The Handbook of Critical Theoretical Research Methods in Education

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Paying emotional tolls

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Introduction

Emotions impact everything and education is not exempt. Thus, the need for a critical theoretical method to theorize these emotions in education. One such theory, poststructural narrative theory, is a viable critical theoretical method that provides unique levels of theoretical nuance about the role of emotions and the implications for well-being. Although many educational researchers have addressed the concerns over emotional burnout in educational leadership writ large (Beatty, 2007; Dantley, 2010; Friedman, 2002; Ittner, Hagenauer, & Hascher, 2019; Mills & Niesche, 2014), they nonetheless do not offer a more nuanced theorization on aspects of emotions like emotional well-being in racial justice. Therefore, a more pinpointed application that addresses emotional well-being in racial justice work in educational leadership must be had.

Regarding the significance of emotional well-being, Boler and Davis (2018) address the social conditions of the “post-truth” era, asking, “What roles do emotions and affect play in the extreme partisan polarization around race, feminism, ‘political correctness,’ and other issues, in North America and beyond?” (p. 76). The answer is that these issues have a direct impact and play an enormous role on leadership psyche. Racial justice, particularly as a matter of well-being, is not only an issue in educational leadership. Central in the preamble of the World Health Organization (WHO) (2019) constitution, complete health is described as a robust state of well-being and a right regardless of, for example, race, political belief, or social conditions. In education, this well-being is evident in scholarship related to particular leadership roles (Bas & Yildirim, 2012; Somech & Miassy-Maljak, 2003; Mehdinezhad & Nouri, 2016) and in leadership as it concerns racial justice (Grosland, 2019; Grosland & Matias, 2017; Jansen, 2006, 2009; Radd & Grosland, 2019). As such, in this chapter we, the authors, propose that poststructural narrative theory (PSNT) is a formidable theory that advances theorizations of well-being among racial justice educators and leaders, a much-needed praxis if expectation of prolong racial justice is to be met. The ultimate aim is to explore the ways in which research using critical theoretical methods produces more critical theoretical scholarship about emotions, particularly in its relation to race and educational leadership, than
empirical methods alone can do. This is not to say that empirical methods are useless. Indeed, they bring forth findings in specific ways. However, we do argue that they alone cannot substantiate the kinds of critical scholarship needed to combat the emotional deprivation faced, for example, among scholars of color committed to racial justice and their allies engaging racial justice practices.

Exploring existing condition of race, education, and emotions

Emotional well-being and educational leadership

Engaging theoretical methods in theoretical race research foregrounds the complexities of leadership practices, particularly among educational policy and politics. One reason for this is that a considerable amount of educational leadership practices involve politicking policy. As political theorists who engage leadership as a core function of enacting/resisting policy, we turn to Young and Diem (2017) in how they state that there is a tendency within the policy community to think about the theoretical part of policy analysis as separate from the more practical part, the empirical and methodological details, as if theory is something that is applied only after data has been collected. However, theory and method should not be treated as two separate issues or stages in a process. It is our contention that theory and method should be considered simultaneously. Policy analysis is, by its very nature, theoretical; that is, it requires theorizing about the objects of study.

Theorizing objects of study is a crux of theoretical research. It is key to use theories and methods in concert when focusing on emotions because emotions can be easily muddled in research on race subjects. This confusion occurs because extreme partisan polarization plays out emotionally in the context of politicized subjects like race policy. When educators are enacting race subjects in policy or otherwise, how they feel about race will impact their policy practices. If leaders care about racial justice, then they will engage, empower racial justice educators, and express emotions related to race as a policy subject, as a discussion subject, and amongst other subjects where race and racism become a focus. Instead of viewing emotions as periphery, we operationally employ post-structural narrative theory to center emotions in leadership studies, particularly emotionally charged topics like racial justice education in leadership.

Leader burnout

Using the WHO (2019) definition for well-being, in the context of U.S.-based racism, sexism, and xenophobia, how are we, as educational advocates, even to
expect mental or emotional well-being if the societal conditions are not just? The social contexts of leadership well-being are imperative, especially when applied to race, and there is definitely an emotional toll to leadership. In our conceptualization, we consider all aspects of affect, emotion, feeling, and other types of constructions that relate to states of feeling (e.g., Cvetkovich, 2012; Grosland & Matias, 2017; Grosland, 2019; Zembylas, 2014). Meaning, we focus on how emotions are conceptualized in poststructural narrative theory as critical theoretical research which includes deconstructing “negative” feelings not as something unwell, but instead as possible resources for political action (Cvetkovich, 2012).

