teachers’ actions in a hostile sociopolitical climate?

This study ultimately provided a deeper understanding of how language teachers take action for social justice and what factors predict such action within the context of a hostile sociopolitical climate.

**Factors Predicting Teacher Action**

Prior research on sociopolitical hostility stemming from the 2016 election cycle and subsequent Trump presidency explored influencing variables in teachers’ decisions to engage in actions of resistance (Dunn et al., 2018; Sondel et al., 2018). Much like an exploratory sequential mixed methods design, the qualitative findings from the research helped inform the development of the quantitative survey instrument in the current study. Previously, researchers identified several variables influencing teachers’ pedagogical decisions when facing a hostile sociopolitical environment but did not determine how these variables were related. As a result, the first research question in this study examined
how the previously-identified variables correlated with teachers’ actions: *What is the relationship between language teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school, their beliefs on social justice, their sense of agency, and the actions they take?*

The first research question did not test a hypothesis, but rather sought to determine which, if any, connections existed among variables that led to action. The four original variables included: Teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility (as indicated by incidents in their school or classroom); teachers’ beliefs on their role in enacting a social justice pedagogy (as indicated by responses to prompts of what teachers should and should not do in the classroom); and teachers’ sense of agency and autonomy (in relation to parents, administration, and colleagues) as they relate to action (in terms of social justice) within a sociopolitical context. Quantitative data were collected using a researcher-developed survey intended to measure teachers’ experiences (items 1-8, divided into two parts such as 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, etc.), social justice beliefs (items 10-20), sense of agency (items 22-30), and the actions they took (items 32-39). In addition to these 36 items, 12 demographic questions were included for a total of 56 close-ended questions. Optional open-ended items with text boxes were included at the end of each of the four sections. Data were collected via an anonymous online Qualtrics survey and the survey link was posted to state, regional, and national FL and ESOL organizations on Facebook and Twitter as well as personal accounts.

A total of 614 FL/ESOL teachers in grades K-12 completed the survey, and all 50 states were represented with at least one response per state. Half of the teachers taught Spanish (n=293, 47.7%), followed by ESOL (n=85, 13.8%), German (n=76, 12.4%), and
French (n=57, 9.3%). In addition, 12.7% (n=78) taught multiple subjects, such as Spanish and math or French and ESOL. Other languages (n=25, 4%) included Latin, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Italian, Cherokee, and American Sign Language.

Data were analyzed using SPSS data analysis software version 25.0 (IBM Corp, 2017). To increase reliability, five survey items (8.1, 8.2, 10, 20 and 39) were excluded, resulting in the total items n=39 with α=.833. Cronbach’s alpha of 0.70 or more is generally accepted as representing good reliability (George & Mallery, 2003). A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test served as an indicator of the strength of the relationships among items by the partial correlation coefficient. When evaluating the size of the overall KMO, Kaiser (1974) stated the range of acceptable values is in the 0.90’s (optimal) to 0.60’s (acceptable). In this study, KMO>.80, indicating the data were well-suited for factor analysis. Bartlett’s test for sphericity compared the correlation matrix (a matrix of Pearson correlations) to the identity matrix (Pett et al., 2003). In this study, Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant (χ² (741) = 12238.169, p<0.005).

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the 39 most reliable items of the survey. Items loaded into five factors. A test of scale reliability for the 39 items that were identified as forming the five factors was conducted. Each of the five factors was assessed individually revealing a Cronbach’s (1951) alpha of 0.91 for the Experiences factor (14 items), an α of 0.82 for Action (6 items), an α of 0.74 for Agency (6 items), and an α of 0.71 for Social Justice Initiative and Beliefs (5 items each).

Correlation analyses revealed there was a moderate positive correlation between Beliefs and Action (r=.425, p<.01) and a moderate positive correlation between Social
Justice Initiative and Action ($r = .394, p < .01$). Experiences and Action showed a weak correlation ($r = .255, p < .01$), and there was no correlation between Agency and Action ($r = .034$). Hierarchical linear regression analysis found that Agency did not help predict Action. However, Beliefs, Experiences, and Social Justice Initiative were significant predictors, $F(3, 611) = 85.504, p < .001$, and explained 29.6% of the variance in Action.

