The White Elephant in the Classroom: A Case Study on Understanding Whiteness to Become an Antiracist Teacher in the Rural Classroom

Jean Ann Little

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The White Elephant in the Classroom: A Case Study on Understanding Whiteness to Become an Antiracist Teacher in the Rural Classroom

by

Jean A. Little

A Dissertation Proposal
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The College of Education,
and The Department of Leadership
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for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Leadership and Policy Studies

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Abstract

While the public-school classroom has increasingly become more diverse, the teaching population has not. Research studies on race and its role in the classroom have been necessary considering the predominantly white teaching force and the opportunity gap that exists in the education outcomes of students of color and that of their white peers; furthermore, a gap in rural and urban studies on white teachers working with students of color provided the additional impetus for the study. This study seeks to add to the emerging field of second-wave white teacher identity studies.

The purpose of this case study was to discover the ways in which white rural teachers were engaging in anti-racist teaching and challenging systemic racism by understanding their perceived biases and beliefs about race. By using a Critical Race Theory lens but situating the study as a second wave white teacher study, this study is significant by providing an asset-based examination of how white rural teachers have worked to understand their whiteness and are engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy with antiracist teaching practices as a means of challenging institutionalized racism in rural schools and communities. Using an interview protocol, field notes, and researcher journal, the following themes became evident in this study: (1) the lack of pre-service preparation or in-service professional development in understanding the structures of whiteness or racism in education, (2) the lack of space and leadership for white teachers to unpack feelings and reflect upon race, (3) the use of antiracist teaching practices, (4) the awareness that rural, majority white, schools need antiracist education for teachers and students.

Keywords: whiteness, critical race theory, second wave white teacher identity studies, critical whiteness studies, culturally responsive teaching, social justice, antiracist teaching, pedagogy
Acknowledgements

Achieving a doctorate has been a lifelong goal of mine. I acknowledge that, by the grace of God, I am successful in this endeavor, and I humbly receive this blessing. I am thankful for the love, support, and patience of my family that allowed me to complete this journey. I am forever grateful to my chair, Dr. Ronald Eric Platt, who never gave up on me, and to my dream team dissertation committee: Dr. Alison Happel-Parkins, Dr. Stephen Zanskas, and Dr. Zachary Casey. I would not have made it if it were not for the shared support, encouragement, and friendship of my fellow cohort members, Jamie Elliott and Lajuan Gray-Sylvester. Finally, I stand on the shoulders of so many strong, talented women who came and conquered before me, who paved the way for opportunities for women, such as myself, to do the same and pass it forward.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, who only achieved a third-grade education, but instilled a love of learning in me through her belief that education was the key to becoming and achieving whatever we desire; and to my mother who taught me strength, perseverance, and that it is never too late to improve one’s life. It is also dedicated to my three children, Skyler, Hagen, and Lily, who are the most important people in the world to me and whose love and support inspire me to be a better person and a better mother every day. Finally, I dedicate my work to all the teachers in the classrooms who have been accused of being the “way out there, in left field, think outside the box, may do anything for their students” kind of teachers. Just keep doing it. Being different can be a good thing.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

She said, “Get your schooling and make a teacher someday.” My grandmother, one of thirteen children in a poor, close-knit home that had survived the Depression, only achieved a third-grade education because she was held out of school by her parents so that her brothers could attend while she remained home, helped with chores, and learned traditional housewife skills. Being partially raised by my grandmother since my mother was very young, I was impacted by my grandmother’s stories of her life and how she would have loved to have become a teacher. She believed that teaching was, and is, an honorable profession, that a teacher’s work was to guide children, that lives can be changed through education, and that anyone can become anything through hard work and “getting their schooling.” She worked as one of the local elementary lunch ladies where she lovingly cooked from scratch, including homemade rolls and desserts, for the children until she retired.

My grandmother may not have been able to complete her education, nor become a teacher, but her strong convictions about education and teaching impacted multiple generations in our family to come. Though all three of her sons were drafted into the military during the Vietnam War and learned trades, all three of her daughters attended and graduated from college and pursued professional careers; they were the first generation of our family to do so. Later, multiple grandchildren, including myself, went on to college and became teachers, followed by some great-grandchildren who plan to attend college to become teachers. As a teacher with almost twenty years of classroom experience, none of my experiences have changed my original acceptance of my grandmother’s positive mindset and strongly held beliefs in education. I believe the teaching profession is an honorable profession, that a teacher’s job is to make a positive difference in the lives of all children, that education is a means to change, improvement,
and empowerment in lives, and that any student can learn and achieve their goals through hard work, if given the opportunity.

She said, “God’s Garden has all kinds of flowers and each one is beautiful.” My grandmother also was an avid gardener and most of her teachings were in the form of gardening analogies. As a child, anytime I pointed out someone who was different from me, my grandmother always responded with the same statement about God’s Garden. I grew up and took for granted the belief that differences were to be appreciated as unique, and that different did not mean better or worse, just different. I learned that commonalities and sameness can be found, but differences made things interesting and beautiful. These simplistic and lofty ideals passed on to me by my grandmother would shape my worldview and be tested as my world changed.

She said, “You have a gypsy mamma.” My young mother, when ready to start a life of her own, chose a path for us that resulted in our leaving my grandparents’ farm and moving eighteen times by the time I was eighteen years old through three states and four school systems. My mother’s nickname became Gypsy, a derogatory term today, but a term of endearment within my family. Depending on the circumstances of the move and the fortunes of the moment, I experienced living in a wealthy neighborhood on Park Avenue, rental houses and government housing projects, trailer parks, and even something close to middle-class suburbia. I would blame our high rate of mobility on poverty, but we also moved when we were not poor. I quickly learned to adapt, excelled academically in school, became involved in a wide variety of afterschool activities, developed an ease of meeting and talking to new people, found a healthy curiosity and acceptance of people who were different from me, and gathered an eclectic group of friends and experiences along the way. I had inherited my mother’s strength, tenacity, and adaptability to change, but I was impacted by the differences in how we and other people were
treated as we moved through the different socio-economic levels and locales. Regardless of my socio-economic standing, I noticed a stark difference in opportunities and treatment between myself, as a young white female, and those of people of color and differing ethnic backgrounds around me.

My unique life experiences shaped my teaching philosophy and impacted the way I worked with students. As a teacher, I gravitated toward students most other teachers overlooked or discounted. I found that I had a strength in building positive rapport and relationships with students of differing backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures; however, as a white teacher, I felt a gap in learning on how I could be a more effective, impactful teacher with students of color. Working in mostly rural schools, I noticed a disconnect between many white teachers and students of color. I began asking questions and trying to learn from those around me while becoming an advocate for multiple groups of marginalized students, but I mostly worked with white teachers like myself who were experiencing the same disconnect or desire to be more effective with students of color. I turned to academia for answers and began to obtain advanced degrees, always remembering and being proud of my life experiences because it made me who I am today. I am someone who sees the connection between the classroom and the world in which we live, and as a teacher I want to make sure I am an asset in the fight to create a more just and equitable world for students and society. My grandmother’s teachings, my mother’s love of change, and my own unique experiences with other people formed the foundation for what would later become a non-judgmental approach and acceptance of others, a quest to live as a lifelong learner and teacher, and a strong desire and belief in social justice reform through education.
Every young person living in the United States is shaped by the education system in one way or another; therefore, the education system shapes society (Freire, 1998). The classroom, which is a microcosm of society and the community in which it exists, is subject to societal ills (Haupt, 2010). If not corrected, the potential for the education system to perpetuate those societal ills can occur. The education system of the United States (US) must uphold the democratic principles of equality and justice by not ignoring societal problems and injustices, especially as they present in the classroom, as is the case with racialized biases and systemic racism; additionally, if one accepts the notion that one of the primary functions of schools is to serve the greater good of society by promoting equality and social justice through an educated electorate, the dismantling of racism must begin in the classroom (Freire, 1998). White teachers must be knowledgeable and properly trained to break the cycle of perpetuating racism, whether inadvertently or overtly, within the classroom if schools are to provide equitable education for all students, therefore ensuring a highly functioning and just society (Hytten & Bettez, 2011).

While the public-school classroom has increasingly become more diverse, the teaching population has not. White teachers account for approximately 80% of the teaching force while children of color account for about 50% of the classroom population (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). While it is true that white teachers can be culturally competent and provide an equitable education to students of color, white teachers must work on unpacking their whiteness and understanding its impact on their teaching (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Research suggests that a significant percentage of white people believe it is better to be color blind as it applies to race; this often leads white people to not understand, to not recognize, or to ignore the impact of race or how white people can inadvertently perpetuate racism (Hartmann, Gerteis, & Croll, 2009). While whiteness, as a race, is not a problem, a
significant percentage of white people report distinct tenets of whiteness that are counterproductive and destructive to social justice needs and initiatives (Gillborn, 2005, p. 484). It is realistic to believe that tenets of whiteness that are counterproductive will be evident within the white teaching population as well. Many white teachers claim to think they are not racist but often exhibit tenets of whiteness unbeknownst to themselves (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). It is problematic that the predominantly white teaching force is responsible for providing an equitable education to children of different races and cultures without proper training on how race plays a factor in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Because this work was an asset-based study, I researched the ways in which white rural teachers were overcoming their perceived racial biases and working to challenge racism in the classroom.

In this chapter, I will also introduce the topics of fundamental knowledge and foundation for my study on how white teachers can become antiracist teachers: racial bias, culturally relevant pedagogy, antiracist teaching, and rural education within the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory, critical whiteness studies and second-wave white teacher identity studies. I will provide the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, definitions of important terms, theoretical framework, research questions and overview, significance of the study, assumptions/delimitations/limitations of the study, and my positionality.

**Racial Bias**

Understanding racial biases is foundational to understanding how race impacts teaching students of color and necessary to becoming an antiracist teacher. During the process of deconstructing whiteness, biases can be categorized as implicit or explicit racial bias. Racial biases present “multi-faceted, deeply embedded, often taken for granted aspects of power relations” (Gillborn, 2005, p. 485). Many white people associate racism with blatant, overt acts
or beliefs about race such as hate speech, beatings, occurrences of lynching, and blatant discrimination as associated with white supremacy groups (Rabaka, 2007), but there are other, more subtle types of racism. Implicit bias, or rather the attitudes or beliefs in stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions unconsciously, can be just as insidious and harmful to students when perpetuated by white teachers in the classroom (Matias & Mackey, 2016). The use of microaggressions, which are the intentional or unintentional indirect insults or offenses directed towards a marginalized person, can stem from a racialized biases (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). Racism is also perpetuated through stereotypical beliefs that have become normalized and taken for granted, thereby, preserving hegemonic whiteness and white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005, p. 485). In today’s socio-political climate, it is just as important as ever to uncover racism in education, whether it be implicit or overt, or found within the educator or within the system, if education is to be a tool for justice and freedom (Matias & Newlove, 2017).

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Another foundational concept in becoming antiracist teachers is having knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive teaching requires a competency that includes an awareness of one’s own cultural identity, an interrogation of one’s views on cultural differences, and an asset-based approach to student achievement and curriculum, as well as teaching (Jett, 2013). Culturally responsive teaching is inclusive of cultural norms, beliefs, and practices of students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Studies show that culturally responsive classrooms are significantly associated with higher educational outcomes, and the development of positive ethnic-racial identity (Byrd, 2016). Whiteness interrogation is a necessary step to becoming a culturally competent teacher. As educators and leaders of teacher preparation programs realize
that there are limitations to the multicultural education paradigm of teaching (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), the culturally responsive educator paradigm becomes essential. Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogical construct, goal, practice, method, or value that recognizes and affirms the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences students bring to the classroom and beneficial to the needs of today’s diverse classrooms (Jett, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It is not a checklist or a lesson plan that can be taught once. Characteristics of culturally responsive teaching are validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory (Jett, 2013). White teachers must be taught cultural competency and specific ways to create culturally responsive lesson plans to be incorporated into the curriculum to make connections with students of color (Kea & Trent, 2013). Additionally, empathy and compassion are necessary components of culturally responsive teaching (Pinderhughes, 1984; Toldson, 2018), as opposed to sympathy and sentimentality which are seen in some white teachers (Matias, 2013a). Culturally responsive teaching, when practiced with intention, is empowering to students of color, provides a more equitable education for all students, and is effective in achieving education outcomes for the teacher (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

**Antiracist Teaching**

White teachers must know what antiracist teaching is to achieve it. Culturally responsive pedagogy is one element of antiracist teaching. An antiracist is anyone who supports an antiracist policy through their actions or by expressing an anti-racist idea (Kendi, 2019, p. 13). Antiracist teaching is the action part of culturally responsive pedagogy. If antiracism is the practice of unlearning racist ideas and providing a new paradigm for people to see the world, then antiracist teaching is the actionable application of challenging racism, making meaningful changes in
curriculum, and enacting policies in the classroom that will bring to fruition equitable education for students of color (Fray, 2019). There is a natural progression for any white teacher who intends to be culturally responsive to students of color to embrace the actions of antiracist teaching, or the intent is hollow without action (Kendi, 2019).

It is noted that the teaching of multiculturalism, the popular pedagogy that has been used in teacher preparation courses, is not sufficient to unpack whiteness in teachers and, therefore, is not indicative of antiracist teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Multiculturalism efforts do not generally address whiteness (Marx, 2004), creating a deficit in teacher preparation for today’s diverse classroom. Therefore, a pedagogy practice that investigates the vestiges and privileges that come with being white in the United States must be utilized to improve teacher effectiveness with students of color. The problematic tenets of whiteness will continue to be perpetuated in the classroom if a self-investigation, reflection, and dialogue concerning race among educators continues to be suppressed by those who are fearful of discussing it or those who wish it not to be addressed due to power holds (Allen, 2004). A long-standing practice of ignoring whiteness in teacher preparation is more reason white teachers need guided introspection and training in how whiteness impacts pedagogy today (Matias & Grosland, 2016).

**Rural Education Studies**

My study’s focus is on white teachers teaching in rural school settings. The foundational knowledge as set forth in rural education studies provides context for the unique challenges of the teacher participants in this study. Rural education studies attempt to characterize the conditions of schools in rural areas across the United States by data within the context of the following issues: educational outcomes, career and college readiness, student and family diversity, and educational policy (Showalter, Hartmann, Johnson, & Klein, 2019). The United
States Census Bureau (2019) defined rural as an area not defined as urban, thus containing less than 10,000 people in a clustered area. Although most rural students attend school in states where they make up less than twenty five percent of a state’s public school student population, if one combines the number of all rural students across the United States, more students attend rural schools than the nation’s largest schools combined (Showalter et al., 2019). A lack of attention and understanding of the unique challenges that rural schools face has created an almost emergency for children in many rural schools; rural education must be made a priority if the nation is to improve education outcomes (Ayers, 2010). Students of color represent small, but concentrated, groups of rural students in rural schools, and face significant opportunity gaps and increased poverty than that of their white counterparts (Farrigan, 2017).

Finally, by applying a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens, which is a framework for scholars to recognize systemic racism and its impact on people of color and society (Ladson-Billings, 1998), the recognition of biases in white teachers serving students of color and systemic racism can be discerned. Because of the large percentage of white teachers present in the workforce today, understanding whiteness is an essential aspect of education reform. Therefore, I have adopted a critical whiteness studies (CWS) perspective. CWS is an outgrowth of CRT and has provided the tools to identify the tenets of whiteness and how they contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In viewing CWS as an extension of the CRT, the socially constructed understanding of race can provide a basis for analysis. CWS will provide the element of deconstructing whiteness, but the CRT elements of storytelling, pervasiveness of racism, and race’s important role in society are part of my framework (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Additionally, I have situated my study within the broader context of
second-wave white teacher identity studies to discern how white teachers use their understanding of race and whiteness to challenge racism in the classroom.

**Statement of the Problem**

Given the disparity in the education outcomes between students of color and that of their white peers, it is evident that further examination of the causes must occur (Allen, 2004; Jett, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2012). Historically, Black, Latino, and Native American children have presented with significantly lower education outcomes revealing large opportunity gaps (Milner, 2012). They are over-represented in special education services and underrepresented in honors classes (Jett, 2012; Togut, 2011), experience higher rates and harsher disciplinary actions (Togut, 2011), and suffer from daily microaggressions (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). An effective classroom teacher is directly related to positive education outcomes for all students (Paolini, 2015). With a predominantly white teaching force, the need to understand the role of whiteness in education and teacher effectiveness with students of color must occur (Matias & Grosland, 2016). To create better student learning outcomes for students of color (Matias & Mackey, 2015) and a more equitable and just society (Freire, 1998), increasing teacher effectiveness with students of color must be accomplished through the investigation of racial biases, white identity, cultural competency, and systemic racism on the part of the overwhelmingly white teaching force.

**Opportunity Gap**

Often the gap experienced by students of color is described as an achievement gap, which tends to attribute the cause to the children when often children do not have control over the cause. By creating a paradigm shift to describe the phenomenon as an opportunity gap, the inspection of reasons shifts to systems that provide educational opportunities or the lack of
educational opportunities as opposed to holding children responsible for aspects of their education for which they cannot control, such as poverty and racism (Beard, 2018). Opportunity gaps can be created in a variety of ways throughout the educational career of a child. Low expectations and deficit mindsets on the part of educators who work with students of color create opportunity gaps, while state standardized testing that is not culturally standardized but is white-normed presents another type of opportunity gap (Milner, 2012.) Overall, teacher attitudes about race and stereotypes of students of color contribute to opportunity gaps (Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

Although this paper does not focus on this aspect, it is noted that a disproportionate number of people of color live in poverty in the US, creating many opportunity gaps and playing a part in the problem of how to improve education outcomes of students of color (Togut, 2011), since evidence suggests there is a prominent link between low educational outcomes of students and poverty (Toldson, 2018). Though breaking the cycle of poverty is a complex problem with many contributing factors, the role of education to provide opportunities and an avenue to break the cycle of poverty cannot be overstated (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It has been proven that socio-economic class is the most important determinant of social and political life in the United States (Allen, 2004). While this may be true, the link between poverty and opportunity gaps does not negate the need for further examination of the role of race and teacher effectiveness with students of color.

**Overrepresentation in Special Education**

The overrepresentation of students of color within special education is problematic on several levels. Due to multiple factors, but by in large due to educators’ unconscious racial bias, Black students represent 33% in special education classes (Togut, 2011). Regardless of social
class, the overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs and under-representation in honors classes suggests another contributing factor, such as the use of stereotypical and racist beliefs, that has led to racial segregation and exclusion in the classroom (Ferri & Conner, 2005). An argument that schools may be integrated but classes have continued to be segregated can be made (Jett, 2013; Milner, 2012).

**Harsher Discipline**

There is a link between schools and prison. The School to Prison Pipeline is fueled by the racial disparities present in using zero-tolerance policies and harsher discipline for similar offenses for students of color than white students (Togut, 2011). Often cultural conflicts and misunderstanding between white teachers and students within the classroom aggravate tensions leading to more discipline referrals (Milner, 2012). A lack of cultural competency, a belief in stereotypes, racial biases, and, in some instances, overt racism are the culprits of harsher disciplinary actions that often include involving law enforcement from outside of the school system (Smith, 2009; Togut, 2011). Harsher disciplinary measures, daily microaggressions and injustices, and acts of racism that students of color experience cause irreparable harm, not only academically, but to the development of a healthy self-identity changing the trajectory of life for students of color (Allen et al., 2013; Hagopian & Jones, 2020).

**Microaggressions**

Students of color often suffer daily microaggressions, the intended or unintended verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities that are hostile, derogatory, and racial invalidations, both in and out of school (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). They are often daily and subtle but are still acts of racism that change the self-perception and world view of students of color (Kohli & Solorzano, 2011) and have been linked to truancy and poor standardized test and graduation rates
for student of color (Johnston-Goodstar & Roholt, 2017). While microaggression is not a recent phenomenon, it can take many forms and change over time. Microaggressions can range from teachers refusing to correctly pronounce students’ names to racial slurs by other students, but these hurtful messages have the intended or unintended impact of supporting a perception of racial inferiority for students of color (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). The rise in racist nativism towards US immigrants is often expressed in the micro-aggressive practice of English dominance with competency being judged based on the English language (Huber, 2011). Educators must be proactive in recognizing microaggressions and vocalizing their support of anti-racism and justice to end the daily assault on young minds (Kendi, 2019).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study is to discover the ways in which white rural teachers in West Tennessee are overcoming perceived racial biases, engaging in antiracist teaching, and challenging systemic racism by understanding their own biases and beliefs about race. By identifying the ways in which white teachers are successfully understanding their white identity and its impact on the classroom, a better understanding can be discerned on how best to prepare and educate future white teachers to effectively teach students of color without perpetuating harm to those students. Much research has been conducted on the impact of whiteness, race, and systemic racism with white pre-service and in-service teachers who will or do work with students of color in urban schools; however, much less research has been conducted with white pre-service and in-service teachers who will or do work with students of color in rural schools (Lavalle, 2018). The rural school setting presents a unique set of circumstances and situations that impact the dynamics of teachers and students and deserves to be the focus of research and
investigative study as well. This study will provide insight into the thoughts and experiences of in-service white teachers in the context of second-wave white teacher identity studies.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined to help the reader understand the context of each term in the study and provide a quick reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antiracist Teaching</td>
<td>The actionable application of challenging racism, making meaningful changes in curriculum, and enacting policies in the classroom that will bring to fruition equitable education for students of color (Fray, 2019).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorblindness</td>
<td>A concept whereby people seek to ignore race completely (Zou &amp; Dickter, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>A theoretical framework that examines race, law, and power in the context of society and culture in the US (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, &amp; Thomas, 1995).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Whiteness Studies</td>
<td>An extension of CRT and seeks to study and define the white race in relation to other races, problematizing whiteness as a means of disrupting racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Relevant Pedagogy</td>
<td>A pedagogical construct that recognizes and affirms the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences students bring to the classroom (Jett, 2013; Ladson-Billings &amp; Tate, 1995).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Responsive Teaching</td>
<td>A teaching practice that centers students’ culture through three primary approaches: high expectations, promoting cultural competence, and promoting critical consciousness (Byrd, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit Bias</td>
<td>Attitudes or beliefs in stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions unconsciously (Matias &amp; Mackey, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microaggressions</td>
<td>Verbal or nonverbal hidden messages that serve to invalidate one’s experiential reality and perpetuate feelings of inferiority (Allen, Scott, &amp; Lewis, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>A socially constructed and arbitrarily assigned set of beliefs and characteristics assigned by the white dominant culture based on physical differences (Warren, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial bias</td>
<td>A bias that is multi-faceted, deeply embedded, often taken for granted aspect of power relations (Gillborn, 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Education</td>
<td>Consisting of grades 7-12 (United States Department of Education).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-Wave White Teacher Identity Studies</td>
<td>An area of education research that seeks to prepare and conscientize a predominantly white pre-service and professional teaching force for teaching and learning across cultural differences in public schools (Jupp, Berry, &amp; Lensmire 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Dominance</td>
<td>Refers to the fact that white people exist as the dominant culture in society (Owen, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Identity</td>
<td>The perception and self-identification of white people that serves as the “norm” in US society and/or to preserves power and dominance (Roediger, 2001).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
White Privilege | The experience of receiving personal, institutional, and cultural advantages due to being white while not experiencing racial discrimination as part of the dominant culture (Aouragh, 2019).
---|---
White Supremacy | A historically based, institutionally perpetuated belief system that white people are of a superior race and therefore, should be the dominant race (Roediger, 2001).

### Research Questions

Critical Race Theory with a critical whiteness studies perspective will be used to analyze the responses and stories of white, secondary teachers in rural settings in West Tennessee to examine their understandings of implicit racial biases, whiteness, and antiracist teaching practices. Since the study seeks to be asset-based, the findings will add to second wave white teacher identity studies. Thematic analysis will provide insight and guide future pedagogical and policy decisions as it applies to a predominantly white, rural teaching force who wish to support students of color more effectively in the classroom. The research will be guided by the following three questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1</th>
<th>In what ways are white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee challenging institutionalized racism?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td>What barriers do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee perceive to exist when engaging in antiracist teaching?</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ3</td>
<td>How do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee understand their own biases and beliefs regarding race and schooling?</td>
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### Overview of Research Design

The research was conducted as a qualitative approach with a case study design to discover the ways in which white rural teachers understand their whiteness, perceived racial biases, and engage in antiracist teaching practices. While a case study often involves exploring how a group of people in a similar place experience something, it can also reveal details and trends within that
experience (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The rationale for conducting a case study to answer the research questions lay in the details provided in the interviewing method. The interview protocol was important in determining how white rural teachers understand the impact of their whiteness and perceived racial biases as they attempt to engage in antiracist teaching. Using a CRT lens with a CWS perspective, the method of choice involved semi-structured questions as the basis for exploration into this research area. Interview goals were created from the context of disrupting whiteness and systemic racism with an intent of finding the way white teachers were engaging in antiracist teaching practices in the classroom. I used open-ended questions crafted to start conversations about teaching, building to questions that included race with the participants. Additionally, the qualitative approach allowed for the participants to provide stories in response to open-ended questions often revealing more in-depth information about their perceived biases, beliefs, and practices. This methodology allowed the focus of the study to be the lived experiences and beliefs of the participants. More details about the specific design of the study are provided in Chapter III.