Although we connote leadership as a stance, including assigned career roles (e.g., principal, superintendent, department, chair, dean), we also define leadership as a way of life. Basically, leadership is a process of both being and becoming. Both noun and active verb, so to speak. And, in becoming leaders the emotional context of leadership is then expressed in schools precisely because these are the very educators who are often active in their communities within and outside of schools (Crawford, 2007). Though not positioned as “superintendents,” their leadership is nonetheless evident in their influence and advocacy for causes they care about (e.g., by protesting, speaking at school board meetings, serving as cultural liaisons). All of which oftentimes comes at an emotional cost “to pay,” leading to burnout.

The concern with contextual burnout is acute among educational leadership in urban, “turnaround,” or reform situations (Beatty, 2007; Dantley, 2010; Ittner et al., 2019; Mills & Niesche, 2014), as these leaders are on the “front lines” of “accountability” measures. Yet and still, the emotions of, and advocating for, social and racial justice reform in educational leadership classrooms (Rusch & Horsford, 2008; Zembylas, 2010) and “leading against the grain” in school buildings is telling of the demands these particular educators face (Jansen, 2006, 2009). Nonetheless, there are political forces and cultural hierarchies of emotions in educational leadership practices (Zorn & Boler, 2007). Clearly, well-being in education leadership is certainly not new; what is novel is the clear need to use poststructural narrative theory as a method to research emotions focused on the implications of burnout in the field of leadership.

### Race and racism

While related concepts such as whiteness, racial formation theory, and the like deconstruct and challenge racial domination, for consistency in this chapter, and because the texts under analysis use race as a subject, we primarily engage the term race or racism. Although race is based on arbitrary body differences, it is yet used to create a hierarchy and ideology of white supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Classic sociological theory reminds us that race and racism symbolize conflict among human bodies that transcends individual identities (Omi & Winant, 1994). Rather, beyond individualities race and racism interpellate between individual and society in severely conflicting and emotional contexts.
Racism is therefore an emotional condition. As emotional conditions, race and racism reproduce emotional dynamics that impact the psyche and can present in the body (tears, trembling, gut feelings, etc.).

These emotions come in the form of loss for idealized objects among teacher educators who use critical race dialogues (Shim, 2018). Such emotions are also hidden among the many undetected stressors of “grit” that accompany the suffering that many Black and other racialized students endure as part of life in racialized schools and society (McGee & Stovall, 2015). Known are the ways that politicized raced emotions manifest in notions of “tolerance” post-9/11. For example, a self-serving version of “tolerance” toward Asian Americans post-9/11 was legitimized as long as it took the form of dominant interpretations of patriotism centering white self-interest (Subedi, 2013). In schools, this played out as a “tolerance” of religion. Although Asian American educators protested acts of white resentment, the racialization of religion in schools post-9/11 created climates of fear and skepticism of students seen as “outsiders” (Subedi, 2013). In these hostile climates, racism has a psychic impact and so the need for therapeutic and cathartic responses, such as those found with the use of Critical Race Theory counterstories (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Needless to say, these racialized hegemonic systems are detrimental to the well-being of racialized groups, and ultimately to humanity.

As a word of caution, harmful racialized emotions have stark research implications for the use of narrative theory, seen in the proliferated methodological use of Critical Race Theory’s (CRT) counternarrative. But, for critical theorists producing theoretical research, and as Ladson-Billings (2013) specifically warned CRT scholars, we “cannot rail against the failure of positivist research to be objective or neutral when our own scholarship is so specific to our personal concerns that it fails to help us grasp important principles of racial justice” (p. 44). Meaning, we, as educational researchers, cannot decry the lack of objectivity in empirical research when sometimes we too are not objective in our quest for racially just educational research. These words of caution exemplify how power must remain central, including that of the researcher, when using critical theoretical research methods to do theoretical research. Arguably, this is even more so for those theoretically researching “difficult” subjects (like race) in leadership and policy studies, due to the large platform leaders have to advocate racial justice principles. Poststructural narrative theory as a critical theoretical research method powerfully deconstructs power and promotes racial justice, even those uncomfortable injustices from within the researchers themselves, as we demonstrate here.