Returning to the research question, the first phase of the study was intended to determine what, if any, relationship existed between teachers’ experiences with sociopolitical hostility in their school, their beliefs on social justice, their sense of agency, and the actions they take. It was unclear if all factors must be present for action to occur, if one was more important than all the others, or if some combination of the factors was the best way to predict action. The variables did, in fact, emerge as factors through the EFA, with the addition of the Social Justice Initiative factor. Agency, in this study, was not a predictive factor for action. Ultimately, the answer to the research question is the more teachers report experiences with sociopolitical hostility and a strong belief in a society justice pedagogy, the more likely they are to take action.

Teachers’ beliefs “in all students’ ability and worth” were in alignment with a social justice approach to education and were manifested by one who “challenges, confronts, and disrupts misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes” (Nieto & Bode, 1998, p. 12). This definition both humanizes vulnerable students and offers concrete actions. The Social Justice Initiative factor was a combination of teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ reflective work with colleagues, further explaining why Beliefs and Social Justice Initiative were predictors of Action. Finally, teachers who held social justice beliefs and
reported that their students had experienced or enacted cruelty reflective of the sociopolitical rhetoric were the most likely to take action. This finding is in alignment with the critical feminist framework guiding this study that emphasizes practical impacts and pragmatic actions when and where they are needed (hooks, 2003; Wood, 2008). In other words, recognition of a problem requires action to address the problem. In the current study, teachers’ fear of reprimand and diminished sense of autonomy appeared to be overridden by their commitment to serving their vulnerable students and promoting critical reflection in students who held dehumanizing beliefs.

However, the scores for experiences on the survey were, overall, lower than scores on other items. On a scale of 1 (Never happened) to 5 (Happened a lot), the item with the highest mean was Q1.2: “I have heard students being insensitive (such as calling a classmate a racially-charged slur, making fun of someone’s parents, etc.) at my school.” The mean for this item was 3.01 (SD=1.16). All other items had a lower mean, suggesting that language teachers are not seeing instances of harassment or bullying grounded in sociopolitical hostility first hand. This finding was interesting, as prior large-scale and highly publicized studies reported a host of bold behaviors (Costello, 2016; Rogers et al., 2017). At the same time, journalists continue to report on the “Trump Effect” in schools, often outlining the consequences (or lack thereof) when students engage in harassment or bullying behaviors (Natanson et al., 2020). It is possible the continued media coverage and publicity have encouraged students to be less open with their actions. In addition, prior studies using a qualitative method offered a more nuanced perspective of how sociopolitical hostility and peer harassment manifested in schools,
suggesting that bold behaviors are not the only type of bullying that can take place (Payne & Journell, 2019; Vega, 2018; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Whispers in the hallways or deportation notes left on desks also constitute cruel behaviors.

With another election cycle gearing up in 2020, it will be interesting to see if hostile behaviors reappear with the same openness as has been reported in the past few years. As hooks (2003) described, the language used in the media is an effective and powerful force to perpetuate negative stereotypes of marginalized or vulnerable groups. While it has yet to be seen what type of language this next election cycle will employ, it has already been established what type of damage might be done.