Significance of the Study

In today’s socio-political climate, it is as important as ever to uncover and disrupt racism in education, whether it is implicit, overt, or systemic or if it is found within the educator or within the system (Matias & Newlove, 2017). To improve learning for all students through teacher development, the overwhelming white teaching force must be culturally competent and be trained in antiracist teaching practices to effectively teach students who do not look like them and/or come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Kendi, 2019). Understanding the role of whiteness and racial biases is an integral part of becoming culturally competent (Matias & Mackey, 2016). Most teacher preparation programs and school systems
neglect racial training (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Recognizing that there are those who do not wish for educators to engage in dialogue about race and are fearful of those who want antiracist teaching practices to become the norm in public education, it becomes important to cultivate and support teachers who are inclined to challenge the power holds (Allen, 2004). Even though race conversations permeate almost every other facet of life in the US, research has shown that there is a lack of race dialogue that exists in the classroom (Matias, 2013c). Educators who remain silent about social injustices give the impression that they agree with the oppressor (Lac, 2017). Thus, white teachers cannot expect to be effective with students of color without, first, understanding the impact of their own whiteness on their teaching to become culturally competent (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Matias, 2016) and, secondly, engaging in culturally responsive and antiracist teaching practices (Kendi, 2019). As scholars and practitioners gain better insight into how white rural teachers understand implicit racial biases, whiteness, and systemic racism, they can find ways to connect white teacher beliefs and experiences culturally responsive pedagogy and antiracist teaching. The findings will be significant to second-wave white teacher identity studies, teacher preparation programs, local and state policymakers, school supervisors and leaders, and communities who will benefit from improved education outcomes for all students, including students of color.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that provides an antiracism lens to societal issues. It grew out of Critical Legal Studies and as a challenge to color-blind ideology in an effort to revolutionize race and power in America (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Derrick Bell and Kimberle Crenshaw are credited with the origination of CRT. Bell (1979), well-known for his
interest convergence theory, which is the theory that Black people would only achieve civil rights when White and Black interests converged, provided analyses and hypotheses on race, society, power, and equality paving the way for the tenets of CRT. In the 1980s, Crenshaw (1989) noted the permanent relationship between race and inequality in the United States, arguing that the intersection of race with other societal categories further marginalized groups of people, and added more scholarly work to CRT. In the 1990s, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998), a key CRT scholar who was widely published, posited that CRT was a tool that could be used to interrogate and eliminate systemic racism, and could be of particular use in education, but it was Delgado and Stefancic’s book, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, that popularized the theory by providing definitive explanations of the themes and key people (2001).

Despite attacks on its legitimacy since its inception in the 1970s, CRT has continued to flourish into the 21st century. It is a relevant tool used to break down the systemic structures of racism and continues to be used extensively to examine inequality in US systems, especially in education. CRT negates the idea that racial equality has been reached in the years since the Civil Rights Movement and affirmative action policies are no longer needed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This is an argument that has pervaded the courts to weaken the legal standing of affirmative action in recent years. CRT is still relevant and has been expanded and transformed to reflect the oppression and concerns of various other marginalized people, with extensions such as Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000), Asian American Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) (Chang, 1993), American Indian Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) (Brayboy, 2005), Critical Race Feminism (CRF) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013), and Critical Whiteness Theory (CWT) (Gillborn, 2005).
CRT can be used to transform ideas of race and racism. Through the investigation of the systemic structures that perpetuate whiteness and white supremacy, the historical contingency of race and racism is apparent in US culture (Gillborn, 2005; Marx 2004). Since race is socially constructed and arbitrarily assigned by society, race must be examined in the context of society and culture (Warren, 2001). CRT provides for the critical analysis of race and racism through its five major tenets: (1) racism is the norm, not the exception, (2) racism serves important purposes in society, (3) the use of storytelling/counter-storytelling, (4) the acceptance of intersectionality and interest convergence, and (5) race is a product of society’s need to label (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT asserts the permanence of racism in society. Racism is not inevitable, nor is it an exception; it is regularly found in society existing as a social construct through power relations and as a product of a white society's need to racialize others to protect the dominant ideology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT asserts that race impacts all power structures and systems, and to deny as such is to perpetuate white dominance and power (Dottolo & Stewart, 2013). While there is debate if progress has been made in reducing racism in America, some contend that racism will always exist in some form as evidenced by the experiences of people of color who have been subjected to structural, systemic, institutional, and individual racism manifesting both intentionally and unintentionally since the inception of America (Milner, 2017). Certainly, America has had a long history of racism and racism is omnipresent today, but the hope and attempts to eradicate racism should continue (Bell, 1979; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The second tenet of CRT posits that racism serves a societal purpose. Racism preserves the status quo of the dominant culture and provides a structure that empowers a white society to benefit from the oppression of people of color (Leonardo & Manning, 2017). It protects white
hegemony and perpetuates white supremacy and dominance through “othering” and oppression (Matias, 2016). The dominant culture often resists changes that will require the sharing of power and wealth, which is a reasonable explanation as to why progress has been slow in eradicating systemic and institutional racism (Owen, 2007).

The voices of those who have been victimized by racism have often been overlooked and ignored. CRT provides a path for those voices to be heard through storytelling and counter-storytelling. The use of storytelling/counter-storytelling by people of color serves to "demystify the notion of a racially neutral society and tell another story of a highly racialized social order" (López, 2003, p. 85). By providing stories of strength, pride, and humanity, people of color challenge harmful stereotypes and tropes presented by the dominant culture while providing a more accurate and balanced historical perspective (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Matias & Grosland, 2016). As the dominant culture, only white people have the luxury of never having to think about race; without narratives from people of color, white people could retreat into a false reality in which racism does not exist while still serving as perpetrators of racism (Dottolo & Stewart, 2013). Storytelling/counter-storytelling can provide more insight and knowledge into the lives and experiences of people of color than historical accounts published on their behalf since people of color are more knowledgeable about their truths than white researchers and scholars (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Intersectionality and interest convergence are core principles of CRT. Racism and discrimination are not uniformly experienced as forms of oppression. The layering of social markers such as age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation create more complex forms of marginalization when intersected with race. Crenshaw (1989) coined the term *intersectionality*; this is the theory of how social categorizations such as race,
gender, and class overlap and create different types of discrimination based on unique identities. Bell’s (1979) theory of interest convergence, the theory that social reforms needed to address racial inequality will only be pursued and realized when they are also beneficial to white society, is also important in understanding the complexities of race relationships.

Lastly, the fifth tenet of CRT asserts that race is a social construct. Race is not based on biology but rather a need to label and structure society that has created “others” (Owen, 2007). To avoid feelings of guilt for imperialism and settler colonialism perpetuated at the expense of indigenous people and lands, white identifications were created based on arbitrary judgements that supported the belief in superiority of the white conquerors and the inferiority of the Black and brown people being conquered (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). The dominant culture’s need to enforce the racialization of other groups of people is directly related to the desire to retain power and a sense of superiority enforcing a belief in white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005). Race labels, with their associated stereotypes and misinformation, have persisted in society today, regardless of scientific proof that contradicts the belief in any significant biological attributes or differences in races of people (Rosenberg et al., 2002).

**Critical Whiteness Studies**

The formalized, critical study of whiteness has been a recent addition to academic studies. Critical whiteness studies (CWS) is an extension of CRT and seeks to name and de-center whiteness through the study and definition of the white race in relation to other races, problematizing whiteness as a means of disrupting racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It is a quickly growing field of study, though the study of white people by people of color has a long history. Many Black authors and historians wrote about whiteness long before it became a scholarly pursuit of white researchers. Some credit W.E.B. Dubois with his studies on race as the
originator of white studies, though he did not coin the phrase *critical whiteness* (Hartmann et al., 2009). Dubois (1903) wrote "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line" (p. 41). Dubois goes on to critique the personal and political roles of race, racism, and whiteness that perpetuated the false narrative of white supremacy and Black inferiority in a ground-breaking essay entitled “The Souls of White Folks” (Rabaka, 2007). As a prolific writer, Dubois continued to examine the role of race in the United States and other countries in his lifetime, often focusing on whiteness, imperialism, and the implications for Black people throughout the world (Rabaka, 2007). Increasingly becoming the pursuit of white scholars, the field of Critical whiteness studies has benefitted from the often overlooked but important works offered by people of color such as Ralph Ellison, bell hooks, James Baldwin, Cheryl Harris, Neil Foley, Silko, Toni Morrison and many others (Roediger, 2001). Even though the field is leaderless, the commonality in the vast number of writings on whiteness has provided a structurally defined idea of whiteness, along with providing the principles of whiteness, to make them more visible and to dismantle the structures that reproduce white supremacy and white privilege (DiAngelo, 2018).

A considerable amount of information on the interrogation and elements of whiteness has been accumulated in the short period of time whiteness has been studied. The major elements of CWS to be explored are the constructs of white identity, white privilege, white dominance, and whiteness as a phenomenon and in relation to history, racism, and education (Matias et al., 2014). It should be remembered that the findings in CWS are not meant to be an assault on white people, but rather an assault on the social constructs of white identifications and power interests (Gillborn, 2005).
In the United States, cultural identity is shaped by race. In studying the white identity, some people have been noted to have very little racial awareness of their white identities or what it means to be white in America (Hartmann et al., 2009). In fact, many white people often do not believe that white people have a cultural identity, even though cultural identity has more significance than any other identifying characteristics in shaping how individuals see the world, suggesting many white people are blind to how their white identity shapes their views (Pinderhughes, 1984; Tranby & Hartmann, 2008). The phenomenon of whiteness has less to do with the color of skin and more to do with positionality, an economic and political power that allows white people to benefit from the advantages of whiteness through traditions, societal norms, and institutions (Leonardo, 2002). As in the case of all races, race is learned; therefore, white people learn to be white even though many white people discount that whiteness is a race and much of what is learned is in the absence of a racial identity (Leonardo & Manning, 2017). White identity is often characterized as the norm or the default race creating a comparison for all other races to the white standard effectively “otherizing” people of color (Owen, 2007).

White privilege is an element of CWS that contributes to the reproduction of racial oppression. White privilege allows a person to experience “every day, institutional, and cultural advantages” due to being white, while enjoying a lack of racial discrimination as part of the dominant culture (Aouragh, 2019, p. 9) The term *white privilege* has acquired the additional connotation to refer to the inactivity of white people to fight on the behalf of racial injustice because they benefit from it (Aouragh, 2019, p. 9). Researchers have found that white people do seem to have problems in understanding the meaning and intricacies of white privilege, though they are aware that white privilege exists (Hartmann et al., 2009). In discussions of race and racism, white privilege often manifests itself in white participants as ambivalence, confusion,
anxiety, and freedom from having to know or understand racism or racial oppression (Dottolo & Stewart, 2013). Understanding white privilege in the context of whiteness can bring awareness to the often invisible, internalized forms of racism (Aouragh, 2019, p. 10).

White dominance refers to the fact that white people exist as the dominant culture. As the dominant culture in the US, white people have enjoyed socio-cultural, economic, and political advantages that have supplied insurmountable power within society. White dominance is closely associated with white supremacy, referring to the “role of [whiteness in] domination and power in structuring the social formation,” and exists as both a pre-cursor and a necessary evil to maintain white dominance (Owen, 2007, p. 215). White supremacy is the systemic exploitation and oppression of people of color that has occurred throughout history and across continents establishing white dominance (Gillborn, 2005). White dominance has led to a false perception of white supremacy beliefs and violence that have seen a resurgence in mainstream America in recent year coinciding with the rise of a nationalist groups, populist agenda, and right-wing conservatism (Fording & Schram, 2020). Racism continues to be perpetuated through stereotypical beliefs that have become normalized and taken for granted by preserving hegemonic whiteness and white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005).

The subtle behavior of colorblindness is a concept whereby people seek to ignore race completely. The idea is distinct from racism in that it does not translate into negative attitude or actions towards people of color, but it does, however, lend itself to inaction and the perpetuation of structural racism and inequality (Zou & Dickter, 2013). The misunderstanding and avoidance of race that is present in colorblindness ideology make it difficult for white people to recognize how colorblindness perpetuates whiteness and is a subtle form of racism (Milner, 2012). Evidence of colorblindness in the classroom is evident when white teachers are not comfortable
discussing or infusing race into the classroom or curriculum, thereby leaving it out altogether (Matias & Liou, 2015). Some consider colorblindness a subtle form of racism since it enables racism to continue and this perpetuation is just as detrimental to students of color in the long run as other types of racism (Zou & Dickter, 2013; Hartmann, Gerteis, & Croll, 2009).

Another aspect of whiteness that teachers must contend is that of the white savior complex. The notion that white people seek to save people of color as a means of feeling good about themselves is the central idea of a white savior complex (Aronson, 2017). Some note that white teachers who overly sympathize with students of color to the point of providing lower expectations may suffer from this complex (Matias, 2015). For this reason, white teachers must interrogate their reasons and perspectives for teaching students of color (Evans, 2018; Matias & Grosland, 2016), and by doing so, can interrupt the “institutionalized racial fetish” (Matias, 2015). The notion that white teachers want to help others is a positive attribute, but not when it limits or marginalizes the group being supported.

**Second-Wave White Teacher Identity Studies**

Second-wave white teacher identity studies grew out of CWS as the means to conceptualize the study of how the predominantly white teaching force can be better prepared to learn and teach across cultural differences in public schools (Jupp et al., 2016). An intentionality to study and reflect upon whiteness and its role in teacher education should provide three goals: “to develop a sociohistorical understanding of race in education, to overcome colorblindness, whiteness, and the belief in meritocracy, and to work within tensions and emotions” (Lynch, 2018, p. 22). By putting a name to the necessary teacher reflection on race, the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings on race can become less guilt-oriented and more constructive with the goal of establishing antiracist teaching practices (Lensmire, McManimon, Tierney, Lee-Nichols,
Casey, Lensmire, & Davis, 2013). Earlier works focused on how white teacher avoided discussions and reflection upon race, whiteness, and white privilege, but the second wave of works focuses on how white teachers can and do attend to the complexities of race and whiteness within pedagogy, curriculum, and the classroom (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016). The progression from deficit-based studies to asset-based studies as evidenced in second-wave white teacher identity studies is not indicative of progress in race relations in America, but rather an “alliance-oriented effort to defend and advance critical knowledge in education research and teacher education that might inform and enhance social justice projects in the present moment” (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 28)

Assumptions

It was assumed that participants were honest and forthright in their responses to interview questions. It was also assumed that the researcher had successfully established a trusting relationship with the participants and that participants felt comfortable sharing experiences and beliefs regarding race in the classroom with the researcher.

Delimitations

To allow for a focus on the experiences and belief systems of white teachers in rural schools, participants were limited to white teachers who taught in a secondary education setting in rural schools in West Tennessee. The experiences and beliefs of white teachers in urban, private, and suburban schools were not included, nor were the experiences and beliefs of pre-school, elementary, or post-secondary teachers. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable to white teachers in urban settings, elementary or post-secondary teachers, or white teachers who work in other regions of the United States.

Limitations
As with all research, this study was subject to limitations. My experience as a white, secondary-education teacher in rural schools may have affected my perspective and understanding of the participants’ responses, experiences, and beliefs. Additionally, due to the sample size, the participant sample was not representative of all white, secondary-education teachers in rural schools in West Tennessee. Another limitation was that I did not conduct observations to see if teachers were enacting what they said their beliefs were. I only had their word that each teacher participant was being truthful about his or her experiences and beliefs.

**Positionality**

As a white teacher, my perspective has been shaped by my white identity. Though I may try to be aware of how my whiteness has shaped my perspectives, I am equally mindful that I have blind spots of which I cannot be cognizant. For ethical considerations, the researcher’s perspective and viewpoint must be acknowledged during the research process (Savin-Baden, 2013). Therefore, my whiteness has served as a limitation to my interpretation of my interactions with the participants and the findings’ analysis. I positioned myself as a learner and a listener in the research process, though I may have had similar experiences as the white participants interviewed. While I may have shared some traits and experiences as my participants, I recognized that I must bracket, or set aside, my feelings (Merriam, 1998) and proceed in an open and non-judgmental manner throughout the research process.

I also recognize that my whiteness and my rural educator background gave me insider status with my participants, leading to the possibility of a quicker acceptance and a more open, trusting connection between myself and my participants. Like many qualitative researchers, I am intrigued by and seek to understand the meaning or knowledge constructed by people while recognizing that “there are multiple interpretations of reality” (Merriam, 1998, p. 22). Because I
moved so many times during my childhood, I was exposed to people with differing backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures than my own. I became very accepting of differences and developed a natural curiosity to learn about people. I have always had a strong sense of social justice. Studying racism is just an extension of my desire to empower others and advocate for those with less power than myself.

I became a teacher partly due to my desire to be part of the process of instilling social justice into society. I wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people. I wanted to be an effective teacher to all students; I still have this desire. I consider myself a lifelong learner, and as a white, veteran teacher who mostly taught in rural schools, I recognized a need to learn how to better support students of color. This background serves as a foundation for my desire to conduct this study.

**Summary**

This study sought to investigate the ways in which white rural teachers understand perceived racial biases and whiteness to engage in antiracist teaching with all students. There are significantly fewer critical whiteness studies based in rural education settings than urban education settings, so the results of this study may serve many rural stakeholders such as white teachers, school leaders, education policymakers, and parents of school-age children.

This proposal presents three chapters. In Chapter I, I provided the personal and theoretical context, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, term definitions, research questions, research design overview, significance of the study, theoretical framework, assumptions/delimitations/limitations, and the positionality statement. In Chapter II, I reviewed existing literature on critical whiteness studies and K-12 teachers, implicit racial biases in education, culturally responsive pedagogy, antiracist teaching practices, and rural education
studies. In Chapter III, I explained my qualitative research approach, research site selection, selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness and ethics.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Public classrooms in the US are becoming more diverse, but the teaching force is not. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (2019), white teachers account for 80% of the teaching force while children of color account for approximately 50% of the classroom population. Although it is outside the scope of this research, it is noted that there is a lack of representation of teachers of color in public classrooms, and more needs to be done to address the issue (Vilson, 2016). Working within public education’s current situation, it becomes even more vital to improve the training of white teachers to positively impact the education and social outcomes for students of color. There is little-to-no real professional training for the white, mostly middle-class teachers during teacher pre-service education to prepare them for the demands of teaching students of a different race and background, thus creating a void of culturally competent teachers in the classroom (Matias, 2013a). This is important because the United States educational system continues to perpetuate inequality and racism through multiple facets of the system which produces deficient educational outcomes for students of color (del Carmen Salazar, 2018). In fact, Black, Latino, and Native American groups of children have historically scored significantly lower on standardized tests (Milner, 2012), suffered higher rates of serious disciplinary referrals (Togut, 2011), have been under-represented in Honors courses and over-represented in special education programs (Ferri and Conner, 2005), and have suffered daily microaggressions that negatively impact their self-esteem and identity development (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). The connection between race and educational achievement (Vaught &
Castagno, 2008) must be examined to address opportunity gaps, provide equitable access to education for all, and to prepare white teachers to be agents of change in the process.

**Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) and K-12 Teachers**

Critical whiteness studies in K-12 education continue to provide important information and better understanding of how to improve teacher effectiveness, outcomes for students of color, and social justice initiatives. The study of whiteness and educators asks pre-service and veteran teachers to examine their whiteness, white privilege, and beliefs about students of color with the goal of educating and enabling white teachers to create classrooms that provide equity and inclusion while stopping the perpetuation of institutionalized racism (Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Largely, the focus of the studies has involved examining teacher attitudes about race, the deficits in preparation and practices of white teachers who work with students of color, and the resistance to critical dialogue about racism (Hagan and McGlynn, 2004; Allen, 2004). While teachers of varying races, backgrounds, religions and genders have proven they can be effective teachers to students of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Vilson, 2016), white teachers, being the dominant race of teachers in the field, must do the work and shoulder the responsibility to not perpetuate whiteness, white supremacy, white privilege, and/or negative stereotypes of students of color in the classroom (Love, 2019). When left unexamined, hegemonic whiteness becomes normalized and more concrete in society via the classroom (Warren, 2001). White teachers must understand the implications of their whiteness before they can become effective and constructive teachers for students of color. Critical whiteness studies provide the research and information for this to occur.

Unpacking whiteness, understanding white privilege, examining racial bias(es), and discussing issues of race are not easy processes for many white people, including teachers. White
teachers who were interviewed about their experiences of white privilege often resorted to three rationalizations as a means of denial: the belief in reverse racism, the rejection of white capitalism, and/or to discount the effects of racism on people of color (Solomon et al., 2005). Furthermore, researchers report emotional responses such as “intimidation, fetishism defensiveness, anger, trust, vulnerability, and reluctance” when pre-service white teachers were asked to confront whiteness and race issues (Matias, Henry, & Darland, 2017, p. 27). CWS shows that white teachers often underreport feelings and experiences of white privilege, indicating that many teachers are mostly unaware or have not come to terms with their whiteness and how it impacts their teaching (Matias, 2013a). Due to the rollercoaster of emotions that are presented in the work of dismantling whiteness in teachers, some may consider it too risky or too complex to undertake with undergraduates. It was found that white pre-service teachers who engaged in a series of structured lessons, interviews, conversations, and reflections on whiteness and racism indicated they had developed less political, more neutral views of race and race issues, were more eager to have conversations that were supportive and trusting, had a better understanding of how their whiteness and racism affected students of color, and felt more empowered to work with students of color (Marx & Pennington, 2003). Teacher education must include direct conversations and training for white teachers on dismantling whiteness because “increased exposure to people of color, multicultural theories, and explicit commitments to social justice is simply not enough to eradicate Whiteness in teacher education” (Matias & Grosland, 2016, n.p.). In order to advance culturally responsive pedagogy and an antiracist education system, teacher education programs and veteran teacher trainings must include the timely and uncomfortable process of self-interrogation and study of whiteness as it impacts teaching.
Even the seemingly good intentions of white teachers were not void of white ideology. White pre-service teacher participants who expressed a desire to help and nurture students of color through tutoring found their efforts frequently undermined by whiteness and racial biases that greatly influenced their beliefs and decisions concerning students of color (Marx, 2004). Teacher candidates often expressed “care, sympathy, and love” as emotions they felt towards students, but upon further research these positive emotions masked underlying emotions of disgust, pity, and over-sentimentalism when directed towards students of color (Matias & Zembylas, 2014). In fact, middle-class white females in urban education teacher programs have expressed a desire to ‘save’ urban students of color. The notion that white people seek to save people of color as a means of feeling good about themselves is the central idea of a white savior complex; some note that white teachers who overly sympathize with students of color to the point of providing lower expectations may suffer from this complex (Matias, 2015). For this reason, white teachers must interrogate their reasons and perspectives for teaching students of color (Evans, 2018; Matias & Grosland, 2016) and by doing so can interrupt the institutionalized racial fetish, a term coined by Matias (2015) to indicate the practice of white people garnering fake friendships with people of color to indicate antiracism and assuage whiteness. The idea of needing to save urban students of color indicates a deficit-approach to teaching in urban settings and undermines and fails to recognize the positive aspects of different cultures; essentially, a cultural incompetency on the part of the teacher (Matias & Liou, 2015). The notion that teachers want to help others is a positive attribute, but not when it limits or marginalizes the group being supported. Whiteness can manifest itself in emotions; therefore, it is important for white teachers to understand the complexity of their feelings and implicit biases towards students of color.
Whiteness is furthered through the misdirected belief in colorblindness as it applies to race, ultimately, perpetuating racial stereotyping and racism (Hartmann, Gerteis, & Croll, 2009; Allen, 2004). Often well-meaning white teachers express that they are colorblind to race as a means of expressing that they are not racist and treat all students equally (Matias, 2013b). Another form of racial colorblindness is when white teachers intentionally, or unintentionally, allow race discussions to take place in the classroom. When race discussions are silenced in classrooms, as if blind to race and racism, students of color suffer. Race-conscious teaching is important to the positive development of students of color and allows teachers to be a “part of the humanizing project of racial justice” (Matias, 2013c, p. 192). Pre-service teachers and teachers who claim they ‘do not see race’ or that ‘race is not an issue’ are engaging in colorblindness, which is insulting to students of color as it denies students of color their cultural uniqueness and painful experiences of racism. The act of colorblindness provides a cover for the importance of racism in the lives of students of color while allowing white people to be the “knowledge bearers of race” (Matias, 2013b, p. 58). To ignore race, racism, and the experiences of students of color does not make one an anti-racist, nor does the act of noticing race and racism make one a racist.

While much of critical whiteness studies in education have focused on the resistance of white teachers to analyze or discuss their whiteness or its impact on teaching, there have been some promising studies on a small, but growing group of progressive novice teachers who indicate an understanding and commitment to racial and ethnic equality and diversity who struggle but challenge the white curriculum and hegemonic norms (Pearce, 2012). According to Hagan and McGlynn (2004), there is reason to worry about the number of new white teachers who claim to be uncomfortable and unprepared for the diversity or race discussions that should
take place in today’s classroom, but there is evidence that “socially-aware, self-critical new teachers” who are not afraid to teach and discuss racism are also entering the classroom (Pearce, 2012, p. 456). Additionally, some strategies have been successful in helping white teachers understand whiteness more than others. Matias and Grosland (2016) found that reflective practices, especially digital storytelling, helped white pre-service teachers recognize and reach self-revelations of their whiteness. Self-reflection, or checking one’s beliefs and privileges, is not about assigning or accepting guilt, but should be a practice that enlightens and creates awareness in the individual that allows white teachers to acknowledge and confront individual and institutionalized racism (Matias, 2013a). With proper guidance, white teachers can become more comfortable in discussing whiteness and racism as well as more successful in understanding the role their race plays in pedagogical practices. Self-reflective practices should be an integral part of whiteness studies within teacher training and education programs.

By using the analytic tools of critical whiteness (Matias & Mackey, 2016) and the theoretical constructs of CRT (Howard and Navarro, 2016), the counterproductive and destructive biases and practices of unprepared white teachers can be identified and examined to meet social justice needs and initiatives within education. Racially-just education is stifled by white emotionality, colorblindness, and the resistance to discuss whiteness and racism among pre-service and veteran teachers (Matias, 2013c). While new teachers are likely to be the change agents for more equitable education (Ladson-Billings, 2001), all white teachers should receive professional development trainings to examine their understandings of racial biases, engage in unpacking their whiteness, and participate in anti-racist teaching practices so that all white teachers have the opportunity to overcome personal biases, become more effective teachers, and play an important part in disrupting institutionalized racism within education systems.
Second-Wave White Teacher Identity Studies

Based on recent work in CWS and building upon the foundational work of Black intellectual traditions, white teacher identity studies have formed a body of educational research that investigates how to best prepare the predominantly white teaching force to learn and teach culturally different students (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016). Through present-day white teacher identity studies, it is recognized that there is a “demographic imperative in teaching and learning” for white teachers to study, address, describe, and critically confront whiteness and racism in, what have become increasingly, re-segregated schools (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 2). The desired outcome of white teacher identity studies is to create a framework for critical conversations around whiteness from which teachers can apply what was learned to teaching practices with all students (Lynch, 2018). First-wave studies primarily focused on how white teachers avoided race and white privilege in their work and life, while second-wave studies shifted the focus to how white teachers with varying degrees of successes are understanding whiteness and learning to fight against systemic racism in education (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016).

