

**White Teachers' Talk about Race Talk:  
Discursive Strategies of Whiteness and Color-blind Racism**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2021

This study investigated white teachers' discourses of whiteness and color-blind racism within the context of their beliefs about the role of race in education and their beliefs about race talk. Participants in this study responded with "no" or "not sure" to at least one of the three Teachers Race Talk Survey (TRTS) items about whether race plays a role in the educational experiences of their students, and if race or racism should be discussed in their classrooms, and then provided follow-up responses to one or more of these questions. In this study, I conducted two stages of analysis: first, an inductive approach through a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) followed by a deductive Codebook Thematic Analysis (Codebook TA). The research questions, methods, and analyses were framed by Bonilla-Silva's strategies of color-blind racism and Nakayama and Krizek's rhetorics of whiteness. Through the RTA process, I organized the teachers' discourses around race, racism, and race talk around three general themes: (a) race does not matter, especially to those without race (white people); (b) race talk is usually "bad" (term used to represent a collection of negative attributions); and (c) racism is external and visible. Each of these themes included aspects of both color-blind racism and whiteness — in alignment with and extending well beyond the conceptualizations of the two guiding theoretical frameworks. In the Codebook TA stage, I created coding schemes based on five types of color-blind strategies detailed by Bonilla-Silva and six discursive strategies of whiteness as outlined by Nakayama and Krizek. The primary theme that emerged from both of these coding schemes revolved around dismissing race as well as avoiding racial language. These results provide an opening for learning

more about how we can inform teacher preparation programs and professional development, both around the historical and ongoing mechanisms of racism in schooling and then learning to discuss race and racism.

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## Preface

This work has sparked one of the most fundamental shifts in who I am, provoking a great deal of both learning and unlearning that has occupied not only my head but my heart, soul, body, and mind. Much of this journey has been guided by my mentor and advisor, Dr. Elon Dancy. From the beginning of our time together, he has taught me largely by example, modeling not only critical ways of thinking but also more relational, authentic ways of being that are rooted in grace and generosity. I feel so grateful and honored to count him as a mentor, colleague, and friend.

I couldn't have asked for more supportive co-advisors for this work and for me as a whole person. Dr. Lori Delale-O'Connor and Dr. Erika Gold Kestenberg both have deep personal and professional commitments to dismantling racism, particularly in schools. I feel very fortunate to have learned from observing Dr. Gold Kestenberg's interventions with teachers, witnessing theory being applied. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Delale-O'Connor for her time and love and space through writing retreats where she offers students feedback, advising, strategies, and reminders to breathe.

Fellow CUE grad students who worked extensively with the Teachers Race Talk Survey — DaVonna Graham, Derric Heck, and Jawanza Rand — offered their time, expertise, and advice around their research. From the moment I joined the Center, they evans-el shared their time, energy, advice: they challenged my thinking and the ways I was showing up, and inspired me to be more conscious and careful. I cherish their friendships, and for the opportunities to learn from and with them.

The faculty in-but-not-of the Center for Urban Education have encouraged and modeled being in conversation with a wide variety of sources of knowledge. In particular, Dr. Leigh Patel's

entreaties to read expansively and to read with love led me to find inspiration in poetry, essays, music, literature, and scholarship far afield from education, as well as to transgress disciplinary boundaries towards more liberatory ways of understanding and being.

Finding writing spaces and communities during a pandemic is particularly challenging. Marijke Hecht cared for me through both writing and parenting crises, and connected me with two beautiful weekly writing groups. Sharing time in community with friends Shallegra Moye, Cassandra Brentley, and Sueño Viveros on my porch or in a zoom room helped me focus and feel less isolated. Brainstorming sessions with Jamaal Gosa have kept me focused on the reasons we are doing this work; I am energized by his perseverance and creativity. Cohort-mate and friend Ashley Grice kept me from giving up, and has been a constant source of encouragement since we began the program together. And I am so grateful to Tereneh Idía, who challenges my ways of thinking and being, and celebrates my milestones with flowers.

I received support from my global Twitter community as well. Kelly Allen generously shared her wealth of research on Critical Discourse Analysis and nearby methodologies, which helped me figure out which approaches best fit my data and research goals. Once I landed in the vicinity of Thematic Analysis, Erin Burrell stepped up and introduced me to Dr. Virginia Braun and Dr. Victoria Clarke, the scholars who conceived and updated the method/ology of Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Both Drs. Clarke and Braun were extremely helpful in offering pre-prints as their work, and freely sharing their learning processes as they continue to develop ways we make sense of data.

I would not have defended this month or perhaps even this semester had it not been for the immense support of Dr. Rochelle Woods. She picked me up in a time I was mired in frustration and helplessness, and offered me some structure and direction, grounding and encouragement. I

will pay it forward, and share these strategies and loving energy with students who are navigating systems that do not fully support them.

My husband Thomas has encouraged me and my work in all its manifestations for over 20 years. My dear friends Jen Primack, Amy Lewis, and Noe Woods have taken care of my family and me through so many bumps and turns for over our many years. Though I started this work after my brother Scott was killed, I have sensed his abiding love, courage, and sense of humor in spirit as well as through our sister Kelley and her husband Marvin, his son Finn and widow Suzy, and our parents Jim and Dayonne.

I dedicate this work to my children Zora and Ezra Harris. They are constant sources of motivation, inspiration, and abundant love. They cheer me on, keep me grounded, make me laugh, and challenge and critique me in the most important ways.

## **1.0 CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW**

“There is no shoving the four hundred years' racial oppression and violence toothpaste back in the toothpaste tube. In fact, it's our desire to ignore race that increases the necessity of its discussion.”

- Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk About Race*

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

White people resist and refuse to engage in discussions about race and racism — making claims of “not seeing color” — and it is this resistance that makes these conversations so necessary. Moreover, avoiding discussions of race “causes us to ignore race in areas where lack of racial consideration can have real detrimental effects on the lives of others” (Oluo, 2019, pp. 43-44). Some of the most affected “lives of others” are those of Black and Brown children in U. S. K-12 classrooms, where the overwhelming majority of teachers are white. Our schooling system has for centuries served as a pillar of white supremacy by “civilizing” children from so-called boarding schools that stripped away the cultures of Indigenous children who were ripped from their families (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006) to punishing students — especially Students of Color — who do not conform to white cultural norms (Emdin, 2016), and by whitewashing curricula that further entrench students “in the ideology of white supremacy, without being taught the harm that white supremacy has done (Patel, 2021, p. 4). Our silence limits students’ educational opportunities not only by positioning school as “an apparatus of incarceration” (Kirkland, 2016) but also by pushing

Black and Brown students out of the classroom (Morris, 2015). Silence is one of many linguistic maneuvers used to avoid and resist dialogues about race or racism, and serves as “a discourse that sustains whiteness as a system of supremacy” (Blaisdell, 2019, p. 1).

Although nothing about discussing race and racism is *inherently* discomfiting, discomfort is a dominant reason for avoiding and refusing to engage in these conversations. Patel says that labeling conversations about racism as “difficult” is a “vehicle for coddling and thereby protecting white supremacy” (2021). That said, discomfort around race talk is a very real experience, which has been created and cultivated to perpetuate white supremacy (Saad, 2020). It is our reaction to discomfort that makes a difference. When we respond to this discomfort with avoidance, we are upholding the white supremacy status quo: “it is an expression of white privilege itself to choose *not* to look at it” (Saad, 2020, p. 38). We engage in “white talk” to derail and avoid these conversations (McIntyre, 1997b). In contrast, reacting to discomfort by intentionally acclimating ourselves to the feelings of fear and shame that are necessarily bound up with it and then working to move through those feelings allows us to engage in deep, meaningful conversations about race and racism. It is a critical process of unlearning that must be undertaken:

We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us. (Lorde, 1984, p. 44)

On the whole, teacher educators do not discuss race and racism with their pre-service students during their coursework or in preparation for their future classrooms, thereby reinforcing the white cultural norm to avoid race talk in learning spaces (viz., Leonardo; Matias; McIntyre; Picower; Sealey-Ruiz; Sleeter). Comfort and discomfort are important factors, and focusing on

avoiding white participants' discomfort can prevent the movement towards any sort of meaningful anti-racist work while upholding the status quo (Blaisdell 2019; Haviland, 2008). This absence of race talk in teacher preparation programs reinforces dominant racial narratives, which "get transmitted from white teachers to the students of color or even the white students, so much so when they grow up, they are getting a miseducation of what race truly is" (Gorski, 2020, 17:03-17:33). This malpractice is unsurprising, as these programs are primarily led and designed by and for white people. It is this practice, and the underlying beliefs, that I hope to disrupt with this work.

Several theoretical frameworks offer ways to examine and understand this resistance to discussing race and racism. The framework I will be relying on most heavily in this work is Bonilla-Silva's conceptualization of color-blind racist ideology (2018). An ideology, according to Althusser, "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" and "has a material existence" (1971, p. 109). A definition of "ideology" grounded in the context of schooling is "a framework of thought constructed and held by members of a society to justify or rationalize an existing social order" (Bartolomé, 2008, p. xiii). A color-blind ideology is a way of thinking that reifies systems of racial oppression by perpetuating and strengthening the white supremacist status quo. Gramsci declared that many institutions including (if not especially) schools, have successfully perpetuated hegemonic dominant ideologies that legitimize the existing social order (Bartolomé, 2008, p. xiii). Color-blind ideology is neither neutral nor innocuous; it is whiteness enacting racism, which manifests in the classroom in a variety of ways from curriculum to pedagogy to discipline.

Ideology underlies and influences practice, and it is imperative to understand and address these beliefs in order to fully intervene upon white teachers' classroom practices. Understanding

teachers' beliefs through what they say about their roles is helpful for approximating their teaching practices (Milner, 2017). Moreover, Milner argues that before attempting "to equip teachers with tools for talking about race in the classroom" (2017, p. 66), we must first understand their beliefs about engaging their students in conversations about race and racism. Hegemonic ideologies influence "teachers thinking, then teachers often 'normalize' these racist and classist ideological orientations and treat them as 'natural'" (Bartolomé, 2008, p. xiii). That racist ideologies have been normalized into ordinariness is a key feature of Critical Race Theory, and "means that racism is difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011, p. 8). And while beliefs and attitudes are often separated from teacher practices in the literature, it is the former that I will have the most access to via the data in this study. To be clear, I will be looking for *patterns* of beliefs across white teachers' discourses, not at the individual level. These patterns of beliefs may provide some additional clarity around how whiteness is enacted, and thus how to most effectively parry color-blind racist discourses.

Though the scope of this particular study is intentionally narrow, it is one of many steps in what I hope will provide a way to elicit and understand teachers' beliefs about racism and race talk. Understanding how white teachers "cite these discourses in reductive and disabling forms allows researchers and social activists to better understand how white folks go about the everyday protection of their own social position" (Hyttén & Warren, 2003, p. 88). As Black feminist scholar Gloria Joseph said: "Education has always been central in anti-racist struggle, for education – or the denial of it – has been integral to the maintenance of a racist society" (1988, p. 175). Thus, gathering this information as a first step in developing and building upon existing anti-racist/anti-bias teacher interventions will allow me and others to more effectively develop and tailor training for teachers. This alignment will support efforts we are making at the University of Pittsburgh and



beyond toward diversifying the teacher population as well as those designed to truly transform teacher preparation programs. Ultimately, I hope to contribute to arguments for transforming teacher preparation programs with not only evidence for the urgency of this change but also tangible and substantial suggestions for areas that must be emphasized towards a change in U.S. education policy.

## **1.2 Positionality Statement**

I am a white, middle-age, cis-gender woman born on land that was originally in the care of the Chickasaw Nation, now known as Mississippi. I grew up in a deeply racially segregated society, where race (not racism) was very explicitly discussed. My formal education began in a private K-6 academy founded in 1968 to circumvent school desegregation orders, followed by public junior high and high schools that were essentially two schools in one — with tracking maintaining racial segregation. In 13 years of school in Harrison County, Mississippi — whose Black population when I lived there ranged between 36.8% (1970) and 35.6% (1990) of the overall state population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018) — *all but two* of my teachers were white. And unsurprisingly, I can neither recall nor fathom that racism was ever discussed outside of the rare social studies or history lesson.

In this study, I am posing questions about white teachers and their beliefs about whether race plays a role in education, and about discussing race and racism in the classroom. One of the reasons I chose to focus on white teachers in the U.S. is because that is a population I know very well: I am a white woman; most of my teachers in my combined 29 years of formal schooling have been white women; and I have taught in U.S. schools (students in grades 5 to 16). Though my

foray into direct, formal teaching comprises a relatively small part of my experience, I have spent most of my adult life supporting, participating in, and studying formalized schooling as well as informal and out-of-school spaces. As Hurtado and Stewart (1997) exhort for scholars of whiteness, in this section as well as throughout this work I will “articulate the implications of [my] own relation to whiteness” (p. 327).

Many have come before me with deeper, richer knowledge grounded in personal lived experiences, study in community, as well as formalized schooling. My goal in this project is to be in conversation with the scholars today and before me, and to build upon a critical genealogy of knowledge systems they have built, particularly with Black feminists and womanists. Subject to both racism and sexism at the convergence of the “inferior half of a series of...binaries” (Collins, 2009, p. 71), Black feminists are most keenly positioned to teach us about the ways in which education (or rather, schooling) has been used to oppress and how it can be used to uplift. It will be critical in this work to pursue a citational pattern that demonstrates principles of Black Feminist knowledge — centering lived experiences and the use of dialogue to assess and develop knowledge, built upon ethics of caring and personal accountability (Collins, 2009) and aiming “to develop a mindset of intellectual inclusion and expansion” (Omolade, 1993, p. 31) — to demonstrate and to underscore whose voices and perspectives are most fundamental to understanding. Through my words as well as my citations, I hope the readers of this proposal will have a very clear sense of the arguments I am making, who is essential, and whose work is essential to the arguments that I am making (Dancy, class conversation, February 26, 2021).

For this work, I will be listening for the dominant discourses<sup>1</sup> of whiteness and color-blind racism that white teachers report in their explanations for why they believe that race does not play a role in their students' education, and that they should not discuss race and racism with their students. Do they believe that race does not enter the classroom, that students leave that part of themselves at home? And if white teachers are not discussing race and racism with their students, how do they explain or attempt to justify this decision?

As critical race theorist Solórzano counsels his students: “research for research’s sake is not worth doing if we cannot find tools we can use to make a better society” (Matias, 2020, p. 3). I hope that this research contributes to the tools for transforming education — from what and how teacher preparation programs operate to intervening on teachers already in the classroom. I want this work to move pre- and in-service white teachers (along with their teacher preparation programs) closer to providing the kinds of educational experiences and environments in which all students not only survive but thrive. Unlearning color-blind beliefs and mindsets is necessary for adopting critical pedagogies and praxes, and for guiding teachers to be able to

think about, negotiate, and transform the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relation of the wider community and society... [in ways] that have the potential to transform oppressive institutions or social relations. (Breunig, 2005, p. 109)

I believe that by gaining a better understanding of white teachers' discourses and narratives around color-blind racism and whiteness, I can inform the design and practices for challenging those beliefs. In addition to its practical applications, the findings from this study will, I hope,

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<sup>1</sup> A Foucauldian concept: “capital D” Discourses are a larger stories or archetypes, ways ideas are discussed that become true by virtue of being told so often. These Dominant Discourses serve as delimiters or constraints on what sorts of possibilities individual actors have as they craft their “lower d” discourses (Gibbs, 2015; Sawin, 2019).

contribute to and grow the quilt of scholarship of Critical Whiteness Studies and other theoretical frameworks that are necessary for transforming education.

### **1.3 Purpose of Inquiry**

In this study, I sought to build upon the data that has been gathered to date through the Teachers Race Talk Survey by examining the ideologies of white teachers who claim to be uncertain about or do not believe that race plays a role in education, and that race and racism should be discussed in their classrooms. Through the theoretical framework of color-blind racism, I focused on two research questions:

1. What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about the role of race in education*?
2. What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about discussing race and racism in the classroom*?

These two questions map on to the three questions from the Teachers Race Talk Survey (TRTS; Milner et al., 2016) that I focused on in this study. Research question 1 and TRTS question 11 are both concerned with beliefs about race in the role of education. Research question 2 is aligned with TRTS questions regarding beliefs about discussing *race* (TRTS #13) and *racism* (TRTS #15) in the classroom. Certainly, answering these questions is not an end unto itself, but a beginning. One goal in asking these questions was to enter into conversation with scholars who have for decades studied and written about whiteness, racism, and the many ideologies and epistemologies that describe and explain white people's unwillingness to talk about race and racism, and why race talk is so important in our classrooms. Another goal is to ascertain and

develop more effective ways to reach and intervene with white teachers' tools of whiteness that are preventing them from acknowledging, understanding, learning, and talking about race and racism.

Doing the work of discussing race and racism with students is often left to Teachers of Color (an example of “cultural taxation”; Padilla, 1994) who are then also subjected to harmful statements from their students. These types of expectations are present throughout the educational systems; in higher education, Black scholars — particularly Black women — are endure “differential labor expectations” (Dancy et al., 2018, p. 183), with many more demands for their unpaid and unrecognized work, such as serving on “shadow committees.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Teachers of Color pay a higher price for discussing race and racism in schools than their white counterparts: “Being a Black educator and having ‘tough conversations’ about race means that a child can (and often will) devalue my humanity in my class and I still have to teach them” (Bond, 2021). White teachers’ beliefs that discussing race and racism with their students is beyond the scope of their work or is otherwise inappropriate along with the resultant avoidance of these conversations form a strong pillar for supporting the white supremacy status quo in U.S. educational systems.

## 1.4 Theoretical Frameworks

The two theoretical frameworks I will be using as lenses for evaluating and interpreting the data are **whiteness**, along with one of its many mechanisms, **color-blind racism**. To understand

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<sup>2</sup> “A network of people or an individual who reads, comments, and mentors your project while providing extensive emotional support to help you process and heal from the disparaging ways committees often treat Black PhD students. There are no CV lines for this but we do it a lot” (Douglass, 2021).

these frameworks, I will first address some fundamental concepts, beginning with *race* and *racism*. Both concepts “have been shaped by a centuries-long conflict between white domination and resistance by people of color” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 3). Their “definitions, meanings, and overall coherence of prevailing social categories are always subject to multiple interpretations” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 105).

Race is the product of an ongoing socio-historical process of classifying people into racial categories and identities (racialization). Though it is multidimensional (Leonardo, 2013), humans continue to categorize by creating boundaries, attributes, and meanings of racial categories; as a result, these classifications have been neither consistent nor stable, changing vastly over time and geography (Omi & Winant, 2015).

[our Western races] . . . are the probabilistically defined populations that result from the white supremacist determination to link appearance and ancestry to social location and life chances. We no longer actively and intentionally maintain this linkage in the way we used to, but the effects of earlier efforts continue to shape our life chances in ways that disproportionately disadvantage specific populations. (Taylor, 2013, pp. 89-90)

Racism, like race, is a multi-faceted term, the definition of which is ill defined. It is an ideology as well as a behavior; it occurs at every level from the interior of an individual to the institutional (policies and practices) to the systemic. When distilled to its most basic ethic, philosopher Paul Taylor sees racism as “an unethical disregard for people who belong to a particular race” (2013, p. 32). In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison portrays racism as having “a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before” (1993a, p. 63). Some scholars argue that power is a

requirement of racism, as we were taught in our first year of this EdD program (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017); that is, without the power to oppress, one is left with the remaining components (prejudice or bias), falling short of qualifying as racism. In contrast, Kendi (2019) argues that power is not a pre-requisite for racism, and that anyone regardless of race can be racist. Philosopher Paul Taylor (2013) offers a nuanced perspective that I have found helpful for reconciling these opposing perspectives. Though Taylor finds the general premise useful, they believe that this “general account of racism obscures other ethically questionable phenomena that seem pre-theoretically to count as instances of racism” (p. 35). To support this argument, Taylor continues:

Imagine a non-white person who decides to beat up every white person he sees, and who does so just because he doesn't like white people. Such a person would be a racist, it seems to me. I agree with the PPP [prejudice plus power] theorist that this racism doesn't amount to much in the grand scheme of things, especially if we're interested in combating the social ills that follow from centuries of white supremacist exclusionary practices. But why not just say that? Why not just say that this sort of individual racist assault pales in significance beside the systemic racism we find in, say, the transatlantic slave trade, or in the West's military adventures in mid-twentieth-century Asia? What do we gain by refusing to call it racism? (Taylor, 2013, p. 35)

Racism is the core ideology and methodology of white supremacy. *White supremacy* is “an ideology, a paradigm, an institutional system, and a worldview” (Saad, 2020, p. 13). In the opening sentence to his seminal book *The Racial Contract*, Mills defines white supremacy as “the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today” (1997, p. 1). Mills continues: “racism [or ... global white supremacy] is *itself* a political system, a particular power

structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties” (1997, p. 3, italics original). Particularly in education, racism is an overarching, “institutionalized process that benefits Whites at the expense of people of color” (Matias & Grosland, 2016, p. 153).

Whiteness is a social construction and way of being that “embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemologies, emotions and behaviors” (Matias et al., 2014, p. 290) and whose function is to superiorize white people and white culture (Matias & Grosland, 2016; Picower, 2009). Mills’ racial contract “define[s] a White class as superior and various subsets of human beings as ‘non-White’ and therefore a different, inferior status” (Dancy et al., 2018, p. 179). “[W]hiteness narrates itself as default human” (Dancy & Edwards, 2021, p. 34) and “centres white people and white things – whiteness is a person, place, thing and idea. Whiteness is an action word and it is status quo, the norm of society, and can not exist if there is not element of power, domination, and oppression” (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020, p. 4). Although this term is not synonymous with white people, this ideology “tends to operate more readily among White people due to the nature of White supremacy” (Matias & Grosland, 2016, p. 153). At the core of both of these concepts — whiteness and white supremacy — is *power*, the ways in which interlocking social institutions are organized to reproduce social inequality (Collins, 2009).

