

A Critical Ethnography of Preservice Teachers' Imagined Emotions and Racial Engagement

by

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Abstract

Teacher education programs in the United States continue to be predominantly white in both faculty and student demographics, with curricular structures that often marginalize or isolate discussions of race and systemic racism (Sleeter, 2017; Milner, 2010). These programs frequently confine issues of diversity to a single multicultural education course. As a result, preservice teachers often enter the profession without having critically engaged with their own racial identities or the broader impacts of systemic racism within educational contexts (King & Butler, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1999). This critical ethnography, framed by Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), explores the imagined emotions and anticipated responses of ten preservice teachers as they consider addressing race in their future teaching practice. Findings reveal that while participants commonly experience fear and discomfort when envisioning these engagements. The study underscores the need for teacher education programs to prioritize critical conversations about race and its influence on teacher development.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“My plan had always been to be a teacher” (Nate). I am accustomed to this response after reading preservice teacher’s reflective narratives over the last two years. Some children grow up knowing from a young age that they will become a teacher. These students usually had great school experiences inspired by a caring teacher or family member who encouraged their love for learning. They were destined to help shape young minds and nurture the world’s future leaders. I, on the other hand, never considered a career in education as a child. The content was difficult at times, but I did feel safe within the walls of my school. My grades were average, and I was more interested in socializing with my peers than learning. As a first-generation college student, my family told me I would be going to college, but I did not have a plan for what to study once I was accepted. My interest in education did not emerge until a year after I graduated from my liberal arts program.

A week after graduating in 2013, I joined a young alumni service trip to New Orleans. It was my first time visiting the city, and I was quickly drawn to the people and culture. Soon after, I moved from Connecticut to Louisiana in the summer of 2014 after being selected as an Americorps member for City Year New Orleans. In this program, I was placed in a public PK-8 charter school in the Gentilly neighborhood that served a predominantly Black population with a high percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch. My role was as a reading interventionist for three first-grade classes. Every class in the school was named after a college, which started a narrative from preschool that getting accepted to college was one of the goals put forward for the students. Reading and math were constantly assessed, with rewards given to those with high scores and exceptional growth, and extra work given to those students who didn’t meet the benchmark. Behavior charts were in the front of every classroom tracking each

student's conduct throughout the day. A report was sent home at the end of each day, often not about the learned content but about how the students acted. Communication between families and teachers usually centered on the student's behavior.

Throughout my first year, I observed these interactions and systems. Amid the chaos and intensity of the school year, I sometimes found it hard to articulate the structural inequities I saw. I loved the students and built relationships with their families, so when a second-grade assistant teaching position was offered to me, I accepted. I was happy to continue working with the same students and learn more about the reading and social studies curriculum. However, lessons often did not reflect the experiences of the students or the rich culture of New Orleans. As the assistant teacher, I integrated an art lesson or connected my lessons more to student interests in my small group sessions. I could see that the lead teacher in my room attended many professional development on testing strategies, had weekly coaching, and had little wiggle room in content delivery.

By year three I was offered a lead third grade teaching position. I was excited because I would be moving up again with my students, but I knew the learning curve for this position would be immense as third grade was the first year of state testing. I enrolled in an alternative teacher training program, where for two months I taught summer school in the morning and took classes on pedagogy and content in the evening. Throughout my first year as a lead teacher, I would be asked to videotape myself teaching lessons and have in-person observations to help build my skills. I would also be observed by an administrator at my school and have weekly coaching sessions in the afternoon. I was also pulled out of my class every week to attend professional development at a location off campus. As a novice teacher, I felt pressure to do what my administrators suggested and was constantly reminded of the assessment goals my class was

expected to meet by the end of the year. These assessment goals were also tied to a percentage of my evaluation, which affected my ability to get my yearly raise.

Race was not always directly addressed by administrators but seemed to have a looming impact on the implementation of policy and procedures in the classrooms. As a white teacher from the Northeast, I was an outsider. It was clear students often had stronger connections with the teachers who were Black and grew up in New Orleans. The school system was plagued with teachers like me who participated in alternative teacher education programs and quickly left their teaching positions after the two-year commitment was met. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina created a reorganization of the New Orleans Public School system with the traditional school board dissolving and private nonprofit companies opening charter schools. Now mostly white women fresh out of college were teaching the children of this city. Most of us were not versed in the specific history of New Orleans education or even a basic understanding of the social foundations of education in America.

The teacher education program I enrolled in spent one day touching upon the history of New Orleans culture which mostly centered on the story of desegregation and Ruby Bridges. On the rare occasion race was discussed, deficit framing was utilized through buzzwords such as “the achievement gap” and “school-to-prison pipeline.” I was never asked to examine my racial identity and how being white would impact my relationships with the students in my class. Throughout the school year I felt I was constantly in professional development to discuss best practices in managing student behavior or how to increase test scores on the next practice assessment. By the end, I was exhausted and felt terrible. I loved the time I got to spend with the students learning about their lives, but I felt constantly surveilled in my new role.

That summer I took a hard look at what I just experienced. I slowly began to educate myself on the history of educational policies, the reasoning behind discipline and testing, and the inequitable structures in place. I considered what my role was in upholding these racist practices and it felt extremely uncomfortable. What could I do to break these practices and still keep my job? The following year I changed my lessons and researched different perspectives that could connect students to the content. I listened more to my students, spending time during meals or recess catching up on their home life instead of prepping for the rest of the day. I began incorporating more of their interests into our daily classroom routines and activities. I utilized the student's families and community members as resources to build experiences outside the classroom. However, testing and discipline were still a significant narrative, especially in my coaching sessions. At the time I still did not have the language or skills necessary to address the issues I was not only observing but participating in.

I felt it was time to leave the classroom and decided to apply to several doctoral programs where I could further explore the social foundations of education and the theories behind learning. I was excited to start Auburn University's Educational Psychology program in the fall of 2019. Within the program I became a teaching apprentice for FOUN 3000: Diversity of Learners and Settings. The course explored sociopolitical factors that influence education and society. Students examined their identity markers, such as race, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and gender, that have shaped their experiences in educational settings. FOUN 3000 was a required course for undergraduates who were in Auburn's teacher education program. Dr. Carey Andrzejewski taught the class each week and I was able to observe the lessons and reflect on the activities the preservice teachers engaged in. I had the opportunity to

teach a lesson on culturally responsive teaching practices the week before the lockdown began in March 2020.

Observing the course, I could see students pondering questions of race, racism, and the inequities in education. Through reflective writing and class discussions, students were provided a space to examine their own identities and consider actions they would take as future teachers. With the pandemic in full swing, the class was moved online and would remain offered in a synchronous online format in the following semesters. In the spring of 2022, I was offered a section of FOUN 3000 to teach as part of a graduate assistantship. This was an opportunity for me to step into a new role as a teacher educator and provide a space where students could consider themselves as racial beings and how they could imagine having discussions of race within an educational setting. I made plenty of mistakes throughout my teaching career when discussing race and mostly avoided the topic. I had never been directly offered the space to consider how to react or the steps to take when an issue of race came up with a parent or administrator. I could at least offer a safe space of self-reflection for preservice teachers to look at their values and how they might react through this course.

In this study, I pose questions about teachers and their values regarding race in education. One of the reasons I chose to focus on race discussions for preservice teachers is that as a white novice teacher, I wanted to advocate for students and challenge policy, but I didn't have the appropriate language to do so. I decided to leave the classroom to continue my education in critical education to obtain the skills and knowledge needed to make an impact. Through my graduate-level work I have had the space to explore my white racial identity (Helms, 1990) and its effect on my role in the classroom. Teacher education programs can provide a space for preservice teachers to begin this exploration before entering the classroom. The classroom in a

teacher education program can be a place for preservice teachers to review racist policies and determine their stance concerning their values. In this study I wore two different hats: I was not only the researcher, but also the course instructor. In the role of instructor, I also took on the identity of a white teacher educator. This context is important to the study as I brought my white experiences in education as a student, teacher, and teacher educator. This perspective influenced my lessons and the information conveyed to the preservice teachers.

Statement of Problem

Historically, teacher education programs are saturated by white preservice teachers and teacher educators (Sleeter, 2017). The curriculum presented is rooted in systemic racism, and discussions of race and racism are often siloed into a singular multicultural education course (King & Butler, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Milner, 2010). By avoiding discussions of race, preservice teachers uphold American society's standard of white racial comfort. They are not asked to examine themselves as racialized beings or taught how to explore the ways systemic racism is upheld in educational practices. Politics have always influenced the educational system in America. Since the pandemic in 2020, new laws have been passed throughout the country to prevent teachers from discussing “divisive concepts” within the classroom (Majewska & Freeder, 2022).

In March 2024, Alabama became one of the many states to pass an anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion law with specific instructions for K-12 teachers and higher education instructors to avoid “divisive concepts.” Alabama Senate Bill 129 defines these divisive concepts as follows:

- (a) That any race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin is inherently superior or inferior. (b) That individuals should be discriminated against or adversely treated because of their race, color, religion, ethnicity, or national origin. (c) That the moral character of an

individual is determined by his or her race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin.

(d) That, by virtue of an individual's race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin, the individual is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or subconsciously.

(e) That individuals, by virtue of race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin, are inherently responsible for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race,

color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin. (f) That fault, blame, or bias should be

assigned to members of a race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin, on the basis of

race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin. (g) That any individual should accept, acknowledge, affirm, or assent to a sense of guilt, complicity, or a need to apologize on the

basis of his or her race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin. (h) That meritocracy

or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist. (i) That slavery and racism are aligned

with the founding principles of the United States (AL SB129).

As a teacher educator in Alabama, I had to consider how the passage of this law would affect not only the content of the class I was teaching but also the exposure of these topics to the preservice teachers who have yet to enter the classroom. Throughout FOUN 3000, preservice teachers reflect on their cultural identity markers and on how they can be supportive teachers the pervasive narrative is that educators should tread lightly when discussing these topics. The passage of this law at the state level is an example of how systemic policy upholds whiteness as a central tenet in our country.

Whiteness in America

Whiteness refers to the beliefs, values, and ideologies that uphold white supremacy in American society (Chubbuck, 2004). White dominant culture normalizes policies and procedures that privilege those who identify or can pass as white while oppressing non-white racial groups.

People who identify as white rarely have to think about their racial identity because American culture normalizes the white experience, setting it as the standard (Leonardo, 2002; Mills, 1997). Whiteness is more than a declaration of white racial identity. The term implies unearned privilege and power that is socially constructed based on skin tone (Lynch, 2018). Individuals can recognize whiteness and take steps to unlearn the assumptions and beliefs society has established to oppress and harm differing ethnic and racial groups. However, more efforts are needed on a systemic level to break the ties of racist practices and policies that perpetuate whiteness.

In public education around the United States racist practices and policies have been particularly harmful to those groups of students and educators who are racially and ethnically diverse (Crutchfield, 2022; Henderson et al., 2019). Whiteness is seen throughout school systems in different contexts. Researchers have found that teachers have incorrectly pronounced or completely changed students' names to make them sound more white (Kohli & Solórzano; 2012). By doing this teachers uphold their own comfort in whiteness and erase the cultural ties to students' names. In some high schools with high percentages of Black and Brown students, honors and Advanced Placement classes can be more difficult to access (Kyburg et al., 2017). This creates a disadvantage for these students who have a goal of college success and creates more of a barrier to accessing higher wages that could come with a college degree (Howard, 2019). More frequent and harsher disciplinary actions take place toward Black and Brown students in American public education (Baggett & Andrzejewski, 2021; Okonofua et al., 2015; Peguero et al., 2021).

Qualitative research has examined systemic policies and procedures within teacher education that uphold racist practices that oppress racial and ethnic diversity. Eurocentric

curriculum centers on teacher education programs (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; King & Butler, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1999). There is a lack of institutional knowledge and best practices to support preservice teachers in engaging in the unique educational experiences of diverse populations (Milner, 2010; Sleeter, 2017). Teacher educators have utilized their racial discomfort as an opportunity to steer conversations in the classroom away from topics of race and racism (Chang- Bacon, 2022; Souto-Manning & Stillman, 2020). Race evasion is a common practice in teacher education not only by instructors but also by preservice teachers. When asked to confront racial issues, preservice teachers have been found to stay silent or become emotional in their response (Matias & Grosland, 2016; Ohito, 2016).

Whiteness is a social construct which means that it can be dismantled (Gregory, 2021). Teacher education programs should be a space for preservice teachers to explore their beliefs and develop foundational practices that consciously minimize negative racialized experiences (Bautista et al., 2018). With the guidance of their instructors, they should practice critically thinking about race and racism before they enter the classroom (Brown, 2017; King, 1991). Little value is currently placed on discussing race as a factor that impacts education throughout a university-based teacher education program (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Milner, 2010; Sleeter, 2017).

Examining Race in Educational Psychology

Educational psychology examines how individuals learn and develop within educational settings. Traditionally, this field has been closely tied to teacher preparation, but recent calls to action have urged researchers to explore how race and its effects impact learning (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2024; Kumar & DeCuir-Gunby, 2023; Woolfolk Hoy, 2000). Despite the importance of this inquiry, race, ethnicity, culture, and related issues have not been adequately examined due

to the white, positivist historical roots of educational psychology (Strunk & Andrzejewski, 2023; Zusho & Clayton, 2011).

As a socially constructed concept, race uses categories to differentiate between groups of people and establish systems of power (Massey, 2007; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). Racialized experiences, those that differ between and within group, can give rise to psychological differences crucial to understanding human development (Kendi, 2016; Pauker et al., 2018). If these racialized experiences are not explored in educational psychology, the white perspective will continue to dominate research, overlooking the complexities of race and its impact on learning.

To address this, theories like those of Russian theorist Lev Vygotsky provide a helpful framework. Vygotsky emphasized a critical role in creating contexts and how they internalize interactions with their environment and others (John-Steiner & Mahn, 2003). Through a sociocultural lens, knowledge acquisition is viewed as a process of cognitive transformation, where the more diverse perspectives an individual has access to, the greater their opportunity for cognitive change. As a social construct, whiteness is understood and enforced by social structures such as education and the media. Individuals internalize the normality and standards of whiteness from our society. CWS examines ways to dismantle whiteness as a social construction and better understand how societal influences can be disrupted from pushing the white agenda. In this study, participants reflect on their lived experiences in education and how their social interactions have shaped their understandings of the effect race has on their future practices as an educator.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine how preservice teachers utilized a singular multicultural education course as a space of reflection in considering how race and racism will impact their future careers in education. Throughout the course, I provided opportunities for written reflection for preservice teachers including autobiography, journaling, and responses to posed vignettes. I designed this study as a critical ethnography that was driven by the research questions:

- In what ways do preservice teachers imagine themselves engaging in discussions of race and racism with stakeholders at their future workplace?
- How do preservice teachers reflect on future emotions and actions tied to race and racism?

Critical ethnography is a qualitative practice driven by the assumption that our society is divided hierarchically and inequities within our society should be interrogated (Madison, 2011). This methodology centers on questions about inequity and privilege. Ethnography focuses the research lens on a “culture sharing group,” describing and interpreting their values, beliefs, and behaviors from an insider’s viewpoint (Fetterman, 2010). I chose critical ethnography for this study because I am a member of the “culture sharing group” I was looking to study: a white educator who must continuously reflect on my racial identity and the racist systemic practices that influence education in America.

Critical Ethnography centers on questions about inequity and privilege. I utilized the methodology of critical ethnography in shaping this study to interrogate the ways race is addressed in undergraduate teacher education programs. This critical ethnography integrates critical whiteness studies (CWS) as its theoretical framework. CWS asks the white individual to

look inward and reflect on how whiteness benefits some while harming others (Bonds & Inwood, 2016). This framework examines how societal norms came to be through the understanding and re-envisioning of whiteness as a racial identity (Leonardo, 2002; Matias & Mackey, 2016). The tenets of CWS prompt preservice teachers to examine not just their race but how whiteness affects education as a whole system. In this study, I focused on two tenets of CWS. Whiteness as assumed racial comfort highlights the discomfort that white people face when discussing topics of race and racism (Cabrera et al., 2016). Whiteness as an epistemology of ignorance refers to the ignorance white individuals exhibit when presented with the realities of racial oppression (Mills 1997; Mills 2007). These tenets guide my examination of preservice teachers' responses to imagined discussions of race.

Table 1. Definition of Terms

Term:	Definition:
Bias	Your personal preference for, or against, an individual or group that can interfere with your judgement (Jewell, 2020, p. 157)
Preservice Teacher	A student enrolled in a teacher education program at a four-year postsecondary institution and working toward completing the degree requirements, including coursework and field experiences, for teacher certification (Chand et al., 2022; Nariyati & Pratiwi, 2020)
Race	A socially constructed term that divides biased on skin tone (Jewell, 2020, p. 24)
Racial Consciousness	An individual's awareness of being white and what that implies in relation to those who do not share white group membership (Rowe, et al., 1994)
Racism	A personal prejudice and bias and the systemic misuse and abuse of power by institutions. Jewell, 2020, p. 31)
Teacher Education	A program at a four-year postsecondary institution that integrates coursework and field experiences to equip students with the

	knowledge, techniques, skills, and dispositions, related to formal teaching and the content they will teach, to become certified teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005).
whiteness	A state of being that goes beyond an individual's racial identity and captures the experiences of all races succumbed to white (Matias, 2016).

Note: I purposely capitalized ‘of Color’ and other non-white races in order to reverse the normalization of whiteness.

Summary

In line with critical whiteness studies, this study examines how preservice teachers imagine engaging in discussions of race with future school stakeholders through written reflection. I examined the participants' responses through a critical lens to see if there was evidence that they could imagine themselves taking action when addressing race and racism. The literature review in the following chapter examines the history of race and racism in teacher education, the utilization of critical whiteness studies (CWS) as a frame for researching preservice teachers, and how written reflection has been used as a tool for educators to examine their beliefs on race and racism.

Chapter three provides an in-depth discussion of the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches and procedures I employed for this study. I will discuss how this study was designed and analyzed, providing information about the ethical treatment of participants and the study’s trustworthiness. Chapter four provides the portraits of 10 preservice teachers, along with an analysis of the findings. Chapter five includes further discussion of the findings, recommendations for practice, and further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In the following chapter, I summarize and synthesize relevant empirical literature regarding the problem of practice investigated in this study. First, I will discuss the role race and racism play in teacher education. This information lays the groundwork for an explanation of whiteness in teacher education. Throughout the chapter, I explain how whiteness is maintained in teacher education curriculum and by teacher educators in the classroom. I go on to present how whiteness is embedded in teacher education, as well as the burdens teachers of Color take on when examining racism in education. A brief explanation of the origins of critical whiteness studies (CWS) follows, leading to a more in-depth explanation of how CWS has been utilized in teacher education research. Further, this chapter concentrates on two tenets of CWS in teacher education: whiteness as assumed racial comfort and whiteness as epistemologies of ignorance. I examine the ways silence, invisibility, and active resistance of white privilege maintain racist practices within teacher education. I then examine how whiteness is present in institutional and social contexts, and how meritocracy is utilized as an explanation for racial inequity in teacher education. This chapter closes with an examination of white emotionality before the consideration of how the roles of reflexivity and imagination play out in preservice teachers' examination of beliefs about race in education.

Race and Racism in Teacher Education

Race has a significant influence on the systemic practices upheld in teacher education programs across the United States. In this section, I will discuss whiteness as a foundation for teacher education and the inequities that continue due in part to a lack of racial diversity in the teaching force and teacher education. I then examine how race and racism are ostracized from teacher education curricula. Finally, I will discuss how teachers of Color are expected to take on the burden of explaining the topics of race and racism to their white students and peers.