**Narrative theory**

Narrative theory, or narrative inquiry in education, is nothing new. However, what is new is applying poststructural narrative theory as methods particularly when investigating race subjects. To do this we first investigate the underlying ideological parameters that undergird poststructural narrative theory apart
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(meaning, poststructuralism separate to narrative) before we define its ideological dimensions together. In short, narrative inquiry (or narrative research) is best described as interpretive research and, although important in critical theory, as we explain, it has limitations for doing critical theoretical research methods. Regardless of its limitations, it is still a major tenet of poststructural narrative theory.

The tenets, not the definition, are most enduring in narrative research thus we begin there. There are a few overarching major tenets and characteristics of narrative in education that easily transcend context. For one, the roots of narrative research sprout from the humanities and narratology (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Meaning, since narrative is a way of understanding experience, things, people, and events (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), its corollary, narrative research, is then rooted in understanding those complexities in human lives. As such, because people’s stories are complex knowledge sources of social reality, narrative research (with roots in feminism) becomes politicized when drawing from that knowledge source (Clandinin & Raymond, 2006; Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997).

Clearly, narratives and applications of narrative theory are deeply political. Case in point, testing narratives in the United States, and elsewhere, are very politicized and racialized. It is through testing policies and practices that Black children are positioned as “underachievers” and thus scorn a “badge of inferiority” that reinforces the myth of Black inferiority (Horsford & Grosland, 2013). As such, the racist narrative that Black children and families are intellectually inferior is reproduced throughout education achievement discourse (Horsford & Grosland, 2013). This is how the “political” aspect of sustained grand narratives are interwoven with issues of power, authority, and legitimacy (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997).

Examinations of power are key to critical theoretical research methods, and so, too, when conducting theoretical research on the emotional landscape of race subjects in education. Without examinations of power dynamics when researching race, and since emotional well-being is a key element of burnout among racial justice education, emotional dynamics in the plight of racial justice can become blurred. These concerns, therefore, relate to who has power in what is considered a “narrative” or narrative “worthy,” the existence of “subject and object,” who gets to make the distinction between them because these decisions all have emotional roots concerning worthiness. Hence, issues of equality and supremacy occur in politically structured narratives (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). Considering Elbaz-Luwisch’s (1997) early work on political issues and implications, expression in narrative research is thus given political value. This strand of narrative analysis challenges prevailing logic that “underlies the technical rationality of most educational research . . . in the background of narrative work [that] is a critique of top-down” education practice and research (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997, p. 77). The act of critique has elements of emotions that are often overlooked, and therefore critique itself has a potentially important element when producing theoretical research on emotions in racial justice leadership.
Although limited because examinations of power are lacking in traditional narrative inquiry, the major aspects of narrative inquiry in education is nonetheless a baseline for postmodern narrative theory including place (context and location), temporality (relationship and dispositions of the researcher and participants), and sociality (how people transition) (Clandinin & Raymond, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Temporality attends to the ways that experiences are rooted in the present and has implications for the future – everything under study is in transition and is described with a past, present, and future (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Then sociality addresses the simultaneous concern with both personal and social conditions of an individual’s experience and context that is under study (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Narrative theory in education provides a backdrop to research methods that form a foundation for methods in poststructural narrative theory. However, in its simplest form, narrative inquiry alone has limitations for the poststructural narrative and critical theoretical researcher because of the under-examination of power and oppression. In this, we focus on what emotions do and how they are the data in theoretical research, and in the context of racial oppression, racialization and racism is driven by emotions. Advancing fair or just racial policy and leadership, therefore, is nullified when emotions are taken for granted or seen as nothing more than “ground noise.” Since emotions are fluid and grounded in issues of power, poststructuralism is needed. Of utmost importance within this is keeping stories central to the theoretical research method while still allowing for awareness of emotional discourses that are often overlooked in many other forms of critical research.

