11-15-2021

A Meaningful Paradox of Color-Blind Racism and Racial Literacy: Understanding the Phenomena of White Women Teachers Educating Students of Color

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Understanding the Phenomena of White Women Teachers Educating Students of Color

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Submitted for the partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Education

Molloy College

2021

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

The dissertation of Alaísa Rigoni Grudzinski **e**ntitled: *A Meaningful Paradox of Color-blind Racism and Racial Literacy: Understanding the Phenomena of White Women Teachers' Educating Students of Color* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the School of Education and Human Services has been read and approved by the Committee:

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of my father Izayas and to my mother Alaide, who inspired me to always nurture curiosity and to never stop learning. I also dedicate my work to my husband Dave, whose unconditional love and support for over 25 years has fueled my *joie de vivre* and all my learning expeditions since the first day we met. This work is also dedicated to my spiritual guide, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, whose wisdom and kindness opened my heart, expanded my mind, and nurtured my soul!

Abstract

Recognizing school resegregation and the demographic imperative as systemic problems impacting the educational outcomes of students of Color, this study examined the role of White women teachers' racial views within the sociocultural context of teaching and learning. The purpose of this dissertation was to explore how 15 high school teachers described their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students in a racially diverse, public high school on Long Island, New York. This qualitative study was conceptualized through combining the theoretical lens of critical whiteness studies and critical pedagogy utilizing a qualitative phenomenological methodology for data collection, with the framework of color-blind racism added during the data analysis phase. The sample of 15 White women teachers engaged in two or three semi-structured interviews. The emergence of four *meaningful paradoxes* indicated that although most participants often employed a rhetoric revealing the uncritical endorsement of a color-blind ideology to describe their experiences, White women teachers also indicated that they were learning to see how race impacted them and their students' lives. These findings provided insights and future directions for K-12 educational institutions and teacher-training programs by suggesting that more efforts are necessary to recognize the signs of color-blind racism, to ensure racial literacy development as an integral part of the education of White women teachers, and to promote positive teacher-student relationships and educational success for students of Color.

Keywords: White women teachers, students of Color, color-blind racism, racial literacy development, critical whiteness studies, critical pedagogy

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Acknowledgments

I could write an entire dissertation on gratitude praises owed to the most important and influential people in my life. It took a global village to support me in accomplishing this doctoral degree! I am deeply grateful to my dissertation chair, Dr. Allison Roda, whom I nicknamed my dissertation therapist, for her endless patience and unconditional support. Dear professor, as my guide, your alignment with social justice ideals, antiracism, and commitment to promoting educational equity inspired and motivated me so much. I am also immensely grateful to my other two committee members. Dr. Amy Meyers, whose knowledge, curious mind, and sharp intellect encouraged me to challenge myself to deepen my learning experiences. Dr. Pat Mason's generosity in sharing her wealth of educational and professional experiences inspired me to broaden my understanding of my research, the data, and the importance of my work for the field of education. I also express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Andrea Honigsfeld, who convinced me that my scholarship dreams could be attained as an immigrant in the United States. I credit her with reigniting my passion for pursuing scholarly work and encouraging me to find my writing voice. I was lucky to have Dr. Audrey Cohan as a professor and to be inspired by the earnest way in which she imparted knowledge, wisdom, and love through her teaching. Dr. Melissa Gebbia's gift of patience, time, and dedication will always stay in the foreground of my mind. I also thank Dr. Tricia Kress for generously sharing her time and wisdom with me, along with amazing suggestions of valuable literature for my research and academic development.

Entering the first cohort in Molloy's Ed.D. program was one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences I have encountered, and I am grateful to all my colleagues. I will always feel immense gratitude to Dr. Signy Emler, whose wealth of knowledge, support, and humor was instrumental for my growth, especially during the first three years in the program when I often

changing, and becoming better in everything I strive to accomplish. My appreciation also goes out to my sweet friend Dita Dobroshi, whose brilliance, kindness, and joy are contagious and always leave me feeling delighted!

Lastly, but not quite yet, I must acknowledge the support of my original tribe, below the equator line, whose unconditional love and support have sustained all stages of my life. First, my almost-Irish-twin sister Adriana: you were my first love, and I am always enchanted by your sweetness and capacity to make me laugh more than anyone else in this world. I am always amazed by the speed, depth, thoroughness, and clarity of your intellect—you are one of the most intelligent women I have ever met! To my youngest sisters Adriza and Aline, and to my brother Izayas: I love you so dearly! The gift of your families has brought more love and joy into my life than I could have imagined being possible. Your children are my children, the closest experience to having my own kids! Ramon, Pedro Paulo, João Arthur, Felipe, Gabriela, Bernardo, and Eduardo: titia ama muito vocês! Fátima, my oldest sister: you inspired my work more than you will ever know. Our lives have changed so much since I would raid your closet looking for ways to look just like you. I cherish my childhood memories with you! Cristina, my sweet Brazilian friend: you are one of the greatest human beings I have ever met! I could never put into words the extent of my gratitude for your love, support, kindness, and joy! Arranging for Tia Celina to become my godmother in the second half of my life was the smartest move of my heart! Madrinha querida, you have always been my second mother, my greatest role model of womanhood, and I am so grateful for your blessings, prayers, and endless love!!!

To my dearest college friend, Dr. Edgard Rebouças: you are such an inspiration! Thank you for never leaving our friendship, for staying connected no matter where you moved around the world! My beautiful friend Teresa Pazolini: your brilliant mind and elegant way of being has

enchanted and delighted my life since our days working for the ore mineworkers' union! You are

a living example of how resilience, kindness, and generosity can flow through every moment of

our lives. My kindest Sangha teachers Kadam Holly McGregor, Dawn Jackson, and Lynda Rice,

and my friends Dianne Batrick, Tom McGuire, and Rita Paiewonsky: thank you for your

support, love, prayers, and living examples of how to walk the Path, the Middle Way!

Finally, I am grateful to my students at Sewanhaka High School, where I have worked for

the past 18 years. You keep me so young at heart, and you are the main reason I pursued the

scholarship represented in this study. I will always have a special place in my heart for you! Jane

Banatte, Ramisa Fatima, and Kelisha Prophet: knowing that you will be walking the earth after I

leave this life leaves my heart filled with joy, knowing your power to teach and spread the social

justice ideals we share. I also feel immense gratitude to the other group of amazing human

beings who so courageously open their hearts and invite me to be their co-pilots—I cannot name

you, but you know who you are! Mi amiga Marlen Pinto: muchisimas gracias for your kindness,

support, and for cheering me up every time I see you! I am always happier after we chat, and it is

such an honor to watch your girls growing up to become as amazing as you are! Julie Cohen:

thank you so much for your insight, feedback, and openness to discuss my dissertation topic.

Despite all the wine we shared, talking to you brought so much clarity to my mind!

I am also immensely grateful to the generosity of the participants in the study, who

opened their minds and hearts so I could conduct this study. Lastly—and I really mean it this

time—this acknowledgment page would not be complete without recognizing, once again, that

the inspiration, encouragement, and love that has sustained me in all areas of my life comes from

the unconditional support, love, and joy that I receive from my partner, my closest friend, and

loving husband Dave! There are not enough words to express my gratitude to you!

Chapter One

The Sociocultural Context of Teaching and Learning

"Inside I am reacting like, 'oh my God, these kids…what's wrong with these kids?'

But then I'm like, wait a minute, this is their cultural way of expressing themselves;

this is their way of communicating. Why am I thinking that there is something wrong

with it just because it is different from my experience or from the social norm?

And I think we have to be more open to that in an educational setting. I feel like

teachers are so afraid of losing control of their class that they want to tamper

the natural way that kids of different races express themselves…."

~ Barbara

As a social worker at a diverse public high school during the past 18 years, I have met with dozens of students of Color who sought counseling to better cope with the stress stemming from teacher bias and racial discrimination in the classroom. My clinical work with racially diverse student groups required that I heard, supported, and helped them learn coping strategies for emotional safety. Although I always took into consideration that the information I received only accounted for the student side, as a Latina immigrant from Brazil, I became increasingly aware that the discrimination the students reported was similar to what I also endured from many of my teacher colleagues. This discriminatory experience was a sharp contrast to my encounters with other teachers who embraced my otherness and were highly successful in teaching and inspiring students of Color.

My decision to examine White women teachers' perceptions of educating students of Color was fomented by this paradox. Through this dissertation study, I attempted to understand how schools often function as institutions that reproduce segregation and educational inequities

(Bartolomé, 2004; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2017; Giroux & Schmidt, 2004; McInerney, 2009; McLaren, 2017) by taking a closer look at the ways in which White women teachers—the dominant racial group in K-12 public education—described their lived experiences as teachers of students of Color. I wanted to better understand what successes and challenges they reportedly encountered, and how they reflected on their work and life events while teaching a racially and socioeconomically diverse student population at Vanguard High School (pseudonym). Throughout this dissertation study, I use the term *students of Color* interchangeably with the predominant racial/ethnic groups at Vanguard—Latinx, Black, and Asian. This choice of terminology is explored at the end of this chapter, under the section titled A Note About Terminology.

U.S. schools are highly segregated by race/ethnicity and social class, and this segregation is getting worse (Heading in the Wrong Direction, 2015; Logan & Stults, 2011; McCardle, Bliss, & Grudzinski, 2018; Wells et al., 2009). One problem is the negative consequences of school segregation—particularly for students of Color (i.e., Blacks, Latinx, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, Asians) who are often isolated in predominantly low-income neighborhoods—such as less access to highly qualified teachers, challenging courses, and the affluence of resources that comes with having high-income peers (Frankenberg, 2013; Mickelson, 2010; Welner & Carter, 2013). This problem is compounded by second-generation segregation in racially diverse school settings when students of Color are disproportionately placed in lower academic tracks (Oakes, 2005; Roda, 2015), labeled in need of special education services (Fletcher & Navarrete, 2011; Skiba et al., 2008), and/or given harsh discipline referrals and school suspensions in comparison to their White student counterparts (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Skiba et al., 2011).

Another often-overlooked problem in racially diverse schools is what occurs inside

classrooms, within the socio-cultural context of teaching and learning (Carter, 2012). One aspect of this sociocultural context is the role of racial bias in the teacher-student relationship (Picower, 2009; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010). This is where my study fits and extends prior research on this topic. The research literature I reviewed to deepen my understanding of the role of racial bias in the teacher-student relationship supported my clinical understanding of the educational and socioemotional toll that students of Color experience in classrooms throughout their lives (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Tatum, 2017; Sleeter, 2001; Steele & Aronson, 1995). However, my dissertation pursuit does not intend to blame teachers as the ultimate cause of systemic educational inequities—rather, I acknowledge that teachers are often targeted for the racial achievement gap in education, which also stems from a systemic sociopolitical failure (Giroux, 2003; Sleeter, 2008; Ullucci, 2011). Instead, I wanted to better understand how White teachers described their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students in a demographically changing high school context, in respect to the role of race. I sought to make sense of what they reported as successes and challenges as teachers, and how, if at all, their personal and professional life experiences impacted and were impacted by their relationships with their students of Color.

White teachers are likely to have been taught color-blindness, to not acknowledge their race as a White person, and to have received misinformation about people of Color early in their lives, as a consequence for growing up or spending their whole lives in segregated, predominantly White schools and neighborhoods (DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1999; Michael, 2015). Such experiences are likely to have led them—especially during their younger years—to make unchallenged assumptions about people of Color, which may have lasted throughout higher education training (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Michael, 2015; Tatum, 2017).

In fact, contrary to popular belief, White students are the most segregated group in schools across the U.S. (Garda Jr., 2011). Research has shown that they benefit from learning in racially diverse environments as much as students of Color (Garda Jr., 2011; Milem, 2003; Smith & Schonfeld, 2000; Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016), while students of Color tend to attain greater academic achievement when they learn from teachers who share their racial/ethnic group (Bates & Glick, 2013). The research literature on student achievement/opportunity gap has found evidence that the racial and demographic mismatch between teachers and students can have a negative influence on teachers' academic expectations of racially diverse students and impact their achievement (Bates & Glick, 2013; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborne & Sibley, 2016; Welner & Carter, 2013). Considering that the majority of pre-service teachers enrolled in education programs are White (Bartolomé, 2004), exploring the successes and failures of educators of students of Color becomes an important step to address these problems identified by the research literature.

White Teachers and Students of Color

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2021) revealed that White teachers add up to 80% of the teaching force in American public schools, with 64% being women. According to Taie and Goldring (2020), the average age of White teachers in public schools is 43 years old, and the median yearly salary is $57,900, placing most of them in the socioeconomic bracket of middle-class. Yet, students of Color, who may live in poverty (Koball & Jiang, 2018), compose 51% of the K-12 public school population (Taie & Goldring, 2020). This demographic disparity reveals that—perhaps more today than at the turn of the 19th century—White women teachers are entrusted with the education of a larger and ever-growing population of racially diverse student groups. This expanding demographic gap between school

children and their White teachers has been termed *the demographic imperative* in the research literature. The demographic imperative has increasingly become the focus of education studies (García, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009), exposing several implications for the over-representation and the role of middle-class White women teachers in the lives of students of Color (Bartolomé, 2004; Dee, 2005; Jupp, 2021; Michael, 2015; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2001; Yoon, 2016).

This dissertation study was conceptualized from the three problems I identified— the educational inequities stemming from school segregation, the demographic imperative, and from racial bias in the teacher-student relationship within the sociocultural context of teaching and learning. I conducted this phenomenological study at a Long Island high school where the teacher-student demographic composition reflects the racial and socioeconomic mismatch exposed by the demographic imperative. I wanted to better understand how teachers made sense of the problem of racial bias in the classroom and the level of awareness they reported having of their own racial bias. I asked about the successes and challenges they had teaching racially diverse classes and noted whether they were able to engage in a critical reflection of their experiences teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students. My initial research goals included applying the theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies to make sense of White teachers' belief systems as educators of racially diverse students. In Chapter Four, I added the framework of color-blind racism as an analytical tool to help me make sense of the data.

My experience in working with students of Color in a diverse public high school on Long Island—which has a similar teacher and student demographic characteristic to Vanguard, where I conducted my study—has informed my understanding of the subtle ways in which some White teachers may inadvertently discriminate against their racially diverse students, while others

choose to educate their students in a culturally responsive manner. Similarly, through this study, I was able to critique the problem of racial bias in the teacher-student relationship, and to find examples of teachers who are making deliberate, conscious efforts to successfully address inequities in the classroom where most students were Latinx, Black, and Asian.

A Note about Terminology

Tatum (2017)—in her book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*—explained that the use of language to categorize one another racially is imperfect. For Tatum, "the original creation of racial categories was in the service of oppression" (p. 97), and the use of such terms might perpetuate this oppression. Tatum further explained that most of the difficulties surrounding the use of social constructs through language are due to the fact that these constructs are based on assumptions of otherness. I share Tatum's discomfort in choosing the terminology to describe racial categories and agree that "it is difficult to talk about what is essentially a flawed and problematic social construct without using language that is itself problematic" (p. 97). In the following paragraphs, I describe my choice of the language that is used throughout this dissertation study and explain the ideas that informed my decision.

Race and Class. In this dissertation study, I refer to the concepts *race* and *socioeconomic status (SES)* or *class* under the umbrella term *race*—a socially constructed category that has real socioeconomic effects on people of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Although I fully acknowledge that there are variations within and between the complex constructs of race and social class throughout the literature, my decision to address race and class as one category is based on three major factors. First, some studies revealed that race and SES have been found to intersect for nearly 70% of all students of Color younger than 18 years old (Koball & Jiang, 2018). Second, data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021), indicate that the majority

of Vanguard's students under the category Black and Hispanic receive free lunch and, to qualify for free lunch, students must live in households with income below 130% of the national poverty level (NSLP, 2021). Third, some of the teachers I interviewed for my study corroborated that most of the Latinx and Black students at Vanguard come from families with low-income backgrounds and they access free lunch at school. Throughout the research literature, race and SES are often combined and referred to as race due to their historical intersection in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Kendi, 2017). Similarly, the variations of skin color are often collapsed under the construct "race," although this synthesis does not do justice to the vastly complex and nuanced issue of race (Ladson-Billings, 2000) or ethnicity.

The link between race and social class has been established through the seminal academic work of scholars from diverse research fields, such as psychology (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Tatum, 2018; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010), social psychology (Steele & Aronson, 1995), sociology (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018), law (Kang, Bennett, Carbado, & Casey, 2011), and education (Kozol, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The policy statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics (Council on Community Pediatrics, 2016) policy statement also connected race and ethnicity with poverty, exposing that "African American, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native children are 3 times more likely to live in poverty than are white and Asian children" (p. 2). The connection between social class and race, and how these demographic categories influence children throughout their education journey, informed my interdisciplinary approach to explore the factors that underlie the education of students of Color.

People of Color. DiAngelo (2018) used "the terms white and people of color to indicate the two macro-level, socially recognized divisions of the racial hierarchy" (p. xv), although she

recognized that the binary categories of Black and White are limited and frustrating for many, especially for multiracial people. Throughout this study, when I use the term *people* or *students of Color*, I am referring to all those who do not identify as White in the United States (Diangelo, 2018; Michael, 2015). At Vanguard, nearly 45% of students are White and 55% of students are Latinx, Black, and Asian. I use the term *students of Color* interchangeably with the predominant racial/ethnic group at Vanguard High School: Latinx, Black, and Asian students. By choosing to use these three racial groups, I sought to acknowledge that racial categories can be constructed internally—by the social groups within the category—or externally—imposed by Whites in positions of power (Bashi, 1998).

Racial categorization is never straightforward, especially during adolescence (Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006). My choice of terminology to identify racial groups attempted to stay as close as possible to the how people of Color identify themselves in regards to race—their internal construction of racial categories (Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006)—although these categories are controversial and subject to changes over time and across different locations. In this study, the category *Latinx* refers to those with ancestry from all countries in the American continent where the predominantly-spoken language descended from Latin—Spanish, Portuguese, or French—are spoken. The term Latinx uses the letter *x* instead of indications of masculine *Latino* or feminine *Latina* to signal nonbinary gender identifications (Torres, 2018). The category *Black* refers to those of African descent, whether or not they identify as *American* (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005), by birth or naturalization. Finally, the category *Asian* refers to East or South Asians (Chow, 2017).