White Racial Dominance of Teacher Educators in America

The U.S. Department of Education (2016) has provided sufficient historical information to show the growth of the white teacher force over the past decade. Nearly 80% of K-12 teachers across the country identified as white. Prospective teachers enrolled in traditional university-based teacher education programs were 74% white. White university students graduated at a higher rate than students of Color, suggesting that the rate of white teachers will continue to grow (Achinstein et al., 2010; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). In contrast, public school classrooms continue to become more racially diverse, with students of Color representing a minoritized majority. The demographics of White students in K-12 public school classrooms decreased to 47% reflecting the increasing population of diverse students who identify as Black, Hispanic, Asian/ Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native and two or more races (Schaeffer 2021). A gap in cultural understanding, barriers to language, and a lack of shared educational experiences between students and teachers are inevitable in a predominantly white workforce.

Not only are preservice and in-service teachers predominantly white, but so are their teacher educators. In 2007, 78% of teacher education faculty in the United States were white

(Milner et al., 2013). White teacher educators bring their perspectives and experiences to their white preservice teachers, further encouraging society to uphold ideologies and values of whiteness. Teacher educators can also be seen as policymakers in the classroom and their more extensive teacher education programs. Having a singular white voice influencing educational policy eliminates the perspectives of students and teachers of Color in decision-making, prolonging systemic inequities (Bales, 2007; Zeichner, 2005). The dominance of a white-driven teacher education program affects student recruitment and the curriculum used to inform their program. Moreover, it determines how urgently race and ethnicity are addressed, and how faculty members who work with race are supported (Milner et al., 2013). These practices negatively affect all preservice teachers, especially those of Color, by continuing to uphold whiteness as a pillar of teacher education.

Whiteness in Teacher Education Curriculum

Teacher education curricula have historically been rooted in Eurocentric and white-dominant ideas (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; King & Butler, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1999). A curriculum that centers whiteness and normalizes white ideologies can be referred to as a “white curriculum” (Peters, 2018). This curriculum excludes the voices and experiences of people of Color, marginalizing them within the American educational experience. University-based pedagogy and curriculum continue to uphold whiteness as the norm, which makes the teacher education classroom a space for white supremacy to be reproduced (Zembylas, 2022). These practices don’t stop at the university level.

The Council for Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP) is the national accreditation agency for PK-12 grade teacher preparation programs (CAEP, 2021). In 2022, six standards were released as an updated guide to ensure educator preparation providers impart

future teachers with the knowledge and skills to support the development of all students. Out of the six standards, diversity, equity, and inclusion were mentioned under the categories of Content and Pedagogical Knowledge, Clinical Partnerships and Practice, and Candidate Recruitment, Progression, and Support (CAEP, 2021). However, at no point are issues of race or racism addressed as a priority in the standards. This is of particular concern as racism, anti-Blackness, or white supremacy are topics rarely addressed within teacher education programs (Mayorga & Picower, 2018; Milner & Howard, 2013). The catch-all phrase of diversity, equity, and inclusion is vague. It is a way to cover the bases in addressing inequities in teacher preparation without naming whiteness and racism as the foundations for these inequities.

Preparation to teach racially and ethnically diverse students is often delivered through a separate multicultural education or social justice teaching foundational course rather than integrated throughout the program's curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Milner, 2010; Sleeter, 2017). Teacher educators play a key role in determining when and how topics of race and racism are included in coursework (Souto-Manning & Stillman, 2020). Stand-alone multicultural education courses often differ in the content they present to preservice teachers. A comparison study of stand-alone multicultural education course syllabi determined that more than half stressed the *celebration* of differences rather than critically examining systemic inequalities in education (Gorski, 2009). In addition, only 29% of the syllabi explored issues of racism, oppression, and systemic power. Not addressing these topics contributes to preservice teachers having difficulties understanding systemic inequities concerning white privilege (Bennet, Driver, & Trent, 2017).

Whiteness Maintained by Teacher Educators

Although policies and procedures are put into place to maintain whiteness at a systemic level, individual teacher educators continue to play a role in the day-to-day upkeep of racism in teacher education. The practice of race-evasion is a common occurrence in predominantly white spaces, including teacher education (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Instructors in these courses have the power and privilege to guide discussions of race and racism within their classrooms (Lensmire et al., 2013). They have utilized their influence to avoid and even silence race talk within their classes, especially when they feel uncomfortable discussing these topics themselves or when they assume their students are too immature to examine whiteness (Kohli, 2019; Galman et al., 2010). Teacher educators reported avoiding discussions of race and racism altogether by making the subject matter so broad and vague that when they were brought up, they seemed unnoteworthy (Chang- Bacon, 2022). By talking around racism or avoiding it all together, teacher educators make it impossible to confront or disrupt racial power hierarchies creating a form of erasure within their classrooms (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Ibrahim, 2008).

Teacher educators also use other techniques to avoid conversations around race and racism. According to Change-Bacon (2022), bracketing is when race and racism are tied into a single topic of a course by the teacher educator. Integration of these topics into the course is at the instructor's discretion. Therefore, they determine when it is "appropriate" for race and racism to be addressed (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Through bracketing, these topics can be intentionally addressed at the teacher educators' comfort level and then dismissed before discourse occurs. By not integrating them fully into their semester-long curriculum, the teacher educator is not considering race and racism as central tenets of daily teaching practices (Daniels & Varghese, 2019).

Another technique teacher educators have used to avoid conversations of race and racism in the classroom is deferment to their predominantly white students. Deferment has been used as a defense mechanism to combat fear and discomfort within the classroom (Chang-Bacon, 2022). This self-fulfilling action not only takes away from their learning but puts pressure on the students to navigate these issues independently (Sleeter, 2017). Without guidance from their teacher educator, the practice of deferment is then learned as a strategy to avoid discussions of race, and conversations around the topic are less likely to take place. This act becomes a barrier to disrupting the narrative around race and racism in the classroom.

The three acts of erasure, bracketing, and deferment are not passive, but take effort to continue to center whiteness and uphold race evasiveness in teacher education. Teacher education can be a space where racism can be disrupted. Still, it is up to individual teacher educators to take the steps necessary in their classes to address the racial inequities that uphold whiteness. The classroom in a teacher education setting should be a place where power and privilege associated with race are not only examined but interrogated (Daniels & Varghese, 2019). When teacher educators provide a space and guidance to explore the larger systemic processes of racism in education, racism can be deconstructed without centering whiteness (Matias & Mackey, 2016; Picower & Kohli, 2017).

Marginalization of Preservice Teachers of Color and Teacher Educators of Color

Preservice teachers of Color often carry the burden of race work, emphasizing and explaining the impact of race, within their teacher education programs. In 2016, 18% of the teaching force identified as people of Color (Kohli et al., 2021). The systems and procedures within teacher education often utilize a race-evasive stance to minimize the reality of systemic oppression that influences policies and procedures (Gorski, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Teacher

education curriculum embedded with whiteness obscures the realities of race and racism within education (Kohli & Pizzaro, 2022). In teacher education, discussions about race often emphasize a deficit perspective on Black students and communities, focusing on achievement gaps, standardized testing, and the lack of resources in racially segregated schools. (Gist, 2017; Valencia, 2010). These racist practices have a profoundly negative effect on the mental and physical health of people of Color (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

Hostile classroom experiences were a common theme for preservice teachers of Color within predominantly white teacher education programs. These preservice teachers felt “othered” due to a lack of representation of their race within the classroom and quickly adapted to have a low profile or stay quiet during discussions of race (Bower-Phillips et al., 2013). Some preservice teachers of Color found that their white peers seemed naive about issues of race but kept quiet because they felt outnumbered by the white perspective during discourse on race (Amos, 2016). When preservice teachers of Color shared in these discussions, their white counterparts refused to acknowledge how racial markers impacted these experiences (Matias & Liou, 2015). White preservice teachers used color-evasive discourse to undermine critical worldviews and intentionally refurbish white privilege (Leonardo, 2009; Utt & Tochluk, 2016). These hostile experiences make the teacher education classroom feel unsafe for preservice teachers of Color while maintaining comfort for white preservice teachers (Amos 2010; 2016).

Teacher educators of Color also take on the burden of race work within their programs. Ladson-Billings (2005) called attention to anti-Black racism in teacher education, while Black teacher educators have reported being silenced and invisibilized by their institutions (Dixson & Dingus, 2007). Teacher educators of Color are often hired and are solely responsible for taking on race work within a program. They take on more responsibilities, with no added compensation,

such as mentorship in race-focused work, which undermines their research productivity (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2017).

In the classroom, white preservice teachers resist the perspectives and experiences of teacher educators of Color. Teacher educators of Color find educating resistant white preservice teachers traumatizing (Kohli & Pizzaro, 2022; Matias, 2013). Evans-Winters and Twyman Hoff (2011) explained how teaching evaluations were utilized by white preservice teachers to anonymously devalue and demean Black teacher educators as a form of resistance to “learning about and deconstructing systems of power” (p.462). The backlash from white preservice teachers and the systemic upkeep of whiteness within teacher education is seen as a threat to the professional stability of teacher educators of Color (McKinney de Royston, 2020; Muhammad et al., 2020). With already limited numbers of people of Color within the education field, these factors do not paint a compelling picture for further recruitment.

Critical Whiteness

The challenges faced by people of Color in navigating a Eurocentric education system and the systematic oppression enabled by white preservice teachers and white teacher educators underscore the relevance of examining whiteness within educational contexts, as illuminated by critical whiteness studies (CWS). CWS reveals whiteness as a hidden system built to produce and reproduce white supremacy (Applebaum, 2016). Foundations of CWS emerged from African-American and Caribbean-American researchers who witnessed and lived the injustices of whiteness firsthand (Jupp, 2020). W.E.B Dubois, Ida B. Wells, Carter G. Woodson, and C. L. R. James emphasized historical-social understanding of race countering the White supremacist ideologies that flourished in the 19th and 20th centuries (p.724). CWS was first integrated into education in the late 1980s. The tenets of CWS have evolved, with more recent ideas being

conceptualized as whiteness as property, whiteness as assumed racial comfort, whiteness as ontological expansiveness, whiteness as epistemologies of ignorance, and whiteness as color evasiveness (Cabrera et al., 2016).

Whiteness as property is described as the way being white is seen as having higher value in society. Whiteness as assumed racial comfort highlights the discomfort that white people face when discussing topics of race and racism. Whiteness as ontological expansiveness focuses on how white people move through spaces in a privileged way (Cabrera et al., 2016). American society makes it simple for white people to navigate spaces without considering how their race may affect their interactions. In contrast, people of Color must consider how their race will interfere with their everyday lives. Whiteness as an epistemology of ignorance refers to the ignorance white individuals exhibit when presented with the realities of racial oppression. This ignorance contributes to the lack of urgency when addressing systemic or individualized racism. Finally, Whiteness as color evasiveness allows white individuals to reject race and racism as reasons for inequity and discrimination in America (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). By avoiding the differences American society projects on white individuals and people of Color, little change can be made to policies and practices.

According to critical whiteness studies, whiteness is the underlying mechanism that upholds and maintains racist systems, and a lack of acknowledgment of whiteness contributes to the permanence of race and racism (Allen, 2001; Leonardo, 2009). CWS as a theoretical framework in education ‘uses a transdisciplinary approach to investigate the phenomenon of whiteness, how it is manifested, exerted, defined, recycled, transmitted, and maintained, and how it ultimately impacts the state of race relations’ (Matias & Mackey, 2016, p.34).

Critical Whiteness Studies in Teacher Education

Two waves of critical whiteness studies (CWS) in teacher education have emerged since the 1980s. The first wave examined the concepts of white privilege and race evasiveness of teachers, while the second examined more race-visible practices (Jupp et al., 2016). As previously discussed, early studies on teacher education focused on race-evasion and examined the ways that preservice and in-service teachers avoid discussions of race and racism. Racialized silence and invisibility, resistance and active reconstruction of white privilege, and whiteness in institutional and social contexts are common themes within CWS (Jupp et al., 2019).

Research into race-evasive teacher education suggested there are deficits in the systems that white preservice teachers have access to. This subset of research is essential to inform what gaps and missteps influence future educators in America. In failing to address race and racism head-on, teacher education upholds whiteness and sends future teachers into the workforce underprepared to address the racism they will encounter in classrooms and school curricula (Chang-Bacon, 2022; Daniels & Varghese, 2019).

CWS provides a framework to examine why white people believe themselves exempt from racial frameworks when actively investing in white racial production (Lewis & Manno, 2011). Whiteness upholds institutional and structural racism in many systems, including education (Schooley, et al., 2019). In American education there are clear disparities between the white and person of Color educational experience (Musu-Gillette, et al., 2017). We commonly hear about the achievement gap between white and non-white students in a vacuous way. (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). However, one key to white racial production is hoarding educational opportunities and spaces by “establishing school systems that provide no, or an inferior, education to Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans” (Anderson, 2010: p. 8). Racial and ethnic

school segregation contributes to achievement gaps largely because Black and Hispanic students are disproportionately enrolled in high-poverty schools (Owens, 2018; Reardon and Portilla, 2016). Further, preservice teachers need to take into consideration Gloria Ladson-Billings' (2006) concept of education debt which considers the long-standing systemic imbalance of educational opportunities for students of Color.

The education debt takes into consideration centuries of denied educational access for marginalized groups, such as through slavery, segregation, and assimilationist policies. Economically, persistent funding disparities leave schools serving students of Color under-resourced. People of Color are excluded from decision-making processes in education, including limited political representation and restricted influence over policy. Finally, moral debt underscores the ethical obligation to acknowledge and address these injustices through intentional and reparative actions. Together, these dimensions reveal that current disparities in educational outcomes are rooted in a much deeper legacy of systemic neglect and discrimination than the short-term concept of the achievement gap suggests (Anderson, 2019). Racial, ethnic, and class-based school segregation is still a common practice throughout the United States. If not acknowledged by white preservice teachers and teacher educators, it will continue to negatively impact students of Color across American classrooms (Johnson, 2019; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).

Even in schools where segregation is not as prevalent, teachers carry their own racial beliefs. A person's racial beliefs are shaped by their socialization within society. Dominant cultural narratives about race, including stereotypes and meritocratic justifications for social hierarchies, are internalized (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Delpit, 1988) throughout our lives, starting in childhood and continuing to develop into adulthood. Depending on social experiences, these

experiences cultivate a person's implicit bias (Bandura, 1986). Implicit bias is the beliefs and emotions that unconsciously impact behavior (Dovidio et al., 2002). This bias impacts the way we react and engage with people different from ourselves.

Racial inequity beliefs have been observed when studying preservice and in-service teachers. After the Obama administration, post-racial beliefs became more prominent across the United States, including the perception that racism, racial discrimination, and racial prejudice no longer exist (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). For teachers who share this belief, issues of inequity due to race are no longer an issue. Others believe that it is the individual's responsibility for their socioeconomic position. This individualistic set of beliefs pushes the idea of a historically disproven meritocracy and does not take into consideration systemic oppression of education for Black and Brown people such as redlining and the resulting funding disparities (Carter & Welner, 2013; Hochschild, 1996). Cultural deficit beliefs regarding poverty in America also impact the way teachers interact with Black and Brown students. Those who hold these beliefs argue that poor people of Color have negative psychological traits that they unknowingly pass down from generation to generation such as laziness, disinterest in obtaining an education, and reliance on social systems (Quinn, 2017; Valencia, 2012). Teachers' racial beliefs can affect their interpretations of Black and Brown students' behaviors, often leading to racial disparities in discipline (Baggett & Andrzejewski, 2021; Legette et al., 2021). This higher rate of discipline means more academic distractions and more time outside of the classroom.

When a teacher's racial beliefs acknowledge white privilege and the normalization of whiteness, teachers tend to attribute racial inequities to institutional racism rather than individuals. These teachers are more likely to provide equitable learning opportunities to students and acknowledge racially minoritized students' experiences with racism (Blaisdell,

2016), Furthermore, these teachers apply more psychological flexibility in their responses to students which in turn are likely to strengthen student-teacher relationships as well as promote students' achievement (DeCuir-Gunby, 2020). Teacher education must make race more visible in its curriculum and classrooms.

The second wave of CWS, race visible practices in teacher education, aims to dismantle racial injustice in schooling and society by centering race through pedagogy, discussion, and reflection (Hambacher & Ginn, 2021; Sleeter 2017; Ullucci, 2012). By placing race at the forefront of coursework, race-visible teacher education looks at systemic practices and policies upheld in American public-school education through a critical lens. These practices provide a space for preservice teachers to reflect on their bias and racial identity. Race evasive and race-visible research in teacher education highlights the beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge the predominantly white preservice teacher force upholds regarding race. In this study, I highlighted how whiteness as assumed racial comfort and whiteness as an epistemology of ignorance impact preservice teachers view toward race in their teacher education program.

Whiteness as Assumed Racial Comfort

Whiteness is normalized throughout American society with little space for discourse due to the majority holding power and privilege (Ladson-Billings, 2001; McIntosh, 1988; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000; Wise, 2005). Whiteness as assumed racial comfort highlights the discomfort that white people face when asked to confront topics of race and racism (Cabrera et al., 2016). White people are socialized to prioritize their comfort, which makes facing conversations about race and racism uncomfortable, leading to further evasiveness. White people will go to extreme lengths to stay within their area of comfort by avoiding and denying inequities based on race. Within teacher education, white preservice teachers have been found taking steps to reconstruct

their white privilege as a form of resistance or use silence as a way to escape uncomfortable conversations.

Silence & Invisibility

Racialized silence is the basis of many studies on race evasiveness in teacher education programs. Silence is often thought of as a lack of communication, but in discussions of race it speaks volumes. White preservice teachers utilize silence as an expression of white supremacy (Mazzei, 2004). Not participating in discussions of race and racism allows white preservice teachers to sit comfortably in their educational experience. This silence can be an avoidance tactic because once white privilege is acknowledged, a fear takes hold that it can be lost (Mazzei, 2008). Maintaining their privileged status becomes essential, and white preservice teachers believe discussions of race and racism would interrupt their education (Mazzei, 2011). This complicity in silence diminishes attempts at multicultural education and race discussion.

One concept that examines the reasons behind racial silence in teacher education is dysconscious racism (King, 1991; 2004). This form of racism tacitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges (p. 143). Preservice teachers tend to use noncritical viewpoints when examining deficit based educational research. This lack of criticality leads to no further action being considered in steps they may take in their future practices working in a diverse school setting. Teacher educators need to assist students in identifying, understanding, and discussing these limited ways of thinking. Without their support and space for examination, preservice teachers will not develop the skills necessary to build critical awareness.

Resistance & Active Reconstruction of White Privilege

The reconstruction of white privilege has upheld race evasiveness in teacher education. A foundational researcher, Sleeter (1992) suggested that white teachers refuse to see color, resist

that they are racialized actors in teaching, and believe race is more about individuals rather than the social structure. Recently, researchers have examined instances of resistance and reconstruction of white privilege through the view of instructors and students of Color. Amos (2010) documented the frustration, despair, and fear of preservice teachers of Color, noting that white preservice teachers created a hostile classroom environment where students of Color felt “fearful for their own safety” (p. 35). This fear came from white peers resistance to understand the role race plays in education. They also downplayed students' of Colors educational experiences and dismissed systemic racial issues within the education system that were discussed in class (Amos, 2010).