The emergence of the field provided the now familiar white privilege and white race-evasive themes of white teacher resistance and denial of importance of race, whiteness, white privilege, and white identity (Jupp et al., 2016). Sleeter (1992, 1993) is credited with the seminal works on documenting, developing, and describing the concepts in first-wave white teacher identity studies. Later, McIntyre’s (1997a, 1997b, 2002) research expanded and reaffirmed Sleeter’s findings on identifying race-evasive white teachers; McIntyre also provided accounts of interventions and the partial transformations from white teacher race- evasiveness to white teacher ally identities, thus providing a roadmap to second-wave studies. Other important themes were present in the literature such as colorblind ideology (Lewis, 2001), whiteness pedagogy
(Marx & Pennington, 2003), racialized analysis of white teachers and humanistic caring (McIntyre, 1997a), and the ethics of white teachers and antiracist stances (Thomas, 2003). The complexity of emerging themes led to second-wave white teacher identity research.

By incorporating first-wave white teacher identity content and advancing new concepts, the second-wave white teacher identity research shifted focus to race-visible studies, which are studies with white respondents who were identified as having “degrees of racial recognition or conscientization” (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 18). Lensmire (2017) suggests that racial visibility can recall feelings of guilt, anxiety, shame, and fear; those feelings are often related to the realization of whiteness and can lead to racial ambivalence that is present in white identity stunting the progression of white teachers. Some authors explored white privilege pedagogy resulting in the denial that there is a need for white teachers to confess to white privilege as part of the unpacking process for white privilege, thus, shifting the focus of white privilege discussions to societal structures and away from personal feelings of guilt (Lensmire, McManimon, Tierney, Lee-Nichols, Casey, Lensmire, & Davis, 2013). From 2004-2014, there were two other major themes that emerged in second-wave race-visible studies: the complexity of white identity in teaching and learning and the intervention of pedagogy/curriculum for white identity change (Jupp et al., 2016). Second-wave white teacher studies attempt to find more complex and reflexive treatments to work with white teachers on matters of race, racism, and whiteness that can make productive changes in teaching practices (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016).

**Implicit Racial Bias in Public Education**

Recognizing all forms of racial bias is important. Implicit bias awareness seminars and trainings are evident in a variety of professional fields today based on a large body of scientific research that studied the impact of implicit bias on people of color (Greenwald & Kriege, 2006).
The most well-known study being the Harvard Implicit Bias Project, which created and utilized the Implicit Association Test (IAT) to measure implicit bias in participants, found that a significant percentage of respondents to the Race IAT showed some form of mostly unconscious bias towards people of color that could affect their decision-making (Project Implicit®, 2021). Therefore, many leaders and decision-makers across society are impacted by racial biases, while knowingly or unknowingly, contributing to racial discrimination and racial stereotyping (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). As other industries and institutions have grappled with implicit bias in their leaders and staff, so too has the field of education. Implicit biases are the attitudes or beliefs in stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions unconsciously (Matias & Mackey, 2016). Implicit bias, unlike explicit bias, is difficult to discover and interrupt because it is mostly unconscious, and most white people express that they are uncomfortable or resistant to discussing race as they do not want to be seen as racist (Castagno, 2008; Matias et al., 2016; Miller, 2019). Regardless, it is a necessary step in improving education outcomes for students of color. Training bias out of white teachers is an actionable step that has been driven, in part, by CWS, indicating implicit racialized bias does exist in K-12 public education settings and does impact a teacher’s ability to provide an equitable education to students of color (Allen et al., 2013; Huber, 2011). Even though research suggests otherwise, white teachers often express that their whiteness does not impact their teaching and are blind to how their white identity shapes their views of students, curriculum choices, or referrals (Pinderhughes, 1984; Tranby & Hartmann, 2008). Therefore, white teachers must engage in training and self-reflection to uncover and understand what implicit racial biases they have and work to unlearn them in order to not exhibit harmful discriminatory practices against students of color (Matias & Mackey, 2016).
Implicit racial bias in the classroom impacts students of color negatively in multiple ways. Teacher implicit racial bias has been found to affect the academic performance of students of color in two different ways: a teacher’s pedagogical effectiveness can be hampered by implicit bias, meaning the teacher underperforms with students of color, and/or a student of color may underperform academically when the student perceives a racial bias from the teacher (Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2016). Either way leads to negative education outcomes. Teacher implicit racial biases can manifest in lower academic expectations, differential grading and evaluative practices, lower referrals to upper-level Honor classes, higher special education referrals, and higher rates of expulsion and other extreme discipline measures, all of which have contributed to the creation and/or widening of the racialized achievement/opportunity gap for students of color when compared to their white peers (Van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010). To close the achievement/opportunity gap, teacher implicit biases must be addressed. Furthermore, implicit racial bias in public education has been noted to contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. “The phrase school-to-prison pipeline conceptually categorizes an ambiguous, yet seemingly systematic, process through which a wide range of education and criminal justice policies and practices collectively result in students of color being disparately pushed out of school and into prison” (Smith, 2009, p. 1012). White teacher interactions with students of color have also resulted in racial microaggressions that negatively impact school and classroom climates increasing the likelihood of discipline problems and dropping out of school for students of color (Johnston-Goodstar & Roholt, 2017); all of which create long term psychological damage and life-altering changes in students of color (Allen et al., 2013). One type of racial invalidation common among white people who wish to not be seen as racist is colorblind ideology, a concept whereby people seek to ignore race completely (Zou &
Dickter, 2013). Well-meaning white teachers often express “not seeing race,” thinking it is indicative of not being racist but not understanding that colorblind ideology perpetuates whiteness and invalidates the racial identity of the student of color (Hartmann et al., 2009; Milner 2012; Zou & Dickter, 2013). Given the magnitude and nature of the damage caused, good intentions are simply not enough to make changes in the classroom to provide equitable education and do no harm to students of color.

Implicit racial bias education has been largely ignored in most pre-service teacher education programs. Mostly, teacher training programs have relied on multiculturalism, which focuses on incorporating texts, histories, and perspectives of people from other cultures into the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2014), or diversity training, which focuses on understanding the differences in behavior, characteristics, and background of students who are different from the white teacher norm (Schwartz, 2019), as a means of preparing white teachers to work with students of color, neither of which include studying whiteness (Marx 2004). Implicit bias and equity training requires white teachers to focus on their own identities and beliefs as a means of improving pedagogy with students of color. Neither investigating and unpacking whiteness, nor the realization of harboring implicit racial biases, is a quick or easy process; time and trust must be established for white teachers to feel safe to participate or share in candid race discussions (Okonofua et al., 2016; Schwartz, 2019).

Ideally, pre-service teacher training programs would provide the tools for white teachers to investigate, reflect upon, and connect how implicit racial biases will impact pedagogy and students of color before teachers ever enter the classroom (Matias et al., 2014). While general anti-bias awareness programs alone have not resulted in noticeable changes in teacher behavior, awareness along with targeted and more concrete interventions were found to be more effective
when studied (Okonofua et al., 2016). Empathy training to change teacher mindset has shown to be promising. Positive exposure and interaction with people of color in professional settings and other environments has been found to increase empathy and change stereotyping mindsets of white teachers; this reinforces the need for schools to recruit and hire more teachers of color as a means of reducing implicit racial biases among white teachers and improving education outcomes for students of color (Vilson, 2016). Empathy-inducing interventions were found to be very effective in reducing teacher implicit bias as well as disciplinary referrals (Whitford & Emerson, 2019), and as stated earlier, empathy and compassion are necessary components of culturally responsive teaching (Pinderhughes, 1984; Toldson, 2018). Implicit racial bias awareness trainings alone are not sufficient. Other interventions must be coupled with awareness to create changes in behavior. 

While empathy-inducing trainings are important, there is still another actionable step that must take place. In a study that examined the racial attitudes of white teachers in urban school settings after anti-bias or antiracist in-service trainings, it was found that white teachers did not believe they were racist, but still expressed racialized responses such as white privilege and individual denial. The awareness trainings did not lead to empathy and ultimately, the researchers found that without structural transformation on a school-wide or district level, the practice of racism continued (Castagno, 2008). Regardless of the pre-service or in-service trainings provided for teachers, if school leaders do not institute anti-racist initiatives on a structural and systemic level, bias and racism will persist within the school.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

The teaching and practice of culturally relevant pedagogy was the first step in the progression towards Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1994), who coined the
term *culturally relevant pedagogy* and changed the discourse on education reform, intended to improve the education of teachers by providing a cultural awareness and paradigm shift towards an asset-based approach, a recognition that students of color are culturally rich and knowledgeable, in teaching Black students in urban settings. Previously, pre-service teaching programs approached the differences in language, literacy, and cultural backgrounds of students of color as deficient – something to be replaced with legitimized ways of speaking, literacy, and culture that aligned with white, middle-class norms (Paris, 2012). Deficit thinking is described as “negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations of these students accordingly” (Ford & Grantham, 2003, p. 217). The theory grew to include students from multiple marginalized cultures. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is a framework that encouraged teachers to include cross-cultural curriculum while focusing on high expectations for student learning and the development of positive ethnic and social identities for all students of color. Students were encouraged to relate curriculum to their own lives and experiences and to challenge social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant teaching requires thoughtfulness and planning. It looks different in different classrooms. There are no culturally relevant lesson plans that can take the place of what the teacher must do. Teachers must think, decide, and plan for students with intentionality and tailor lessons and curriculum to include the diversity of the students in that specific classroom at that time (Fray, 2019).

Unfortunately, many educators and pre-service programs began to leave out critical parts of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and it was often simplified to the practice of only including cross-cultural curriculum in the classroom and cultural celebrations in the school. Another criticism was that Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, while it recognized that students of color have
cultures and languages that are assets to their ability to learn and should be integrated into the classroom, did not adequately address the increasing diversity and differences of cultures and languages (Paris 2012). Educators must meet the needs of public schools that are more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse than ever before (Kea & Trent, 2013). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy was not dynamic and critical enough to meet those needs. Without a fluid understanding of culture and engagement in the sociopolitical aspects of questioning justice and equity, culturally relevant pedagogy needed transformation (Paris, 2012).

Culture is not static. Educators must embrace an evolving and dynamic view of culture (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy’s focus on cultural heritage alone without considering the evolving nature of culture and language fell short of the contemporary needs of students of color (Paris & Alim, 2014). Changes in terminology began to arise to signal the extension and building upon of Ladson-Billing’s work. One such extension is the theory of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy “is interested not in relevance or responsiveness, but in sustaining and extending the richness of our pluralistic society” (Paris, 2012, p. 96). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy takes into account not only the past, but the future of marginalized cultures and their place within US society. It stresses the need to not only recognize the language, literacy, and culture of students of color as an asset, but also something to be preserved or sustained. It is with this notion that teachers should present cross-cultural curriculum, lesson planning and instructional delivery to connect students of color to their heritage, to their current day situations, and to sustaining their culture in the future.

Often used interchangeably with Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, the terminology most current, has subtle differences in meaning and interpretation. Gay’s (2000) work to shift teacher thinking from deficit to asset in
terms of recognizing the knowledge that students of color present in their learning process was added to the growing research that became known as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. The change in terminology extends the understanding of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, meaning that teachers should differentiate instruction as a way of responding to the unique knowledge and needs of students from different cultural backgrounds. It also expanded the category of culture to include family structure, socio-economic status, ability and mental health, sexual orientation, as well as ethnicity and race (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). More than just being inclusive, culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes that each student learns differently, and learning is connected to their unique background and should be nurtured to create optimal learning environments (Matias, 2013a). In order to be a culturally responsive teacher, it is equally important to advocate for students and families of color as it is to maintain high expectations in the classroom (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive teaching is not just about becoming a better teacher; it entails the wider purpose of creating “a civil rights movement that reclaims hope” (Matias, 2013a, p. 70). It would not be responsive teaching if teachers did not respond to all the obstacles facing students of color, thus advocating for equity, justice, and anti-oppressive/racist leadership in schools is important in culturally responsive teaching (Khalifa et al., 2016).

**Antiracist Teaching**

Antiracist teaching does not replace Culturally Relevant, Responsive, or Sustaining pedagogy. Rather, antiracist teaching is the goal and outward culmination of the interventions, strategies, and asset-based pedagogies teachers strive to enact in the classroom. Antiracist teaching first requires one to be antiracist. According to Kendi (2019), an antiracist is “one who is expressing the idea that racial groups are equals and none needs developing and is supporting
policy that reduces racial inequity” (p. 24). Furthermore, Kendi (2019) states that “one either allows racial inequalities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of ‘not racist’” (p. 9). How does this definition translate into anti-racist teaching? Antiracist teaching encompasses teaching practices that not only bring awareness to the historical racism and inequities of marginalized groups of people, but also includes teaching practices that allow for students’ critical thinking and discussion of race, racism, inequity, and injustice in the classroom (Dlamini, 2010). Kendi believes it is essential that antiracist teachers teach antiracist educational curriculum, strive to create antiracist learning environments, and model antiracism (Koenig, 2020). Antiracist teaching stems from an anti-racist mindset that informs teaching while working with families of color and advocating for structural and policy-related changes that remove race-based barriers and provide for social justice for students of color inside and outside the classroom (Love, 2019). Simmons (2019) recommends five actions to engage in antiracist teaching: engage in self-awareness by self-reflecting on one’s own racial identity and the impact of race in the classroom, acknowledge the existence of racism and white supremacy ideology, study and teach history that is truthfully representative and depictive of racial oppression and inclusive of the successes and achievements of people of color, lead and allow classroom discussions on race to take place, and act against racism when one sees it.

In antiracist teaching, the hegemonic whiteness that dominates the field of education must be unveiled and the existing power structures challenged. Hegemony is a psychological power that is structural and institutional involving influence or predominance of one group over another; it is preserved and perpetuated in the US education system (Dottolo & Stewart, 2013). Antiracist teaching requires that white teachers first deconstruct their own whiteness through
practices that force them to reflect on their white privilege and hegemonic whiteness, also
helping them to develop the emotional strength for antiracist teaching. By rejecting emotional
responses such as guilt or discomfort that are often projected onto students of color, white
teachers begin to carry the burden of dismantling whiteness and white supremacy in the
classroom, not the student (Matias & Mackey, 2015). To engage in antiracist teaching, white
teachers must acquire a new lens in which to see how implicit racial biases and structural racism
impact the achievement of students of color, if it is to be a means of destabilizing the ways race
and racism operate in schools and in everyday life (Shaw & Coles, 2020). According to Love
(2019), “the achievement gap is not about white students outperforming dark students; it is about
a history of injustice and oppression” (p. 92). White teachers who wish to create better education
outcomes for students of color will have to address how racism is impacting students of color in
the classroom.

Teachers armed with antiracist knowledge and a desire to fight injustice and inequity are
the best resources to improve the education system. While one teacher may not be able to change
district policies, teachers do have the responsibility of noticing and making a difference in how
race operates in their classrooms (Shaw & Coles, 2020), and it only takes small groups of
teachers to build alliances in organizing school or district change (Love, 2019). To eradicate or
fix the education system, education leaders, scholars, and stakeholders often call for new
teaching practices and resources, but those things will never get to the root of the problem to
truly change or improve the system because they do not address the persistent inequality in
education (2019). Teachers must be prepared with an anti-racist mindset that will inform their
teaching practices as well as prepare teachers emotionally for the difficult task of pursuing anti-
racism and social justice (Matias & Mackey, 2015). As noted earlier, race is not a subject most
white people are comfortable discussing (Matias et al., 2017; Solomon et al., 2005), nor do a significant number of white people wish to relinquish the power and privilege that comes with being the dominant race in society as evidenced in white supremacy and white capitalism (Dubois, 1903; Casey, 2020), so teachers who practice antiracist teaching should expect pushback.

Teacher preparation programs should play an important role in preparing teachers to be antiracist teachers. Lessons and experiences that require self-reflective practices have been useful in investigating and creating awareness of whiteness and white privilege (Matias & Grosland, 2016), which is the first step towards antiracist teaching. Race-focused teacher education programs have mostly tried to change teacher perceptions and attitudes about race, ethnicity, and cultural differences, which is important and necessary work, but research shows it is very difficult to change those ideological anchors (Shah & Coles, 2020). Not only are beliefs and attitudes often situational and shifting dependent upon the context (Garrett & Segall, 2013), just changing ideology without changing practice has very little impact on improving inequities in the classroom (Gay, 2009). Therefore, antiracist teaching requires actionable practices. Some scholars recommend teaching racial-noticing, which is “the process of attending to, interpreting, and formulating responses to racial phenomena in learning settings” as a means of teacher practice (Shaw & Coles, 2020, p. 586) and is the opposite of colorblindness ideology that perpetuates racism (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Teaching racial-noticing as a strategy can support efforts in race-focused teacher preparation programs, but racial-noticing is distinct from antiracism and does not take the place of antiracist teaching (Shaw & Coles, 2020). Additionally, white teachers should provide an opportunity to listen to the voices and needs of students and families of color respecting them as active participants with valuable knowledge that can be
brought to the classroom (Delpit, 2006). White teachers with inclinations towards antiracist teaching should always be learning, reflecting, doing, and advocating for students of color to be effective in dismantling personal biases and structural racism within schools.

A national awakening and awareness occurred in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and subsequent trial, as people across the US reacted in shock and outrage and were no longer able to ignore the racism and violence being perpetrated against Black people by police, and traditionally supported by the legal system. Grassroots organizations, such as Black Lives Matters, organized and demanded reform to long-held systemic racist practices in policing of communities of color and it grew into civil protests joined by people from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and races, in a solidarity not seen since the 1960s protests (Van den Berk & Visser-Maessen, 2019). The growing antiracist sentiment and desire for reform spread to include the interrogation and investigation of other institutions, one of which being America’s education system. There has always been a need for antiracist teaching, but the opportunity for its use in public schools could not be greater or timelier than now. In recent years, there has been an influx of antiracist teaching materials and suggested practices to guide teachers on how to talk about race in the classroom, how to help students deal with acts of racism, and how to be an antiracist (Simmons, 2019). A movement that began several years ago, but has gained more traction recently, with the goal to include antiracism in school curriculums, practices, and polices, has resulted in a book, Black Lives Matter in Schools: An Uprising for Educational Justice (2020) that outlines four anti-racist demands of schools: ending zero-tolerance discipline policies and administering restorative justice; recruiting and hiring more Black teachers; mandating Black History and Ethnic Studies in K-12 curriculum; and shifting funding to hiring more counselors instead of police officers in schools (Hagopian & Jones,
Another important piece of antiracism work that has been introduced to schools is The 1619 Project (2019), a long-form journalism project aimed at reframing US history by centering slavery and the contributions of Black people in the national narrative. The goal of which is to provide a more historically accurate depiction of the full lives of Black people and the inhumane system of slavery recognized as the root of racism in America today, in the hopes that truth and knowledge can create a more just future for America (Hannah-Jones, 2019). Moving forward, school curriculum that is inclusive of the accurate and full histories of people of color coupled with antiracist teaching practices will be fundamental in creating an equitable and socially just society.

For every recent advance towards an equitable and antiracist society, there is pushback from those who do not wish to see racial reforms in America and attack antiracism as a deemed threat to the power structure that supports white supremacy and hegemony. Recognizing the importance and role of schools in advancing and supporting social justice reforms in a democratic society (Freire, 1998; Hytten & Bettez, 2011), conservative and alt-right groups, media, and politicians have pushed back on the inclusion of antiracism practices or curriculum in schools, specifically on the two described earlier, the support of Black Lives Matter materials and the 1619 Project. Labeling antiracist curriculum and Black Lives Matter support in schools as “politically motivated” and “indoctrination,” some white communities complained, and political leaders began to systematically create bills and legislation to combat the rise of antiracist teaching and curriculum being integrated into schools and to stop the teaching and use of Critical Race Theory (Meckler & Natanson, 2021). The 1619 Project has received considerable public criticism from high profile politicians such as former president Donald Trump and numerous conservative-Republican senators. Republican Senator Tom Cotton of
Arkansas (2020) proposed the “Saving American History Act of 2020”, which would prohibit K-12 schools from using federal funds and ineligible for federal professional-development grants if any of the curriculum related to The 1619 Project was taught in the school. These regressive tactics aimed at educators and schools continue to date, as does the advocacy for students of color and the fight for social justice in schools.

**Rural Education Studies**

The unique needs of rural schools are often left out of national conversations on education improvement and have been overshadowed by the needs of urban and suburban schools in public discourse (Lavelley, 2018; Showalter et al., 2019), but rural schools do matter in the big picture of education in the US. Current numbers shows that roughly one-half of school districts, one-third of schools, and one-fifth of students are located in rural America (NCES 2019); approximately 9.3 million children attend rural schools, which is a number greater than the nation’s top 85 largest school districts, representing 15% of all students in the nation are enrolled in rural schools and rural schools represent 30% of all public schools, albeit disproportionately distributed across states; half of all rural students are concentrated in only eleven states (Showalter et al., 2019). Some states have significant numbers of rural students and others do not, creating broad regional variations and difficulty in creating a categorical message about rural schools (Lavalley, 2018), but there are some distinctive characteristics and needs that have come to light.

Children from rural communities, especially in the South, experience higher rates of poverty, often more extreme levels of poverty, and far more generational poverty than their urban and suburban counterparts with large variations of support from state to state (Farrigan, 2017; Lavalley, 2018). Higher poverty rates are often coupled with higher mobility rates, which
is associated with lower academic achievement, as learning is often disrupted and inconsistent; Additionally, significant numbers of rural students in public schools, often more than 50%, are eligible for free and reduced lunch (Farrigan, 2017; Showalter et al., 2019). Poverty is the lack of resources, often considered only as a lack of financial resources, but poverty can include a lack of emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships and role models, and affects all races and countries (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Understanding the lack of resources and cultural differences rural areas is very important to teacher development of relationships with students who attend rural schools. Since schools typically function on middle-class norms and are staffed with white teachers who are primarily from middle-class backgrounds, there is a lack of cultural competency in dealing with the intersectionality of poverty and race (Kea & Trent, 2013). Therefore, teacher training in understanding poverty is just as important as training in pedagogy, curriculum, and race.

Populations within rural communities have historically been, and remain, predominantly white, often with small clusters of minority populations that differ across regions (Showalter et al., 2019). While some rural districts have no diversity, other rural communities have experienced a tremendous population increase in Latino students in recent years, so much so that one in five rural residents identify as Latino, and this number is projected to continue to grow. Dependent on the state, specific groups of children of color have risen according to geographical trends and are more likely to live in extreme poverty than their white counterparts (Johnson et al., 2014; Showalter et al., 2019). Latino students make up a large portion of the English Language Learner (ELL) students in rural areas, where it is even more difficult to find qualified ELL teachers to work with this growing population (Showalter et al., 2019). In rural areas, poverty continues to disproportionately affect children of color and children of color are more
likely to attend a rural school that is experiencing high rates of poverty in comparison to other rural schools (Irvin et al., 2016; Lavalley, 2018). It is important to note that while white children represent the largest group of children in poverty, there is a higher percentage of children of color living in poverty (Showalter et al., 2019). As rural areas become more diverse, persistently high levels of poverty remains a factor facing rural schools.

Rural students face academic hurdles as do urban schools, but often with fewer resources (Ayers, 2010). In recent years, academic performances in rural schools have improved, often presenting higher test scores than urban schools, but still lagging behind suburban schools; however, the academic achievement/opportunity gap remains consistent in rural schools for students of color (Showalter et al., 2019). Rural schools are plagued by low literacy rates, below average rates of college attendance, limited access to advanced courses, broadband internet, and technology, and less qualified, lower paid teachers (Lavalley, 2018). Even though college admittance still has lower numbers than other areas, there was a sharp rise in rural students taking Dual Credit courses in high school and overall graduation rates appear to be higher in rural communities than urban areas, though there is still a significant gap in graduation rates between students of color and their white peers with rural students of color lagging far behind all other student groups (Showalter et al., 2019). Due to the unique characteristics and experiences of rural schools, students of color can experience school differently impacting their educational goals and outcomes; whatever gains rural schools have experienced, students of color within those rural schools have been largely left behind (Farrigan, 2017).

Teacher effectiveness and qualifications are important to the success of students in all schools. Rural schools have a harder time recruiting teachers, especially in STEM and ELL positions, and hire a larger number of novice teachers than other schools (Lavalley, 2018). Rural
teachers are often from nearby rural communities and less likely to have advanced degrees or come from selective colleges (Miller, 2012), with little or limited experiences with people of other ethnicities and races (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020). Rural school leaders are more likely to serve in multiple roles and capacities within the school or, in some cases, be responsible for multiple schools and have difficulty in obtaining access to high quality professional development, often restricting the ongoing training necessary for teachers to be effective in their roles (Parson et al., 2016). These factors impact student learning and may contribute to overall lower education outcomes as evidenced in rural schools (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Lavalley, 2018, Showalter et al., 2019).

Because rural schools and communities have fewer people of color, whiteness, racism, and stereotypical thinking can go unchallenged. While white rural people know that racism and racial stereotyping is not acceptable in higher, polite environments where people are expected to be politically correct, therefore, racist views, white supremacy ideals, and jokes based on stereotypes take place in what has been termed basement culture, a setting where white people can speak freely and are encouraged to express racism and other extreme views without fear of being shamed by other white people (Lensmire, 2017). Largely white, rural areas are often resistant and hostile to people who represent change or diversity, such as people of color and differing ethnic groups, and will move away from areas, known as white flight, when diverse groups of people move to the area as opposed to creating relationships or getting to know people who they are not like (Kosciw et al., 2011). In rural areas, white people who have had little exposure or experiences with people of color in positive settings, as is often the case in rural environments, often express fear of people of color and a strong belief in stereotypes that are not only reinforced but encouraged by their white peers regardless of their socioeconomic standing.
in the community; it is a means of repressing and controlling people of color while creating a false sense of superiority (Lensmire, 2017). White rural community members often “hold a parochial epistemological stance (i.e., epistemological divide) toward diversity and diverse peoples” (p. 119) bringing further awareness to people of color within the community their minority and other, or non-white outsider, status (Han, 2015). This often carries over into educational spaces where students of color become isolated and must endure racism in the K-12 setting (Kohli, 2014).