I adopt Michael's (2015) use of capitalized words (i.e., students of Color; White teachers), which represent sociopolitical constructs rather than the description of skin color.

However, I do not capitalize the word *whiteness* because it refers to a state of being, which can be expressed by individuals with various racial identities (Matias, 2016). All teachers of European descent or who are European immigrants (i.e., Italian, Irish, German) are referred to as White. I am aware of the fact that the racial, social construct of White does not encompass all the positionalities (i.e., ethnicity, culture, religion) of those who identify themselves as White. Today, in the US, Europeans and their descendants are recognized as *White*, and they hold a privileged position in our racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The ultimate focus of this dissertation study is to explore the shared racial ideologies of women educators who identify as White but may have other racial or ethnic positionalities.

A Brief Review of the Literature

My dissertation study highlights the work of White women teachers. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that the White culture they represent is not a monolith, but "varied manifestations of whiteness and White cultural practices across the United States" (Warren & Hancock, 2017, p. 20). Teaching has been identified as a profession identified with whiteness (Blackmore, 2010; Schick, 2000), and middle-class White women teachers have played a decisive role in the American history of education (Clifford, 2014; Warren & Talley, 2017). At the start of the 19th century, White women were thought to be desirable schoolteachers due to their mothering role of nurturing and instructing the young (Clifford, 2014; Yoon, 2012). As representative of their racial group, White women educators were expected to teach the values of the middle-class White-dominant ideology to racially or socioeconomically subordinate groups—such as Native Americans (Adams, 1995), African Americans (Tatum, 2017), Latinx (Tatum, 2017), and other population groups (i.e., Asians from various countries, Pacific Islanders). Their lifestyle and knowledge of the upper and middle-class values and social capital continues to be considered

highly valuable for social mobility (Yoon, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Although they may be moved to teach due to their beliefs in the value of social capital that they embody (e.g., education as the great equalizer; Lewis, 2011) and by their altruistic intention to educate all children, middle-class White women teachers may not always be inclined to question the status quo of segregation and inequality that students of Color face in schools (Lewis, 2011; Michael, 2015; Ullucci, 2011; Yoon, 2011). From birth, they benefitted from the privileges awarded by the White culture, which is structured to keep them mostly unaware of how their racial prejudices could undermine their stated goals of practicing educational equity (DiAngelo, 2018; Tatum, 2017).

Racial Bias and White Supremacy

Racial bias can be expressed implicitly or explicitly. There is a growing body of research literature that focuses on the impact of implicit racial bias. Implicit bias activates unconscious prejudices related to the onset of moral judgments that divide, categorize, and discriminate against human beings by social class, race, ethnicity, culture, religious affiliation, cognitive or physical ability, gender identities, and other characteristics or stereotypes (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2016; Payne & Gawronski, 2010). Explicit bias is the overt, deliberate, and conscious expression of the positive and negative subscription to certain stereotypes or prejudices, "a belief that is consciously endorsed" (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006), and based on full awareness of the mental process at play. Some studies found that implicit and explicit racial bias pose socio-emotional threats to racially diverse groups (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016), and in education, it was found to correlate with students' poor achievement (Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2016; Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, & Jacoby-Senghor, 2016) and disengagement (Giroux, 2003). The research studies that revealed the widespread and pervasive impact of racial biases on students revealed that the negative impact of implicit racial

bias on students is explicit, inequitable, and with dire negative life-long consequences (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2016; Payne & Gawronski, 2010).

Through reviewing the literature on racial bias in education, I explored the socio-economic, political, and cultural processes underlining racism. Research in multiple academic areas has exposed racism as a systemic enterprise based on the economic privilege of Whites that is disseminated through culture—i.e., mass media, television, advertising, cinema, art, and literature (DiAngelo, 2018; Tatum, 2017; Vera & Gordon, 2003). In her book titled *White Fragility*, DiAngelo (2018) explained how racism pervades social ideologies, which are "the big ideas that are reinforced through society" (p. 21). According to DiAngelo (2018), the socio-cultural and political concept of race was developed to legitimize racial inequality and to protect Whites' economic advantage. DiAngelo explained that this social system of political and economic domination is based on the enduring ideology that assumes the supremacy or superiority of Whites over all other racial groups. Leonardo (2002)—whose scholarship in education highlights the study of ideologies and discourses with respect to structural relations of power—proposed that the racial category *White people* "represents a socially constructed identity, usually based on skin color" while *whiteness* is a racial discourse composed by everyday strategies "supported by material practices and institutions" and that is "characterized by the unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience of the group, the minimization of racist legacy" (pp. 31-32). These conceptual understandings of implicit and explicit racial bias and whiteness have guided and contributed to my conceptualization of the problem of practice and the choice of theoretical frameworks used to articulate the purpose of this study.

Theoretical Frameworks

The two frameworks that I have interwoven to support this dissertation study are critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies. Leonardo (2002) argued that "critical pedagogy benefits from an intersectional understanding of whiteness studies and globalization discourse" (p. 29). His view postulates that globalization and whiteness are "critical components of a pedagogy attempting to understand the oppressive structures that distort clear knowledge" (p. 31). I concur with Leonardo, that the juxtaposition of these frameworks creates a valuable opportunity to examine how "these structural features filter into micro-interactions between students and teachers" (p. 31).

The theoretical framework of critical pedagogy presumes that teaching is a political act where teachers and students share the role of teaching and learning (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2017). It asserts that educators are catalysts of social ideologies throughout their daily interactions with students and that they should adopt a critical view of society and of the sources of social problems such as racism and poverty (Giroux & Schmidt, 2004; McLaren, 2017). Racism and poverty are often mistaken for individual problems, rather than the product of a social structure that upholds a system of domination and social control based on economic, political, and cultural hegemony (McLaren, 2017). My research was forged from the critical pedagogy view that the racialized social systems of domination are enforced by the educational institutions. Additionally, to make sense of how White women teachers' racial rhetoric may inadvertently filter the oppressive ideologies through their relationships with students of Color, I turned my research gaze to the dominant racial discourse that maintains the privileges of Whites over all other racial groups. This is where critical pedagogy intersects with critical whiteness studies in my research.

The framework of critical whiteness studies offered the opportunity to better understand the predominance of the White racial rhetoric. Levine-Rasky (2000) articulated the relevance of this framework to the field of education:

> In teacher education, critical whiteness studies reflect the realization that the failure of equity education initiatives is attributable to a misidentification of change object. Traditional solutions to inequitable educational outcomes for racialized groups of students have been directed to the putative problems of these racialized others ('them') and to the challenges in implementing culturally sensitive pedagogy (the space between 'us' and 'them') rather than to the workings of the dominant culture itself. (pp. 263-264)

The framework of critical whiteness studies provided the appropriate lens to identify and investigate whiteness as a phenomenon that is intrinsically linked to the demographic imperative and the educational inequities endured by Latinx, Black, and Asian students. Through centering my inquiry on the lived experiences of White women teachers, my study explored the racial ideas about what participants believed to underlie their experiences of successes and challenges to educate students of Color.

Scholars of critical whiteness studies—such as Bonilla-Silva (2018), DiAngelo (2018), Frankenberg (1999), Leonardo (2002), Michael (2015), and Mills (1999)—advocate for the importance of recognizing and naming White supremacy as a means to "challenge our complicity with and investment on racism," in addition to making the system visible and shifting "the locus of change onto white people, where it belongs" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 33). Leonardo (2002) conceptualized critical whiteness studies as a racial worldview, a social construct that is "supported by material practices and institutions" (p. 32), which disseminate the ideology of White supremacy. The whiteness discourse is subtly internalized through the unquestioned

exposure to culture, which is filtered into consciousness and later disseminated through micro-interactions such as in teacher-student relationships. The belief in the superiority of Whites represented through the whiteness culture can be expressed explicitly or in subtle ways, through the articulation of implicit racial bias. These ideologies are enacted through various psychological, sociological, and linguistic mechanisms, some of which have been identified in the research literature as *White privilege* (McIntosh, 1988), *aversive racism* (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012), *racial microaggressions* (Sue et al., 2007), *White fragility* (DiAngelo, 2018)*,* and *color-blind racism* (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). These mechanisms share the ideological beliefs of the racial superiority of Whites (discussed in Chapter Two).

As the large majority of the American teaching force, White women teachers can act as unintentional catalysts of White supremacist ideologies of the broader sociopolitical and economic systems through their daily micro-interactions contact with students (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Leonardo, 2002; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2004; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010; Yoon, 2016). A considerable number of White teachers are likely to have grown up in segregated communities and to have had limited relationships with people of Color (DiAngelo, 2018; Michael, 2015). They are also likely to have attended teacher-education programs that did not prioritize learning about the unique perspectives and life experiences of people of Color or to engage in critical discussions on the topic of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Michael, 2015). Most educated, well-intentioned, altruistic, and progressive White Americans tend to spend most of their lives unaware of the social inequities endured by people of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Michael, 2015; Tatum, 2017). Notwithstanding, these scenarios do not apply to all middle-class White women teachers, as many have had a number of personal experiences with race and discrimination that informed

their perspectives on race and led them to become equity advocates (Michael, 2015; Ullucci, 2011; Yoon, 2016). Furthermore, if these experiences of White teachers could be paired with a critical pedagogical understanding of how the White supremacy ideology impact their lives and the lives of their students, they would have immense power to create and enact educational equity, with monumental implications for the future of the global society.

The Context of the Study

I conducted my dissertation study at Vanguard (pseudonym), a racially diverse suburban high school on Long Island. This high school stands in contrast to Nassau and Suffolk counties that make up Long Island, which is considered one of the most racially segregated regions and school systems in the United States (Erase Racism, 2015; Logan & Stults, 2011). According to research conducted by the regional organization ERASE Racism (Gross & Harris, 2005), school segregation on Long Island has remained high for African Americans and has increased for Latinx and Asians since 2010. On Long Island, White women teachers are more likely to come from the middle class (Colvin, Klingel, Boehme, & Donovan, 2013) and to have attended segregated, predominantly White schools (Roda & Wells, 2012).

I have chosen to conduct my research at Vanguard High School because this school's demographic reality reflects the cultural gap between White teachers and students of Color that predominates the United States. In 2018, Vanguard enrolled approximately 1,900 students from grades 9 through 12. Data from the New York State Education Department (n.d.) revealed that in the school year 2018-2019, the racial/ethnic composition of the student body at Vanguard was approximately 45% White, 39% Hispanic, 10% Black, 5% Asian and 1% multiracial. The racial or ethnic composition of the school staff was not published by the websites from Vanguard or the New York State Education Department. However, during a preliminary meeting with the

school's assistant principal, I learned that the racial and socioeconomic demographics of the teaching staff at Vanguard follows the national trend, with mostly middle-class White women teachers.

In Spring 2018, the Vanguard school administration sought to help teachers adapt to the changing demographics in the high school by establishing a partnership with a local organization to train 10 teachers on cultural proficiency. These 10 teachers volunteered to participate in the training and to subsequently share their knowledge with all school staff through a professional development training that would take place in December 2018. The school administration invited me to attend the final workshop on implicit bias, as an observer, in October 2018. The 1.5-hour-long workshop introduced the participants to the topic of implicit bias, how it conceals ideologies, its impact on teacher expectations, and how it could be neutralized to minimize prejudice in the school setting. During this first visit to Vanguard, I asserted that the combination of Vanguard's racially diverse student body, the predominance of a White teaching staff, and the administration's efforts to promote educational equity by promoting awareness to implicit racial bias, made the school an ideal site to conduct my dissertation research.

When I arrived at Vanguard for the first of the three interview series, I learned that the school administration, along with the teachers who participated in the cultural diversity workshops, had decided to not turnkey the implicit bias workshop. During an interview with one of the school's assistant principals, I expressed my curiosity about the reasons for the change of plans, but he was nonchalant about the shift and did not further elaborate on the topic. He explained that the school staff had agreed that the most important area for teacher growth and development at that time was "how to make better word choices to show students that they were

being heard." I wondered though whether the decision not to turnkey the workshop on implicit bias was a color-blind maneuver to avoid race-related discussions among the teaching staff.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine how teachers make sense of the problem of implicit bias in the teacher-student relationship, the level of awareness they have of their own racial biases in the classroom, and what successes and challenges they experience as educators of racially diverse students. The research questions that guided this study include:

1. How do White women teachers describe their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students in a demographically changing high school context?

1a. What successes and challenges do they report having in their increasingly diverse classrooms?

1b. How, if at all, did their personal and professional life experiences impact and were impacted by their relationships with Latinx, Black, and Asian students?

Research Methods and Design

The research questions of this dissertation study were answered through employing a qualitative phenomenological design. I chose phenomenology for my dissertation study because it is a philosophy and a research methodology used to gather the essence of "human experience as it is lived" (Laverty, 2003, p. 24). As a research methodology, the purpose and design of a phenomenological study is to observe the lived experiences of participants situated within a local and social context, which, in the case of my study, is the context of a racialized educational system. I followed the structure for in-depth phenomenological interviewing proposed by Seidman (2013), through collecting data in three interview series. Based on Seidman's guidelines, I devised three semi-structured interview protocols that aimed to uncover (1) the

participants' life experiences in the context of their school; (2) the details of their experience at the time of the interviews; and (3) their ability to engage in a critical reflection about the meaning of their emotional and intellectual experiences teaching their Latinx, Black, and Asian students.

The Role of Positionality

My positionality, working as a social worker at a racially diverse Long Island public high school for the past 18 years, is relevant to this study because it inspired my research. Throughout my career and work experiences in Brazil and in the US, I have observed the power of ideologies stemming from a racialized system of inequality that influence myself and others. The subtle nature of these ideologies is obscure, often unquestioned, and, in education, can have serious long-lasting impact on students of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The dissertation study I conducted was fomented by the sum of all my life experiences, starting as a reporter and advocate for better working conditions for 22,000 workers mining iron ore in Brazil. Through working with the workers' union leaders and investigative journalism, I wrote articles, newsletters, and letters to denounce the poor conditions in the mines and to mobilize the workers. After I immigrated to the United States, my choice of pursuing a master's degree in social work allowed me to continue following my social justice ideals while working with individuals and families to improve their living conditions. During my graduate training, I focused my studies on learning to understand and assist young people's journey through navigating adolescence. After graduation, I secured my current job in a racially and ethnically diverse public high school on Long Island, where I have had the opportunity to work with adolescents and their families. By participating in post-graduate institute trainings in psychodynamic psychotherapies, I learned to observe the lived experiences of individuals and

groups in clinical settings, through a process that is akin to the phenomenological method of data collection—by listening for what's explicitly said or unconsciously implied, and through eliciting the participants' engagement in critical thought processes geared to re-frame their experiences. As in the psychodynamic interview methods, the phenomenological interviewer is intentional in eliciting the participants' lived experiences through broad and open-ended questions, creating extensive opportunities for the expression of their lived experiences.

After I obtained permission to conduct this study at Vanguard High School, I received an IRB approval from Molloy College. Participants in my study were selected through convenience and purposeful sampling—the school's assistant principal working as my liaison, Mr. Turner, invited all 10 teacher-participants of the implicit bias workshop to participate in the study, in addition to disseminating an email I wrote explaining my study and inviting other participants to volunteer. The first phase of interviews consisted of four focus groups, with a total of 17 participants—one participant was male, and his participation is discussed in Chapter Four. The women who participated in the focus group were invited to engage in subsequent individual interviews, for the second and third series of the data collection.

The data I used to answer the research questions included the interviews conducted during the focus groups and two following individual interviews. The rationale for conducting focus groups was based on my assumption that, initially, teachers would be more likely to divulge their perspectives of their roles as teachers of students of Color in a setting where they felt supported by their colleagues. The reason for conducting individual follow-up interviews was to probe deeper on what was discussed during the focus group, to elicit their individual experiences, and to introduce a discussion of sensitive topics (i.e., race) that they might feel more comfortable discussing with the researcher as opposed to their colleagues.

During the first phase of data collection, my role as the researcher was to observe and analyze the narratives from the four focus groups when participants collectively described their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students at Vanguard. The interview question for this first interview series was intended to place participants' life-history in the context of Vanguard, a demographically changing high school. During the second stage of data collection—the first individual interviews with 15 women teachers—I focused on eliciting concrete details of their lived experiences, by asking them to reconstruct their present lived experiences by sharing stories about their successes and challenges as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. Only nine participants returned to the third interview series. The goal of this series was to engage teachers in a reflection about the intellectual and emotional connections between their work and life. I attempted to engage them in a critical discussion of their role as White teachers in the lives of their students of Color, to explore how teaching at Vanguard has influenced them personally and professionally, and how they thought their students of Color perceived them.

Conclusion

Each of the next four chapters in this dissertation elaborate on specific content. In Chapter Two, I discuss the theoretical frameworks I used to conceptualize this study, review the literature pertaining to my topic of interest, and highlight three research studies that directly relate to my research. In Chapter Three, I offer the rationale and description of the methodology I used for the research, the site of the study, the sample of participants, and the process of data collection. In the following Chapter Four, I reveal the method used for data analysis, the theoretical framework I brought in to analyze the data, and the thematic findings. Finally, in

Chapter Five, I summarize and conclude the study, and discuss how my research adds to the

literature, as well as possible directions and implications for future practice and research.

Definition of Terms

Color-blind racism: According to Bonilla-Silva (2018), color-blind racism is the rhetoric that reveal today's predominant racial ideology. He proposed that the color-blind rhetoric is widely used to explain racial matters while claiming neutrality about race, with seemingly harmless arguments that deny the existence or relevance of race and racial bias. Color-blind racism is a *linguistic maneuver* that denies that racism still exists but fails to notice the ample evidence of racial prejudice in society. As a racial grammar*, color-blind racism* is an example of the adaptability of White supremacist ideologies to the post-civil rights, modern-day culture. It is based on the premise that since one does not "see color," it is because racism does not exist and that those who claim that race matters are the ones holding racist views (DiAngelo, 2018). Bonilla-Silva conceptualized four central frames of color-blind racism—abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization framework—which he used to unpack the racial grammar of whiteness. These frames will be further explored in Chapter Four.