**Articulating What We Do**

Phase II of the study was a qualitative follow-up to the quantitative survey in order to better understand the actions teachers have taken to promote social justice as a means of resistance to sociopolitical hostility, racism, and xenophobia. This phase was designed to answer the second research question: *How do language teachers attempt to mitigate dehumanizing beliefs and practices in the current sociopolitical climate?* Even though a social justice approach to teaching can be enacted in any subject area (Adams & Bell, 2016), there is little empirical research specifically on language teachers (Wassell et al., 2019). This lack of research is problematic, as there continue to be calls for “a more reflective, interpretive, historically grounded, and politically engaged [language] pedagogy” (Kramsch, 2014, p. 302).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven K-12 language teachers for approximately one hour each. The interview questions were influenced by the
quantitative results and prior research. In addition, the questions were grounded in critical feminist theory in which “both exercises in recognition, naming the problem but also fully and deeply articulating what we do [emphasis added] that works to address and resolve issues, are needed to generate anew and inspire a spirit of ongoing resistance” (hooks, 2003, p. xiv). The participants’ interviews revealed evidence of addressing both. Even though agency was not a predictor of action for social justice in the current study, the survey still showed a range of responses related to fear of reprimand. In addition, prior research has suggested a diminished sense of agency is related to language teachers’ reluctance to take action for social justice (Wassell et al., 2019). Therefore, questions in this study were also posed in relation to potential backlash or fear of complaints. The seven interviews resulted in three themes that helped answer the research question. These themes include: Classroom permeability and possibility, curricula as safe harbor, and a discursive approach to social justice pedagogy.

The first theme, classroom permeability and possibility, describes one way teachers have taken action to mitigate dehumanizing beliefs and practices that have become more commonplace within a hostile sociopolitical context. Indeed, all seven of the teachers reported that students from Kindergarten through 12th grade have either reflected or been impacted by the dehumanizing political rhetoric of recent years. Yet the instances of bullying, cruel words, or whispers in the hallway, for these teachers, were not treated as a discipline issue. Rather, all seven teachers reported that they reflected on the incidents and developed lessons in class in order to address what they believed to be an underlying cause of the hostility. These causes ranged from students who simply did
not understand why the rhetoric they were repeating was hurtful to students who proclaimed their disdain for immigrants and purposefully used the rhetoric of President Trump to make their stance known. The underlying causes in these examples might be as simple as a lack of information or as complex as a racist belief system. In other words, the hostility that permeated the classroom walls allowed teachers the opportunity to attempt to create change.

Within a pedagogy of hope, teaching as a form of resistance is one way in which teachers can serve their students well (hooks, 2003). In this study, resistance came in the form of a social justice approach to teaching that “challenges, confronts, and disrupts misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes” (Nieto & Bode, 1998, p. 12). Across all seven teachers, there were a total of 80 mentions of sociopolitical hostility in the school or classroom and a total of 124 mentions of action for social justice. These actions were often in alignment with prior research. For example, a study of sixth grade Latinx English Language Learner (ELL) students found integrating the arts helped students navigate their fear of President Trump and his policies while also fostering a sense of responsibility to enact practices of resistance and to create change in the future (Vega, 2018). Similarly, honoring students’ feelings while helping them regain a sense of dignity and control was also mentioned by teachers in this study.

The second theme was how language teachers use curriculum as a safe harbor from potential complaints, backlash, or reprimand. These negative consequences might come from students, parents, colleagues, or administrators. As a result, language teachers are often reluctant to engage with a social justice pedagogy or introduce sociopolitical
topics in the classroom (Journell, 2016; Osborn, 2016). In the current study, the ways in which teachers protected themselves depended on their teaching context. Some teachers reported they felt a great deal of support by their administrators when teaching for social justice, while others have been called in to the principal’s office when a student complained to a parent and the parent complained to administration. Some teachers expressed that the parents at their school were overly involved and threatened to report teachers any time they were unhappy while other teachers struggled to contact a parent at all. All teachers, however, mentioned the ways they used curriculum to include social justice material in alignment with official standards at least once when they discussed the actions they take in the classroom.

The strategy of aligning topics that may come with potential backlash with official stances beyond the teachers’ control has served the participants well. None of the teachers mentioned any complaint or reprimand when they carefully explained to students how the lesson met a specific standard or curricular goal. In contrast, a study by Wassell et al. (2019) found that for language teachers, “social justice work was predicated on their curricular freedom in the classroom and ability to use the materials that they liked” (p. 11). In their study, teachers felt constrained and avoided sociopolitical engagement when the topics did not align with official curriculum or materials. This study, however, found that teachers reported they intentionally and carefully aligned their lessons to exploit the curriculum for social justice teaching. Moreover, this study has shown that a teacher’s belief in a social justice pedagogy and the possibility for change is predictive of action, whether or not their sense of agency has been diminished. Perhaps it
is less an issue of curricular constraint than an issue of conviction, determination, and hope.