A great deal has been written about the need to prepare white teachers to work with students of color, but mostly the studies have centered on urban settings (Sleeter, 2001). Even though rural schools often have smaller numbers of students of color, those schools are rapidly diversifying with high mobility students and are in no less need of academic support in antiracist classrooms than urban students (Lavelley, 2018; Lensmire, 2017). Smaller numbers of students of color within schools does not preclude the perpetuation of whiteness; in fact, racism and implicit racial biases are very prevalent in predominantly white rural schools due to the lack of diversity and cultural competence (Chakraborti & Garland, 2004). Providing white rural pre-service teachers with the knowledge to become antiracist teachers helps all students connect culturally relevant pedagogy to their lives and experiences in rural settings (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020). White students benefit from antiracist teaching practices and for some white, rural students, antiracist teaching is the only way white supremacy and racism will be dismantled (Kendi, 2019). Some white, rural teachers have mistakenly expressed that implicit bias and antiracism trainings should only be taught to urban teachers where the student body is predominantly students of color, believing that white teachers who teach in predominantly white rural schools have no need of such training (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020). White rural
teachers must shift their thinking to preparing all students for a rapidly, diversifying world, and remember they still have an obligation to provide culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy to white students and students of color, no matter the classroom representation (Castagno, 2008). Diversity and antiracist teaching matters in rural areas as much as it does in urban areas. It motivates and empowers students to fight for social justice, dismantles racism, and moves schools towards more equitable education, which is a fundamental civil right in America (Han & Leonard, 2016). Because of the unique needs and characteristics of rural schools, more studies on the impact of race and antiracist teaching practices in rural settings are needed.

Some of the needs of rural schools can be met by through basic policy measures. Rural schools should have fair chances to receive and compete for federal education funds; school-based comprehensive wraparound services should be made available to rural students based on special needs and limited capacity of rural schools; turn around options should be made available to rural districts for low-performing schools; and supports for building up of the teacher and principal workforce should be provided for rural schools (Ayers, 2010).

**Summary**

To improve education outcomes for students of color, provide equitable education for all students, and interrupt the perpetuation of institutionalized racism in education, the mostly white teaching force must become culturally competent and be committed to anti-racist teaching practices. Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy, along with antiracist teaching practices, are needed to improve education outcomes and personal development for students of color, to create cultural competency in teachers and students, and to dismantle racial biases and stereotypes often believed by white students, and to challenge structural racism present in school systems (Kendi, 2019). Understanding the role of whiteness and racial biases is an integral part
of the process for teacher preparation but is not the only step in becoming an antiracist teacher (Matias et al., 2014; Kendi, 2019). While most teacher preparation programs have not attempted to tackle whiteness or the impact of white identity on pedagogy (Matias, 2013a), a great deal of research has been accumulated to suggest that self-interrogation of racial biases (Castagno, 2008; Project Implicit®, 202; Matias et al., 2016; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Miller, 2019), understanding white identity and privilege (Gillborn, 2005; Matias, 2016), self-reflection practices (Matias & Grosland, 2016), empathy training and emotional strengthening (Pinderhughes, 1984; Vilson, 2016; Whitford & Emerson, 2019), racial-noticing (Shaw & Coles, 2020), and positive exposure to people of color who break negative stereotypes (Matias & Grosland, 2016) are better ways to prepare white teachers to work with students of color than multiculturalism or diversity training (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As tensions have risen and more communities and grass roots committees call for racism to be addressed in schools, teacher preparation programs and trainings have begun to initiate race-based instruction to create more culturally competent teachers (Love, 2019; Simmons, 2019). Rural pre-service and in-service teachers should not be overlooked for anti-bias and anti-racism trainings even though they teach predominantly white students (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; Castagno, 2008). Rural students of color have some of the worst education outcomes in the nation (Lavalley, 2018) and addressing rural racism in the classroom and teacher preparation are ways to overcome education barriers and create equitable access to education for all students.

The literature review provides the specific foundational knowledge of critical whiteness studies, second-wave white teacher identity studies, implicit bias in public education, culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy, anti-racist teaching, and rural education studies as it applies to the purpose of this study. The purpose of this case study was to discover the ways in which white
rural teachers were engaging in anti-racist teaching and challenging systemic racism by understanding their perceived biases and beliefs about race. This study is significant by providing an asset-based examination of how white rural teachers have worked to understand their whiteness and are engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy with antiracist teaching practices as a means of challenging institutionalized racism in rural schools and communities.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The study presented in this paper will add to the growing body of literature that explores the ways in which white teachers seek to interpret and interrupt whiteness, racism, and its impact on teacher education and student learning. This study has the potential to build upon and expand CWS and second-wave white teacher identity studies by furthering the understanding of the relationship between white identity and systemic racism and that of white teacher preparation and reflection. The findings provide direct implications for school leaders, supervisors, and pre-service teacher education programs and professional development programs for novice and veteran teachers.

Like many other research and policy discussions, the growing number of studies in the field of whiteness and education have mostly focused on urban areas (Lavalley, 2018). However, students of color also live and attend school in rural areas and are no less deserving of well-prepared educators and education void of racism than students of color who live in urban areas. While rural areas may not experience the sheer numbers in diversity, the predominantly white teaching force must still provide an equitable education to those students. As a white educator and researcher who has worked in multiple areas of education and within urban and rural school settings, I recognized the rural setting’s potential for unique cultural experiences and its impact on the predominantly white teaching force and students of color who inhabit it. My experiences in rural and urban education led to conducting this study. There is a small, but growing, body of work focused on rural white teachers, with some asset-based approaches, that have been documenting how white teachers overcome racialized bias(es) and systemic racism to provide antiracist teaching to all students called second-wave white teacher identity studies. This study aimed to add to that growing body of work and explore the possible ways in which white rural
teachers were coming to terms with their white identity, implicit racial biases, and institutionalized racism; in part this study can be used to start a conversation for rural white teachers on improving teacher effectiveness and antiracist practices as they pertain to working with students of color.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1</th>
<th>In what ways are white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee challenging institutionalized racism?</th>
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<tr>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td>What barriers do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee perceive to exist when engaging in antiracist teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3</td>
<td>How do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee understand their own biases and beliefs regarding race and schooling?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this chapter, I further explain the methodology for this qualitative study. I present a description of the case study design, offering a rationale for why the case study approach is the best methodology for this study. I include a discussion of the research and site selection, the data collection and storage methods, the data analysis and presentation, and the trustworthiness and ethics.

**Methodology: Case Study**

Qualitative case study methodology was used to discover how white rural teachers understood their white identity, racialized biases, and cultural competency; additionally, it was used to discern the ways white rural teachers challenge systemic racism as educators of students of color in high schools. This study sought to develop conceptual categories and translate critical concepts into pedagogy, creating an interpretive case study (Merriam, 1988). The case study design lent itself to the exploratory nature and interpretive study of educational professionals’ beliefs and experiences within a specific context (Stake, 2003). The issue of race and racism is
complex, sensitive, and problematic for most people, but the work of eliminating its impact on teaching must occur. Additionally, the case study provided a tool to document teachers’ experiences and beliefs to learn and theorize how best to prepare white teachers to instruct students of color effectively without causing harm. Teacher preparation programs and professional development can be improved using cases studies.

The case study’s origin and history can be traced back to the late 1800s and early 1900s. The French sociologist and economist, Le Play, was noted to have used a case study in his work with working-class families in 1829, while the early pragmatists and Chicago School interactionists were using case study research in the early 1900s (Savin-Badin & Major, 2013). Education scholars Yin (1984) and Stake (1995) introduced case studies to the field of education, encouraging a pragmatic approach. By the 1990s, Creswell (1998) and Merriam (1988) had successfully established the case study as a primary research tool in qualitative research, especially in the fields of health and education. Yin, Stake, Creswell, and Merriam continued to publish scholarly works on case study into the early 2000s. They are still considered the authorities on case study, even though each subscribes to differing epistemological orientations that have led to different techniques and strategies in designing case study methodology (Yazan, 2015). Regardless of the differences, case study has become more commonly used and accepted in qualitative research.

The growth and interest in using case study as a research approach are primarily due to the many advantages presented by the research choice. Case study is flexible and can be used with a variety of goals and philosophical positions, it allows for depth of investigation and a capacity in understanding complex phenomenon useful in examining relationships between people and structures with which people operate, and it is often solution-oriented (Savin-Baden
Case study design aligns with my research goals of learning from a specific group of individuals working in the education field within the context of racism and how it impacts teacher choices. As an emerging researcher, I position myself much more closely as a constructivist and connected with Merriam’s view that “the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based in the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p.6). While both Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) utilized constructivist paradigms and were similar in many ways, I found that Merriam offered more structure and guidance in developing case study methodology than Stake. According to Merriam (1998), case is bounded; it can be a person, a program, a group, or a specific program, and has the defining characteristics of being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic in nature. The findings can be used to learn, teach, and further define theory. Merriam (1998) also provides five steps to the research design: conducting a literature review, constructing a theoretical framework, identifying a research problem, crafting and sharpening research questions, and selecting the sample through purposive sampling. I will use Merriam’s case study approach to guide me through my research project.

While I believed case study methodology to be the best choice for the study, it was recognized that there are criticisms of this research approach. Some view the nature of case study as an intrusion into participants’ lives and one that can offer a narrow view into a situation that can lead to an overly simplistic and, possibly, incorrect worldview (Walker, 1983). While it can be difficult, it is central to a case study to understand the boundedness and behavior patterns involved in the case (Stake, 2003). Additionally, methodologists do not agree and often present opposing approaches to designing and implementing of case studies (Yazan, 2015). This disagreement can be confusing, especially for novice researchers.
Research Site and Participant Selection

Research Site Selection

Per the guidelines and regulations set forth by the University of Memphis, I requested permission to conduct this research through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. Once permission was granted, I distributed and collected consent forms from the participants and scheduled their interviews. The locale of the research was chosen due to researcher access; thus, participant selection was from public schools in rural, mid-Southern America. The interviewees were able to choose in-person interviews, videoconferencing, or teleconferencing due to Covid-19 precautions and accessibility to such resources by the participant. It is noted that a significant amount of research has been conducted with teachers instructing students of color in urban education settings (Lavalley, 2018), and decidedly less research has been conducted with teachers instructing students of color in rural education settings. By choosing this research site, I acknowledged that rural, white teachers may have different lived experiences, beliefs, and practices in the classroom than urban, white teachers, and would provide unique data.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected using criterion-based sampling set forth as white teachers with more than one year of experience who were teaching in grades 9-12 in a public high school in rural, mid-South America. Criterion-based sampling, often used in qualitative research, is a type of purposeful sampling that can provide information-rich cases from a smaller number of samples and gain maximum variation (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants varied in age, gender, and years of teaching experience. I recruited and contacted participants via email (see appendix 1 for email script). Recruitments received an email that contained the recruitment script, a brief overview of the study, and a consent form (see appendix 2 for consent form). Once
I received the return email with a signed consent form indicating the participant wished to be in the study, interviews were scheduled. The consent form was reviewed, and an explanation of the study’s purpose, data collection methods, and data usage was provided to each participant on the day of the interview.

To ensure the participants’ anonymity and confidentiality, each participant chose a pseudonym to be used throughout each step of the study. Participant demographics are presented in a table in Chapter 4. Some of the participants had pre-existing relationships with the researcher. Those that did were former coworkers of the researcher. As former coworkers, the researcher did not have any undue influence over the participants in acquiring their participation.

The anticipated sample size was less than ten participants. Participants were accepted from two rural high schools in one generalized area of Northwest Tennessee. The number of participants was dependent on achieving sufficiency and saturation of information. According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), in-depth interviews of six to eight participants can indicate common themes.

### Data Collection

Merriam (1998) suggests qualitative case study requires the use of three types of data collection. The researcher conducted interviews, analyzed documents, and kept a researcher journal during the research process.

### Interviews

The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted as hour-long sessions and guided by a list of vetted, open-ended questions to allow participants to express their perspectives. Interviews were conducted in person, via phone, and on Zoom, dependent on the preference of the participant. The participant was asked to describe
experiences and beliefs involving lesson preparation, instruction, teacher feedback and
reflection, and classroom interactions with students of color within the context of the school’s
stated mission and adherence to diversity, inclusion, and equity goals. The study allowed for
additional interviews with individual participants as follow-up questions arose, trust established,
and more probing discussions were generated. Interviews can provide detailed information, but it
is the researcher’s responsibility to develop a rapport and to establish trust with the participant so
that the participant feels able to share experiences and beliefs honestly (Merriam, 1998).

Building trust takes time, so time was allotted during the interview process. Semi-
structured interviews require an interview protocol to focus the interaction on crucial ideas of the
research, often from general to specific, gradually introducing sensitive issues (Baden-Savin &
Major, 2013). The interview process, with its goal of ascertaining the participant’s perspective
and insight on the research topic (Turner, 2010), was ideal for this study as it sought to gain
knowledge and truths from the experiences and beliefs of white, rural teachers as voiced in their
own words to inform pedagogy and policy.

Even though the interview format was semi-structured, the data collection process was
structured. In preparation for the interviews, a list of questions based on whiteness and anti-racist
teaching practices were created to procure teacher responses that detail interactions with students
of color in the classroom; the questions were submitted and vetted by the dissertation committee.
The interview instrument consisted of seventeen questions that were clarified and reviewed by
the dissertation committee. Follow up questions were asked for further probing or clarification.
Once the interview questions were clarified and approved, and participant consent was given to
participate in the study, I scheduled interviews with the participants. I emailed the interview
questions to the participants the day before the scheduled interviews to purposely give them only
one day to think about the questions and not over-prepare for the interview. However, I wanted to strike a balance between relieving anxiety about the sensitive issue of race by allowing the participants to think over their answers with that of being able to create a conversational atmosphere during the interview, thus, eliciting truthful, descriptive responses to open-ended questions. (See appendix 3 for interview questions.)

**Document Analysis**

To better understand the context in which each research participant operates, the mission and diversity, inclusion, or equity statements from each school were collected. The purpose of introducing the documents into the research study was to provide participant context through the documentation of an established education goal for the participant’s teaching environment. The school mission and diversity, inclusion, or equity statements could be found on school websites for public view. Each school was given a pseudonym to ensure privacy. I collected a mission statement from both schools, but it is noted that neither school had a diversity, inclusion, or equity statement published for their school. During the interview process, participants were asked to respond to their school’s mission statement in relation to teacher decision-making, lesson planning, and its inclusivity or exclusivity for students of color in their classrooms.

**Researcher Journal**

Journaling can be a powerful tool to provide the researcher and the research process with discerning and heuristic knowledge. In qualitative research, the researcher is considered an essential tool (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), thereby making it of critical importance that the researcher documents the interactions between the participant and researcher in a way to examine the influence of the researcher and the connection to the researcher on the research process. According to Merriam (1998), there is always a connection between the researcher and
what is being researched in qualitative research. As part of the research process, a research journal was used to record the process and to reflect upon the researcher’s initial responses, thoughts, and feelings during the data collection process. The journaling process can provide insight into the participants’ experiences and how it relates to the researcher’s view and interpretation of the research data. I kept a journal documenting the steps in the research process as well as my thoughts, feelings, and experiences after each interview and each step.

**Data Storage**

All precautions were taken to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. An audio-recording device was used to record the interviews/conversations conducted with participants via the phone or Zoom. If Zoom was used, only audio-recordings were saved. The information collected was categorized as teacher demographics, reflections, experiences, perceptions, and personal accounts of participants regarding teaching students of color. The recorded interviews were stored on a password-protected electronic device, as were the interviewee’s transcriptions. All printed materials were stored in a secured cabinet belonging to the researcher. Names and other identifying information were removed from participant responses, and each participant chose a pseudonym for reference and responses. Emails were saved as PDFs in a password-protected folder for review by the University of Memphis. The data will be destroyed after five years.

**Data Analysis**

**Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis was the primary means of data analysis. However, it is noted that the process of recording notes and engaging in spontaneous questioning and discourse during data collection often requires some initial interpretations that require some qualitative data analysis to
occur in the field. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in
data, often occurring at an intuitive level (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Participant responses
were coded and grouped by common themes as expressed through the interview process. The
data was generated with different structures and patterns, dependent on the participant, but was
guided by semi-structured interview questions. I did not presuppose how the data would manifest
and was prepared to interpret and create themes from within the data responses. By analyzing the
elements of whiteness and antiracist teaching practices in search of ways rural teachers attempted
to understand whiteness and racism through the lens of CRT, the study built upon the foundation
of other second-wave white teacher identity studies.

The process of thematic analysis occurred in phases and was a recursive process, moving
back and forth throughout the analysis phases, not linear. The phases of analysis were:

(1) familiarizing yourself with data through transcribing and reading data, and
notetaking of ideas, (2) generating initial codes by interesting features of the data
in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each
code, (3) searching for themes by collating codes into potential themes and
gathering all data relevant to each potential theme, (4) reviewing themes to see if
the themes work with coded extracts (Level 1) and entire data set (Level 2),
generating a thematic map of analysis, (5) defining and naming themes through
the ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story
the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme, and (6)
producing the report for analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 87).

The listed procedures were used to determine common themes present in the teacher responses,
creating digestible bits of information to inform future pedagogy and teacher training.
Coding and Categorizing

The coding protocol provided the analysis technique in which all interview questions would be evaluated. According to Saldana (2009), coding is an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow. It can be “the initial step toward an even more rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation for a report. Coding is not just labeling, it is linking” (p. 8). I used a combination approach of deductive and inductive coding. I first created codes to represent the theoretical framework. Then I began with open or initial coding and in vivo coding, the process of creating codes from the participants’ terminology and quotes (Saldana, 2009), by reading, highlighting, underlining, and making notes in the margin of each transcribed interview. I compared the in vivo coding with the pre-determined codes from the framework and together created the structural coding; I used the structural codes to label relevant data pertinent to each code. The following structural codes were used to create themes:

Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical/Conceptual Framework</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Areas of Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elements of Whiteness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>Colorblindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP</td>
<td>White privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WD</td>
<td>White Dominance/Supremacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER</td>
<td>Emotional Reactivity (sympathy, anger, denial, disgust, Savior Complex)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elements of Antiracist Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AW</td>
<td>Awareness of white identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRP</td>
<td>Engages in culturally responsive practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>Practices Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF</td>
<td>Reflects on race</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using an inductive approach, the themes were created from condensing the coded data into general themes, then refined themes based on reoccurring data. For example, the following quotes “I don’t think my whiteness impacts my ability to be a good teacher” and “I don’t discuss race at work because I feel uncomfortable” were coded as reflections on race and categorized as an element of antiracist teaching. Then the categorized quotes were refined into general themes of reflections on white identity and feelings about race subsequently. Those general themes were further collapsed into the theme of lack of space and leadership for white teachers to unpack feelings and reflect on race because both of those categories were reflected in multiple data sets creating an overall theme.

Trustworthiness, Dependability, and Ethics
This study’s primary purpose was to add to existing second-wave white teacher identity studies and anti-racist teaching practices to improve student learning outcomes and teacher effectiveness with implications for teacher preparation programs. The researcher’s responsibility was to be intentional in providing trustworthy, dependable, and ethically derived research knowledge (Merriam, 2009). The following steps were taken to ensure that this study produced trustworthy, dependable, and ethical results.

**Trustworthiness and Dependability**

Qualitative methodology approaches the concern of validity and reliability of data differently from quantitative studies, but it is still equally important to ensure that the study’s knowledge is trustworthy and dependable. Research trustworthiness refers to the level of assurance in data analysis and quality control demonstrated in a study and dependability suggests how well findings will endure (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). To enhance trustworthiness and broaden my understanding of the participants, triangulation, or using multiple data collection techniques, was used by collecting data through interviews, document analysis, and the utilization of a research journal (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Additionally, member-checking and disclosure of researcher bias were used to increase internal validity. Member checking, the technique of having participants check the accuracy of their transcribed responses, was a crucial step in ensuring dependability because it validated those transcriptions accurately represented the participants’ responses (Merriam, 2009). Transcripts were emailed to participants, and participants were asked to give feedback on the accuracy of the transcriptions and add additional comments, if desired. I was able to produce thick, rich descriptions and highly detailed accounts of the data collected.

**Ethical Considerations**
Ethical considerations were considered to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and rights of participants. Participation in the study was voluntary, and withdrawal from the study could have occurred at any time as desired by the participant. Participants selected pseudonyms to label responses during the research process. No personal identifying information was used. Participants were informed of the study’s purpose, data collection process, and the intended use of the data. A signed consent form indicated consent to participate and consent to be recorded. Additionally, criticality, the act of using information to develop an understanding of existing connections (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), was enacted as rural white teachers expressed and explained their experiences and beliefs in coming to grips with their white identity and fighting whiteness and racism in the classroom.

**Summary**

Through a critical race lens and critical whiteness perspective, this study used case study methodology to discover the ways in which white rural teachers understood white identity and challenged racialized bias(es) and institutionalized racism through cultural competency and antiracist teaching practices while instructing students of color in high schools. Criterion sampling was used to select participants, and data was collected via semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and through a research journal. Protocols to protect participant privacy and data confidentiality were used in the research process. By using coding, thematic analysis was applied to understand the data, whereby themes were created and presented. This second-wave white teacher identity study served to inform change, advocacy, activism, and pedagogy.
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction to the Data

Given the current demographics of a largely white teaching force and increasing numbers of students of color in the public classroom, there is an urgent need to better prepare white teachers to be more effective with students of color (Matias & Grosland, 2016) and to become antiracist teachers (Love, 2019; Kendi, 2019). For social justice reform and a more equitable society (Freire, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994), we must understand the role of racial biases and white identity in education to create culturally competent, antiracist teachers (Shaw & Coles, 2020). By studying the overwhelmingly white teaching force and the ways in which white teachers engage in antiracist teaching practices, pre-service and in-service teacher training programs can better prepare white teachers to educate a more diverse student population (Delpit, 2006; Kendi, 2019; Love, 2019; Matias & Mackey, 2015).

The purpose of this case study was to understand the ways in which white rural teachers are understanding biases and beliefs regarding race, and challenging institutionalized racism within rural schools. This study serves as a second-wave white teacher identity study and is significant by providing an asset-based examination of white rural teachers and their understanding of white identity and how it impacts their teaching as a means of challenging institutionalized racism in rural schools.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the themes that were created from the case study data. Each theme was created by responses from an interview protocol, field notes, and researcher journal to answer the following research questions: In what ways are white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee challenging institutionalized racism? What barriers do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee perceive to exist when engaging in...
antiracist teaching? How do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee understand their own biases and beliefs regarding race and schooling? In this chapter, I will provide a rich description of the participants, document findings, and data supporting each theme. I will connect themes to theory in Chapter V.

**Introduction to the Participants**

The six participants were selected using criterion-based sampling set forth as white teachers with more than one year of experience who were actively teaching in grades nine through twelve in a public high school in rural, midsouthern United States. The selected participants were all white teachers who indicated an interest in antiracist teaching through their response to participate in the study and were actively teaching in one of two public high schools within one rural school district. There were some other commonalities between the participants. All, but one, attended a public four-year university for their bachelor’s degrees. One attended a private, four-year, Christian university for her bachelor’s degree. All, but one, began their teaching careers in their early twenties. One began her teaching career in her early thirties. All participants had experience teaching in two or more school districts, but were currently working in mostly white, rural schools with clusters of students of color.

The gender, age, age at time of the start of teaching career, highest education attained, years of teaching experience, number of school districts taught, and which grades taught varied with each participant. Each participant chose a unique pseudonym and the mode, virtual, phone, or in-person, and location of the interview. The researcher met each participant as requested to reduce participant stress. The case study is based on interviews with the following participants:

*Amy*
Amy was a 44-year-old white, female teacher who taught at South High School. She chose to meet in-person during a summer evening at the researcher’s home for the interview. Amy was a former co-worker of the researcher and had participated in a previous interview with the researcher, thus, a rapport had already been established. The participant appeared relaxed and eager to do the interview. The interview lasted an hour and fifteen minutes and resulted in twenty-seven pages of transcript. Amy shared that she became a teacher because she had a love of literature and wanted young people to love literature. She began teaching right out of college at age twenty-two and has been teaching for twenty-two years. In that time, Amy taught in three different school districts, all rural, and has always taught in grades 9-12. She attained a master’s degree and an education specialist’s degree (EDS). She expressed that she would like to complete a doctoral program but does not feel she has the time. Amy also served as an adjunct instructor for a local university.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was a 31-year-old white, female teacher who taught at North High School. She requested a lunchtime Zoom interview from her home while her child was taking a nap. There was no previous relationship between the participant and the researcher. The participant volunteered to be part of the study because one of her co-workers was also participating and because she said she was not uncomfortable discussing topics of race. The interview lasted an hour and a half and resulted in twenty-six pages of transcript. Elizabeth said she had a difficult time deciding on a career path but ultimately chose teaching because she loved math and had a math teacher in high school who served as her mentor. In becoming a teacher, Elizabeth hoped to serve in the same positive mentor role to young people that she had experienced. She began teaching right out of college at age twenty-three and has been teaching for nine years, while most
recently completing her master’s degree. Elizabeth has taught in two rural school districts; previously, she taught in a middle school but was teaching in a high school at the time of the interview. Elizabeth also coached two of the high school sports at her school.

Lynn

Lynn was a 62-year-old white, female teacher, who taught at South High School, and wanted to meet at the park after lunch on a sunny day for the interview. Lynn had just completed her final year of teaching and retired after thirty-eight years of teaching just one week prior to the interview. Lynn had many stories to share, accompanied by laughter and tears. Retirement was still fresh on her mind and Lynn was very reflective. The participant and the researcher were former co-workers and Lynn had participated in a previous interview with the researcher. The interview lasted almost two hours and resulted in thirty-four pages of transcript. Lynn said she knew from a young age that she wanted to be a teacher after she taught her little sister to read at a very young age. She would often teach neighborhood kids and assign homework to them, which they did. She began teaching upon college graduation at age twenty-four and only taught in two school districts, both rural, in her lifetime. She had experience teaching elementary, middle, and high school students, with most of her years spent at the high school level. Lynn never felt she had the time to obtain a graduate degree since she started a family very early out of college.

Rex

Rex was a 50-year-old white, male teacher who taught at North High School, requested the interview take place at his home in the early afternoon at his home. Rex was a former co-worker of the researcher. The interview took place outside at the family’s pool while we watched his young son swim. The interview lasted almost an hour and resulted in twenty-nine pages of
transcript. Rex came from a family of teachers; both parents were teachers, and later, his younger brother would also become a teacher. He said he did not grow up wanting to become a teacher, though, and it was not until college, where he was already deep into his chosen path to become a banker, that he realized that he wanted a career that he felt passionate about what he was doing, like his parents did about teaching. He switched majors and began teaching right out of college at age twenty-two and has been teaching for twenty-eight years. Due to coaching a major high school sport, Rex has moved and taught in five different school districts, all rural, but has always taught in grades 9-12. Rex completed a master’s degree many years before but explained that he just finished his education specialist’s degree (EDS) the semester before. He stopped coaching to attend the EDS program.