Critical pedagogy: A theoretical framework that proposes that educators conduct a thorough analysis of the professed ideals of educational institutions vis-à-vis the de facto dynamics of power and interests that sustain educational inequities. It postulates that educators—as catalysts of social ideologies throughout their daily interactions with students—must adopt a critical and partisan view of society in relation to social problems such as racism and poverty (Bartolomé, 2004; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2017; McInerney, 2009; McLaren, 2017).

Critical whiteness studies: A theoretical framework that proposes a close examination of how White hegemony is constructed, produced, and maintained. Instead of the typical focus on the racial 'other'—people of Color—critical whiteness studies seek to analyze the racial 'normal' or 'standard'—Whites—and how racism elevates them (DiAngelo, 2018). This framework

establishes whiteness as an ideology that undergirds all aspects of the lived experiences according to White supremacist beliefs (Leonardo, 2002; Picower, 2009). Far from being a new concept, the critical study of whiteness was conceptualized by African American intellectuals in the early 1900s (i.e., W. E. B. Du Bois, James Baldwin) who characterized whiteness as "a social and institutional status and identity imbued with legal, political, economic, and social rights and privileges that are denied to others" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 24).

Explicit bias: Explicit bias is the overt, deliberate, and conscious expression of the positive and negative subscription to certain stereotypes or prejudices, "a belief that is consciously endorsed" (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006), and based on full awareness of the mental process at play. The term *explicit bias* is often interchangeable with the term *explicit association* and other synonymous expressions.

Implicit bias: Implicit biases are the unconscious prejudices related to the onset of moral judgments that divide, categorize, and discriminate against human beings within a hierarchy of groups differentiated by social class, race, ethnicity, culture, religious affiliation, cognitive or physical ability, gender identities, and other characteristics or stereotypes (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2016; Payne & Gawronski, 2010). The term *implicit bias* is often interchangeably referred to as implicit association, implicit social cognition, implicit attitude, or implicit moral attitudes, among some other terms that carry similar or identical meaning. Implicit biases are unconscious manifestations of cognitive thought processes that derive from positive and negative stereotypes and often thought to arise from automatic, cognitive processes of association, as well as to derive from pre-existing beliefs (Payne & Gawronski, 2010).

Phenomenology: Phenomenology is a philosophy and a research methodology used to gather the essence of "human experience as it is lived" (Laverty, 2003, p. 24). It establishes that the researcher must read the text (transcription) of participants' interviews and "isolate themes" by reflecting on the contents and "discover something telling, something meaningful, something thematic" (Sloan & Bowe, 2013, p. 1292). Additionally, the researcher rewrites the phenomenal themes through interpreting the meaning, according to the experience as an observer.

Positionality: This is the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study—the community, the organization, or the participant group (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

Race: Throughout this study, I refer to *race* as a socially constructed category that has real socioeconomic effects on people of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), which has been historically used to justify social, economic, and political inequities (Frankenberg, 1999). This working definition of the term *race* is also informed by other definitions presented in scholarly works, such as the conceptualization of the term by the race historian Kendi (2019), to the description offered in the Merriam-Webster dictionary (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Kendi postulated *race* as "a power construct of collected or merged difference that lives socially" (p. 35). In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, *race* is "any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Racial Literacy: Twine's (2004) original use of the term *racial literacy* was used to describe the ways that biracial children would learn about the experiences of both races. However, the law professor Guinier (2004) expanded on the meaning of *racial literacy* on her seminal paper where she advocated for a shift from racial liberalism to racial literacy. Guinier posited *racial literacy* as the process of learning about race, which opposes the idea of a rigid, static place of knowing.

Racism: This is a pervasive system of dominance based on the belief of the racial superiority of Whites that encompasses all social institutions (DiAngelo, 2018). My broad understanding of racism is encompassed by the definition from the race historian Kendi (2019): "racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities" (pp. 17-18).

White fragility: DiAngelo (2018) coined the term *White fragility* to describe Whites' powerful means of racial social control that, in spite of the seemingly weak and defensive sensibility, is based on a sense of superiority and entitlement that protects White advantage and holds racism in place. Emotional fragility is displayed when individual privileges and identities of "good, moral people" are questioned (p. 2).

White privilege: *White privilege* is an "invisible package of unearned assets" that Whites can count on throughout their lives and gain systemic advantages over all those considered non-White (McIntosh, 1988, p. 30). According to McIntosh, this process is largely unconscious.

White supremacy: White supremacy is an ideological system that assumes the racial superiority of White people, who they consider to be the "normal" standard for humanity. White supremacy is an enduring social system of political and economic domination maintained through the systemic dissemination of ideologies proclaiming the racial superiority of White people (DiAngelo, 2018).

Whiteness: The African American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois is credited as an early precursor of the theoretical framework critical whiteness studies to analyze the depth and pervasiveness of whiteness "for the critique of dismantling of structures of white supremacy" (Owen, 2007, p. 107). Jupp et al. (2019) articulated *whiteness* as "a racial component of hegemony" (p. 6) that normalizes the White racial identity as the standard. According to Leonardo (2002), Whiteness is

a racial discourse "supported by material practices and institutions" (p. 32), characterized "by the

unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial

experience or group, the minimization of racist legacy, and other similar evasions" (p. 32).

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

"Teaching in New York City [prior to teaching at Vanguard] made me a better person—a

teacher who appreciates cultural, racial, and all kinds of diversity."

~ Dana

The empirical research I review in this chapter guided my choice of the theoretical

frameworks that undergird this dissertation study: critical pedagogy and critical whiteness

studies. This study explores the socio-cultural context of teaching and learning in light of these

frameworks. I sought to better understand how White women teachers made sense of their lived

experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students in a demographically changing

high school context. I explored the successes and challenges participants reported having as

teachers of students of Color, whether they were aware of holding racial bias and how, if at all,

their personal and professional life experiences impacted and were impacted by their students of

Color. While the lens of critical pedagogy guided my analysis of the problem of practice implied

in these questions, I relied on the tenets of critical whiteness studies to inform my exploration of

how racial ideologies relate to White women teachers' lived experiences as educators at

Vanguard (pseudonym), a racially diverse public high school on Long Island, New York. The

literature reviewed in this chapter illustrates the problem of practice I have identified through a

critical analysis of the role of race in the teacher-student relationship.

There is a growing body of research literature that highlights the successes and

challenges of White women educators in relation to their racially diverse student groups

(Bartolomé, 2004; Lewis, 2011; Michael, 2015; Picower, 2009; Ullucci, 2011; Yoon, 2011).

Likewise, there is an expanding research thread across the literature revealing how the

acquisition of racial prejudices is connected to the socialization process in U.S. society and culture, and some of this research traces it to life experiences limited to segregated neighborhoods and schools (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Kang, 2005; Lewis, 2011; Michael, 2015; Tatum, 2018; Ullucci, 2011; Yoon, 2011). While some research has focused on exposing the pervasiveness of implicit racial biases in the teacher-student relationship (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Glock, 2016; Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2016; Jussim & Harber, 2005; Warikoo et al., 2016), other research has highlighted teachers who are intentional about seeing how racial prejudice could negatively impact their students of Color and change their practices as a result of this inquiry (Bartolomé, 2004; Michael, 2015; Ullucci, 2011; Yoon, 2011).

The evidence of how systemic racism impacts the lives of people of Color in the United States and across the world is indisputable—the overwhelming racial profiling of people of Color is denounced in both mass media and social media. Likewise, there is an extensive body of literature that examines the modus operandi of racial ideologies throughout social interactions, which informed some of this work (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1999; Freire, 2000; Kendi, 2016; Leonardo, 2002; Matias, 2016; Neville, Gallardo, & Sue, 2016; Roediger, 2007; Tatum, 2018). Some of these researchers exposed how systemic racism is enacted through a number of subtle linguistic mechanisms that are acquired and expressed daily through cultural interactions (Bertrand, Perez, & Rogers, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Devine, 1989; DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1999; Leonardo, 2002; Osborne & Walker, 2006; Smith & Hung, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Tatum, 2018). In this chapter, I briefly define and explore five of these mechanisms, which I studied to make sense of participants' lived experiences as teachers of students of Color, in respect to how race plays a role in the teacher-student

relationship. These mechanisms are *White privilege* (McIntosh, 1988)*, aversive racism* (Dovidio

& Gaertner, 1986; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012), *racial microaggressions* (Sue et al., 2007), *White*

fragility (DiAngelo, 2018), and *color-blind racism* (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The research explained

how these five rhetorical mechanisms are developed and deployed to uphold racial bias. I

understood that these mechanisms often overlap or intersect to uphold the racial ideology of

White supremacy, "the all-encompassing centrality and assumed superiority of people defined

and perceived as white and the practices based on this assumption" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 28).

Through my choice of using the framework of critical whiteness studies, I turned my

gaze to the dominant discourse that maintains the privileges of Whites over all other racial

groups, rather than focusing on the otherness of people of Color as the problem at hand. The

focus on critical whiteness studies added to my exploration of teachers' racial rhetoric used to

express their successes and challenges in educating racially diverse student groups. According to

scholars of critical whiteness studies—such as W.E.B. Du Bois, the African-American

intellectual who pioneered critical whiteness studies—racism is the predominant political,

economic, and social system of domination, which is subtly disseminated through culture (i.e.,

mass media, literature, film) and broadly impact educational institutions through the

implementation of policies and curricular choices that impact the lives and education of racially

diverse student groups (Bertrand, Perez, & Rogers, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018;

Freire 2005; Goldberg, 1993; McLaren, 2017; Roediger, 2007; Tatum, 2018). In this dissertation

study, the theoretical frameworks *critical whiteness studies* and *critical pedagogy* informed my

attempt to understand how teachers made sense of racial bias in the classroom, the stated level of

awareness they have of their own racial bias, the successes and challenges they reported having

in their increasingly racially diverse classes, and if they could engage in a critical examination of

whether they acknowledge that their positionality as White female teachers impacts their Latinx, Black, and Asian students.

Oppression and Language

The framework critical pedagogy sought to offer educators a tool to disrupt all forms of oppression through intentional pedagogical choices. Through his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2000) posited that education and knowledge acquisition are necessarily processes of inquiry that must be used to oppose the *ideology of oppression* rather than to enforce it. In the field of education, Freire has been identified as "the most influential educational philosopher in the development of critical pedagogical thought and practice" (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2017, p. 5). Giroux—whose 1986 book was the first to use the term *critical pedagogy*—viewed critical pedagogy as the result of "a long historical legacy of radical social thought and progressive educational movements, which aspired to link practices of schooling to democratic principles of society and transformative social action in the interest of oppressed communities" (Darder et al., 2017, p. 2). For Darder et al. (2017), critical pedagogy is a fundamentally analytical framework in which theory and practice are inextricable, as reflection, dialogue, and action constitute the *praxis* of human life.

Critical pedagogues regard educators as catalysts of social ideologies whose daily interactions with students give them power to choose to adopt a critical problem-posing and partisan views of society in relation to all social problems, such as racism and poverty (Bartolomé, 2004; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2017; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2017; McInerney, 2009; McLaren, 2017). Following the principles of Freire's critical pedagogy, McLaren (2017) proposed that, through embodying and teaching critical thinking skills, educators can develop and expand their political consciousness, and expose the hidden curriculum of dominant

ideologies throughout their interactions with students. Critical pedagogues such as McLaren endorse the dialectical understanding of schools as sites of both domination and liberation, where educational institutions simultaneously represent the dominant ideologies of indoctrination and offer a forum for students to develop critical analytic skills and to question such ideologies.

I established the problem of practice in this dissertation study because I wanted to better understand whether the experiences reported by White women teachers differed, and whether their life or professional situations were associated with these experiences. I strove to understand whether, through sharing their ideas during the interviews, participants adopted a critical view of the components that brought their lived experiences into existence, and if they recognized the role of race in the teacher-student relationship. I explored their understandings of the underlying factors of the teaching experiences they deemed successful and challenging in educating Latinx, Black, and Asian students, and if they were critical of how their race played a role in these experiences. The lens of critical pedagogy allowed me to further explore the role of the socioeconomic, political, and cultural structures in the internalization of racial ideologies. Likewise, critical whiteness studies deepened my understanding of the role of systemic racism in the sociocultural context of teaching and learning.

The Research Problem

The research problems identified in my dissertation study stem from three major sources: the re-segregation of the schools, the teacher-student demographic disparity, and the role of racial bias in the teacher-student relationship within the sociocultural context of teaching and learning. The first research problem I identified is the re-segregation of U.S. schools by race/ethnicity and social class, which has worsened since the Civil Rights movement (Heading in the Wrong Direction, 2015; Jupp, 2020; Kozol, 2005; Logan & Stults, 2011; McCardle, Bliss, &

Grudzinski, 2018; Ravitch, 2010; Wells et al., 2009). This re-segregation has increased the educational inequities particularly endured by students of color who are often isolated in predominantly low-income Black and Latino schools, such as less access to highly qualified teachers, challenging courses, and the affluence of resources that comes with having high-income peers (Frankenberg, 2013; Mickelson, 2010; Welner & Carter, 2013). School re-segregation was found to have a profound impact on students of Color, such as their disproportionate placement in lower academic tracks (Oakes, 2005; Roda, 2015), over-identification as students in need of special education services (Fletcher & Navarrete, 2011; Skiba et al., 2008), and/or receiving harsh discipline referrals and school suspensions in comparison to their White student counterparts (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Skiba et al., 2011).

The second problem of practice underlying this study stems from the *demographic imperative*—the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparity between teachers and students throughout the U. S. educational system (Fix, Passel & De Velasco, 2005; Garcia, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009). Historically, the teaching force in this country has been composed of mostly middle-class White women teachers (McRae, 2017; NCES, n.d.; Taie & Goldring, 2020), while the majority of the student population in public school has become increasingly diverse (NCES, n.d.; Schulte, 2011; Taie & Goldring, 2020). Through her seminal research, Ladson-Billings (1994) exposed the correlation between the teacher-student demographic incongruence and the academic achievement of African American students. Thus, she advocated for educators to adopt a *culturally relevant pedagogy,* where teachers' respect for and understanding of the multiple identities (e.g., race, class, gender) would lead to the cultural integrity and academic success of their students. Likewise, Gay's (2001) poignant research that acknowledged the demographic imperative sought to improve the academic success of ethnically diverse students through

preparing teachers to adopt a *culturally responsive* teaching practice. Gay's framework posits that "when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lives experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly," leading to improved academic achievement (p. 106).

Both frameworks—culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching practices—are aligned with Freire's (2000) critical pedagogy in the sense that they expose and criticize the educational system's failure-to successfully educate African American and other ethnically diverse student groups. The educational approaches proposed by Freire (2000), Ladson-Billings (1994), and Gay (2001), seem to share the goal to foment and inform teaching practices that focus on bridging the opportunity gap between students of Color and their White counterparts, as well as to mitigate the impact of the demographic imperative on the education of students of Color. By reviewing their research literature, I understood that these approaches attempted to address the educational inequities stemming from the two major problems of practice I identified in my research: school re-segregation and the demographic imperative. I wondered how White teachers—such as my colleagues at the racially diverse school where I work as a social worker—made sense of these problems of practice and whether their success stories were related to the practice of these frameworks. In my view, these questions posed a third problem of practice, and this is where my study fits and extends prior research on this topic.

The often-overlooked problem I sought to explore through my research is what occurs inside classrooms or within the sociocultural context of teaching and learning in racially diverse schools (Carter, 2012). This dissertation study focused on one aspect of this sociocultural context: the role of racial bias in the teacher-student relationship (Picower, 2009; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010). White teachers may unintendedly enact White

supremacist ideologies through their daily micro-interactions with students (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Lewis, 2011; Leonardo, 2002; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2004; Yoon, 2016). As discussed in Chapter One, White educators often share a history of early socialization in segregated, mostly White communities, with little opportunities for developing relationships with people of Color (Frankenberg, 1999; Sleeter, 2004) and attending teacher-education programs that failed to prepare them to understand the role of race in their lives (DiAngelo, 2018). Notwithstanding, White women teachers are not a monolithic category and these scenarios certainly do not apply to every middle-class White women teacher. Indeed, some teachers may have had personal experiences with race and discrimination based on their other identities (e.g. due to inter-racial marriage or adoption), which most likely informed their perspectives on race and led them to become equity advocates. Nevertheless, educated, well-intentioned, progressive Americans who identify as White and middle class could spend most of their lives unaware of, or ambivalent about the social inequities endured by people of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018).

DiAngelo (2018) used the concept of *saliency* to explore the intersecting social positionalities that may be relevant to an individual at any given time when one of the identities becomes more relevant than others. In this study, when referring to White women teachers, I share Jupp, Berry, and Lensmire's (2016) view of their identities "as a complex and multidimensional social-historical construction that should not be reduced or essentialized to one of its characteristics or dimensions" (p. 1154). I also acknowledge that the juxtaposition of race and gender does not do justice to the complexities of the numerous identities of White women teachers. Nevertheless, I have chosen to focus on the salience of this juxtaposition of race and gender because White women teachers represent the largest group of the teaching force in the

United States (Warren & Hancock, 2017), and many of them are teaching in schools and classrooms that are predominantly inhabited by low-income students of Color (NCES, 2008).

The participants in this study—teachers at Vanguard High School—filled out a brief demographic questionnaire before the start of the focus groups and identified their name, age, gender, ethnicity, race, number of years teaching, subject area, place of birth, languages spoken, and schools attended from elementary to higher education. Long Island has the highest median income for school teachers in New York, which indicates that teachers at Vanguard were most likely to be middle-class in contrast to their students of Color (Colvin et al., 2013). As explained in detail in Chapter One, I have chosen to combine the constructs of race and socioeconomic status, due to their historical intersection in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2017; Tatum, 2018; Yoon, 2016). Today, in the United States, the racial category *White* mostly consists of White-skin individuals of European descent, who hold a privileged position in the country's-racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Although race is a construct and not a biological characteristic—albeit it has real consequences for the lives of people of Color—whiteness does not encompass all the intersections and life experiences of those who identify-as White. Furthermore, many White teachers may have had past life experiences and current family compositions that led to the development of race and class consciousness, and they may dedicate themselves to help students of Color succeed (Michael, 2015; Ullucci, 2011).