Poststructural in a “narrative turn”

Poststructural narrative theory for theoretical research on the emotional dynamics of race subjects in leadership is a promising approach, whereas emotions would be otherwise peripheral. Under the auspices of “narrative turn,” narrative education research increasingly took up Marxist/critical and poststructuralism theories (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This turn is particularly important because it mitigates the limitations of narrative alone in terms of the role of power in producing theoretical research. Thus, when researching issues of emotions, emotions are not only relegated to the individual, but instead, as Ahmed (2004) reminds us, they become matters of cultural politics related to race subjects, be it racial resistance, empowerment, or something else. Meaning, emotions are structured by power.

Poststructural narrative research methods involve other ways of knowing and being because it critiques objectivity as proclaimed in “objective” research, hence problematizing post-positivism’s stronghold on research methods (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Distinguished from positivist/post-positivist research, poststructural narrative theory as a critical theoretical research method foregrounds the role of power in the functioning of stories. Consequently, it is precisely these stories that help critical theoretical researchers best understand
how structural power shapes how one’s stories, which are then used to understand the broader social factors that shape the experience behind the stories (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), like white supremacy and patriarchy. Poststructuralists are concerned about hegemonic structural power of large-scale social factors like those aforementioned, and how this power influences individual stories so ubiquitously that they are blinded by their own participation in social oppression (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This blindness is a detrimental condition for educators committed to advancing critical and racial justice practices, for how can they engage in racial justice if they, too, are blind to the larger hegemonic structure of whiteness and white supremacy that structures not only the experiences that frame their stories but the very emotions that arise from those experiences?

Although Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) use the term “poststructural narrative inquiry borderland” to describe the theoretical borderland of both narrative theory and poststructuralist theory, we operationalized it as “poststructural narrative theory” because of our attraction to both the doing and being of racial justice and activism in leadership, for example. Using this theory as a method of theoretical research, one operationalizes discourses that address both their inner and outer world and how these perpetuate (in)justices in education. Discourses in this sense are (Radd & Grosland, 2019):

ways of knowing, acting, judging, and thinking, [discourses] function to direct how power and resources are distributed. In addition to serving as the tools of social construction and, thus, the undergirdment of social systems, [discourses] inhabit the minds, emotions, and bodies of individuals within those systems.

(p. 5)

Abiding by this definition of discourse helps us understand that these ways of knowing and emoting, coupled with the working of power, are key for using poststructural narrative theory as a critical theoretical research method.

Discourses about leadership become then both the being and doing of leadership. That is, leadership is not just auditory talk, but also how one “shows up” and embodies a leadership stance. One of our following examples discusses this in relation to cyberspace. Since space becomes fluid when conducting critical theoretical research in educational leadership, especially during a tide of the COVID pandemic where the leadership and expressed emotions go online, one must ask “profoundly multicultural questions” that at times can be seen as difficult (Nieto, 2003). The difficulty of these questions is deeply emotional. Yet, it is precisely these difficult emotions that disrupt the problematic discourses that permeate leadership because these are the exact emotions needed to undergird racial justice.

Needless to say, the poststructural turn in narrative theory grew out of the limitations of narrative theory’s overdependence on interpretivism and critical theory’s overdependence on structural power (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).
Other infused theories have also sprouted from these one-theory limitations. For example, Pillow (2015) used a fused theory of temporality and post-feminist queer praxis to explore the relationship of time and its implications for the marked bodies of teen mothers in schools. Just as Pillow was able to more deeply explore time and teen mothers using a fused theory, so too do we attempt to explore more deeply emotion states in the temporality context of race subjects in educational leadership. Doing so gets at both the structural and the individual.

Presenting a fusion: poststructuralist narrative theory

The foundations of narrative theory and narrative in the poststructural turn are rooted in stories. Although both theories are strong separately, their separation still poses limitations because they do not readily address the flexibility needed to challenge power in racialized landscapes and discourses that themselves are fluid and constantly changing (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). For this reason, we offer a fusion application of narrative and poststructuralism as poststructural narrative theory. Next we discuss the limitations before the definitions.