Whiteness has many tools and mechanisms. One of those tools is *color-blind racism*. Color-blindness as an ideology is one of the tenets of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). This principle “prompts asking how structures that seem neutral, such as teacher testing, reinforce Whiteness and White interests” (Sleeter, 2017, p. 155). Color-blind racism is an ideology that describes the mindsets as well as the linguistic behaviors used to defend and uphold white



supremacy. Indeed, “the absence of a sharp focus on racism inhibits the social change desired” (Joseph, 1988, p. 175). A logical consequence of this illogical ideology is that if we profess not to see race or racial differences, then we cannot talk about them; in other words, “to be color-blind is to be color-mute!” (Sue, 2015, p. 76). In describing “colormuteness” in the U.S., Pollock says “given the amount of worrying that race-label use seems to require in America, it is perhaps unsurprising that many Americans have proposed we solve our “race problems” by talking as if race did not matter at all” (2004, p. 1). One of the most prominent scholars of color-blind racism is Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. More about his conceptualization of this theoretical framework is described in Chapter 2.

Mills speaks to this ideology (quite directly, though surprisingly they are neither cited nor referenced by Bonilla-Silva) in the language of “an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (Mills, 1997, p. 18). Gonsalves (2008) describes this racial ideology of denial as “hysterical blindness”:

This form of defense represents a deeper ideology of denial that simultaneously represses public and individual awareness about the inequities of our educational systems. It is a resistance developed during early socialization and operates as a form of collusion between the individual and society, ensuring that the ideological imperative of dominant culture is well defended and replicated without distortion. (pp. 4–5)

Certainly, some adjacent or overlapping ideologies would also be useful and may be incorporated more intentionally in future studies. For example, Annamma’s color-evasiveness, which not only replaces an ableist term but represents and names the intentional ignorance to

acknowledge race and racism, offering an even more expansive way of theorizing this racial ideology (Annamma et al., 2017). Frankenberg (1993) has similar objections to this languaging “because it places a value judgment on a physical disability, and partly because it offers a quasi-physiological description of what is in fact a complex of social and political processes” (p. 268). She uses the terms for this discursive strategy as “a double move toward ‘color evasiveness’ and ‘power evasiveness’” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 14). Pollock (2004) uses the term “colormute” to describe the intentional avoidance of language or conversations about race. Evans-Winters offers the metaphor of “unmasking white fragility” to describe preventing or removing this willful ignorance (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020). The story that white people have told for so many years — that we should not see color as that is impolite or racist — is so deeply embedded in white culture that it has become a dominant discourse: a way of thinking that constrains and limits the realm of reasonable conversation and rewards silence.

### **1.5 The Unbearable Whiteness of Teaching**

A deeply held white cultural norm is to be (or at least claim to be) “color-blind to race” as a technique for avoiding talking about race and racism. In fact, to underscore just how un-racist we are, white people often declare “I don’t see color!” I recall teaching my older daughter as a preschooler to describe people’s skin color with terms such as light or dark, and avoided saying anything about race or racial categories. I was modeling denial, lauding ignorance, and actively training my child to perform the “polite” silence that prevents change and maintains a white supremacist status quo — a status quo that divides people with no additional descriptors (e.g., Americans, women) from Lorde’s “hyphenated people” (Lorde, 1992; Schultz, 2012, 14:04).

White Americans avoid these conversations through a variety of mechanisms rooted deeply in mindsets and socialized behaviors: coded language, asserting ignorance or uncertainty, silence, changing the topic, joking, and affirming sameness (Haviland, 2008). We reify our color-blind racism by staying “unprepared or unable to acknowledge race as an intimate factor in interpersonal interaction” (Sue, 2015, p. 14). We claim discomfort or twist our shallow understanding of “race is a social construct” into a logical pretzel that discounts the roles that race and racism play in our society. We see and speak about white people as “just people” and position our selves and our lived experiences as the default culture in large part by not speaking about whiteness at all. To avoid these interactions, we adopt linguistic strategies of speech and of silence that are rooted in color-blind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2018) and that wield whiteness (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995).

The white cultural aversion to acknowledging and discussing race and racism is important to examine and remedy because most teachers in the U.S. are white. White teachers – especially white cis-gender women<sup>3</sup> – continue to be drastically overrepresented in U.S. K-12 classrooms. This racial mismatch is a consequential issue, as socio-emotional development and academic achievement are higher when the race of a student matches their teacher (as summarized in Carver-Thomas, 2018; see also Goldhaber et al., 2019). Whiteness — via a lack of cultural connection, understanding, or even awareness of the potential for cultural differences leads white teachers to

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<sup>3</sup> This study will be focusing on white cis-gender women: people (a) who were assigned at birth to the female sex and (b) whose gender identity (the way they see themselves) is as female (girl, woman). The language I will use around reporting gender data will be limited to a binary (female/male, men/women) as the sources from which I have drawn upon report this way. Though I shall endeavor to write in a way that is inclusive and accurate with respect to the many gender identities that is also parsimonious.

make decisions based on biases and misinformation (decisions that affect Black<sup>4</sup> and Brown<sup>5</sup> students' lives) from what they teach (curriculum) and their approach to teaching (pedagogy) to their perceptions and expectations of what constitutes appropriate student behavior (discipline). White teachers are under-prepared to teach students who are not white (though arguably well prepared to school them), though as pre-service teachers they “anticipate working with children of another cultural background. As a whole, however, they bring very little cross-cultural background, knowledge, and experience” (Sleeter, 2001, pp. 94-95).

Many more letters in the alphabet are necessary to account for the various functions of schooling beyond “the 3 Rs” such as socialization, sorting, citizenship, and workforce development — preparing future citizens who will comply with capitalist white supremacy goals as well as cultivating workers to support the production of wealth for members of the upper classes. As Black feminist scholar Gloria Joseph said, “the educational system orchestrates an internecine relationship between teachers and students... [which serves to keep] the inequalities and hierarchies that characterize capitalist America” (1988, p. 174). The longstanding practice of “schooling” has needed bodies for a particular colonial project, and has needed institutions and systems to warehouse and cull those bodies. These practices of both “civilizing” and of maternal colonialism (Jacobs, 2009) are throughlines in the history of schools in what we call the United States and Canada, from the boarding and residential “schools” to our contemporary state schools — they are marrow extraction factories (S. Vaught, book study lecture notes, February 4, 2021).

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<sup>4</sup> [I capitalize “B” in Black when referring to people; “I believe that eight million Americans are entitled to a capital letter” (Du Bois, 1996 [1899], p. 1). However, I do not capitalize “white” as “historically it has been deployed as a signifier of social domination and privilege, rather than as an indicator of ethnic or national origin” (Biondi, 2006, p. i).]

<sup>5</sup> In the context of race and racialization, “Brown” is a malleable and “murky” term. In the U.S., it has historically been used to refer to Latinx populations, while often also encompassing people of Caribbean, South Asian, and Middle Eastern descent (Silva, 2010).

Foundational to every latent or manifest function, the U.S. educational system was designed to be one of the pillars of white supremacy.

The purpose of state-sanctioned schooling has been to forward the largely assimilationist and often violent white Imperial project, with students and families being asked to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to achieve in schools. (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1)

This structure is an intentional and planned consequence of *Brown I* to ensure white women's role of upholding one of the most important white supremacist institutions in the country. White supremacy is not distinct from patriarchy, and is itself patriarchal. White women, though subjugated by sexism, are active participants in white supremacy patriarchy. We "join[ed] the oppressor under the pretense of sharing power" (Lorde, 1984, p. 113), "but at the cost of participating in [our] own subordination" (Collins, 2009, p. 176). We have been key players in upholding not only whiteness but also white-male-ness and the systems that uphold their domination, an extension of maternal colonialism (Jacobs, 2005, 2009).

White women deliver "a feminized form of racism" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 39), or "whiteness with a soft touch" as we both support and enact patriarchal racism through caring professions, particularly teaching. Christian white women suggested that they direct the North American boarding schools as an act of "better mothering" of Native children, and laid the foundation for the continuing dominant presence of white women in classrooms that we see today (S. Vaught, book study lecture notes, February 4, 2021). In schools, white teachers' "racial unconscious [is] at work through the detour of 'caring'" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 39).

There are many reasons beyond these nefarious histories that a less white teacher population would be beneficial. Black and Latinx teachers are perceived more favorably by

students of all races and ethnicities over white teachers; hypotheses for this preference include greater multicultural awareness in racially minoritized educators, as well as greater competence around building rapport with students across races or ethnicities (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Black teachers in particular may be more likely to recognize “that Black students have strengths and abilities that may be invisible to mainstream schooling” (Cherng & Halpin, 2016, p. 416), and are more likely than their non-Black counterparts to hold higher academic expectations of Black students (Gershenson et al., 2016). This finding is consistent with the extensive review of literature by Villegas and Irvine (2010), as one of five pedagogical practices of successful Black teachers: “(a) having high expectations of students; (b) using culturally relevant teaching; (c) developing caring and trusting relationships with students; (d) confronting issues of racism through teaching; and (e) serving as advocates and cultural brokers” (p. 180). Extensive research in personality and social psychology has documented that the more similar we are to someone, the greater the likelihood that we will like each other. In classrooms with white teachers, Students of Color often feel “invisible to the teacher and less nurtured than the other students” (Saad, 2020, p. 36). In her most recent book, Dr. Bettina Love describes her experience as a Black first-year teacher of Black students: “Although my students were new to me, I felt as though I knew them all personally because there were pieces of me inside each of them” (2019, p. 21).

The detrimental effects of cultural dissonance between teachers and students as well as the lack of multicultural awareness in white teachers leads to ineffective and often harmful disciplinary and teaching practices, particularly for Black and Brown students (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Many teachers’ beliefs around what classroom behaviors are acceptable and appropriate as well as habits and mindsets (e.g., perfectionism, paternalism, only one right way, progress is better/more, belief in objectivity; Okun, n.d.) are rooted in white supremacy. These beliefs and

expectations lead to exclusionary classroom practices and a disproportionate rate of punitive actions against Black and Brown students – what the NAACP in 2005 termed the “school-to-prison pipeline” (NAACP, 2005). For example, Black students in particular are more likely to be punished for behaviors for which white students are “forgiven,” which leads to a school and sometimes juvenile justice record very early in life. These practices lead to school being itself “an apparatus of incarceration” (Kirkland, 2016); in practice, this pipeline is designed to be entirely carceral for Black and Brown students.

On the flip side, the students experience the *least* cultural dissonance in school are white cis-girls, who make up less than a quarter of students (22.6%; see Table 2). Of all demographic populations, we are most likely to see reflections of ourselves in most of our classrooms (NCES, 2019a). Throughout most if not all of our schooling lives, we<sup>6</sup> (white cis-females) see ourselves represented in the classroom – more than any other demographic – and thus are socialized to know that teaching is a viable career path for us. And thus, white supremacy culture is reassured that the long-term perpetuation this cultural dissonance – and all the benefits to white culture that it brings – is firmly in place.

### **1.5.1 Background Statistics.**

As stated earlier, white teachers – especially white women – are overrepresented in U.S. K-12 schools. A much greater proportion of teachers in the U.S. are white (about 80%; NCES, 2019b; Taie & Goldring, 2018) than are K-12 public school students (46%; NCES, 2019a). Within

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<sup>6</sup> Note, in some parts of this paper, I will write using first person pronouns (e.g., I, me, we, us) “to indicate my own complicity, as a white person, in whiteness” (Blaisdell, 2019, p. 17).

the 79-80% of teachers who are white, 76.5% are female (NCES, 2019c); thus, in the United States, about 61% of all K-12 public school teachers are white and female (see Table 1).

And while there are more white teachers than white students in U.S. public schools, the opposite is true for Black teachers and Black students. In the 2019-2020 school year, Black students comprised 15.1% of the total U.S. public school student population (NCES, 2019a), more than double the estimated proportion of Black teachers in the U.S. (only 6.7% in 2017-2018; NCES, 2019b). Furthermore, this “diversity gap” or lack of racial parity is predicted to continue to increase; in fact, the U.S. Census projects that the proportion of racially minoritized students – particularly Black students – will grow at a much faster rate than the proportion of Black teachers unless significant changes in recruitment and retention are made (Putman et al., 2016).

**Table 1: U.S. K-12 Public School Teacher Demographics in 2017-2018**

	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Asian + Pacific Islander</b>	<b>American Indian/ Alaska Native</b>	<b>Two or more</b>
<b>Female (76.5%)</b>	60.7	5.1	7.1	1.8	0.4	1.4
<b>Male</b>	18.6	1.6	2.2	0.5	0.1	0.4
<b>All gender</b>	79.3	6.7	9.3	2.3	0.5	1.8

(Source: NCES, 2019b)

**Table 2: U.S. K-12 Public School Student Demographics in 2020**

	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Asian + Pacific Islander</b>	<b>American Indian/Alaska Native</b>	<b>Two or more</b>
<b>Female (49%)</b>	22.6	7.4	13.6	2.8	0.5	2.2
<b>Male</b>	23.5	7.7	14.1	2.9	0.5	2.2
<b>All gender</b>	46.1	15.1	27.7	5.7	1	4.4

(Sources: racial demographics: NCES, 2019a; gender demographics: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018)



Given white people's reluctance and refusal to discuss race and racism as well as the abundance of white teachers in the U.S. K-12 schooling system, transformative work aimed at changing white teachers' ideologies and classroom practices is urgent. Ideologies of whiteness and color-blind racism must be addressed to reach and change behaviors and practices. "[B]y naming whiteness, we displace its centrality and reveal its invisible position" as a counter hegemonic move in which whiteness "gains particularity, while losing universality (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 294).

## **1.6 White Teachers and Race Talk**

With rare exceptions, teacher education programs provide no training around discussing race or racism with their students. White faculty in predominantly white institutions and their mostly white student population have little to no motivation to discontinue maintaining and protecting the status quo. In teacher education, the ideologies of whiteness serve to reinforce institutional hierarchies and the larger system of White supremacy" (Picower, 2009, p. 198) as well as to "obstruct teacher educators' attempts to center race and disrupt racial injustices" (Graham et al., 2019, p. 23). As a result, white teachers do not feel prepared to discuss race or racism in the classroom, and do not believe these topics should be discussed (Graham et al., 2019; Graham & Heck, 2019). Teachers cite many other reasons for avoiding these discussions, including lack of support by students' parents (Delale-O'Connor & Graham, 2019) as well as a lack of relevance to the course they are teaching (e.g., math; Graham & Heck, 2019).

Students — particularly Students of Color — want and need to have these conversations. "Silencing race dialogue in urban classrooms is painful for students of color" (Matias, 2013c, p.

187). Racially minoritized students benefit greatly from acknowledging and discussing their racial identity, which promotes healthy racial development (Pauker et al., 2015). Recently, a teacher tweeted (with consent) a message they received from a former student of theirs who was currently in 9th grade, about having discussions of race and racism in elementary school:

It is honestly such a relief knowing that kids at a lower grade level than high school can have the freedom to freely discuss these kind of topics in class...Many teachers claim to get kids ready for adulthood but if these kind of topics are not discussed they are not getting them fully ready...Yes they might see things on social media and try to understand things themselves but discussing it with an adult and even more kids is something beneficial. Teenagers and kids have the right to know from their school teachers, counselors, etc what is going on in the world... just as there is good there is also injustice. Now that is actually getting them ready, ready to face injustice. (Michie, 2021)

White teachers are very resistant to discussing race and racism, and this attitude is very much present before they enter a classroom as a teacher (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020; Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011; Schick, 2000; Watson, 2012). This enactment of whiteness — the mindset of denial and act of resistance — is a white cultural norm and is unsurprisingly reflected in teacher preparation programs: “the strategic dismissing of race becomes an exertion of how Whiteness operates in teacher education” (Matias et al., 2016, p. 7). Unfortunately, when conversations about racism do occur, the level of discussion in multiethnic classrooms “is often set at the level of the least racially literate — often white class members” (Pearce, 2018, p. 89).

## 1.7 Significance

The potential significance and usefulness of this study is broad; researchers in a variety of fields ask questions about education as do many readers and thinkers in a variety of communities. School districts employ teachers, and this work may influence the decisions they make about who they hire and what types of professional development they require and offer. I consider the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education as a whole to be a stakeholder in this work. The University of Pittsburgh School of Education offers 4 degree-only programs and 10 certificate programs for pre- and in-service teachers, as well as 21 combined certificate+degree programs (M. Sobolak, personal communication, October 13, 2020). I hope that this study will inform the leaders of and faculty in each of these programs as to what sorts of practices as well as curricular materials should be changed or added to their current programs. On June 1, 2020, Dean Kinloch launched the PittEd Justice Collective, a three-year working group in the School that centers equity in education. One of the growing number of initiatives is the White Co-Conspirators Groups; facilitators lead discussions and support the formation of action plans for groups of white graduate students, faculty, and K-12 teachers. This study will inform that project not only in its directions, but also around improving facilitators' practices. Finally, findings from this work will also support the upcoming McElhattan Foundation-funded work to expand educator diversity, particularly with guiding the un/learning of white in-service teacher participants.

This study's aims and intended outcomes are very much aligned with the School's Mission and Vision Statement that we so frequently read together when gathering as a community:

**We ignite learning.** We strive for well-being for all. **We teach.** We commit to student, family, and community success. **We commit to educational equity.** We advocate. We work for justice. **We cultivate relationships.** We forge engaged partnerships. **We**

**collaborate.** We learn with and from communities. **We innovate and agitate.** We pursue and produce knowledge. We research. **We disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures.** We approach learning as intertwined with health, wellness, and human development. We address how national, global, social, and technological change impacts learning. **We shape practice and policy.** We teach with and for dignity. We think. We dream. **We lead with integrity.** We are the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. (University of Pittsburgh School of Education, n.d.)

## 1.8 Overview of Study

To provide context for the motivations as well as theoretical underpinnings of this study, I first offer a review of some of the literature around some key themes, the theoretical framework, and previous work based on the Teachers Race Talk Study (TRTS; Milner et al., 2016). I then walk through the analytic approaches that I undertook in this work by describing the methodology (critical discourse analysis) and the method (reflexive thematic analysis), followed by the analyses and conclusions. At each stage of this work, I posed questions and sought answers through a process of “writing to find out” (Baldwin, 1984).

## 2.0 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

“Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence;  
does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge.”

-Toni Morrison, *acceptance speech for the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature*

### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this inquiry is to examine white teacher’s explanations for why they say that they are uncertain, reticent, or unwilling to discuss racism and race in their classrooms, as well as for why they do not believe that race plays a role in education. As stated in the first chapter, understanding teachers’ beliefs about discussing race and racism in the classroom is a question that is foundational to making design decisions about how to best prepare teachers to have these discussions (Milner, 2017). I am entering this work with an eye to two key research questions:

1. What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about the role of race in education*?
2. What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about discussing race and racism in the classroom*?

These questions are aligned with the three TRTS questions included in these analyses. My most immediate goal for undertaking this work is to build upon the body of knowledge that has been borne from the studies based on the Teachers Race Talk Survey (TRTS; Milner et al., 2016). Longer-term goals of this investigation are to better position myself and others in this work to

intervene and reach white teachers pushing through/going around their tools of whiteness that are preventing them from acknowledging, understanding, learning, and talking about race and racism. Ultimately, the goal of this work is to transform teacher preparation programs as well as both pre- and in-service teachers; to prepare white teachers with the knowledge, skills, and mindsets so that they can effectively engage in dialogues about race and racism with their students; without this change, our formal systems of schooling are bound to maintain the white supremacist status quo. As stated in the introductory quote by Black feminist scholar Gloria Joseph, “the absence of a sharp focus on racism inhibits the social change desired” (1988, p. 175).

In this chapter, I will present an initial review of some of the relevant research that informs these lines of inquiry. This literature review as well as subsequent analyses will be grounded in the theoretical framework based primarily on Bonilla-Silva’s conceptualization of color-blind racism. Finally, I will summarize the studies that have emerged from the TRTS project to date.

## **2.2 Themes in Literature**

This line of inquiry is rooted in and in conversation with various over-arching topics. At its foundation, this work is about language and how what is spoken, written, or silent enacts oppressive ideologies and behaviors. In the context of language, I will be examining the themes around whiteness, color-blind racism, and race talk — each in general and then specific to education and white teachers. I will follow an overview of the scholarship in these areas with a summary of research that has been conducted around the measure I will be using in this study, the Teachers Race Talk Survey (TRTS; Milner et al., 2016).

### 2.2.1 Language and Whiteness

For centuries, scholars have explored the ways in which human language influences and shapes thoughts, behaviors, and culture and vice versa. Sapir and Whorf first put forth their linguistic determinism hypothesis (that language *structures* thought), which they later reconceptualized as a less direct relationship (linguistic relativism: that language *influences* thought; for a review see Kay & Kempton, 1984). Certainly, languages are interpretive, and humans “survey the world through the lenses provided by our languages” (Taylor, 2013, p. 6). The nature and strength of the relationships between language and thought continue to be challenged and interrogated. Linguist John McWhorter (2014) opposes the assertion “that people’s languages channel the way they think and perceive the world” (p. ix) or of the conceptualization of language as thought in the ways that have sprung from Whorf’s theorizations. He cautions that the relationship between language and culture is not easily distilled, and that the lenses of our various languages do not lead to significantly different world views. Regardless of the strength to which we assign to the relationship between language to our culture, “[l]anguage is the medium of human culture and cognition” (Taylor, 2013, p. 5) and very much *reflects* culture.

Language is a social behavior, and necessarily reflects and reinforces the role of social power and position – both current and historical. A common level or unit of analysis of language is that of *discourse* — yet another term that has various and conflicting definitions that depend largely on disciplinary and theoretical standpoints (Fairclough, 1992). In linguistics, “discourse” refers to extended examples of language, which includes speech, writing, or images. Norman Fairclough has written extensively about how and why power is exercised through language, particularly in social contexts. They focused on the ways in which “sociolinguistic conventions...arise out of and give rise to particular relations of power” (1989, pp. 1-2). His work

in developing one form of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is grounded in the Foucauldian idea that language is inextricably tied to power, and that discursive practices both reflect and create ways to enable and to constrain people's conduct (Gibbs, 2015; see Foucault, 1969). More information about CDA is in Chapter 3, Methods.