The third theme, a discursive approach to social justice pedagogy, reiterated one of the main principles of pedagogy of hope: The possibility for change. When a student’s perspective is grounded in the dehumanization or oppression of others, teachers can and should position themselves in resistance (hooks, 2013). Refusing to engage with these students does little to facilitate critical thinking and examination of one’s own beliefs, identity, and positioning. The possibility for transformation is unlikely. With this in mind, all seven teachers in this study clearly articulated the ways in which they engaged their students from privileged or dominant groups without demonizing or shaming. Avoiding a direct, confrontational, or explicit approach to teaching sociopolitical issues has served teachers well. By showing examples of how people in other countries or cultures treat immigrants and refugees, engage with others in their community, seek safety from violence, or otherwise have different life experiences than those of the students in the classroom, the teacher doesn’t need to give her own opinion; students are the ones to grapple with the new information and reflect on how the information fits within their own worldview.

By offering counter-narratives, new information, and other resources that challenge students’ thinking, teachers address both the needs of their most vulnerable students and those of their students from dominant groups. In a Spanish classroom with heritage speakers, for example, teachers’ actions can either validate or further marginalize the students who are already disempowered in political rhetoric (Valdés,
2000). By humanizing the experiences of Latinx people, so, too, might teachers extend human dignity to the heritage or native speakers in their classroom. At the same time, students from dominant groups might learn the ways in which structural inequality dictates how stories are told. Indeed, “it is essential that critical language education not only opens the door to new sources of knowledge and understanding, but that it also involves investigation of whose knowledge has historically been privileged, whose has been disregarded, and why” (Norton & Toohey, 2004, p. 15). The teachers in the current study recognized that dismissing students who hold dehumanizing beliefs or engage in hostile behaviors should not be met with a “neutral” stance, nor should they be excluded from the conversation. These teachers worked to facilitate change as they all agreed racist or sexist thinking is not permanent or immutable. Indeed, a pedagogy of hope acknowledges “how easy it is for individuals to change their thoughts and actions when they become aware and when they desire to use that awareness to alter behavior” (hooks, 2013, p. 39). Within a hostile sociopolitical climate, language teachers have, indeed, reported a range of approaches to mitigate the harm done to their most vulnerable students while simultaneously maintaining hope that other students might change and adopt a more humanizing stance as well.

**Teaching as Resistance**

The third phase of the study integrated the quantitative and qualitative findings in order to address the final research question: *How do the quantitative results and qualitative findings combine to provide an enhanced understanding of teachers’ actions in a hostile sociopolitical climate?* To answer this question, I drew on the words of bell
hooks and the principles of critical feminist theory to organize the findings. Ultimately, there were no major surprises or contradictions between the qualitative and quantitative results. Rather, the results were largely in alignment, providing an additional degree of trustworthiness and validity to each of the phases.

Due to the critical feminist orientation of this study, the findings in each of the phases were focused on actions taken as opposed to solely the problems identified. These actions took place within the latest iteration of a hostile sociopolitical environment in the United States. As such, the dehumanization taking place in the political sphere requires political resistance in the world of education. Teachers working to serve students well know that “service as a form of political resistance is vital because it is a practice of giving that eschews the notion of reward” (hooks, 2003, p. 91). Teachers in the current study did not mention any recognition from administration or accolades from colleagues when engaging in a social justice pedagogy. They engaged in the work because the work needed to be done, and their beliefs in equity, justice, and the possibility for change served as their motivation.