One limitation of narrative theory is how it treats lived experience as the beginning and endpoint – essentially the narrative stands on its own (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Yet, with respect to poststructural theory, narratives do not stand on their own because they are not created in a vacuum. Conversely, according to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), a limitation of poststructuralism is how lived experiences are not treated at face value and as immediate sources of knowledge but instead are filtered through social processes. Since research is not an exactness and stories are messy, traversing is necessary. Traversing borderland, per Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), is an opportunity to “play” with ideas and methods. Borderlands are “spaces that exist around borders . . . where one lives within the possibility of multiple plotlines” (p. 59). In acknowledging this, we can traverse the borders of both narrative and poststructuralist theories. Since traversing is a core aspect of poststructural narrative theory methods, its applicability as a method allows researchers to swiftly navigate the unique aspects of theoretical nuance that happens when researching emotions in the context of race subjects.

Poststructural narrative theory is a theoretical fuse that offers “epistemic and methodological diversity in the social sciences” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 52). It is a theoretical hybrid used to critically examine experiences (Clandinin & Raymond, 2006). In doing so, it challenges majoritarian stories of privilege while considering issues of power and the limitations of the human experience. These fusions allow us to ask: “Whose stories? Whose and which stories are privileged or disadvantaged? How is this story operating in the context of power and the limitations of being human?” Although the primary purpose of narrative research is to create understanding, by-products include change or solutions to problems (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997), but fusing it as post-structural narrative theory offers solutions that include challenging race and
racism discourses. That is, regardless of how they are presented, the discourse with all its considerations of how contemporary race language is used, examines how emotion is presented in relationship to the race language or discourse. Informed by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), when engaging poststructural narrative theory, the purpose of crafting stories is rooted in the political value of stories and the ability of stories to foster emotional and moral responses to topics such as racism and other forms of oppression. This is true because, as mentioned earlier, this borderland is negotiated in conversation with critical theory, in that the critical researcher examines the role of power in a way that they listen through a participant’s story in order to hear the operation of broader social discourses shaping experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). However, unlike other forms of research, in poststructural narrative theory the researcher simultaneously considers both challenging power and, rather than listening through the story, honors story as a valid source of knowledge (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Poststructural narrative theory, again deriving from narrative theory nuances keeps central place, temporality, and (3) sociality. Again, place is the actual location of where the research is occurring; temporality is a description of how you as the researcher interact with the field; and sociality is how people transition over a certain amount time – this is an examination of how people take on different actions over time (e.g., an engineering class building a bridge). Forthcoming are examples of how these are applied in theoretical research.

**Maneuvering methods: poststructural narrative theory amid race subjects**

Although there are many cases we could have chosen, we focus on these two primary texts for application of poststructural narrative theory as a method. As an author and a researcher in these examples (Grosland), this insider status allows for an additional exploratory level of emotional psychological observation nuance.

**Example 1**

The first text is based on a study of a U.S.-based graduate classroom (doctoral and master’s class) where race and racism in higher education and educational leadership are topics of study (Grosland, 2019). Grosland utilizes poststructural narrative theory to research emotional discourses via race and racism in the classroom where she was participant observer/observer participant (temporality – relationship of the researcher to the participant). In her classroom research in an urban city (place – context and location), she is guided by post and critical theories on antiracism/Critical Race Theory, emotion, and anti-oppression. In her theoretical methods, although addressing problematic discourses, she treats narrative instances as one’s own story, reality, and perception of “truth.” A common example of this is when classrooms predominated by white students claim
they are “overwhelmed” by discussions of racism. In traditional methods, overwhelmed would not be analyzed as data to develop theoretical research. This under-analysis is evident throughout the scholarly literature. So, if applying poststructural narrative theory as a method, white students’ “overwhelmed” feelings then become a matter of racial theory and drive the data collection.

As for the researcher, her digital recorder becomes her microscope, and audio recordings of students’ feelings of “overwhelmed” become a point of theoretical data. In order to deconstruct this, first the researcher needs to notice the emotional pattern, document it, and how it is racialized. Then once the researcher notices these theoretical patterns in real time, it is important these moments are noted as sociality (how people transition over time). Here, emotions as data become a theoretical point of exploration, not in a psychological manner to clinically “diagnose.” To be clear, emotions drive a theoretical study that promotes racial justice. Seen in this way, emotions are data and thus a researcher employing a poststructural narrative method must determine emotional patterns in the field.