Expanding on this research, Matias (2013, 2015) analyzed in class writing assignments, highlighting how white preservice teachers engaged in what she termed “White Diss-course.” This discourse made it “okay to disrespect me [instructor of Color]” (2013, p. 65), allowing white preservice teachers to dismiss discussions of race and “aggressively choose to refuse their acknowledgement of how their racial marker impacts how people of Color experience race” (2013, p. 62). The concept of “White Diss-course” refers to the deliberate use of color-evasive rhetoric by white preservice teachers to reject critical perspectives on race while reinforcing their own white privilege (Leonardo, 2009; Utt & Tochluk, 2016).

Preservice teachers continue to avoid discussing race and racism while embracing cultural differences when engaging in their courses. Participants would acknowledge other identity markers such as gender or sexuality as reasons for oppression rather than race (Ullucci, 2012; Young, 2016). Other studies suggest white preservice teachers believed class or economic standing were major factors for disparities experienced by Black and Brown students (Crowley, 2016; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). White identifying preservice teachers gave vague descriptions of

culture as the characteristic that shaped their racialized identities (Ullucci, 2012). To avoid conversations of race, preservice teachers discussed “anything but race” as a defense mechanism to protect white dominance (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Picower, 2009).

Another tactic to avoid conversations of race is utilizing politeness. Sue (2013) explains that the politeness protocol when discussing race is a ground rule stating that potentially offensive or uncomfortable topics should be avoided, ignored, and silenced (p.666). If race is discussed, it should be spoken about lightly in a superficial manner. Talking about topics of race, including white privilege, in a social setting can be seen as improper or divisive and will disrupt social harmony (Zou & Dickter, 2013). Preservice teachers can use this concept to avoid conversations of race or diminish the directness that is often necessary to address racial issues that arise.

Whiteness as an Epistemology of Ignorance

Whiteness as an epistemology of ignorance refers to the ignorance white people exhibit when witnessing racial oppression (Cabrera et al., 2016). A white person may give reasons other than race to explain why a practice or policy is upheld. This tactic avoids uncomfortable discussions of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). This ignorance “allows the contours of contemporary systemic racism to remain uninterrogated” (Cabrera et al., 2016, p. 21). White people then avoid critical thinking about why systems and procedures in America are upheld. Epistemology of ignorance fosters false perceptions of the world and misunderstandings that allow the continuation of white supremacy (Mills, 2017).

Whiteness in Institutional and Social Contexts

Whiteness in institutional and social contexts has also been suggested to impact race evasiveness in teacher education programs. White preservice teachers come into multicultural

education courses with preconceived notions of diversity and education that are detrimental to their openness to explore the topics covered (Foster, 1995; Locke, 2005). Their past lived experiences and the cultural environment of their upbringing have already shaped their values before stepping foot into the classroom (McCall, 1995; Smith, 2009).

St. Denis and Schick (2003) reflected on their experiences as preservice teacher educators. They identified three ideological assumptions that their predominantly white students upheld throughout the time they were in a multicultural education course. First, they suggested that white preservice teachers do not think race matters but believe culture does (p. 61). By focusing on cultural differences rather than the dominance of whiteness, preservice teachers continue to “other” those who are not white and use culture as an explanation for inequities. The second assumption was meritocracy (p.63). White preservice teachers often did not see the ways race, gender, class, and social identity play a role in meeting an individual’s goals. Finally, white preservice teachers assumed good intentions and individual acts led to innocence and superiority (p.65). Whiteness is an unspoken norm that many white preservice teachers refuse to acknowledge they participate in. These assumptions suggest an ignorance in the thinking about race in white pre-service teachers and how their whiteness is seen as a norm.

Further research has the influences of white preservice teachers’ multicultural beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge. Locke (2005) observed and interviewed white preservice teachers in a multicultural education course they taught. Locke observed that participants were influenced by their lived social and educational experiences. Popular culture and media consumed by white preservice teachers also influenced their beliefs. They were mainly influenced by their social and educational histories, popular culture and media, as well as the traditional structure of the teacher education program. Locke explained how the traditional structure of teacher education also plays

a role in influencing white preservice teachers' attitudes and beliefs about multicultural education. Multicultural teacher education is usually addressed in a singular course and is not integrated throughout a teacher education curriculum. By minimizing the importance of discussing power and multicultural aspects of education, preservice teachers do not prioritize these practices throughout their teacher training.

Meritocracy as an Explanation for Racial Inequity

Studies of race-visible teacher education suggested that preservice teachers recognize racial inequalities but diminish their importance. Many white teachers adopt a “bootstraps narrative” that a person in the United States who works hard, assumes personal responsibility, and feels they maintains a strong moral center can accomplish anything (Bodrick, 2015). This belief in meritocracy became a way for preservice and in-service teachers to explain racial inequity (Brown, 2013; Sleeter, 2011; Solomon et al., 2005). Preservice teachers recognized their white privilege, but this acknowledgment was not enough to significantly change their racial conscientization (Haviland, 2008; LaDuke, 2009). White preservice teachers who responded to interviews with racialized understandings inevitably concluded that race is “insignificant or irrelevant” (Segall & Garrett, 2013).

Amos (2011) examined the written reflections of 54 preservice teachers to understand their beliefs about race and ethnicity better. The results of this study suggested that white preservice teachers uphold stereotypes about minoritized groups. This perception was due to a lack of exposure and interaction with people of Color (Selwyn, 2007; Ukpokodu, 2004). The participants placed blame on minoritized groups for the racism that they experienced. Previous studies suggested that white preservice teachers do not believe racism still exists and race is only an issue because society continues to discuss it (Guerrero, 2008). Participants in this study did

not take on any responsibility for their negative perception of race and ethnicity but rather described themselves to be “nonbiased,” “far from being racist,” and “nontypical whites”. The white preservice teachers admitted in their writing that they upheld stereotypes, but explained these beliefs would not impede their teaching of a diverse student body. The participants saw their beliefs as separate from their future actions.

White Emotionality in Teacher Education

Understanding emotion is central to learning how racism is experienced and why it is often defended or denied (Applebaum, 2010; Winans, 2012). White emotionality has been described as the emotional reaction when confronted with race-based issues and race-based discussions (Matias, 2016). White individuals often use their emotions of discomfort, guilt, shame, anger, and denial to project despair onto people of Color for having to acknowledge racial injustices and the privileges white people inherit from society (Matias and Allen, 2013; Matias et al., 2022). These emotions can present themselves in different ways according to research on white preservice teachers. Reactions of resistance include outburst, denial of race and privilege, and accusations of fault towards people of Color (Matias, 2016). Emotions can also manifest in a lack of action and present as fatigue (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Crowley & Smith, 2015; Flynn, 2015). This fatigue leads to a form of “emotional paralysis” due to the cognitive dissonance that leaves white preservice teachers feeling vulnerable and angry (Solomon et al. 2005). Pre-service teachers who had trouble understanding and regulating their emotions were less likely to change their racial beliefs (DeCuir-Gunby, 2020).

Imagination in Teacher Education

In teacher education, instructors use imagination as a tool for students to internalize theory and content and apply it to future situations the preservice teachers will experience in the

classroom. Imagination is an engagement that transforms the sense of becoming more knowledgeable and creative in thinking (Egan, 2005). This is commonly seen in writing when a teacher educator assigns a lesson plan about a topic for a specific grade level. The preservice teacher must imagine themselves as a teacher in this context and create a plan to assist students in meeting the learning objective. Preservice teachers must consider what they will say, what their students might say, what materials are needed, and the objective assessment. Even if the preservice teachers have never been in front of a class, they have observed teachers throughout their academic careers and apply what they have observed to their imagined teacher self (Lortie, 1975).

Another way imagination is utilized in teacher education is through performance. Preservice teachers often practice in their teacher education classes and pretend their peers are students. By creating a scenario in which they are the lead teacher, the preservice teacher imagines how they would physically conduct themselves while delivering a lesson. Preservice teachers also imagine how they would handle difficult situations, such as a disruption by a student or a whole class redirection. Under the supervision of their teacher educators, preservice teachers are provided intellectual, moral, and emotional spaces of reflection on how they would respond in different scenarios. Allowing preservice teacher to ask ‘why’ and to ‘think differently’ is an opportunity for them to think critically about their future teaching (Cartwright & Noone, 2006; Greene, 2000).

Research was conducted on ways that imagination was used to assist preservice teachers in considering their responses to other practices outside of content delivery. Hyry-Beihammer et al. (2022) examined their student’s writing to see how preservice teachers imagined addressing future classroom moral dilemmas. Instructors posed scenarios as assignments, and the preservice

teachers had to look at the situation from three points of view: the pupil, the teacher, and an outside stakeholder. Providing space for the preservice teacher to take multiple points of view, it allowed them to consider the relational and moral complexities in their future work (Hyry-Beihammer et al., 2022).

Imagination has also been examined in the sociocultural context. Mills (1959) conceptualized social imagination as a way for individuals to “grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society” (p.5-6). Social imagination can be applied as a tool to help individuals better understand themselves concerning the environments they are situated in (Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016). Imagining social situations empowers individuals to realize that their beliefs have social and historical beginnings. The concept of social imagination can be utilized for preservice teachers to understand themselves and their students in the context of broader socio historical forces (Milner, 2010).

White preservice teachers do not have to think about the impact their whiteness has on their practices or on the people they interact with (Leonardo, 2009; Matias, 2012; Rodriguez, 2009). White imagination is the mythically constructed narrative of white dominance and Black inferiority that white people utilize to reproduce racial subordination (Aronson et al., 2020; Matias & Zembylas, 2014). Preservice teachers find it difficult to examine their white imagination because they do not recognize that their mind is subjected to the dominant racial ideology (Picower, 2009). In a study of white imagination, Matias and Zembylas (2014) found that white preservice teachers could not acknowledge the construction of acts of whiteness. Participants described themselves as white but did not push themselves beyond this recognition and were emotionally disinvested in racial justice (p. 5). Participants resonated with white guilt and were complicit in hegemonic whiteness. These practices uphold racism in teacher education

by avoiding the work necessary to disrupt foundationally racist ideologies. Matias et al. (2014) called for teacher educators to provide experiences and space for preservice teachers to deconstruct whiteness in education.

Written Reflexivity as a Tool to Consider Action

Although many deficits persist in race-visible teacher education, some studies highlight its potential to provide preservice teachers with opportunities to critically engage with whiteness in nuanced ways. Matias and Grosland (2016) suggested that digital storytelling can help preservice teachers bridge the gap of emotional distancing from racial issues. Similarly, Ohito (2016) guided white preservice teachers to recognize how their embodied whiteness could shape their future teaching practices. Through reflective activities such as autobiographical writing and journaling, participants confronted discomfort during moments of exposure to racialized language. This process underscored the importance of embracing discomfort for growth. Marx and Pennington (2003) also emphasized the value of candid discussions between white teacher educators and preservice teachers about their journeys in recognizing racism. Such dialogues foster nonjudgmental spaces for exploring racial identity.

When preservice teachers critically examine their beliefs and engage in conversations about race, the structural origins of white privilege often remain unaddressed (Berchini, 2017). However, some studies suggest that reflective practices can create opportunities for preservice teachers to explore their white racial identity and emphasize the importance of addressing systemic racism within the American education system. Reflective writing, in particular, has been shown to help preservice teachers analyze deficit-based thinking and challenge white normality. Despite initial apprehensions about racialization in their teaching practices, participants acknowledged the need for open discussions on race (Crowley, 2016).

In a follow-up study, Crowley (2019) found that preservice teachers developed critical insights into their personal experiences with white privilege. By contextualizing these insights with their understanding of structural racism, they recognized the power of their position as white individuals in society. Additionally, participants acknowledged their white privilege and took initial steps toward examining their racial consciousness. Crowley highlighted that while white individuals may feel vulnerable in these discussions, they also have the ability to retreat into their privilege at any time—an option not available to people of Color. These findings collectively underscore the importance of embedding race-conscious practices in teacher education to foster awareness and promote equity in the classroom.

Vignettes have been used in previous studies as a tool in teacher education for preservice teachers to imagine how they would respond to discussions of race in their future profession. Anast Seguin and Ambrosio (2002) constructed vignettes that allowed preservice teachers to demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural/diversity outcomes added to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education Standards in 2000. Through written responses participants were given time to reflect on the scenarios and determine what actions they would hypothetically take as the teacher in the role. The study suggested preservice teachers often incorporated classroom theory into imagined practice in their responses. Some responses were entrenched in white privilege, with students seeming satisfied with a quick answer rather than using higher-order social justice-oriented answers (McIntosh, 1988). Student ignorance in aspects of diversity and justice could then be addressed through teacher feedback and learning group discussions.

In a similar study, graduate-level preservice teachers' were presented cultural and political vignettes and were prompted to write how they would respond to the situation (Darvin, 2011).

Participants had the opportunity to reflect on the situation and consider the steps they would take as an educator attending to the problem. The participant's responses showed an increase in cultural and political awareness in imagined situations involving stakeholders including students, parents, and peers. Participants also increased their awareness of the relationship between culture and identity (p. 284), and contemplated fears and concerns about participating in the study.

These studies suggested opportunities to explore social imagination in teacher education can be a starting place for preservice teachers to examine their racial consciousness and begin to think about how they could take action to disrupt racism. Integrating reflection into teacher education coursework establishes a more direct learning process to assist preservice teachers develop agency in their practices (Dervin, 2023). Preservice teachers must look inwards and concentrate on developing their own racial identities before attempting to address race and racism in a professional setting (Pollock et al., 2010).

When preservice teachers acknowledge whiteness and racial inequities, they can think about ways they can take action in the future. This in turn creates antiracist practices in teacher education, meaning teachers work to go beyond broad discussions of race to specifically address and disrupt white supremacy in education (Change-Bacon, 2022).

Summary

In this section I have examined how race and racism affect teacher education. Critical whiteness has been utilized as a method to critique the practices within teacher education that uphold whiteness and racism. I determined the role whiteness plays in developing preservice teacher's beliefs and knowledge of multicultural education by examining race evasive and race visible teacher education research. Then I reviewed how whiteness is upheld in teacher education by curriculum, teacher educators, and preservice teachers. I took the stance that whiteness as

assumed racial comfort and whiteness as an epistemology of ignorance were two major factors in practices of upholding whiteness within teacher education. Finally, I reviewed literature suggesting that exercises in examining imagination and written reflection within a multicultural education course can allow preservice teachers to examine their own race and how they might engage in discussions of race with stakeholders at work.

The purpose of this study is to examine how preservice teachers imagine future discussions of race, and how reflective practices in teacher education coursework provide them the opportunity to consider how they could take action. I designed this study with CWS as an essential framework considering that whiteness is a major factor in the reasons why racism is alive in the field of education. I engaged in a critical ethnographic study to examine the ways preservice teachers imagine engaging in discussions of race in their future teaching career.

Chapter Three: Methods

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

1. In what ways do preservice teachers imagine themselves engaging in discussions of race and racism with stakeholders at their future workplace?
2. How do preservice teachers reflect on future emotions and actions tied to race and racism?

Dual Role of Researcher and Instructor

For this study I held the role of both instructor and researcher. I instructed one section of FOUN3000 in the fall of 2022 and one section in the spring of 2023. Holding this dual role, it was important to mitigate coercion for the participants. Students may have felt pressure to participate in this study because I would be the one grading their work. It was important to inform students prior to their participation that I would not know the identity of the participants until after their final grades were submitted for the semester. I often thought about how the students who agreed to participate may have felt when completing their assignments. I wondered if they put more effort into their responses because eventually, they knew I would be reviewing their work in detail. Throughout the semesters I found myself putting more emphasis in grading assignments with feedback rather than the rubrics I created. After reading each journal or responses to vignettes, I found myself asking students to push their thinking or providing more resources on topics that students were unclear about. The fact that I knew I would be using some of the students' assignments as data made me want to be more attentive to individual needs when grading and providing feedback.

As the researcher for this study, I reflected on my own identity that could bias the outcomes of this study (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). I identify as a white, cisgender woman, who was born and raised on the unceded land of the Paugusett and other Indigenous peoples, what is today known as Southwestern Connecticut. The schools I attended growing up, both private and public, were well-funded and predominantly white. I began my training in early childhood education through the alternative teacher training program teachNOLA, after completing a year of service as a reading interventionist through City Year New Orleans. I hold the demographic makeup not only similar to the majority of the preservice teachers in this course, but also across the United States. Many of the experiences I had before teaching were similar to the experiences described by the data that follows. I had some difficulty learning content in grade school but overall had an enjoyable experience. I rarely considered race when thinking about my education and the privileges that were afforded to me because of my race. This lack of reflection and understanding of who I was as a racial being made me unprepared to address racial differences and my own bias as a teacher.

Role of Critical Whiteness Studies

As mentioned in Chapters One and Two, CWS provided a lens to conceptualize the experiences of preservice teachers as they imagine engaging in discussions of race. The hegemonic invisibility of whiteness allows preservice teachers to refuse to acknowledge that white imagination exists (Lipsitz, 2006; Matias et al., 2014). The white experience is normative in the field of education and it is often not challenged, especially in teacher education (Matias, 2012; Rodriguez, 2009). CWS focuses on problematizing the normality of hegemonic whiteness and provides a framework to examine how society invests in white racial production in education, which includes teacher beliefs (Lewis & Manno, 2011; Lipsitz, 2006; Thandeka,

2009). The tenets of CWS prompt preservice teachers to examine not just their race but how whiteness affects education as a whole system. In this study I focused on two tenets of CWS, white racial comfort and epistemologies of ignorance, as a guide for examining preservice teachers' responses to imagined discussions of race.

Critical Ethnography Methodology

Critical ethnography is a qualitative practice that is driven by the assumption that our society is divided hierarchically and inequities within our society should be interrogated (Madison, 2011). This methodology centers the asking of uncomfortable questions about inequity and privilege. Fitzpatrick and May (2022) outline nine tenets of critical ethnography: (1) orienting power, in/justice, and in/equity; (2) social theory and ontology; (3) troubling the questions (4) relationalities, relationships and reciprocity; (5) positionality, reflection and reflexivity; (6) time; (7) understanding and communicating cultures; (8) fieldwork; and (9) addressing change. A critical ethnographer uses their privilege and resources to bring participants together to have critical conversations (Madison, 2011). I utilized the methodology of critical ethnography in shaping this study to interrogate the ways race is addressed in undergraduate teacher education programs. The purpose of this study is not to solve the inequities that are upheld by a lack of exposure to race talk in teacher education. However, it is to see where the gaps are currently in teacher education and where there could be improvements. I felt as a white teacher educator and former elementary school teacher, I was in a position to question these inequities (Fine, 2006). As an insider in this group, I knew my view could be limited, however it should not be the sole responsibility of people of Color to address inequities in America's educational system (Madison, 2019; Paecher, 2012). As the researcher I utilized critical reflexivity about my experiences as a white teacher to push my thinking about the context

of this study and how preservice teachers benefit from having space to imagine discussions of race. As a critical ethnographer I sought to create change and challenge the inequities suggested in this study, myself, and in education as a whole.

FOUN 3000

The course Diversity of Learners and Settings (FOUN 3000) is a required component for elementary and secondary education majors with at least a sophomore standing in Auburn University's teacher education program. As part of the Alabama State Department of Education's requirement for teacher certification, students in FOUN 3000 must receive a grade of a C or better to be recommended for state licensure (Alabama Department of Education, 2020). This course covers socio-political topics, and how students' diverse identities shape their experiences in different settings (Andrzejewski, 2020). Inequities in the American school system are addressed in this course as an introduction to the students' future workplaces. FOUN 3000 addresses a wide range of social and political issues in education which include exploring race, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, and dis/ability (Ellerbrock & Cruz, 2014; Sleeter, 2017). This course also has a service-learning component that links theoretical experience to a community-based environment (Yuan, 2018). The service-learning component of the class had a separate instructor and had separate requirements centered on community-based learning.