Penny

Penny was a 28-year-old white, female teacher who taught at South High School, participated in the interview via Zoom from her home’s front porch. Penny was a former co-worker and former student of the researcher; she had participated in a previous interview with the researcher. The interview lasted about an hour and resulted in twenty-two pages of transcript. Penny thought she would become a nurse but did not like nursing school. As she decided what major would be the best fit for her, she focused on her love of English class and met several faculty and staff members in the English Department who later became mentors, so she decided she wanted to teach English. She began teaching right out of college at age twenty-one and has been teaching for the last seven years. Penny has taught in two different school districts, both rural, and has always taught ninth or tenth grade English. She has also very active student drama classes. Penny has completed one master’s program in curriculum and has stated that she wants to move into education leadership when she finishes her master’s in administration.
**Sally**

Sally was a 41-year-old white, female teacher who taught at South High School, interviewed from her home office via an afternoon Zoom session. Sally was a former co-worker of the researcher and had participated in a previous interview with the researcher. There were a few technical difficulties since Sally lived in a very rural area. The interview lasted an hour and half and resulted in twenty-five pages of transcript. Sally was greatly influenced by several teachers as she grew up and she knew from an early age that she wanted to be a teacher like them. She originally thought she wanted to teach early elementary but changed her major to secondary education in college after an internship class. Sally was not able to start college right after high school, so she began her teaching career at age thirty and has been teaching for eleven years. During that time, Sally taught in three different school districts, two rural and one urban, and taught middle and secondary school. Sally completed her master’s degree the previous semester.

Table 6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Race/Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age Began Teaching</th>
<th>Highest Education Level Attained</th>
<th>Experience: Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Experience: # of school districts</th>
<th>Experience: Grades Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>white female</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>EDS</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>white female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7, 9-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>white female</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rex</td>
<td>white male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>EDS</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>k-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>white female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>white female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Document Findings**

The case study participants were all active teachers in one of two secondary schools located within the same West Tennessee school district. To provide context to participant responses and an understanding of each school’s major organizational commitments, I obtained the mission statement from each school. It is noted that I also wanted the equity and diversity statement for each school, but neither school had one written or in use. I also obtained the basic student demographics from an online source. The document findings are as follows:

Table 7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
<th>Equity &amp; Diversity Statement</th>
<th>Students of Color in Student Population (Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Mission Statement</td>
<td>Equity &amp; Diversity Statement</td>
<td>Students of Color in Student Population (Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North High School, a public, rural secondary school in West Tennessee</td>
<td>To prepare students to live, work, contribute, and excel in an ever-changing world</td>
<td>Does not have one</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South High School, a public, rural secondary school in West Tennessee</td>
<td>To develop self-reliant, responsible citizens by challenging students through instruction, curriculum, and example to achieve their highest potential in all endeavors</td>
<td>Does not have one</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. I used initial/in vivo coding and structural coding. Together, I created data-specific categories based on the coding practices. Then I refined and collapsed the categories into themes. Several themes were created from the data from this study: (1) the lack of pre-service preparation or in-service professional development in understanding the structures of whiteness or racism in education, (2) the lack of space and leadership for white teachers to unpack feelings and discuss race, (3) the use of antiracist teaching practices, (4) the awareness that rural, mostly white, schools need antiracist education for teachers and students.

Theme 1: The Lack of Pre-service Preparation or In-service Professional Development in Understanding the Structures of Whiteness or Racism in Education

Within the study, all teacher participants consistently responded that they had received no significant pre-service preparation or in-service professional development in the areas of understanding the structures of whiteness or challenging racism in education. The lack of training and leadership were evident in some responses that showed little or no knowledge, or only an awareness of the problem, in the following areas: unpacking whiteness and examining the structures that produce white privilege, coming to terms with one’s white identity, the role whiteness and white identity plays in decision-making and interactions with students of color, and ways to challenge institutionalized racism within education. Those teachers who were further advanced in the process of unpacking and understanding white identity responded that it was through their own methods of discovery and collaboration with like-minded teachers that each had arrived at that point, not through teacher training programs. All six teacher participants responded that the only way systemic racism in education could effectively be challenged would
be with effective education and training. This section provides the data to support the theme that teachers indicated a lack of pre-service preparation or in-service professional development in understanding the structures of whiteness or racism in education. The data in this section is divided into the following sub-themes: the lack of education in working with students of color, a desire for training on how to work with students of color, and a lacking or developing understanding of the structures of whiteness.

**Sub-theme: The Lack of Education in Working with Students of Color**

Teacher participants were specifically asked what pre-service and in-service training each had received. Initial answers were negative, so I probed further and asked if teacher participants had received any training on how to work with students of color that may have been called *multiculturalism, diversity training, culturally relevant pedagogy, or implicit bias training*. All six participants indicated they had not received any pre-service training on how to work with students of color, but some did receive coursework during graduate programs. For many, the first time they had heard of research, theories, or programs specific to teaching students of color were in their graduate programs. Additionally, the four teachers from South High School responded that they had never received professional development in areas specific to working with students of color, although each indicated that they had received multiple trainings on working with students living in poverty, often questioning if this *counted* as training for students of color. The one teacher from South High School who also had previous urban school experience indicated that she had received annual professional development specific to students of color, but none since she had begun teaching in rural schools. The two teachers from North High School indicated some professional development in working with students of color, but not enough to
meet their needs. Amy’s statement summarizes the overall sentiment for the four South High School teachers.

I remember the phrases, but nothing really stands out, no specific classes or professors from college in undergraduate studies when I was getting my teaching degree…and we definitely haven’t had any professional development on the topics of race, implicit bias, or white privilege since I’ve been a teacher.

The two teachers from North High School shared that they had been provided some professional development, especially in recent years, on topics specific to working with students of color as indicated by Rex’s statement. Rex explained:

I remember I had to take one class called Multicultural Education but that was in my master’s program. I don’t think I had anything in my undergraduate classes dealing with working with diverse students. As far as ongoing professional development, every year we get together and talk about scores and gaps in scores between groups of student and maybe why there is a gap. We also have motivational speakers come who try to make teachers aware of cultural differences, but I wouldn’t say that we have any real training on what do.

Rex and Elizabeth both surmised in their responses that, possibly, North High School had started providing some training because their school had larger clusters of students of color. North High School’s student population is approximately forty percent students of color, while South High School’s student population is approximately four percent students of color.

**Sub-theme: A Desire for Training on How to Work with Students of Color**

While most indicated a lack of training, they also indicated they had a desire for professional development or training on how to better understand race in the context of teaching
students of color and becoming antiracist teachers. When asked what type of training or professional development the teacher participants wished they would be provided, all the responses could be categorized as relationship building or empathy training, a way of changing a teacher’s mindset to reduce the belief in negative stereotypes and improve empathy (Vilson, 2016). Relationship building and connecting with students were emphasized by the teachers from South High School. Amy stated:

I wish they would give us some system-wide training on how to use curriculum to help students be more open-minded, and I wonder if we need classroom management training since I think we have an overrepresentation of Black students being disciplined at the office, maybe how to have a better relationship, like a connection.

For Amy, relationship building was important for becoming a better teacher, but also for decreasing school discipline issues that she believed were the cause of an overrepresentation of students of color being in alternative classroom settings or suspensions. This belief is in line with research that suggests that training teachers in relationship building with students of color can decrease student discipline referrals (Whitford & Emerson, 2019). Other teachers made similar claims. Penny added:

We need PD (professional development) on how to be more inclusive of things from other cultures and learn different ways to connect to different kids. I don’t know, relationship building, but I don’t know how you could have a PD on just how to connect with Black kids because that seems very blunt, but maybe relationship building with other cultures?
In this response, Penny shared a similar desire for relationship building with students of color and recognized a need for multicultural training to help students feel more included.

Multiculturalism training, which is training on how to infuse curriculum with positive texts and materials representing other cultures, has been connected to increased student engagement in class (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

South High School teachers focused on another way to build relationships. Empathy training and gaining perspective from other points of view were stressed by the two teacher participants. For some, intersectionality (Crenshaw et al., 1995) was noted as an additional area of concern as noted in Rex’s response:

I think that empathy training would be important. Only I don’t think it should just be based on different races. I think it should include gender also. Since I coached girls’ basketball for years, I coached a lot of Black girls, and I could see that they had it harder and fewer opportunities than the boys did. I just tried to champion the girls because I could see it. In general, teachers just need to learn to relate and care about students who are different from them no matter what.

In summary, relationship building and empathy were common words used by many teacher participants throughout the interviews. It is noted that the need to use empathy with students of color by teachers and students was found in responses to multiple interview prompts as a way of better communication and understanding. Using empathy and understanding, teacher participants believed that better relationships could be built. Recent research suggests building foundational relationships as being crucial to the antiracist teacher’s success in working with students of color (Delpit, 2006; Love, 2019; Kendi, 2019).

Sub-theme: A Lacking or Developing Understanding of the Structures of Whiteness
The lack of pre-service training or effective professional development in understanding whiteness or racism was evident in their responses on understanding the structures of whiteness. Teacher participants gave a variety of responses with varying degrees of understanding the structures of whiteness. White privilege was the focus of the interview question. The responses were compared to the accepted definition of white privilege as the experience of receiving personal, institutional, and cultural advantages due to being white while not experiencing racial discrimination as part of the dominant culture (Aouragh, 2019). Half of the participants gave strong responses as to understanding white privilege but indicated that their understanding originated from reflections upon personal experiences and having friendships that guided their understanding, not from training or education. There was not a trend in responses based on the participant’s place of teaching. Amy shared:

I know I have benefitted from white privilege. Even though my family didn’t have a lot of money growing up, my guidance counselor pushed me and made sure I filled out scholarship applications and stayed on me to get into college. I don’t remember her doing that with the Black students in my high school, maybe she did, but I don’t remember many of them going on to college. I also notice that when I go shopping, people at the store treat me differently than a Black person. It’s like they trust me more.

Amy’s experiences with white privilege were shaped around her ability to get an education and how she felt she was treated when shopping. Using reflection practices, Amy had begun the process of trying to understand how her white identity had been shaped by white privilege. Her awareness connected to personal experiences and her reflection was shared by others. Penny expanded on the idea in this response:
I understand what white privilege means. When I have tried to talk about it with other teachers, they always bring up money and work ethic. They don’t get it. I know that I don’t have to worry about my husband getting pulled over and shot by the police because he is a white man. I have friends with Black husbands, and they don’t have that peace of mind. It’s not the same thing for them. Nobody looks at me funny when I enter a store; nobody judges me and decides I am going to steal something. For me, white privilege means I was born with the privilege of not having to deal with those things and Black Americans do have to deal with those worries.

Penny’s experiences with white privilege were largely shaped by recent socio-political events and reflection as to how those events would play out for her and her family, as well as shared experiences from personal friendships. Exposure and relationships with people of color informed and guided Penny’s reflection. Reflection also played a significant role in Elizabeth’s understanding of white privilege. Elizabeth stated:

I absolutely understand what white privilege is. Yes, I grew up poor and had struggles, but the color of my skin wasn’t one of them. I am sure I have been given things in life because I was white, but it is such a part of our society that I don’t think we notice it when it is happening. It is just if I reflect back that I realize the ways that I have benefitted from being white.

Half of the teacher participants had a basic understanding of white privilege and recognized it in some form within their own lives. Understanding white privilege as one of the structures of whiteness is a crucial step in interrupting the perpetuation of racism (Aouragh, 2019). The other half of the teacher participants shared views and responses that did not align
with a true definition or an accurate understanding of white privilege. Rex did not acknowledge white privilege and equated it with economic privilege and racism. He explained:

I don’t know about white privilege. I see economic privilege. There are more white people who benefit from this economic privilege because there are more white, rich people in America than Black people. But I think that’s due to racism, not white privilege. For example, I worked at a movie theatre when I was in college and my boss wouldn’t hire Black people. Every application that came in, he just threw them in the trash. So is that white privilege because he gave me the job or racism because he refused to give Black people a job.

Rex’s explanation of white privilege had elements of deflection and denial, but also ambivalence. This is in line with research that suggests that white people who do not understand white privilege may ambivalence, confusion, anxiety, or defensiveness (Dottolo & Stewart, 2013). Other flawed explanations of white privilege did not follow Rex’s logic but were still undeveloped. Both Sally and Lynn believed they understood white privilege and readily expressed that they acknowledged its existence but struggled to connect a meaningful definition to their experiences and instead associated it with job opportunities only. Sally said:

I know white privilege is real. I don’t think it is made up. I noticed it more when I was in the corporate world. When I worked at Walmart, I was promoted really quickly probably because I was a white woman with a college degree. I don’t feel like I, personally, have experienced it in education though because any leadership opportunities and positions I have held were really based upon merit and effort. It hasn’t been anything outside of that.
Sally claimed that she benefitted from white privilege in her previous position but did not see any evidence of white privilege in her experiences within the education profession. Similarly, Lynn’s flawed perception of white privilege was evident. Lynn stated, “Oh, I believe in white privilege. I think it is real. I don’t know how much we have it around here though. We have job openings but if you don’t have enough people of color to apply, how are you going to hire them?” In both Sally and Lynn’s thinking, white privilege was not only connected to jobs but also a problem that was occurring elsewhere. Rex, Sally, and Lynn used undeveloped or partial definitions of white privilege to respond, often showing a personal disconnect to white privilege or the belief that white privilege was a problem somewhere else. The use of denial to keep from having to come to terms with white privilege has been noted in other research (Solomona et al., 2005).

The theme that teachers indicated a lack of pre-service preparation or in-service professional development in understanding the structures of whiteness or racism in education was based on the data in this section from teacher responses concerning the lack of education in working with students of color, a desire for training on how to work with students of color, and their lacking or developing understanding of the structures of whiteness; all of which impacted their ability to embrace antiracist teaching practices.

**Theme 2: The Lack of Space and Leadership for White Teachers to Unpack Feelings and Discuss Race**

Teachers expressed a lack of leadership in each school in facilitating, leading, and providing space for difficult discussions about race. Most of the teachers made a connection between personal development and professional development where feelings of race and racism in education were concerned and noted that without leadership provided, teachers were left to
find their spaces to do the work of unpacking their beliefs about race in the classroom. This section provides the data that supports the theme that there is a lack of space and leadership for white teachers to unpack feelings and reflect upon race. The data in this section is divided into the following sub-themes: reflection on white identity, professional discussions on race and racism, classroom discussions on race and racism with a section on the recognition of the hostile political environment impacting teacher decisions, and expectations of the school mission statement.

**Sub-theme: Reflection on White Identity**

The need to reflect on white identity is central, and often the first step, to becoming an antiracist teacher (Hartmann et al., 2009; Jupp et al., 2016; Sleeter, 1992 & 1993). In this study, data suggested that teachers were in varying stages of coming to terms with their white identity and its impact on their teaching. All six of the teachers indicated the difficulties in finding the right space to work on their feelings and beliefs as to how their white identity impacted their teaching decisions and interactions with students of color. The difficulty in finding the place and guidance to adequately deal with one’s feelings on race and teaching are reflected in teacher participant responses. Teachers indicated they were left on their own to unpack whiteness resulting in varied levels of progress. Three teachers felt their white identity did affect their teaching and ability to work with students of color. Amy offered:

> I think my being a white teacher does affect how I interact with Black students because I am very cautious, very shy, maybe over the top sweet to my students who are not white. I don’t even know how I should do things because you know, guilt, white guilt? I don’t want to be the teacher the Black kid writes about in his
journal that was so mean to him and judgmental. So, I compensate. Compensate is the right word.

While Amy understood her white identity played a role in the ways in which she taught students of color, she suggested that she overcompensated with students of color due to her lack of understanding on how to interpret her feelings concerning her white identity as it related to her interactions with students of color. Emotions such as sympathy, sentimentality, and guilt which are seen in some white teachers can impact teacher decisions and lower expectations for students of color (Matias, 2013a; Matias & Mackey, 2015). Similarly, Penny also understood that her white identity played a role in the classroom, so she stated that she works harder with students of color due to her white identity in the following response.

I think the main way me being a white female teacher affects my teaching is just in the building trust area. I have to work harder to build a connection with a Black kid than I do a white kid. I always want them to feel comfortable with me, so I put forth a lot of effort trying to talk to them and get to know them. I think kids of color get passed over a lot and I want them to know that I am an ally, and they can come to me.

Penny further explained her perspective on white identity and perpetuating the structures of whiteness in the classroom by explaining a lack of understanding on the part of many white teachers and her powers of reflection prowess in the following statement:

I don’t think white teachers purposefully perpetuate whiteness in the classroom. But because they don’t have all the same experiences as people of color, white teachers are just living and teaching on assumptions that you can live out your life by working hard and achieving your goals, and it isn’t that straightforward for
people who aren’t white. So, they just teach from a white perspective without knowing what that means.

Similarly, Lynn also shared that she knew her white identity somehow played a role in how students of color saw her, so she also “worked harder with students of color.” The three teacher participants who recognized white identity could impact their relationships or teaching of students of color indicated a need for further self-interrogation that could be accomplished if only they had the support and leadership at school.

There were varied beliefs shared from Rex, Sally, and Elizabeth who had different views on white identity and its impact on teaching. Rex admitted he really did not know what he thought and deflected to speaking about Black teachers and affirmative action practices.

We have a couple of Black people working in our school right now that have a job because they are Black. They don’t do what they are paid to do, and part of what they are paid to do is work with our Black males. They just shuck their duties any chance they get and that frustrates me. Of course, we have white people who don’t do their job, but they didn’t get their job because they are white. So, talking about race and what I think about it at school would be a touchy subject for me, because I just don’t know what to think about it. I know that if someone is put in a position because of their color, then they need to take that responsibility seriously.

There is no real correlation between affirmative actions to hire people of color and the understanding of one’s white identity, though Rex’s statement indicates he has somehow conflated the question of understanding his racial identity and its impact on teaching to the belief in reverse racism. Often white teachers who are faced with questions concerning elements of
whiteness have resorted to rationalizations, one being the belief in reverse racism (Solomon et al., 2005).

There were additional responses that indicated a lack of understanding of whiteness, and therefore, an un-interrogated white identity. Sally and Elizabeth denied that their white identity impacted their teaching decisions or relationships with students of color. Sally indicated that she focused on sameness, not differences, which can be indicative of colorblindness ideology. Sally shared:

I think when my students look at me, they just see a successful teacher who came from a poor background and worked her way to where she is. I can always relate to any student, but the whole racial identity thing is one that no matter how much I want to understand, I never will. I just don’t understand why some people only see differences.

In a similar statement, Elizabeth responded that she believes her white identity does not affect her ability to connect or make decisions with students of color in the classroom by saying:

I don’t think me being a white teacher impacts my ability to teach my students of color. I don’t think of myself as the white woman who teaches English. I can immerse myself in any group and if I notice a student of color being uncomfortable around me, I always think ‘just give me 2 weeks buddy and we will be connecting!’ Once they find out what I’m about, they usually relax in my room.

The teachers who were in denial that there was a connection between white identity and effective teaching of students of color were still attempting to be antiracist teachers, but in an unguided fashion and with mixed results, as self-reported by the teacher participants. According
to Jupp and others (2016), white teachers who were in denial of the importance of race, whiteness, white privilege, and white identity have been well-documented in the works of Sleeter (1992, 1993) and McIntyre (1997a, 1997b, 2002).

Overall, teacher participants were split evenly in their beliefs on if and how their white identity played a role in their decision making within the classroom concerning students of color. The lack of space and leadership indicated within the schools in understanding the complex topic of race in the classroom, especially white identity, was evident in the varying responses and degrees of understanding of white identity shared by the teacher participants and their ability to do the work of unpacking whiteness and realizing their white identity. While all of the teacher participants indicated a willingness to understand, there was a clear need for support in space and leadership for that work to continue.

Sub-theme: Professional Discussions on Race and Racism

Teachers indicated that there was a professional avoidance in discussing race and its impact on teaching. The data suggested that professional discussions among teachers about race and racism were not commonplace in schools, even in the light of socio-political events involving race. Even though four of the six teachers indicated they felt comfortable talking about race and racism with their colleague, they indicated they chose to only collaborate secretly by searching for like-minded colleagues. All six teacher participants indicated they chose discriminately with whom they expressed their feelings about race, racism, or changes needed within education due to race and racism, regardless of their comfort zone on the topic. Two teachers indicated they avoided all conversations about race and racism within their professional circle. Rex shared why he does not feel comfortable discussing race and racism in the following statement:
Even though our school has more students of color than the other district high school, it (race) isn’t brought up much at our school. I think a lot of things get swept under the rug and a whole bunch of people in leadership accept it for what it is. It’s like we just aren’t going to discuss it and pretend it isn’t a problem. Why am I uncomfortable talking about race and racism? Because I’m a fifty-year-old white dude and like, maybe I have racism in me that I don’t see for myself.

While Rex shared his fear of revealing hidden prejudices and racism, and thereby, avoiding all discussions on the topic with other teachers, some teacher participants said they were willing to have professional conversations about race. They expressed that they were willing to discuss race and racism with colleagues under certain conditions for fear of emotional responses. Emotionality as a response to discussions of race and racism among teachers is common (Matias, 2016). Sally responded:

No, I wouldn’t have any problems discussing racism with my colleagues, but I just don’t do it. I mean, if I needed to, I know I could go to those people privately and we can speak one-on-one in a manner that is non-threatening. If it were to be in a group forum or setting, tempers would flare and things would be said that shouldn’t be.

In her statement, Sally explained that she chose sparingly to have professional conversations about race and pedagogy, and even then, believed those conversations should occur privately with select colleagues. Elizabeth went a step further to explain which colleagues she refused to have those discussions. Elizabeth expressed:

I am not uncomfortable having discussions about race with my colleagues, but there are certain people I just avoid because I know I can’t change their mind and
I will just get upset. We have this librarian who says some racist things. She really believes all of these stereotypes. She is one that I just try to avoid.

The variations of responses did not hide the indication of types of avoidance in discussing race and racism with other professionals. While Rex chose to avoid race discussions completely, Sally and Elizabeth expressed that they felt comfortable in discussing controversial topics such as racism with their colleagues, but that they handled those conversations differently. Sally indicated that she searched for small-group interactions that she found less threatening, and Elizabeth indicated that she preferred to only have those conversations with like-minded people and avoided those with whom she disagrees. Professional discussions about race and racism are an important part of dismantling the effects of whiteness in the classroom and moving towards a better understanding of how one’s white identity can be reconciled with antiracist teaching (Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love, 2019).

**Sub-theme: Classroom Discussions on Race and Racism**

Teacher participants shared their beliefs and concerns on the classroom being a space to discuss race and racism. Another important step in becoming an antiracist teacher is developing the ability to lead in-class discussions with students on the complex topic of race and racism (Hartmann et al., 2009; Jupp et al., 2016; Sleeter, 1992 & 1993). Four of the six teacher participants said they did lead and allow classroom discussions of race and racism to take place. Two of the six teacher participants indicated that they did not believe students wanted or needed to discuss race and racism in class. The two teachers expressed an avoidance of controversial topics. The avoidance is indicated in the following statements:

I have mostly white students and we haven’t really talked about race or racism in class. I think they know I wouldn’t put up with that. So, if they are a little bit
racist, they don’t express around me. Yeah, I’m uncomfortable letting them talk about racism because I don’t know how to fix racism or where the discussion would go.

In Amy’s response, she expressed her discomfort and avoidance of leading classroom discussions on race and racism because of her concern that she could lose control of the discussion. Additionally, Amy indicates that she did not know how to fix racism as another reason to avoid in class discussion on racism, suggesting a realization that she was not comfortable in her own knowledge of race and racism. Rex shared a similar view that he avoided the discussion because he may lose control of the classroom discussion resulting in student arguments or parent complaints. Teacher participants have reported that they have received negative response from outside sources when attempting to hold discussions about controversial topics such as race and racism in the classroom. Rex said:

I don’t think most of my students want to talk about race and racism in class I used to be better about getting students to talk about controversial, real-life things in class discussion and express their opinion. I’ll be honest, I don’t really try to anymore because I just want to avoid conflict. I don’t want the kids to argue because once they are arguing, no one is listening. It seems like everyone is just arguing more. And it’s more of what they go home and tell their parents and then parents call and complain. What are you teaching my kid? So, I mostly just try to get them to express themselves in their writing.

Dissimilarly, four of the six teacher participants expressed that they had in-class discussion on race and racism and prided themselves on their ability to allow and direct students to speak freely on any topic within their classroom; the teachers indicated the lengths each went
to create an environment that was conducive for student expression and voice. Students of color should be given a voice in class discussions that pertain to their race and culture without shouldering the responsibility for speaking for their race (Delpit, 2006; Kendi, 2019, Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love, 2019). Penny responded:

I don’t have a problem with having class discussions about race or racism in class. I will shut down anything that goes badly, so I always set up my expectations and norms for being respectful. I have to say things carefully to not offend anyone, but mostly I ask my students of color to take a leading role in those discussions. I always tell them I am a white woman, so shouldn’t be the one really saying everything. I don’t think it puts them on the spot or anything. It’s like they are more engaged because they are the experts. Plus, it’s good for white students to hear it from them firsthand and I find that the white kids walk away from those discussions with a new perspective because it makes it more real.

Penny’s statement indicated a willingness to lead the classroom discussions on race and racism, although she also indicated that she was willing to abdicate the leadership role when students of color were present in the class. In a similar vein of thought, another teacher participant, Sally, explained that she was proud of leading classroom discussions on race and racism. She added that she engineered a positive ending to discussions. While training on how to lead more effective class discussions on race and racism may be needed, the teacher participants were actively practicing this important step in antiracist teaching (Kendi, 2019; Simmons, 2019). Sally responded:

Oh absolutely, I let my students discuss whatever comes up in the class discussion, including race and racism. It’s my job to get students to think. I had a
Black student respond in class discussion that even though the Declaration of Independence talks about equality that we don’t really have equality in America. So, I said tell me more. Then I just let the students respond to each other. Many white kids were nodding their heads in agreement. I pointed out that it didn’t have to be the way it has been in the past and that we have made progression though, like having a Black president and vice-president. He agreed. I was proud of my students that day because we had a good discussion. I am that teacher that gets myself in trouble with my colleagues because I let my student express what they think. I think that’s important for them to have voice, even if it is controversial topics, like Black Lives Matter.