Although Grosland’s explorations forefront racist discursive instances, she uses these instances of racism as emotional interplays and as such strengthens her claims about the need for theoretical research on emotions. She deconstructs these emotions and racist instances by, most importantly, first addressing her own racist and racialized emotions as a racialized researcher. For example, in this study, a white female student name Diane cried after watching the film *The Color of Fear* (Wah, 1994). Focusing on poststructural narrative theory, one becomes aware of how their own emotions become theoretical data points. These data points are not simply two dimensions as oftentimes depicted in traditional research. Instead the emotional outbursts become multi-dimensional because they can happen in a multitude of ways. Hence, in doing so, she finds that although she is from a racialized community, she is not excluded from perpetuating racism in her pursuit to deconstruct racism and whiteness. Her theoretical goals here are to address the multiplicity and situatedness of oppression, deconstruct self/other dichotomies, and show the serious limitations of education for the Other, of the Other, and education that is critical of privileging and Othering (Kumashiro, 2000), particularly the racial Other. Using a poststructural narrative theory as method clearly shows more than an emotional outburst to a film but structures the emotional outburst within a larger social and racial context.

If poststructural research narrative were not the guiding method, especially since Grosland typically used to have a slight abhorrence for emotions in herself and others, then it is reasonable that the role of emotions would have been overlooked or seen as distraction from the goal of racial justice. Deconstructing her own emotions are types of emotional dynamics that take place in everyday racial justice research but that are often omitted by researchers. However, in using poststructural narrative theory as method it then forces researchers to address those emotions head on. If emotions are not included as points of data in the poststructural, then advancing knowledge on well-being in leadership and policy research on race subjects is arguably inadequate.
In studying race and racism subjects for the purpose of racial justice and well-being, Grosland makes the connection between self/other emotional dynamics in several ways. One, per Connelly and Clandinin (2006), she brackets herself into the narrative theory in the act of theoretical research. She constantly writes in order to become more conscious of which systems of oppression inform her methods. These reflective practices were/are sometimes troubling for her because they reveal unexplored theoretical assumptions and aspects of herself (e.g., fear and racist assumptions in antiracist/racial justice theorizing) that she never intentionally addressed nor shared in writing (Grosland, 2010). Although she found it emotionally difficult in ways that made her physically ill due to the stress of self-exploration, these practices made for a more robust theoretical analysis and helped her grow personally in ways that always keep central the fluidity of power across “differences” (race, gender identity, socio-economic status, language, geographic status/north-south/east-west). That is, the burden of meaning is not placed solely on the narrative of others but also on the theoretical researcher herself.

Results from exploration indicate the significance of poststructural narrative theory as both theory and method because it brings to the forefront the realities of dynamic emotional states on researchers when conducting leadership research on race and racism subjects.

**Example 2**

The other precedent of poststructural narrative theory was when two researchers, Grosland and Matias conducted a traditional qualitative study on an online graduate class where race is discussed. In their empirical data collected from the course they noticed an emotionally charged discussion (also digital text) between two students from different racial backgrounds in a graduate teacher leadership course (Grosland & Matias, 2017). Since the main feature of poststructural narrative theory as method is to discover how emotions operate as pity and emotional negativity toward racially minoritized people, this became instead a data site for investigation. However, there was something more happening that became an key moment that informs theoretical research. The researchers became emotionally interested with the participant (graduate student) through their participation in the analysis of the student’s digital text. And, since poststructural narrative theory as method focuses on emotions as stories, researchers cannot ignore the emotional dynamic happening for the participant (graduate student) in the traditional empirical qualitative study nor could the researcher ignore the emotional dynamic happening between them and the digital text they were analyzing.