I am particularly interested in the language of white teachers at work — what Haviland (2008) refers to as “White educational discourse” (p. 40). She defines White educational discourse as “a collection of ways of speaking, behaving, interacting, and thinking that together impacts how White teachers and students interact in White-dominated educational settings about race, racism, and White supremacy” (p. 51). This type of discourse — behaviors, beliefs, and thoughts — represent what Gee (2011) refers to as “‘Big D’ Discourse,” which is “language *plus* ‘other stuff’” (p. 34, *italics original*). Haviland identified a variety of these linguistic behaviors that served three key characteristics of whiteness: (a) powerful yet power-evasive, (b) uses a wide variety of techniques to maintain its power, and (c) not monolithic. Some of the primary types of White educational discourse strategies she named as examples of the first two of these characteristics — many of which are aligned with not only Nakayama and Krizek's strategies of whiteness (1995; below) but also with Bonilla-Silva's rhetorical strategies of color-blind racism (2018; next section): avoiding words, asserting ignorance or uncertainty, silence, changing the topic, joking, and affirming sameness (Haviland, 2008). She concludes:

Each of these Discourse moves enabled us to shift focus away from the fact that our Whiteness gave us unearned power and dominance. By carefully avoiding acknowledgement of the power that Whiteness conferred on us and instead positioning ourselves as less than powerful, we avoided seeing ourselves as powerful agents with an



obligation to disown our unearned privileges and fight to reform the institutions that conferred such privileges on us. (p. 44)

These discourses — whether conveyed through spoken or written language — serve both cognitive and political functions (Keller, 1995). As stated in the opening quote of this chapter: “Oppressive language ... does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge” (Morrison, 1993b).

For this study, I examined discourses about ideologies of color-blindness and whiteness to learn more about the ways in these ideologies are conveyed and exerted. In this context, it is not only the spoken or written rhetorical strategies being used as tools of white supremacy, but also the language of silence — the refusal to say anything. In this section, I will focus on Nakayama and Krizek’s six discursive strategies of whiteness; those associated with color-blind racism will follow in the next section.

### **2.2.2 Discursive Strategies of Whiteness.**

Nakayama and Krizek (1995) identified six strategies (or “rhetorical moves”) of the discourse of whiteness:

- **“white” as powerful** (e.g., white is the “majority” or “high status”) regardless of whether this power is recognized; in fact, it is often masked and hidden to uphold its ordinariness and normality (per Critical Race Theory).
- **“white” as negative, invisible** (e.g., “lacking racial or ethnic features”), also sets up color-based binaries (white/not; visible/not) wherein white is a non-color or the absence of color; and white is neutral and lacks any “cultural markings” and as such is a “negative, an invisible entity” (p. 299). Domination requires the objectification of a

subordinate group, and oppositional binaries such as these are common tools of subjugation (Collins, 2009). An example in fiction Toni Morrison describes in *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison points to Hemingway's positioning of Blackness as "something one can 'have' or appropriate.... Whiteness here is a deficiency" (p. 87).

- **“white” as a scientific classification** is another mechanism of rendering whiteness invisible, draining its history, cultural components, and social status. “Conflating the discourse of whiteness with the label of science serves to mask irrationality and contradictions with a rational image possessing cultural currency” (p. 300).
- **“white” as a nationality.** In the U.S., “white” is equated with “American” and requires no further descriptors or modifiers; mainstream media upholds this regularly, only adding racial descriptors to everyone except white people. This conflation was baked into our constitution with the requirement that a person be “white” to count as a naturalized citizen. Blood quantum laws have since been enacted in many states to both expand who is white (to extend our land steal from the Indigenous) as well as to restrict and disenfranchise (e.g., “one-drop rules” applied to anyone whose ancestors included someone of African descent) — depending on which was more profitable to white society.
- **“white” as a rejection of labeling** (beyond “American”) includes a contradiction includes both that ethnicity is irrelevant while at the same time not wanting their ethnicity to be used, both emphasizing “the ideology of individualism over subjectivity, the social construction of identity” (p. 301). This strategy aligns with the potential applications of cognitive science to ethics (per Alvin Goldman), in which white people first “*legitimize* the racial order, privileging them as the master race and relegating nonwhites to

subpersonhood” followed by a second phase of conceptually “*derac[ing]* the polity, denying its actual racial structuring” (Mills, 1997, p. 95, italics original).

- **“white” as European ancestry.** Though identifying one’s lineage may be seemingly reflexive, this type of “symbolic ethnicity” lacks any analysis of power that a racial identity may inhere. Many white people “selected their ethnicity, much as one might try to accessorize a wardrobe” (p. 302), underscoring the unsubstantial role that their own ethnicity plays in their lives.

Many of these rhetorical moves serve to obfuscate and to normalize whiteness as default, to “elude any recognition of power relations” (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 300), and to subvert the language needed “to decenter whiteness as a dominant ideology (McIntyre, 1997b, p. 47). “To talk about race, then, is usually to talk about events, conditions, and experiences that are familiar and ubiquitous. But it is also talk about these things in somewhat muddled ways” (Taylor, 2013, p. 7) — ways that are unclear and inconsistent, by design. These discursive strategies represent a collection of contradictions (e.g., nationality vs. scientific classification), which are necessary for whiteness to function within and around any attempts to challenge its uninterrogated space. A primary contradiction in these discourses is that whiteness is simultaneously invisible and important. In this study, I expect to find many examples of these discursive strategies in the white teachers’ responses to why they believe race does not play a role in education, and for why they do not believe discussions of race and racism belong in their classrooms.

### **2.2.3 Color-blind Racism**

As stated earlier, the focus of this work is on the discourses and beliefs in white teachers’ explanations for why they are uncertain, reticent, or unwilling to discuss racism and race in their

classrooms and do not believe race plays a role in education. To ascertain the ways in which teachers' responses reflect ideologies of whiteness and color-blind racism, the second theoretical framework that I am grounding my analyses in is that of color-blind racism as conceptualized by Bonilla-Silva (2018). The concept of color-blind racism was introduced in Chapter 1 as one of the two theoretical frameworks for this study, and in this section, I will provide more details about a particular way of identifying this ideology.

White people use “linguistic buffers” to defend the hegemonic stories we tell ourselves in order to uphold and perpetuate a white supremacist status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). He describes three categories of ways of understanding the rhetorical strategies white people use to justify and reproduce racial privilege (a) dominant themes (racial frames), (b) rhetorical strategies, and (c) racial storylines. For this study, I will be focusing on the second category: rhetorical strategies.

Bonilla-Silva outlines five of the most common types of rhetorical strategies. The first stylistic component of color-blind ideology is the **avoidance of racial language** — speaking hesitantly and indirectly or through coded language, if saying anything at all. Second, **semantic moves** are “verbal parachutes” (p. 78) or “verbal pirouettes” (p. 172) that white people use to avoid race talk, especially in situations where they fear they may be perceived as racist. These types of speech are cloaked ways of expressing racial views, with racial statements sandwiched between non-racial utterances. Four of these strategies are apparent denials (“I am not racist, but...”), claims of ignorance (“I’m not Black, so I don’t know”), ambivalent arguments (“yes and no”), and dismissing race<sup>7</sup> (“It doesn’t have anything to do with racism”). These strategies “act as rhetorical shields to save face because whites can always go back to the safety of [their] disclaimers” (p. 81).

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<sup>7</sup> See also Bonilla-Silva & Baiocchi’s chapter “Anything but racism: How sociologists limit the significance of racism” (2008).

The third common type of rhetorical strategy — **projection** — is often found in white people’s discourses about race. For example, white people often describe situations of racial segregation as a result of so-called Black self-segregation rather than acknowledging its historic reasons, and demonstrates an utter “lack of reflexivity about how race fractures their own lives” (p. 131). These explanations are designed to serve to soften additional, racist, negative attributions and projections (e.g., selfishness, laziness).

Similarly, the **use of diminutives** is also intended as a cushion for their expressed racist views, a way of speaking in coded language rather than speaking directly. Finally, though a common occurrence in all speech, white people’s **rhetorical incoherence** skyrockets when discussing racially sensitive matters and includes “digressions, long pauses, repetition, and self corrections” (Matias & DiAngelo, 2013, p. 4). We babble and fumble in our attempts to mollify or manage our feelings by saying what is socially desirable rather than what we actually believe.

These are five of the many verbal maneuvers that white people engage in to avoid discussing race and racism. This avoidance is motivated by what Thandeka (1999) calls “white shame” — internal conflict (a “hidden civil war”) induced by the dissonance between what we have been taught (to claim we do not see race) and the deeply racialized reality in which we live. Together, the theoretical frameworks of color-blind racism and whiteness will be used as lenses for interpreting white teachers’ discourses around race talk. Next, I will provide a brief summary of some key research around whiteness in U.S. education.

## **2.2.4 Whiteness in/and Educational Systems**

Most research in the general field of whiteness and teachers has been done with a mostly white pre-service teacher population. In her review of 80 studies in whiteness in pre-service

teaching programs, Sleeter found that “the great bulk of the research has examined how to help young White preservice students (mainly women) develop the awareness, insights, and skills for effective teaching in multicultural contexts” (2001, p. 101). This description is consistent with most of the studies that I have reviewed to date, though some of these studies were focused on teachers already in the field, and all of whom were white (Matias & DiAngelo, 2013; Schauer, 2018; Sleeter, 1993; Vaught & Castagno, 2008) with the exception of one subsample in the study of anti-racist practices by Kinloch and Dixon (2017).

Two of the most frequent variables I found to be examined in this body of literature were **racial literacy** (Flynn et al., 2018; Mosley & Rogers, 2011; Sealey-Ruiz, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) and **racial identity development** (Borsheim-Black, 2018; Farinde-Wu et al., 2020; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Matias, 2013a; Matias & Mackey, 2015; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; Peters et al., 2016). Emotionality and affect are also widely examined as a tool of whiteness and of color-blind racism by scholars (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008; Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020; Matias 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Matias & Allen, 2013; Matias & DiAngelo, 2013; Matias & Grosland, 2016; Picower, 2009; Zembylas 2008, 2015; Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012).

As most of these studies were done with the aim of interrupting whiteness and improving the lives of racially minoritized students, most of the theoretical frameworks were critical in nature. Evans-Winters’ work is grounded primarily in Critical Race Feminism and Critical Race Theory around the experiences of white pre-service teachers’ emotionality and/as resistance to learning about race and racism from Professors of Color (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020; Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). Some studies combined Critical Race Theory with a second critical lens, such as Critical Whiteness Studies (Blaisdell, 2019; Irby et al., 2019; Kinloch & Dixon, 2017; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Matias, 2013b, 2013c; Matias & Grosland, 2016;

Matias & Liou, 2015; Matias et al., 2016; Picower, 2009), Black feminism (Matias et al., 2016; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005), or whiteness as property (Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

A variety of methods have been used — primarily qualitative — to understand whiteness in pre- and in-service teacher populations. Case studies (Borsheim-Black, 2018; Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008; Farinde-Wu et al., 2020; Touré & Thompson Dorsey, 2018), interviews (Malott et al., 2015; Pearce, 2018; Schauer, 2018; Schick, 2000) have been frequently employed. Surveys are less common, and more likely to accompany qualitative methods such as observations; some surveys were designed by the researchers (e.g., Matias, 2013b; Matias & Mackey, 2015) while others used validated scales of critical consciousness and white racial identity development (e.g., Peters et al., 2016). I found two studies around whiteness and/in education that used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodology, both of which were conducted by Rogers and Mosley (Mosley & Rogers, 2011; Rogers & Mosley, 2008). In their extensive review of 257 studies in education from 2004 to 2012 that did use CDA (Rogers et al., 2016), they identified only one with a specific focus on whiteness (Yoon, 2012) and very few that included an analysis of race.

The discourses and linguistic tools of whiteness and color-blind racist ideologies are pervasive in white culture. They serve to uphold and “reinforce institutional hierarchies and the larger system of White supremacy” (Picower, 2009, p. 198). Most K-12 teachers and administrators in the U.S. are white, and thus it is no surprise that we see these mechanisms of white supremacy at the heart of this institution. Understanding teachers’ beliefs about race talk through color-blind racism and whiteness offer complementary, imbricating perspectives for analysis as well as intervention.

### 2.2.5 Race Talk

Rooted in the cultural norm of color-blindness and color-muteness, white people often describe racial dialogues (“race talk”) as being uncomfortable, difficult, impolite, or unnecessary. In this work, I am intentionally avoiding any support — explicit or implied — for the notion that discussing race or racism is inherently difficult or uncomfortable. As mentioned in the first chapter, “[t]his phrasing is vehicle for coddling and thereby protecting white supremacy” (Patel, 2021). For white people, discussing race and racism creates potential conflict both internally and externally, a clash between our ethnocentric lenses and the various racial realities beyond our lived experiences (Sue, 2015; Thandeka, 1999). Gonsalves (2008) describes this ideology of denial as “hysterical blindness.” Any meaningful discussion requires reflection, which if done well, would expose (to ourselves and to others) our biases, conscious as well as unconscious. White people are afraid of saying the wrong thing, resulting in hurting People of Color or — “worse” — being labeled a racist (Oluo, 2019).

Sue (2015) outlines five dominant discourses that frame white American culture’s aversion to race talk. The first of these discourses is that American society is democratic and meritocratic, and race no longer influences anyone’s chances of success. According to legal and Black feminist scholar Patricia Williams (1991), this narrative attributes any lack of success to individual or cultural deficits rather than anything systematic, since racial discrimination is no longer legal. The second dominant discourse is that racism is a historic issue, not a current one, and that — especially since we elected a Black president — we are now “post-racial.” Sue organizes a third discourse, color-blindness, around three aspects: (a) the assumption that seeing race is itself racist, and runs counter to the direction to treat everyone the same; (b) that it is our sameness rather than our differences that should be emphasized; and (c) similar to the first discourse — that opportunities



for success are in no way impacted by race or racism. The fourth narrative overlaps with the first three: the patent denial of power and privilege; we are “good people” and do not recognize our own participation in racial oppression (which “is a thing of the past). Sue’s fifth dominant discourse of race talk is the denial of individual racism; we get emotional and defensive with statements such as “I never owned slaves” and claims of “many Black friends.” We work to hide personal biases rather than to deal with them.

An abundance of research indicates that *not* talking about race and racism include perpetuating the status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), and the status quo in U.S. K-12 classrooms is one that continues to harm racially minoritized students, especially Black students (Pauker et al., 2015). However, the Eurocentric model after which most schools are structured leaves little to no space or need for these discussions (Ladson-Billings, 1998). “Naming race is difficult when discussions of race and education, specifically in K-12 teaching, are silenced by colorblind practices and policies” (Matias & Liou, 2015, p. 602). This “failure to acknowledge and consider race in school contexts erects a different set of barriers that commonly result from colorblind approaches to addressing racial inequality and discrimination” (Horsford, 2014, p. 124).

This enactment of whiteness — the mindset of denial and act of resistance — is a white cultural norm and is unsurprisingly reflected in teacher preparation programs: “the strategic dismissing of race becomes an exertion of how Whiteness operates in teacher education” (Matias et al., 2016, p. 7). Christine Sleeter, Cheryl Matias, and Alice McIntyre are among those who have focused a great deal of their scholarship around the overwhelming whiteness of the U.S. teacher population, and in understanding white teachers’ race-evasive identities and discourses.

McIntyre conducted “interventionist action research” with white women in pre-service teaching programs and noted their commitment to evading discussions of race through what she

called “White talk” — “talk that serves to insulate White people from examining their/our individual and collective roles in the perpetuation of racism” (McIntyre 1997b, p. 45). Similar to speech tactics of whiteness and color-blind racism discussed above, some examples of white talk are “derailing the conversation, evading questions, dismissing counterarguments, withdrawing from the discussion, remaining silent, interrupting speakers and topics, and colluding with each other in creating a ‘culture of niceness’ that made it very difficult to ‘read the white world.’” (McIntyre, 1997b, p. 46).

More than just awareness, white teachers/people need an understanding of the historical origins of these privileges, and how they were baked into society to maintain white supremacy and to understand how whiteness ideology impacts white people and people of color (Matias & Grosland, 2016; Matias & Mackey, 2015). “The salience of whiteness cannot be overstated. The successful production of white domination as a demonstration of respectability is part of a teacher’s qualification and access to governance” (Schick, 2000, p. 87).

### 3.0 CHAPTER 3: METHODS

“The absence of a sharp focus on racism inhibits the social change desired.”

— Gloria I. Joseph, *Black Feminist Pedagogy and Schooling in Capitalist White America*

In this section I will describe the methods and methodologies that I enacted to address my two lines of inquiry:

1. What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about the role of race in education*?
2. What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about discussing race and racism in the classroom*?

#### 3.1 Previous TRTS Research

The primary method I used to learn about white teachers' beliefs about discussing race and racism in the classroom and about the role of race in education were through survey and open-ended responses to three questions in the Teachers Race Talk Survey (TRTS; Milner et al., 2016). The TRTS is an exploratory measure designed to elicit pre-service and in-service teachers' beliefs about whether race plays a role in students' educational experiences, whether race and racism should be discussed in their own classrooms or at school in general, and other questions around the topics of race and race talk. This survey was developed by Rich Milner, Lori Delale-O'Connor, Ira Murray, and Adam Alvarez (see Milner et al., 2016), and has been open to data collection in

Qualtrics since August 2016. No compensation or incentives are offered for completing the study. This 33-item survey begins with 9 demographic questions (not including sex or gender identity) followed by 12 multiple-choice questions around teachers' beliefs about race talk ("yes," "no," "not sure"), each of which was followed by the open-ended follow-up prompt "Please provide an explanation of your response." The sampling has been non-random, with specific solicitations to educational networks associated with the University of Pittsburgh, educational organizations (e.g., American Association of Universities Deans of Education), and email distribution lists (e.g., Literacy Research Association).

In this review of previous literature on the Teachers Race Talk Survey, I will focus on these six manuscripts — four published in peer-review journals, and two unpublished dissertations:

- Milner (2017): "Race, talk, opportunity gaps, and curriculum shifts in (teacher) education" in the journal *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*
- Murray (2018): "Youth sociopolitical development inside and outside of the classroom: Making sense of varying perspectives and opportunities" (University of Pittsburgh, dissertation)
- Alvarez & Milner (2018): "Exploring teachers' beliefs and feelings about race and police violence" in the journal *Teaching Education*
- Alvarez (2018): "Teachers' reported beliefs and feelings about race talk" (University of Pittsburgh, dissertation)
- Delale-O'Connor & Graham (2019): "Teachers' talk about race and caregiver support: "You can NEVER be too sure about parents" in the journal *Urban Education*

- Rand (2020): “The calculus and quotients of social illiteracy: Equations of race, responsibility & critical-ethical literacy in schools” in the journal *Education and Urban Society*

To best illustrate the similarities and differences among these studies, the following information is presented in tabular format (see Table 3):

- TRTS question(s) included in analyses
- Theoretical framework(s)
- Overall number of respondents at time of data export
- Sample size for the study and sampling criteria
- Method(s) of analysis

As the TRTS is a “live” study that is still open for responses, it is important to note that the number of responses included in each study is different since the data were exported at different points in time. The sampling criteria depended on the research questions. For example, some studies included all teachers while others selected based on race, responses to specific questions (e.g., “if answered ‘yes’ to question 19”), or the type of teaching position they reported.

**Table 3: Overview of TRTS Studies**

		Milner (2017)	Murray (2018)	Alvarez & Milner (2018)	Alvarez (2018)	Delale-O'Connor & Graham (2019)	Rand (2020)
TRTS Qs:	11	X	X				
	13	X	X	X	X	(X)	
	15	X	X			(X)	
	17	X	X				
	19	X		X	X		
	21	X		X	X		
	23	X					
	25	X				X	
	27	X					
	29	X					X
Framework(s)		Teacher knowledge	Critical consciousness & sociopolitical development	Bonilla-Silva's color-blind racism	Bonilla-Silva's color-blind racism	Cultural and social capital theories	Pt1: CWS Pt2: virtue of responsibility & anti-racist ed/ped
n/sample size		386 (all)	308 (of 422)	336 (of 495)	495 (all)	320 (of 501)	Part 1: 33 Part 2: 44 (of 538)
Sample		All teachers	(Q11=Y) + (Q13=Y) + (Q15=Y) Then violence (Y/not-Y)	White teachers	All teachers	All teachers responding to Q25 follow-up prompt	(1) WTs of 1 <sup>st</sup> W Ss who said N/NS (33) (2) WTs of 1 <sup>st</sup> Black Ss & said YES (44)
Methods		Descriptive (overall and within 41% ELA)	Mixed methods: Regression & inductive thematic analysis (based on Sue's race talk; academic protocol)	Emergent themes	Quantitative	Inductive coding & thematic analysis	Quantitative & Qualitative (Grounded theory)
Date data pulled		11/28/2016	12/1/2016	n.d.	n.d. (2016-17 academic year)	Spring 2018	September 2017

#### TRTS Questions:

- 11 - "I believe race plays a role in the educational experiences of my (current/future) students."
- 13 - "I believe the topic of race is important to discuss with the students in my (current/future) classroom."
- 15 - "I believe that teachers should discuss racism and racial discrimination with their students."
- 17 - "I believe teachers should discuss recent instances of violence against Black people with their students (e.g., Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Philando Castile)"
- 19 - "I believe teachers should discuss recent violence against police officers with their students."
- 21 - "I feel prepared to have conversations about race in my classroom."
- 23 - "I believe my teacher training program prepared me to discuss race in my classroom."
- 25 - "I believe my students' parents/guardians would support conversations about race in my classroom."
- 27 - "I believe the administration at my school supports conversations about race inside the classroom."
- 29 - "I believe that it is my responsibility to help my students acquire the skills to critically analyze and respond to social injustices."

Milner (2017) conducted the first analysis, which was based on the first four months of data collection (August 16 to November 28, 2016). He describes the throughline for this aspect of his research "the ways in which teachers talk about their knowledge, beliefs, mind-sets, thinking, and consequently practices in schools to attempt to understand linkages to student learning opportunities" (p. 66). In this initial descriptive study, he cross-tabulated teacher responses to 10 multiple-choice questions (these items are listed just below Table 3) by teacher race, first across all 386 respondents, and then within the subset of 41% of respondents who reported that they were English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. His analyses in both the overall sample and the subsample were racial comparisons in participants' responses to these questions, including their degree of

confidence (confidence was defined as whether they selected “not sure” or one of the definitive responses. These results are published as figures in online appendices.

The data for Murray’s dissertation (Murray, 2018) was exported just a few days later (December 1, 2016) with an additional 36 respondents ( $N = 422$ ). His analyses were focused on a subset of teachers who (a) responded “yes” to questions 11, 13, and 15, which reduced the sample to 308, or about 73% of all respondents. He then divided this sample between those who answered “yes” ( $n = 239$ ) and those who answered either “no” or “not sure” ( $n = 69$ ) for question 17. Those who offered follow-up responses to this question were included in the qualitative portion of his analyses (177 of the 239 who responded “yes” and 50 of the 69 either “no” or “not sure”).