Two of the six teacher participants went a step further and indicated that they created assignments that encouraged or required student participation in a class discussion on race and racism. The teacher participants shared that they believed the students needed and wanted an educational space to discuss controversial topics, such as racism, especially with the topic being so prevalent in today’s media. Culturally competent teachers intentionally create space in curriculum for lessons that increase awareness of racism (Delpit, 2006; Kendi, 2019, Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love, 2019). According to the teacher participants, the discussions gave students of color a voice and the result was a new sense of empathy on the part of white students. Elizabeth stated:

I gave a writing assignment in class where the student was asked to write an essay that started with how they identify, for example, ‘How I as a white female, or how I as a Black male’ experience America. Then we discussed them in class. I told them as long as they are respectful, no topic is off limits. The discussion was so
eye-opening for so many of the white students. Some even cried. Some said things like ‘Bro, I didn’t know you went through that’ or ‘I didn’t know it was like that for you.’ They talked about what it was like to be pulled over by the police because it was right after a lot of the shootings. White kids need to know too.

Like Elizabeth, Lynn found that structured, teacher-led classroom discussions on race and racism help white students gain a different perspective leading to more empathy in her white students. Lynn indicated that she also spent time preparing the students for the discussion by setting the example and expectations of respect so that the classroom could feel like a safe space to share one’s feelings and experiences. Lynn shared:

> Over my years of being a teacher, I haven’t avoided any topics that have come up in literature or class discussions. I have always taught a unit on Black history and authors, including Civil Rights, so racism has always come up. I just tell them we aren’t going to say things that might hurt someone’s feelings and we are going to be thoughtful before we speak. Then I try to get them to see each another’s perspective through the literature. I always feel being honest with students is the best way to get them to open their eyes.

All the teacher participants were forthcoming with their experiences in leading classroom discussions on race and racism with varying concerns and levels of comfortability. According to the teacher participants, classroom discussions concerning race and racism are aligned with various Tennessee teaching standards, but the current socio-political environment in Tennessee and a new law was noted as part of teacher participant responses on having in-class discussions on race and racism. All six teacher participants made either passing comments or full responses
on the current socio-political environment for such discussions in Tennessee schools and how that would impact their ability to have honest discussions about race and racism in the classroom the next school year.

**The Recognition of a Hostile Political Environment Impacting Teacher Decisions**

In the Spring of 2021, Governor Bill Lee of Tennessee signed into law the anti-“Critical Race Theory” (CRT) law, a law intended to ban CRT, or what politicians believe are CRT principles, from being taught in K-12. Although CRT is rarely taught outside of law schools, Tennessee Republican politician used the law to make it illegal to teach that one race is superior to another, that one race is privileged or racist against another, or that morality is determined by gender or race (TN HBO580).

While all six teacher participants expressed concern, three teacher participants verbalized their worry more specifically on their ability and possible consequences on having honest, educational in-class discussions next school year due to a new law passed in Tennessee to regulate or suppress educational discussions on race and gender in the classroom. Sally explained:

> I’m really worried about next year. With this new law in Tennessee, it’s going to be very hard for me to do my job as a teacher. It’s going to be very similar to religion. They say we won’t be able to talk about racism. We won’t be able to teach what is historically correct. We are expected to just gloss over events. How can I teach any literature that has the Holocaust in it? Or Japanese internment camps? Or Civil Rights?

Sally equated the law restricting discussions on racism with the ethics guidelines on teacher-led discussions on religion for public schools forbidding public school teachers to promote religious
beliefs or religion to students. Similarly, Elizabeth spoke about her concerns with the law and detailed some of the censorship that had already begun at her school. Elizabeth explained:

I am aware that next year may be harder or I may get in trouble for some of the stuff I teach on Civil Rights or even the race discussions I allowed this year, especially anything to do with Black Lives Matter. Our district already sent out an email warning of us certain texts we can’t use like *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I said I was going to teach it anyway and my principal said I would be fired. Everyone is worried about how we will be politically correct next year and still teach historically accurate material or talk about the things that really matter in society.

Even though Lynn would not be teaching the next year due to retirement, she also expressed concern over censorship resulting from the Tennessee law in the following statement:

I have seen so many trends come and go over the years and I have certainly witnessed censorship. Censorship is what that law is doing. It is censoring what teachers can and can’t say, and what literature can be read in class. I won’t be in the classroom to deal with that, but that makes me sad.

Teacher participants did not go into detail or spend a great deal discussing the specifics of the law, but all of the teacher participants made statements exhibiting like-concern that the new law would negatively impact their ability to either have honest and effective conversations with students about race and racism, even when connected to literature or history, or restrict them from having any educational conversations about race and racism in the classroom.

**Sub-theme: Expectations of the School Mission Statement**

In keeping with the role of school leadership, teacher participants were asked if their school was living up to or accomplishing the goals as set forth in the mission statement. Five out
of six did not feel the school was living up to its mission statement, and two noted the absence of an equity and diversity statement. Elizabeth’s statement was very representative of the overall sentiment expressed:

Don’t get me wrong, I love where I work, but I think schools are just required to put a mission statement on paper and most just forget about it after that. I don’t think we do all of that and it doesn’t surprise me that we don’t have an equity and diversity statement.

Amy also noted the absence of the equity and diversity statement and adds that the wording of the mission statement should be inclusive for providing antiracist education. Amy expressed that the mission statement was not specific enough to be inclusive of all students and questioned the need for adding an equity and diversity phrase or statement to the mission statement. Amy said:

I think our school does a good job of providing opportunities for our students, especially in academics, but when I read this mission statement, I really focus on the words responsible citizens. Wouldn’t being anti-racist fall under being a responsible citizen? We probably do need an equity and diversity statement.

For Penny, Sally, and Rex, the mission statement seemed to work for most students, but not all; specifically, they indicated in the following responses that the mission statement was not being successfully applied to students of color. Penny responded:

I don’t know if we are really doing all of that, especially with our African American students. To be honest, it seems like they are the ones always having discipline problems and the school is more interested in controlling them, rather than shaping them into good citizens and reaching their full potential. Again, it
always comes back to relationships. I don’t think our school is encouraging or leading in that like they should. A lot of our problems would be fixed if adults would focus more on building relationships.

In her response, Penny’s concerns for the school’s mission to meet the needs of all students focused on the lack of meeting the needs of Black students in her school. She refers back to her earlier statements concerning the need to build better relationships with students of color to accomplish the school’s mission. Sally concurred, “I think there is always room for improvement, but I think our school does a good job meeting the needs of the majority of our students. Do we do a good job for all of the students? No. We have had so many inconsistencies with our students of color.”

There were similarities among the responses from teacher participants concerning the mission statements from both schools. Even though Rex was not a teacher at the same high school as Penny and Sally, and did not have the same mission statement, his response was like those of South High School teachers. Rex said:

Even though our school has more students of color than the other district high school, it (race) isn’t brought up much at our school. I think a lot of things get swept under the rug and a whole bunch of people in leadership accept it that for what it is. It’s like we just aren’t going to discuss it and pretend it isn’t a problem. I don’t think our school is living up to its mission for all students, maybe some of the students.

Unlike the other teacher participants, there was one positive response offered. The only teacher who felt the school was living up to the mission statement shared she had also been on the team who wrote the mission statement. Lynn indicated as such in the following statement:
I was on the committee for our school that helped write that mission statement. We weren’t thinking about race when we wrote it. We were just thinking about kids, all kids, and how we want to prepare them to become responsible citizens. I think overall we are doing a good job of that.

The consensus of the teacher participants, except one, was that the overall feeling that the mission statements were not inclusive enough for all students and the expectations set forth in the mission statements were not being met by school leadership choices. This contributed to the feelings of a lack of leadership on school issues concerning race, racism, and effectively working with students of color.

The lack of space and leadership for white teachers to unpack feelings and discuss race was a common theme once the data revealed how teacher participants responded to questions. Those questions were concerned with reflection on white identity, professional discussions on race and racism, class discussions on race and racism, the recognition of the hostile political environment that impacts teacher decisions, and the expectations of meeting the schools’ mission statements.

**Theme 3: The Use of Antiracist Teaching Practices**

In this study, the teacher participants struggled to define antiracist teaching, but each teacher participant indicated through a series of responses that he or she did use several antiracist teaching practices. This section provides the data to support the theme that teacher participants used antiracist teaching practices. This data in this section is divided into the following sub-themes: engaging in culturally relevant pedagogy with sections on choosing multicultural curriculum, practicing empathy, and using an asset-based approach to relationship building with
families of color, and additional sub-themes: developing an awareness of racism and practicing activism.

**Sub-theme: Engaging in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

The data from teacher participants indicated that the most prevalent aspect of antiracist teaching used was the engagement in culturally responsive pedagogy. The use of culturally responsive pedagogy is another step in becoming an antiracist teacher (Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Love, 2019; Simmons, 2019). While many of the teacher participants were not able to connect the use of culturally responsive teaching practices to any training, there was evidence of their use from the data. According to the data, making curriculum choices, practicing empathy, and using an asset-based approach to relationship-building with families of color were culturally responsive practices the teacher participants used that were integral to their teaching and overall effectiveness with students of color.

**Choosing Multicultural Curriculum**

All six teacher participants said that the ability to make multicultural curriculum choices was important to them and they readily practiced it, regardless of which curriculum they taught. Teacher participants also indicated an understanding of the importance of exposing students of color and white students to multicultural curriculum. Each teacher participant agreed that there was a positive impact on all students from exposure to multicultural curriculum. The inclusion of multicultural literature, history, and positive contributions to society were indicated and in alignment with studies showing the importance of culturally responsive teaching to being an effective teacher with students of color (Byrd, 2016; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Three of the six participants indicated that supplementing diverse texts to their existing curriculum was important; two of those teacher participants focused on the new scripted curriculum that they felt
offered limited diversity in the literature, so they intentionally choose to supplement the curriculum with diverse pieces of literature. Amy explained:

   Our school recently went to a scripted curriculum, and it is very regimented. I hate it. When we first found out that we were being required to use it, I asked for the list of literature for my class. I teach British Literature so it is already pretty white, but I try very hard to bring in some multicultural pieces everywhere I can. If I stuck to the list they sent me, that wouldn’t happen. So, I make a point to add diversity to the curriculum. If students, even white students, don’t read Black authors, then they probably get the idea that there are no great Black authors out there. Plus, I think students relate better and feel empowered when they read stories that are written about their own culture and are usually more engaged.

   Lynn recognized that the new curriculum did not offer diversity in texts, so she decided to supplement the curriculum with texts that would showcase cultural diversity to increase engagement. Lynn shared a similar sentiment that she felt students needed to relate to what was in the curriculum, so she often customized the curriculum to fit the student needs. She also conveyed the impact on white students being exposed to multicultural texts. Lynn said:

   I really hate the scripted curriculum our department was given this past year. It took teacher choice out of the curriculum. I always liked to pick literature that the students in my class could relate to, meaning if I had Black kids in class, then I would be sure and pick out literature that they would like. I have always tried to pick out literature based on who is in my class. Then I would add in literature that I thought they needed to be exposed to so they could ‘meet’ other types of people,
like Native American literature or Asian inspired literature. It is important for students to be exposed to diversity in curriculum.

In another response indicating the value of multicultural curriculum to the teacher participants, Elizabeth said she saw more student engagement by all students, especially her students of color, when she incorporated multicultural texts into her curriculum. This concurred with Ladson-Billings’ (2014) studies which found a positive relationship between student engagement and multicultural texts. Elizabeth shared:

Our online text is pretty cool, and I use a lot from it, but our department supplemented a whole lot this year. We got a grant to help add multicultural curriculum into our curriculum so we really dived in and added literature and authors from other cultures, as many other cultures as we could fit in. I have found way more engagement in my class because of it…from my Black and Hispanic kids and my white kids. It’s like such a shift in thinking to learn about all of these other cultures that were all living and producing at the same time instead of just white males, like that was the whole world. The other curriculum is just boring if you ask me. We all like learning about different kinds of people, I think.

Penny and Rex went further and explained how they were influenced by their students to begin choosing texts that represented other cultural influences. Without proper training, teacher collaboration, or school leadership, the act of properly responding to student suggestions or concerns becomes even more important. Culturally competent teachers listen to student voice classrooms (Jett, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Penny stated:
I teach ninth grade English so there is a whole unit on social justice in our text that I love to teach. Any units that don’t have enough multicultural texts, I just add them in based on the groups of students I have in my class. I have a lot of Hispanic students so I usually do a whole unit on authors and stories they can relate to. One day, a Black female student said why don’t we read more stories by Black female authors, and I said I don’t know. Let’s do it. They need to see people who look like them in their curriculum.

As evidenced in her statement, Penny responded to a student question on multicultural curriculum by adding specific texts and authors to meet the needs of the students in her class. She recognized the need for students of color to have positive representation of their race and culture in the curriculum. Rex also gave consideration to his student’s complaint that there was a lack of multicultural representation in the class curriculum with a similar response of adding texts and authors who represented the students of color in his classroom. Rex shared:

I heard a student say in class one day that all we read is a bunch of old white guys. I started looking over my curriculum and I kind of got angry with myself for not noticing before that I didn’t have enough female representation or other cultures in the curriculum I was teaching. I had just been teaching what they gave me, so I had to fix that.

The teacher participants were consistent in wanting the students within their classes to feel represented in a positive manner believing that would increase student engagement and effectively build bridges between students of color and white students. Although all the teacher participants acknowledged the relevance of diversity in curriculum and its positive effects on both students of color and white students, Sally best expressed it in this statement:
I try to take the bias out of curriculum and make sure that students see themselves in what they’re learning and reading. If we don’t make a conscious effort to intentionally reflect diversity in the curriculum, then we are just going to teach what’s comfortable to a white, middle-class female. The impact on students of color is that you’re in a white world and this what you’re going to learn. The impact on white students is that they never have to get out of their comfort zone. They need to see diversity also.

The six teacher participants showed progress toward antiracist teaching in providing multicultural texts and infusing their curriculum choices with representations of diversity. Using multicultural texts is just one culturally relevant practice and using culturally relevant practices is another element of antiracist teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Love, 2019; Kendi, 2019).

Teachers described more than one type of culturally relevant practice as indicated in the next category.

**Practicing Empathy**

The importance of practicing empathy as teachers or students was a common response by five out of six teacher participants. In an earlier theme, I discussed the teacher desire to be provided or to obtain empathy training for the school. In this section, I am providing data that suggests the use of empathy as a culturally relevant practice in the teacher participants. Four of the six teacher participants recognized that students who practiced empathy were more likely to be more understanding of their peers of color and as a way of lessening racism. Understanding differences arises out of the practice of showing empathy, which is another culturally relevant practice (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Pinderhughes, 1984; Toldson, 2018). Teachers either focused
Amy focused on teachers in this statement: “I just think more teachers need to have empathy. When I think about how to treat students who are culturally different from me, I always think about how I would want a teacher to treat my child if she were in a different place with people not like her.” In her statement, Amy responded that she uses empathy to make teacher choices in the classroom. Penny also referred to empathy in the classroom but from the standpoint of teacher modeling for students. Penny stated:

It’s our job as humans to learn about other humans that aren’t like us. It is the responsibility of every person to understand the struggles of other people. It shouldn’t even have to be a white or different color thing. If you want to be a good person, then you have to have empathy for other people’s experiences.

Teachers should model this behavior.

Similarly, Lynn shared Penny’s belief that it is the responsibility of the teacher to guide and model for students how to show empathy towards others. As indicated by teacher statements, empathy training would be important for students as well as teachers. Without positive exposure to people who are culturally different, Lynn worried that white students would not learn empathy for people of color in society. If society were to become more tolerant of differences, Lynn expressed: “It’s about teaching students to see another person’s perspective and having empathy. I think the whole ‘walk a mile in his shoes’ theory is the best way to get people to relate and that is probably the key to better understanding in our society.”

A similar response to the role of society and empathy was expressed in what Rex indicated that he witnessed after the Black Lives Matter movement. He said that he saw an
increased empathy among white students towards their Black peers after the events of the previous summer and the movement. This shift organically happened without the help of teachers or the school, and Rex said it seemed more genuine in that context. Rex explained:

As the Black Lives Matters movement stuff started becoming more and more prominent, it seemed a lot of our white kids were trying to be more empathetic or trying to express more empathy in their dealings towards our Black students. It was refreshing to see them act like that in solidarity. I really didn’t know what we would be coming back to after that summer, but most people here do care about each other. We are a small school of around 400 students and that movement seemed to bring more awareness to our students of what their Black friends were dealing with.

The wide use of empathy as a culturally relevant practice amongst the teacher participants connects back to the need for empathy training as provided professional development. Teaching students to practicing empathy and teachers practicing empathy are examples of a culturally responsive pedagogy practice that most of the teacher participants expressed a strong willingness in which to engage.

**Using an Asset-based Approach to Relationship-building with Families of Color**

The teacher participants did not all agree on the ways in which the connection was lacking, or the causes, but all six teacher participants recognized that the home and school connection between white teachers and students of color was lacking and important. All the teacher participants indicated that they believed having family involvement as a means of support for a student would be beneficial but were not specific in how to create the connection. This belief is in line with findings that suggest the importance of families of color to be included
in their children’s education and classroom (Khalifa et al., 2016). Lynn shared her acknowledgment that parent involvement is important and has lessened over the years in this statement: “I always communicated with parents at home as often as I could. Over the years, I have seen less response or involvement from homes and that makes me sad. I am not sure how to get that back except to just keep trying.”

Though teacher participant responses varied, most indicated they were not exactly sure what to do but were trying asset-based approaches. The overall focus was on creating positive interactions through positive communications with home, treating families with respect, setting high expectations, and making families of color feel welcome in the school as essential to building relationships with families of color. Penny stated:

I think the trend with students of color, at our school anyway, is probably to only call home when their kid does something bad, but I call when to tell them something good and catch them off guard. I feel like our Black families don’t get a lot of positive communication, so I make an effort from the very beginning to make calls and let them know positive stuff.

Penny expressed making a conscious effort to be unlike other teachers who only call families of color with student problems or negativity. Like other teacher participants, Amy stressed that effort was essential in establishing positive connections with families of color. Amy believed that treating families with different cultural backgrounds with respect would be the first step as indicated in her statement:

I have found that in building relationships with families of color is that it takes a while for them to trust and connect with me. They are very standoffish at first, until they see that I, as a white teacher, am going to treat them with respect and
treat them well. I think you have to work harder with students and families of color to build that connection. Not everybody in my school tries very hard to overcome that with students of different racial backgrounds, so I don’t think many white teachers do have connections with the families.

Similarly, all of the teacher participants expressed a belief that showing respect for differences was an important part of working with students or families of color. Respect for differences and other cultures is necessary to create positive connections with families of color (Jett, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In addition to respect, Rex stated that relaying high expectations for students of color to the students and their families was the best approach to building a relationship with families of color. Some white teachers fall into the trap of lowering expectations for students of color which indicates a deficit mindset (Milner, 2012.) The act of having high expectations for students of color is a culturally relevant practice, and indicative of antiracist teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Love, 2019; Kendi, 2019).

Rex said:

As my awareness has grown about the issue of racism, I have become more sympathetic with Black students. But I don’t think teachers need to treat them differently like lowering expectations of them. We’ve established life is going to be hard for them, so teachers need to have high expectations of them to help them be prepared for life. I think their families will appreciate this.

Additionally, Elizabeth stated that she did not feel that families of color felt welcomed at the school and that the school must find ways to change that perception of families. Elizabeth denied that teachers intentionally made families of color feel unwelcomed but struggled to understand why they would feel unwelcomed at academic events yet come to athletic events. Elizabeth said:
I don’t think parents of color feel welcome at our school. On our end, it’s a lack of understanding more so than you’re not welcome. We don’t have a lot of staff of color. There has been an obvious attempt to rectify that this past year. The school has filled the last two positions with people of color, the basketball coach and they created a position for man of color to help with black male students who are having behavior problems. I think it’s probably why we don’t see them come to many events like parent-teacher conference or academic programs, but they will come to athletics events.

Regardless of the way in which teacher participants felt positive relationships should be built between home and school, each teacher participant recognized the lack and the need for that connection to be made with families of color. Most teacher participants admitted that they did not know why the overall connection between home and school had been broken, and they did not mention teacher collaboration on how to achieve their goals of creating better relationships with families of color.

Sub-theme: Developing an Awareness of Racism

Teacher participant responses indicated the adoption of some antiracist teaching practices and varying levels of growth towards becoming antiracist teachers. CRT indicates the permanence of race and requires an awareness of the persistence of racism (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Relevant to CRT and to antiracist teaching, creating an awareness of racism and the need for activism are relevant practices of any antiracist teacher (Love, 2019; Matias & Liou, 2015). Each teacher participant expressed varying degrees of self-awareness, event awareness, and activism in response to racism.
Before activism can take place, teachers must first become aware of racism, both implicit and explicit events. Considering long term effects, implicit biases, microaggressions, and negative stereotypical beliefs can affect teacher decisions and actions causing just as much harm to students of color in the classroom as explicit racism (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013; Matias & Mackey, 2016). All six teacher participants indicated that as they learned more about the structures of whiteness, implicit biases, and racism from varying sources such as colleagues, friends, social media, or even students, they became more aware of racism that they once overlooked. Four of the six teacher participants were specific in their statements that indicated teacher awareness. Amy said:

I remember one day I’m walking by the students who are in alternative school. They line up every morning near the office. And I counted two of the five students there who were black, and I noticed that. And I, you know, I wonder if they’re overrepresented in disciplinary actions.

Amy explained further that her school was only about four percent students of color in a school with approximately 800 students, so to always see several Black students represented in alternative school seemed concerning. She indicated a new awareness of a problem possibly based on race. Amy also expressed another instance where she felt a racialized awareness in this response:

One day in particular, I was doing hall duty and I saw two Black female students outside of a teacher’s room and they were both loudly laughing and slapping their knees. I mean, like literally slapping their knees and having a big time. And I just noticed that when I looked both ways, I saw a couple of my white colleagues poke their heads out and just, you know, sort of look sternly with a negative look on
their face. I just thought, ‘Oh my gosh, we don’t know how to respond or react to different cultures!’ The kids were just laughing. They weren’t causing a disruption, but I see that white people do interpret their [Black students’] responses differently.

Amy was not the only teacher participant to respond to interview questions with situations of racialized awareness. Elizabeth and Rex both made statements concerning an awareness of the under-representation of students of color in honors classes. This observation is in line with studies that indicate that honors classes have been used to segregate schools with students of color being under-represented in honors classes and programs (Ferri & Conner, 2005; Jett, 2013; Milner, 2012). Elizabeth expresses her awareness of under-representation of students of color in honors classes with that of noting a difference in expectations of students of color and white students. Elizabeth stated:

I see a difference in teacher expectations for students of color and white students. Maybe it has to do with socioeconomics, not sure, but there isn’t an expectation of preparing some of our Black and Hispanic students for college. It’s more like just trying to get them to graduate. There is a lack of push. For example, I think students in Honors classes get the most attention and you will find a lot less diversity.

Similarly, Rex noticed the lack of students of color in his honors classes and expresses a new self-awareness with Black female students and discipline in the following statement. He does not connect the two issues and seems to require more self-reflection and knowledge of how the school schedules honors classes to know if there is a connection. Rex explains:
I teach a lot of the honors classes and I can tell you that there are rarely many students of color in my classes. I always wonder if I am the only one who notices this. I used to teach the regular English classes and that’s where all of the students of color are put. I know many of them could be in honors classes but aren’t. Maybe no one pushes them or expects them to take the honors classes. I like to work with the students who may fall through the cracks. At our school, that is mostly Black students. It’s hard to get to know them because they are defensive at first. I think they see me as this older white dude and think what does he know? So, I don’t know. I just keep being friendly with them and trying. My race may be a thing, but I don’t know what to do with that. I have noticed I have more discipline problems with Black females. Now that I think of it, that may be me as the problem. I don’t know.

In another example of awareness, Sally indicated that she had become aware of her colleagues’ beliefs in negative stereotypes of students of color. She also connected that the negative stereotypes perpetuated lower expectations and were indicative of racist beliefs. When white teachers believe and act upon negative stereotypes with students of color, racism becomes normalized and perpetuated in the classroom (Gillborn, 2005; Warren, 2001). Sally indicated:

I would just really like for some of my colleagues to be able to look beyond the outer layer and peel back and see what’s underneath, because they don’t give some of those students a chance. They just label them. That’s stereotyping. Once they do that, those teachers just never expect anything else from them except whatever that negative stereotype is.
All the teacher participants gave examples of a growing awareness of racism. Awareness of racism is important. While awareness must occur, awareness is not enough; to challenge racism effectively, awareness must be followed by activism (Kendi, 2019). The following category reveals the ways in which teacher participants engaged in activism.

**Sub-theme: Practicing Activism**

It was common in this study for teacher participants to voice a need for activism on the behalf of students of color. All six teachers expressed a need and a desire to act on the part of students of color who were victims of racism. Five out of six teacher participants gave responses that were examples of activism. One of those expressed that he acted on the part of students in the face of consequences from his peers. The following statements indicated acts of teacher challenges to the structures of institutionalized racism within their respective schools. Amy expressed:

> My little group of teacher friends make an effort. The other senior teacher and I were asked to pick ten students that we would recommend having their face on a poster to go on the downtown light poles as representing our school. She must have read the email the same time as me and sent me a text that said let’s try and pick some students of color to represent our school. And I said, I was just going to say the same thing to you. So, we both intentionally named students of color in our top ten to represent our school. If we hadn’t done that, no one else would have thought to do that.

In more examples of activism, Elizabeth and Sally each intentionally sought retribution for a student of color for racial slurs that were directed to their students during school activities but not in their respective classes. Both teachers admitted that the use of the N-word was
problematic at their respective schools, whether it was used by students of color towards each other or by white students towards students of color. All of the teachers expressed that at one time, or another being faced with disciplining a student or explaining to a student why the N-word cannot be used. Sally said:

Teachers do a disservice to their students to not challenge racism or racist beliefs when they see or hear them and should have those discussions with their students. Teachers are usually one of the adults that students trust so they should hear the truth about racism from teachers. When I heard that one of my students was called the N-word, I went to admin and made sure that the other student was punished even though it didn’t happen in my class. I don’t know if they would have followed through on consequences without a teacher pushing for it.