To account for these under-investigated emotions, Grosland and Matias collaboratively used poststructural narrative theory as method to explore racial justice in a professional practice course by abridging their emotional reactions to the empirical data to make better sense of the data theoretically. This emotional dialogic exploration between Grosland and Matias occurred while the
more traditional qualitative study of examining student work in a graduate course was taking place. To be clear, the empirical portion of data collection was already done and is not the focus of this application of poststructural narrative method. The poststructural narrative theory as method began because as Grosland felt remiss about some of her analysis from the student work in her traditional study, she found greater understanding when applying poststructural narrative theory as a method to collaboratively explore her own emotional landscape with Matias. This investigation happened during a fall course and students were all practicing professionals in K–12 settings engaged in an educational leadership program. Emotions arose in the course when observing forms of digital writings (see the following). For example, and as detailed next, “Teachers shared stories about how the district had ignored their pleas for help” (Grosland & Matias, 2017, p. 77)

In thinking through the analysis of students’ emotional writing, Grosland and Matias include an example concerning how Black identity is discursively linked to “fighting” and “pleas for help (Grosland & Matias, 2017, p. 77),

student fights, suspensions from school, and numbers of absences and tardies. Teachers shared stories about how the district had ignored their pleas for help and had, in fact, made decisions that actually set the school up to fail. I simply couldn’t imagine how all of this could possibly be completely true.

Another example is (Grosland & Matias, 2017, p. 77),

Just as teachers are susceptible to learned helplessness and a defensive rather than offensive use of educational practice, educational leaders must resist the temptation to fall victim to external pressures and leadership fatigue.

In seeing this link come up in the traditional empirical research there was something missing for understanding how it is emotionally processed by researchers. Grosland and Matias started dialoging about the ways in which they were emotionally responding to the empirical data which they realized in and of itself became a new study with immense theoretical implications. “Why is this getting to me,” one researcher asked aloud. The other asked, “I’m getting angry just reading this student’s journey. I don’t even know her.” That the importance of a researcher’s emotional connection to the studied is not contested. What is contested is that what method then do researchers use to investigate their own emotions to better understand what they research empirically.

Another example was when Grosland and Matias delve into a story of one of their teacher leader participants who, as a self-identified Black, told Grosland about a conversation she had with a white colleague. That student shared to Grosland in their class that her white colleague used negatively emotionally laden words to explain what happened to them when they overheard their students using race language about Black children in their classroom. The Black teacher, in taking about her white colleague, said (Grosland & Matias, 2017, p. 78),
At the end of the day on Wednesday, the [white] teacher came to me and told me that the students were yelling, “You black boy/girl,” at each other. She did not understand why they were doing this because all of the students are African American but knew that they were being hurtful to one another because of the tone of voice they were using. I explained that the students were most likely referring to each other’s skin complexion. We decided we should have a discussion with the students regarding their race.

These emotional experiences prompted the graduate student to attempt to educate her white colleague about race, language, and emotion. In this situation, temporality of poststructural narrative theory as method came into play. Because although this story was told to Grosland during the fall course, it was not until it was relayed to Matias a year later during the traditional analysis of the digital texts that it led to greater meaning. Using temporality which includes notions of space and time, Grosland and Matias realized they were not only emotionally reacting to the digital texts and the stories being told as they analyzed such texts, they were becoming emotionally embedded to the study. Using post-structural narrative theory as method then allowed the researchers to shift from strictly focusing on the analysis of the traditionally collected empirical data to the temporal space between empirical data to emotional data experienced by the researchers in their process of analyzing. No longer were there strict boundaries, instead there are borderlands. The data no longer was just what was written on the online course but what was becoming of the researchers themselves.

By using poststructural narrative theory research methods, they were able to seamlessly embed aspects of their own experiential knowledge teaching graduate courses for this theoretical essay. In particular, they engaged aspects of narrative theory based on work by Chase (2005), in that Grosland and Matias are narrators who also acknowledge their own theoretical conceptions of emotions, thoughts, interpretations, and events. This reflexivity on theoretical assumptions was made possible by making those assumptions public through a systematic approach. Although they live more than 2,700 miles apart – Grosland in the South on the Atlantic Coast and Matias on the Pacific Coast – they were able to conduct regular scholarly briefings via calls and texts and were able to collaborate in real time using shared syncing documents. Their dialogic process included conversations that intentionally noted how their own stories and emotions influenced their research method decisions for the essay. This use of poststructuralist narrative theory as method ultimately improved their practices related to addressing race subjects, for if it were not for their ongoing reflexivity, they would have been blinded to how their own emotions were impacting their emotional analysis.