Alvarez’s research both for the *Teaching Education* article (Alvarez & Milner, 2018) as well as his dissertation (2018) were approached using Bonilla-Silva’s theoretical framework of color-blind racism. The data for both were exported around the end of the 2016-2017 academic year ( $N = 495$ ). Alvarez and Milner used emergent themes as the method for their journal article, which focused on the 336 white teachers. For his dissertation, Alvarez included the entire sample at the time and conducted extensive quantitative analyses.

Delale-O’Connor and Graham (2019) were primarily interested in responses to question 25, whether teachers felt that parents would support conversations about race in the classroom. Within the overall sample at the time of analysis (“spring 2018”), their study was based on the subset of 320 participants who also responded to the open-ended question asking for additional information. Open-ended responses were examined in relationship to their responses to the questions about whether teachers felt they should talk about race (question 11) and/or racism (question 13) in the classroom. Their qualitative analyses — both inductive coding and thematic analysis — were grounded in the theoretical frameworks of cultural and social capital theories.



In the most recent publication, Rand (2020) focused on question 29: “I believe that it is my responsibility to help my students acquire the skills to critically analyze and respond to social injustices.” At the time of the data export, 538 teachers had responded to the survey, of whom 429 answered this question. Rand conducted both quantitative and qualitative analyses in this study. In the initial quantitative portion, he focused on teachers who responded to this question with “no” or “not sure” ( $n = 62$ ), all but two of whom were white. In the second, qualitative analysis, he based the inductive coding and thematic analysis on grounded theory and compared those who teach primarily Black students ( $n = 45$ ) to those who teach primarily white students ( $n = 142$ ). His overall interpretations were analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of Critical Whiteness Studies, the virtue of responsibility, and anti-racist education and pedagogy.

This study was similar to many of these described in that I have taken a critical approach with the goal of building towards making transformative change. Critical Discourse Analysis is the methodology for this study and was used in conjunction with a critical method (Reflexive Thematic Analysis, as discussed in Chapter 3), to analyze white teachers’ discourses about the role of race in education and about race talk in the classroom. I believe that by being in conversation with existing directions of work as well as reaching into less common methodological territory, that this study can offer some unique and useful findings.

### **3.2 Sample & Data Sources**

As of May 14, 2021, there were a total of 672 responses to the TRTS, of whom 440 (65%) reported their “race/ethnicity” as white. From within this sample, I selected for those who responded with either “No” or “Not Sure” to at least one of the following statements:

- (Question #11) *I believe race plays a role in the educational experiences of my (current/future) students*
- (Question #13) *I believe the topic of race is important to discuss with the students in my (current/future) classroom.*
- (Question #15) *I believe that teachers should discuss racism and racial discrimination with their students.*

My analyses were based upon the open-ended responses following each of these three closed-ended survey questions.

### **3.2.1 Data Preparation.**

Within this sample of 440 white teachers, I reviewed the data and then made decisions about how to best prepare the dataset for analysis. Some participants — particularly pre-service teachers — responded to “Number of years teaching” with “NA” or something similar, or did not respond. For pre-service participants only, I changed these types of text responses to a numerical zero (0). Similarly, eight teachers did not respond to whether they were pre-service or in-service educators; for those who reported a non-zero number of years teaching, I re-coded their role as “in-service.”

Then, I reviewed all open-ended responses to the follow-up questions 12, 14, and 16. During this process, I noticed that some of the responses to question 14 and several to question 16 were only “see previous response” or similar. In each of these instances, I copied and pasted the immediately previous response into this cell in parentheses, prefaced with “Previous answer:”. For example, in a response to question 12, a participant said, “I don’t believe race matters” and then

responded to question 14 with “see last answer,” I then appended this response so that the data for this cell read “see last answer. (Previous answer: “I don’t believe race matters.”)”

Next, I took a high-level look at the data to get a sense of the participants and their responses. I calculated sums for Current Teaching Grade Level (Pre-K, elementary, middle/junior high, high school), Current Role (pre-service, in-service, other), and Student Racial/Ethnic Demographics (primarily white, primarily Black, primarily Hispanic, primarily Asian, mixed), as well as an average for Number of Years Teaching (overall and in-service only). These descriptive statistics are summarized below in the Study Sample section.

I then set up the data so that I could study the open-ended responses from two different angles: (a) at the person-level, seeing all three responses for each person; and (b) at the question-level, reading all responses to one particular question at a time. To view the data at the **person-level**, I created a new spreadsheet and concatenated the following data copied from the overall dataset:

- ID: I assigned a simplified personal identifier based on the order in which participants took the survey to use in place of the Qualtrics-assigned identifier, which is cumbersome and non-sequential (e.g., “R\_2BxquWcELSX2u1L” was recoded to “4”).
- Q11: No, Not sure, or Yes (or no answer)
- Q12: Anything entered when prompted for an explanation to Q11
- Q13: No, Not sure, or Yes (or no answer)
- Q14: Anything entered when prompted for an explanation to Q13
- Q15: No, Not sure, or Yes (or no answer)
- Q16: Anything entered when prompted for an explanation to Q15

Less than 10% of the participants ( $n = 37$ ) did not enter data for any of these three open-ended questions. When organizing the data, I sorted the sheet so that these participants were at the bottom of the spreadsheet. This sorting process served primarily to keep all elaborative data at the beginning of the spreadsheet so that I could conserve paper when printing.

For the **question-level** analysis, I created three separate tabs for each of the open-ended responses (questions 12, 14, and 16). Similar to the person-level organization, I sorted the data with all questions with responses above those with none. For each set of open-ended responses I printed two columns: (a) the simplified identifier and (b) their response.

For both the person- and question-level printouts, I created a blank column to make room for my notes. I also intentionally used a paperclip rather than stapling the pages together so that I could shuffle the pages and view the data (e.g., all responses to question 12) in slightly various orders. Each page contained between 2 and 15 responses, so some small-scale ordering of responses was consistent. Though I do not think the ordering could or would necessarily impact my interpretations, I believe that the various orderings of my readings helped me to avoid primacy and recency effects (i.e., paying more attention or remembering the earliest and latest items more than those in the middle).

### **3.2.2 Study Sample: Overview.**

Overall, the 440 white teachers in this study sample:

- Most reported teaching in either high school ( $n = 193$ ) or in elementary ( $n = 139$ ), with about 17% ( $n = 75$ ) in middle school classrooms; 9 participants did not list a teaching grade level.

- The sample was pretty evenly divided between in-service ( $n = 223$ ) and pre-service ( $n = 206$ ) teachers; 10 reported “other” and 1 did not respond.
- The number of years teaching ranged from 0 to 40, with an overall average of 5.6 years across the population (which included pre-service) and an average among in-service teachers of 10 years.
- Almost all teachers ( $n = 410$ ) reported pursuing their teaching education and credentials through a traditional teacher training program, 27 through a non-traditional program, and 3 did not answer.
- About 42% ( $n = 185$ ) of the teachers reported a primarily white student population, followed by 34% ( $n = 150$ ) of teachers reporting a “mixed” student racial/ethnic population. Fewer described their student population as primarily Black ( $n = 51$ , about 11.5%) or Hispanic ( $n = 43$ ), and only 5 as primarily Asian students.

### **3.2.3 Study Sample: TRTS.**

Most (84%) of white participants answered “yes” at least one of the three study questions ( $n = 368$  or  $370$ ; see Table 4), and 316 participants answered “yes” to all three. A smaller subsample of white respondents ( $n = 124$ ) did not express agreement with one or more. This subsample of white teachers who responded with either “No” or “Not Sure” comprised just over 28% of the 440 white respondents and 18% of the total participants at the time of the data export, which is the sample on which the analyses in this study were based.

**Table 4: White Participant Responses to Questions 11, 13, and 15 (no exclusions)**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
Q11	368 (83.6%)	28 (6.3%)	30 (6.8%)
Q13	370 (84.1%)	23 (5.2%)	33 (7.5%)
Q15	370 (84.1%)	17 (3.9%)	39 (8.9%)

About half of the participants ( $n = 223$ ) reported their current role as in-service, 206 as pre-service, and they followed similar patterns of responses to the three survey questions in this study. Pre-service and in-service teachers had similar patterns of responses, found no reason to separate analyses.

In this study I focused on a specific sample within this total population: (a) white teachers (b) who answered “no” or “not sure” to *any* of questions 11, 13, and 15. Table 5 displays the frequency of responses to each of these three statements for those who disagreed or expressed uncertainty with at least one of the three statements, as well as the frequency and percentage of those respondents who entered any text in the follow-up to that item.

**Table 5: Frequency of Responses for White Teachers who Answered “No” or “Not Sure” to at Least One of Questions #11, 13, or 15, with Frequency (and Percentage) of Those who Responded to the Corresponding Open-ended Follow-up Question**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>No + Not Sure</b>	<b>Responded to follow-up</b>
Q11	52	28	30	58	<b>36 (62%)</b>
Q13	54	23	33	56	<b>40 (71%)</b>
Q15	54	17	39	56	<b>36 (64%)</b>

Note: Teachers who answered “Yes” to all three questions are not included in this table.

The *ns* for these are Q11 (358), Q13 (360), and Q15 (360).

### 3.3 Researcher Positionality and Epistemology

Because the study of race talk “as a form of patterned cultural practice, with predictable scripts and silences—requires a special self-consciousness about ethnographic method” (Pollock, 2004, p. 10), I continue to explore and attend to my research-specific positionality. In my previous doctoral studies in experimental and cognitive psychology, I was trained in a very non-reflexive approach within a positivist logic – that is, I was taught that it was not only possible but expected that I set aside my own personal biases, assumptions, and perspectives in the course of conducting research. This (pairing a post-positivist philosophy with qualitative methods) is what Kidder and Fine call “small q qualitative research” and is built around expectations that the results will demonstrate replicability as well as reliability, and “is a translator of those speaking the language of qualitative analysis and those speaking the language of quantitative analysis” (Boyatzis, 1998, viii). The type of thematic analysis I used for my master’s thesis (McGuire, 1998) in which I coded data from 179 semi-structured interviews and then calculated inter-rater reliability with my colleague’s codes is what Clarke and Braun call a “coding reliability” approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this method, themes are brought to the process before any real coding begins, as inputs; the coding process adheres rigidly to this method. This approach assumes that coding can be neutral and that the multiple coders are stringently trained so that they see (code) as similarly as possible to demonstrate a successful outcome (measured via inter-rater reliability). Nowhere in this process is the researcher’s position or perspective or role in the process acknowledged.

This description is important for the current study, as this is the disciplinary tradition in which I spent about 15 years learning, practicing, and teaching. It was an approach that I took for granted as the way the scientific world operated – that there is objectivity, there is neutrality, and that personal beliefs and politics were anathema to finding “the right answer” (and that there *was*

a right answer). I feel somewhat robbed yet much more liberated knowing that my earlier experience was so limited. That said, I hope to maintain aspects of this approach that are still helpful to research processes: an ethical commitment to consent; a respect for participants, and for the data as well as the processes that were involved in the TRTS collection process; a desire to understand the data; understanding of the importance of documentation and citation.

Unlike the ways in which I was trained as an experimental psychologist over 20 years ago – to do research *on* people (a very impersonal “here’s the survey, here’s your check, thanks bye”) – I am committed to doing (and continuing to learn how to do) research *with* people. My approach to this work originates primarily from the critical qualitative tradition: based on the stance that the reality of the world we live within is socially constructed, and thus the societal structures and institutions (e.g., white supremacy, anti-Blackness) must be interrogated, critiqued, and disrupted. A critical approach based on a thorough understanding of the effects of power relations is essential, not only for producing knowledge for understanding, but perhaps even more importantly to work towards a more equitable society – and in the context of this study, in K-12 schools. As an initial step in a larger research trajectory, I expect this work to be in conversation with critical whiteness studies by exposing and ultimately working to dismantle the structures that create and perpetuate inequitable educational opportunities and outcomes for Black and Brown students in the U.S. Critical Whiteness Studies takes a transdisciplinary approach to examining and describing “the complex nature of race, racism, and White supremacy with a specific focus on how manifestations of Whiteness uphold White supremacy” (Matias & Grosland, 2016, p. 154) as well as “a framework to deconstruct how whites accumulate racial privilege (Matias & Mackey, 2015, p. 34). Another goal of this work is to apply the findings into existing anti-bias/anti-racist curricula and



practices, and for imagining potentially more transformative approaches to reaching and intervening with in-service white teachers.

### **3.4 Analytic Approach: Methodologies and Methods**

To conduct this inquiry, I grounded my approach and my questions in the theoretical frameworks of whiteness and of color-blind racist ideology. These frameworks were chosen for the ways in which they inform the methodologies and the methods that I used in this process as well as helped make sense of the research questions. I will use the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in conjunction with the method of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA).

Reflexive TA does not provide tools for a detailed and fine-grained analysis of language practice that some discourse analytic approaches offer. But, when implemented within a critical qualitative theoretical framework of some kind..., it can offer something akin to what we have elsewhere described as pattern-based discursive approaches. (Braun & Clarke, 2020a, p. 7)

In this section I will discuss the analytical approaches for this study: Critical Discourse Analysis and Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Then, I will offer more specific outlines of the processes I implemented based on these approaches in the Data Analysis section.

#### **3.4.1 Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis**

Language is a social practice that is part of a larger interconnected set of social processes (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is designed to understand the

ways in which language, power, and ideology are connected: “how ideologies are embedded in features of discourse which are taken for granted as matters of common sense” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 77). The goal of critical theories including CDA is to “produce and convey critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection ... [aiming] not only to describe and explain, but also to root out a particular kind of delusion” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7). Given this interdisciplinary methodology’s attention to and concern with the ways in which power is reflected, created, and perpetuated through language, I believe that CDA provided the most access to identifying and organizing dominant racial ideologies and discourses in the open-ended responses to the TRTS.

My two research questions were organized around the central organizing concepts of color-blind racism and whiteness. I examined elements of participant responses reflect elements of these two ideologies, not only in what was said but in what was not said. For the first research question — *What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements **about the role of race in education**?* — I listened for discourses about how teachers describe the roles of schools, teachers, students, and of the ways in which race does or does not interact with these roles. What were some of the historical functions of schools and schooling, both overt (workforce, citizenship) and hidden (erasure and assimilation via “civilizing”) named in their responses? Was there any acknowledgement of their own whiteness? Discourses were gleaned from teachers’ language (expressed directly, indirectly, and through silence) that reflected ideologies of whiteness and color-blind racism. More broadly I looked for how they defined race and racism, and within those definitions, asked what their definitions allowed (and did not allow), and how they may have been limited by this knowledge?

To address the second research question (*What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements **about discussing race and racism in the classroom?***), I analyzed participant responses for reflections of dominant discourses from the two primary ideologies discussed in the literature review: rhetorical moves of whiteness and of color-blind racist ideologies, as well as common maneuvers to avoid or derail discussions of race and racism.

For both research questions I attended to what discourses were most salient to white teachers when they considered their beliefs about the role and the discussion of race and racism in the classroom. How did white teachers' responses reflect the power to control (i.e., allow or limit) certain social practices (Gibbs, 2015) — of teachers and of students? What types of metaphors and other descriptors did teachers use to position themselves and their students in ways that reflected their beliefs about ways that people's behavior can be controlled (Gibbs, 2015)? Additionally, were there indications in their responses of any uncertainty about color-blind racist discourses, or perhaps of any openness to adopt an anti-racist discourse? In this work, I strove to employ a “Big Q” conceptualization of qualitative research (Kidder & Fine, 1987); that is, the qualitative techniques and tools used to form interpretations and generate knowledge were applied within a qualitative paradigm or “values framework” – one that centers “researcher subjectivity as a resource for research and of meaning and knowledge as partial, situated and contextual” (Braun & Clarke, 2020a, p. 3), with no regard for reliability or any other (post)positivist concerns.

### **3.4.2 Method: Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (“Reflexive TA” or RTA) operates between a method and a methodology within the qualitative paradigm. Braun and Clarke “the heading methodology over

method, to signal a theoretically embedded and reflexive account of the research process” (2021, p. 17). This analytical approach centers researcher reflexivity in generating themes *from* codes through an organic, unstructured, subjective process that is organized around a central organizing concept (Braun & Clarke, 2020a). Unlike most other types of thematic analysis (TA), which often draw from research traditions such as phenomenology or experiential qualitative research, RTA is often understood within a *critical qualitative theoretical framework* – “focusing on the interrogation of socially embedded patterns of meaning and the implications and effects of these” (Braun & Clarke, 2020a, p. 3). Reflexive TA is never conducted in a way that is neutral to or independent of theory (Braun & Clarke, 2020b); likewise, this methodology acknowledges that “researchers always make assumptions about what the data represent..., what can be claimed on the basis of these data, and indeed what constitutes meaningful knowledge” (Braun & Clarke, 2020b, p. 10). Thus, this process necessarily relies on researcher reflexivity, maintaining an awareness and understanding of the assumptions and choices we are making as “our choices always reflect where we come from and who we are” as well as “the context, the possibilities, and the constraints of the environment we’re in” (Clarke, 2018; see also Braun & Clarke, 2020b).

Reflexive thematic analyses are organic, fluid, and iterative. The coding process involves interpretation, beyond identification and description; throughout the process, codes can and do evolve or change (Braun & Clarke, 2021). One way in which this exercise is reflexive is that the evolution of codes reflects the growing understandings of the researcher(s) as they are “actively engaged in interpreting the data through the lens of their own cultural membership and social positionings, their theoretical assumptions and ideological commitments” (Clarke, 2017). More specific information about how I applied this process is described below in Stage 1: Theme Generation.

Braun and colleagues outlined six phases of reflexive thematic analysis in their pivotal 2006 *Qualitative Research in Psychology* article, for which they have continued to publish updates since its unexpected popularity and broad misapplication. Their most recent work is an online-only pre-publication in that same journal, in which they revise and clarify the labeling of each of the six phases of RTA as well as enumerate ten of the most frequent problems they have observed in publications that purport to conduct RTA, followed by corrections and/or suggestions for each (Braun & Clarke, 2020b).

1. **Data Familiarization and Writing Familiarization Notes.** This initial phase is a relaxed, casual process of getting to know the data. While taking notes about the data, the researcher should engage in reflexivity by attending to their own assumptions well as how they are responding to the data — what questions they are asking, what they are noticing.

2. **Systematic Data Coding** involves more systematic and involves more focused attention to interpreting the data, along two continua: inductive-deductive orientation and semantic-latent levels of meaning. In this phase, RTA involves taking an orientation or approach that is primarily inductive, or “bottom-up” while attempting to minimize or de-center preconceived assumptions or theories. Likewise, RTA research is meant to seek out deeper or more implicit (latent) meanings that go beyond the more surface (semantic) levels of analysis. In this phase, researchers generate initial **codes**, which are a mix of descriptive and interpretative information (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This moment in the coding process is quite generative, as codes created in this phase may eventually be pruned or subsumed; the researcher cannot yet know what will ultimately be the most relevant and meaningful information (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

3. In the third phase, **Generating Initial Themes from Coded and Collated Data**, “candidate themes” are developed and “tested out” as they relate to the overall dataset and the

research questions. The researcher evaluates the degree to which each theme “tell(s) a coherent, insightful story about the data in relation to the research question” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 854). The two ways that researchers develop codes into candidate themes are through combining similar themes that hang together in “coherent clusters of meaning that tell a story about a particular aspect of the data” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 855), or by elevating (subsuming) a code that the researcher deems substantial enough to promote to a theme. Compared to a code (a more narrow, thin, or unidimensional observation), a **theme** is multi-dimensional “patterns of shared meaning, united by a central concept or idea” (Braun & Clarke, 2020b, p. 14) that are engaged as “analytic outputs, not inputs” (p. 15).

4. **Developing and Reviewing Themes.** Although changes occur throughout the process of RTA, this phase involves intentional attention to revising themes such as removing or substantially changing the ideas generated in the first three phases. The process of reviewing and developing themes is recursive, and involves checking the themes — their meanings, their boundaries, their labels — against the data, then adjusting the themes accordingly (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researcher repeats the check-and-adjust process until they feel that the themes adequately fit the data, and “coher[e] around a central concept — the central idea or meaning the theme captures” (Braun & Clarke, 2020b, p. 4). The goal of this phase is to develop “an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the central organizing concept and boundaries of each theme, including any sub themes (and overarching themes) and the overall theme story” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 856).

5. The phase of **Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes** involves clearly describing the boundaries and outlines of each theme; also, evaluating how well they align with the central organizing concept as well as how well they relate to one another. Likewise, themes under review

should be checked against the entire dataset. Although Phases 4 (revising) and 5 (defining) are listed as two separate phases, Braun and colleagues describe these phases as iterative and somewhat simultaneous aspects of analysis. At the conclusion of this phase, the researcher should be able to assign clear and succinct names to each theme.

6. The final phase, **Writing the Report**, is an extension of the analysis and not simply an exercise. This phase “often serves as a final test of how well the themes work individually in relation to the dataset, and overall” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 857), and continues to involve revisions and updates to the conceptual and structural aspects of the themes, including their naming.

Each of these phases requires the researcher maintain an awareness of their own assumptions and ideas, and to engage themselves as well as the literature. It is important to note that these phases flow from one to the next, with overlap or blending among them — as well as often involve recursive, iterative navigation — returning to previous steps as needed (Braun & Clarke, 2020b).

Both Critical Discourse Analysis and Reflexive Thematic Analysis recognize:

- the importance and centrality of context, and that meaning is located and situated in contexts;
- that there are multiple realities; and
- that the researcher is actively engaged and thus their own cultural and social positions are relevant, as are their beliefs, assumptions, and disciplinary history.

Throughout these analyses, I worked to theorize and reflect upon what assumptions I was making as a researcher that I may have been treating as “common sense.” Certainly, I did not notice or detect all dominant discourses of whiteness and color-blind racist ideology that I may hold myself, was not aware.

### **3.4.3 Method: Codebook TA**

In the second stage of analysis, I conducted a Codebook Thematic Analysis based on two theoretical frameworks: Bonilla-Silva's five rhetorical styles of color-blindness (2018) and Nakayama and Krizek's six discursive strategies of whiteness (1995). For each analysis, I first created coding schemes on separate tabs of an Excel codebook workbook (a separate document from the data spreadsheet). Each strategy was listed as a column, with definitions and examples by the theorists listed below each to use as a reference while coding the data. Then, in the Excel data workbook, I created a new "themebook coding" tab, with five columns for each of the strategies of color-blind racism and six columns for the rhetorical moves of whiteness. I first examined the responses for statements that aligned with the types of color-blind racism, making multiple passes in different directions through the data. Then, I followed these same steps for Nakayama and Krizek's six discursive strategies of whiteness. In each cell where I identified a code-able statement, I noted (a) which sub-type, if applicable (e.g., "[ignorance]" within the "CBR-semantic moves" category as there are four types within this strategy); (b) part or all of the relevant response. When I completed this process for both frameworks, I was able to easily and accurately tally the number of instances of each. Each of these coding processes took very little time, though I intentionally conducted this work across multiple days in an effort for thoroughness as well as to account for any possible variations in my ways of thinking about the data.