At Vanguard High School, most teachers are White women, and more than half of their pupils are Latinx, Black, or Asian. The teacher-student demographic at Vanguard is aligned with the national demographic trend where the majority of public school teachers are White women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). The research literature in this chapter highlights

the contrasting successes and challenges of White women teachers educating students of Color and what their perceptions and expectations of these student subgroups revealed. Following the lead of other researchers based on the literature review, I chose the theoretical framework of critical whiteness studies to guide the analysis of how Vanguard's White women teachers made sense of their relationships with Latinx, Black, and Asian students. However, this study's unique approach to the topic is by combining the lens offered by critical whiteness studies with the framework critical pedagogy. Chapter Four adds the framework of color-blind racism to assist in the data analysis.

The Context of the Study

My dissertation study was conducted at Vanguard (pseudonym), a suburban high school located on Long Island, New York. This racially diverse high school stands in contrast to Nassau and Suffolk counties that make up Long Island, which is considered one of the most racially segregated regions in the US (Heading in the Wrong Direction, 2015; Logan & Stults, 2011). My sample of White women teachers consisted of participants who—with the exception of one participant—grew up on Long Island. Additionally, one White man was assigned by the school to participate in one focus group, and I allowed for this exception because removing him could have caused unnecessary discomfort for the other participants. The sample of my study represents a pattern within the national demographic composition of teachers in public schools— teachers who are likely to come from the middle class and to have attended their local, segregated, predominantly White schools (Frankenberg, 2009). According to research conducted by the regional organization Erase Racism, school segregation on Long Island has remained high for African Americans and has increased for Latinx and Asians since 2010 (Heading in the Wrong Direction, 2015).

In 2018, Vanguard registered around 2,000 students from grades 9 through 12. Data from the New York State Education Department (n.d.) revealed that more than half of the student population fall in the racial/ethnic categories of Hispanic or Latinx (the largest ethnic group); Black or African American; or American Indian, Alaska native, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, or Multiracial. As explained in Chapter One, I chose to refer to these three groups as Latinx, Black, and Asian, and I use the terminology *students of Color* interchangeably with *Latinx, Black, and Asian students*. The racial/ethnic composition of the school staff was not published on the websites from Vanguard or the New York State Education Department. However, during a preliminary meeting with the school's assistant principal, Dr. Turner (pseudonym), confirmed that most of the teachers at Vanguard are White women.

In the spring of 2018—perhaps as an effort to help teachers adapt to the changing demographics in the high school—the Vanguard school administration established a partnership with a local organization to offer training on cultural proficiency to 10 teachers in a series of four, 1.5-hour-long meetings throughout the year. These 10 teachers were invited by the school administration to participate in this group and to subsequently share their knowledge with all school staff through professional development sessions that took place in December 2018. I was not able to gather details regarding the selection of these teachers for participating in the training. My liaison at Vanguard, Dr. Turner, invited me to attend the final implicit bias workshop as an observer in October 2018. The 1.5-hour-long workshop introduced the participants to the topic of implicit bias, how it conceals ideologies, its impact on teacher expectations, and how it can be neutralized to minimize prejudice in the school setting.

The Purpose, Research Questions, and Theoretical Frameworks

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine how teachers make sense of

the problem of implicit bias in the teacher-student relationship, the level of awareness they have

of their own racial biases in the classroom, and what successes and challenges they experience as

educators of racially diverse students. The overarching research question that will guide this

study and the two sub-questions were the following:

1. How do White women teachers describe their lived experiences as educators of Latinx,

Black, and Asian students in a demographically changing high school context?

1a. What successes and challenges do they report having in their increasingly

racially diverse classrooms?

1b. How, if at all, did their personal and professional life experiences impact and

were impacted by their relationships with Latinx, Black, and Asian students?

My dissertation contributed to the research literature by extending what is already known

about the role racial bias has on White teachers' relationships with their students of Color. By

using the theoretical lens of critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies, I attempted to make

sense of the lived experiences of White women educators teaching racially diverse student

groups at Vanguard High School. The next sections in this chapter examine the themes that cut

across the research literature related to critical pedagogy and to critical whiteness studies. I detail

each of these frameworks and establish the foundation for my research design and data analysis.

First, I explain how critical pedagogy informed my understanding of racial bias as the product of

the ideological subscriptions of an oppressive political agenda for social control disseminated

through educational institutions. Second, in light of what has been identified in the literature, I

explore how critical whiteness studies informed my analysis of the insidious ways in which the

White supremacy ideology is deployed, and racial bias is expressed. Third, I will review three

research studies that informed my dissertation study and conclude with a summary of how the main ideas reviewed in this chapter guide the following phases of my study.

Critical Pedagogy

The historians of critical pedagogy, Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2017), traced the origins of the framework to the seminal writings of pioneer education leaders and philosophers of the early 19th century. The authors proposed that the early works of the critical pedagogy pioneers expressed concerns and hopes for a multi-dimensional and democratic public education. Darder, Baltodano, and Torres explained that the term *critical pedagogy* first appeared in a textbook published by the education philosopher Henry Giroux in 1983. Giroux (2017) established a connection between critical pedagogy and critical theory, a theoretical framework that originated in Germany in 1923. Philosophers of the German *School of Frankfurt* posed critical theory as a dialectical method for interrogating society's contradictions. Giroux's (2017) conceptualization of critical pedagogy was influenced by the work of the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, who posed that the central value of critical theory was to explore the economic and cultural-social structures that sustain inequities related to race and class (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2017). Giroux (2017) called for a critical investigation of "the world of objective appearances to expose the underlying social relationships they often conceal" (p. 31).

Following the tenets of the Frankfurt School, critical pedagogy proposes a thorough analysis of the professed ideals of educational institutions vis-à-vis the de facto dynamics of power and interests that sustain educational inequities. This framework poses a view of society as "a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege" (McLaren, 2017, p. 56). For critical pedagogues, a dialectical analysis of education presupposes that social problems are not merely isolated events of individuals or deficiencies in the social structure. Instead, they

are the result "of the interactive context between individual and society" (McLaren, 2017, p. 56). The critical pedagogy perspective offers the opportunity to envision White teachers as social agents holding the power to disrupt the system of oppression within the segregated and unequal political, economic, and social spheres of schools and larger society.

Critical pedagogy provided me with a framework to make sense of the dynamic interplay of the power structures and the racial ideologies that produced and maintain cultural, political, and socioeconomic mechanisms related to education inequities, especially through unexamined racial bias. Through the lens of critical pedagogy, educational institutions are seen as a microcosm of the larger society, working as sites of dissemination of culture through pedagogical choices. Educators act as the gatekeepers of educational institutions (Michael, 2015) and may inadvertently help to enforce the dominant sociopolitical *hidden curriculum*—the collection of "the attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge that are covertly or unintentionally learned through the schooling process" (Haddad, 2014, para. 1). The education philosopher Paulo Freire (1921-1997) contributed to the development of the tenets of critical pedagogy to oppose the oppression of the systems of power and privilege and, instead, to educate for social justice (McLaren, 2017). As a microcosm of the larger society, educational institutions function as historical representations of the structural system of inequities exemplified by the existence of opportunity gaps between White students and students of Color, a phenomenon that has been extensively reported by the research literature (Ferreira & Gignoux, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Welner & Carter, 2013).

Some White teachers may feel trapped in a dialectical dilemma, in much need of learning to become critical consumers of the ideologies that they unquestionably reproduce, while paradoxically holding altruistic intentions to teach all children regardless of their racial

background. Freire (2005) reasoned that, like their pupils, teachers are also learners and must

commit to the love for others and the process implied in teaching with "joy, rigor, […] physical,

emotional and affective preparation" (p. 5). Throughout this research, I intended to hold Freire's

advice to heart, keeping the learner stance and nurturing the commitment to the love of others,

which I share with all teachers I interviewed. Through my quest to understand White women

teachers' lived experiences as educators of students of Color, I applied myself with joy and rigor,

and I hope that my study will contribute to the body of literature focused on engaging educators

to promote educational equity for all students, regardless of their race and other demographic

characteristics.

Individualism, Meritocracy, and the Whiteness Habitus

Critical pedagogy denounces that racism and poverty are often mistaken for individual

problems rather than stemming from a social structure that is the product of an economic,

political, and cultural system of domination and social control (McLaren, 2017). In alignment

with the critical pedagogy lens, DiAngelo (2018) argued that ideologies of individualism and

meritocracy are disseminated by distorted representations of people of Color, while whiteness is

perceived as the human ideal. For DiAngelo, the focus on individualism diverts the attention

from the real social issue, which is systemic racism. She explained that individualism mistakenly

suggests that "there are no intrinsic barriers to individual success" (p. 10), so that if people of

Color live in poverty, this problem is ascribed to individual character flaws rather than to

systemic racism and White supremacy.

The sociologist Bonilla-Silva (2018) revealed that a closer and critical analysis of the

color-blind racist rhetoric—the post-civil rights racial grammar that denies the existence of race

or racial bias (see Chapter One for a thorough definition)—exposes the ideological belief of

Whites of their superiority over all other races. Whether the color-blind racist discourse

expresses racial bias through implicit or explicit means, it is always employed to protect the

unearned privileges and property of Whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The color-blind racism lens is

aligned with critical whiteness studies in the sense that both theoretical frameworks intend to

trouble and dismantle White supremacy (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017). I used the lens

offered by the critical whiteness studies to guide my conceptualization of the problem of practice

and the study design of this dissertation, but I saw the need to add the framework color-blind

racism and its four frames to analyze the data I collected (discussed in Chapter Four).

Critical Whiteness Studies

The body of literature that informs the theoretical framework critical whiteness studies

proposes turning the gaze to critical race studies and how White hegemony is constructed,

produced, and maintained. Instead of focusing on the *racial other*—non-Whites—critical

whiteness studies seek to analyze the *racial normal* or *standard*—Whites—and how racism

elevates them (DiAngelo, 2018). Far from being a new concept, whiteness was originally

conceptualized, denounced, and written about for decades by the African American intellectual

W. E. B. DuBois, as "a social and institutional status and identity imbued with legal, political,

economic, and social rights and privileges that are denied to others" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 24). In

other words, whiteness represents the ideology undergirding all aspects of the lived experiences

according to beliefs in the superiority of Whites (Picower, 2009), and critical whiteness studies

examines the *habitus* of White supremacy and how Whites impose the micro and macro aspects

of the racialized social order (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Frankenberg, 1999; Michael, 2015).

The anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (2005) conceptualized *habitus* as a deep mental

structure acquired through the repetitive messages that are internalized through the cultural

process of socialization. Applied to whiteness, the concept of *habitus* can be used to understand how White supremacist ideologies are generative of all thoughts and behaviors that are often unexamined, unquestioned, and reproduced. Shome's (2000) review of the literature that contributed to the establishment of critical whiteness studies as a theoretical framework summarized whiteness as an institutionalized, systemic social problem that is often unseen and, therefore, perpetually maintained through "the everyday, unquestioned racialized social relations that have acquired a seeming normativity" (p. 366). The framework of critical whiteness studies attempts to deconstruct the masked racial rhetoric of the status quo and the invisibility of White supremacist beliefs by noticing and questioning how it functions and is maintained as an enduring social force. In general, critical whiteness studies intends to make explicit the often-implicit White supremacy ideologies that led to the development of rhetorical mechanisms such as color-blind racism. Rather than being a localized ideology within the United States, whiteness has a profound global impact. It is promoted worldwide as "the ideal for humanity well beyond the West" and disseminated through mass media representations, motion pictures, advertising, missionary work, historical colonial relations, education, and through a variety of other means of mass communication (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 29). For DiAngelo, the sociopolitical domination of whiteness keeps it largely unnoticed by Whites and by other racial groups as well, as the failure to acknowledge White supremacism is the key to ensure its survival.

The Pedagogy of Whiteness

Critical whiteness studies examine the problem of racism as an all-pervasive systemic phenomenon that dominates all social institutions, including education. Scholars in the field of education have historically identified racism as an endemic racial ideology and a key organizing system for inequality in schools (Ladson-Billings, 2012; Lewis, 2011; Picower, 2009; Zirkel,

2005). One way that whiteness is transmitted in schools is through the curriculum and daily pedagogical choices, as well as through student sorting and uneven access to educational experiences via tracking and ability grouping (Oakes, 2005). For example, Lewis' (2011) ethnographic research with White teachers in urban and suburban schools examined how race shapes social experience and educational outcomes. Lewis' work showed that schools are presumed to be neutral instructional sites that merely transmit useful knowledge, "functioning as the 'great equalizer'" (p. 4). However, schools have been found to reproduce the existing social order and perpetuate existing social inequities, such as by enforcing the ideology of meritocracy and proclaiming that success and failure are determined by the students' merit (DiAngelo, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Lewis, 2011; McLaren, 2017; Picower, 2009; Zirkel, 2005). For Lewis, understanding the role of race in education is paramount because racism shapes social experience and educational outcomes. She argued that learning about how whiteness ideologies reproduce racist practices in education must be the main focus of education research.

Through the lens of critical whiteness studies, white supremacy is the unseen cultural norm that position Whites as the ideal, shift the focus to the problems created by racism, and challenge the sociopolitical system's complicity and investment of the protection of Whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1999; Leonardo, 2002). While whiteness employs a colorblind rhetoric—allegedly intended to ward off racism by arguing that naming race is a racist act—critical whiteness studies acknowledge and denounces instances where structural racism hides in plain site (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). The critical study of whiteness intends to expose the processes in which the White supremacist ideology was subtly internalized through unquestioned exposure to culture, inadvertently filtered into consciousness, and later disseminated by linguistic maneuvers through daily micro-interactions (Michael, 2015).

In the next section, I briefly explain five mechanisms associated with the whiteness rhetoric, commonly used to conceal the endorsement of White supremacist ideologies—White privilege (McIntosh, 1988), aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012), racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007), White fragility (DiAngelo, 2018), and color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The research literature that reported these instruments of whiteness hegemony was paramount for my development of racial literacy and informed how I conceptualized and conducted my dissertation study.

White privilege. McIntosh's (1988) research reported on the existence of an interlocking system of social hierarchies that privileges men over women and Whites over non-Whites. For McIntosh, *White privilege* is an "invisible package of unearned assets," which Whites can count on throughout their lives and gain systemic advantages over all those considered non-White (p. 30). McIntosh acknowledged that this process is largely unconscious and—in her seminal paper titled "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"—she described how, through adopting a critical approach to understand the role of male privilege, she was able to conceptualize how White privilege awarded her the role of oppressor as "an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture" (p. 31). The privileges awarded to Whites are often unearned, accrued without their knowledge through the social value placed on white skin color, hair texture, nose shapes, and other characteristics, which are extended to other racial groups that approximate these characteristics (Leonardo, 2004).

The discussion of White privileges has spread throughout the society and, although it can trigger *White fragility* (discussed below), it has become an integral part of academic and colloquial discussions about race. However, the commonplace use of this terminology may reinforce racism rather than oppose it. Two research articles, the first by Leonardo (2004) and

the second by Lensmire et al. (2013), explored how discussions of White privilege can collude with racial hegemony. Leonardo recognized that although McIntosh (1992) and other scholars who focused on discussions of White privilege were concerned with the meaning and impact of whiteness on everyday life, the discussions of White privilege "has pushed critical pedagogy into directions that account for the experiences of the 'oppressor' identity" (p. 137). Leonardo (2004) proposed that without a rigorous examination of White supremacy, the discussion of "the state of being dominant" will neglect the "processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it" (p. 137). Leonardo warned that "the discourse on privilege comes with the unfortunate consequence of masking history, obfuscating agents of commination, and removing the action that make it clear who is doing what to them" (p. 138). Similar to Leonardo's critique of the limitations inherent to discussions of White privileges, Lensmire et al. (2013) posed that "McIntosh's seminal 'knapsack' article acts as a synecdoche, or as a stand-in, for all the antiracist work to be done in teacher education and that this limits our understanding and possibilities for action" (p. 410).

 Aversive racism. As in White privilege, aversive racism results from the lack of understanding of implicit bias (DiAngelo, 2018). Aversive racism is characterized by Whites who hold egalitarian values, while simultaneously maintaining ambivalent racist feelings toward Blacks and other people of Color. This implicit mechanism of racial bias was described by Gaertner and Dovidio (2012) as "a subtle, often unintentional form of bias that characterizes many well-intentioned White Americans who possess strong egalitarian values and who believe that they are nonprejudiced" (p. 3). The authors explained that negative racial feelings and beliefs are developed through the process of socialization and the unintentional discrimination is a hallmark of aversive racism. People who have aversive racism attempt to justify their racist

behavior on the basis of factors other than race, by maintaining a non-prejudiced self-image while inadvertently engaging in discrimination. Instead of displaying open hostility or hate towards people of Color, their reactions involve discomfort, uneasiness, disgust, and sometimes fear. Aversive racists find Blacks 'aversive,' while, at the same time, they "find any suggestion that they might be prejudiced 'aversive' as well" (p. 3). Aversive racists are aware that holding racial prejudices is bad, but they are mostly unaware that they engage in prejudiced actions.

Racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are the brief and commonplace conscious or unconscious daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental expressions of hostile, derogatory insults toward people of Color (Sue et al., 2007). Through this predominantly unconscious form of racism, White supremacist ideologies are subtly expressed in the forms of "microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation" toward people of Color (p. 271). Sue and his colleagues highlighted that the deployment of racial microaggression is often undetected by Whites who hold a position of power, such as mental health practitioners. As representatives and gatekeepers of the educational system, educators may hold a position of power that is similar to clinicians.

White fragility. DiAngelo (2018) argued that Whites are socialized into a sense of superiority and that—whether consciously or unconsciously—they tend to display emotional fragility when their individual privileges and identities as "good, moral people" are questioned (p. 2). DiAngelo coined the term *White fragility* to describe Whites' powerful means of racial social control that, in spite of the seemingly weak and defensive sensibility, is based on a sense of superiority and entitlement that protects White advantage and holds racism in place. Through her experience as a professor of education and as a diversity trainer for over 20 years, DiAngelo noticed that Whites often display resentment and disinterest in learning about the "complex

social dynamic" of racism (p. 2). DiAngelo also noticed that Whites' expression of anger toward

people of Color may be fueled by their isolation from and ignorance of how racism still

oppresses African Americans in the United States.