FOUN 3000 and other stand-alone multicultural courses in teacher education programs utilize a version of Donna Gollnick and Peter Chinn's *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society* (Miller Dyce & Owusu-Ansah, 2016). This text briefly introduces the foundations of education in America. Its chapters then outline how social and political issues intersect with the identities of students that a teacher will encounter in the classroom. Students are also assigned readings from Adams et al. (2013) *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*. This text provides

examples of lived student experiences from different perspectives within education. These stories allow preservice teachers to expand their knowledge about the situations some students face inside and outside of the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Sleeter 2008).

Concentrated Content

FOUN 3000 is anchored in *Learning for Social Justice's* four standards: identity, diversity, justice, and action (Teaching Tolerance, 2018). These standards guide the practice of this course. Under each standard, *Learning for Social Justice* suggests five domains to be considered when approaching each standard. The following domains were prioritized throughout FOUN 3000.

Identity

Identity is a twofold topic in FOUN 3000. In this course, I provided students space to examine their own racial identities and started to explore the identities of their future students. A major objective of this course was for students to recognize themselves as cultural and racial beings. Research has found that often white preservice teachers do not identify as having a culture (Haddix, 2008; Nieto, 2000). Under the standard of identity, students recognize traits of the dominant culture, their home culture and other cultures, and understand how they negotiate their own identity in multiple spaces (Teaching Tolerance, 2018). Through readings, class discussions, and reflective writing students were positioned to examine their family history, educational history, and the intersectionality of different groups they identify with. Students developed linguistic, historical, and cultural knowledge that affirms and accurately describes membership in multiple identity groups (p.3). Examining the experiences of people with different identities may help preservice teachers consider what their students may be going

through in and out of the classroom. Topics covered under this standard include: school integration, intersectionality, marginalization, and cultural imperialism.

Diversity

Diversity is in the title of this course and I want to ensure the class discusses how impactful acknowledging differences can be in a student's education experience. One goal in addressing diversity is for the respectful expression of curiosity about the lived experiences of others, and the exchange of ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way (Teaching Tolerance, 2018). I utilized Zoom breakout rooms as a place to share their experiences. Supplemental material, including readings from *Diversity and Social Justice*, allowed students to examine diversity in social, cultural, political and historical contexts, rather than in ways that are superficial or oversimplified (p.3). Topics covered under this standard include: privilege and implicit bias, school funding and zoning, and exploration of powerlessness.

Justice

Once diversity is recognized by preservice teachers, the next step was to analyze the inequity that exists in American schools. Film and supplemental reading explored the unfairness on the individual level and injustice at the institutional or systemic level in education (Teaching Tolerance, 2018). Through written reflection, students analyzed the harmful impact of bias and injustice. (p.3). Topics covered under this standard include: (micro)aggressions and violence, achievement, discipline, and opportunity.

Action

Once students acknowledge concepts of diversity and justice, the next step is to discuss what they can do as educators to support their students as a teacher. Students can work toward recognizing their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice, and injustice (Teaching

Tolerance, 2018). Class discussion included local and national organizations where they can join to support continuous growth in becoming a socially just teacher. Through the final paper students plan how to carry out collective action and evaluate what strategies are most effective (p.3). Topics covered under this standard include: curriculum, policy barriers, and work for teachers.

Preservice Teacher Participant Recruitment

The data collection process began with IRB Approval in December 2022 (See Appendix 1). Ethical consideration was at the forefront of the recruitment of this study. I recruited preservice teachers during the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters at a predominantly white four year university in the Southeastern United States. Undergraduate students enrolled in my sections of FOUN 3000 had an opportunity to participate in the study. To uphold autonomy, beneficence, and justice, steps were taken to protect students who chose to participate in the study. No additional time or effort was required outside the amount they put into their classwork.

In anticipation of coercion, my dissertation chair acted as the research recruiter. She joined one of our first Zoom classes and explained the study. Dr. Andrzejewski provided a blank consent form via the chat function on Zoom (See Appendix 2). Students who chose to participate emailed their copy of the signed form to Dr. Andrzejewski, and she kept the forms in a protected Box folder for the remainder of the semester. I was not present during this portion of the class meeting and did not have access to which students agreed to participate. When the semester ended and grades were submitted Dr. Andrzejewski sent me the Box folder which indicated the consent forms of the students that agreed to participate in the study. I then download those students' assignments from Canvas as Word documents. I edited the documents to remove the students' names from the documents and renamed files based on the assignment and a

pseudonym that I came up with. Only de-identified assignments were stored in a new secure Box file as research data.

Preservice Teacher Participants

The demographic information in this section was self-reported through the participants' Cultural/Schooling Autobiography assignments. Eight participants identified as being white, one identified as Asian, and one identified as white/Hispanic. Eight participants identified as female and two as male. Five participants' major concentration was elementary education, two studied social science education, two studied special education, and one student is majoring in interdisciplinary studies. During the time they were taking FOUN 3000 three of the participants were sophomores, three were juniors, and one was a senior.

Table 2. Preservice Teacher Participants

Pseudonyms	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Major	Year
Annie	White	Female	Elementary Education	Junior
Heather	White	Female	Elementary Education	Sophomore
Evelyn	White/Hispanic	Female	Interdisciplinary Studies	Senior
Ethan	White	Male	Special Education	Junior
Sya	Asian/Chinese	Female	Social Science Education	Senior
Samantha	White	Female	Special Education	Junior
Nate	White	Male	Social Science Education	Sophomore
Margaret	White	Female	Elementary Education	Junior
Deborah	White	Female	Elementary Education	Sophomore
Amy	White	Female	Elementary Education	Junior

Data Sources

Cultural/Schooling Autobiography

Written reflection is suggested as a useful tool for white preservice teachers to examine past schooling and cultural life experiences (Carter Andrews et al., 2018; Haddix, 2008; King, 1997; Pennington, 2007; Ullucci, 2012). At the beginning of the semester, students examined how their identities influenced their practices as a teacher through an autobiography of their past

experiences (Aydarova, 2018). This assignment provided information to help me as an instructor understand the personal experiences that helped shape the development of the preservice teachers so far in their journey to become educators.

Response to Vignettes

Throughout the semester I presented students with six vignettes (See Appendix 3) discussing race and racism in different educational contexts. The vignettes prompted participants to imagine how they would respond to the situation. Vignettes were posed to address different stakeholders that teachers interact with throughout their time in the classroom including students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. Accompanying each vignette were three prompts asking students to examine and name the problem they saw in each scenario; what action, if any, they might take to address the problem; and if they saw any risk in taking action. The purpose of this activity was for participants to think critically about their position on critical school issues. Preservice teachers used this assignment to imagine what they would say and how they would act when presented with a cultural or political issue.

As a guide for creating meaningful situations for students to reflect on, I referred to Anast Seguin and Ambrosio (2002) and Darwin's (2011) research. These studies designed their vignettes to be student-centered and had the goal to examine preservice teachers' potential to consider alternative precedents for action within a diverse classroom. I read through the vignettes offered in these studies to better understand the types of scenarios the researchers interpreted as meaningful for preservice teachers to consider. I then considered my own formative experiences as a white novice teacher and reflected on what would have been helpful to consider before entering a classroom. Further, I considered highly debated current issues of race in education. Similarly, I modeled the vignettes in this study to center the preservice teacher in a scenario

where they would have to decide how to act. I decided to include opportunities for reflection in a school setting as a whole rather than just the classroom. This study concentrated on the aspects of the vignettes that address race and racism over other identity markers such as class, dis/ability, sexual orientation, access, and gender.

For clearer identification in chapter four I have given each of the six vignettes a title.

Table 3. Vignette Titles

Vignette Number in Appendix 1	Title of Vignette
1	Teacher Talk Vignette
2	Hate Crime Vignette
3	Gifted Program Vignette
4	Braids Vignette
5	Diverse Hire Vignette
6	Book Vignette

Discussion Participation/ Journal

The format of this course was online synchronous which can bring forth difficulty for students to connect with each other. I wanted to utilize breakout rooms as an opportunity for students to build comradery through discussing the weekly assignments. During the second week, I assigned students a group that they continued to meet with for the remainder of the semester. The hope was that working with the same group would allow students to get somewhat comfortable with each other as discussions became more high risk. Anast Seguin and Ambrosio (2002) utilized small group class discussions as a way for student reflection on feedback they received from their instructor on their responses to vignettes, and a chance to brainstorm additional insight with peers. This approach was intentional to provide an opportunity for discourse and build critical thinking when considering topics on diversity. Since I could not be in

every breakout room at the same time, students completed a short journal entry at the end of each class, reflecting on their discussions with their classmates.

Final Paper

The final assignment for this class was a culminating written reflection. Toward the end of the semester, students read Tarek Grantham's (2011) *New Directions for Gifted Black Males* *Sufferings from Bystander Effect: A Call for Upstanders*. The final paper prompted students to review their previous vignette responses and journal entries to see how they imagined responding to issues when they are in-service teachers. Students then were to determine what next steps they could take to be an upstander teacher for their students rather than a bystander. An upstander teacher confidently and intentionally diffuses situations, initiates or encourages discussion of race, and volunteers themselves to be responsive advocates for their students (Grantham 2011, 2014). Students were to connect their ideas to previous readings and topics discussed in the course. Although this article concentrates on upstanders for gifted Black male students, I believe the concept and actions of being an upstander could be more broadly applied to developing social justice practices as an educator.

Data Analysis

When the spring semester of 2023 ended, I was given access to the consent forms of the students who opted to participate in the study. I organized all digital documents collected off of Canvas into individualized participants folders on a secure online Box management site (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). For the purpose of confidentiality, I labeled the data with participants' pseudonyms. To manage the data in preparation for analysis I uploaded the participants files into DeDoose, a qualitative coding software.

For data analysis, I read each autobiography, journal entry, vignette response, and final paper in full by participant several times before the coding process. For the first cycle of coding, I used the method of in vivo coding. In vivo coding is a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of participants rather than researcher generated terms (Saldaña, 2016). Throughout this process, I memoed how these terms connect to the theoretical frame of critical whiteness studies. I looked for the absence of acknowledgment of race, silence as an action, and acknowledgement of privilege. Castagno (2012) explained how critical ethnographers are especially interested in the nonliteral meanings of language and other forms of communication (p.385). We often examine data for silence and how particular terms carry meaning within a community.

In the second cycle of coding, I applied a priori codes to the text (Blair, 2015). These predetermined codes reflected the two tenets of interest under CWS: whiteness as assumed racial comfort and whiteness as epistemologies of ignorance. Under whiteness as assumed racial comfort, I categorized instances of silence, invisibility, and active construction of white privilege. For Whiteness as epistemologies of ignorance, I categorized instances where participants took into consideration whiteness in structural and social contents, emotionality in responses, and mentioned meritocracy as an explanation for racial inequity. I also examined the data looking for a turning point when participants used words of action to show how they might choose to step in and speak out in a situation. I created themes from the coding and memoing to convey the imagined experiences of the participants (Saldaña, 2016).

Throughout the process of data analysis I also journaled about my interactions with the student content. I reviewed the feedback I provided for participants and how this feedback might have affected the next upcoming assignment. I also reflected on how being a white teacher

educator affected the way I was interpreting the data. I considered the motives behind each assignment and how the responses made me feel in my attempt to provide space for the participants to reflect on how race will impact their teaching profession.

Credibility

Quality ethnographic studies express a reality that seems true, providing “a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the ‘real’” (Richardson, 2000). Credibility of a qualitative study has four criteria: thick description, triangulation, multivocality, and member reflections (Tracy, 2010). The written reflective work throughout the course contained participant’s thick descriptions of their experiences. Participants shared their experiences and values through multiple written assignments and revisited their previous writing to see if their views evolved for the final paper. Similarities in gathered written responses throughout the study indicated triangulation. These similarities were seen on an individual basis in different assignments but were also seen throughout the group as a whole. Although there were similarities in experiences each participant brought their individualized voice to their writing which shows multivocality. For this study, it was important for the researcher to learn about each participant's individual background in education because teachers often emulate the teachers they experienced (Lortie, 1975). Member reflection occurred throughout the study through dialogue during class time, specifically in breakout rooms, and through comments I provided on assignments so that participants could clarify the meaning behind their writing.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to detail the critical ethnography research design that provided the examination techniques on how preservice teachers imagine engaging in race and racism in their future employment. This chapter discussed my position as a researcher and instructor, and how this dual role could have affected my participation in this study. Further, I elaborated on the methodology of critical whiteness studies and how its frame influenced the design and analysis of this research. I introduced the participants through short profiles to better inform the reader of the participants being analyzed. Finally, I considered the credibility of this study. In the next chapter, the findings of the written work provided by participants will be discussed and organized by theme. Looking forward, the subsequent chapter will focus on presenting and analyzing the main findings from preservice teachers. These findings reflect the emotionality and action imagined by participants through their written reflections, responses to vignettes, and final paper.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter presents the findings from written responses to vignettes by ten preservice teachers taking a multicultural education course at a predominantly white four-year university in the Southeastern United States. The findings are organized by reviewing each participant's data for two primary reasons. Firstly, I wanted to mirror the structure data was analyzed: I analyzed each participant's reflections in full before proceeding to the next individual. Secondly, each individual's unique imagined emotions and actions warranted a distinct presentation, allowing a comprehensive understanding of their considerations.

In analyzing the data, I developed categories grounded in my research on Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), with particular attention to the tenets whiteness as assumed racial comfort and whiteness as epistemologies of ignorance. I drew extensively on Chang-Bacon's (2022) framework, which outlines how teacher educators maintain racial comfort through bracketing, deferment, and erasure. This framework resonated with me both as a researcher and educator, as it offered a structured lens for identifying patterns of invisibility and avoidance, topics that are often overlooked or omitted from research findings. In examining the emotions imagined by participants, I engaged with scholarship on white emotionality in preservice teachers. White emotionality refers to the affective responses that arise when white individuals are confronted with race-based issues and discussions (Matias, 2016). Drawing on this literature, I created categories that captured emotional reactions such as fear, discomfort, guilt, and shame, particularly in relation to how participants anticipated engaging in racialized conversations (Matias & Allen, 2013; Matias et al., 2022).

Each participant's section presented an overview of their demographic background and a summary of their educational experience taken from their Cultural/Schooling Autobiography and

weekly reflective journal assignments. I then present a summary table showcasing their imagined emotions and actions. Following the tables are further conclusions from their responses to the vignettes and the final paper.

Annie

Annie grew up in a small rural town in Alabama, where she attended public school from kindergarten through high school with the same fifty-seven students. She identified as a straight, white, able-bodied woman who came from a middle-class family supported by two parents at home. She played basketball in high school and experienced sexist discrimination when she saw the support the boys' sports received from her school and community. Annie plans to go back to her community and teach in the public school system once she graduates. She reported that her teachers growing up were white, and she did not realize this lack of diversity until attending college. When considering how her cultural identities will affect her relationship with her students, she stated, "I may not be able to relate to my students on some of the issues that they will face but I will be able to give them grace and love them through whatever they are experiencing." Annie realizes that the lack of racial diversity in her educational experience will have an effect on her teaching and interaction with students with differing racial backgrounds.

When considering racial differences for students in American education, Annie reflected on racial inequities and the influence teachers have on their classes. In response to viewing the documentary *A Class Divided*, where an elementary school teacher in Iowa experimented with bias within her third-grade classroom after the murder of Martin Luther King Jr., Annie stated:

Without a teacher who cares for all students equally, many students would "fall through the cracks." Teachers must work first on themselves to make sure that they are able to get rid of any past biases so that they can educate students... Students deserve the right to a

fair and equal education. Segregation is the exact opposite. “Separate but equal” is anything but equal.

This response suggests that Annie has a foundation of American, however she has work to do regarding addressing racial bias as a teacher. She explains that self-work needs to be done by teachers to address racial prejudice, but believes teachers can “get rid” of such bias. Racial bias is deeply ingrained into American society and educational practices. Annie will never be able to completely “get rid” of the bias. Still, she can work toward acknowledging and uplifting differing perspectives. She does not directly address that historically, students of Color are the ones who “fall through the cracks” and do not get equal opportunities in public education. However, she hints at injustice, which is a first step in acknowledging that action needs to be taken by teachers.

Our final class in FOUN300 focused on how current policies affect education. At the time of this course, Florida was attempting to pass its first round of anti-DEI bills. Annie discussed discomfort and fear of the passage of such a bill:

There are a lot of good educators who will leave the State of Florida because they are worried about saying the wrong thing and losing their jobs. I think that this [passage of anti-DEI bills] has a very high possibility of rolling out into other states that lean to the right... I cannot honestly say that I would stay in Florida even if I had been living there my entire life. There are too many opportunities to mess up and say the wrong thing.

Through these reflections, Annie began to think about her role and values as an educator. She explained how she did not consider racial issues much as a student because the school system she was in was predominantly white. Although these issues may not have arisen in her

educational experience as a student, she is aware that race and policy will play a role in her upcoming career as a teacher.

Table 4.1: *Annie’s Imagined Emotions and Actions when Addressing Issues of Race*

Data Source	Emotions	Actions
Vignettes	1. Fear 2. Shame 3. Guilt	1. Organize 2. Engage in Discussion 3. Defer
Final Paper	1. Fear 2. Anticipation	1. Race work 2. Reflection 3. Advocate

Imagined Emotional Responses to Addressing Issues of Race

Annie exhibited negative emotional responses when addressing issues of race throughout the vignettes provided in this study. Fear was a major emotion seen throughout multiple reactions. Annie imagined engaging in discussion with her peers, fellow teachers, in two scenarios when she felt they were discriminating against Black students. She felt there was risk in these discussions that her peers may think she is calling them racist. She feared they would then “tell all the other educators and staff at the school.” Although she felt it would be the right move for her to discuss the situation with her peers, the fear that this could risk her image at her school was still a factor. She also conveyed this fear when imagining having a discussion with her principal about an unfair policy on braided hair as part of the dress code policy. She wrote, “A risk that lies within my approach is that I could potentially lose my job and be seen as “an angry woman.” As a white woman this fear of being stereotyped could be a barrier for Annie.

Though she felt fearful in these moments, Annie followed up by saying “If I am able to help students express themselves in a way that is comfortable to them, that is a risk I am willing to take.”

Annie also expressed shame and guilt when considering the book vignette. She explained she would feel “horrified to hear that one of the students felt like they were being discriminated against.” She went on to say she would “more than likely go home and cry. I would really try and make sure that the student knew how sorry I was.” She imagined this shame and guilt as a motivator to go out and buy more books for her classroom and consider why she did not “put herself in her students’ shoes” when picking out books for the library.

In her final paper, Annie reflected on what it would take for her to advocate for her students. She wrote about Grantham’s (2011) point that, “If I get involved, I’ll jeopardize my own safety and security” (p.264). This comment suggests fear and anticipation of the unknown situations as a teacher, where she will need to stand up for her students. “If a situation arises where I am worried about the safety of the students, I must put the safety of myself behind them.” Annie recognizes that advocating for students can be nerve-racking, but she is willing to do what she feels necessary. She believes “Educators should always feel obligated to do what is in the best interest of their students... Students deserve someone who will fight for them no matter what, even if they are the only ones fighting.” Although Annie believes there is an obligation for educators to stand up for the students her imagined negative emotions could prevent her from taking action.