## 4.0 CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS<sup>8</sup>

“In the transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish or examine her function in that transformation and to recognize her role as vital within that transformation.”

- Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

In this section I describe the analyses I conducted to address my two research questions in this study:

1. What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about the role of race in education*?
2. What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about discussing race and racism in the classroom*?

### 4.1 Data Analysis

My analytical approach was informed through the theoretical frameworks of whiteness and color-blind racism. For these analyses, I was interested in both the ways and the degrees to which the responses reflected Bonilla-Silva's color-blind rhetorical strategies as well as discursive strategies of whiteness vis-à-vis Nakayama and Krizek (1995). However, before embarking on

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<sup>8</sup> This chapter is traditionally referred to as “Findings” and includes descriptions of results. By labeling this section “Analysis,” I am striving to “[avoid] evoking both discovery and finality” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, pp. 17-18).

any sort of search for information about these specific questions, I first wanted to “enter into conversation” with these white teachers to understand more about their reasons for reporting doubt or disbelief around whether race plays a role in education and around the importance of race or racism being discussed in classrooms.

To avoid falling into a less reflexive type of thematic analysis in which theoretically based categories are used to create themes as inputs (which Braun and Clarke refer to as a “coding reliability” or “bucket” approach), I structured my analysis into two consecutive stages. In the first stage, I took a more inductive approach of theme generation with the Reflective Thematic Analysis process before moving to a second, more deductive stage with pre-determined codes in a Codebook Thematic Analysis. For clarity, I am using the term “stage” to refer to each of the two types or steps of analyses (RTA and Codebook TA), and “phase” to refer to the six steps of analysis within RTA.

#### **4.1.1 Stage 1: Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

In this initial stage of analysis, I was guided by the general steps of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as outlined in the Analytic Approach section in Chapter 3: data familiarization and writing familiarization notes; systematic data coding; generating initial themes from coded and collated data; developing and reviewing themes; and writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2020b). My approach for this qualitative analysis was largely *inductive* (developing themes and interpretations built from codes); *critical* (this is a little “c” critical -- asking questions to make sense of the data); and *constructionist* (with the mindset that reality is being made or constructed, and is neither neutral nor objectively observable) and focused on latent, deeper levels of meaning beyond the more surface or semantic level. My analyses in this study are interpretative more than

descriptive, and began with researcher-identified codes (which were in turn used to generate themes). This work is a critical application of RTA as the process of making sense of the data located the participants within wider contexts (i.e., social, historical). In the proposal stage of this work, I hypothesized that the themes to be organized around two central organizing concepts: whiteness and color-blind racism. In reflection upon the process, I believe that the foundational, core idea that unites the themes most coherently is whiteness, with color-blindness as one of several strategies and concepts encompassed by this over-arching central organizing concept.

In this section I describe the coding and themes that I identified in this process, along with supporting examples. The stories these data are telling revolve around a default world of unacknowledged whiteness, an unraced place which — when untouched by different-other outsiders — is insulated from race and racism and thus from any need to consider or discuss either of these taboo, mature topics. Race talk was described as divisive, and participants framed discussions around racism as more likely to create rather than to reduce racism. Although many conceded that race talk is sometimes necessary for dealing with specific, visible incidents, they emphasized that these discussions require expertise that they do not possess (e.g., “Most teachers I know are not experts in race issues”; participant 72). Participants describe racial problems to be rooted in race itself, not racism (e.g., “Many participants stated that erroneous beliefs about race and racism sometimes come from the homes of Black and Spanish-speaking students — from their parents and social media. Those teachers who did acknowledge that race plays a role in education offered a “heroes and holidays” approach to countering its effects, and to inspire their racialized (not white) students to break free from the encumbrances of race.

**Phase 1: Data Familiarization and Writing Familiarization Notes.** Drs. Clarke and Braun caution researchers that interpretations based upon initial impressions of the data may often

be superficial, and that meaningful time must be spent reflecting on the data in order to arrive at “more complex and interpretive themes that go beyond the obvious” (Clarke, 2018). Following their instructions for embarking on a reflexive TA, I first familiarized myself with the data and made extensive notes. I spent a little over a week with the data, reading printouts at the person level and at the question level, in various orders, and making notes both on the paper printouts as well as electronically with Microsoft OneNote.

Then, I noted items of interest as well as began to reflect on what I saw while also actively considering what assumptions I might be holding based on my own personal or research experiences. I recorded these initial ideas as inclusively as possible, and in the subsequent rounds read much more actively, analytically, and critically. I noted questions (e.g., “Are race and/or racism seen as containable, traveling,<sup>9</sup> or as having borders?”) and observations (e.g., “the teachers who are willing to talk about race or racism talk about being reactive rather than proactive”). Additional notes included:

- conversations about race and racism are optional and maybe a little risky. I noted: “like they’re in McCormick bottles on a spice rack, and that they prefer to keep their dishes bland for fear of students getting out of hand (topic might be too spicy).”
- teachers believe that students — not themselves — are responsible for learning about racism as well as for prompting any classroom conversations.
- teachers talk as if they treat all students the same, and all have the same opportunities.

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<sup>9</sup> My notes around the idea of race/ism traveling included “where it is relevant or appropriate to discuss, and where it is not” and “Where is race/ism: outside/inside school; does it “enter” school/conversation/classroom.” They discuss that they are giving/providing/making space to discuss (“*They* bring race and racism to school from their families”)

During this stage, I noticed some assumptions I was making in my interpretations about which students those teachers were referring to in responses such as “[race talk] helps students accept students who are different from themselves.” My initial interpretation of this statement was that race talk could help white students accept people who are not white (especially given “different” — a term that was used many times as code for “not white,” and that whiteness is often the default). However, participants could in fact be saying that they think Black and Brown students need to be more accepting of white students, or that all students regardless of race could be more accepting of people who are different from themselves. Their language is unclear, and I brought my own lens, my own experiences, and my own biases into the coding process.

Similarly, when I studied comments about how the teachers in this study view students’ home lives as places where they receive misinformation about race and racism, my assumption was that the participants were referring to Black students. However, this assumption could easily be incorrect or at least incomplete, as many white students learn racism at home. I believe my interpretation of these kinds of statements were based in part on recollections of comments such as those I witnessed during a professional development session conducted by Dr. Erika Gold Kestenberg at a local high school, where teachers claimed that Black parents were brainwashing their children with lies about racism, and that these falsehoods were at the root of Black students’ claims that white teachers were racist.

As I coded, I was also reading work that I was interested in and were conceptually adjacent to this project, though not necessarily directly applicable. For example, Givens’ book, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (2021), guided me to think much more expansively about what I was not hearing in their responses, as documented in notes such as “I don’t hear anything that indicates or sounds like they feel they don’t belong” and “they do not

see liberation as one of the functions of schooling or education.” One of many stark contrasts to the historical and ongoing lives of Black teachers and Black pedagogy was the idea of risk: whereas Black educators like Tessie McGee risked their livelihoods and more to teach beyond the white curriculum (Givens, 2021), the only risks I heard white teachers describe were those concerned with being accused of racism and of fears of offending parents. In my final pass through the data for this phase of reflexive thematic analysis, I asked: “What are the teachers saying about themselves?” — noting as well as reflecting, including assumptions I was making (e.g., “When they refer to homogeneity as the reason for lack of issues in their school or community around race or racism, I am assuming that this is coded language for a mostly white school”).

I closed the initial phase of the reflexive thematic analysis by collating observations and questions that I felt were most interesting, most surprising, and most frequently occurring in the teachers’ responses. Many of my notes were multi-faceted and early-stage candidate themes (e.g., “The more race you have, the more problems you have”) while others were more code-like in that they were “thinner” and more unidimensional (e.g., “Parents/families frequently cited as sources of race/racism”). I also recorded questions to keep in mind as I moved forward.

**Phase 2: Systematic Data Coding.** For this phase, I returned to the electronic spreadsheet. I opted to read data at the person-level, and to see all three of their responses, as often a response to question 14 or 16 referred to or was a continuation of a response to question 12 or 14. In this step, I added columns when something in their response was relevant enough to code. In the row, I copied or summarized what part of their responses was being coded. For example, for the first participant, I added the first column “race matters less for white people // only matters when non-white people around” in the header row. Then, in the row to the right of this participant within this column, I recorded the question number (since this is the person-level data view) as well as

what they said that I was coding this way (in this instance, I recorded: “(12) in school with mostly white and Chinese so haven't noticed differences [race doesn't matter here].” For this participant, I created three additional codes: “Race/ism is visible,” “Race causes problems,” and “students need to learn, more understanding (educate out of racism?).” For every subsequent participant, I then considered their statements as to whether they were code-able in any of these categories, or required a new code, or was not necessarily code-able. I had a few additional columns (acting as codes) to record snippets for which I was still unsure about how to code and wanted to be sure to return to:

- “Not sure what to do with” (responses that seemed potentially relevant but did not fall into a current code and which I could not easily capture as a new code; noted in case other responses held similar resonance)
- “OMG” (something that was over the top, usually quite racist or a really illustrative example of something)
- “blah blah” (when teachers said something that sounded to me like it was something they felt was appropriate and safe).

I continued coding down the spreadsheet (across all participants in this subsample) coding statements that fell within coding categories I had already created as well as creating new codes as needed. In this phase I was relatively confident in my decisions about what should be coded given my familiarity with the data from phase 1. Once I completed the first pass of coding, I began at the end of both the participant data (bottom of the spreadsheet) and with the newest codes (newest columns, furthest to the right). I scrolled up, coding only what was visible to me on that screen (usually 10-12 codes/columns at a time), asking myself for each participant “Does anything in their responses fall into any of these coding categories? Did I miss anything? Is there anything

new?” For the 42 columns, I made a total of 4 passes and filled in many more cells with statements I had read earlier but had not yet created a code. During this part of the process, I added two additional coding categories: “Deficit mindset” and “Acknowledge systemic racism.” I also reviewed what was in the “Not sure what to do with” column to evaluate whether any of those excerpts were aligned with any of the final set of 44 codes, and when applicable, moved or copied those response segments to the appropriate coding column.

**Phase 3. Generating Initial Themes from Coded and Collated Data.** In this step, I reviewed the 44 codes and looked for redundancies as well as stories from coding clusters or connections. Some of the ideas overlapped (“sounds like sex ed” and “not appropriate for younger students”) that could be combined to form more complex stories or larger themes (“race talk is dangerous: divisive, touchy, inappropriate”). Through this process I created 11 larger preliminary candidate themes:

1. Predominantly white spaces seem less impacted by race (Question: is this because whiteness as default, uncolored?)
2. Racism is visible and is usually bounded by time/place, and if white people do not see or witness it, then they cannot necessarily believe it
3. Race talk requires expertise, these teachers do not have that expertise. (Questions: what kind of expertise? And do white teachers lack this because they're white and lack race?)
4. Race is not relevant in school, except for a few subjects; otherwise a distraction; race is negative (drain on resources, annoyance, disruptive)
5. Teachers should be reactive, not proactive, about race talk



6. Race talk is dangerous: divisive, touchy, inappropriate (Note: groups with themes 4 and 5, because if race talk is dangerous or irrelevant (theme 4), then teachers should not push to have these conversations (theme 5))
7. Race does not matter as much as culture or socio-economic status
8. “Color-blind” talk (treat everyone same, coded talk, denial, etc.)
9. Racism comes from other people (different) and other places (outside)
10. We can educate racism out of people (but regarding theme 3, who has the expertise to do this educating?)
11. Whiteness: white as default (othering language) and superior (deficit lens, requiring special treatment)

**Phase 4 (Developing and Reviewing Themes) and Phase 5 (Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes).** I then created an outline to expand and build this list of themes, in hopes of seeing ways they spoke to one another. Through this process, I developed five candidate themes from this list:

1. Race does not matter
2. White as default
3. Racism comes from other people and places
4. Racism is visible and containable
5. Race talk is usually bad<sup>10</sup>

After testing and reviewing these themes by checking them against the dataset, I shifted my strategy to try another suggestion from Clarke and Braun’s work: creating a visual map of the

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<sup>10</sup> (term used to represent a broad collection of negative attributions including inappropriate, dangerous, or something they do not want or like)

themes. Using MindMaple software (2013), I mapped these five candidate themes, each of which included sub-themes and example codes within those sub-themes (see Appendix A). This tool was particularly helpful in reflecting my thoughts back to me, helping me to ask questions about the themes, and making adjustments (such as moving, combining, or eliminating sub-themes, or refining the themes themselves). Because this was a recursive process — not only did I return to notes from earlier phases but I also checked the themes with the data (much like a quality check) — I added what I felt were important elements to the map. Additional reading of the literature also prompted me to add important elements to the map.

During this process, I read two very important pieces of literature that I had not read prior to my proposal that helped guide my analyses. First, a twitter connection pointed me to Haviland's (2008) article on "White educational discourse" (Brown, 2021), which is an incredibly salient concept that provided even deeper context and more meaningful ways to conceptualize this work. White educational discourse is "a collection of ways of speaking, behaving, interacting, and thinking that together impacts how White teachers and students interact in White-dominated educational settings about race, racism, and White supremacy" (2008, p. 51). One of those ways of speaking and being is "asserting ignorance or uncertainty" to help us minimize, mediate, or mitigate our personal responsibility and role in upholding both the power and the power-evasiveness of whiteness (p. 44). I heard comments that resonated with ignorance and uncertainty frequently throughout my time with this data. The second conceptual influence was Banks' discussion of multicultural curriculum reform. He presents four general approaches to "integration of ethnic content into the curriculum" (2015) along a spectrum from the most shallow to the most transformative: (a) the contributions approach (including the variant heroes and holidays approach), (b) the ethnic additive approach, (c) the transformative approach, and (d) the decision-

making and social action approach. I recognized many instances of the most superficial of these approaches in the TRTS data — the “contributions approach” (with “heroes and holidays” as a key example), which I had labeled in Stage 2 as “promote Black exceptionalism” and then renamed “heroes and holidays.”

After several days thinking through this mapping, I continued “writing to find out” (Baldwin, 1984), drafting themes in preparation for moving into the next phase of RTA. First, I revisited several of the articles and chapters that Clarke and Braun have published since 2006, to ensure I was still moving in a direction that was not only aligned with their guidance but that also made sense for my own research purposes and goals. Three of the most important ideas I found to be helpful reminders were that:

- themes are multi-faceted, and to communicate the essential meanings or concepts within each, avoid one-word names (Braun & Clarke, 2021)
- between two and six total themes is ideal, including sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021)
- “one central theme or concept may draw together or underpin all or most of your other themes” which come together to tell a coherent story (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 65).

Next, I took pencil to paper to not only adjust my approach from the previous phases that tapped into ways of thinking as one interacts with a computer, but also to return to a somewhat more intimate way of thinking through the data including my own assumptions. Through this process, I distilled the five themes into three larger stories (themes; see Table 6):

**Table 6: Development of Themes**

<b>Phase 3 Candidate Themes</b>	<b>Phase 4/5 Themes</b>
Race doesn't matter	Race doesn't matter, especially to people who don't have it
White as default	
Racism comes from other people and places	Racism is external, visible, and momentary
Racism is visible	
Race talk is usually bad	Race talk is usually bad

**Phase 6. Writing the Report.** As I wrote this report as my dissertation, my thinking continued to evolve, not only in this particular stage but then again as I considered the conclusions and implications. My understanding of the three themes from the phases leading up to this moment became clearer and more nuanced. As Drs. Braun and Clarke advise, these phases of RTA are iterative and not distinct from one another. The three resulting themes are described in more detail below.

#### **4.1.1.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis Themes**

**Theme 1: Race Does Not Matter, Especially to Those Without It.** Many of the statements made by the white teachers in this study reflected elements and examples of color-blind racism and of whiteness. The many ways teachers insisted that race was not a limiting factor for what students can accomplish or in how they are treated by teachers (in general or by themselves personally) demonstrated a core element of color-blind racism. Whiteness was also represented in a variety of responses, particularly through expressions of uncertainty (e.g., whether or how to discuss racism; Haviland, 2008). Denial was prominent maneuver of whiteness, as evident in many participants' refutation of any premise that race impacts educational outcomes; most of the infrequent acknowledgements were conditional, usually qualifying race as a secondary or ancillary

role in students' lives to more powerful influences such as socioeconomic status or class. Some of these equivocations served to avoid using racial language — a behavior consistent with the rhetorical strategies of color-blind racism (“avoiding words”; Bonilla-Silva, 2018) and whiteness (“white as rejection of labeling”; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995) — for example by asserting that “culture” was a more apt term than “race.” When acknowledged, race and racism were referred to as relevant primarily if not only to people who are racialized (i.e., anyone who is not white), and so people in predominantly white environments were “safe” from their negative effects. Much of the language used to express these beliefs were that of othering (e.g., Fine, 1994; hooks, 1990; Spivak, 1985). Without qualification or description, participant statements resonated in the spirit of “*They* bring race and racism to school from their families” and “*Those* students have a lot to deal with.”

***Color-blind racism and whiteness.*** Examples of color-blind racism and whiteness were well represented throughout the white teachers' responses to the three TRTS questions in this study. Some examples of responses containing discourses of color-blind racism include:

- “They need to know that it does not matter the race, it matters who the person is inside.”  
(participant 224)
- “It is important to understand that no matter what we look like, we all have gifts.”  
(participant 294)
- “I do not think race has anything to do with experiences at all.” (participant 72)
- “I believe the students' environment, family life and economic level are what play roles in their educational experiences. The skin color does not matter. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we are all mixed races because of our heritages.” (participant 85)

- “I believe the only thing which needs stated to younger students is although people may look different on the outside, everyone is the same on the inside.” (participant 351)

Overwhelmingly, teachers believe that students receive the same educational experiences regardless of race, from themselves as well as from teachers in general:

- “I believe all of my students, no matter their race or ethnicity, will receive the same educational experience. The color of one’s skin, or the background they might have shouldn’t cause me [sic] to be unteachable.” (participant 41)
- “I provide the same learning experiences and opportunities to my students no matter their race.” [Q12] and then “Every student is different but treated with fairness and respect no matter their race.” [Q14] (participant 68)
- “I believe all of my students receive the same level of education regardless of race.” (participant 135)
- “All students are treated as one and provided with top education from highly qualified teachers.” (participant 341)
- “I will always provide the same education for all students and appropriately scaffold so every student can get the same education.” (participant 372)

And given these beliefs of equal treatment, it is no surprise that they assert that all students have equal access to success in school:

- “I have yet to experience how the non-white students in my class differ from my white students. This is my first week of teaching and while I have read about how race affects students I tend not to believe it until I see it for myself. I can see how the media and their peers could treat them differently for having a different skin tone, but I believe they can accomplish anything just like any other race of student.” (participant 17)

Two pre-service teachers – both of whom agreed that race plays a role in education and were uncertain about whether racism should be discussed – expressed beliefs that I interpreted to be some attempt to acknowledge racism, but which lacked any recognition of how differently racialized people have different life experiences:

- “I believe that race plays a role in everyone’s experience, in any facet of their life.”  
(participant 22)
- “Race has an effect on every life at every time.” and “It affects them all.” (participant 44)

Asserting ignorance or uncertainty is a power-evasive strategy of whiteness (Haviland, 2008) and one of the many “ways in which whiteness is invested in its own self-concealment” (Yancy, 2017 p. 230). Teachers’ responses to each of these three survey questions reflected a great deal of uncertainty and ignorance — from whether or how to discuss race and racism with their students, to a more fundamental belief about whether race plays any role in education at all:

- “I am not sure [if race plays a role in education] because I have not had much exposure to the classroom. I would think it would not because I believe all children should be given a chance equally in the classroom to succeed.” (participant 190)
- “I believe placement in low SES plays a role. Whether or not race plays a part in that I don’t know. I know that certain races are associated with those areas but that’s not a race thing it’s a money thing.” (participant 371)

In particular, teachers said that they were unsure about how to discuss race or racism, conveying (or couching) their concerns at a procedural level:

- “I just don’t know how I would start that topic [racism] in class.” (participant 309)

- “I am not sure how to engage in these conversations with students. Where should I begin, and how can I mediate these conversations to ensure that all students’ voices and opinions are heard but remain respectful.” (participant 10)

Many expressed serious concerns about whether race and racism were appropriate to discuss at all, particularly with younger students:

- “I teach first grade so I am not sure if this would be appropriate to discuss with first graders.” (participant 137)
- “I think it’s important do [sic] know diversity, but in the pre k class I don’t know that it would be appropriate to go into race in much detail.” (participant 47)
- “How do you appropriately talk about race?” (participant 310)

***Race is less important than class.*** Many of the white teachers in this study stated that race is less relevant to a student’s educational experiences than their socioeconomic status. For example:

- “I feel that poverty/economic level plays the primary role in the educational experiences of my students. I also feel that the educational level of the parents also plays a primary role.” (participant 66)
- “I believe the students’ environment, family life and economic level are what play roles in their educational experiences. The skin color does not matter. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we are all mixed races because of our heritages.” (participant 85)
- “I believe placement in low SES plays a role. Whether or not race plays a part in that I don’t know. I know that certain races are associated with those areas but that’s not a race thing it’s a money thing.” (participant 371)



Several teachers' responses discounted the importance if not the validity of arguments that race plays a role in the classroom. For example, Participant 151 stated: "Race is a false social construct and it is important that my students understand the ways in which they can rise to success in the face of cultural classism; by developing a personal identity; or just in code switching for a culture of power." In a series of responses, Participant 72 declared: "I do not think race has anything to do with experiences at all" and then to explain why racism should not be discussed in the classroom, "Seems like a lot of students listen to the 'media' and what they want them to believe instead of researching the truth."