A similar incident happened to one of Elizabeth’s students at North High School, and Elizabeth had to be proactive to advocate for the student. Elizabeth explained that the student did not want teacher assistance and did not seek help but was clearly upset. It took persistence to find out why the student was upset. Research suggests that students of color experience microaggressions daily at schools, such as racial slurs (Allen et al., 2013). Elizabeth said:

I had a Black student come into my class who seemed very upset. I asked him if everything was ok, and he said that it was. He was a very good student, and we had a test that day and he really bombed it. When I saw the results, I looked up his schedule and went and found him in his study hall. I told him ‘You are telling me what is wrong because this test is just not like you. What is going on?’ He finally told me that someone, a white kid, had called him the N word in the hallway before class. I could tell that he was so angry, so hurt. I asked him if he had told a
teacher or admin and he said no because he didn’t feel comfortable. I told him I would do it. I went to admin and let them know what happened and they took it seriously and did something to the other kid. I rescheduled the test for him also.

Teacher participants often lamented that when challenging racism, they were acting in ways that were not supported by their white colleagues or superiors. Challenging racism is not always supported, and white antiracists report often feeling alienated by their white peers when taking unpopular stances concerning race (Kendi, 2019). Rex indicated that speaking out for students of color to administration was not always received well. Rex said:

I make a lot of enemies because I go and complain to people about what I see when others see it and just seem to be fine with it. I think admin would like for me not to be so vocal, but I think more people need to speak out if they see a Black student or a female not be treated the same as others, like I do with administration. I don’t care if people like me or not, so I don’t find that hard to do.

In another example of activism, Sally stated that she was proactive in preparing students to prevent acts of racism in her class through an initial class meeting and document signatures. She explained the importance of classroom environment and understanding consequences was needed before the work of discussing cultural or racial differences could occur. Sally explained:

As part of my syllabus, I have students sign a form saying they understand and agree that no student will be degraded or bullied within my classroom, whether of color, sexuality, ethnicity, or religious beliefs. And they know I won’t tolerate it. I had a student once who said a racial slur in class and I lost my temper and escorted him to the office chewing their tail all the way to the office. I want students to know it’s not ok and it won’t be tolerated.
In this study, the theme that teacher participants were using antiracist teaching practices such as engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy, specifically, teacher participants indicated that they were choosing multicultural curriculum, practicing empathy, and using asset-based approaches to developing relationships with families of color. Teacher participant responses also indicated a developing awareness of racism and the practice of activism.

**Theme 4: The Awareness that Rural, Majority White, Schools Need Antiracist Education for Teachers and Students**

The findings indicated that teacher participants showed an awareness that there was a lack of antiracist education for teachers and students but suggested there was a strong need due specifically to the majority white demographics of each school. According to some research, white teachers must receive training on dismantling whiteness where whiteness occurs (Matias & Grosland, 2016). All teacher participants believed that teachers were responsible for modeling antiracist behavior and teaching white students how to be antiracist. Additionally, one teacher participant referred to a paradigm shift in thinking that only urban schools with large numbers of students of color needed antiracist education, or topics mainly focused on race, shifting to the idea that mostly white schools may need antiracist education more due to a lack of exposure to people of color. This paradigm shift is in line with findings that majority white schools are in need of multicultural or antiracist training (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020). Another teacher participant who had worked within an urban and rural setting pointed out that she received antiracist professional development while working within the urban school setting, but not ever while working within the rural school setting. Urban school settings traditionally have more students of color than rural schools, which are known to have small clusters of students of color (Showalter et al., 2019) and may receive more multicultural training than do rural schools.
(Ayers, 2010). This section provides the data to support the theme that teacher participants indicated an awareness that rural, majority white, schools need antiracist education for teachers and students. The data in this section is divided into the following sub-themes: antiracism and the role of the teacher, antiracism and the needs of white students, and antiracism and the teacher disconnect.

**Sub-theme: Antiracism and the Role of the Teacher**

Teacher participants explained their beliefs in how k-12 teachers are responsible in creating a more socially-just world and in becoming an antiracist teacher, and the perceived unique difficulties in doing so in a majority white rural school. Since the teachers in this study worked at mostly white schools, their answers were based on how to educate white students to be antiracist. Many teacher participant responses included statements on how to deal with white students believing in stereotypes of people of color. Each teacher participant expressed teachers do have a responsibility to model how to be an antiracist for white students. This belief is in line with research suggesting that culturally competent teachers are more effective in the classroom with students of color (Delpit 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995) and research that suggests that teachers have a social responsibility to promote antiracism (Freire 1998; Kendi, 2019; Love, 2019). One teacher participant expressed frustration in how to combat racism in students who learn the ideology from home. One teacher participant did not know how to go about teaching white students to be antiracist. One similarity in responses was the desire to work in an antiracist environment. The teacher participants were consistent with most believing that school leaders would have to take a more active role in providing education and leadership for this to occur. Although expressed in other terms such as *awareness, multicultural, unbiased, accepting, relationship-building, respectful, role-model and exposure,* the desire to become an antiracist
teacher was indicated. Teacher participants connected this desire to the need for majority white schools to provide antiracist leadership and education, and ways teachers could educate white students. Sally explained:

> I think the main way to be an antiracist teacher is to challenge racism. That sounds obvious, but a teacher has to understand that is part of her responsibility. Granted we need school leaders to lead this, but teachers can do it on their own if need be. That is just harder. Maybe teachers can’t be obvious about it, since we aren’t supposed to show that we have an opinion. I think the way to think about it is that our classroom is like a mini-society and how we treat those kids and how we let our classroom function is how it will be in society. I just think that what happens in the classroom should model how we want society to be. We have to leave white privilege out of the classroom and attack any bias or stereotyping that occurs. We have to teach kids to work together and build students into people who will work together as citizens someday.

In working to challenge racism, Sally explained the role teachers should play in the connection between school, classroom, and society. Sally subscribed to the belief that the classroom was representative of society and to improve society, it started in the classroom. Penny shared this belief but explained that she believed it was also teachers’ responsibility to shift the burden of challenging racism away from people of color and to white people, much like Love (2019) indicates in her literature. Penny indicated the importance of working with white students in the classroom on antiracism in this statement. Penny said:

> Teachers just have to keep working with students. If a white student has some racist beliefs, you aren’t going to change his mind overnight and it’s not
something that can be forced. It’s going to happen over time, and they will need to be exposed to successful people of color, maybe bringing in more multicultural curriculum. Pull them aside and talk to them if they say something that isn’t right and just keep showing them a different way. I think modeling is the way to do it and asking those uncomfortable questions to start discussions.

According to most of the teacher participants, white teachers play an integral role in challenging racism by modeling and instructing white students on how to be antiracist. Due to the unique problems that rural schools face, such as lack of exposure to positive representations of people of color, lack of multicultural or inclusive training, lack of diversity in student body, and stereotypical beliefs from home, teacher participants expressed a greater need for majority white schools to receive antiracist education as much, or more, than do more diverse schools.

**Sub-Theme: Antiracism and the Needs of White Students**

Teachers consistently expressed the need for white students to receive antiracist education or for there to be antiracist programs evident in schools to correct white student racist behavior or to counter stereotypical beliefs about people of color. For white teachers to be antiracist teachers, they must address and counter instances of negative stereotypes and implicit racism, as well as explicit racism (Kendi, 2019; Love, 2019; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Warren, 2001). The need was based on experiences or observations of the teacher participants. One teacher discussed the insensitivity and ignorance of white students in their interactions with a Black teacher.

When we had a Black teacher in our department, I was walking by his room one day and he asked me to step in so the students could ask me something. As soon as I walked in, they all went no, no, no! Don’t bring her in here. He pointed to one
of the students and told her to ask me what she had just asked him. She said OK, I want to know why we can’t say the N word. I was stunned and shocked and told her that I was very disappointed in her for asking that question and that it is racist to use that word. Later, I talked to the teacher, and he said he wasn’t offended because the students really wanted to know why it wasn’t ok and he tried to explain, but they really didn’t seem to understand why.

Amy further stated that she could not believe that a student would be so ignorant or offensive to ask such a question of any Black person, especially one in an authoritative position. She stated that she had witnessed so many statements made by white students based on stereotypes over the years, that she saw a need for antiracist education for those students. Amy said: “I don’t want white students to believe in stereotypes or have a skewed version of history, so they need some kind of education that is antiracist.”

There are multiple ways teachers can break the cycle of racist beliefs in white students. Lynn indicated another way white teachers can responsibly educate white students in becoming antiracist is through exposure to curriculum, topics, and activities that depict people of color in a positive light to interrupt the beliefs in negative stereotypes. While research indicates that exposure to people of color is not enough, it is one practice that lends itself to antiracism (Matias & Grosland, 2016). Lynn offered:

My job as a teacher is to get students to think, so I have to expose them to different ideas and points of view. With awareness comes understanding and a new understanding can change the world. Students don’t need to believe in stereotypes. Teachers must expose students to subjects and people they wouldn’t
already know and help them figure out on their own that we can live in harmony and there is a better way.

Furthermore, Penny and Elizabeth expressed similar sentiments about the belief in stereotypes. Their responses connect a lack of antiracist education or exposure to positive images of people of color to the beliefs of white students in negative stereotypes, and with proper guidance from teachers can be interrupted. Penny reveals:

I think it is even more important for white students than non-white students to be taught antiracism because we don’t want more white people being racist. Without learning about antiracism or negative stereotypes, white students will be ignorant the rest of their lives and not understand other human beings. They need to know everybody isn’t like you and that’s okay.

Elizabeth’s response echoed Penny’s concern about lack of exposure and the belief in negative stereotypes, but also includes her concerns about the influence from home. Several teacher participants expressed concern about the difficulty and uncertainty of how to challenge negative racial beliefs that originate from home. Elizabeth stated:

If white students don’t see teachers of color or talk about racism in school, then it just leads to believing in stereotypes. If all you see is white at home and white at school, then you aren’t getting any other perspective and you begin to think that is what the world is or should be like. It leads to ignorance and ignorance leads to stupidity. I tell my students all the time that ignorance is a lack of knowing and stupidity is doing something because you don’t know any better.

Similarly, Rex accurately portrayed teacher frustrations with the desire to educate white students on being antiracist when white students bring racist beliefs and ideology from home into
the classroom. According to the teacher participants, when there is a direct conflict between what a student is taught at home and taught at school, as can be the case with racism, teachers are often the recipients of that anger. With little support, one teacher participant expressed avoidance of the task. Rex said:

I always had this one kid in class who wanted to tell everyone what his grandfather believed, and it was always racist. I would have to shut him down and send him to the office every time before fights would break out. I think kids bring to school what they are taught at home about racism, so is it our job to try and fix that too. How do we combat what they are being told at home? White kids need to learn about antiracism because we are all part of the problem. Without it white kids will just be walking out into the world with all of these stereotypes in their heads because they have never been exposed to anything positive. They get into the real world and then they may not intentionally be racist, but they are. I don’t know if teachers need to be the ones responsible for it though because I get tired of society thinking teachers can fix everything. Shouldn’t it come from home? I mean it needs to be done. I just don’t know how we fix it.

Not only can teachers or parents have emotional responses, but students can often express highly emotional responses to conversations about race. Emotional responses are common in controversial conversations about race and racism (Matias, 2016). In another experience, Penny shared a student-teacher interaction with a student reaction that was highly emotional, and only proved to her that white students must be able to have frank discussions about race and racism in the classroom if teachers want students to leave the classroom with a new perspective. Penny explained:
We were reading Martin Luther King’s speech “I Have a Dream” and something came up in class discussion about police brutality. When I told the student that she couldn’t completely understand what it was like because she was white, she got really mad. Several students got mad at me for saying that. I asked them if anyone had ever stopped them or offended them because of their race. They said no. I said then you don’t know what it’s like for Black people and shouldn’t judge. It blew their mind that I said that. They need more straight conversations like that.

Just like Penny, Elizabeth felt that white students needed to be part of honest class discussions concerning race and racism, regardless of emotional responses. White students benefit from having frank discussions about race where feelings can be interrogated, and points of view can be shared; awareness alone is not enough (Matias & Grosland, 2016). By doing so, the class discussions would increase student awareness and empathy for their classmates who were students of color. Elizabeth shared:

I let students discuss the police shootings in class. I told them as long as they are respectful, no topic was off limits. My Black students shared what it was like to be pulled over by the police or some of their dealings with police and other authority figures. The discussion was so eye-opening for so many of the white students. Some even cried. Some said things like ‘Bro, I didn’t know you went through that’ or ‘I didn’t know it was like that for you.’ White kids need to know what’s going on outside of their world.

Teacher participants identified instances and examples of why white students need antiracism education and programs. Schools with majority white students who are not exposed to
positive interactions and images of people of color, who do not have negative stereotypes challenged, or who do not see antiracism modeled are in danger of perpetuating racism through the white student body, according to the teacher participants. The teacher participants were aware that majority white schools need assistance in providing antiracist education.

**Sub-Theme: Antiracism and the Teacher Disconnect**

While all teacher participants responded positively to questions about understanding the elements of whiteness and the structures of institutionalized racism, there was some disconnect evident in responses. Three teacher participants expressed statements consistent with colorblind ideology (Hartmann, Gerteis, & Croll, 2009; Milner, 2012; Zou & Dickter, 2013) even though race-visibility is indicative of antiracist teaching (Jupp et al., 2016; Lensmire, 2017). The following statements showed evidence of colorblind ideology. Sally stated:

> I don’t see any difference in working with students of color than with white students. I used to work at an urban school and now I work at a rural school, and I think the differences I’ve seen in students of color or white kids is more about their surroundings and socio-economic. It’s how they learn to act or fit in with their surroundings. It’s more about the student than it is about color. I don’t think race has any impact on how I work with students.

Sally claimed to not see race, including her own, in the classroom. She attributed any cultural differences she noticed to socio-economic or urban versus rural settings. Similarly, Elizabeth agreed that she did not notice race in this statement: “I don’t notice color when I teach kids. I just notice the kid. I do try to get to know their culture though, so maybe on some small level, I can appreciate color? I guess I see color. Overall, I just try to treat each kid the same.”
Unlike Elizabeth’s response above, Lynn claims to see race, but defaults to the belief that treating everyone the same is preferable than noting differences that may apply to the student of color. Lynn’s statement is like Elizabeth’s response in the act of seeing race, but she does not connect it to any cultural differences. “Sure, I notice color, but I don’t let that cloud my judgement of getting to know a student for who he or she is. Race shouldn’t be an issue. I treat them all of them the same…with respect.” All three teacher participants wrongfully equate not seeing color with being equitable, which is a flawed perception.

Overall, teacher participants described experiences with insensitivity and racist ideology on the parts of students that could be addressed with antiracist education. Additional teacher participant responses revealed an awareness that teachers have a responsibility to educate and model antiracism for students, but there was evidence that white teachers needed guidance on unpacking their whiteness first to provide that antiracist education for white students. White teachers who received proper education and training on how race impacts working with students of color and how to deal with issues of race reported feeling more empowered to work with students of color and issues concerning race and racism (Marx & Pennington, 2003). A lack of diversity in majority white rural schools only strengthened the teacher participants’ argument that there was a need for antiracist education for white teachers and

Ancillary Findings

I discovered a pattern of responses during thematic analysis, but it was not included as a major theme because there were no matching codes or categories for this finding; the finding was outside the scope of this study. The subject of this secondary finding was related to the need for teachers of color. There is a lack of teachers of color in public education, especially in rural schools (Kohli, 2014; Showalter et al., 2019; Vilson, 2016). The phrase need teachers of colors
was prevalent when discussing ways to combat the perpetuation of racism in the education and ways to provide antiracism education to white students. Some teachers would default the responsibility of antiracism teaching to teachers of colors. Penny questioned:

Yes, our school needs something so that the white students won’t be racist, but who is going to teach that? We don’t have any African American or Hispanic teachers. All the teachers are white. Everyone else would be afraid of saying the wrong thing. I wish we had more Black teachers and students of color.

Similarly, another teacher participant felt that hiring teachers of color could somehow prevent or interrupt racism in rural schools. Lynn suggested:

I think one thing that would help stop racism in schools would be having more diversity among teachers. I don’t know how we would do that in this county because it seems hard to find teachers from other backgrounds in this area. Why is there such a short supply of qualified teachers who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, or whatever?

While recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers of color is important, I do not include this topic in my research study. I will include more on this ancillary finding in chapter V under the section, Directions for Further Research.

Summary of Findings

This research study sought to uncover the ways in which white teachers understood and challenged the structures of whiteness, racialized bias, and institutional racism in education. The data aligns with a Critical Race Theory and critical whiteness studies framework as it reveals the important impact of race, both that of white teachers and students of color, on classroom decisions, interactions, and the ways in which those decisions can perpetuate racism. As a
second-wave white teacher identity study, I questioned teacher participants on the ways in which they understood the elements of whiteness and how they used that information to better understand the ways to challenge racism in the classroom. A rich description of participants, document analysis, and thematic analysis was provided. Using thematic analysis, the essential data was presented as four themes: (1) the lack of pre-service preparation or in-service professional development in working with students of color and understanding the structures of whiteness or racism in education, (2) the lack of space and leadership for white teachers to unpack feelings and discuss race, (3) the use of antiracist teaching practices, (4) the awareness that rural, mostly white, schools need antiracist education for teachers and students. In Chapter V, I connect the Chapter IV themes to theory and provide conclusive discussion summarizing how the data analysis results relate to the research questions. Research study implications and recommendations for further study are also provided.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

"Racism does not exist without whiteness. Whiteness is at the center of the reproduction of structural inequality. White folx truly concerned about understanding racism, about being in solidarity with dark folx, about building community, and who are interested in intersectional justice have to start about whiteness and how it functions" (Love, 2019, p. 143).

This study aimed to learn how white rural teachers understood their perceived biases and beliefs about race and how they were engaging in antiracist teaching to work towards challenging systemic racism. This research sought to build upon previous research in critical whiteness studies in k-12 education and second-wave white teacher identity studies. Critical whiteness studies are based on examining the structures of whiteness and its impact on teaching students of color (Solomon, 2005). Second-wave white teacher identity studies are emerging research that examines how to best train white teachers to learn and teach students of color (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016). Through a CRT lens and asset-based examination, the findings on how white rural teachers have worked to understand their race and its impact on working with students of color have provided data on the ways white rural teachers need to be supported to develop into antiracist teachers. Research studies on race and its role in the classroom have been necessary considering the predominantly white teaching force and the opportunity gap that exists in the education outcomes of students of color and that of their white peers (Allen, 2004; Jett, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2012); furthermore, a gap in rural and urban studies on white teachers working with students of color provided the additional impetus for the study (Lavalley, 2018).

I identified four overarching themes using thematic analysis of qualitative research data gathered from semi-structured interview questions with six teacher participants and document
analyses from two rural schools in West Tennessee. The study's findings and themes were discussed in Chapter IV and included the following: (1) the lack of pre-service preparation or in-service professional development in working with students of color and understanding the structures of whiteness or racism in education, (2) the lack of space and leadership for white teachers to unpack feelings and discuss race, (3) the use of antiracist teaching practices, (4) the awareness that rural, majority white, schools need antiracist education for teachers and students. The first two themes describe the supports that teacher participants felt were lacking and acted as barriers in their development of antiracist teaching. Theme 3 discusses the antiracist teaching practices that teacher participants described using in their classrooms and their subsequent progress towards antiracist teaching goals. Theme 4 concerns the expressed awareness of the teacher participants that majority white, rural schools need antiracist education for white teachers and students as much, if not more, than urban schools.

The themes highlighted elements related to the research questions that this study sought to answer:

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<th>RQ1:</th>
<th>In what ways are white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee challenging institutionalized racism?</th>
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<tr>
<td>RQ2:</td>
<td>What barriers do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee perceive to exist when engaging in antiracist teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3:</td>
<td>How do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee understand their own biases and beliefs regarding race and schooling?</td>
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In this chapter, I discuss how the themes mentioned above are related to the study's research questions, provide implications and recommendations, and summarize the findings and conclusion.
Research Question 1

*In what ways are white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee challenging institutionalized racism?*

The findings indicated that the white teacher participants from rural high schools in West Tennessee in this study were attempting to challenge institutionalized racism in the way of becoming antiracist teachers. To challenge institutionalized racism, white teachers must embrace antiracist teaching practices (Delpit, 2006; Love, 2019; Kendi, 2019). It only takes a small group of teachers to challenge structural racism in a school (Love, 2019). The six teacher participants in this study exhibited varying stages of development in becoming antiracist teachers, and all were found to be engaging to some degree in Simmons’ (2019) antiracist teacher actions. Simmons’ (2019) recommendations for active engagement in antiracist teaching are as follows: (1) teachers must become self-aware through self-reflection on one's own racial identity and how it impacts the classroom; (2) teachers must acknowledge the existence of racism and white supremacy ideology; (3) teachers must study and teach history that is truthfully representative of racial oppression and inclusive of the achievements of people of color; (4) teachers must lead and allow classroom discussions on race and racism to take place; (5) teachers must be activist who challenges racism when observed.

One of the themes in this study related to the first research question finds the use of antiracist teaching practices as prevalent in teacher participant responses. The findings showed that teachers were using the following antiracist teaching practices in varying degrees of development and ability: engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy, developing an awareness of racism, and practicing activism. The literature revealed that becoming an antiracist teacher does not occur instantly upon the desire to become one but rather is a process of learning,
development, self-investigation, dialogue, reflection, and action (Allen, 2004; Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2014; Kendi, 2019; Love, 2019; Matias & Lackey, Grosland, 2016). Kendi calls becoming an antiracist "the grueling journey to the dirt road of antiracism" (p. 11). Similarly, the data revealed in this study that becoming an antiracist teacher was a progressive process suggesting that all teacher participants had the desire to be antiracist teachers and were engaged in culturally responsive actions, reflection, awareness, and activism, but, again, not at the same developmental stage and not with the same successes.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is an asset-based, cross-cultural framework used to guide teacher choices in providing diversity in the curriculum, providing high expectations for students, and positive self-development for all students of color through intent and planning (Ladson-Billings, 1995) is an integral part of antiracist teaching. In this study, teacher participants discussed several ways to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy, including choosing to supplement the existing curriculum with a multicultural curriculum, choosing to lead in-class discussions on race and racism, practicing and teaching empathy, and using an asset-based approach to building relationships with families of color. In this study, the findings indicated that teacher participants relied on choosing a multicultural curriculum, which is the act of including multicultural texts, histories, and perspectives of people of color (Ladson-Billings, 2014) as their most robust practice of culturally responsive pedagogy. All six teacher participants indicated why they chose to supplement their existing curriculum with multicultural texts; it increased student engagement and provided white students and students of color with a curriculum that portrayed other cultures positively. This finding was corroborated in the literature that there are significantly higher educational outcomes, increases in positive ethnic-racial identity development, and decreases in negative stereotype beliefs associated with
culturally responsive classrooms where a multicultural curriculum is used (Byrd, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Other literature suggests agreement that antiracist teaching involves making culturally responsive curriculum choices and policies that allow students of color to be successful in the classroom; it is the classroom actions and preferences of the teacher that challenge racism (Fray, 2019).

Most of the teacher participants stated that they used other culturally responsive practices besides multicultural curriculum. In alignment with Simmons' (2019) actions for antiracist teaching, four of the six teacher participants claimed to engage in the culturally responsive practice of leading truthful and open class discussions routinely and intentionally on topics related to race and racism. This practice is a part of culturally responsive pedagogy. Still, this practice is also consistent with Simmons's (2019) and Kendi's (2019) research that antiracist teachers must be actionable in allowing and leading open discussions on race and racism. The literature corroborated that the ability to lead in-class discussions with students on race and racism is a crucial step in becoming an antiracist teacher (Hartmann et al., 2009; Jupp et al., 2016; Sleeter, 1992 & 1993). As a result, teacher participants who led or allowed educational discussions on race and racism claimed they witnessed students of color more engaged in class and white students who expressed more empathy for their students of color peers. Increasing heart in the classroom aligns with research that indicates empathy and compassion are necessary components of the culturally responsive classroom (Pinderhughes, 1984; Toldson, 2018).

There were other culturally responsive practices evidenced in the responses of the teacher participants. Five out of the six teacher participants expressed the importance of using empathy for students of color or feeling responsible for modeling empathy for students of color to teach white students to be more empathetic towards people of color. Another effective culturally
responsive practice that was suggested as necessary to all teacher participants but lacking clarity and actionable steps was that of developing asset-based approaches to building relationships with families of color. All teacher participants expressed that there was a need for schools and families of color to have strong, positive relationships and work together for the benefit of the student. Some indicated they tried to create positive connections with families of color. Still, most were uncertain how to accomplish the task and stated that they had experienced mixed results and responses in their attempts. Only one teacher participant felt she had strong relationships with her students' families of color. The literature connects being a culturally responsive teacher with that understanding and advocating for families of color to meet the unique needs of students of color (Khalifa et al., 2016), so the work of building positive relationships with families of color becomes the responsibility of the teacher who wants to be effective with students of color.

Evidence of the developing awareness of racism was another indicator that the teacher participants in this study were engaged in antiracist teaching as the act of challenging institutionalized racism. For white teachers to become self-aware and create an awareness of racism, both implicit and explicit, are relevant practices to antiracist teaching (Love, 2019; Matias & Liou, 2015). Intent and awareness without action are hollow (Kendi, 2019) but necessary before activism occurs. In teacher participant responses, evidence could be found of the desire to be self-aware and create awareness of racism. All six teacher participants said that as they were made aware of whiteness, implicit biases, and racism from varying sources, mostly from recent socio-political events and like-minded colleagues, they became more aware of the racism they once overlooked. Regardless, only four of the six teacher participants were able to give examples of times they experienced an awareness of acts of racism at school. None of the
teachers gave examples of self-awareness in engaging or perpetuating racialized biases or beliefs. However, one teacher did describe what he believed to be an affirmative action hire in his school that revealed some unpacked views on whiteness. The literature confirms the tenets of whiteness and implicit biases will continue to be evident and perpetuated in the classroom if white teachers are not encouraged and given the opportunity and training for self-investigation, reflection, and dialogue to become aware of implicit biases and feelings about race (Allen, 2004; Delpit, 2006; Matias & Grosland, 2016; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Matias & Newlove, 2017).