Imagined Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Throughout Annie’s reflective writing, it was clear she considered taking action in addressing the issue of race. She often imagined addressing the situation head-on and speaking to

peers or administration regarding the incident. In the hate crime vignette, Annie said she would have a conversation about the importance of the topic with the principal. She felt that high school students would need to have a space to discuss what was going on for Black Americans. She brought up that “some of the students may even be old enough to vote in the elections that are being influenced by these events.” Annie felt she would need to say something to the principal, so he knew she believed this lesson was important. She wrote:

I would try to ask him or her if they had ever sat down and truly checked themselves for some kind of bias. There are so many people who have some kind of bias where they might not even know that they may have one. It is so important to help educate those around you to check themselves... I would make sure that they knew that I was simply trying to make sure that my students received the best education and became functioning members of society.

Annie felt she would need to say something to the principal because she believed that she could have an open conversation with her students and discuss the facts or they would just see images on social media. However, telling an authority figure if they have “checked themselves” seems unrealistic. Annie does not hone in on racial bias, which is the issue she is trying to discuss with her principal.

Besides one-on-one discussions, Annie also discussed organizing groups to address issues of race in the future. In response to the diverse hire vignette, Annie explained she would stand up to ensure this happens. She reflected:

Many people may agree with the teacher and say that this situation is discriminatory and racist and that will probably be a major issue wherever this is taking place. If I was the teacher in this situation I would try to put out some of the fire very quickly. I would work

to just speak to a few people at once and help them see that diversity is not a bad thing at all, and it will help the students who do not look and think like the people who make up the board.

What Annie is describing here is organizing a group of people to stand up for diverse hiring practices. By being the organizer, she is creating a small disruption to combat the person who called these practices racist against white people. Annie assumed that her coworkers would agree with her but did not state what would happen if she found how her values were considered in the minority. If Annie found that most of the teaching staff disagreed with her it is not clear if she would be willing to advocate for her values.

Although Annie can imagine addressing race, she can also imagine herself deferring to others in some situations. In response to the gifted program vignette, she felt someone else should handle this situation. She stated, “I would take it to someone higher to see if they can help.” Annie did not feel capable of handling the situation herself, in her response she justified why someone else should address the situation:

If the person in question chose solely on race and sex, then they need to be called out for their actions. The world is already such a hard place for minorities, and school should be a place where students should be able to receive an education without thinking that they are not getting the same opportunities.

Annie is upholding an unrealistic expectation that all students in the American education system get equal treatment. By deferring to someone else she is not engaging in the issue which prevents her from thinking critically about how race affects her schools gifted program.

One action Annie planned on taking was continuing to educate herself about race and reflect on her experience as a white educator. Annie knows this will take time explaining, “I will

have to explore until the day I retire.” In her final paper, she reflected on the work she will need to do:

As a developing social justice-oriented teacher, I will need to look deeply into the backgrounds of all my students to make sure that I understand the scenarios they could possibly be in. Even though I may not be able to understand their situations, I still must attempt to try and comprehend what they are going through either at home, at school, in their social lives etc.

In this response, Annie acknowledges that she needs to take her students' racial backgrounds into consideration. Annie does not detail how her students' experiences will impact her own racial consciousness and inform her teaching practices.

Heather

Heather identifies as a straight, cisgender woman of “European descent.” On her father’s side, her German ancestors arrived in America in the 1850s to farm in Iowa. Hannah believes American history and culture are closely tied to European history, referring to America as “The Great American Melting Pot.” She says American history has always been a very comfortable subject because she could relate it to her own culture and family. This Eurocentric perspective erases many other perspectives in American history especially people of Color.

Hannah acknowledged her privilege as a white person in education, yet she did not realize how fortunate she was “until later in life.” From her reflections it is clear that Hannah has not been exposed to a racially diverse student population and is coming into teaching with a limited perspective based in systemic whiteness. As a future teacher, Heather stated, “I want to use this experience to create an environment where multicultural education occurs from the

beginning, where every student can feel comfortable in their own skin and learn more about history than just through one particular cultural lens.”

Throughout her weekly journals, Heather avoided the direct role race played in education and her future as a teacher. She often utilized the term “culture” and other identity markers as a term to avoid the direct correlation to race. She emphasized how other factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and religion are issues rather than race. Her first journal acknowledged systemic whiteness in America:

I do believe that White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants still hold the majority of power in the United States. While our country is working to continually be more inclusive, there are still many areas of power where those in the dominant culture have the upper hand because those opportunities are not as easily available to those of other cultures.

She acknowledged that whiteness holds power in America, but did not hone in on the inequalities that people of Color face daily. She continued this deferment in another reflection where she considered the integration of public schools. She discussed the importance of “integrating students from a poorer community into a nicer quality school,” but did not discuss race once. Heather did not acknowledge racial issues in her journals but explained her concerns about the effect anti-DEI legislation will have on her career:

As a future teacher, it is concerning and makes me nervous, as there is already so much pressure to teach a certain way or to use certain tools or to say certain things in the classroom... It creates that feeling of walking on eggshells, as I become increasingly nervous because no matter what you do, someone will be unhappy.

Table 4.2: Heather’s Imagined Emotions and Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Data Source	Emotions	Actions
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Vignettes	1. Fear 2. Lack of Control 3. Anxiety	1. Defer 2. Engage in Discussion 3. Politeness
Final Paper	1. Anticipation 2. Encouraged	1. Build Community 2. Advocate

Imagined Emotional Responses to Addressing Issues of Race

Heather exhibited fear throughout her written response to the vignettes. In three different situations, she believed there was a risk of being fired. She clearly feared authority and what might happen to her if she spoke up for her beliefs. She considered, “I do not have full control over what I teach in my classroom, so this disagreement between the principal and myself as a teacher could possibly be a threat to our professional relationship and my job.” She went on to explain how her lack of control being a novice teacher could stop her from advocating. In response to the gifted program vignette, Heather explained, “I do not have any control or authority over this coordinator and may not be able to help very much.” These responses suggest her emotions would prevent her from addressing issues of race in the future.

When Heather did consider sharing her opinions, she made it a point to say how polite she would be, “I would try to put this in the nicest way I can without being too strong.” By avoiding directness, she might not be taking the best steps in advocating for her students. She discussed how her peers may get angry with her for discussing racial issues and how she would “lightly bring the topic to their attention.” She felt anxiety at the prospect of taking action to address these issues, stating that her peers “would know that someone reported them and potentially cause further tension and problems in our workplace.” Politeness in used in this way

as an avoidance tactic that makes Heather feel more comfortable when having discussions about race.

The emotions of fear, lack of control, and anxiety shaped her responses, suggesting Heather would not take the steps to advocate for her students. Heather presented a sense of anticipation to advocate for her students in her final paper. She wrote, “I plan to advocate for my students, and it is especially important when certain students face discrimination.” When considering how she would address discriminatory behaviors, she seemed encouraged, stating, “I can use my privileges as a white person to my advantage to help advocate and for my students [of Color].” Heather emotional responses suggest she is not equipped to take the actions she can imagine.

Imagined Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Throughout her responses to the vignettes, Heather often discussed some hesitation she felt before she took action. Although she often considered stepping up if others were behind her, she rarely wrote about taking immediate action to advocate for her students. When considering the teacher talk vignette she wrote:

I would at first take no action. I may tell a fellow colleague that I trust about the situation I overheard, but I would at first hold off because there is a possibility that I do not understand the content of their conversation or what the situation is. But if this becomes a noticeable pattern that multiple people have noticed occurring, then I would work with those others to bring this to the attention of the principal.

This lack of taking initial steps to advocate in situations where race was discussed led to her deferring to others to make a difference. She doubted her ability to make a difference, writing, “I feel that if I tried to convince the teacher that having more inclusive staff does not

mean discrimination against white people, they might grow angry with me, and it would just cause further problems.” She often deferred to an authority figure, such as a principal, to handle a situation. By deflecting her responsibility to help students through these situations, she complies with racist practices.

In contrast to her vignette responses, Heather’s final paper expressed an interest in advocating for her future students. She discussed the importance of community building in the location where she ends up teaching. She wrote how important it was to her to attend community events, meet new people, and research local news to learn more about her new community. Over time she hoped she would “understand more about the perspectives of my future students, their parents and guardians, and faculty and staff.” Heather explained that to best serve her students, she needs to learn about their backgrounds and “connect learning material to their daily lives.” Heather’s interest in community building and learning about the culture and makeup of her new school setting allows are important first step in addressing her racial consciousness as she begins to challenge her understanding of her educational experience and how others' have differing experiences.

Evelyn

Evelyn identifies as a white and Hispanic, heterosexual woman who grew up in an upper-middle-class family. Her father served in the Army National Guard and Air Force; during her childhood, her family moved all around the South. With so many moves, her mother ended up homeschooling her and her younger brothers. She spent time in community programs where she “never really noticed the difference in race or social class then.” When her family moved to Alabama, she went to a public high school for the first time, where she excelled in school.

Evelyn believes her educational path which she considers different from the norm will help her support the diverse learners she will have in her classroom one day. She knows she has more to learn to serve students, saying, “I will utilize every training opportunity and ounce of knowledge to learn how to better educate every kind of student, no matter the difference, whether that be through special education, accommodation, or any other related practice.”

Reflecting on her identity, Evelyn acknowledged herself as a "mix of ethnic backgrounds" and had considered how racial privilege influenced her experiences. In one reflection, she noted that while she is of mixed heritage, she presents as white and therefore benefits from societal privilege. She expressed a desire to use that privilege in meaningful ways to advocate for and uplift others. When reflecting on the Class Divided documentary, she said it was an eye-opening experience to witness how open “the children were about saying slurs.” Evelyn finds discussions of race to be “very uncomfortable.” However, she feels it is “important for children to understand the seriousness of the issue of prejudice and discrimination.”

Table 4.3: Evelyn’s Imagined Emotions and Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Data Source	Emotions	Actions
Vignettes	1. Empathy 2. Anger 3. Confusion	1. Advocate 2. Educate 3. Organize
Final Paper	1. Empathy 2. Confusion 3. Encouraged	1. Advocate 2. Engage in Discussions

Imagined Emotional Responses to Addressing Issues of Race

While Evelyn contemplated issues of race throughout her responses, she was confused about what she should do at times. When considering how she would feel about addressing the teacher talk vignette, she seemed conflicted.

The prompt mentions that students are predominantly African American, but it does not specify the race or ethnicity of the teachers, so we cannot directly connect this to prejudice, however, even teachers who are people [of Color] can have implicit bias regarding other people [of Color].

Evelyn touches upon implicit bias but does not consider it a factor in this scenario. She brings up the race of the teachers, trying to determine if this could be an act of racism or prejudice which suggest she understands there are negative racial undertones to this scenario but is not willing to directly address them. She goes on to explain how she would comfort the teachers for feeling overwhelmed and help them make more engaging lesson plans so the students would not be bored. By taking race out of the situation, Evelyn is not considering how their words uphold systemic oppression and stereotypes about Black students being lazy, and she is encouraging her peers to have these types of discussions in the hallways where anyone can hear. By avoiding her initial thought that this issue has to do with the students race she is participating in a culture of whiteness within her school.

Evelyn felt empathy for her students when considering addressing issues of race. In the braids vignette, she wrote, “The way they called them out is very humiliating for some kids and can cause instances of bullying later on.” This empathy quickly turned to anger about the “illogical policy” the school was upholding. She justified,

This is not a military camp where you must have short hair for safety purposes, this is a very formative experience and age for these children. They are just beginning to figure

out who they are and who they will want to be. Everyone should be entitled to expression if it is not causing harm to anyone.

Evelyn felt empathy for her students who practiced culturally important hairstyles. She suggested the school administration write a public apology to the students facing this discrimination. However, this empathy did not lead to her taking action but rather deferment to an authority figure at the school.

Another representation of empathy in her reflections was when she discussed the book vignette. She explained how she would apologize to the student, but suggested this issue may be more systemic than individual. She wrote, “This country has a long history of racism, and that goes into the curriculum too, and we [educators] should try to bring diversity into it.” Evelyn considered the risk of adding more books with Black figures to her library. She felt some faculty and parents might want to teach the curriculum the way it had been for years, but she felt assigning these books was a way to advocate for her students.

In her final paper, Evelyn explained in her own educational experience how angry she got with her parents, whom she felt were close-minded. She explained how she was homeschooled and grew up in the Mormon Church. They often used religion to separate people into superior and inferior groups. This learned practice is something that she had to acknowledge and work through. She explained how she developed empathy and was open to learning about people’s differences once she was exposed to more diverse people in college.

After I left for college, I started to have a very diverse group of friends and peers. I started hearing the stories of my friends who struggled, which encouraged me to use my voice even more. I had arguments with my parents, old friends, and even with myself, just trying to go against any wrong or discriminatory thoughts about people. It was a

difficult time for me because I felt so strongly about equality, yet I lacked the knowledge to back myself up when advocating for change.

The confusion Evelyn is feeling is based on her challenging her own beliefs. Although this can be uncomfortable her reflections she is committed to learning from others. There is growth in this realization. She was aware that she does not have all the tools to fully understand what others go through, but is open to learning from others' experiences.

Imagined Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Evelyn felt it necessary to educate others throughout her responses to the vignettes. For the gifted program vignette a first step she could imagine taking was to teach her peers about bias. She explained, "I would give a presentation on implicit bias and prejudice towards students [of Color] and other demographics. I would show them numerical data on over- and under-representation in special education and gifted programs." If this did not make an impact, she would defer to another party.

I would try to bring in unbiased professionals to help us with training and evaluation got these programs. I could see some faculty feeling defensive or combative about the situation. There could be some teachers or faculty that I have to have private conversations with if it seems they have an issue with a certain demographic.

Evelyn also considered educating fellow staff members for the diversity hire vignette. She wrote,

I would probably try to educate my fellow teachers about the great benefits of diversification in schools. I would mention how it helps problem solving, brings more students [of Color] to feel safe in our school, more community, and just being a better school where anyone can feel welcome. There could be risk with faculty taking sides in

the matter since the majority of the faculty are white, but that is just a risk that has to be taken when advocating for equality.

Although Evelyn has good intentions by wanting to educate others. She is still in place where she is growing her racial consciousness. By taking on the role of a racial educator who is not yet deep enough in her own development she may misguide those around her into racist practices.

In her final paper, she explained that when it comes to racism and discrimination, “not only do we need to protect and vouch for our students, but we need to make sure we bring diversity into our school workforce.” She acknowledged that a white teacher force is not optimal for the growing culturally diverse classrooms. She made it a point to discuss how not only do staff need to bring diversity to the school, but they need to be trained in cultural competency, stating, “As long as we are staying strong in efforts to familiarize ourselves with diverse backgrounds, we can make a positive change in schools.” If diversity, equity, and inclusion are to be silenced in teacher education and the classroom, there will be no space for preservice teachers to begin to grasp cultural competencies.

Ethan

Ethan grew up in a predominantly white community in Ohio. He identifies as a cisgender white man who grew up in a middle-class family. Ethan has been in a wheelchair since he was little, which he explained greatly impacted the way other students treated him. He became a member of his high school's adaptive wheelchair basketball team and received an athletic scholarship to attend college. Ethan explained, “I plan on making my classroom accessible for everyone and making sure each student is respected and feels safe in my classroom.” When asked how he would create a welcoming classroom environment, he stated, “I would make sure

as the teacher to not have bias for any students and to make sure I treat all my students the same.” It is impossible not to hold biases. By having the belief that bias can be eliminated he is not addressing the true issue which is acknowledging where racial bias comes from.

During the class, each student took Harvard’s Implicit Association Test for race. For this test, participants are asked to categorize words and images at a fast pace in order to determine their preferences without spending a long time considering the options. The attempts to determine implicit bias on the categories presented. Ethan completed the task and reflected on the emotion the results conjured:

The results also made me uncomfortable and as if I was a bad guy because of the strong automatic preference for European American children compared to the African American children. If anything this test really opened my eyes to implicit bias and through the videos I watched today on implicit bias really helped me understand what was happening.

Ethan shows guilt, shame, and discomfort in his results, because he associated white faces with positive terms and Black faces with negative terms. This class exercise opened his eyes to the meaning of implicit bias and how it is something influenced by media and society. However, he does not reflect on what next steps he could take to begin to address his racial consciousness.

Table 4.4: *Ethan’s Imagined Emotions and Actions when Addressing Issues of Race*

Data Source	Emotions	Actions
Vignettes	1. Discomfort 2. Fear 3. Confusion	1. Defer 2. Investigate 3. Advocate

Final Paper	1. Discomfort 2. Empathy 3. Encouraged	1. Race Work 2. Reflection
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Imagined Emotional Responses to Addressing Issues of Race

Ethan's emotions throughout his responses tended to be negative. He often explained that he was not sure what he would do in these situations. Often, he gave two possible outcomes instead of making his opinion known with support from his values. The discomfort and fear that arose throughout his answers were based on how others would perceive him for speaking up. In the teacher talk vignette, he feared:

Those teachers may keep talking bad about the students still and they may tell other teachers not to talk to me because I disagreed with what they said. If I ask the principal to hold a meeting the teachers may realize that I was the one who wanted the meeting to happen and that teachers would look down on me.

In this response, Ethan exhibited fear of social retaliation. If he speaks up, then he risks ostracizing himself from his peers. Although in this vignette response, he does not make a final decision if he will act, he later takes a stance when considering the consequences of speaking up. In the braids vignette, Ethan goes back and forth with what he thinks is right. He states,

I think since it is a private school, it does make sense that the school has a strict dress code if they enforce it on everyone, and it is fair. I think it would be a major problem if they are only enforcing the policy on black students.

Ethan continued to say he needed more information to make an informed decision. However, at the end of his response, he stated that if he felt the students had their hair braided for

cultural reasons, he would advocate that the policy be challenged. He knows there is a risk in this and wrote, “There may be some heated exchanges, but overall, I think that would only help the situation, so it doesn’t happen in the future for other students.”

It is clear that Ethan feels discomfort in these situations, and that is why he cannot decide whether they are racial issues or not. By not committing to one idea, he is avoiding having to deal with the repercussions of addressing the racial issues in the scenarios. This avoidance tactic allows him to stay in a comfortable space but could have negative impact on his future students.

In Ethan’s final essay, he reflected upon how FOUN300 allowed him to have “a lot of great and uncomfortable conversations” about race. He touched upon the empathy he felt for those who were discriminated against based on their race. In response to Grantham’s (2011) study on gifted Black students and the bystander effect, he wrote,

I would try to break down these barriers from black males because I am a part of an underrepresented community and understand partially what it feels like to be left out or not included. I also think that all teachers should be aware of the situation and bring awareness to the fact that black males are not graduating at the rate as their white peers and that there should be more black students in gifted programs.

Ethan utilized his experiences as a person in a wheelchair and found some common ground about mistreatment in education. However, he knew it was not the same situation between physician disability and race. By making this connection, Ethan felt encouraged in the steps he would take to become a social justice educator, writing,

I will make sure to teach about some sensitive topics to my students or at least put my foot in the door so that students can try to understand other cultures and learn more about their history as well as learn about what others may be going through every day.

Imagined Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

In almost all vignette responses, Ethan explained that he needed more information. He discussed how he would collect more information about each situation to determine the correct response. This could either be interpreted as hesitation or wanting to be thorough. When faced with an issue of race in the real world there often is not time to ask more questions and you must respond based on your values. When considering if there was discrimination against students of Color in the gifted program vignette, he stated,

I would first get more information on the situation before talking to the coordinator, but if there was indeed racism or prejudice, I would have a talk with the coordinator personally and try to see what or why she chose only white students. If it was obvious racism or prejudice, I would either go to the board or try and get a meeting with the principal to tell him the situation.

For this example, Ethan decided that if racism or prejudice were evident, he would engage in a discussion, but he would not do it alone. Ethan's inability to decide is an issue is underpinned with race is a form of avoidance and potentially erasure. If he approaches situations and doesn't consider race to be a factor he is excluding others' perspectives from influencing his actions.