Although the work of the teachers in the current study is important and meaningful, the teachers did not mention that it was easy. Even when they admitted feeling tired, defeated, or anxious about the work, they carried on and did not abandon a social justice approach. This struggle is important to note, as “a democratic educator has to cultivate a spirit of hopefulness about the capacity of individuals to change” (hooks, 2003, p. 73). In this study, teachers did not give up on students who expressed racist, sexist, or xenophobic beliefs and they did not choose a “neutral” stance when
incidents occurred at school. Rather, regardless of what happened, they persisted and maintained a spirit of hopefulness that their actions were making a difference.

Throughout the study, teachers did not struggle to name issues and problems stemming from sociopolitical hostility at their school. Similarly, they did not hesitate to explain how they worked to encourage a humanizing perspective within their own classroom. One of the most, if not the most, important principles guiding the study states: “Both exercises in recognition, naming the problem but also fully and deeply articulating what we do that works to address and resolve issues, are needed to generate anew and inspire a spirit of ongoing resistance” (hooks, 2003, p. xiv). Addressing the final research question, an enhanced understanding of how language teachers take action in a hostile sociopolitical climate has been achieved by documenting how the “Trump Effect” has harmed their students, revealing what factors predict action for social justice, enumerating the specific actions teachers have taken, and offering a hopeful conclusion that their work does, in fact, make a difference.

**Limitations of the Study**

In the current study, the survey instrument was shown to have a high validity and reliability according to the Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient (George & Mallery, 2003) and the Pearson correlation coefficient (Hinkle et al., 2003). However, a threat to validity lies in face validity, or understandability (Litwin, 1995). To address this threat, individuals both within and outside of academia were consulted to ensure items were clear and easy to understand. Another threat to validity in online survey research is misreporting or response error (Dew, 2008). As this survey was distributed online
through Facebook, Twitter, and email, one limitation is that it is impossible to know if participants misrepresented themselves or purposefully answered questions inaccurately. However, a close examination of the data did not reveal any obvious misreporting.

Another limitation of the study is the threat to validity due to response bias. When recruiting participants, snowball sampling “poses a distinct risk of capturing a biased subset of the total population of potential participants because any eligible participants who are not linked to the original set of informants will not be accessible for inclusion in the study” (Morgan, 2012b, p. 816). Furthermore, it is possible the teachers who chose to participate were more likely to have strong feelings about the topic than other teachers, thus preventing a truly representative sample (Villar, 2008). In addition, responses were grouped by nine geographic divisions as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau (1995) (see Figure 3.2) to ensure both conservative and liberal parts of the country were included in an effort to reduce response bias. Yet the South Atlantic division had a much larger response rate than other divisions, resulting in uneven representation across the country.

In the qualitative phase, “the term trustworthiness refers to an overarching concept used in qualitative research to convey the procedures researchers employ to ensure the quality, rigor, and credibility of a study” (Morgan & Ravitch, 2018, p. 1728). One of the ways to increase trustworthiness is through data triangulation during the integration phase. In this study, data triangulation occurred in the form of complementarity by comparing the quantitative and qualitative findings “to measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon” (Greene et al., 1989, p. 258). However, one
limitation of this strategy is researchers might exclude findings that are surprising or contradictory. Thus, care was taken to ensure any such findings would be noted and included.

Implications

For pre-service and in-service teachers, the current study is intended to offer hope that action for social justice is possible and necessary. As opposed to a tidy checklist of actions teachers have successfully taken to use as a model, however, this study outlined broad approaches that might be adapted for different contexts. In order to encourage this hopefulness for change, teachers should seek out like-minded colleagues both within and outside of the school to encourage “collaboration and collective agency for social justice” (Pantić, 2015, p. 766). In other words, this work is not to be done in isolation behind the closed doors of individual classrooms. There is strength in numbers, and as this study has demonstrated, the fear of reprimand is common and persistent. Exchanging ideas and offering encouragement are ways in which teachers can increase their sense of safety while continuing to engage in actions that mitigate hostility. As the 2020 election cycle is set to take place in a matter of months, the political rhetoric is almost certain to increase in intensity and resume the dehumanization of vulnerable groups.