Additionally, the awareness of white rural teachers that the majority white schools need antiracist education for teachers and students, possibly more than their urban counterparts, indicates a challenge to institutionalized racism. One of the major themes in the findings showed awareness that rural, majority white schools need antiracist education for teachers and students because they were majority white. Teacher participants listed negative home influences, lack of positive interactions and exposure to people of color, lack of awareness and empathy, holding strong beliefs in negative stereotypes of people of color, and using racial slurs as unique reasons that majority-white, rural schools may need antiracist education for students more urgently than an urban school with more diversity if teachers are to interrupt the perpetuation of racism in schools. The literature aligns with the teacher participants' beliefs by suggesting that antiracist education for teachers and students is the means to develop antiracist teachers further and interrupt the whiteness structures in rural schools with majority-white students (Delpit, 2006; Love, 2019; Kendi, 2019). According to the literature, rural schools have been noted to have larger populations of white students with clusters of students of color (Showalter & et al., 2019) and a greater need for antiracist training (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020) creating unique barriers to challenging institutionalized racism and, thus, a higher need for antiracist education.
Given that teachers have a responsibility to provide antiracist teaching (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994) and white students must be taught to be antiracist (Love, 2019, Kendi, 2019), the literature supports the claim made by the teacher participants that their majority-white schools have a greater need for antiracist education for teachers as well.

Finally, practicing activism was evident in the study's findings as another way the teacher participants engaged in antiracist teaching. Again, the teacher participants may have indicated a belief in activism being a part of antiracist teaching. Still, teacher participant responses revealed that the teachers were in varying developmental stages of how to react to racism when racism was observed and what it meant to act against racism. Five out of six teacher participants were able to describe examples of activism in which they engaged. They ranged from small acts of going against the norm by intentionally choosing students of color to represent the school in media promotions to more critical acts of supporting students of color at school when they had been victims of racism and to controversial actions of challenging one's peers and school leaders to rectify instances of perceived wrongs concerning students of color. The literature supports that activism is the goal of antiracist teaching; awareness alone is not enough (Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Love, 2019; Matias & Liou, 2015). Two teacher participants indicated that they experienced some resistance from their peers or administrator when advocating for students of color in areas of perceived racism. One teacher stated that he did act against racism when witnessed by reporting it to the school leaders, who, according to the teacher participant, did not like it. The literature indicates that teachers who practice antiracist teaching should expect pushback (Dubois, 1903; Casey, 2020).

Research Question 2
What barriers do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee perceive to exist when engaging in antiracist teaching?

The findings proved that the white rural teachers in this study faced obstacles to engaging in antiracist teaching. Two significant themes evident in the study are related to research question 2. Teachers indicated that the major obstacles were the lack of pre-service preparation or in-service professional development in working with students of color and understanding the structures of whiteness or racism in education, and a lack of space and leadership to unpack feelings and reflect on race.

The lack of pre-service preparation or in-service professional development in working with students of color and understanding the structures of whiteness or racism in education was a common complaint among the six teacher participants. None of the six teacher participants recalled receiving any instruction relating to working with students of color or understanding the structures of whiteness in their pre-service training. This assertion became evident in their varying, often inadequate responses to questions concerning the forms of whiteness, especially white privilege, and the role of white identity in the classroom. For example, half of the teacher participants did not fully understand the concept of white privilege, which is the structure of whiteness that allows a white person to benefit but not have to think about race (Aouragh, 2019), and common when white people have not been educated on the structures of whiteness (Hartmann, Gerteis, & Croll, 2009). The literature corroborates that some pre-service training programs have included multicultural education, which does not delve into unpacking whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 1995) but has not traditionally included instruction on how to understand whiteness, white identity, or racism (Delpit, 2006; Jupp et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Love, 2019; Matias, 2013a; Matias & Mackey, 2015; Shaw & Coles, 2020; Sleeter, 1992).
Therefore, the majority-white teaching force has been sent to classrooms and expected to provide an equitable education for all students without proper education on how race, especially their own, impacts their teaching decisions and working with students of color (Ladson-Billing, 2014; Jupp et al., 2016; Sleeter 1992). White identity is a construct, like all racial constructs (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Owen, 2007), and guidance is often needed for teachers to reflect on white identity is an integral step to becoming an antiracist teacher (Hartmann et al., 2009; Jupp et al., 2016; Lensmire, 2010 & 2017; Sleeter, 1992 & 1993). Emergent themes in the literature from 2004 and forward suggest that if teachers receive proper education and training on understanding the complexity of white identity in teaching and receive curriculum intervention, a teachers' understanding of white identity in the classroom can be changed (Jupp et al., 2016; Jupp & Lensmire, 2016; Lensmire, 2010). Additionally, it is noted that although they varied in what type of training they desired, five of the six teacher participants indicated a desire for professional development to be provided by their respective rural schools to overcome the lack of education barrier to develop into antiracist teachers fully.

The second overarching theme related to research question 2 discusses the barrier teachers face in becoming antiracist teachers; there was a lack of space and leadership for white teachers to unpack feelings and reflect upon race. The responses of teacher participants revealed that all participants had the desire to understand race, including white identity, and how it impacted their roles as teachers. All teacher participants shared that they felt inhibited with some restrictions on being able to discuss race in professional spaces with their colleagues, and all voiced concerns over the increasingly hostile political environment in Tennessee that would impact teacher decisions. Two teacher participants avoided having in-class discussions on race and racism. Five out of six participants did not feel their schools were meeting the expectations
of the mission statements for all students, especially students of color, which they attributed to school leadership. Many of the teacher participants noted that they believed school leadership should be addressing their concerns. The literature supports the teacher participants' concerns by suggesting teachers need time and space to come to terms with their beliefs on race, as well as understand the role it plays in how white teachers interact with students of color (Delpit 2006; Love, 2019; Matias et al., 2017; Okonofua et al., 2016; Schwartz, 2019; Solomon et al., 2005; Warren, 2001). School leaders do have a role in providing leadership and support in culturally responsive activities (Khalifa, 2016), though this topic was not part of the scope of my research.

The lack of pre-service education, professional development, space, and leadership to guide white teachers in unpacking whiteness and understanding white identity explains how a group of teacher participants who have the desire to be antiracist teachers are engaging in some antiracist practices, but still display varying degrees of understanding whiteness and the perpetuation of racism. Given the variables of age, years of experience, highest degrees attained, the number of places worked, and the personal style of each teacher participants, a different level of understanding and ambivalence of what it truly takes to be an antiracist teacher existed.

Research Question 3

How do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee understand their own biases and beliefs regarding race and schooling?

The findings suggested several sub-themes were related to research question 3 regarding how white rural teachers understand their own biases and beliefs regarding race and schooling. The data indicates that many teacher participants were in the early stages of self-interrogation and reflection but were largely unaware of how their white identity impacted their work with students of color. While all teacher participants expressed the desire to be an antiracist teacher,
more work was needed in understanding the role of white identity and elements of whiteness before teacher participants could fully realize their goal. The data suggested that all teacher participants had a firm grasp of stereotyping and how not to perpetuate the use with students of color. However, only half of the teachers felt their white identity was important in their role as teachers working with white students. Even those teacher participants who accepted that their white identity did play a role in their teaching were still working out exactly what this meant. Of the teacher participants who believed white identity impacted them as a teacher, one expressed feeling guilt causing over-compensation in the classroom, and the other two were not able to say how it affected them. The other three teacher participants did not believe their white identity played a role in the classroom or working with students of color. This finding is consistent with research studies that have found that white people are blind to their white identity and how it impacts their views of other races or decision-making (Pinderhughes, 1984; Tranby & Hartmann, 2008). Consistent with second-wave white teacher studies, some teacher participants exhibited race-visible beliefs, meaning the teacher participants recognized different races of people as having unique experiences and perspectives (Jupp et al., 2016; Lensmire, 2017), but white people who are in the early stages of understanding their white identity may recall feelings of guilt, anxiety, shame, or fear (Lensmire, McManimon, Tierney, Lee-Nichols, Casey, Lensmire, & Davis, 2013).

Additionally, this study revealed that there were elements of colorblindness ideology, white savior complex, and white privilege in at least half of the teacher participant responses, indicating a disconnect between the teacher participants' good intentions and desire to be antiracist teachers and their understanding of their own biases and beliefs. In this study, most claimed to feel comfortable discussing race in the classroom, and some avoided it. Evidence of
colorblindness in the school is evident when teachers are not comfortable discussing race (Matias & Liou, 2015). Research suggests that the colorblindness ideology, which believes that seeing no color or race is antiracist (Zou & Dickter, 2013), perpetuates whiteness and is an implicit form of racism (Milner, 2012). There was evidence of the white savior complex in one teacher participant; the white savior complex is when white people seek to save people of color as a means of feeling superior and self-righteous (Aronson, 2017). Half of the participants did not recognize white privilege, as mentioned in an earlier discussion. This finding is consistent with research studies that have found that white people know that white privilege exists but struggle to understand the meaning of white privilege and how it relates to them (Hartmann, Gerteis, & Croll, 2009).

While these observations may fall under aspects of critical whiteness studies, I believe they can also be associated with second-wave white teacher identity studies by identifying the asset-based findings and areas of need for further development in teacher participants. Since the teacher participants expressed a desire to be antiracist teachers, recommendations for other actions can be made. A great deal of research has been accumulated and highlighted within this study in the following areas of need for the teacher participants: understanding white identity and privilege (Gillborn, 2005; Jupp et al., 2016; Lensmire, 2017; Matias, 2016), self-interrogation of implicit racial biases (Castagno, 2008; Project Implicit®, 202; Matias et al., 2016; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Miller, 2019), self-reflection practices (Matias & Grosland, 2016), racial-noticing or race-visible practicing (Jupp et al., 2016; Lensmire, 2017; Shaw & Coles, 2020) and more on developing the culturally competent antiracist teacher (Delpit, 2006; Kendi, 2019, Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love, 2019).

Implications
Several implications can be drawn from this study. By applying a CRT lens and asset-based studies to inform practice, I believe these implications apply to white teachers and school leaders of rural schools and institutions of higher learning—specifically, teacher training programs. First, the teacher participants in this study were volunteers, and although a selection criterion was set, only those teachers who already had a desire and interest in antiracist education applied. One implication from this study is that there is a need to identify and support more white teachers who are willing and able to do antiracist work. There is growing evidence of new teachers entering the classroom who are not afraid to teach and discuss racism (Pearce, 2012), and they need support. Second-wave white teacher studies suggest that there are many white teachers who are doing the work of understanding white identity and looking for ways to overcome racism in the classroom (Jupp et al., 2016; Lensmire et al., 2013). According to this study, there are implications for white, rural teachers to continue to do the work of developing into antiracist teachers with or without the help needed. According to Love (2019), it is the work of white teachers, as the majority race of teachers, to be responsible for not perpetuating whiteness, white supremacy, white privilege, or negative stereotypes of students of color. Studies based on the tenets of CRT and CWS uncover the elements of whiteness that need to be interrogated for white teachers to become antiracist teachers (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The research findings indicate a progressive nature in becoming an antiracist teacher in keeping with Simmons’ (2019) and Kendi’s (2019) studies on becoming an antiracist. This study suggests that some white teachers may be willing to become antiracist teachers and may attempt to engage in antiracist teaching practices without really knowing or understanding the structures of whiteness or without knowing how to unpack their white identity. This can lead to white ambivalence (Diangeo, 2018; Matias et al., 2014). This implies that teachers should
plan to do the work of becoming antiracist teachers by learning the actions, practices, and influences of white identity in the classroom as part of that developmental process to becoming antiracist teachers and to overcome feelings of white ambivalence (Diangelo, 2018; Kendi, 2019; Love, 2019; Matias, 2016).

Secondly, this study has implications for teacher pre-service training programs. There is much research that is critical of white teachers and their effectiveness with students of color (Ladson-Billings, Hagan & McGlynn, 2004; Marx, 2004; Matias, 2013 a, b, c; Matias, 2015; Matias & Liou, 2015; Matias & Grosland, 2016; Matias et al., 2017). However, this research study illustrates that despite their lack of understanding of white privilege and white identity, the teacher participants attempted to engage with certain parts of antiracist teaching. This is consistent with literature that indicates that most white people struggle with understanding white identity, white privilege, and the perpetuation of racism creating white ambivalence without some type of intervention or education (Dottolo & Stewart, 2013; Hartmann et al., 2009; Matias et al., 2014). The findings from this study could be applicable to white teachers who receive proper education, training, and support to create better outcomes for students of color. For example, the omission of whiteness and other race-sensitive topics from pre-service teacher preparation should be corrected and replaced with guided introspection and training in how whiteness impacts pedagogy today (Matias & Grosland, 2016).

Third, this study provides implications for school leaders of rural schools. Due to the omission of race topics or antiracist education in many pre-service teacher training programs—as indicated by the teacher participants in this study—teacher participants stated a desire for more support from school leaders by way of providing professional development on how to work with students of color, giving support in unpacking feelings and beliefs about race in professional
spaces, and inclusion of students of color in the schools' mission statements. The implication is that school leaders will need proper education and guidance to create and lead antiracist schools. Since rural schools provide a unique set of obstacles and cultures that urban school studies do not address (Showalter et al., 2019), the implication of this study is that rural schools may have a greater need and urgency for such professional development and support of teacher in providing antiracist teaching. The findings in this study and other second-wave white identity studies should be used to inform teacher professional development programs, specifically those of white teachers who intend or already work in rural schools.

**Directions for Further Research**

Based on new insights gained in this study, recommendations for further research are indicated in becoming an antiracist teacher, the role of rural school leaders in producing antiracist schools, and the role of teachers of color in rural areas and antiracist education. More research is needed to understand further how white teachers develop knowledge of their white identity and how they process that to better understand the stages of becoming an antiracist teacher. Simmons (2019) has developed an action plan for antiracist teachers to follow as a guide and Kendi (2019) describes what it means to be an antiracist; overall, the research was lacking but emerging in describing the process of becoming an antiracist teacher. The white teacher participants in this study attempted to engage in antiracist teaching practices but needed support in understanding white identity and its role in teaching students of color. This study adds to the work of second-wave white teacher identity studies. Still, more white teacher identity studies are needed, like the work of Jupp and Lensmire (2016), whose work describes the ways in which white teachers are learning about race and how to better educate students of color, or Casey
(2020), who studies the development of white identity and racism. Studies are needed to provide more insight into the developmental process of understanding white teacher identity.

This study revealed that white teacher participants indicated a lack of professional development, space, and leadership in rural schools. Some suggested support should come from school leaders. Specifically, they expressed a desire for school leaders to play a role in creating antiracist school environments that supported all students, inclusive of students of color. This finding was outside the scope of this study. Therefore, an exploration of the role of school leaders in encouraging, developing, and supporting rural white teachers to become antiracist teachers should be conducted. Future works could build upon the works of Delpit, (2019), Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995), Love (2019) who have published widely on how teaching and leading as antiracist professionals. The study could provide insight into how school leaders can best provide professional development, space, leadership, and inclusive school culture for students of color.

Finally, a trend in the data that was also outside the scope of this study was the recurring belief of white teachers that having more teachers of color was an answer to questions about dealing with racism in rural schools. Interwoven throughout the responses to interview questions were subtle mentions of the need for teachers of color at rural schools to intervene in racism, provide antiracist professional development, and provide positive role models to students of color and white students. Just as Vilson (2016) wrote about the need for teachers of color and LaVAlley (2018) wrote about the needs of rural school, the role of teachers of color in antiracist education in rural schools requires further research on how those topics intersect.

**Summary of Findings**
This case study revealed the insights, beliefs, and understandings of six white teacher participants working in rural secondary schools in West Tennessee regarding racialized biases and assumptions, whiteness and white identity, and antiracist teaching practices. These findings were revealed through the emergence of themes. Four overarching themes were consistent in teacher participant responses. Professional interests, whiteness, and antiracist teaching elements were analyzed in the responses to create themes. Using an interview protocol, field notes, and researcher journal, the following themes became evident in this study: (1) the lack of pre-service preparation or in-service professional development in understanding the structures of whiteness or racism in education, (2) the lack of space and leadership for white teachers to unpack feelings and discuss race, (3) the use of antiracist teaching practices, (4) the awareness that rural, majority white, schools need antiracist education for teachers and students.

The themes and elements were related to the following research questions: In what ways are white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee challenging institutionalized racism? What barriers do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee perceive to exist when engaging in antiracist teaching? How do white teachers in rural high schools in West Tennessee understand their own biases and beliefs regarding race and schooling?

The findings in this study are built upon the fundamental and foundational knowledge of Critical Race Theory, critical whiteness studies, second-wave white teacher identity studies, implicit racial bias trainings, culturally responsive pedagogy, rural education, and antiracist teaching. The findings revealed that the white rural teacher participants in this study have the desire but are working with varying levels of knowledge on how race impacts teaching to challenge institutionalized racism. They are attempting to engage in antiracist practices, such as choosing a multicultural curriculum, showing empathy, building positive relationships with
students of color, reflecting on and becoming aware of race and racism, and engaging in activism. The teacher participants also indicated that they faced barriers in rural schools to becoming antiracist teachers. Those barriers are a lack of pre-service education, ongoing professional development, school leadership, and space concerning race and racism. Additionally, teacher participants exhibited varying levels of growth in understanding their biases and beliefs regarding race though attempting to engage in antiracist teaching practices. Teacher participants struggled with an un-interrogated sense of white identity, white ambivalence, and some elements of structural whiteness, as noted in the findings.

**Conclusion**

This study progressed from using a Critical Race Theory lens with a critical whiteness perspective resulting in the study being situated as a second-wave white teacher identity study. By identifying the tenets of whiteness and the ways in which race impacts teacher decisions in the classroom, the study went further to find out how the teacher participants were using that knowledge, or lack of knowledge, to work towards antiracist teaching. Through a case study approach, white teacher participants from rural West Tennessee high schools provided insight into their beliefs, teaching practices, and experiences concerning race and racism. The findings add to growing literature on how white rural teachers make sense of race, racism, white identity, and antiracist teaching. Teachers play an essential role in creating a more just and equitable society. Through public education, the United States can uphold the democratic principles of equality and justice that require interrupting the perpetuation of racism, especially as they are presented in the classroom. The predominantly white teaching force must shoulder the responsibility of creating antiracist classrooms. To do so, white teachers must unpack their white identities and embrace the beliefs and practices of actively engaging in antiracist teaching.
Appendix A: Recruitment Email

[Date]

Dear Participant,

I hope this email finds you well. I am conducting a study to explore the ways in which white, rural teachers are overcoming implicit bias and racism to better support their students of color. In exploring teacher perceptions and experiences, we seek to know how this impacts their effectiveness with students of color in the classroom. This research will inform culturally relevant pedagogy and antiracist teaching strategies. I would like to have your participation in a semi-structured interview estimated to last about 1 hour. You have been selected for this study, based on your meeting the following criteria:

a) identify as white,

b) work in a public school in the rural mid-south region,

c) have at least one year of teaching experience in secondary education (grades 7-12).

Attached, you will find a letter of informed consent.

Please review and let me know if you are interested in being part of the study. If so, please also indicate possible dates for an interview, which can be conducted via telephone or video conference. To participate in the study, please reply to this email. You may also need to print, sign, scan, and email the informed consent letter back to jalitt@memphis.edu.

Sincerely,

Jean A. Little, MSed
Student, EdD Leadership & Policy Studies
The University of Memphis
Ph. 7313320225
Appendix B: Letter of Consent

Consent for Research Participation

Title: Critical Whiteness Studies and Teacher Bias

Sponsor:

Researcher(s): Jean A. Little, University of Memphis

Researcher Contact Info: 731-332-0225
jalittle@memphis.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information for you to consider when deciding if you want to participate. More detailed information is provided below the box. Please ask the researcher any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you volunteer, you will be one of about 10 people to do so.

Key Information for You to Consider

- **Voluntary Consent.** You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
- **Purpose.** The purpose of this research is to discover the types of racialized implicit bias(es), if any, and the ways white, rural teachers working with students of color are overcoming bias and racism in the classroom.
- **Duration.** It is expected that your participation will last 60 minutes.
- **Procedures and Activities.** You will be asked to answer interview-style questions.
- **Risks.** Some of the foreseeable risks or discomforts of your participation include none.
- **Benefits.** Some of the benefits that may be expected include satisfaction in participating in improving pre-service teacher education programs and professional development.
- **Alternatives.** As an alternative to participation, you could not participate, simply not participate.

Who is conducting this research?

Jean A. Little of The University of Memphis, Department of Education Leadership and Policy. Her faculty advisor is Dr. Ronald Eric Platt. No member of the research team has a significant financial interest, and/or a conflict of interest related to the research.
What happens if I agree to participate in this research?

- If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a one-to-one interview. It can be in person or over the phone, whichever you are most comfortable.
- The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed to a word document, but all identifying information will be removed.
- You can skip any question that makes them uncomfortable and you can stop at any time.
- Once the interview is complete, there will be no follow up. Your participation in the study will be complete.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

Information collected for this research will be used for research purposes only. Your name will not be used in any published reports, conference presentations, or part of this study. We may publish/present the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?

We promise to protect the privacy and security of your personal information as best we can although you need to know about some limit to this promise. Measures we will take include: removing identifying information and assigning pseudonyms in place, storing data in password-protected electronic files, saving emails as PDFs in a password-protected, electronic folder and deleting the originals from the computer, storing any paper materials in a locked cabinet. All materials will be destroyed after 5 years.

Individuals and organization that monitor this research may be permitted access to and inspect the research records. This monitoring may include access to your private information and emails. These individuals and organizations include:

- The Institutional Review Board
- Dr. Ronald Eric Platt

Mandatory Reporting Requirement: PLEASE READ

Research team members are required to report the following if a team member suspects child abuse or neglect, TN Law may require this suspicion be reported. In such a case, the research team may be obligated to breach confidentiality and may be required to
disclose personal information. Information about elder abuse or domestic violence or
the possibility of doing harm to others may also need to be reported to authorities.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?
It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for this study. It is also okay to decide
to end your participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are
otherwise entitled if you decide to not be involved. Your decision about participating will not
affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Memphis.

You do not give up your legal rights by signing this form.

Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?
You will not be compensated for taking part in this research

Who can answer my questions about this research?
Before you decide whether to volunteer for this study, please ask any questions that might come to
mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can
contact the investigator, Jean A. Little at 731-332-0225 or jalittle@memphis.edu or Dr. Ronald Eric Platt
at 901-678-4229 or replatt@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in
this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705
or email irb@memphis.edu. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.
STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this form. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this form. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation.

As described above, you will be audio-recorded during the interview process described above. The recordings will be used for data analysis only, but the data may be included in conferences, presentations or other educational purposes.

☐ Initial the space below if you consent to the use of [audio/video or photographs] as described.

☐ I agree to the use of [audio/video recording or photography]

Name of Adult Participant __________________ Signature of Adult Participant __________________ Date __________

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Name of Research Team Member __________________ Signature of Research Team Member __________________ Date __________
Appendix C: Interview Questions

Name:
Date
Time:
Location:
Pseudonym:

1. Tell me your teacher story. When did you figure out you wanted to be a teacher and how did you here?
   - Probe: What do you like most about teaching?

2. Tell me about your teacher training program. What kind of courses and experiences did you have there?
   - Probe: What did you learn particularly about working with students of color in your program?

3. Describe your ideal student.
   - Probe: What does he/she need both inside and outside the classroom to be successful at school or in your classroom?

4. Talk to me about how you see the relationship of the home and the school for the students with whom you work.
   - Probe: Is it different for your students of color? If so, how?
   - Probe: Do any stories or examples come to mind you would like to share?

5. Describe the racial makeup of your current or most recent classes?
   - Probe: Approximately, how many SOC do you have in your classes each year?

6. What do you see as the differences between your white students and students of color?
   - Probe: Has, if at all, has this changed over time?
   - Probe: Do you think teachers in your school have better relationships with white students or students of color? Why do you think that is?

7. Describe a classroom experience where race was the topic of discussion.
   - Probe: Have you found that students want to discuss race or racism in your class? Why or why or why not?
• Probe: How have you (or would you) handle the issue of race in a lesson, class discussion, or current event in school or society?

• Probe: Have you ever had to discipline a student for an act of racism? How did you handle it?

8. Describe a situation in which you discussed race or racism and you feel like it went well?

• Probe: What, if anything, makes you uncomfortable about discussing race or racism?

9. What, if any, training or professional development have you been provided in your current school environment on working with SOC?

• Probe: In an ideal world, what kind of training or professional development would you want to help you better work with SOC?

10. How do you think your racial identity impacts your work as a teacher?

• Probe: How do you think your racial identity impacts your work with students of color?

• Probe: What work have you done as a teacher to grow in these areas?

11. Tell me what you think about white privilege, and where you have seen white privilege in your life.

• Probe: How much do you think white privilege impacts our work in schools?

12. As I am sure you know, the curriculum used in most schools mostly consists of white authors, scientists, historians, etc. What are your thoughts on this?

• Probe: How do you think this impacts SOC?

• Probe: How do you think this impacts white students?

• Probe: Do you ever think about race when you plan your lessons? Why or why not? If so, how does it impact your decision making?

• Probe: If yes, what are some examples of units or lessons that you currently teach that feature POC?

13. Talk about the times, if any, you choose an author, subject, topic, or lesson because it pertained or related to the specific students of color in the classroom (either by their request or your choice)?
• Probe: What was the lesson response and engagement from the SOC?

• Probe: What was the lesson response and engagement from white students?

14. What role do you think the classroom teachers play in challenging racism in society?

• Probe: How do you think teachers can help their students know how to challenge racism?

• Probe: What should teachers do to be anti-racist?

15. Ask the teacher to read the school’s mission statement and diversity, inclusion, or equity statement and explain what it means to him/her.

• Probe: How is your school living up to or accomplishing the goals in those statements?

• Probe: How could your school do better, in your opinion?

• Probe: How are you living up to or accomplishing the goals in those statements within your classroom?

16. Is it important for white students to be included in class discussions on race or be exposed to lesson on antiracism? Why or why not?

• Would that teaching or lessons look different in an all-white class of students as opposed to a diverse class of students?

• Probe: How should those lessons or class discussions be different, if at all, for white students?

17. Is there anything else you think I should have asked but didn’t or would just like to add on the subject?

Demographic Information on participant:
Current age:
Age began teaching:
Years of teaching:
Grades taught:
Subjects taught:
# of school districts:
Rural or urban schools:
College or university attended:
Highest degree attained:
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