   Color-blind racism. The sociologist Bonilla-Silva (2000) posed color-blind racism as a

widely employed rhetorical maneuver to conceal the undergirding endorsement to White

supremacy. According to Bonilla-Silva's research posed that the color-blind rhetoric became

prominent after the Jim Crow and the Civil Rights eras when overt and blatant racism was no

longer endorsed by most Whites and it is an example of the adaptability of White supremacist

ideologies to the modern-day culture. The colorblind discourse uses a myriad of rhetorical

mechanisms that claim neutrality about race through seemingly harmless arguments that deny the

existence or relevance of race or racial bias. It is based on the premise that if Color is not seen,

then racism cannot exist, and that speaking of racial matters equals to upholding racist views

(DiAngelo, 2018). The main characteristic of the color-blind rhetoric is to employ linguistic

maneuvers denying that racism still exists, while circumventing the ample evidence of racism in

today's society (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

   In his seminal book titled *Racism Without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva (2018) examined sets of

qualitative data interviews and identified four major rhetorical styles that "whites use to explain,

rationalize, and defend their racial interests" (2012, p. 192). The first frame of color-blind

racism, *abstract liberalism*, illustrates the use of abstract language, often out of context, to

explain racism. The rhetorical styles of this frame oppose directly opposes addressing racial

inequity and instead resorts to the language of liberalism to convey morality (e.g., arguments

based on the free market ideology, equal opportunity, or choice individualism). The second

frame, *naturalization*, suggests that racial phenomena are natural occurrences that can be

explained away (e.g., segregation is a natural development common to all races). *Cultural racism*, the third frame, commits to culturally based arguments to justify the racial status quo (e.g., Mexicans dismiss the value of education, or Blacks have too many babies). The fourth and last frame, *minimization of racism,* disregards racism, defending that discrimination no longer impacts the lives of minority groups (e.g., admitting that racism exists but that it is better than in the past, or making things look racial when they are not).

The next section reviews three recent studies that examined the everyday practice of White educators in regard to how their racial ideologies impacted their successes and challenges while teaching students of Color. This chapter concludes by restating (a) the relevance of the critical frameworks that have informed my theoretical conceptualization of the problem of *implicit racial bias* in educational institutions, (b) the importance of the literature reviewed for this study, and (c) how these bodies of literature supported the present research.

White Women Teachers and Students of Color

There is a considerable body of research literature on middle-class, White, women teachers as educators of students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Bartolomé, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Lewis, 2011; Michael, 2015; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2004; Ullucci, 2011; Yoon, 2011). While reviewing the literature, my attention was particularly drawn to three studies conducted in the past decade. In each of these studies, at least one aspect became salient to my own inquiry and inspired this research. In the following pages, I briefly review these studies and explore how each juxtaposes my research goals. The first is the dissertation study conducted by Yoon (2011), which provided examples of teachers who succeeded and who were challenged while educating students of Color. The second is Michael's (2015) year-long study published in her book *Raising Race Questions.* Michael conducted a

study *with,* rather than *on,* teachers about their journey to make sense of their own racial

identities in the hopes of strengthening the relationship with their students of Color. The third is

Ullucci's (2011) qualitative study that presents a positive take on White teachers' successful

relationships with their students of Color and their movement toward developing racial literacy.

The teacher participant quote I used to introduce this Chapter Two illustrates Ullucci's view on

how teachers can learn from their relationships with students of Color. All three studies

emphasized the importance of White teachers' understanding of their own racial identity before

they can make connections with students of Color, how they talk about race in the classroom,

and how they can support students developing their own racial identities.

The Collective Construction of Middle-Class White Womanhood

Yoon's (2011) qualitative case-study research culminated in three separate articles, which

comprised her dissertation study. She investigated how race, class, and gender operate in the

daily experiences of middle-class White women. She sought to make sense of how low-income

students of Color still underperformed despite multiple interventions to promote educational

equity in the schools that she researched. Yoon's interviews with White women teachers focused

on the "tensions that might be revealed from the perspective of the politics of race, class, and

gender," by inquiring about the nature of the culture they produced during their interactions with

one another, and between themselves and their students of Color (p. 7). The ultimate goal of

Yoon's study was to explore the underlying racial assumptions of middle-class White women

teachers, which guided their behaviors—monitoring students and socializing with their

colleagues—and how the ideologies they revealed maintained or represented middle-class White

privilege.

Yoon's (2011) analysis of how middle-class White women teachers shared meanings and constructed narratives about their students of Color resulted from the qualitative data collected over five-month ethnographic observations of two focal teachers and from the written work of a third educator. The findings of her research with the two teachers were presented in two different articles as case studies, which described how teachers' narratives are often based on stereotyped assumptions about low-income students of Color, reproducing the ideologies of social structures that perpetuate White privilege. Included in Yoon's dissertation was a third article, written to contrast with the first two articles. This third article presented a conceptual exploration of the written work of a White woman teacher, Vivian Paley, whom she identified as being well known for challenging the distance between students and teachers. Yoon's analysis of Paley's teaching offered a counterpoint to the first two articles of her study by challenging the norms of classroom climate and emphasizing the possibility, feasibility, and importance of teachers becoming the facilitators of "a humanizing education imagination" (p. 23).

My study differed from Yoon's (2011) research on various aspects (i.e., the purpose of the study, the methodology used, and how the data was analyzed) but intersected with her study in other areas. Like Yoon, my inquiry was motivated by my role as a participant-observer at my job in a public school. Our studies share the choice of critical Whiteness studies as a framework through which we explored how racial ideologies are connected and expressed through the whiteness discourse. However, unlike Yoon, I relied on a second framework—critical pedagogy—to explore how, if at all, teachers' stories of challenges and successes in teaching non-White students accounted for the role of racism in their education and whether they were critical about how their relationships with students of Color impacted them. Also, while Yoon

used case study as the method for data collection, my research methodology was phenomenology.

White Teachers' Racial Identity Inquiry

In her book *Raising Race Questions,* Ali Michael (2015) revealed two sets of data she collected in two different action research studies. The largest portion of her book revealed the process and the product of her ethnographic fieldwork research on six White teachers who volunteered to participate in her year-long inquiry forum to explore the participants' questions on race and racism. Throughout her ethnographic research, Michael's role included leading the inquiry process as well as being a participant-observer in the group. Participants in this study were White teachers with different positionalities (i.e., gender, marital status, religion, and sexual preference). The main focus of Michael's study was "to convey the complex interplay of the intention and impact, the dynamics and context behind each question" (p. 2) about race posed by the participants in the inquiry group.

Michael's (2015) research approach utilized inquiry circles in which the researcher's observations were guided by the teachers' concerns. According to Michael, her collaboration with the teachers was complicated by the fact that the teachers were not aware of their racial illiteracy "they couldn't know what they didn't know" (p. 143). After each classroom observation, the participants in the study requested that Michael share her expert feedback with each of them. During follow-up interviews, Michael also asked teachers about the "pedagogic and curricular choices they made throughout the year and to explain changes they made," insisting that they vocalize the questions they had gathered throughout the meetings (p. 143). While looking for answers to their individual questions, as well as to the questions of other

participants, Michaels marked each teacher's progress through a process of continuous, deeper

inquiry so they could develop a positive racial identity.

In her final analysis, Michael (2015) demonstrated that racial competence can be learned.

She argued that the goal of race inquiry is to make teachers, students, classrooms, and schools

"more whole" (p. 2). Nevertheless, Michael's conclusions in her second data set revealed that

while some teachers in one school setting continued and progressed on their race inquiry as a

group, other teachers in a secondary school setting did not show signs of commitment to

promoting racial equity. Michael speculated that this disparity indicated a process where some

teachers undermined the development of *a culture of shift*. She emphasized that the development

of a positive racial identity requires engaging in courageous dialogues about race, which will

support the positive racial identity necessary for encouraging students to develop their own racial

identity.

One of the main intersections between Michael's (2015) research and my dissertation

study is a benign view of teachers who have a challenging job that requires them "to make

hundreds of decisions on any given day" (p. 8). I have also adopted Michael's stance of choosing

to view teachers as learners, landing in a broad spectrum of awareness about the impact of race

on their lives and on their students' lives regarding various levels of racial literacy. Michael's

explanation of the inquiry impasse was based on the *Johari Window* model—a tool created by

the cognitive psychologists Luft and Ingham (1950) for self-knowledge—which presents four

modes of knowing things. Michael summarized the four steps of the Johari Window as "(1)

things we know we know; (2) things we don't know we know; (3) things we know we don't

know; and (4) things we don't know we don't know" (p. 28). The fourth step—things we don't

know we don't know—is key to understanding the role of White supremacist ideologies on what

Michael called "the tragic misalignment of the *intention* of the teacher […] and the *impact* […] on the students and their parents" (p. 1). Although my study was informed by Michael's study, rather than focusing on the White teachers' intention versus the impact on their students of Color, I focused on making sense of the lived experiences participants reported; their perceived successes and challenges as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students; and their views of whether their personal and professional experiences impacted their relationships with these student groups.

Learning to See Race

Kerri Ullucci's (2011) study of six exceptional White teachers and their racial identity development investigated how they learned about race, class, and diversity, and how their personal stories shaped their race consciousness. Ullucci's goal was to understand what creates the difference between teachers who "understand that schools are not neutral, and that racism is not simply a historical issue" (p. 562), versus those who "openly resent or dismiss entirely discussions of race" (p. 561). More precisely, Ullucci's study sought to identify the experiences that create "diversity-conscious" White teachers.

The relevance of Ullucci's research to my dissertation study is that we share the view of White teachers as navigating a spectrum of diversity consciousness, or *racial literacy*. However, unlike Ullucci, I chose to adopt the term *racial literacy*. The term was originally coined by the sociologist Twine (2004) to describe how parents of biracial children in the United Kingdom approached learning about the experiences of the other race. However, I decided to use the definition of *racial literacy* used by Guinier (2003), who expanded the meaning of the term. According to Guinier, racial literacy describes the interactive process through which the understanding of "race functions as a tool of diagnosis, feedback and assessment" (p. 115).

Ullucci's (2011) study and my study fall within the category of second-wave of White teacher identity studies—the recent research trend that highlight White teachers' various degrees of knowledge about how race, racism, and social class impact teaching and learning (Jupp et al., 2016). In contrast, the first wave of White teacher identity studies provided a substantial and necessary critique of the demographic imperative in teacher education but failed to move from the critical stance and explore ways to address the racial literacy deficits of teachers. Ullucci's research focused on unpacking the lived experiences of White teachers who were successful in teaching and connecting with students of Color. Ullucci's qualitative interviews attempted to make sense of teachers' perceptions of what it took to be successful—the factors that shaped their ability to connect with and help students of Color thrive. According to Ullucci, by unpacking teachers' success stories researchers may gain awareness of the components that shape successful teachers, broadening the understanding of individuals whose characteristics make them best suited to teach diverse student groups. Furthermore, Ullucci argued that these stories represent the missing voices of successful White teachers in the research literature.

This study echoes Ullucci's (2011) emphasis on the importance of reporting teacher triumphs, especially in times when teachers are often unfairly blamed for the education gaps that result from influences outside of school or top-down policies like standardized testing (Giroux, 2003; Sleeter, 2008). Teachers sometimes become the target for criticism of the poor performance and alienation of students, particularly low-income students of Color, and are blamed for the failure of the political agenda that sponsor the current emphasis on narrow student outcome measures (Giroux, 2003). Highlighting the work of educators who succeed at educating students of Color, in spite of the systemic obstacles that often maintain racial disparities in

schools, could contribute to a better understanding of how educators can be critical of the pedagogy of oppression and oppose educational inequities.

Ullucci's (2011) research was part of a larger study on six White teachers' take on multiculturalism. She reported on a set of three extensive interviews conducted with exceptional teachers selected by school administrators in two urban schools with predominantly low-income students of Color. Ullucci was not interested in the pre-service influences on these teachers but on their experiences before and after their teacher training in schools of education. The interviews focused on inquiring about teachers' stories of how, when, and where their experiences informed their privilege, bias, difference, and their enactment on educational spheres.

The three participants Ullucci chose to highlight in her article represented a positive example of when teachers recognized the importance of having shared life experiences with people of Color, the value and function of equity in their community, and the lessons learned through their personal struggles. The participants' perception of diversity was informed by reality, rather than created from unchallenged assumptions, and they were cognizant of how injustices impacted the lives of people of Color. Ullucci emphasized that these teachers did not rely on using the colorblind discourse pretending "that race issues are dated and not relevant" (p. 575) but on true empathy for others, stemming from their personal experiences of being marginalized throughout their lives. Ullucci's study ultimately indicated that when teachers are able to remain aware of their unconscious assumptions and of the challenging life experiences that all persons are likely to experience throughout their lives, they are more likely to succeed in educating all students equitably. Ullucci's study inspired my research to encounter teachers whose lives shaped and informed their successful experiences in educating students of Color.

Ullucci's (2011) study fomented my inquiry of the role of personal and professional experiences of White teachers who were successful in educating students of Color; how this success could be described; and what participants meant by successfully teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students. These questions have guided the literature review of my dissertation study. I share Ullucci's altruistic curiosity to unravel and closely examine the experiences and mental processes of White women teachers who have learned to see the role of race and class in the lives and education of their low-income students of Color. Perhaps the close examination of teachers' lived experiences through research that falls within Jupp et al.'s (2016) proposed category of second-wave White teacher identity studies can offer directions toward bridging the demographic gap between White women educators and students of Color through racial literacy development.

Conclusion

This chapter described how the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies, in addition to the research literature I reviewed, guided the inquiry of how White women teachers described their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students in the demographically changing context of Vanguard High School. Both frameworks informed how I approached the problems of practice I identified; the re-segregation of schools in the United States, the demographic imperative, and the role of racial bias in the teacher-student relationship. The juxtaposition of these three problems of practice guided my conceptualization and design of this dissertation study. My chosen research design is discussed in Chapter Three, along with a detailed description of how I conceptualized and conducted this qualitative phenomenological study at Vanguard High School.

Chapter Three

Research Design and Methodology

"The reality is that they'd [students of Color] have a much more difficult time

getting the services that I was fortunate enough to be able to get,

just because of my connections in general"

~ Teresa

This chapter delineateas the research methodology I used to conduct this qualitative phenomenological study at Vanguard High School (pseudonym), located on Long Island, New York. My ontological approach derived from two theoretical frameworks: critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies. Through these lenses, I explored the socio-cultural context of teaching and learning and how White women teachers made sense of their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. More precisely, I sought to closely examine what racial ideologies participants' rhetoric unintendedly revealed through their shared experiences of successes and challenges, and whether they would engage in a critical discussion of how their personal and professional life experiences impacted and were impacted by their relationships with students of Color. Through conducting the three interview series—one focus group and two individual interviews—I attempted to make sense of their experiences in light of the research problems I identified and sought to address by conducting this dissertation study.

Research Literature

The literature review in Chapter Two informed how I conceptualized the problems of practice that contribute to educational inequities. I explored how the critical lenses of pedagogy and whiteness studies have informed the undergirding sociopolitical, economic, and cultural forces that play a role in sustaining implicit and explicit racial bias. Through adopting these

lenses for a critical view of the racialized social systems put forth by educational institutions, I

turned my research gaze to the dominant discourse that maintains the privileges of Whites over

all other racial groups. The focus on the framework critical whiteness study adds to my

exploration of teachers' racial tropes, which express the unconscious beliefs that influence their

successes and challenges in educating racially diverse student groups. Critical whiteness studies

work in tandem with the critical pedagogical examination of how the dominant White

supremacist ideologies may influence the racial ideologies underlying the socio-linguistic

manifestations of implicit racial biases.

Some researchers have suggested that White teachers may act as unintentional catalysts

of White supremacist ideologies of the broader American sociopolitical and economic system

through their daily micro-interactions with students (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Jupp

et al., 2019; Leonardo, 2002; Lewis, 2011; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2004; Yoon, 2016). A large

number of White educators—including participants in this study—are likely to have grown up in

segregated, mostly White communities and to have had limited relationships with people of

Color. Many may have attended teacher-education programs that did not prioritize learning about

the unique perspectives and life experiences of people of Color, or to engage in critical

discussions on the topic of race (Bartolomé, 2004; DiAngelo, 2018; Sleeter, 2001). These

scenarios certainly do not apply to every middle-class White female teacher. Indeed, some

teachers may have had personal experiences with race and discrimination based on their other

identities (e.g., due to a past history of poverty, inter-racial marriage, or child adoption), which

most likely informed their perspectives on race and led them to become equity advocates.

Nevertheless, educated, well-intentioned, progressive Americans who identify as White and

middle class could spend most of their lives oblivious to or ambivalent about the social inequities endured by people of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018).

The Research Problems

The research problems identified for this dissertation study were informed by my review of the literature and stem from three major sources—the re-segregation of schools in the United States, the demographic imperative, and the role of racial bias in the teacher-student relationship. This third and overlooked research problem is the focus of my study. In this chapter, I explain how I tailored my study to explore the shared racial ideologies of women educators who identify as White. My study was conducted with White women teachers at Vanguard High School, situated on Long Island, New York. Long Island has the highest median income in New York, which indicates that teachers at Vanguard are most likely to be middle class (Colvin, Klingel, Boehme, & Donovan, 2013). As detailed in Chapter One, throughout this study, I have chosen to combine the constructs of race and socioeconomic status, due to their historical intersections in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2017; Tatum, 2018; Yoon, 2016). The three largest student populations at Vanguard High School were Latinx, Black, and Asian.