The ability to notice emotions in self and others in theoretical research influences theoretical research on emotional well-being in leadership when race is the topic of study. Our textual analysis of the two research precedents, where emotion is explored when race is the subject on the ground and in cyberspace, draws attention to when poststructural narrative theory is used to create theoretical research, particularly how it makes emotion apparent in ways not clear in other
research methods. Although these studies take place in different environments, the power of using poststructural narrative theory as method is that it grounds the critical researcher so they can traverse theory for the purpose of theoretical research even when researching something as fluid as race subjects and emotion.

**Race and other political subjects: implications**

Clearly, poststructural narrative theory as method expands existing critical theoretical research methods about the intersection of emotions and race and racism subjects. Promising practices lead to an interpretation that unabashedly and explicitly centers the messiness of politics, challenges oppressive power discourse, and honors the multiple layers of lived experiences for both the researcher and their participants. Humans are complicated, thus dichotomous emotions are just par for the course, hence emotions can guide emotional healing in the sometimes conflicted emotional world of race subjects. Advance-ment of well-being for both the participants and the researcher is the pathway to health that the WHO emphasizes is needed worldwide. The sociality of emotions and liberatory politics (Boler & Davis, 2018) makes for a cogent connection for poststructural narrative theory, emotion states of being, and political life as lived. In sync with Boler and Davis (2018), more research is needed on the relationship between emotion and politics, but this research is particularly necessary for critical theoretical methods in education. For if one is unable to notice emotions in themselves, how are they able to “see” emotions in theoretical research? The answer is simple: they cannot. Reflexivity of one’s own emotions toward race subjects in poststructural narrative theory research methods is a crucial aspect to theoretical research.

Auspiciously we provided two research scenarios where poststructural narrative theory as method became necessary for the production of critical theoretical research methods in leadership studies on race subjects and how these methods can mitigate the harm to emotional well-being among leadership committed to racial justice. With these examples, poststructural narrative theory as a method provides a richer and more robust body in leadership studies than simple interviews, focus groups, and/or observations could ever provide. Pillow (2017), for example, argues that there are “theoretical absences and blind spots” that discount theories from Women of Color. She then asserts that theory and praxis need to be engaged differently if we are to be more equitable in race and gender. Therefore, to advance theoretical methods in research, two things need to be operationalized: first, theoretical reflexivity and praxis must be paramount in critical theoretical research methods in education. Reflexivity through in-depth and frank journaling on the social and political climate assists in deconstructing binaries. Hence, developing inquiry reflexivity in critical theoretical research methods in education involves asking deep questions of oneself rooted in critical non-binaries that challenge majoritarian narratives. This binary challenge includes scholarship related to stopping otherizing (e.g., trans-women, racialized bodies, dis/abled, deaf/hearing). Research promise is
endless when scholars move beyond discourses that marginalize the being and doing of critical theoretical research.

**Conclusion**

In research on educational leadership burnout, when poststructural narrative theory is not the grounding method, it is reasonable that the emotional occurrences are taken for granted and assumed, resulting in under-analysis or the complete absence of analysis of emotional data objects. Of course, other forms of theory would suffice, like narrative because it foregrounds lived experiences or critical because it examines experiences. However, as a result of the dichotomizing perspectives of story in those theories – narrative theory diminishes the structural oppression that occurs in narratives, and critical theory overlooks the power of individual stories as they are – serious limitations abound in a world of conflictive emotions. As, in 1970 education was said to be “suffering from a narration sickness” (Freire, 2008, p. 52) and, in spite of more than 50 years of scholarship since, this is still where the problem lies. Critical researchers, in general, and racial justice researchers particularly, who produce theoretical research to examine the fluidity of power in the context of race subjects, need a theoretical method that is fluid in order to advance education research.

Education, as a function of society, is suffering from an emotional crisis and the demands for theoretical methods to address the complexities of this ongoing crisis. Poststructural narrative theory offers unique and creative pathways to address the evolving problems that surface from burnout in educational leadership for racial justice in the context of race and racism subjects. Due to social issues that upend society, like wars, genocide, and pandemics, and the resulting pending emotions, oppression is amplified; therefore, racism and subjects become more important. So, the importance of theoretical methods that address well-being is utterly fundamental to humanity, if not for the well-being of our educators and students, especially those committed to racial justice or racially minoritized, then for everyone in our communities. Simply stated: emotional well-being is the miner’s canary.

**References**


Paying emotional tolls