Throughout his responses, he explained how he would lean on the principal for more guidance. This became more apparent in his reflection in the hate crime vignette.

I would side with the principal in that situation because there is no need to go that far in depth and scare the kids that way. If I was the teacher, I would make sure the lesson is about hate crimes and try to make the lesson about how it is not right to kill people based on their race and maybe talk about the history of African Americans and how they always

had to fight for their rights. I also would not go in depth on the murder like I talked about earlier and tell the students how they were murdered.

Ethan imagined agreeing with the principal. This could be because of a power dynamic between a novice teacher and a supervisor or because of a lack of confidence in addressing racial issues in the classroom. Compliance can be seen as a form of erasure and is upheld throughout. There were some vignettes where Ethan imagined standing up for what he believed in. For the diversity hire vignette, he discussed confronting the teacher:

I would call this teacher out and try to understand where she is coming from while also giving her my piece of mind. I would hope other teachers would stand up to the teacher with me. I would tell the teacher that it is not racist or discriminatory because there are already a lot of white faculty members, and it is better to have diversity and different cultures.

Ethan also said he would stand up for Black students who were looking for more books with a “Black focus.” In response to the book vignette, he discussed going to the librarian at this school and asking for assistance to get more books. He followed up,

If the librarian does not make any changes, I would need to talk to the principal about this issue. I would explain that it is unfair and upsetting when my students come up to me and say things like this. In the school, we want the students to feel welcomed, included and comfortable, and when doing this it is important to have resources they can make connections with.

In his final essay, Ethan discussed the reflection and work he still needed to do to better serve students of Color.

The first step I would take in my development as a social justice-oriented teacher is to look in the mirror and see if I have any biases and it may not be on purpose, but I have learned in this class that there is implicit bias and that is where you have stereotypes and maybe prejudices toward someone or a group, but it is not intentional. It is something that you may have gotten growing up with your family and how they act, or it could be your friends that may give you implicit bias. After learning about implicit biases, I know that I had some but am trying to be better so that the future students who need me will get the best version of me and try to be more understanding of whatever their situation may be.

Ethan explains in this passage how he needs to prepare to begin to address his racial consciousness. He understands he has work to do but it is still unclear to him exactly what steps he needs to take. He went on to explain, “Going into this class I really didn’t think of other people’s feelings and what they might be going through as well as just being in general self-centered.” This realization is an acknowledgment and could be seen as a first step in addressing his values.

Sya

Sya is an international student from China. She grew up in a middle-class family with her mom being a teacher. She reports having a hard time understanding American race and identity issues because she grew up in a racially homogeneous society. However, her school was very ethnically diverse, with more than 55 ethnic groups. Her schooling experience influenced her belief that “all ethnic groups are equal and there is no difference between high and low, and we should respect different ethnic groups and their customs.” Sya hopes as a teacher that, based on her experiences, she can help students develop a beneficial multicultural perspective.

Throughout her journal reflections, Sya discussed the new information she was picking up about education in America. After listening to a podcast about segregation, she explained her new understanding of modern-day racial segregation in schools:

White people can go to religious schools and have better learning resources. While others can only learn in scarce learning resources. Over time, public schools have gradually become schools for people [of Color]. When people [of Color] go to religious schools, they are excluded or even prevented from enrolling, which is also segregation. I think my role in this situation is to maintain a sense of equality so that there is no way of segregation or school segregation around me.

With this light introduction to segregation, Sya cannot yet understand how deep-rooted racist practices, policies, and whiteness uphold the foundations of American education. She reflected on how white Americans hold power in the United States and how educators play a role: “As educators, we need to confront our own biases and respect cultural diversity to provide an equitable and inclusive education.” However, when considering whether discrimination should be addressed, she stated, “I disapprove of this activity conducted by teachers to show students issues of discrimination, racism, and prejudice. I think the teacher’s experience hurts the self-confidence of students who have been discriminated against.”

Table 4.5: Sya’s *Imagined Emotions and Actions when Addressing Issues of Race*

Data Source	Emotions	Actions
Vignettes	1. Comfort 2. Encouraged 3. Empathy	1. Deficit Thinking 2. Censor 3. Engage in Discussions 4. Advocate

Final Paper	1. Comfort 2. Encouraged	1. Advocate
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Imagined Emotional Responses to Addressing Issues of Race

Unlike other participants, Sya did not express any fear or discomfort when considering how she would address the racial discussions in each vignette. She never felt there was a risk or negative consequence to her planned actions that would directly affect her. When she reflected on risks, it was more of a conversation about a lack of power as a new teacher or the timeliness of action. She wrote that, “School leaders don’t necessarily change the school’s rules on the advice of a teacher.” Yet that did not stop her from planning to take action and address issues of race. When considering the braids vignette, she wrote, “It wasn’t his fault that he got kicked out of school because of braids, which I can understand for his culture.” Sya felt empathy for the students who she felt were being racially discriminated against.

Sya felt encouraged in the advocacy work she plans to do in the future. In her final paper, she wrote, “As multicultural oriented educators, we should be the righteous ones for talented Black students. We need to recognize racial bullying and help Black students to escape their plight by guiding white students to be “helpers” rather than “abusers.” When considering her role as an educator, she wrote about her hope to “help students to properly view and deal with their multiple identities, build self-awareness and positive racial identity.” Specifically, she wrote about how she wants to assist Black students “escape the pressure” of underachievement that others put on them. Sya ends her paper by claiming that she will “take personal and professional responsibility for changing students’ ideologies” on bullying and race.

As an international student there is much experience, and growth that must come to inform Sya's understanding and attitude towards race in America. Sya took more of systemic approach at examining the injustices rather than faulting an individual. This may be helpful when learning more about the historical foundations of American education and how whiteness is upheld in current practices.

Imagined Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Sya felt conflicted about her anticipated actions regarding discussions of race. At times, she advocated for students, and at others, she upheld deficit thinking about marginalized groups. Sya discussed how she would censor material to protect her students. In response to the hate crime vignette, she wrote,

In order to reduce the likelihood that my course is too brutal to present to students, I will only give a cursory introduction to the three incidents of hate crimes in the United States, and avoid too many details. Second, I will focus my teaching on teaching conflict resolution skills that demonstrate simple nonviolent and/or violence-averse problem-solving skills. Third, monitor students' feelings throughout the course and provide support throughout the course. Finally, I will tell the students that you live in a very safe place and that these vicious incidents are uncommon. Parents, teachers, police, the community will do everything they can to keep you safe.

By censoring the violence of these incidents and telling students there is nothing to worry about, Sya is creating a false sense of security for students. She is making assumptions about the community and the lived experiences of families and erasing the reality of the brutal racial violence that goes on in this country. Sya continued to consider how to address race in response

to the teacher talk vignette. Her approach was to address the students' laziness, but not address the teachers who were gossiping.

I think the main problem is that African-American students do not have a high degree of cultural identity for teaching, which leads to a lack of motivation for African-American students to learn. If it were me, I would incorporate students' multiple identities into teaching and make my curriculum more multicultural... I will learn the history and experiences of students and their families and incorporate them into my teaching. When I understand students' demands, I can connect teaching academic content with students' own experiences, build on their previous knowledge, add their cultural identity, and teach from their perspective.

Sya is discussing culturally competent practices in her plan for action, but they are based on deficit thinking. By stating that Black students do not have a “high degree of cultural identity” her thinking is that she needs to educate them on their culture. She wants to learn more about their experiences and incorporate their interests into lessons, but considers her students not to have strong cultural ties. She continues,

If the degree of integration of academic content and cultural identity in teaching is not well grasped, it may cause students to identify too much with their own culture, and it is difficult to accept other cultures, which will eventually lead to a further reduction of learning enthusiasm.

Sya's deficit thinking about Black student academic performance contradicts her opinions about the importance of a diverse educational staff. She decided she would advocate for a diverse workforce at the board meeting by speaking out.

We can affirm that a diverse faculty and staff is moving toward the goal of racial equality and the development of a diverse culture... With white teachers already saturated, I think schools can make it clear that schools need some teachers of other races to teach some diversity curriculum. For example, black teachers may have a better understanding of African history and culture.

Sya found it important to have a diverse teaching staff in her school system. However, she should recognize that it is not solely Black people's job to teach white people about Black culture. They should not be the sole source of educating the staff about diversity. With that being said, it is imperative for white people to hear and validate Black people's educational experiences.

Samantha

Religion had a great influence on Samantha's educational experience. She was born to an upper-middle-class family in New Orleans and moved to Alabama after Hurricane Katrina. She attended a private, predominantly white, Catholic high school. The class sizes were very small, with her graduating class only consisting of 25 people. She reported, "I never noticed any racism or prejudices in my school, we just weren't very diverse." The homogeneity of Samantha's educational experience insulated her from seeing the racial inequities that are prevalent in American schools.

Samantha did notice inequities outside of race in the ways boys and girls were treated differently at the school. She reflected on gender discrimination throughout the semester. For example, she adhered to a strict dress code her male classmates did not have to endure while the girls were always pulled aside to measure the length of their skirts. When Samantha thinks about

her future classroom, she wants it to be welcoming to students of all identities, “because school is a place to learn and grow, not be treated differently for something that is out of your control.”

Through her journaling, Samantha contemplated race as a factor in education. She acknowledged that “racism is still very much alive in the United States.” Her entries discussed how she is working through her racial biases and what her role as an educator would be when addressing issues of race. After taking the Implicit Association Test, she explained how her differing results made her feel.

I got “little to no preference” option and was very happy to get that result. I took the IAT quiz for a different class 2 years ago & received a “slight preference toward European-Americans” and it made me frustrated. My freshman year was Fall 2020, only a few months after the George Floyd story became public and the many similar ones that came after it, as well as the strongest fight against police brutality I have seen in my life. I had been working hard for months before going to school to switch my implicit biases on race because I could see the consequences of them every day in the news. Seeing that result my freshman year was very frustrating but I am happy to see it has changed since then.”

Samantha found it important that she was seen as less racist in the IAT results. She touches upon working on her biases, but does not explain what work she has been participating in. This acknowledgement is not enough to make a change in developing her racial consciousness. She needs to take these thoughts and consider what learning and actions need to take place to support her future students. After listening to the podcast *Nice White Parents* about modern-day racial segregation in New York, she considered how her actions could impact desegregation in schools:

As far as my role as a teacher in desegregating schools, I think I impact these decisions at the national/state levels depending on who I vote for, but my immediate impact is on my own classroom. As a special education major, this is something we talk about all the time. Students of Color are more likely to be referred to special education and excluded from gifted programs, as well as being over-represented within disability categories like learning disabilities. Segregation doesn't only mean physically separating students, it also means putting them in a certain box based on our own subconscious biases or eliminating them completely in order to build an environment and school that gives every student room to grow.

Samantha takes into consideration her role as an individual and the different settings she can make an impact. She touches upon bigger systemic issues of inequity such as erasure. Samantha needs to continue to connect her actions to racial issues that impact her students.

Table 4.6: *Samantha's Imagined Emotions and Actions when Addressing Issues of Race*

Data Source	Emotions	Actions
Vignettes	1. Fear 2. Discomfort 3. Guilt 4. Encouraged	1. Advocate 2. Engage in Discussions 3. Politeness
Final Paper	1. Discomfort 2. Encouraged 3. Empathy	1. Race Work 2. Reflection 3. Engage in Discussions

Imagined Emotional Responses to Addressing Issues of Race

Similar to other participants, Samantha felt fear when she considered engaging in discussion of race throughout the vignettes. In three of the vignettes, she discussed losing trust or respect from her peers or principal as significant risks. After thinking through the diverse hire vignette, Samantha wrote:

The main negative risk that comes with this is that the teacher thinks I am accusing them of racism. It is not racist to want white people to have an opportunity for a job, but it is racist to push back against a move of racism because you are afraid of people [of Color] “taking their jobs.” The positive consequence is that the teacher is able to see the difference and be more welcoming to coworkers of different races and backgrounds.

Students should feel safe and welcomed at school, and a big part of that experience could be having teachers that look like them and relate to them on a new level.

This response shows the discomfort and guilt white people experience when they consider someone interpreting their words or actions as racist. Samantha does not want to offend her colleagues, but also felt like something needed to be said. Fear also presented itself for Samantha in response to the hate crime vignette. She discussed how difficult it would be to stand up to her principal, a figure of power for her as a novice teacher. She explained that by confronting the principal about this lesson she may lose the respect of her boss or potentially get fired. Fear was a major factor in Samantha’s responses that suggest she may not take action even if she feels it would be the right thing to do.

Samantha’s responses differed from other participants in that for each vignette, she offered negative and positive risks she felt could occur if she engaged in discussions of race. The negative consequences often had to do with how the interaction would affect her personally, while the positive consequences were more concerned with the well-being of her students or

overall awareness of issues being addressed at her imagined place of work. When considering how to advocate for her students in the braids vignette, Samantha explained, “There would be the positive consequence of my students trusting that I will put their best interest forward and be an advocate for them in situations I deem necessary.” By putting herself on the line for her students and what she believes in, Samantha felt encouraged that she could build relationships with her students. When imagining the positive consequence for addressing the two teachers in the teacher talk vignette, she wrote, “On the positive side, I would be giving the teachers the environment to evaluate their worldview and teaching style. This gives them the opportunity to better themselves for their students and other people around them.” By providing two options for each answer she is not committing to her values and avoid the potential consequences that may occur from having strong racial opinions.

In her final paper, Samantha discussed the emotions that came up for her when considering advocating for her students in the future. She explained the discomfort that would come from reflecting on her implicit bias. One racist thought she wants to work on is her idea that she is “more scared of African American men than white men when I am alone in my car at night.” We discussed in class how society and media create fear against Black men as criminals, whereas white men are often portrayed as less dangerous.

Samantha showed empathy when considering that every student's experience at school will be different, and she needs to keep that into consideration when working with diverse populations. She wrote that this knowledge could be difficult, but she is willing to put in the work. Along with other participants, she felt encouraged in her plans to stand up for her students and create an inclusive classroom. Samantha’s discomfort, fear, and indecision may outweigh her empathy stopping her from taking action as she plans.

Imagined Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Samantha decided she would take action in response to each of the vignettes. She did not defer to others or stay silent when she felt an issue of race needed to be addressed. For the book vignette, she contemplated how systemic racism might play a role in the lack of Black representation in her classroom library.

If we place the problem on the children's book industry as a whole, we can acknowledge how the idea of diversity and representation in children's books is slowly making an incline but has a long way to go. There are more and more stories with Black main characters being produced every day. Taking this another step forward, their stories don't have to focus on civil rights.

Samantha is aware of Eurocentric predominance in children's literature, and knows it is bigger than just one teacher having only two books with Black characters. She explained she would take action immediately and go purchase more diverse books for her classroom. Samantha explains throughout her vignette responses how she would engage in discussions with peers and her principal and would advocate for her students. However, there is an undertone of politeness in how she is considering her actions. She discusses how she does not want to offend fellow teachers and how a teacher must "remain neutral" when conveying true events to students. This politeness may be an indicator that she could second guess her action and could use being kind as a way to diffuse a situation.

Samantha plans to continue reflecting on her own bias and putting in the work necessary to create an inclusive classroom environment for her students. In her final paper, she discussed how she wants to continue exploring her implicit bias. She noticed more when her gut response to situations had her "racial bias shining through." She explained how reflection was not enough:

“I will need to continue to analyze my own personal biases, encourage others to do the same, and act on my intentions.”

Samantha also plans on engaging in the discussion of race in her classroom. She wrote, “Part of being a teacher is having important conversations and setting important boundaries to ensure the well-being of your students... My job as a teacher is to prepare my students for experiences unlike their own so they can be welcoming and successful as they move through their lives.” By engaging in these practices, Samantha wants to learn from her students and their families. She is open to hearing their perspective and wants to create an inclusive environment where all are welcome.

Nate

Nate acknowledged the privileges of being born a white man. He grew up in a middle-class family and attended a private Christian school. Nate was greatly affected by bullying at this school, and by seventh grade his parents pulled him from the school and began homeschooling him. Although he was homeschooled, he did not just sit at home with his mother. He joined multiple homeschooling groups in his area of Alabama and was taught by many retired college professors. As a teacher, Nate wants to “treat others with love, respect, and kindness regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, or anything else.”

In his reflective journals throughout the course, Nate touched upon systemic racism and his own values. In his first post, he wrote about the inequities in America and how he believed white Anglo-Saxon protestants held the most power. He felt that “laws and policies should protect citizens from harm, and foster equity; not be barriers to citizens living fulfilling lives, or create fear.” He believed power needed to be spread out between people with diverse opinions for a more inclusive and equitable society. He also mentioned how society influences bias. In his

reflection about the unfair treatment of two Black women paying with checks at a grocery store, Nate wrote,

While my initial reaction was that this was most likely a bias brought on from family, I was speaking with a classmate who pointed out a lot of retail training videos and documents primarily will show people of Color as the “suspicious person” in the video or other visual media... I do believe at least some of the bias was created at the workplace in how management had decided to train staff on the policies involving checks.

Table 4.7: Nate’s Imagined Emotions and Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Data Source	Emotions	Actions
Vignettes	1. Empathy 2. Frustration 3. Encouraged	1. Engage in Discussions 2. Advocate 3. Politeness 4. Defer
Final Paper	1. Fear 2. Discomfort 3. Anticipation	1. Reflection 2. Race Work 3. Advocate

Imagined Emotional Responses to Addressing Issues of Race

Nate’s responses often considered more systemic issues within American education. For three of the vignettes, he discussed how the policies that were in place were outdated and change was needed. For the braids vignette he wrote,

I am fully aware that outdated policies such as this still exist in schools, and they have no place there. Schools are meant to be a place of learning, and anything that takes away

from that needs to be changed. An outdated dress code that punishes unnecessarily is a relic from a time that lacked understanding and has no place in our current society.

Nate was also frustrated when considering his response to the hate crime vignette. His frustration came from the principal's response that the content of recent racial crimes made America look bad. He stated:

Of course, it was terrible. But it's part of history. It's a decision made by elected leaders at the time in America. If I were the teacher, I would bring up this point to the principal; as well as mass slavery, Black Wall Street, the Birmingham church bombing and many other tragic and terrible events that occurred in America's history. I would also make the point that current events are often linked to history, as there can almost be seen a domino effect. If history and current events "make America look bad," then that is America's fault.

Nate continued in his response how important it would be to address this issue with the principal. He felt the principal would see his push-back as insubordination, but that was a risk he was willing to take. He felt encouraged to stand up for his values by saying,

As important a topic in history and current events are, I don't believe it would be something to back down on. These real events that affect the current and the future; and the students here and now will be ones shaping the future. It's important they learn as much as they can from the past and present now.

Nate also felt empathy for the students throughout the vignettes. He often sided with them or advocated for what he felt would be the best outcome for the students. For the book vignette, he wrote,

In a classroom library, representation helps to create interest and encourages students to pick out books and read. If I were the teacher here, I would start by agreeing with the student, affirming their discovery that yes, I had made a mistake. I didn't take this into account and it is something to be remedied.

Nate didn't just sympathize with the student who only found two books with Black representation. He acknowledged his misstep and decided to take action. Nate was quick to critique policy but did not acknowledge why they were still in place. There is more for him to explore regarding whiteness in educational policies and how these policies are currently still being upheld.

In Nate's final paper, he spoke about the uncertainty he felt about becoming an upstander for his students. He discussed how in the past he had been silent when he knew he should have taken action or spoken up for others. He fears retaliation for speaking up when others may disagree with what you are saying. He also stated that he felt "people don't always act for the best interest of others." Throughout the paper, there was a sense of anticipation that he knew as a teacher he would need to step up and engage in uncomfortable conversations with others for the benefit of his students. The frustration Nate felt may cause a paralysis of taking action. If his emotions are overwhelming, he may not know where to start and may decide to take up old habits of being silent.