Several teachers conflated race and culture or suggested that "culture" was a more accurate way to conceptualize reasons for educational inequality than race. For example:

- "In terms of race, I think it is important to discuss equality. I think it is more important to discuss culture than race, although the two can be closely related." (participant 101)
- "I think it is important to discuss different cultures, but look at it as a culture not a race." (participant 28)

Finally, race was sometimes presented as a mediator for more proximal influences, such as socioeconomic status or family values (e.g., "I think race has an effect on economic background, the time available to a family and the importance placed on education"; participant 165). The response by Participant 373 about why they believe that race plays a role in education — "They face economic and social disadvantages in and out of school which causes stress" — is also illustrative of white peoples' beliefs that race affects people who are not white ("they"), the exclusionary or marginalizing linguistic practice of "othering" (Morrison, 2017; Spivak, 1985; see also Jensen, 2011; Painter, 2017).

***Othering.*** The participants in this study spoke of race as something belongs to “others” who are “different”; for those who are racialized or who have race (i.e., not white), race causes problems and is something to break free from or requires some sort of remediation in the classroom (e.g., scaffolding, differentiation). For example, Participant 17 (who answered “not sure” to Question 11) said:

I have yet to experience how the non-white students in my class differ from my white students. This is my first week of teaching and while I have read about how race affects students I tend not to believe it until I see it for myself. I can see how the media and their peers could treat them differently for having a different skin tone, but I believe they can accomplish anything just like any other race of student.

This participant’s response is rich with examples of whiteness, including language illustrating that whiteness is default (e.g., “non-white,” “different skin tone,” “them” and “they”). They also believe that any racism would be visible and legible to them, and that in the absence of these visible moments of racism, there is no difference in how “they” are treated and thus in their potential educational outcomes. For the statements that lacked any qualifiers or indications about which race(s) of students they were referring to, I interpreted their responses as referring to students who are not white. Many more examples of “othering” language are found in participant responses:

- “Students come in with the thoughts of how they are affected by their race. They also might feel racism in the classroom.” (participant 317)
- “They face economic and social disadvantages in and out of school which causes stress.” (participant 373)

- “Socioeconomic status plays a much bigger role. I do what I can to supplement experiences but these students are at a huge disadvantage.” (participant 379)
- “They are from low-income families, but also seem surprisingly spoiled (expensive clothing & makeup, new phones) and do not demonstrate much work ethic.” ... “Their race also has played a role, in my opinion, during their upbringing since they do not seem to have experienced much outside of their Mexican neighborhoods.” (participant 149)
- “Race is a false social construct and it is important that my students understand the ways in which they can rise to success in the face of cultural classism; by developing a personal identity; or just in code switching for a culture of power.” (participant 151)
- “My class is primarily white and I believe it is important to talk to them about race. Students need to be aware of others outside of their community.” (participant 303)

Another example of othering language is the use of the term “diversity” which positions “whiteness as the standard and ‘everyone else is diversity’” (Idía, 2021).

- “Currently, my culturally diverse students seem to be afraid of the police. These feelings were brought up in a poetry writing/get to know you exercise.” (participant 66)
- “As cultures change, the diversity of the student will change as well.” [Q14] and then “My class is low incidence, so while I try to incorporate multicultural and diverse themes, my students might not recognize the themes associated with race or color.” [Q16] (participant 355)

Finally, being racialized (not being white) is seen as a problem that requires intervention, and their statements reflect low expectations and a deficit lens. Racialized students require additional support, scaffolding, and behavior management:

- “Socioeconomic status plays a much bigger role. I do what I can to supplement experiences but these students are at a huge disadvantage.” (participant 379)
- “I will always provide the same education for all students and appropriately scaffold so every student can get the same education. Drop out rates are higher for Latino and African Americans but I think that will change.” (participant 372)
- “Although I have had exposure to classrooms which have students of a variety of races, I believe each child is capable of learning and achieving at a high rate as long as the teacher differentiates, is positive, and has good behavior management.” (participant 351)

People who resemble the “*referent-we*” (i.e., white; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) position and describe predominantly white environments as safe, insulated, and unaffected by race or racism (free from occupation by “others”). Perhaps because race is less relevant to our personal lives, we view race as less important overall; thus, perhaps participants in this study understand race as less relevant to their work as classroom teachers. For example, a participant who responded with “not sure” to Question 11 followed up with “Since I teach in a predominantly white school, it is difficult to say what role race plays; however, I am inclined to believe that there is some type of role” (participant 354). Participants used language rooted in ideas of safety (e.g., sheltered, insulated) to describe mostly white environments. Another teacher whose response to question 11 was “not sure” explained their response: “In this specific town, probably not.... Very *insulated* and *sheltered* NE town” (emphasis added); then, elaborating on why they do feel race should be discussed in schools (“yes” to Question 13), stated “Students in my current school have little opportunity for discussing race mostly because of where they come from and who their peers are. They are *insulated* in this New England town and very few travel outside this area” (participant 67; emphasis added).

The white homogeneity of teachers' environments was often cited as reasons for lack of awareness or lack of need to be concerned about race (e.g., "I have taught primarily a homogeneous population, similar to myself but I can see how this may effect [sic] someone who considers themselves [sic] a minority"; participant 332). I interpret these types of statements as saying that racism and race are not present in predominantly white environments, and further that they view white people as without race. For example, one white teacher who responded "no" to Question 11 explained their response: "I went to school in a predominantly white area and have taught in a predominantly white area" (participant 54). They also responded with "no" to Question 15 (that racism should not be discussed with students) and elaborated: "While this probably does some good, the issue is that many of the students will take this as a reason to be prejudiced." Given that this participant teaches in a school with mostly white students, I wonder if they believe that racism cannot be present without people who are not white, and that discussing racism creates or exacerbates racist mindsets.

**Theme 2: Race Talk is Usually Bad.** The white teachers' responses in this survey reflected an overwhelming agreement that race talk is undesirable and dangerous, and that race and racism are inappropriate for discussion with students as they are sensitive, mature, and taboo topics. The comments sound very much like those in discussions around sex education: controversial, "mature" topics that should not be discussed in school and are best left to parents so that they are aligned with their personal values. Teachers expressed concern that leading these conversations could lead to them being "fired or ostracized" (participant 267). Extreme caution, they said, should be exercised whenever these discussions are unavoidable, taking care to ensure

that the conversations are “nice”<sup>11</sup> (Castagno, 2019) and that space is provided for all opinions and viewpoints. In fact, most teachers see conversations about race and racism as falling outside of the scope of their curriculum (with the exception of those who teach social studies or English) and require expertise that they do not possess.

***Taboo, risky, divisive, distracting.*** The discourse around race talk sound very much like the frequent objections to sex education in school: it is taboo, inappropriate especially for young children, and upsetting to parents. The age of the student was a particularly salient factor, and many teachers expressed concerns about discussions of race or racism being inappropriate for younger children, and that they may not be developmentally able to understand these concepts.

- “Touchy subject [racism]. I feel that topic of discussion is more appropriate with older high school and college aged students as they. Might be more exposed to it with social media and life experience. They are soon to be in the real world and it is an unfortunate part of our society.” (participant 341)
- “Kindergarten students are not equipped to understand racism per se. I do talk a lot about fairness and treating people with kindness.” (participant 344)
- “I think it depends on the age. In early elementary classes, I don’t think students would understand what the teacher was talking about. I think in the higher grade levels of elementary school the teacher should talk about it [racism] to prevent students from developing those behaviors.” (participant 366)

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<sup>11</sup> “Niceness is an analytic category that encompasses a number of other practices, discourses, and concepts frequently found in educational settings. Aspects of Niceness that are perhaps the most commonplace in schools include silence around issues of racism, homophobia, and sexism; coded language that allows for the discussion of others while not actually naming them as such; and the general avoidance of potentially uncomfortable or controversial conversations so as not to rock the proverbial boat” (Castagno, 2019, p. xvi).

- “I believe the only thing which needs stated to younger students is although people may look different on the outside, everyone is the same on the inside.” (participant 351)
- “At a developmentally appropriate age.” (participant 165)
- “They are in first grade. That discussion is better left to older grades.” (participant 359)

Another argument around reasons to avoid conversations of race or racism were rooted in concerns that parents would be upset or disturbed:

- “Sometimes I think it is best to get input from the parents to guide the conversations.” (participant 355)
- “Even though the issues are public, many families prefer to have the issue of racism discussed within the confines of their homes. They feel that this topic should not be discussed in the school very much the same way that many feel about religion.” (participant 273)
- “Some of the parents of my students are offended when the topic [race] arises.” (participant 260)

Race talk also requires a safe space for discussion, given its sensitivity:

- “I think it’s important for students to be able to discuss race in a safe environment.” [Q14] and “I think it’s important that these issues be discussed in a safe environment.” (Q16) (participant 135)

Because these topics are so controversial, teachers avoid them as much as possible, and believe that engaging in discussions around race or racism would be risking their personal and professional lives.

- “I think we need more honest discussions of race and to do that we need less victim mentality and less double standards when it comes to who can say what about race. I

know that part of the reason I would never discuss race is that if I said the wrong thing I could be fired or ostracized. That is a risk I am not willing to take.” (participant 267)

- “I feel like if you open that discussion [racism], the students will be more aware and call things racism that isn’t, such as going counterclockwise in a group for snack when they are sitting in the middle.” (participant 194)
- “Most of my students come from a Hispanic background and sometimes they will think that teachers are being racist to them. Thus, they end up not liking the teacher and not doing well in their class.” (participant 165)
- “Students jokingly try to ‘blame’ things on their race but as a teacher I avoid it all together. Every student is different but treated with fairness and respect no matter their race.” (participant 68)

Several teachers asserted that discussing race is actually divisive, and that these conversations create rather than curtail racism.

- “If we keep creating the race divisions, then people are divided into categories to create differences.” (participant 85)
- “While [discussing racism] probably does some good, the issue is that many of the students will take this as a reason to be prejudiced.” (participant 54)
- “By talking about [race], it might isolate children and make them feel different from their peers.” (participant 190)
- “I feel like if you open that discussion [racism], the students will be more aware and call things racism that isn’t, such as going counterclockwise in a group for snack when they are sitting in the middle.” (participant 194)



- “I think it is important to discuss different cultures, but look at it as a culture not a race.

The nation is more divided than ever.” (participant 28)

Race and racism are complicated topics that require training, which falls beyond the scope of their professional expertise.

- “Depending on what you teach I feel this [racism] should be an issue maybe a Civics teacher should cover. Most other teachers I know are not experts in race issues.”

(participant 72)

- “I think there should be specially trained personnel to carry on these conversations.”

(participant 247)

Some courses such as math or science were seen as less relevant spaces to discuss race or racism than social studies, civics, or English, though the classroom in general was not necessarily an appropriate place for these discussions regardless of what is being taught (e.g., “It’s important to discuss the topic of race with students, but there might be better venues than the classroom”; participant 265).

- “I would not find it necessary to talk about race in a math class unless I see it having an impact academically” [Q14] and “...we should only touch on race if it distracts from the material” [Q16] (participant 17)
- “I don’t believe math class is the place to discuss race. The topic of race should not be brought up in every situation [Q14]” and then “In English and social studies when it affects the concepts being studied, it is appropriate. To just discuss it otherwise is ineffective and inappropriate in the classroom” [Q16] (participant 136)

- “As a social studies teacher I believe it is my duty to discuss racial topics. I inform my students that it is a safe place to have discussions and raise questions they may have.” (participant 290)
- “When and where appropriate, these conversations are beneficial. Only where contextually appropriate, though — eg not in algebra.” (participant 151)
- “I don’t see it fitting anywhere in my current curriculum.” (participant 22)
- “I teach math. While I’ll allow a conversation if it is brought up, the amount of content I need to cover is far too high to set specific time for off-topic conversations.” (participant 147)
- “Teaching math, I don’t find that race is a topic that arises in my classroom. If an incident occurs, then I will address it, but otherwise, it does not come up.” (participant 156)
- “I will be a physics teacher. Race/ethnicity/religion/etc shouldn’t be topics that I have to make important and discuss in a science classroom.” (participant 41)

*Approaches to race talk.* In addition to avoidance, the participants’ approaches to engaging in race talk clustered around (a) being reactive rather than proactive, (b) centering conversations about race around “heroes and holidays,” and (c) needing these conversations to be balanced and civil. However, a variety of reasons were offered to support conversations around race and racism, including developing empathy and perspective, preventing or eliminating racism, and making the topic less taboo.

One of the only times most of the teachers agreed that racism should be discussed is when it “happens” (usually described as an incident or a student “saying something”). Teachers describe their preferred approach to race talk, when necessary, as reactive rather than proactive. Some of

the examples included above in race and racism being distracting (above) also represent examples of teachers adopting a reactive approach to these discussions.

- “While I would call out students that use racial slurs or are negative to another student in anyway [sic], I would not find it necessary to talk about race in a math class unless I see it having an impact academically.” (participant 17)
- “If something came up at school in the community dealing with race that was of interest for the kids, I would discuss it. Likewise, if the kids wanted to talk about race in the classroom for any reason and asked me about it, I gladly would talk about it. However, I don’t see it fitting anywhere in my current curriculum specifically aside from perhaps some interesting discussion about genetics (bio teacher).” (participant 22)
- “If there is an incident that happens such as a student making fun of someone because of their race then, I think it is necessary to have a discussion about racism and racial discrimination, so that students know that it is not tolerated.” (participant 182)
- “I think they can [discuss racism] if something happens or if something is happening in the country and its is on the news. Teachers should not bring it up just to talk about it though.” (participant 317)
- “I wouldn’t make it a point to go out of the way of the lesson to talk about race but if the topic was brought up or to my attention then I might say something.” (participant 320)
- “Not as a rule [should racism be discussed]. However there is content in which it of arise, but in general teachers should refrain.” (participant 340)

Some participants offered examples of how discussing race and racism could be helpful revolved around what Banks refers to as the “heroes and holidays approach,” a variation of the contributions approach to multicultural education (2015). Initially I labeled this code as

“promoting Black exceptionalism” as I interpreted teachers’ desire to provide examples of successful Black scientists, writers, etc. as a way to motivate or engage their students. Some statements that I coded as such and fell within this theme, however, are more as delimiters rather than openings to discussions (e.g., “Topic of race is discussed only when teaching holidays”; participant 341).

- “I would like to show them inspiring true stories (including having speakers come) who are of various non-Caucasian ethnic backgrounds to show them that they are capable of breaking out of their current, low-income lifestyles. Students experience gang activity and are tempted by it, so they need to see that people from their same upbringing have become successful... if they stay focused and productive during their academic careers” [Q14] and then “In addition to talking about systematic injustices that minorities have experienced, I think they need to hear about the best way to break free of those stereotypes and discriminatory restrictions is through education.” [Q16] (participant 149)
- “Incorporating texts from different writers will engage students and open up their minds about different races.” [Q14] and then “It is important to focus in a literature class on the contributions of different writers’ voices and their unique contribution to literature and to life.” [Q16] (participant 292)
- “A science classroom is not a place where race is typically discussed. I believe that I will try to introduce diversity of races into science discoveries, instead of only discussing the typical white scientists like Mendel or Darwin. Showing scientists of all races and genders being successful in the field of science will send a message of inclusion. But I don’t know if other issues of race or deeper conversations need to be discussed. Unless of

course there is a direct issue in my classroom that I need to take care of.” (participant 306)

- “It will eventually come up. For example, Martin Luther King Day and books and authors.” (participant 359)

When conversations around race and racism cannot be avoided, teachers emphasize that they must be balanced and include all voices and perspectives (a very #AllVoicesMatter spirit). Participants expressed concerns about keeping these conversations civil and respectful.

- “I am not sure how to engage these conversations with students. Where should I begin, and how can I mediate these conversations to ensure that all students’ voices and opinions are heard but remain respectful.” (participant 10)
- “As long as it is an open dialogue which allows for multiple points of view, I am in favor.” (participant 226)
- “I feel in an ideal world this would be the case [race discussed in classroom], but I don’t think I can fully trust high school students to have a civil discussion about the topic of race.” (participant 316)
- “I think its important [discussing race] but it needs to be done in a healthy balance.” (participant 388)

In contrast to the various objections and concerns expressed by this sample of the white teachers, many said that they believed race talk had value — that they could essentially educate racism out of their students. Most of these responses centered around how teaching students about race or racism could help students develop empathy or expand their perspectives. Some participants pointed to ways in which these conversations could be corrective or preventive:

- “Students need to be aware of cultural differences to better understand others perspectives and develop empathy” [Q14] and “Students should know what it [racism] is and why it is wrong so that they can make better informed decisions in the voting booth one day.” [Q16] (participant 379)
- “Different races have different values and traditional and it is important that students are aware of other races besides their own. And that they are accepting of everyone.” (participant 182)
- “I think it is important that students are exposed to different cultures and races so that they understand that their point of view isn’t the only point of view.” (participant 156)
- “I would discuss this with my students as a way to show how that mindset is negative and that everyone should be accepted for who they are. I also think it will help them be aware of when to step in when they do see a peer engaging in such activity.” (participant 190)

Some participants framed race talk as beneficial to society, a way to make the topic less taboo, with some mention of how these conversations are consistent with the function of schooling:

- “If we ignore the issue it will never get better.” (participant 371)
- “We need them to know about biases and why/how they’re wrong. We need to talk about problems so they go away.” (participant 372)
- “Yes when and if appropriate. The most powerful tool for change is education. If we don’t education [sic] youth about it, nothing will ever get better. As a nation we are failing minorities. We need to do better.” (participant 306)
- “Its the democratic thing to do. Their eyes and souls need to be opened to the effects of discrimination.” (participant 67)
- “To develop good citizens and teach tolerance and acceptance.” (participant 332)

- “I think it is important to discuss race to make it less of a taboo subject.” (participant 143)

Two interesting yet inconsistent reasons for supporting race talk that were offered were disseminating color-blind perspectives: “They need to know that it does not matter the race, it matters who the person is inside” (participant 224) as well as helping racially minoritized people “break free of those stereotypes and discriminatory restrictions” (participant 149).

**Theme 3: Racism is External and Visible.** The white teachers in this study sample viewed the influence and impacts of race or racism on students’ lives as indirect (via socioeconomic class or a more general “culture”), and originating from outside of school (e.g., students’ families or peers, media). Although a few participants acknowledged some types or examples of systemic racism, for the most part they referred to racism as definable, visible instances at the interpersonal level.

While most participants acknowledged race and racism, many believe it comes from a variety of places that have nothing to do with them personally. Some point to general external influences (e.g., “Race and culture can affect a students experiences outside of school which then affect the educational experiences they have in school”; participant 101), and several to students’ peers (e.g., “I believe that a student’s race does not have anything to do with their education. However, other students could negatively or positively impact their education because of skin color (i.e., bullying)”; participant 374). The vast majority, however, pointed to the students’ home or family:

- “Not within the school. Can’t respond for home philosophy.” (participant 131)
- “Family values.” (following “yes race plays a role in education; participant 207)
- “Some children might hear things from their parents and think its ok to say in school.” (participant 187)

- “What my students learn/hear at home prior to coming to the classroom is very important. The race and experiences of the parents are directly displayed by the students.”  
(participant 247)
- “I provide the same learning experiences and opportunities to my students no matter their race. I do believe that if they come from households that do not make education a priority then their experiences may be impacted.” (participant 68)
- “I also feel that the educational level of the parents also plays a primary role.”  
(participant 66)

Other external sources of racism suggested by this sample were other people, including other teachers:

- “I believe that my students perceive me differently from their black teachers because of the way they interact with me. Many of my students have had terrible experiences with ‘white’ people” [Q12] and “It depends on the student teacher relationship and especially the teachers’ beliefs. I would hope no teacher would impose discriminatory beliefs and practices but it does/can happen” [Q16] (participant 290)
- “The students are going to run into stereotypes and discrimination in schools, either from parents, their peers or staff members.” (participant 366)
- “Other students could negatively or positively impact their education because of skin color (i.e., bullying).” (participant 374)
- “I have noticed that it seems the educators in urban settings do not believe that their students have as much potential or will be as successful as students in rural settings.”  
(participant 396)



- “Colleges judge students based on race, so it makes a difference to what college they get into.” (participant 267)
- “Students of color are, and always have been marginalized by their white teachers, the school system, and more broadly the government.” (participant 10)

Additionally, I interpreted their descriptions of racism as visible, and thus if present would be evident. Racism is positioned as something they (as white teachers, white people) can see and witness and would be legible to them if in fact racism were “happening.”

- “I have yet to experience how the non-white students in my class differ from my white students. This is my first week of teaching and while I have read about how race affects students I tend not to believe it until I see it for myself. I can see how the media and their peers could treat them differently for having a different skin tone, but I believe they can accomplish anything just like any other race of student.” (participant 17)
- “I have never seen any discrimination against race/ethnicity in any of the schools I have taught at.” (participant 297)
- “I have seen no evidence in current position that race plays a role.” [Q12] and then “I think [race] is an important topic, however not one that is currently showing need in my classroom.” [Q14] (participant 340)

Some teachers described ways in which they have recognized or witnessed manifestations of systemic racism:

- “Although my district is both racially and socioeconomicly [sic] diverse, I have noticed that my lower level math classes tend to hold more African Americans than my upper level classes.” (participant 147)

- “However, just because I wouldn’t talk about it on. My own does not mean I don’t see that there are many instances in which the current system is rigged against certain racial and economic groups.” (participant 22)
- “After visibly seeing the differences between the tracks (gen. ed. VS. honors) in my placement, I know for a fact that my students have been marginalized based on their race. My gen. ed. classes are predominantly Black while my honors classes are predominantly White. This is not because my students of color are any less intelligent or motivated than their White peers, but rather, because they have been marked off as “disruptive,” or “unmotivated” by teachers in the past (mainly due to lack of understanding of the students’ cultures).” (participant 10)

#### 4.1.2 Stage 2: Codebook Thematic Analysis

Following this first stage of inductive exploration of the data, I then turned to a more traditional way of coding as another way to understand the data. In this stage, I looked for ways in which these participants’ responses map onto coding schemes based on Bonilla-Silva’s verbal strategies of color-blind racism (2018) and on Nakayama and Krizek’s discourses of whiteness (1995).

As described in Chapter 3, the spectrum of approaches to Thematic Analysis (TA) ranges from the most deductive (Coding Reliability TA) to the most inductive (Reflexive TA) to the, with Codebook TA in between. **Coding reliability TA** is deductive, experiential, largely descriptive and summative, and is “little q qualitative”: qualitative methods with a (post)positivist philosophy and is designed to “speak the language of quantitative analysis” (Boyatzis, 1998, viii; see also Kidder & Fine, 1987). Coding reliability approaches involve early theme development and

structured coding schemes, as well as multiple coders who must measure and determine their degree of consensus following independent coding (Braun & Clarke, 2020b).