My Research Problem

The research problem emerged from my work experiences as a school social worker. Throughout my career, I listened to Latinx, Black, and Asian students, who frequently relied on the privacy of our clinical meetings to report the negative and pervasive impact of racial bias in their lives as students. Listening to their stories, I learned that although they sought my assistance to better cope with emotional problems that required clinical intervention (e.g., racial stress, anxiety, stereotype threat, depression, low self-esteem), oftentimes, the root of their

struggles stemmed from the systems of inequity underlying their sociocultural experiences in

school. Overtime, I learned to see how racism stood as the undergirding factor embedded in all

aspects of my students' lives and how my colleagues—mostly White women teachers—

uncritically disseminated the oppression students of Color that endured daily. They often

mistook the problems of Latinx, Black, and Asian students as the consequence of sociocultural or

emotional deficits (e.g., lack of material resources, absent/inept parenting, learning disabilities,

lack of impulse control, or immigration-related issues). However, my students of Color were

painfully aware of their teachers' stereotypical assumptions about them and of the role that

systemic racism played in their lives. I had listened to their stories, learned about their lived

experiences, and heard of how racism impacted their daily lives. This dissertation study

represents my attempt to listen to the lived experiences of the other side, to understand how

White women teachers make sense of their role as teachers of Latinx, Black, and Asian students,

and how their personal and emotional lives are impacted by their students of Color.

The research literature I reviewed expanded and deepened my knowledge of this problem

of practice. My exploration of how racism impacts students of Color through daily interactions

with White teachers exposed that racial bias is conveyed through implicit and explicit means,

and this discrimination plays a decisive role in the opportunities these students can access

throughout their lives (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Campbell, 2000;

Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; DiAngelo, 2018; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; McIntosh,

1988; Michael, 2015; Tatum, 2015; Terrill & Mark, 2000; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra,

Voeten & Holland, 2010; Ullucci, 2011). One example in which racial discrimination can be

enacted in the teacher-student dyad is through the low expectation or marginalization of students

of Color (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; McIntosh, 1988;

Michael, 2015; Tatum, 2015). As highlighted in Chapter One, other examples of how racial

discrimination is carried out by educators is through disproportionately placing students of Color

in lower academic tracks (Oakes, 2005; Roda, 2015), labeling them as in need of special

education services (Fletcher & Navarrete, 2011; Skiba et al., 2008), and/or giving them harsh

discipline referrals and school suspensions in comparison to White students (Lindsay & Hart,

2017; Skiba et al., 2011).

Notwithstanding, I acknowledge that White women who choose a career in education are

mostly altruistic and share a genuine intention to teach all students. However, the research

literature has exposed that their life experiences, education, and professional training have led to

their lives being often depleted of experiences with the racial Other (DiAngelo, 2018; Jupp et al.,

2019; Michael, 2015; Warren & Hancock, 2017). Since they lack life and professional

experiences that would lead to the understanding that racism is systemic and that it has dire

impacts in the lives of people of Color, White teachers may uncritically endorse negative racial

stereotypes and beliefs about non-White student groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018;

Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2016; Lewis, 2011; McLaren, 2017; Michael, 2015; Payne

& Gawronski, 2010; Picower, 2009; Ullucci, 2011; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten,

& Holland, 2010; Yoon, 2016). This misalignment between White teachers' intention and impact

(Michael, 2015) contributes to the maintenance of a system of education inequity represented in

the discrepancy between the access to academic opportunities (Gorski, 2017) and the

achievement of low-income students of Color and their White counterparts (Carey, 2014;

Ladson-Billings, 2006). These systems of inequity are maintained by decision makers in every

school level, from government officials (Hursh & Martina, 2003) to classroom teachers (Minor

et al., 2014).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine how teachers make sense

implicit bias in the teacher-student relationship, the level of awareness they have of their own

racial biases in the classroom, and what successes and challenges they experience as educators of

racially diverse students. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do White women teachers describe their lived experiences as educators of Latinx,

Black, and Asian students in a demographically changing high school context?

> **1a.** What successes and challenges do they report having in their increasingly
>
> racially diverse classrooms?
>
> **1b.** How, if at all, did their personal and professional life experiences impact and
>
> were impacted by their relationships with Latinx, Black, and Asian students?

By answering these research questions, I sought to uncover how White women teachers

experienced their role as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students in respect to race. The

three interview series I conducted at Vanguard High School provided the opportunity to engage

participants in a deeper exploration of the meaning of their experiences, first, collectively

through four focus groups at Vanguard with 17 White teachers (1 man and 16 women). The

following two meetings were conducted individually, the first with 15 women teachers at

Vanguard, and the second with the 9 participants who agreed to a third and final interview at

public spaces—libraries, restaurants, or coffee shops. During the first focus-group interview, I

introduced participants to my research topic, and they shared their collective teaching

experiences with students of Color in the context of a racially diverse school. This inquiry

deepened through individual interviews, increasing the rapport between the researcher and the

participant. During the second meeting at Vanguard, I concentrated on eliciting participants'

stories of challenges and success. In the final meeting, I met with participants outside the school, without the constraint of the 45-minute teaching period at the school, I attempted to enlist participants' critical ability to explore the underlying meaning of racial views exposed through their rhetoric.

The Context of the Study

Vanguard High School (pseudonym) is a suburban school that, in contrast to other Long Island schools, is racially and ethnically diverse. According to my liaison at the school, Mr. Turner (pseudonym), most teachers at Vanguard are White and female. In 2018, Vanguard registered nearly 2,000 students from grades 9 through 12 (New York State Education Department, n.d.). This site also revealed that the racial/ethnic composition of the student body is grossly 45% White and 55% racially/ethnically diverse. Throughout this dissertation study, I chose to combine the predominant racial classifications at Vanguard under the category *Latinx, Black, and Asian,* which are interchangeably used with the term *students of Color*. The ethnic composition of the school staff was not published by the websites from Vanguard or the New York State Education Department. However, during a preliminary meeting with the Vanguard's assistant principal, he stated that the largest majority of the teachers at Vanguard are White and women, following the national trend.

The administration of Vanguard High School sought to help their teachers to adapt to the changing student demographics, and in spring of 2018, 10 teachers were invited to participate in a year-long series of four to five workshops on cultural diversity training. The teachers who attended the training planned to present their knowledge to all school staff during a professional development day scheduled to take place in December 2018. I was invited to participate as an observer in the final workshop that was titled "Implicit Bias." This workshop was held in

October 2018 and lasted one and a half hours. The speakers introduced and explained the

meaning of *implicit bias*, as well as how teachers' awareness of bias could minimize the negative

impact of implicit bias at Vanguard. However, while conducting the first interview series, I

learned about the change in plans for the staff development day and the topic of the workshop. I

asked Dr. Turner about the reasons for the change in plans, but he did not elaborate on this,

explaining that he and the 10 teachers who participated in the implicit bias workshop agreed that

the most important area for teacher growth and development at that time would be to give

teachers an opportunity to learn new communication skills so students would feel heard and

supported.

Research Paradigm

To answer the overarching research question and sub-questions in this study, I used a

qualitative phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology is a philosophy and a research

method used to gather the essence of "human experience as it is lived" (Laverty, 2003, p. 24),

originally established by Husserl (1859-1948) and further developed by Heidegger (1889-1976).

Their approaches differed in how they conceptualized phenomenology. While Husserl

established phenomenology as a merely descriptive method to observe phenomena, Heidegger

argued that it was an interpretive method to describe lived experiences and proposed a

hermeneutic approach to phenomenology that valued the researcher's interpretation of the

phenomenon (Laverty, 2003).

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher reads the text (transcription) of

participants' interviews and "isolate themes" by reflecting on the contents and "discover

something telling, something meaningful, something thematic" (Sloan & Bowe, 2013, p. 1292).

Following this, the researcher rewrites the themes by interpreting the meaning as an observer of

the phenomena. Unlike Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology does not bracket out the researcher's perceptions of the phenomena. For Heidegger, researchers are not able to completely remove their subjectivity while seeking to identify the essence of the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004; Laverty, 2003; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Heideggerian phenomenology capitalizes on the researcher's reflexivity as data, which is "the process in which researchers are conscious of and reflective about the ways in which their questions, methods and subject position might impact on the data or psychological knowledge produced in a study" (Sloan & Bowe, 2013, p. 1297).

Throughout the data collection and data analysis, the interpretive researcher moves through the hermeneutic circles of investigation, attempting to make sense of the data while reading "part of the text and the whole of the text, to establish truth by discovering phenomena and interpreting them" (Sloan & Bowe, 2013, p. 1296). In this study, I sought to use phenomenology according to Heidegger's philosophical approach to phenomena, by uncovering the meaning of teachers' lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. The data I gathered throughout the three interview series were analyzed in a circular process in which the verbatim transcription of the interviews was repeatedly read and analyzed, resulting in a deeper understanding of the meaning underlying participants' experiences. This circular process of data analysis resulted in thematic emergences that combined to reveal the answers to my research questions and offer insights for future practice—these are discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

The next sections of this Chapter Three further delineate the research methods and procedures I used throughout my dissertation study. I discuss my philosophical assumptions, including the constructivist epistemology that guided this study design; the description of the

role of the researcher, including my positionality as well as my racial, cultural, and ethnic identifications; and how this positionality may have played a role throughout my interactions with participants. I explain the sample selection, the educational setting in which the research was conducted, and the procedures for the data collection. I conclude this chapter by addressing strategies used to validating the findings, ethical issues, and the impact and significance of this study regarding trustworthiness, potential bias, and limitations.

Procedures

The epistemological worldview guiding this study is constructivism, which is complementary with the phenomenological research and with the critical theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies (explored in Chapter Two). The constructivist epistemology is based on the development of understanding through the process of constructing meaning, of acquiring knowledge as a process (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Consistent with Heidegger's hermeneutics—which is informed by research on participants' lived experiences as a method for meaning gathering—constructivism proposes that reality can only be known in a personal and subjective way (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study was conceptualized and designed according to this principle, which aligns with the worldview informed by the theoretical frameworks that undergird this study.

The axiological assumption underlying this study is that White women teachers' narratives are shaped by the cultural beliefs and racial ideologies regarding their students of Color. The exploration of these narratives through a phenomenological research method was in accordance with the theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies. Additionally, the framework color-blind racism brought in an analytical tool complementary to critical whiteness studies to deepen my examination of the underlying meaning of the racial

language used by participants. These frameworks offered a clear pathway to understand how

participants' racial ideologies were formed and how racial bias was revealed through their

rhetorical choices to describe their lived experiences as White women teachers educating Latinx,

Black, and Asian students.

The Role of Researcher

For the past 18 years, I have worked as a social worker at a racially and ethnically diverse

public high school where most of the student population is Latinx, Black, and Asian; many are

recent immigrants; and most of them come from households that fall in the category of low

socioeconomic status. My ethnicity is Latinx, and although I was raised identifying myself as a

Brazilian White woman with Portuguese, German, and Italian heritage, my racially mixed

European background has become secondary to my ethnicity and immigrant status because I

emigrated from Brazil to the US at age 25. Experiencing my Brazilian culture and my mixed

European racial background in the United States has offered me the unique opportunity to

experience how others relate to my identities. I learned that how a person identifies in relation to

one's race, ethnicity, education, age, gender, or socioeconomic status can change how he or she

will identify my race and ethnicity. This volatility is further complicated when I speak English;

while my accent can be easily understood by some, others cannot understand me, often leading

to questions about where I come from. Although I have experienced discrimination, mostly

against my immigrant identity, since the U.S. presidential election in 2016, my experience with

xenophobia has increased exponentially, especially at my job as a social worker in a public

school setting, where I spend most of my days.

I recognized that, as an educated White Latinx immigrant woman, the xenophobia I

experienced from some of my teacher colleagues cannot compare with the insidiousness of the

racism students of Color endured daily, throughout a lifetime of school experiences. I also recognized that these experiences were a sharp contrast to my encounters with other teachers who embraced my otherness, who students of Color loved and admired, and who were highly successful in teaching and inspiring Latinx, Black, and Asian students. My decision to pursue scholarship in education was fomented by this paradox.

The initial body of literature I reviewed for my dissertation study concentrated on the impact of implicit racial bias. However, I became increasingly aware that racism is not a problem of individuals, but is systemic. The focus on individual racial bias, whether implicit or explicit, diverts from the focus of the source of all racial inequities, which are systemic. I learned that racism is a system of systems rooted in the socioeconomic and political hegemony that uphold all forms of social inequities. This literary investigation resulted in a deeper understanding of the undergirding components that undermine the success of the public education system as an integral part of a democratic society.

Informed by my personal and professional experiences, and by the literature I reviewed, my research attempted to understand how White women teachers educating students of Color would describe and make sense of their experiences; their role in the lives of their students; and whether they were impacted by Latinx, Black, and Asian students. The theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy, critical whiteness studies, and color-blind racism guided my analysis of the problem of practice, conceptualization of this study, and interpretation of the phenomena I observed. The non-directive, observational stance of the phenomenology method of inquiry guided my interviewing approach as well as the semi-structured interview protocols containing open-ended questions and probes.

Data Collection

The data I collected for this dissertation study followed the three-interview structure for phenomenological research proposed by Seidman (2013). He emphasized that, while there are different phenomenological approaches for interviewing, all of them focus on participants' experiences and on the meaning they assign to their experiences. Seidman articulated that "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). His in-depth interview system established a research platform "to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience" (p. 10) without straying from the topic under study. Following Seidman's method, I conducted three interview series.

The first interview series established the context of participants' collective experiences in relation to the topic under study: White women teachers' experiences as educators of students of Color. I decided to conduct the first interview series in focus groups where participants would meet the researcher and reveal their shared experiences as a group. Xerri (2018) proposed that focus groups establish the forum for education researchers to access the meaning of participants' conceptualizations regarding the research topic while they engage in conversation and discussion with other participants. The interview protocol I developed for the focus group interviews consisted of two major open-ended questions that asked them to (1) describe their school and their student population and to (2) report on their ingredients for success in teaching the larger student group (Latinx, Black, and Asian students). My original interview protocol for the focus groups had a question about the implicit bias workshop during the staff development day, but due to the change in plans about the workshop topic, I removed the question from the protocol.

The second interview series consisted of individual meetings with participants and focused on the concrete details of their present lived experiences. These interviews were conducted at Vanguard during one teaching period, which lasts 45 minutes. Dr. Turner, the assistant principal that functioned as my liaison at Vanguard, scheduled the individual interviews with the 16 women who participated in the focus groups. He ensured that their classes were covered, and I interviewed 15 participants (one was absent) in two days, during school hours. The second interview series concentrated on asking participants to reconstruct the details of daily experiences. I asked them to reveal (1) why they became teachers and why they chose to teach at Vanguard; (2) a typical day teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students, from start to finish; (3) how their life/educational experiences informed/influenced ability to successfully connect with and teach Latinx, Black, and Asian students; (4) whether they were aware of the impact of their words on Latinx, Black, and Asian students; (5) their stories of success; and (6) the stories of challenges they faced as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students.

The third interview series also consisted of individual meetings. However, these individual interviews were conducted outside the school, during Spring Break, at a place of participants' choice—coffee shops, public libraries, or restaurants near their Long Island homes. The goal of the third interview series was to address "the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). To meet this goal, I invited participants to reflect on (1) their role as teachers of diverse students; (2) how their work and life events may have influenced and contributed to their present experiences as teachers of Latinx, Black, and Asian students at Vanguard; (3) how they thought these students perceived them; and (4) whether they thought they held implicit racial bias and, if so, which bias they held, and if they believed their bias could impact their students of Color. Table 1 lists the abbreviated

interview protocol questions in each interview series.

Table 1

Interview Series and Abbreviated Protocol Questions.

Interview Series	Abbreviated Interview Protocol Questions
First Series – Focus Groups: The context of participants' experiences	**IP1** 1) Describe your school.
	IP1 2) Ingredients for success teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students.
Second Series – First Individual Interviews: The details of participants' present lived experiences	**IP2** 1) Why did you became a teacher and how you did you start teaching at Vanguard?
	IP2 2) Describe a typical day teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students.
	IP2 3) How does your life and educational experiences inform and influence your ability to successfully connect with and teach Latinx, Black, and Asian students?
	IP2 4) Awareness of impact of words on Latinx, Black, and Asian students.
	IP2 5) Stories of successes.
	IP2 6) Stories of challenges.
Third Series – Second Individual Interviews: Participants' reflection on the meaning of their experiences; the intellectual and emotional connections of work and life	**IP3** 1) Your role as a teacher of diverse students: intellectual sense and emotional sense.
	IP3 2) How has teaching at Vanguard influenced you personally and professionally?
	IP3 3) How do you think your Latinx, Black, and Asian students perceive you?
	IP3 4) Do you think you have implicit racial bias? **Probe:** If so, in what ways does your bias impact your students of Color?

In addition to gathering data through interviewing participants, after the interviews, I wrote

fieldnotes about participants' body languages, my insights, and reactions to the interviews or to

individual participants.

Participants, Setting, and Methods for Data Collection

Participants in this study were teachers at Vanguard, a racially diverse suburban high school on Long Island, where White women teachers are more likely to come from the middle class (Colvin, Klingel, Boehme, & Donovan, 2013) and to have attended segregated, predominantly White schools (Roda & Wells, 2012). The racial/ethnic composition of the school staff was not published on the websites of Vanguard High School or in the New York State Education Department online database. However, during a preliminary meeting with the school's assistant principal, I learned that the racial and socioeconomic demographic composition of the teaching staff at Vanguard follow the national trend, with mostly middle-class White women teachers.

Timeline and Interviews

In Fall of 2017, I met with the superintendent of the Vanguard school district and received permission to conduct my research study with volunteer teachers at the high school. Shortly after this initial contact, I met with the school principal and was assigned a liaison, one of the school assistant principals, Dr. Turner (pseudonym), to assist me with organizing my research. In November 2018, Dr. Turner invited me to participate in one of the implicit bias workshops offered as professional development to a select group of 10 teachers throughout the year. After I received the IRB authorization to conduct my research on March 1, 2018, I contacted Dr. Turner and he agreed to disseminate my email to the faculty, where I briefly explained my study and invited participants to join my inquiry about the sociocultural context of teaching and learning in a racially diverse high school.

Through the convenience and purposive sampling method, teachers who volunteered to participate responded to Dr. Turner. He arranged the space, scheduled the time, and divided the

participant-volunteers into four focus groups, while ensuring that their classrooms would have coverage in case the focus group conflicted with their teaching schedules. The four focus group interviews were conducted on the same day at Vanguard and they lasted 45 minutes, the length of two school periods. The number of participants in each of the four focus groups varied from three to six participants, adding to a total of 17 participants.