Imagined Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Nate's values were his guiding light in the actions he could imagine taking when responding to the vignettes. For the braid vignette, he explained how he would communicate with the dean to talk through why he thought the dress code policy was outdated and needed to be changed. However, he wouldn't stop there if the policy held. He explained,

I would find it necessary to take this further and request a meeting with upper administration, the school board, or anyone else necessary in order to have such an outdated and unnecessary dress code changed so that students can be free to express themselves from their own cultural backgrounds.

Nate continued to imagine putting himself out there and speaking up for what he believed in. When considering how he would address the Special Education Coordinator in the gifted program vignette, he imagined speaking up but also discussed how he didn't want to offend them. He reflected,

I would ask to meet with the Special Education Coordinator so that we could discuss other candidates for the gifted program. The risk here is ensuring that the Special Education Coordinator does not feel that this is an attack on them, so framing this in a way that doesn't cause offense.

Although Nate is taking the risk of speaking up, he also does not want to bring attention to the racial undertones of this issue. He felt that it would be diplomatic to leave race out of the conversation and ask for another evaluation in which he would participate.

In two of the vignettes, Nate decided not to take action. For the teacher talk vignette, he did not discuss addressing the issue of the teachers gossiping in the hallway but rather came up with a plan to make his lessons more exciting for the students, so they didn't seem lazy to the teachers. The student's race was not raised as a factor in the answer. He also felt no need to take action in the diversity hire vignette. He responded, "I do not feel it would be my place to address the other teacher's comment directly as another teacher." He went on to explain his deferment to an administrator whom he felt was more qualified to address the issue.

Nate explained how much work he felt he still needed to do to sufficiently address issues of race as an educator. In his final paper, he discussed times he did not speak up when he should have, and the regret he felt. He wrote about the skills it would take to understand the correct way he would advocate for his students. He explained, “If I am to become an upstander, I need to ensure I have the courage and presence of mind to speak when I see an issue.” Nate understands there is more work to be done to become an advocate for his students but does not dig deep into what that would look like in this paper.

Margaret

Margaret had a self-described wonderful experience in the public school system from first to twelfth grade. She grew up in a white upper-middle-class family, although her family went through financial struggles while she was in high school. These events made her recognize how money plays a role in education. Although she went to a public school, there were field trips and extracurricular activities she wanted to participate in but could not due to their cost.

When reflecting on her racial identity, she explained that race was not a topic she had to think about growing up. Margaret understands that due to her white privilege, she “will have to unlearn a lot of things and consciously learn to identify and work on overcoming my implicit biases.” She hopes to create a classroom environment that fosters students' individuality and encourages them to pursue their dreams, which can be difficult with her lack of experience working with diverse populations.

In her journal responses, Margaret discussed how she plans to create an inclusive classroom for her students. She touched upon having students discuss their culture with their peers. She stated, “Education is an extremely important part of our society and by allowing students to learn more about their culture in school, they likely feel a lot more welcomed and

accepted, encouraging them to work hard and graduate.” She also discussed integrating information from the Zinn Education Project into her lessons. This resource provides multiple cultural perspectives on events that occurred in the United States. She reflected, “This activity encouraged me to work on finding lessons that are not all from the European perspective when I am a teacher.” Throughout her reflections, Margaret explained that she believes it is important to be attentive to the backgrounds of all of her students. However, she rarely mentioned race as a specific identity marker that she would be addressing in her classroom.

Table 4.8: Margaret’s Imagined Emotions and Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Data Source	Emotions	Actions
Vignettes	1. Fear 2. Empathy	1. Defer 2. Organize
Final Paper	1. Fear 2. Discomfort 3. Hope	1. Reflection 2. Race Work

Imagined Emotional Responses to Addressing Issues of Race

Margaret described a fear of engaging in discussion of race throughout her responses to the vignettes. She believed discussing the issues with her principal or supervisor would get her fired from the position in the braid vignette. For the hate crime vignette, she wrote about how she thought she should act in advocating for the lesson but then stated,

If I were the teacher, to address this conflict, I would want to explain these things to the principal, but in reality, I would likely stay quiet and do whatever I was being instructed to do by my superiors because I would be afraid that I would lose my job.

Margaret imagined her fear being so strong that she would go against what she felt was right to do in order to stay in good standing with the principal. She also felt that when she expressed her concerns, specifically in the gifted student vignette, the Special Education Coordinator would take offense and that would cause a conflict. For the braids vignette she also felt that if her peers found out she went against what the school's disciplinary officer said, there could be conflict. She reflected, "I could develop a tense relationship with this co-worker because they could potentially interpret what I am saying as an insult towards them, even though it is really just a critique of our school's policy." Here Margaret is internalizing the effects of what could happen to her relationships with her colleagues in a negative way before she can even consider taking action to assist her students.

Similar to other participants, Margaret felt empathy for the students in the book vignette. She explained,

To address the conflict, I would apologize to the student for not having a wide enough selection of books and ask them if they could find any books that do a better job representing people [of Color] to add to my classroom library.

Although she empathizes with her imagined second graders, she is also putting the work of finding books on the Black student. This could put more stress on the student who now has to get assistance elsewhere to make sure they feel seen in the literature of their classroom library. Throughout history Black people are often forced to be the ones making white people in their environment more understanding. Margaret would be upholding this practice by asking her student to find the books.

Margaret's final paper was full of hopeful thinking about herself as a future socially-just teacher. She reflected on the vignette responses she wrote and how she could see at the end of the

semester that she was mostly afraid in each situation. She wrote how after reading Grantham's (2011) paper she felt "encouraged to be the opposite of a bystander and not focus so much on her self-preservation." Taking steps to not be so fearful when confronting issues of race will be uncomfortable for Margaret but she sees how it will be necessary to support her students.

Imagined Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Margaret had a mix of responses to the vignettes presented. For three of the vignettes she would stay silent or defer to an authority figure, which is used as a tactic of avoiding addressing issues of race. When she decided to take action she always talked about doing it with others and not addressing an issue on her own. In the diverse hire vignette, she reasoned,

I would probably stay quiet and let the superintendent respond to this comment because I would not want to overstep my role as one of several teachers at the meeting and potentially instigate an argument. I know the superintendent would likely have planned a response to such a question before the meeting, so I am sure they would have a more eloquent and proper response already planned that would effectively address the situation.

Margaret decided to take no action for the teacher talk vignette and the hate crime vignette. Her silence is a way for her to stay within her white comfort. Although she said she would stay silent for the hate crime vignette, she believed the right thing to do would be to confront the principal and teach the class about the events. She wrote,

By discussing these horrific events and bringing awareness to them, we are able to incite change. Even if change incited is small, a bunch of small changes in people's mindsets can allow huge, grand-scale changes to occur. If we were to not talk about things because they are "too brutal," students would likely gain a false sense of reality about the world

around them. The truth is that the world is a pretty brutal place, and by talking about these brutal things in a safe-classroom environment, a student can be more well-informed going out into the real world.

For the braids vignette Margaret felt the school's disciplinary officer targeted Black students. She felt that something needed to be done to change the policy, but her actions alone would not be enough. She explained,

I believe if a lot of the school's staff are able to get on the same page, we could work together to enact change and try to get the administration to change the dress code or at least make it fairer for people of all cultures.

Although Margaret did not feel comfortable enough to advocate alone, she did feel like she could be an important part of a group of peers who could make change happen at the school. By not being the first one to take a step in action for her values she may miss an opportunity to advocate for her students. In her final paper, she explained how she will have to make changes to her thinking in order to be able to be in a good place to advocate for her students. She wrote,

As an upstander, it is important to make sure you are not forcing Eurocentric expectations onto people of other races, and I would make sure to acknowledge my own Eurocentric biases and put them into question as one of my steps to ensure I am being socially-just.

Margaret knows she has work to do to examine her racial consciousness. She plans to continue to work on her self-reflection as she grows as an educator.

Deborah

Deborah was raised in Florida, where she explains she barely left the city limits. She attended predominantly white elementary and middle schools. Her high school was more racially diverse, and she made new friends who took pride in their backgrounds. When considering her

previous teachers, she could only remember six male teachers in her 16 years of education. She believes that because she had mostly female teachers, she did not realize the struggles women face in a male-dominated society until she got to college.

Deborah recognized that her school experience limits her beliefs and biases. She believes, "someone's race is a part of who they are and that mustn't be ignored but rather affirmed as a valuable part of their identity." She hopes to foster a classroom environment that does not allow her identity to get in the way of her students finding their own. When reflecting on how new laws preventing "divisive concepts" from being taught in the classroom she stated,

This would greatly affect teachers because classes like this one [FOUN 3000] would not exist. In addition, history would not be able to be taught in full and therefore children would be left uneducated on topics that matter greatly to the future climate of our country and culture.

Deborah was upset with the way these laws would affect American education and followed up with, "Too often, individuals just accept the way things are without regard to the effect they have on others. The effects of education go far beyond what we acknowledge and realize." This reflection explains how the white perspective is seen as the norm and anything outside of that perspective is considered irrelevant not only in education but America as a whole.

Table 4.9: Deborah's Imagined Emotions and Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Data Source	Emotions	Actions
Vignettes	1. Empathy 2. Discomfort 3. Guilt 4. Shame	1. Politeness 2. Engage in Discussion 3. Advocate

Final Paper	1. Discomfort 2. Guilt 3. Encouraged	1. Race Work 2. Reflection
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Imagined Emotional Responses to Addressing Issues of Race

Deborah's responses to the vignettes showed her discomfort. She imagined pushing through the discomfort to act in the best interest of her students and uphold her values. Empathy for students was the motivation for her actions. In the book vignette, she explained the shame and guilt she would feel if she were the teacher,

If a student does not feel like they can trust you, there is little to no chance that you will be able to give them all the resources they need to succeed. A healthy and strong teacher-student relationship is one of the most valuable things that you can give a student... This teacher probably was horrified to hear that one of his or her students felt they were being discriminated against. The problem is not that the teacher was using race to discriminate. The problem is that they did not put themselves into their students' shoes. If I were the teacher, I would more than likely go home and cry. I would really try and make sure that the student knew how sorry I was.

She went on to explain how she would go out and get books that had more of a wide range of racial representation to make up for this incident. In her final paper, Deborah reflected on the guilt she feels due to her privilege:

I had been feeling guilty for the abundance of areas of privilege that I had in my life but then the speaker really emphasized how you can use your privilege for good and make it

the platform you stand on to educate others and make right a situation that is wrong. This left me feeling encouraged and inspired.

Deborah felt encouraged to examine her privilege and guilt. She seemed determine to process her emotions into action. In two other responses she felt discomfort in how her peers would respond to her actions. For the braid vignette, she responded,

One risk that I run by approaching the dean to address this issue is that he could become defensive and perceive our conversation to be an attack against him or his character which could cause unwanted and unnecessary strain on our relationship.

Although Deborah seems determined to step out of her discomfort and act for her students. However, this worry and discomfort could hinder her actions in the real world. She wrote, “People avoid the truth because it is uncomfortable but in doing so, the issue only manifests beneath the surface.” This reflection shows that Deborah is considering how comfort plays into action.

Imagined Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Deborah imagined speaking up in response to many of the vignettes. She mentioned how she would do this in a polite way. In the teacher talk vignette she explained, “I would start by speaking up to say something in a kind, gracious, and respectful way. I would remind them that feelings are not always facts as well as caution them to be careful of where they speak of such things.” For this vignette she was able to consider why someone might not talk with the gossiping teachers:

Too often, a fear of what could happen leads to silence which can be interpreted as unspoken support and escalates the issue even further. While there are risks and consequences of using this strategy such as possible stain on your relationship with

fellow faculty members or risk of the teachers misinterpreting what you are trying to say and becoming offended, the risks of not saying anything are far greater.

Deborah understands the risk of how taking action could affect her relationship with her peers but she can imagine taking the risk for the betterment of her students' educational experience. She also decided to politely address the Special Education Coordinator in the gifted program vignette. She wrote,

I would kindly and graciously pull aside the coordinator and ask them to please explain to me why they picked the three students that they did... I would hope that the coordinator would come to an understanding and realization of why what they did was wrong and how it might have been rooted in sexist and racist ideals.

Deborah considers how not to offend others while also addressing the issues at hand. By going into a conversation where there could be push back from the other person, there is some discomfort in anticipation of what could happen. This politeness or kind words is used in order to soften the blow of the confrontation and avoid pressure on her for being seen as having strong opinions on race.

In the diverse hire vignette, Deborah felt she would support the superintendent's intention of hiring a more diverse staff. She could imagine addressing her fellow staff member who made the comment by saying,

I would explain to them that not hiring someone simply because they are white would indeed be discriminatory and racist and they are justified in their thinking that however that is not at all what is going on here. I would then explain to them the importance of having a diverse faculty and allow the superintendent further explain more details about

the hiring process. None of this is about hating white people but rather returning things to the rightful just and equitable place that they should be.

Deborah recognized she has work to do when it comes to becoming a socially-just educator. In her final paper she describes the steps she will take in striving “to be a facilitator, problem solver, and communicator” for the good of her students. She wrote,

It all started with examining your own bias about the relationship between behavior and intelligence while resisting the tendency to overlook justice issues to purposefully overcome self-preservation, perceived inability, situation ambiguity, diffusion of responsibility, and pluralistic ignorance.

Deborah went on to explain, “One of the only things that is certain in the world of education is the truth that problems, barriers, and crises will arise and the thing I will get to control is how I choose to respond.” She understands as an educator she will make mistakes, but her plan is to take responsibility for her actions and find a way to remedy issues.

Amy

Amy was raised in a white upper-middle-class family in Florida. Her family moved to Alabama when she was in the 5th grade. She explained how her educational experience in Florida was very diverse with students of different races, social classes, genders, and languages. Her school in Alabama was more homogeneous, with most students being white and Christian. Amy was diagnosed with a few learning differences that made reading comprehension difficult. However, she felt her teachers and school community were supportive and provided her with the resources to succeed. She hopes her past school experiences will assist her in being the best teacher for her future students.

Amy only mentioned race once in her reflective journal. She often spoke about how important culture and identity are, but often chose to speak about gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status. By bringing up culture rather than race Amy continues to “other” those who are not white and use culture as an explanation for inequities. The one time she mentioned race was after watching a video about the Clark Doll Test. In the video, children are presented with a white baby doll and a Black baby doll. They are asked questions about which one they would rather play with and which one they imagine is good or bad. Amy wrote,

It was very surprising to see that almost all the African American children chose the white doll and described them as prettier or smarter. This really shows the importance of teaching children about different cultures and help them unlearn the bias they may have.

Amy uses the avoidance of the topic of race in her response. She mentions culture and bias as a way to skirt around the racial issues in the scenario. The absence of discussions and reflections of race in her journals was profound.

Table 4.10: Amy’s Imagined Emotions and Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Data Source	Emotions	Actions
Vignettes	1. Shame 2. Discomfort 3. Empathy 4. Encouraged	1. Engage in Discussion 2. Advocate 3. Ask for Support
Final Paper	1. Encouraged 2. Empathy	1. Reflect 2. Engage in Discussion 3. Advocate 4. Ask for Support

Imagined Emotional Responses to Addressing Issues of Race

Amy was empathetic in the vignettes where unjust policies directly affected students. She wrote how she understood where they were coming from and how some policies or actions were unfair. For the gifted program vignette, she explained how she would have a discussion with the Special Education Coordinator about her processes for only picking white males for the program. She reflected, “The coordinator might get offended that I am questioning her skills and ability, but I would explain that I just want to make sure that all my students have a fair opportunity for the gifted program.” Amy decided she would take this risk to ensure all students had access to the gifted program.

She also felt empathetic towards her future students when reflecting in her final paper. She wrote, “All teachers are taught to treat every student equally, but it is difficult to act on this if they have not fully experienced what it is like.” Amy is aware that Black students have a different educational experience than their presumably white teachers. However, by claiming they need equal rather than equitable support this could negatively impact her understanding of what her students need from her as an educator.

Amy felt encouraged to advocate for her students. When considering if she would address the teacher who spoke out in the diverse hire vignette, she decided she would speak up.

I would explain that it will only benefit our school more if we have more faculty and staff members that are diverse. It is important for our students to be surrounded by a wide variety of people. I would also explain that it will also make our students feel more comfortable and welcomed while being at school.

Amy’s reason for advocating was clear, “I feel confident speaking up about this situation because creating a more diverse community for the students will only benefit our school.” She is

encouraged by the fact that the superintendent's values about diversity are similar to her own. This gave her the confidence she needs to be a leader in the conversation.

Amy explained she felt shame and discomfort when her student approached her in the book vignette. She also felt this way in the teacher talk vignette. In her response to this scenario, she did not mention the race of the students as a factor. However, she was upset by the behavior of her fellow teachers. She wrote,

It is also very discouraging for the other teachers to listen and hear teachers talk about their students like this... No teacher should ever treat and talk about their students this way and this would need to be fixed immediately.

Amy felt she could have an open conversation with the teachers about her feelings about them gossiping in the hallway. She lacked insight into how their conversation could have racial undertones.

Imagined Actions when Addressing Issues of Race

Amy followed a similar thinking pattern when addressing the issues throughout the vignettes. She could imagine herself discussing the situation one on-one with another person to get a conversation going about the issue. She backed that up by explaining if nothing happened in response to the conversation she would go to an authority figure such as a principal or superintendent for support. An example of this can be seen in her response to the book vignette. Amy interpreted the classroom library in this scenario as the school library. She explained,

I would talk to the librarian and ask to get more books that are fitting for every student. I would explain to the librarian about what my student said to me and tell her/him that the school needs to make some changes in the library... If the librarian does not make any changes I would need to talk to the principal about this issue. I would explain that it is

unfair and upsetting when my students come up to me and say things like this. In the school, we want the students to feel welcomed, included and comfortable and when doing this it is important to have resources, they can make connections with.

Amy also imagined having to advocate for her students to multiple stakeholders to make sure her voice was being heard. For the braid vignette, she wrote,

I would first address this problem with the office. I would have him explain to me why he felt the need to point out certain students. I would then explain how I noticed that there are white males in the class that have hair styles that do not follow the dress code either and ask him why he did not address the issue with those students as well... After addressing the issue with the officer, I would talk to the principal about changing the hair dress code in school and explain the issue I had to deal with.

Amy continued this thinking into her final paper. She discussed the reflective work she needed to be an advocate for her students. She felt she would need to look at her own bias and to better determine her values. She wrote that when addressing an issue of bullying of Black gifted students similar to the experience in Grantham & Biddle's (2014) article she would have a conversation with the student bullying and why they were doing it and then she "might go to an administrator and let them know about the bullying and come up with a way to stop it." When Amy imagines being an upstander, she is not alone. She has the support of her administration.

Summary

This chapter explores the imagined emotions and actions among ten preservice teachers in their future careers as educators. The participants imagined emotions such as fear, discomfort, guilt, shame when considering engaging in racialized conversations. These emotions often led them to adopt avoidant behaviors including silence, polite deflection, or deferring responsibility

to others. These practices uphold whiteness as racial comfort by allowing the participants to potentially ignore how race impacts their decision making.

Participants imagined taking action to address issues of race, most commonly by starting a discussion or advocating for what they thought would enhance the students' educational experience (organizing, educating, building community, investigating). Participants expressed empathy for their imagined students and a sincere desire to create positive change. While all ten participants imagined engaging in action, they also acknowledged they would need ongoing self-reflection and personal growth to better understand the role of race in education. However, participants rarely articulated the specific racial work or reflective practices they would need to engage in to continue growing their racial consciousness.