**Reflexive TA** centers the researcher's positionality and is the most organic, inductive, and flexible type of thematic analysis, embracing both the methods and underlying philosophy of qualitative research. It is "big Q qualitative," meaning that both the techniques and philosophy are qualitative (Kidder & Fine, 1987). Rather than eschewing researcher bias or taking steps to eliminate any fingerprints of human involvement, RTA posits that understanding and incorporating researcher values and assumptions is a "*resource* for knowledge production, which inevitably sculpts the knowledge produced, rather than a must-be-contained threat to credibility" (Braun & Clarke, 2020b, pp. 7-8, italics original).

The third type of thematic analysis, **Codebook TA** lands in between these two "poles" of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2020b, p. 8). Codebook TA is a more structured method than RTA in that the researcher does in fact determine some themes before the coding process; however, this method is also much more flexible and fluid than "Coding reliability TA" in that these codes do have the potential to change (e.g., refined, new themes added) over the course of the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2020b). It is in this second stage of data analysis where I will invoke framings based on Bonilla-Silva's rhetorical strategies of color-blind ideology as well as Nakayama and Krizek's discourses of whiteness. The coding scheme for this Codebook TA stage was designed to inspect the participants' responses for ways in which they reflect mindsets and behaviors of color-blind racial ideology and whiteness.

**Theme 1: Discourses of Color-blind Racism.** As outlined in the previous chapter, I focused on the ideology of color-blind racism through the rhetorical styles in teachers' responses that serve as linguistic buffers that white people use to defend the hegemonic stories we tell

ourselves in order to uphold and perpetuate a white supremacist status quo. The five types of strategies detailed by Bonilla-Silva (2018) that I used for this analysis are: (a) avoidance of racial language, (b) semantic moves, (c) projection, (d) diminutives, and (e) incoherent rhetoric (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). More extensive definitions and descriptions for each of these in Chapter 2, and are distilled below:

- **avoidance of racial language** — speaking hesitantly and indirectly or through coded language, if saying anything at all
- **semantic moves** — cloaked ways of expressing racial views, with racial statements sandwiched between non-racial utterances. Four of these strategies are
  - **apparent denials** (“I am not racist, but...”)
  - **claims of ignorance** (“I’m not Black, so I don’t know”)
  - **ambivalent arguments** (“yes and no”)
  - **dismissing race** (“It doesn’t have anything to do with racism”)
- **projection** — explanations that project racist motivations onto racially minoritized people
- **use of diminutives** — softening racist statements
- **rhetorical incoherence** — verbal babbling and fumbling when discussing racially sensitive matters

The overwhelming majority of statements reflected strategies within **semantic moves** — in fact all but one of the 27 semantic moves were coded as “dismissing race” with the remaining one falling into the “claims of ignorance” category (“Since I teach in a predominantly white school, it is difficult to say what role race plays”; participant 354). Examples of dismissing race ranged from the very explicit statement “I believe that a student’s race does not have anything to do with

their education” (participant 374) to an indirect rejection or dismissal by naming another variable they believe is more important: “I believe placement in low SES plays a role. Whether or not race plays a part in that I don’t know. I know that certain races are associated with those areas but that’s not a race thing it’s a money thing” (participant 371). Another way in which race was dismissed was by claiming that race does not play a role in their own or any classrooms:

- “I will always provide the same education for all students and appropriately scaffold so every student can get the same education.” (participant 372)
- “I believe all of my students, no matter their race or ethnicity, will receive the same educational experience. The color of one’s skin, or the background they might have shouldn’t cause me [sic] to be unteachable.” (participant 41)

The other two categories in Bonilla-Silva’s strategies that represented in these data were **avoidance of racial language** (4 instances) and **projection** (5 instances). Two the examples of avoidance language that was coded (“urban,” “rural) as well as “othering” (as discussed in the RTA stage section):

- “These children are extremely different than children in the suburbs/rural areas. Discipline, respect, and behavior are polar opposites.” (participant 187)
- “I have noticed that it seems the educators in urban settings do not believe that their students have as much potential or will be as successful as students in rural settings.” (participant 396)

The other two instances of avoiding racial language were vague descriptions of homogeneous populations:

- “We work in a school district that is fairly similar in terms of race. In regard to day to day activity, there aren’t many issues with [sic] deal with and our high school tends to be very accepting of all students.” (participant 226)
- “I have taught primarily in a homogeneous population, similar to myself but I can see how this may effect [sic] someone who considers them-self [sic] a minority.” (participant 332)

Finally, five responses fell within or near the scope of Bonilla-Silva’s definition of the **projection** strategy (claims that racially minoritized people are responsible for the racist ideas of the white belief-holder):

- “I think we need more honest discussions of race and to do that we need less victim mentality and less double standards when it comes to who can say what about race” (participant 267)
- “Children are often times segregated within a school, based on neighborhoods or family belief systems.” (participant 273)
- “Most of my students come from a Hispanic background and sometimes they will think that teachers are being racist to them. Thus, they end up not liking the teacher and not doing well in their class.” (participant 182)
- “Students come in with the thoughts of how they are affected by their race. They also might feel racism in the classroom.” (participant 317)
- “Prior experiences or context in which they may have defined their beliefs.” (participant 353)

I annotated this final statement as “maybe”; although it is less explicit than Participant 317’s statement just above it, I interpreted it to be very similar in meaning.

**Theme 2: Discourses of Whiteness.** The second portion of the Codebook TA stage included the six discursive strategies of whiteness as outlined by Nakayama and Krizek (1995), described in the previous chapter. These are:

- **“white” as powerful** — emphasizing majority, dominance
- **“white” as negative (lacking, absence) or invisible** — lacking racial or ethnic features; white as default
- **“white” as a scientific classification** — white as natural not cultural, drained of history and social status
- **“white” as a nationality** — conflating nationality and race (e.g., “just American” which calls to mind “American means white” (Morrison, 1992, p. 47))
- **“white” as a rejection of labeling** — just human, should not call attention to color, labels create barriers
- **“white” as European ancestry** — symbolic ancestry without recognition of power; race as an accessory

In this coding scheme, two types of strategies were most frequently identified strategies from within the TRTS participant statements: **“white” as a rejection of labeling** and **“white” as negative/invisible**. I identified examples of the **rejection of labeling** strategy in 28 of the participants who offered any statements, and **negative/invisible** with 15 instances. Finally, only one (1) statement was coded as **“white” as a scientific classification**, with a generous interpretation of this category. I did not identify any statements that reflected “white” as powerful, a nationality, or as European ancestry.

Some statements fell neatly within the scope of **rejection of labeling**:

- “I believe the only thing which needs stated to younger students is although people may look different on the outside, everyone is the same on the inside.” (participant 351)
- “I think it is more important to discuss different cultures, but to look at it as a culture not a race. The nation is more divided than ever.” (participant 28)
- “I believe the students’ environment, family life and economic level are what play roles in their educational experiences. The skin color does not matter. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we are all mixed races because of our heritages.” (participant 85)

The second most frequently identified strategy within this coding scheme was “white” as negative/invisible. In the 15 statements that reflected this strategy, participants centered their whiteness, racialized only people who were not white, and responded to questions about race or racism by referring only to student who were not white.

- “These children are extremely different than children in the suburbs/rural areas. Discipline, respect, and behavior are polar opposites.” (participant 187)
- “I have taught primarily a homogeneous population, similar to myself but I can see how this may effect [sic] someone who considers them-self [sic] a minority.” (participant 332)
- “Since I teach in a predominantly white school, it is difficult to say what role race plays; however, I am inclined to believe that there is some type of role.” (participant 354)
- “I have yet to experience how the non-white students in my class differ from my white students. This is my first week of teaching and while I have read about how race affects students I tend not to believe it until I see it for myself. I can see how the media and their peers could treat them differently for having a different skin tone, but I believe they can accomplish anything just like any other race of student.” (participant 17)



Some of the examples that I coded as **rejection of labeling** also made reference to skin color, which could have also been coded as **scientific classification**. For example, “people may look different on the outside, everyone is the same on the inside” (participant 351). However, because none of the responses, when evaluated in the larger context of a participant’s set of responses, sufficiently lacked historical or social attributes or engaged scientific arguments for the lack of differences. However, I did code the following statement as **scientific classification**: “Race is a false social construct and it is important that my students understand the ways in which they can rise to success in the face of cultural classism...” (participant 151). Though this statement does not bear any explicit markers of this particular rhetorical move as described by Nakayama and Krizek. However, I reasoned that scientific classification is one form of social construction — ways in which humans in dominant positions have decided to organize and explain the world. For decades, philosopher and physicist Evelyn Fox Keller has made arguments that the language we invoke and impose — from the metaphors to the organization of taxonomies — are “grounded... in our particular social and political realities (1995, p. 42) and “[depend] on where one looks for the source of one’s organizing principle” (Heldke, 1987, p. 136). As with race and gender, scientific classification is replete with examples of language and ordering that reflect what hooks termed “white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy” (1984; see also Keller (2010) for examples of racial and gendered metaphors in genetics).

## 4.2 Limitations

This dissertation represents a work in progress, and like most writing of this nature it is never really finished (L. Patel, class conversation, January 29, 2021). Certainly, there are elements

of the work that limited my ability to know or understand the bigger questions I asked — some within my control (e.g., the theoretical frameworks I chose) and many beyond, some personal and others external to me. Some of these limitations are also opportunities or suggestions for ways to continue asking these questions differently in the future.

**Researcher.** As a white person in the U.S., I share many historical social and cultural features of the participants, as well as many dominant discourses. This aspect of my positionality may mean that I miss or am less able to recognize and identify these dominant discourses. Secondly, this is my first venture into using any sort of thematic or discourse analysis, which may constrain the thoroughness, accuracy, or efficiency of the research process.

**Theoretical.** In this initial step of work, I selected two theoretical frameworks with the understanding that they each offer meaningful yet limited perspectives, with the understanding that there are many ways of approaching the data and my research questions that can offer additional nuance. For example, color-blindness as an ideology conveys a reduced or removed ability to sense — it names a disability, and thus implies a lack of intention or control rather than a acknowledging the agency of a mindset or intentional behavior. Grounded in Critical Race Theory, Annamma takes a more expansive approach to this type of racial ideology “in order to capture ways that the ideology of refusing to acknowledge race functions in society more accurately,” (Annamma et al., 2017, p. 150), and offers a conceptual framing of “color-evasiveness” to capture the intent and controllability.

Regarding Bonilla-Silva’s conceptualization of color-blind racism, I believe that these categories are more relevant to spoken/uttered responses in a conversation or interview, and that brief and edit-able answers in a survey do not elicit the same types of responses. Akinaso (1982) summarized several theories across tens of studies on the ways in which written and spoken

language differ. In general, most studies consistently demonstrated that written language includes longer words (in both number of letters and number of syllables); higher linguistic density, variation, and difficulty level in vocabulary; and less overall (shorter) text. The syntactic structures of written text contain more passive voice rather than the active voice that is more common in spoken language (Akinnaso, 1982). With this understanding, it would be difficult to interpret how much of the extensive use of passive voice in participants' written responses in this study were attributable to this general linguistic pattern, and which were rooted in white people's tendency to use passive voice to minimize our current and historic role in upholding and enacting various types of racism (Brown, 2015; Jimenez, 2020).

Bonilla-Silva's was based on data from interviews and not surveys (like the TRTS). These two methods elicit different responses both in size and scope. I believe that his strategic categories are more applicable to spoken/uttered responses from a conversation or interview (e.g., they are less likely to babble incoherently in typing than in speaking), and that answers to a survey are usually much shorter. Akinnaso (1982) summarized several theories across tens of studies on the ways in which written and spoken language differ. In general, most studies consistently demonstrated that written language includes longer words (in both number of letters and number of syllables); higher linguistic density, variation, and difficulty level in vocabulary; and less overall (shorter) text. The syntactic structures of written text contain more passive voice rather than the active voice that is more common in spoken language (Akinnaso, 1982). With this understanding, it would be difficult to interpret how much of the extensive use of passive voice in participants' written responses in this study were attributable to this general linguistic pattern, and which were rooted in white people's tendency to use passive voice to minimize our current and historic role in upholding and enacting various types of racism (Brown, 2015; Jimenez, 2020).

**Data.** Neither the non-randomness nor the not-necessarily representative nature of this sample are considered to be limitations for this “big Q” qualitative approach. In fact, given the percentage of white teachers who agreed that race does play a role in education (83.8%), that the topic of race is important to discuss in their future/current classrooms (84.3%), and that teachers should discuss racism and racial discrimination with their students (84.3%), this sample of white teachers is most definitely unrepresentative of the larger white teacher community. Finally, gender information was not collected, and although I do not have a theoretical reason to expect gender differences in dominant discourses around whiteness or color-blind racial ideology, it would have been an interesting pathway for exploring the data for a sense of what axes or variables gender differences may be present.

**Analytical Approaches.** Theories offer ways to make sense of data through research questions, and applying different theories or asking different questions renders a different analysis. A vast number of important and interesting questions could be asked about the data that I am not asking. There are many other theories and theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and methods – each with the potential for a multitude of analyses and ways of engaging with data.

## 5.0 CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

“Description is not liberation.”

- Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*

### 5.1 Summary

This study asked two questions about white teachers’ discourses of whiteness and color-blind racism about the role of race in education and about race talk; as a result of these inquiries, many more questions have been generated. The 124 teachers in this study responded with “no” or “not sure” to at least one of the three Teachers Race Talk Survey (TRTS) questions about whether race plays a role in the educational experiences of their students, and if race or racism should be discussed in their classrooms. Consistent with the larger sample of 440 white teachers who participated in the TRTS (most of whom answered “yes” to all three questions), this subsample was about evenly divided between pre-service teaching students and in-service teachers with an average of 10 years of experience teaching. Of the 124 participants, 113 provided follow-up responses to at least one of these questions. In this study, I conducted two stages of analysis with these open-ended responses: first, an inductive approach through a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) followed by a deductive Codebook Thematic Analysis (Codebook TA). The analyses throughout this work were informed by Bonilla-Silva’s (2018) strategies of color-blind racism and Nakayama and Krizek’s (1995) rhetorics of whiteness.

Through the RTA process, I organized the teachers' discourses around race, racism, and race talk around three general themes: (a) race does not matter, especially to those without race (white people); (b) race talk is usually "bad" (term used to represent a collection of negative attributions); and (c) racism is external and visible. Each of these themes included aspects of both color-blind racism and whiteness — in alignment with and extending well beyond the conceptualizations of the two guiding theoretical frameworks. Participants asserted that all students, regardless of race, receive the same educational opportunities, and that race is only important to people who are racialized. Race and racism were taken up as irrelevant to or even absent from predominantly white spaces through narratives that portrayed white people as "unraced," as default humans. These discourses also included characterizations of predominantly white spaces as "safe" — harmless, and protected not only from racism but also exempt from any aspects of race — while ascribing blame for any effects of race or racism to people who are not white: "others."

Furthermore, the descriptions and examples of racism in this study were almost always visible behaviors, comparable to the interpersonal level of racism, with virtually no references to institutional or systemic levels of racism. Much like the prevalent "iceberg model" of racism — the participants in this study made virtually no reference to any forms of racism that are beneath the surface. Expressions of uncertainty and ignorance permeated the responses, which aligns with the conceptualizations of both whiteness and color-blind racism in this study. The teachers also understood that race talk can be beneficial if the discourse is "civil" and that someone (else, not white teachers) should conduct those conversations in another place, space, and time — all maneuvers of whiteness. In the Codebook TA stage, I created coding schemes based on five types of color-blind strategies detailed by Bonilla-Silva (2018) and six discursive strategies of whiteness

as outlined by Nakayama and Krizek (1995). The primary theme that emerged from both of these coding schemes revolved around dismissing any effects or implications of race as well as avoiding speaking about race. These results hold the potential for informing teacher preparation programs and professional development, both around the historical and ongoing mechanisms of racism in schooling and then learning to discuss race and racism.

## 5.2 Key Findings

Through two methodological stages — the first an inductive Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) followed by a deductive Codebook Thematic Analysis (Codebook TA) — I explored the TRTS data to learn more about ways to understand answers the following two research questions:

1. What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about the role of race in education*?
2. What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about discussing race and racism in the classroom*?

**Key Findings: Reflexive Thematic Analysis.** Through the process of the RTA, I identified dominant discourses of both color-blind racism and whiteness that were applicable to both research questions. General color-blind racism in the vein of “color/race doesn’t matter” was a common throughline of teachers’ responses: teachers claimed that race made no difference in students’ educational experiences, and thus there was no reason to distract from important topics by discussing race or racism in their classrooms. Bonilla-Silva categorizes a specific manifestation of color-blind racism — speaking in **coded language** to avoid mentioning race — as a type of “semantic move,” one of the five rhetorical strategies in this framework. This linguistic behavior

overlaps with the other theoretical framework in this study, whiteness, through Nakayama and Krizek's rhetorical move of whiteness which they call "rejection of labeling." At the heart of each of these conceptualizations is the emphasis on avoiding calling attention to race, and on speaking and moving through the world as if "what's on the inside is all that matters."

Similarly, **claims of ignorance or uncertainty** are relevant to each of these theoretical frameworks. This strategy is one of Bonilla-Silva's "semantic moves" as well as a characteristic of White educational discourse (Haviland, 2008). More generally, this position of asserting ignorance calls to mind Dunbar-Ortiz's conceptualization of "unforgetting," which is a political act that encompasses an epistemology of ignorance (Mills, 1997) and an ontology of forgetting — a way of being that permits not knowing (Dixon, 2009; Shotwell, 2015). Wielding ignorance provides one way to avoid engaging in conversations that risk unmasking racist systems of oppression and that could steer us into situations that elicit fears, discomfort, and defensiveness (Picower, 2021; Shotwell, 2015).

**Whiteness as the default** position or state is one of the rhetorical move of whiteness named by Nakayama and Krizek: "white" as negative (lacking, absence) or invisible. Picower (2021) calls this tool "white out" — a curricular tool of whiteness that "cement[s] Whiteness as normal, innocent, and ever present" (p. 27). White people are "just people" and racial descriptors are often omitted: "Eddy is white, and we know he is because nobody says so" (Morrison, 1993a, p. 72).

Regarding the first research question — **What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements about the role of race in education?** — participants' responses included several elements of both theoretical frameworks.



Discourses of color-blind racism pertaining to the role of race in education:

- race plays no role in education, and other factors such as SES and family values are more important in determining educational outcomes (Bonilla-Silva “dismissing race” semantic move)
- teachers treat all students the same
- all students have equal opportunities to succeed in school
- students bring racism into school with them, and fall prey to false narratives they learn in the media, from parents, from other outside influences (Bonilla-Silva’s “projection”)

Discourses of whiteness about the role of race in education:

- “Others” are affected by race and for whom race is a problem
  - predominantly white spaces are “safe” from the effects of race
  - “diversity” to refer to people who are not white
- being racialized — which white people are not — is a deficit, and students who are not white require additional support, scaffolding, management

Discourses of both color-blind racism and whiteness were also identified throughout responses related to the second research question — **What are the dominant discursive strategies of whiteness and color-blind racism revealed in white teachers' statements *about discussing race and racism in the classroom?***

Primary discourse of color-blind racism around race talk:

- all viewpoints matter, balanced and civil discussions are important (the “All things being equal” curricular tool of whiteness, in Picower, 2021; see also *The Price of Nice*, (Castagno, 2019) for extensive discussions around the components and mechanisms of niceness as a way of maintaining white supremacy)

Discourses of whiteness relevant to race talk:

- race and racism are taboo topics that are:
  - mature, inappropriate topics especially for younger students
  - dangerous and risky to discuss
  - controversial, like sex education and religion (two of the participants (41 and 273) compared or equated the taboo-ness of race to that of religion.) — and thus also upsetting to parents (especially to parents like those in the podcast *Nice White Parents* (Snyder, 2020))
  - irrelevant and distracting
  - divisive, causes more racism (Nakayama & Krizek’s rhetorical strategy “rejection of labeling”)
  - requires expertise (which white people do not have because of ignorance)
  - requires safe spaces — which white and white-led spaces naturally are because we are race-neutral
- ignorance and uncertainty about whether and how to discuss race and racism
- “White educational discourse” (Haviland, 2008):
  - avoiding racial language
  - asserting ignorance or uncertainty

Many dominant discourses from the data fell outside of these frameworks. I organized these discourses into three themes, where I saw ways in which the collection of discourses told a cohesive story. The first theme I labeled “race does not matter, especially to those without it.” White people are “safe” from race or racism (unlike Others), and we engage in a variety of discourses of both color-blind racism and of whiteness to uphold and maintain our ignorance,

insisting that we do not possess the necessary expertise to discuss race or racism because of our race-free world (speaking as people whom I believe Lorraine Hansberry would refer to as “uncolored eggheads” (Hansberry, 1961/2021)). In addition, race is less impactful on educational outcomes than class, culture, or family values. Color-blind racism ranged from the general “we are all the same on the inside” color-blind quips to denials that race and thus racism negatively impact Students of Color, particularly Black students.

A second theme captured discourses of the dangers of race talk (“race talk is usually bad”), while also acknowledging the necessity and benefits of these discussions, which should be initiated and facilitated by people who were more qualified and whose job descriptions aligned with this work. Participants in this study described race and racism as taboo topics, and conversations about them as risky, divisive, distracting, and upsetting to parents, and generally inappropriate. Discussions of race are treated similarly to those of school-based sex education (e.g., see letter to parents by Carmichael, 2021). When they do engage in these types of discussions, it is usually a reaction to an incident, never proactively. Some contexts such as English or social studies classes were seen as exceptions, and incorporating exceptional people in history who are not white was presented as a way to motivate or engage students (Banks’ heroes and holidays approach to multicultural education; 2015). Though white teachers see themselves as ill equipped to handle these discussions, and see the topics as irrelevant to their classes, many do acknowledge that learning about race and racism may reduce or prevent racism. They also believe more informal education that occurs through exposure to cultures other than their own.