Again, Dr. Turner organized the infrastructure for the second interview series, which were conducted with 15 individual participants, in eight consecutive 45-minute periods, in two consecutive days. As in the first series, Dr. Turner secured a private room where the interviews were conducted privately, and he ensured that participant teachers' classrooms received coverage. Only the male participant was not invited to continue participating in the following interviews, and one female teacher was absent on the day of the second interview series. The teachers who participated in the second interview series were invited to participate in the third series, which were conducted outside Vanguard, and lasted from 90 to 120 minutes. However, only 9 out of the 15 women teachers agreed to participate in the third phase of data collection, which took place during Spring Break. The 7 teachers that dropped out of the study were not available to meet during the break due to having previous family plans.

All three interview series were electronically recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim on Rev.com. In the two-week time interval between conducting the focus groups and the first individual interviews, I read the focus group interviews to follow up on conversation topics if necessary. I adopted the same procedure between the second and the third interview series. I started each interview by introducing and re-introducing myself, summarizing the study I was conducting, and asking if teachers had any questions or concerns about their participation, while emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation in the research. Participants were

informed that they were free to stop the interviews at any time, for any reason, and asked to sign a consent authorizing the recording of interviews. I was the sole collector and analyzer of the data during this study. I followed the interview protocols in each interview series, asking open-ended questions, and allowing periods of silence for participants to process their thoughts and feelings. I tried to refrain from enacting my belief systems and my ethnocultural perspectives as a Latin-American immigrant.

Researcher Memos

Shortly after every round of interviews, I documented my perceptions of the teachers' reactions to the questions and of all non-verbal communication that I noticed. I remained attuned to possible indicators of discomfort, and I documented those instances to assist in the data analysis. The researcher's memos were written shortly after the interviews, when I also documented my insights, thoughts, and feelings throughout the interviews. Prior to the first interview series, I asked participants to answer a simple demographic questionnaire about their age, gender, race, ethnicity, years of teaching, subject area of expertise, city and country of birth, spoken languages, and the location of schools attended during elementary, middle, and high school, as well as higher education.

Data Collection

Shortly after I received IRB approval from Molloy College, I initiated the data collection process through three interview series as described above. Prior to each meeting, I read a brief summary of my study, asked participants to sign the consent agreeing to participate and to have the interviews be electronically recorded. The digital recordings of the interviews and the transcripts were stored on a password-secured computer in a locked location, in accordance with IRB requirements. Participants received a copy of their signed consent and were assured of the

confidentiality of their responses. They were given pseudonyms, and the name and specific location of the school were also disguised. The first and second interview series—the focus groups and the first individual interviews—were conducted in March 2018. The third interview series were conducted in April 2018.

Data Analysis

Immediately following each of the three phases of data collection, the electronic recordings were professionally transcribed verbatim and uploaded into Dedoose, a data management web-based program designed to support qualitative research data analysis. Likewise, the researcher's memos were also uploaded into Dedoose, for triangulating with the teachers' narratives throughout data analysis. The analysis of thematic patterns from the focus groups informed the probes used during the second interview series, and the process was repeated between the second and third interview series. I analyzed the narratives, with the objective of identifying codes, categories, and themes, and gathered relevant teacher quotes related to the theoretical frameworks that informed my study. In Chapter Four, I offer a more in-depth description of the analytic procedures employed.

While the role of the researcher must be accounted for in all qualitative methodologies, in the phenomenological method of interviewing, the researcher seeks to understand how participants make sense of their personal and social world, and this method of analysis is an integral part of the data analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I was able to spend some time at Vanguard, observing the dynamics of interactions between students and school staff. My textual documentation of these different sets of data were used to triangulate the data, to provide a comparative analysis, and to further my understanding of the overarching phenomenon that was the objective of my research.

Strategies for Validating Findings

The findings from this study were validated in different ways. First, I triangulated the data from the three interview series—the initial focus groups and the two consecutive individual interviews—with the researcher memos and field notes. To increase trustworthiness, I also counted on the feedback of five scholars in the field who shared their expertise and validated the entire process involving this study, from the research literature I reviewed, the conceptualization of this study, the data analysis, and the overall findings. Other strategies I used to increase the trustworthiness of the data I collected was spending an adequate amount of time in the field—Vanguard High school—and through reaching data saturation. The thorough and extensive descriptions of the findings I present in Chapters Four and Five provide a clear picture of the school setting, as well as my observations and experiences while visiting Vanguard, the amount of time I spent collecting data throughout the three interview series, and the phenomenon I observed in light of the theoretical frameworks I used to conceptualize and analyze this study.

My positionality was fully disclosed through the use of researcher reflexivity, from the early processes that informed the conceptualization of this study, to selecting the research literature to review and choosing a methodology, to the final process of writing the findings and recommendations for practice and future research. Following the structure inherent in a phenomenological methodology, the positionality I documented throughout my dissertation journey was used as data to inform and confirm the findings.

Throughout this study—and in all aspects of my life, from different professional roles to personal interactions with family, friends, and strangers—I have vowed to remain ethically committed to continue working on the life-long goal of developing racial literacy, engaging in antiracist practices, and opposing racist policies (Kendi, 2019). To increase my awareness of the

insidious and contagious effects of neoliberal and White supremacist ideologies in mind, I participated in several anti-bias workshops. These experiences, along with engaging in scholarly and personal conversations with people of Color from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, have been instrumental for my racial literacy development. I learned to accept that, due to my socialization and education as a White-skinned Latina immigrant, my rhetorical relapses to using the whiteness lens do not make me or anyone else an inherently racist individual incapable of developing racial literacy. Instead, I have grown to understand that the shameful character of these experiences offers the opportunity to remember that, rather than being an individual flaw, racist beliefs and actions are collective experiences stemming from a system of inequity designed to remain unseen. Awareness, humility, and the strong commitment to oppose internal and external racist ideologies are some of the skills of the racial literacy toolkit.

Phenomenology theorists propose that the experience of conducting phenomenological research grants individuals a deeper learning experience that has a transformative impact on their lives, as an individual and as a researcher (Laverty, 2003)—and this summarizes my experience. Furthermore, my dissertation journey embodied the critical pedagogue McLaren's (2017) understanding that "schooling permits us to see schools as sites of *both* domination and liberation" (p. 57). While founded and structured on whiteness ideals, I view my scholarly pursuit as representative of how educational institutions can function as a bridge between systemic oppression and social justice. This view reiterates the overall findings and recommendations I offered through my research, which I present in the next two chapters.

Expected Impact and Significance of Study

I expect that my dissertation study will contribute to the research literature by extending what is already known about the role of White women teachers' racial rhetoric in the teacher-

student relationship. By applying the theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies to conceptualize and conduct this study, and through adding the framework color-blind racism to analyze the data presented in Chapter Four, I attempted to uncover the meaning of White women educators' experiences with students of Color, with respect to the racial ideologies they revealed while describing their lived experiences teaching students of Color at Vanguard High School. I sought to make sense of the potential impact and significance of the racial rhetoric White women teachers revealed—for the lives and education of their Latinx, Black, and Asian students; for White teachers' education and professional training; and for the policies governing decisions creating or disrupting educational equity at the macro, meso, and micro levels.

The main significance of the findings I present as the result of conducting this dissertation study lies on the importance of educational equity of students of Color. The impact of color-blind racism predominant in the rhetoric of White women teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students is an often-unexamined problem. In addition, the resegregation of public schools and the demographic imperative, can have dire consequences in the lives and education of students of Color.

I hope that the research findings will contribute to further educational equity policy changes by adopting the critical view of systemic racism as the undergirding invisible force that educators must learn to oppose through the development of racial literacy.

Possible Limitations

A common limitation to qualitative phenomenological studies is that, since each researcher's perspective is unique and a key instrument to interpret and analyze the data, these methodologies are difficult to replicate (Bevan, 2014; Laverty, 2003). Additionally, in

phenomenology, the researcher's documented experiences with participants and the field observations are used to triangulate and validate the analysis of the data. This method renders the unique positionality of each individual researcher as a tool that could add significance to the findings or lead to biased results. In my study, I strove to remain aware of the blind spots that my insider status—as a school social worker with 18 years of experience working at a racially diverse high school—could present as both a limitation and an opportunity to self-reflect on my own racial literacy as a White Latina immigrant.

With respect to the participants interviewed in this study, only White women teachers were interviewed, and they all self-selected to participate, which could have introduced selection bias. Notwithstanding, I sought to attract participants who cared about and were successful in teaching students of Color, and whose lived experiences may have led them to learn to see race. Throughout the interviews, teachers indicated that they were motivated to participate in my study because they were confident about their ability to successfully teach students of Color and were curious about the experience of participating in my study.

This study did not include interviews with teachers of Color as a comparison group—a limitation that could be circumvented in future research studies. Additionally, the data I analyzed were collected in a single school setting, located in a specific region of the United States, with a particular demographic profile, which differed from most public schools in the region. It is possible that if I had conducted the same study in a different geographic area, with different demographic characteristics of the teaching staff or the student population (e.g., mostly White or Asian student groups), the results could have revealed different themes. Furthermore, the themes that emerged from my analysis of the interviews with teachers should not be generalized as representative of the lived experiences of all other White teachers. As indicated in previous

chapters, the lived experiences that participants in my study reported does not necessarily apply to every middle-class White woman teacher.

In this research, some aspects of the lived experiences that the White women teachers revealed (e.g., the rhetorical use of color-blind racism to describe experiences with non-Whites) have been reported throughout the literature review in Chapter Two (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Lewis, 2011; Michael, 2015; Payne & Gawronski, 2010; Picower, 2009; Ullucci, 2011; van den Bergh et al., 2010; Yoon, 2016). Although the collective lived experiences of the White women teachers of this study are unique, the theory uncovered by the research literature that preceded and underlie my study can be generalized to unpack the meaning of the phenomenon I observed.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the design and methods used to conceptualize, conduct, and analyze throughout this dissertation study. I have detailed the application of the qualitative phenomenological design through which I established the conditions to examine White women teachers' lived experiences as educators of racially diverse student groups. The methodology of this research study was framed by the constructivist epistemological worldview, which is complementary to phenomenological research design and the critical theoretical frameworks alike. Through these lenses, I sought to make sense of the meaning White teachers collectively reported throughout my study and how the ideology revealed through their whiteness discourse influenced their lived experiences as educators of students of Color.

In conducting this dissertation research, my ultimate goal was to contribute to the literature that strives to promote racial equity, through extending what is already known about the role of racial bias in the teachers' relationships with students of Color. By exploring how

White teachers' everyday language can uncritically reveal racial ideologies that undermine all aspects of the lives of Latinx, Black, and Asian students, I hope that the development of racial literacy among White teachers will become a priority in schools and seen as a fundamental tool for educational equity. Chapter Four reveals in detail the process of data analysis, explaining how I tracked the emergence of the relevant themes and how they were juxtaposed to deepen my understanding of the observed phenomenon. Then, Chapter Five discusses the relevance of the thematic emergences in light of the overarching research question, sub-questions, and the contributions of the findings to the related body of literature.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Findings

"Just wanna say…you keep on bringing up the issue of White, Black, Spanish.

I don't see it that way and that's a bit surprising to even have that

kind of conversation, 'cause it's what we try not to do,

is to single out a kid because of that issue."

~ Brenda

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine how teachers make sense of implicit bias in the teacher-student relationship, the level of awareness they have of their own racial biases in the classroom, and what successes and challenges they experience as educators of racially diverse students. My inquiry aimed at uncovering the salient aspects of the life experiences they believed to inform and influence their teaching practices and relationships with their Latinx, Black, and Asian students at Vanguard, a racially diverse high school. As discussed in Chapter One, although my study highlights the work of White women, I acknowledge that the White culture they represent is not a monolith but involves "varied manifestations of whiteness and White cultural practices across the United States" (Warren & Hancock, 2017, p. 20). Through this phenomenological study, I engaged in dialogue with the participant teachers about how their life and professional experiences might impact the educational experience of their Latinx, Black, and Asian students—who make up the largest student subgroups at Vanguard— and whether they were critically aware of the racial dynamic in the educator-learner relationship. Throughout this chapter, I interchangeably describe Vanguard's students as *Latinx, Black, and Asian students* or as the short version *students of Color*, staying consistent with the language I

used throughout the interviews with participants. The overarching research question and sub-

questions addressed in this chapter are:

1. How do White women teachers describe their lived experiences as educators of Latinx,

Black, and Asian students in a demographically changing high school context?

> **1a.** What successes and challenges do they report having in their increasingly
>
> racially diverse classrooms?
>
> **1b.** How, if at all, did their personal and professional life experiences impact and
>
> were impacted by their relationships with Latinx, Black, and Asian students?

The extant quantitative literature on racial discrimination and education established that

teacher biases are a determinant factor in the educational outcomes of Latinx, Black, and Asian

students (Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2016; Leonardo; 2002; Levine-Rasky, 2000;

Michael, 2015; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2004; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, &

Holland, 2010; Warikoo et al., 2016; Yoon, 2016). Likewise, qualitative research in the field of

White teacher identity studies denounces the demographic imperative—the cultural gap between

a teaching force of 80% White teachers (NCES, 2016) and the student body composed of 52%

students of Color. Both sets of literature conclude that there is an urgent need to prepare and

conscientize the large majority of White teachers who educate Latinx, Black, and Asian students

in today's re-segregated public schools (Haddix, 2017; Jupp et al., 2016).

Another aspect of this problem is what occurs inside the classrooms, or the socio-cultural

context of teaching and learning and how White women teachers perceive and experience their

role in educating students of Color (Carter, 2012). This is where my study fits and extends prior

research on these topics—I wanted to better understand how teachers make sense of racial bias in

the classroom, the stated level of awareness they have of their own racial bias, the successes and

challenges they report having in their increasingly racially diverse classes, and whether they can engage in a critical examination of their positionality as White women impacting their Latinx, Black, and Asian students.

Data-Collection Procedures

I was granted access to conduct my dissertation research at Vanguard by the school district superintendent and the school principal in Fall of 2018, and all the data were collected from March through April 2018. After I received the approval to conduct this study, Dr. Turner (pseudonym), one of Vanguard's assistant principals, was assigned to work as my liaison within the school. In November 2018, he invited me to participate in one of the implicit bias workshops offered as professional development to a select group of 10 teachers throughout the year.

After the first meeting with Dr. Turner, I wrote in my fieldnotes about his stated confidence that Vanguard was not only a unique Long Island school for having a racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse student body but also for having excellent teachers who were dedicated and well-prepared to teach their diverse student populations. His sense of pride for his school was genuine and contagious, and I wondered whether the Vanguard teachers' successes in educating Latinx, Black, and Asian students would reveal an exceptional formula for success, unlike the findings reported in the literature of most first-wave White teacher identity studies. These studies have found that the demographic imperative in teacher education (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Jupp, et al., 2016); the exacerbated resegregation of public schools (Jupp, et al., 2016; Kozol, 2005; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Skiba et al., 2011); and the lack of emphasis of power, race, whiteness, and White teacher identity in the pre-service education of White teachers (Jupp, et al., 2016; Michael, 2015; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2004; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010; Warikoo et al., 2016; Yoon, 2016)

often contribute to the educational inequity responsible for the opportunity gap between White students and students of Color (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gorski, 2018; Welner & Carter, 2013).

Dr. Turner further explained that during the spring of 2018, the Vanguard school administration established a partnership with a local non-profit organization to offer training for a small group of 10 staff members on cultural proficiency. Through this training, the administration sought to help all teachers adapt to the changing demographics in the high school. As briefly explained in Chapter One, this non-profit had received a grant that sponsored the trainings, which, according to Dr. Turner, consisted of four to five meetings throughout the year that lasted 1 to 2 hours each. I was invited by the school administration to audit the last session of the training, which was titled "Implicit Bias." The workshop was delivered by two social workers from the non-profit organization that had been providing the cultural diversity training to the 10 faculty members since the beginning of the year. Dr. Turner explained that the 10 participating staff members of the year-long training would be responsible to turnkey the information they learned to the entire faculty during staff development day in a couple of months. After I received IRB approval in March 2018, I contacted Dr. Turner and he provided me with the dates I would be welcomed to conduct the first and second rounds of interviews.

An interesting turn of events occurred regarding the school's plan for the staff development day when the topic for the workshop was changed. Upon my arrival at Vanguard to conduct the focus group interviews, I informally asked participants in the first focus group about the outcome of the implicit bias workshop they had planned to attend but was instead changed to a focus on how to improve communication with students. The teachers were not able to explain the reasons for this change in direction, even after I probed them about how they felt about the change. After having spent a year learning about cultural proficiency, they did not have the

opportunity to share what they had learned with their colleagues.

When I met with Dr. Turner again, I reported what I had heard from the teachers and expressed my curiosity about the change of plans. Nevertheless, he was nonchalant about the shift and did not elaborate on the topic other than to say that the school administration and the teachers who participated in the implicit bias workshop agreed that the most important area for teacher growth and development at that time was learning how to make better language choices to improve teacher-student communication. My interview protocol for the focus groups had a question about the implicit bias workshop during the staff development day, but due to their change of plans, it no longer made sense to ask participants that question. Although I was not able to learn more details about the school's change of plans, I wondered whether the decision to not hold a workshop on race was a color-blind maneuver by the school administration.

Rationale for Data Generation

To capture the experiences revealed by the stories reflecting the lived experiences of White women educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students, I chose to use qualitative interviews for data collection, as quantitative methods would not be conducive for capturing the in-depth, meaningful information I sought to uncover. I used the phenomenology methodology proposed by Seidman (2013), which consisted of three interview series designed to elicit participants' life history by reconstructing their lived experiences. Based on Seidman's guidelines, I devised three interview protocols that aimed to uncover (1) the participants' life experiences in the context of their school; (2) the details of their experience at the time of the interviews; and (3) their critical reflection on the meaning of their experience teaching their Latinx, Black, and Asian students. The protocols consisted of semi-structured interview questions to ensure that all participants would be asked the same questions, while also having the

opportunity to spontaneously share accounts of personal experiences.