The implications for policy makers, administrators, school boards, and others in positions of power center on the myth of neutrality. Neutrality, as this study has shown, is a loaded word. Yet as teachers, “all our silences in the face of racist assault are acts of complicity” (hooks, 1995, p. 19). The same is true of sexist rhetoric, slurs against LGBTQ students, harassment of Muslim and Jewish students, or xenophobic
proclamations. Thus, official mandates for teacher “neutrality” actually dictate that teachers take the side of those in dominant positions of power as opposed to siding with disempowered, vulnerable, or targeted students. Ultimately, teachers in this study have found that neutrality in their words, such as avoiding directly expressing their own personal opinions in front of the class, is quite different than neutrality in their actions. Teachers can be intentional in the books selected, the topics discussed, the videos shown, and the information shared, all of which may be designed to foster reflection and critical thinking. Neutrality, therefore, should no longer be the goal of any school or district. Encouraging transformation through engagement is a more humanizing and just way to frame the conversation.

Finally, the implications for future research should extend on the findings of this study to continue to build the body of literature in language teaching for social justice and for the resistance of sociopolitical hostility. Specifically, the questions remain: How do we encourage teachers who are not hopeful? Teachers who do not subscribe to the notion that it is our job to facilitate change? Teachers who don’t believe undocumented students deserve to be at school? Or teachers who don’t believe racist, sexist, or dehumanizing beliefs can be challenged and changed? For this avenue of future research, I propose a focus on the identity of teachers and how a social justice approach might be introduced. As Norton Pierce (1995) explained, identity is mutable and depends largely on power relations and positioning. When one’s identity is tied to the rhetoric, culture, beliefs, and practices of a community that embraces a white, middle-class, heterosexual, patriarchal dominant culture, a degree of vulnerability is required to relinquish the more powerful
positioning and eschew cultural norms. Therefore, when teachers find their personal beliefs at odds with the principles of a social justice pedagogy, care must be taken to adopt a “discursive” approach. Professional development is one possible way to deliver the information, as these settings often mimic what it’s like for a student in a classroom. The same principles apply. Direct confrontation seldom leads to transformation and change, yet engagement and critical reflection most certainly can.

**Conclusion**

In recent years, the “Trump Effect” has caused harm, anxiety, and even trauma for many K-12 students in the U.S. The dehumanizing political rhetoric has changed the way students behave towards one another in ways teachers have not seen in years past. Yet this study was intended to document the efforts of FL and ESOL teachers to mitigate this hostility and enact a pedagogy that centers on social justice and equity. With President Trump seeking a second term, the rhetoric is likely to continue to permeate the school walls for the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, teachers who do the work of naming the problems and taking action in response will continue to find ways to take action. Indeed, “serving students well is an act of critical resistance. It is political” (hooks, 2003, p. 90).
APPENDICES

Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Guiding Questions

1. Your survey says you teach languages – can you tell me about your educational background?

2. Have you noticed any changes with students in the past few years?
   a. What are some examples?
   b. Have you noticed any changes with bullying?
   c. Have you noticed students behaving differently towards classmates?

3. Your survey says you have/have not experienced a lot of ramifications from sociopolitical influences. Why do you think that might be?

4. To what extent do you think it is a teacher’s job to create change in society?

5. How much do you worry about getting in trouble as a teacher if a parent or student complains about your lessons?

6. Survey results showed that teacher beliefs in social justice strongly correlate with action. Why do you think that might be?

7. Have you ever taken an action in class that you felt was important, but also ran the risk of someone complaining?

8. What advice would you give a teacher who wanted to participate in social justice action, but was afraid of parent or administrative pushback?
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Immigrants, or Illegal Immigrants, “Animals.” Wrong! They were begrudgingly forced to withdraw their stories. I referred to MS 13 Gang Members as “Animals,” a big difference - and so true. [Tweet].

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