Discourses that I collected into the third theme involved two perceptions of racism: as an external factor (i.e., beyond the sphere of the participating teachers) and as visible. Teachers cited external sources of racism such as “the media,” other students, other teachers, and parents. Racism

was also largely described at the interpersonal level, not only discounting and ignoring the arguably more powerful and harmful effects of institutional and systematic racism, but also carrying the assumptions that racism is legible to white people, and that if we do not witness racism then it is not happening. These descriptions of the visibility of racism imply, to me, that they view this vector of oppression as having borders (a describable incident with a beginning and an end), as having geography (racism exists or occurs in some places and not others), and which is containable (if it happens, the teachers will address the incident with the class and correct the person or people who were responsible, then end the distraction and move back to class topics).

**Key Findings: Codebook Thematic Analysis.** Some of the color-blind racist language from the TRTS survey responses were code-able into three of Bonilla-Silva's (2018) five types of color-blind rhetorical strategies. One of these strategies "semantic moves," includes four strategies (apparent denials, claims of ignorance, ambivalent arguments, and dismissing race). Almost all of the 27 statements that were aligned with this strategy were examples of "dismissing race," and one was an example of "claims of ignorance." The two other types of strategies that I found any examples in the data were "avoiding racial language" and "projection," which had four and five identifiable statements, respectively.

Results from the coding using Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) discursive strategies of whiteness, two of the six strategies were more frequently identified: "white" as a rejection of labeling and "white" as negative/invisible. One additional statement was aligned with the code "white" as a scientific classification. About the same number of statements were coded as "rejection of labeling" in this scheme (28) as the Bonilla-Silva color-blind strategy "dismissing race" (27) as they have similar definitions. Rejection of labeling includes assertions that labeling and calling attention to race is negative and divisive, and that we are all "just human." Fifteen

statements were categorizable as white as invisible or lacking race — implying or referring to white as neutral, unracialized.

### **5.3 Implications for Research**

This work has a great deal of potential to contribute to theoretically based practices of training pre-service teachers and to the continuing education of in-service teachers. How we study and address the discourses — the intertwined beliefs and behaviors — of color-blind racism and whiteness is a critical undertaking of critical importance. Language is one of the most conspicuous of these behaviors, one that is not only reflective but also agentive. As discussed in Chapter 2, language and thought are inseparable; the way we communicate (in speech or writing) influence how we think (internal “speaking”), and vice versa. Changing how we think requires changing the language we use.

Two specific contributions that this study can make are in the building upon the growing body of research based on the Teachers Race Talk Survey as well as demonstrating the richness of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis methodology.

#### **5.3.1 Extending the TRTS**

As summarized in Chapter 3, to date six investigations into the Teachers Race Talk Survey data have been conducted and published in a journal or as a dissertation. This “live” survey with a growing set of responses (672 as of May 14, 2021) has the potential to answer many more questions. I am also interested in updating the TRTS with questions that — through the benefit of

hindsight — are important gaps: asking “Do you discuss race/racism with your students?” and including gender identity as a demographic variable. In addition, I believe that expanding the TRTS to elicit more extensive responses could be particularly enlightening. Focus groups, interviews, and other qualitative methods hold a great deal of potential for learning about white teachers’ beliefs through their discourses beyond what people are willing to type into a Qualtrics survey. A more intentional, representative sample of teachers than those who have responded to the survey to date would also add to our theoretical understandings of white teachers’ discourses of whiteness and color-blind racism (and more).

### **5.3.2 Broader Application of Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

Compared to the Reflexive Thematic Analysis method, the Codebook Thematic Analysis was a much less robust way of understanding the data. When I moved from the RTA stage into the traditional Codebook TA stage, I was holding a great deal of hope that the process of making sense of the data would continue to be fruitful. However, analyzing the data through a top-down, deductive approach using pre-determined codes and definitions felt much like attempting to view an expansive vista through an opaque screen with ill-placed pin holes. In comparison to what was visible through the RTA, my view of the data through Codebook TA was limited and largely obfuscated. And without deep familiarity with the data, I may not have realized that I was missing.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis is a relatively new variation of a much more established method of thematic analysis. This analysis not only incorporates but requires the researcher to acknowledge, consider, and understand their biases, it rejects any notion of “objectivity” that is prevalent in most research. As such, this approach aligns very well with critical methodologies (like Critical Discourse Analysis) as well as with critical theoretical frameworks. Similar to the

relationship of language and thought, I hope that broader use of the RTA will help move the theoretical and practical aspects of research towards increasing comfort with and expectations of factoring in the roles that researchers (and our biases) play throughout the research process.

## **5.4 Implications for Practice**

This work — not only the “results” of the analyses but what can be learned from the entire process — can inform the way anti-racist education for teachers is planned and conducted. The ways we are educating practicing teachers and their successors must be built upon principles of Black educational thought, with an accurate accounting of the histories of schooling and education that have led to today’s systems and institutions. Certainly, teachers will experience and exhibit defensiveness and discomfort throughout, including habitual returns to positions of uncertainty and ignorance; these emotional responses are valid, and acknowledging them is part of the (un)learning process. In her work, Dr. Gold Kestenberg trains in-service teachers and administrators to navigate these feelings as a core skill so that they are able to authentically reorient their practices towards equity and justice. Understanding the many discourses within these behaviors (including but not limited to color-blind racism and whiteness) can inform how we invite and guide teachers into more informed and equitable ways of being and teaching. We must “go get [our] cousins” (Picower, 2021, p. 15). Intervening at the level of teacher ideology and beliefs — whether it is coursework and internships for pre-service teaching students or professional development with in-service teachers — will impact the ways they think about, speak to, teach, and treat their students. In her most recent book, Picower emphasizes that

teachers create curriculum that flows from their ideology — in other words, educators teach what they believe. It would follow then that sites for disruption are the spaces in which they learn to teach, as these can also become the places in which they rethink their beliefs. (Picower, 2021, p. 13)

As it is white people who created racism, it is primarily our responsibility for dismantling it. However, we (white people) cannot be trusted to get this right, and must be constantly accountable to the people who are experiencing our oppression (Yancy, 2017). We have to recognize that there are places and spaces we do not need to insert ourselves, and that we have all of the knowledge required to design and implement antiracist interventions, for example. “Part of the culture of Whiteness is to believe we have all the answers and that we have the right to do anything our hearts desire” (Picower, 2021, p. 16). Our “insights must be challenged and corrected by those bodies of color that stand to suffer from these subtle blinkers that inhibit the efforts of antiracist whites. People of color must keep whites cognizant of the limits of their visions, their “certainty” regarding how to tackle whiteness” (Yancy, 2017, p. 231). We have work to do on ourselves and how we operate in the world before attempting to disrupt or dismantle racism: “The problem for pro-democracy white people is not only how to end racism and inequality but how to stop functioning or participating in the subject position of that verb” (Martinot, 2015, pp. 173-174). Three waves of white feminism have demonstrated that we do not think or move intersectionally, and that we prioritize our own self-interests.

One issue that is of major concern to us and that we have begun to publicly address is racism in the white women's movement. As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial



comprehension of race, color, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue. (Combahee River Collective, p. 273)

## 5.5 Conclusions

Much like testing a sonar system, this study was designed to survey the landscape of white teachers' foundational beliefs and practices (as one might an ocean floor). This work is an opening for mapping the discursive contours of whiteness and color-blind racism in white teachers through my own lens as a white cis-woman. White teachers — like most white Americans in general — do not have a working knowledge of the calculated origins, intended functions, and expected productions of the U.S. public education system. Without a full understanding of our past and present, we cannot make transformative changes for the future. We cannot move to a model of schooling for liberation if we do not understand its past and present designs that are rooted in racial capitalism. As Professor Cassandra Jones says, “One of the central questions in Afrofuturism is can we create a liberated future without an understanding of the past?” (Jones, 2017). We must prepare all of our students — particularly those in teacher preparation programs — about the history of schooling in the U.S., its latent and manifest functions, and how this system was designed as a central pillar of white supremacy.

Most teachers in the U.S. are white women. Historically, we have served as willing props of patriarchy and white supremacy, and are responsible for doing the work to dismantle both the system that oppresses us and the system from which we benefit. “Racism is patriarchal. Patriarchy

is racist. We will not destroy one institution without destroying the other” (Roberts, 1993, p. 3). We have operated and continue to work towards our own perceived liberation, without any meaningful power analyses around class, race, ability, and other inequities rooted in white supremacist patriarchy. The resonant words of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. — that no one is free until we are all free — are drowned out by the cacophony of individualism and racial capitalism, promoting competition rather than collective work, favoring the transactional over the relational ways of being.

These profit-driven ways of being and “winning” require that the system be set up at the expense of pre-determined losers, the people Gramsci referred to as the subaltern, are those who are considered by the elite classes to be “a *deviation* from an *ideal* — the people or subaltern — which is itself defined as a difference from the elite” (Spivak, 1988 p. 285, italics original). A society in which living requires being accepted fully as a human being is based on dominant discourses of “each to his own” more than “all for one and one for all,” then groups of people — the subaltern, the Others — must necessarily be rejected, and assigned to what Patterson refers to as “social death” (U.C. Berkeley, n.d.). Whiteness and the “*referent-we*” positions white people as unraced and thus that “People of Color are the only people with a race” (Picower, 2021, p. 7). Whiteness creates Others; Blackness is associated “with strangeness, with taboo” and “‘others’ them” (Morrison, 1993a, p. 87). Afropessimism situates Black people as outside of humanity: “[t]he Black cannot be human and is not simply an ‘other,’ but is other than human” (Dancy et al., 2018, p. 180). In white-centric language, the term “diversity” is code for individuals or groups of people who are not white. At the intersecting vectors of race and gender, Black women in particular are objects of othering: “Maintaining images of U.S. Black women as the Other provides ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression” (Collins, 2009, p. 77).

How can race talk in schools move the institution of education — and all of us — towards a more liberated place? Can an institution even be liberatory? How can weaving Black and Indigenous knowledge traditions into teacher preparation programs move us towards this type of transformation? What must white teachers know and understand in order to enact equitable and just ways of being for all children, especially their Black and Brown students?

**Future work.** I have many more questions, and even more than these require asking and investigating. A broad array of methods and methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and researchers and collaborative research teams are essential for this critical work.

Current and future Teachers Race Talk Survey data offer innumerable opportunities for inquiry. For example, conducting similar analyses to this study with a broader subset of the data (e.g., all teachers regardless of race; participants who answered “yes” to all three questions) could be educative, though I would expect, on the whole, to find a similar pattern of responses. An analysis based on the race of the student population may also offer insights into teachers’ beliefs as well as practices.

There are several theories and concepts I am interested in exploring as ways of understanding not only these data but for designing future studies that ask different questions, or that ask similar questions differently. For example, I want to know more about tools of whiteness and how our systems were designed to prefer these tools so that as we are transforming the systems, our designs will ensure these mechanisms will not function. Are uncertainty and othering two of the “multiple ways in which whiteness is invested in its own self-concealment” (Yancy, 2017, p. 230)? How do we understand the grammar(s) of discursive geographies, the language of hegemony?

What do other approaches to what Bonilla-Silva and many others refer to as “color-blind racism” tell us about this way of being? As discussed in Chapter 1, DisCrit scholar Annamma offers the term “color-evasiveness,” which not only removes the ableism but also represents and names the intentional ignorance to acknowledge race and racism, offering an even more expansive way of theorizing this racial ideology (Annamma et al., 2017). Frankenberg uses the language of “a double move toward ‘color evasiveness’ and ‘power evasiveness’” (1993, p. 14) as she has similar objections to this ableist languaging. Pollock (2004) uses the term “colormute” to describe the intentional avoidance of race words and conversations about race. Evans-Winters offers the metaphor of “unmasking white fragility” to describe preventing or removing this willful ignorance (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020). The story that white people have told for so many years — that we should not see color as that is impolite or racist — is so deeply embedded in white culture that it has become a dominant discourse: a way of thinking that constrains and limits the realm of reasonable conversation and rewards silence.

I would love to explore concepts in assemblage theory, and how that way of thinking could inform this work. My questions to date are based on a very nascent understanding, but I will offer a few to begin an explanation. Do the models of a non-hierarchical rhizome or a constellation offer ways to differently organize and understand the concepts in this study? How do educational systems function as organizations with many identifiable parts, but whose properties are irreducible to those component parts? I am certain that much has been written about these questions and about the perspectives that assemblage theory offers for understanding the power relations and linguistic codes of race and racism and the ways in which those concepts and many others provide shape to the ways we see and understand models of educational systems.

I would also like to explore Wynter's conceptualization of an "autopoietic system" (McKittrick, 2006, 2021) as an opening to more nuanced ways of talking and thinking about maintaining (and disrupting, transforming) a white supremacist status quo.

"Autopoiesis" is a term...used by Wynter to show that we invest in our present normative mode of existence in order to keep the living-system — our environmental and existential world — *as is*. This is a recursive logic; it depicts our presently ecocide and genocidal world as normal and unalterable. Our work is to notice this logic and to breach it. (McKittrick, 2021, p. 2, italics original)

No matter what theoretical frameworks or methodologies we choose in these and other future steps, our work must be interdisciplinary, and in alignment with Black epistemologies and ontologies:

*Dear Science* argues that black people have always used interdisciplinary methodologies to explain, explore, and story the world, because thinking and writing and imagining across a range of texts, disciplines, histories, and genres unsettles suffocating and dismal and insular racial logics. By employing interdisciplinary methodologies and living interdisciplinary worlds, black people bring together various sources and texts and narratives to challenge racism. (McKittrick, 2021, p. 4)

In closing, race talk is important for everyone who is living in a racialized society. Not talking about race is harmful, and this silence serves only to uphold white supremacy and to benefit white people. As Oluo stated so vividly, "ignoring [race] does not make it go away. There is no shoving the four hundred years' racial oppression and violence toothpaste back in the toothpaste tube" (Oluo, 2019, p. 43).

“And after that what do we need language to do? What might language be capable of if we think in and with it differently? What is and might be the grammar of our being?” (Brand, 2017, p. 64). Anti-racist practitioner Kim Crayton said that “changes in language force changes in behavior” (2020). Perhaps, an intervention that focuses on changing white teachers’ vocabularies and ways of speaking may in turn change their thoughts. At the very least, an ideological intervention must intentionally and carefully include linguistic components designed for “practice at integrating theory and practice: ways of knowing with habits of being” (hooks, 1994, p. 43). With this work, I hope to enter into conversation with – and build upon – Critical Whiteness studies whose focus is on the intersection and interaction of white teachers’ ideologies and practices.

Critical whiteness provides teachers, many of whom are white, with a process of learning their own whiteness and how the exertions of whiteness create a violent condition within which people of color must racially survive. Choosing to ignore this knowledge set gives a partial understanding of racial justice, one that cannot fully allow for commitment to racial justice. (Matias & Mackey, 2015, p. 35)

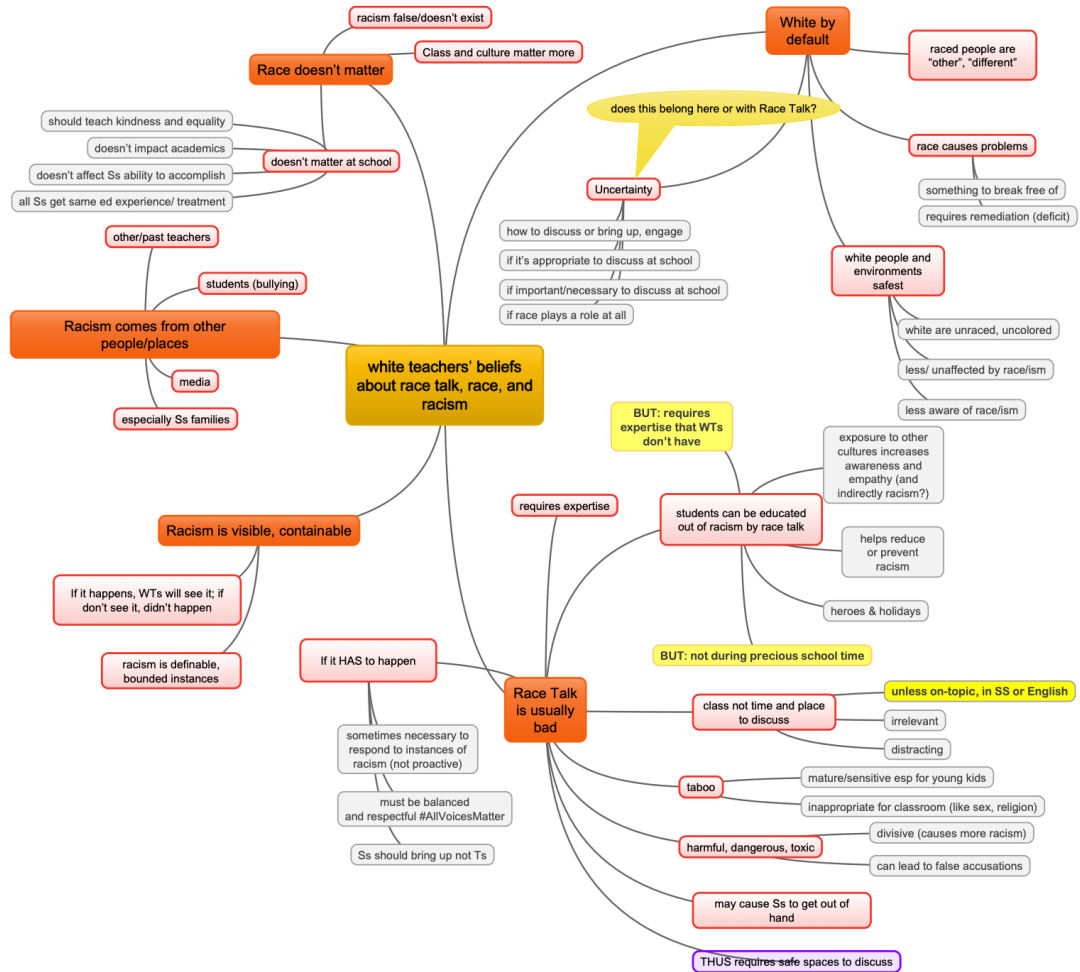
I also hope to work towards more liberatory frameworks of education (e.g., Black feminisms, Indigenous ways of knowing), in which schooling is educational, fostering critical and expansive thinking towards the goal of collective liberation. A beautiful example of Black feminism: Alexis Pauline Gumbs in her book *Undrowned*:

What if school, as we used it on a daily basis, signaled not the name of a process or institution through which we could be indoctrinated, not a structure through which social capital was grasped and policed, but something more organic, like a scale of care. What if school was the scale at which we could care for each other and move together. In my view,

at this moment in history, that is really what we need to learn most urgently. (Gumbs, 2020, pp. 55-56)

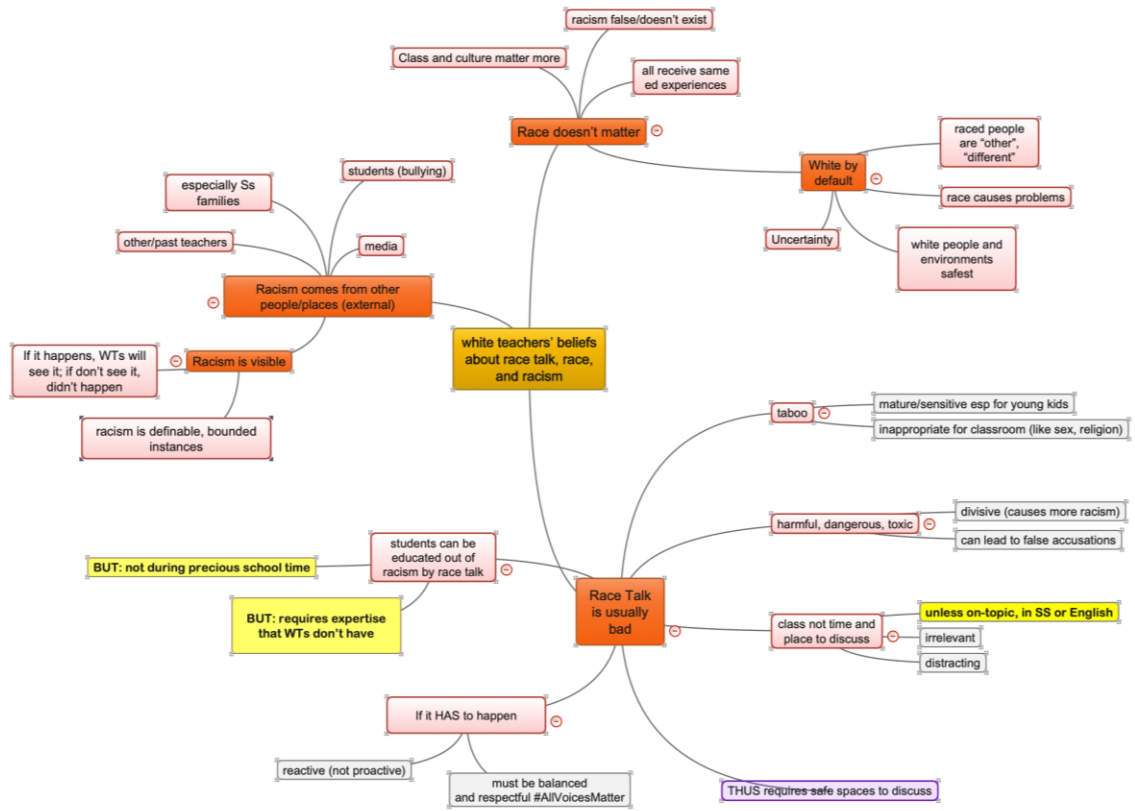
Research must also at its core call upon and live within liberatory frameworks. **Description is not liberation** (McKittrick, 2021), and research – even knowing – cannot be an end unto itself. This study is one small first step in what I hope will be many years of life work thinking and acting collectively to move beyond the descriptive and into the transformative. On their own, even the most reliable and valid tools will not suffice when it comes to changing the way schooling happens or for creating equitable learning opportunities for our Black and Brown students. We need outcomes that can be understood, adopted, adapted, scaled, and implemented as interventions with our overpopulation of white teachers. The work of teaching to transform white teachers must occur along with changing who and how we recruit student teachers into the profession while also re-imagining what schooling should look like and its purposes. Regardless of the specific contexts of this work, **I hope to embody and amplify the mission and vision of our School of Education – not out of any institutional allegiance, but because its transformative orientation is rooted in a commitment to authenticity, equity, and community.** I hope to ignite learning; to teach; to remain committed to educational equity; to cultivate relationships; to collaborate; to innovate and agitate; to disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures; to shape practice and policy; and to lead with integrity.

## Appendix A Visual Thematic Map (Phase 4 of RTA)





## Appendix B Visual Thematic Map (Phase 5 of RTA)



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