Participants' reflections in this study indicate an awareness of the inequities faced by people of Color in the American education system. When prompted to reflect inwardly as future educators, they were asked to consider how whiteness upholds unearned advantages to some while simultaneously disadvantaging others. However, many participants struggled to identify the concrete steps needed to critically examine how their own emotions and behaviors contribute to the maintenance of racist policies and practices. Further, their reflections revealed a limited understanding of the broader, systemic impact of whiteness on education as an institution. Although participants hoped to create positive change and create an inclusive classroom environment, it is unlikely this will occur due to the lack of training and development of the individual's racial consciousness.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Research Summary

This study explored how preservice teachers might imagine future discussions of race, and how reflective practices in teacher education coursework support their ability to take meaningful action. I grounded the research in critical whiteness studies (CWS), recognizing that whiteness is deeply embedded in both college level teacher preparation programs and the overall education system in the United States. CWS challenges white individuals to examine the privileges of whiteness, and the disadvantages People of Color experience (Bonds & Inwood, 2016). The study also investigated how society maintains racial norms, prompting a rethinking of whiteness as an identity that shapes systems of power (Leonardo, 2002; Matias & Mackey, 2016).

I focused on two key tenets of CWS: whiteness as assumed racial comfort, which highlights the discomfort white people often feel when discussing race (Cabrera et al., 2016), and whiteness as an epistemology of ignorance, which describes the deliberate ignorance white individuals exhibit toward racial injustice (Mills, 1997; 2007). These concepts guided my analysis of preservice teachers' responses to imagined race-related scenarios. In my literature review, I examined how whiteness has historically shaped preservice teachers' learning experiences, and how institutional practices continue to reinforce these influences.

Through the lens of critical ethnography, I examined how preservice teachers envisioned addressing racism in their future schools, and the emotions they associated with these engagements. Ten undergraduate students enrolled in FOUN 3000: Diversity of Learners and Settings participated in the study. They contributed data through weekly reflective journals, responses to vignettes, a Cultural/Schooling Autobiography, and their final course paper. I

structured my research around two central questions: (1) In what ways do preservice teachers imagine themselves engaging in discussions of race and racism with stakeholders at their future workplace? (2) How do preservice teachers reflect on future emotions and actions tied to race and racism?

This research shows that racial bias and systemic racism continue to inform the decision making of preservice teachers when imagining future discussions of race. Participants expressed emotions such as fear, discomfort, guilt, and shame when imagining how they might engage in racialized conversations (Matias & Allen, 2013; Matias et al., 2022). These emotions often led them to adopt avoidant behaviors including silence, polite deflection, or deferring responsibility to others (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Chang-Bacon, 2022; Sue, 2013). These practices uphold whiteness as racial comfort within education and prevent preservice teachers from taking necessary steps to critically think about race.

At the same time, participants expressed empathy for their imagined students and a sincere desire to create positive change. They envisioned taking action through discussion, advocacy, community-building, education, and inquiry. While all ten participants imagined engaging in action, they also acknowledged they would need ongoing self-reflection and personal growth to better understand the role of race in education (Crowley, 2019; Pollock et al., 2010). However, participants rarely articulated the specific racial work or reflective practices they would need to engage in to continue growing their racial consciousness (Zembylas & Matias, 2023). Preservice teachers are not often provided the space, time, or curriculum to contemplate their racial consciousness and the effects race has on their future teaching. Without these tools preservice teachers are not prompted to critically think about race. Society does not support the need to examine the racial impact on education with systems in place to avoid or

erase evidence of inequity. This gap reinforces the concept of whiteness as an epistemology of ignorance, highlighting how sustained racial learning requires intentional effort and time (Mills, 2007).

Methodologically, this study expanded the scope of critical educational psychology research in teacher education by directly addressing its white, positivist historical roots (Strunk & Andrzejewski, 2023). It highlighted the value of qualitative ethnographic methods, particularly the use of fully online written reflective assignments and vignettes, to explore complex and uncomfortable topics. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of participants' anticipated emotions and intended actions as they prepare for their roles as educators.

Research participants benefited from having space within their teacher education program to critically reflect on race's impact on their educational experiences and their future roles as educators. This opportunity served as an essential first step toward the ongoing work of becoming a socially just educator. The following sections will offer a more comprehensive discussion of the study's implications and limitations.

Implications

Since the collection of data for this study, the attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) have greatly impacted American education. DEI policies were implemented to support historically marginalized groups by promoting diversity in hiring and funding, equity in opportunity and outcomes, and inclusive practices in institutions like universities (Taylor, 2024). In January 2025, The U.S. Department of Education shared steps taken to prevent others from engaging in DEI:

The U.S. Department of Education has taken action to eliminate harmful Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, including references to them in public-facing

communication channels and its associated workforce. These actions are in line with President Trump's ongoing commitment to end illegal discrimination and wasteful spending across the federal government. Following President Trump's recent Executive Orders and initial guidance from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Department removed or archived hundreds of guidance documents, reports, and training materials that include mentions of DEI from its outward facing communication channels. The Department also put employees charged with leading DEI initiatives on paid administrative leave. These review efforts will continue as the Department works to end discrimination based on race and the use of harmful race stereotypes, both within the agency and throughout America's education system.

In February 2025, the U.S. Department of Education launched EndDEI.Ed.Gov, a public portal for parents, students, teachers, and the broader community to submit reports of discrimination based on race in publicly funded PK-12 schools. Although the described intention is to report discrimination the actuality of this service is to persecute those individuals who are disturbing racist ideals and practices. The weaponization of DEI by critics sees these policies and programs as "unfair, divisive, anti-white, and antisemitic," questioning the legitimacy of people of Color (Taylor, 2024). In this portrayal, DEI becomes a symbol used by opponents to cast doubt on the qualifications or merit of underrepresented individuals. The added public surveillance on teachers who choose to go against federal anti-DEI practices is another cause for fear and discomfort when discussing topics of race in the classroom. It will hinder teachers from emphasizing the importance of race in the subjects they teach or addressing racial issues with colleagues or administration.

Teacher Education programs also need to put an emphasis on the impact of race outside of a single multicultural education course. To improve these practices, teacher educators need to incorporate conversations on race and racism into their courses outside of the stand-alone multicultural education course. By discussing race and the practices that uphold whiteness, preservice teachers will consider the implication of differing perspectives and experiences in education outside of their own. This will require teacher education programs to hire educators who are already or willing to incorporate culturally competent pedagogies and activities into their classrooms (Amos, 2011). These teacher educators should be prepared to advocate for these practices and have aligned values to these practices.

Teacher educators must be trained and willing to utilize critically reflective practices in order to assist preservice teachers in navigating their racial consciousness. This study utilized journal reflections and prompted vignettes as a way for students to imagine how they would handle issues of race and consider potential risks they might encounter. Vignettes are a useful tool to have preservice teachers think through situations before they are faced with them in their future teaching positions (Anast Seguin & Ambrosio, 2002; Darwin, 2011). Teacher educators can use vignettes to ask pointed questions that require preservice teachers to examine their values. Race is an underexamined and uncomfortable topic for many students. Written self-reflection is a way for students to consider their opinions on race without the pressure of being called out in a face-to-face discussion. Teacher educators can then provide feedback to push critical thinking about their responses (Anast Seguin & Ambrosio, 2002; McIntosh, 1988).

Teacher education programs and teacher educators can do all of the above, but the preservice teacher must be willing to examine their racial consciousness. For many white preservice teachers coming out of high school, their lack of exposure to people of Color and the

national narrative towards maintaining whiteness prevents them from being open to examine themselves as racial beings. Preservice teacher's emotional responses to addressing race can range from violence to paralysis (Matias, 2016; Solomon et al. 2005). The unpredictable response from preservice teachers can be hard for them to deal with, even though it is necessary to examine their stance before entering the classroom. Preservice teachers imagine many aspects of their future teaching careers through lesson planning and performance. It is imperative that preservice teachers use the technique of imagination to begin to contemplate how they will engage in discussions of race throughout their teaching career.

More broadly, discussions about American education must prioritize race and the pervasive impact of racism. As classrooms across the country become increasingly racially and culturally diverse, it is essential to recognize that the traditional expectation of whiteness as the norm no longer reflects the lived realities of today's students. Educational policies, curricula, and classroom practices that continue to center whiteness marginalize students of Color, limiting their ability to fully engage in their learning environments.

When race is left out of educational conversation, systems of white supremacy remain unchallenged and are allowed to persist. This silence not only upholds inequitable structures but also contributes to the erasure of students' experiences. When students are made to feel that their racialized experiences are unacknowledged or unwelcome in academic spaces, it can negatively affect their sense of belonging, academic growth, and overall well-being. In order for all students to thrive, especially those of Color, education must intentionally confront and disrupt the ways whiteness is embedded in schools and learning.

The field of educational psychology is increasingly being called to critically examine race as a central factor in the learning process. Adopting a sociocultural lens, learning is understood

not as an isolated cognitive event, but as a socially mediated process of transformation. This process is shaped by the cultural values and perspectives available within a learner's environment. The more diverse and inclusive these perspectives are, the more opportunities individuals have for meaningful cognitive development and critical racial consciousness.

Race is a social construct that is created, maintained, and legitimized through societal structures and daily interactions. These interactions transmit norms and values that reinforce whiteness as the unspoken standard in educational and psychological spaces. As such, individuals often internalize whiteness as a marker of what is considered normal which can marginalize the lived experiences and epistemologies of people of Color.

Educational psychologists, therefore, have a responsibility to interrogate and disrupt the ways whiteness operates as a dominant ideology within schooling and research practice. This involves actively deconstructing the ways race and racism shape knowledge production. By acknowledging the sociopolitical dimensions of learning, the field can begin to dismantle the systems that privilege whiteness and instead promote inclusive learning opportunities for all students.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the findings of this study offer valuable insights, they are not exhaustive and must be understood within their specific context. The mindsets described reflect the experiences of a particular group of preservice teachers at a specific moment in time and should not be generalized to all preservice teachers. I chose to focus on race because scholars have identified it as a topic often avoided or erased in discussions of oppression within American education (Ullucci, 2012; Young, 2016). However, race is not the only identity marker that shapes systemic inequities. Gender, sexuality, class, age, ability, and religion, etc also influence educational policies, and shape the lived experiences of both students and educators. While this study centers race, I emphasize that it is one of many critical factors that deserve attention.

This research took place during the tail end of the global COVID-19 pandemic, at a time in the United States when national attention focused on violence against Black and Asian Americans. Race was a prevalent topic on the news and social media feeds with explicit stories of police brutality. Although violence towards people of Color has occurred throughout the history of our country, at this time it seemed to come to a head in visibility. Additionally, the study was conducted entirely online, rather than in a traditional classroom setting. I remain uncertain whether discussions about race would have been more dynamic in person or if the online format, via Zoom, allowed participants to engage more freely.

While traditional ethnographic research often includes participant-observation, my approach incorporated elements of autoethnography in both the observation and analysis of participants' data. To better understand the educational backgrounds of each participant, I asked them to write a Cultural/Schooling Autobiography. This allowed me to identify formative educational experiences and explore how participants perceived the role of race in their

schooling up to this point. As they reflected on their experiences, I engaged in parallel reflection through memo writing about my own educational journey. This personal reflection ultimately informed the development of Chapter One. I closely analyzed participants' journal entries and vignette responses, frequently revisiting earlier submissions to track potential shifts in their thinking about race as the course progressed. Although this study did not include direct participant-observation, I consider my process of examination of students' written reflections as a form of observation, supporting the classification of this work as ethnographic in nature.

Another limitation of this is that I upheld practices of whiteness in the design of my study. As discussed in Chapter 2, many teacher candidates enter their programs unaware of racism and their own whiteness. For this reason, many scholars in critical whiteness studies argue that building racial awareness is essential to countering racist teaching practices (Matias & Boucher, 2023). While I recognize the importance of understanding how whiteness shapes teaching, I do not believe that reflection alone can dismantle racist practices. Instead, I view this research as identifying the bare minimum that teacher education programs must address.

In future research aiming for broader generalization, institutions across the country should recruit teacher educators that teach multicultural education courses similar to FOUN 3000 who would be interested in adding vignette work into their coursework. I would be interested to see how students respond now that anti-DEI crusades in education have taken place. I am curious how their emotions differ from this study and what actions they could imagine taking.

The procedures of this study could also be adapted to nontraditional teacher education programs. For programs such as Teach for America or the New Teacher Project incorporating a space to reflect on race could be useful to participants. In these programs, participants are often teaching at racially diverse PK-12 schools and have a minimum of a two-year contract. I would

be interested to see how their written reflections would evolve the more time they spent with their students.

In future research the vignettes could also be updated to include local racial incidents or more current events. As time goes on impactful events that concern race will continue to happen across the United States. It will be important for teacher educators to update vignettes to meet the needs of preservice teachers engaging with their racial consciousness with these events.

Researcher Reflection

Reflecting on this research, I gained valuable insights from both the participants and the overall research process. The participants helped me better understand the persistent influence of systemic whiteness in education and how it affects individuals, even before they enter the classroom. Despite not yet being full-time teachers, they already felt the impact of how whiteness is maintained and reproduced in educational spaces.

The current national backlash against Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts heightened my concern that preservice teachers will be less inclined, or less prepared, to develop racial consciousness before stepping into the classroom. Without this preparation, I fear that educators will continue to uphold whiteness, and that unresolved racial dynamics will intensify conflicts between teachers and students.

One of the most significant findings of this study was the importance of early and sustained reflective conversations about race. Although participants expressed a desire to become socially-just educators after completing FOUN 3000, their subsequent coursework offered few opportunities to continue engaging in reflective practices with instructor feedback. As a white teacher educator, this realization motivates me to seek a position where I can work with

colleagues to design curriculum and programming that support ongoing reflection throughout students' undergraduate experience.

This research also challenged me to further reflect on how whiteness shapes my own learning, actions, and scholarship. As noted in the limitations section, I upheld whiteness by centering my work on this study within a white epistemology, a core tenet of CWS that highlights the passivity of white individuals. Moving forward, I want to follow the guidance of Matias and Boucher (2023) and critically study whiteness. This means decentering whiteness, elevating the experiences of people of Color, and drawing more heavily on the work of researchers of Color. Like my participants, this study marks one step in my ongoing effort to deepen my racial consciousness as a white student, educator, and researcher.

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Appendix 1

Dear Ms. Durham,

Your protocol titled "Preservice Teachers Thoughts on Participating in Race Talk" has been approved by the IRB as "Exempt" under federal regulation 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1,2). Attached is your approved protocol.

Official notice:

This e-mail serves as official notice that your protocol has been approved. By accepting this approval, you also accept your responsibilities associated with this approval. Details of your responsibilities are attached. Please print and retain.

Consent documents:

Attached is a copy of your consent form. You must provide a copy for each participant to keep.

Expiration:

Continuing review of this Exempt protocol is not required; however, all modification/revisions to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB.

When you have completed all research activities, have no plans to collect additional data and have destroyed all identifiable information as approved by the IRB, please notify this office via e-mail. A final report is no longer required for Exempt protocols.

PLEASE NOTE: If any unfunded, IRB-approved study should later receive funding, you must submit a MODIFICATION REQUEST for IRB review. In the request, identify the funding source/sponsor and AU OSP number. Also, revise IRB-stamped consent documents to include the Sponsor at the top of page 1 and the "Who will see study data?" section of consent documents." (see online template consent documents).

Best wishes for success with your research!

IRB Administration
Office of Research Compliance
540 Devall Drive
Auburn University
334-844-5966

Appendix 2



AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

**(NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH
CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)**

INFORMED CONSENT

for a Research Study entitled

"Examining Preservice Teachers Thoughts on Participating in Race Talk "

You are invited to participate in a research study to explore how preservice teachers imagine engaging in race talk with stakeholders in their future employment. The study is being conducted by a team led by Dr. Carey Andrzejewski in the Auburn University Department of Educational Foundation, Leadership, and Technology. You were selected as a possible participant because you are enrolled in FOUN 3000: Diversity of Learners and Settings and are age 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to allow Dr. Andrzejewski and her research team to review your class assignments. Participation in this study will not require any time or effort beyond what you have already expended while enrolled in the class.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are breach of confidentiality, coercion, and social pressure to participate. To protect your confidentiality, we will remove your name from your assignments before we analyze them as research data, and we will never report your name. To minimize the risk of coercion, your instructor will not know whether you have given consent until after your grades are submitted for FOUN 3000. Your decision regarding whether to participate in this study will not impact your grade for the course, your grades on any assignments in this course, or your relationship with your instructor. Regarding social pressure, we will make every effort to keep your participation secret from your classmates.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? There are no direct benefits to you, but your participation may improve FOUN 3000 and other courses like them for future students.

Will you receive compensation for participating? You will not receive any compensation for your participation.

Participant's initials _____

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Are there any costs? There are no costs to participate.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Departments of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology, Dr. Andrzejewski, or your instructor.

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be published in professional journals or other publication or presented at professional meetings.

If you have questions about this study, contact Dr. Carey Andrzejewski by phone at (334)-844-3012 or by e-mail at cea0011@auburn.edu . Please keep a copy of this consent form for later reference.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY.

YOUR INITIALS HERE INDICATE YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE. _____

YOUR INITIALS HERE INDICATE YOU DO NOT WANT TO PARTICIPATE. _____

PLEASE SIGN BELOW.

Participant's signature Date

Investigator obtaining consent Date

Printed Name

Printed Name

Co-Investigator Date

Printed Name

Appendix 3

Vignette 1

While you are participating as a youth advocate at a local elementary school, you hear two teachers talking in the hallway. One teacher asks the other how their day is going. The other teacher responds, “my day would be better if the students were willing to learn and stopped being lazy.” The other teacher agrees, “I know what you mean. I swear these kids don’t want to do anything.” The teachers work with students who are predominantly African American.

Vignette 2

You are a high school history teacher. Your principal comes to observe your class on a day you are discussing hate crimes in the United States. During class you discuss the recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmad Arbery, and the shooting at the Buffalo supermarket targeting African Americans in the community. During your weekly check-in your principal raises concerns that your lesson was too brutal to be presented to students and makes the United States look bad.

Vignette 3

You are working with the Special Education Coordinator for your school to create a list of students who need additional services and those who should be recommended for gifted programming. The Special Education Coordinator has pulled students throughout the week to do individual testing in math and reading. They have also observed small group activities in your class this week. The three White males in your class have all been recommended to participate in gifted programming.

Vignette 4

You work as a classroom teacher at a private middle school that has a strict dress code policy. Part of this dress code policy states that males need to keep their hair ear length or shorter. Two Black male students in your class come to school on the first day with dreadlocks in their hair. The school disciplinary officer pulls these students from the class and explains they must cut their dreads or become enrolled in in-school suspension indefinitely. The two student's explain that dreadlocks are communicative, they express pride in one's Black racial heritage, their family heritage. They also take a long time to grow and care for. You notice white male students in the class have hair styles that often go past the ears.

Vignette 5

In a board meeting for a school system made up of predominantly white faculty and staff members, the superintendent shares that they are working towards hiring a more diverse faculty and staff amongst their schools. A teacher responds, “So white people won’t get hired if they apply? That’s discriminatory and racist.”

Vignette 6

You are a second-grade teacher. A Black student in your classroom comes up to you during quiet reading time. They ask, “Why are there only two books in the classroom library with people who look like me?” You follow them to the library and they show you a book about Martin Luther King Jr. and one about Rosa Parks.