During the first phase of focus groups, I concentrated on gathering participants' collective stories that would establish the racial/ethnic diverse nature of their school environment and how the faculty has perceived and interacted with Latinx, Black, and Asian students at Vanguard throughout their careers. The second phase of the individual interviews focused on eliciting teachers' accounts of successes and challenges while teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students. Participants were asked to focus on details of their lived experiences, recounting a "typical day," including successful and challenging moments as teachers of the diverse student body of their schools. The third phase of the individual interview series focused on participants' reflection and critical thinking on how they made sense of their teaching experience, how it has influenced their lives; how they believed they were perceived by their Latinx, Black, and Asian students; and whether they are aware of implicit or explicit biases they held.

The interviews for the first and second series were conducted at the school, in a conference room allocated by Dr. Turner. He disseminated the invitation to participate in my study via email to all teachers, and he reportedly arranged for those who volunteered to have classroom coverage during the interviews. The third round of interviews was conducted at places chosen by the participants—i.e., public library, restaurants, or coffee shops. Dr. Turner emailed my invitation to the faculty about participating in the study. According to Dr. Turner, 24 teachers initially agreed to participate. However, on the day of the focus group event, only 17 of the 24 teachers arrived. I reasoned that by starting the data collection through focus groups, participants may be more inclined to participate in discussions. I anticipated that through answering my interview questions collectively, participants would focus on their interactions with on another, voicing their opinions, and listening each other's ideas. Dr. Turner organized the 17 volunteers in

four groups, according to their availability and to the school's capacity to ensure that the teachers

did not miss a teaching period. Although I specified that my focus was to include White women

educators, one male teacher showed up to participate in one of the focus groups (his participation

is further discussed in Chapter Four). The remaining 15 teachers were White women (see Table

2).

The second and third series of interviews were conducted individually with the 15

women teachers, based on the study design. As in the first series, the second interviews took

place at the school, two weeks after the focus groups, with 15 women teachers in two days (16

teachers were scheduled, but one teacher was absent from school on that day). The interview

schedule for the second interview series was also provided by Dr. Turner. The third interview

series was also conducted individually, but due to the impossibility of scheduling meetings at the

school, they were conducted outside the school during the school's spring break. Nine out of the

15 women teachers agreed to be interviewed for the third phase of data collection. The seven

teachers that dropped out of the study were not available to meet during the school's spring

break due to personal reasons. Table 2 offers the detailed breakdown of participants in each

focus group.

Table 2

Composition of the Focus Groups

First Interview Series	Number of Participants Per Group	Men	Women
Focus Group 1	6	-	6
Focus Group 2	4	-	4
Focus Group 3	3 (one participated twice)	-	3
Focus Group 4	5	1	4
Total		1	17

On the first day of data collection, I began the focus groups by introducing myself to the teachers and disclosing that I was a school social worker at a different high school. Participants seemed to feel at ease to ask and answer all questions related to my research. I wondered whether disclosing that I was also a full-time employee at a public school on Long Island could have played a role in their apparent relaxed demeanor. There was a sense of camaraderie between the participants, and they were excited about the home-baked cookies Dr. Turner had left on the table for them to enjoy. The overall climate during the focus groups was relaxed, but while some teachers seemed genuinely interested in participating in the study, others seemed to exercise more caution regarding the topic of the study and were less talkative. See Table 3 for the details of teachers' participation in each interview series.

Table 3

Breakdown of Participants in Each Interview Series

Teacher (Pseudonym)	First Interview Series	Second Interview Series	Third Interview Series	Women	Men
Sophia	X	X	X	X	
Teresa	X	X	X	X	
Daisy	X	X	X	X	
Nyla	X	X	X	X	
Barbara	X	X	X	X	
Faith	X	X	X	X	
Sarah	X	X	X	X	
Taylor	X	X	X	X	
Jessica	X	X	X	X	
Susan	X	X	--	X	
Olivia	X	X	--	X	
Bianca	X	X	--	X	
Sandra	X	X	--	X	
Brenda	X	X	--	X	
Dana	X	X	--	X	
Stella	X	--	--	X	
Thomas	X	--	--		X
Total	17	15	9	16	1

Vanguard High School has approximately 2,000 students, of which more than half are Hispanic or Latinx; Black or African American; or American Indian, Alaska native, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, or Multiracial (as explained in Chapter One, I have chosen to refer to these groups as Latinx, Black, and Asian). The school employs nearly 160 teachers, and the teacher-student demographic ratio follows the national trend, as most teachers are White women and the majority of pupils are students of Color. Roughly 35% of the students are Central American, Spanish-speaking Latinx, and according to Vanguard's teachers, most have arrived in the United States less than 10 years ago. There are other smaller Latinx immigrant groups who speak Spanish or other Romance languages, from the Caribbean and South America. The school is socioeconomically diverse, with about 45% of the students who qualify to receive free or reduced lunch, an indication that they fall on or below the poverty line, according to the *2021-2022 Free and Reduced Price Income Eligibility and Policy Information,* (New York State Education Department, Child Nutrition Knowledge Center, 2021). Table 4 offers a comparison of the students' basic demographic characteristics between the school years 2008-2009 and 2018-2019.

Table 4

Vanguard High School – Demographic Change in Student Body Over 10 Years

Year	Students Enrolled	White	Latinx	Black	Asian	Multi-racial	Free/Reduced Lunch	ELL's
2008/ 2009	1,800	60%	20%	15%	5%	1%	30%	5%
2018/ 2019	1,900	45%	40%	10%	5%	1%	45%	15%

Note. Data for Table 4 from National Center for Educational Statistics *https://nces.ed.gov*
These are approximate numbers

The teachers who volunteered to participate in this study identified their race as White (*n*=12) or Caucasian (*n*=3), and six teachers did not state their race or ethnicity—perhaps due to being unaware of the difference between race and ethnicity. Of the 9 teachers who identified their ethnicity, one declared to be a White-Latina (she had one parent of Latin-American descent) while the others stated that they were of Eastern or Western European descent. All participants obtained their master's degree from Long Island colleges.

Vanguard teachers who volunteered to participate in my study—especially the 9 teachers who agreed to be interviewed for the third phase of the study during their Spring Break—were aware that my inquiry focused on racial bias and White women teaching racially diverse student groups. They seemed curious and interested, although also cautious, perhaps due to fears or insecurities of talking about racial bias, which indicates the racial double consciousness that characterizes the findings of second-wave White teacher identity research studies. The White women teachers that participated in my study differed by age, marital status, whether they had children, the number of years teaching, the number of years working at the school, the subjects they taught, and whether or not they had prior jobs or prior careers earlier in their professional lives. All but one teacher was born and raised on Long Island, and most attended segregated, predominantly White schools. Their ages ranged from 30 to 60 and their teaching experience from 10 to 35 years. The subjects they taught were English as a New Language, ELA, special education, science, English, chemistry, math, social studies, living environment, and earth science. Table 5 summarizes the major demographic characteristics participants reported during the second interview series.

Table 5

Demographic Characteristics of Participants in the Second Interview Series

Teacher (Pseudonym)	Age (Approximate)	Race	Ethnicity	Years Teaching (Approximate)
Sophia	40	White	Undeclared	15
Teresa	40	Caucasian	Undeclared	15
Daisy	35	White	White/Italian	15
Nyla	40	White	Italian	15
Barbara	50	Caucasian	Hispanic	15
Faith	40	Caucasian	Eastern-European Mix	15
Sarah	30	White	Irish-German	10
Taylor	35	White	Undeclared	10
Jessica	50	White	Irish-German	30
Susan	30	White	Undeclared	10
Olivia	30	White	Undeclared	10
Bianca	30	White	Undeclared	10
Sandra	35	White	Irish-Italian	15
Brenda	60	White	White-Irish	35
Dana	30	White	Polish, Russian	10

Although all 15 participants in the second interview series were invited to join in the third

meeting, only 9 women teachers accepted the invitation. Those who declined to participate stated

that they would not be available to meet with me due to prior personal commitments. The 9

participants that returned to the last interviews reported that they had enjoyed the process as they

thought the research topic was "engaging," "interesting," or "thought provoking."

Other Sources of Information

The primary source of data for my dissertation was the three interview series with the

teachers, three interviews with the assistant principal to obtain background information about the

school context, interview field notes, and the research memos. I documented field notes at the

end of each interview day and the researcher's memos after reading the transcripts of the

individual interviews. My fieldnotes consisted of brief annotations of the process to establish my

connection with participants and of anything that seemed important to note (e.g., body language
or non-verbal communication cues during the interviews.

The researcher's memos included information I recalled from the interviews, my analysis
and interpretation of the interaction with each participant, and how it intersected with my
positionality as a Latinx school social worker. Through writing the memosm, I processed my
observations, feelings, and insights about the climate of the interviews. My first memo was
regarding my first visit to the school, which I wrote after participating in the implicit bias
workshop. I also wrote memos at the end of each of the three days I spent conducting the first
series of interviews, after the day I interviewed all four focus groups, and at the end of the two
days I spent at Vanguard during the first individual interviews. I also wrote memos after
receiving and reading the transcripts of the third interview series. The process of writing the
memos after reading the transcripts for the first time after the interviews enforced a critical
stance toward the data, setting the tone for the process of coding and *themeing* that culminated in
the analysis presented in this chapter.

Researchers' Memos and the Intersection with Theory

All three interview series were electronically recorded, professionally transcribed
verbatim on Rev.com, and uploaded for coding into Dedoose—a data management web-based
program designed to support qualitative research data analysis. I kept track of the emerging
themes and codes from the data by reading and coding the transcripts according to the data-
collection goals for each phase of the study, which followed the structure for in-depth
phenomenological interviewing proposed by Seidman (2013). During this first round of analysis,
I summarized each interview question with a code and wrote comments on the side of the page,
noting possible themes. Then, the transcripts were transposed into Dedoose and, through a

second round of data analysis, I created families of codes in parallel with the interview protocol. This second round of analysis identified over 30 codes. In the next round of analysis, I collapsed the codes that overlapped and intersected (i.e., turning point events and relevant personal/professional experiences) into essentializing themes (i.e., successes or challenges). This process of data analysis was interspersed with weeks of immersion in the research literature that illuminated the different perspectives of the phenomena I was uncovering and return to the data for new rounds of analysis. This long process allowed data analysis through different sets of lenes, deepening and furthering my understanding of phenomena I sought to understand.

As the interviews progressed and participants revealed the intimate details of their life experiences that shaped their worldviews, I became intrigued by the process that started to surface. The circular process of re-reading the interview transcripts unearthed a thread of complexity in the respondent's positionalities, which denoted ambivalent perspectives about their racially diverse students as well as their perception of the impact they have on their lives and education. Throughout the second and third series, teachers shared information revealing their racial ideologies and subtle views of the impact they had on the educational experiences of their Latinx, Black, and Asian students. This process exposed different aspects of their White identities, reported through accounts of personal experiences and professional journeys stemming from first-hand experiences with the racial Other represented by their students. While participants reported on how they were educated and transformed through difficult life experiences and through connections with their students of color, they simultaneously and inadvertently expressed racial bias and other stereotypes. This pattern is the essence of the rhetorical style of color-blind racism, conceptualized by Bonilla-Silva (2018), which surfaced as a cross-cutting theme throughout the data analysis across all three interview series.

During the data analysis process, I was noted the frequency with which I thought of the word *ambivalence*—in the psychoanalytic sense of the term, which means to experience two opposite feelings at the same time. Participants seemed to simultaneously see and not see race in their school. I noted two off-the-record conversations I had with the participants after the interviews ended, which illustrate this point. One teacher said she had a Latin-American parent, chose to work with immigrant students, married a Latinx immigrant, and had Latinx children, and asked me whether I could explain why she sometimes caught herself harboring biased and prejudiced thoughts against people who looked like her family and her students (she was raised by a White grandmother and, at the start of our interview, reported identifying as White). Another teacher asked me whether I could make sense of one of her colleague's position regarding race. This teacher explained that she had always thought of her colleague, a White young teacher like herself, as an avid advocate for their Latinx, Black, and Asian students. However, on one occasion, she was shocked to hear her colleague making a racist remark against Black people while they shared a subway ride in New York City. I determined that this thread of what I originally thought of as teacher *ambivalence*, in which a participant could make a remark that suddenly changed from opposing to reinforcing racially biased ideas, was the actual phenomena of color-blind racism, a complex and paradoxical pattern revealed throughout my data. (In Chapter 5, I discuss the relevance of these findings to teaching and learning.)

Researcher Positionality

To unpack this finding regarding colorblind racism, I once again turned my gaze to the research literature in an effort to make sense of how ambivalence about racism intersected with other salient themes from the data and whether it was akin to color-blind racism. As I studied the literature that examined White teacher identity and race evasiveness (i.e., the avoidance of

talking about race) versus race visibility (i.e., the willingness to talk about race), I became

increasingly aware that my choice to look at the thematic emergence of ambivalence regarding

racism could be viewed as laden with racial bias. I pondered on whether the process of

identifying and emphasizing what I had thought to be ambivalence was in itself a color-blind

thought process. I also wondered if my entire approach to analyzing the data—including the

interview protocol I devised to collect the data—was hopelessly contaminated by the insidious

invisibility of whiteness. If that were the case, colluding with whiteness would render my

research quest—which I aspired to be antiracist—utterly obsolete. I was paralyzed by these

thoughts, and I dove into the research literature and engaged in dialogue with friends and

colleagues for a soul-searching experience that lasted months.

Through this painful realization, and a subsequent period of research and analysis, I

learned that to complete the data analysis, I would have to adopt an unrelenting, critical, and

circular approach to question every thought or assumption about what the data might reveal, in

each and every step of analysis. I became hyper-aware of the fact that I had benefited from the

privilege of having White-looking skin, and that while breathing the smog of white supremacy

throughout my upbringing, I had assimilated the racial caste system of the South and North

Americas. I realized that my intention to produce unbiased scholarly work would require that I

continuously and systematically check my racial biases in juxtaposition to the data I was

determined to analyze. After several weeks of feeling paralyzed by this realization I read an

article that allowed me to write and remain cognizant that all my growth, work, and dedication

would be fruitless unless I finished writing this dissertation. Thompson's (2003) paper resonated

with my plight as it called on White scholars who research racism to remain aware that "what

will come to count as antiracist will change as we take on new lived possibilities" because

"critical tools are shaped to an important degree by the relations they are meant to disrupt" (p. 20).

Thompson's (2003) poignant argument gave voice to my uneasiness about analyzing the data. I learned that the critical tools I was availing myself to make sense of the phenomenon I had set out to unpack were as imperfect as my ability to clearly see through the smog of whiteness. My new challenge was to stay mindful that perfection and the structures of the educational systems I was both criticizing and utilizing to conduct my research, were mechanisms devised by whiteness, and that my work was fundamentally tainted by whiteness. This realization gave me an escape route for my project to continue as close as possible to my anti-colorblind aspirations. Following Thompson's lead, I decided to proceed on analyzing the data, using the best-suited lens possible to understand and interpret the phenomenon I observed, while remaining aware that "antiracist traditions provide us with useful critiques of existing situations, but tools developed to challenge racism will not always serve equally well to envision new racial possibilities" (p. 20). I finally welcomed the discomfort of the painstaking job of questioning when and how my race talk was laden with color-blind racism and when my antiracist positionalities were most salient as well as, how it influenced my decisions regarding how I analyzed the collected data. By holding the awareness that the frameworks—which Thompson referred to as "tools"—I used to analyze the data were created in the same racial milieu that they aimed to disrupt, I was able to proceed with my work.

In the remainder of Chapter Four, I report the findings of each interview series under three different parts. In each part, I discuss the codes and themes that emerged throughout the interview's transcripts in light of the research question and the two sub-questions in each interview series. I explain the context of the interviews, the coding process, and the subsequent

thematic emergence from the analysis, with the illustration of excerpts from the interview

transcripts.

Part I

First Interview Series—The Focus Groups

In this section, I refer to the focus groups in the numeric order in which they were

held (see Table 2). Throughout all four focus group sessions, the atmosphere was

dynamic and collegial, and participants seemed eager to portray an aspect of their school

that they were proud to share—that their school student population was diverse and that

they were able to successfully teach all students. In the researcher's memo I wrote at the

end of the interviews, I noted that the participants seemed enthusiastic about sharing their

ideas and open to discussing the sensitive topic of my research—White teachers'

successes and challenges educating students of color. Each of the four focus groups lasted

45 minutes and all were conducted in the same day. The first focus group differed from

the last three—it was the largest group, with six participants.

Codes and Themes

The transcripts from each of the three series of interviews were coded using the

interview protocol as a guideline. I followed Saldaña's (2016) idea of tracking the

"quantities of qualities" (p. 25), which consisted of grouping the qualitatively meaningful

excerpts and tracking the frequency of occurrence. Statements that shared a similar

experience or answered the same interview protocol question were assigned a code that

identified the experience (e.g., color-blind racism) or the interview question that it

answered (e.g., awareness of how their words impacted Latinx, Black, and Asian

students). The first phase of analysis was done by pen-and-paper coding. During this first

phase, I did a thorough review of the interview scripts and became acquainted with the data in written format, while annotating on the right side of each page the patterns of codes and themes that were most salient. After the first phase of hand coding, I uploaded the interviews into three different projects on Dedoose (e.g., first interview series, second interview series, third interview series). This second phase of data analysis in Dedoose consisted of transposing the firsthand codes into the program, of observing new codes that grouped subjective ideas, and of coding statements according to the interview protocol questions. These different categories of coding sometimes overlapped, resulting in an excessive number of codes, which were eventually collapsed during the subsequent phases of data analysis and prioritized according to incidence and relevance to the research questions.

The 10 codes that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts from the first series of interviews summarized participants' responses from the focus group interviews' transcripts. As I re-read transcripts and re-analyzed the data, those initial 10 codes were synthesized into 5 final codes, when I realized that they overlapped or that the codes with low incidence did not have relevance to the study. In the first series, the code with the highest incidence (n=15) of the five final codes was *diverse school,* which grouped statements where participants expressed their views that Vanguard students were racially, culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse. The second highest incidence (n=11) was the code *ingredients for success,* which grouped participants' statements indicating what teachers do to educate all students regardless of their race, culture, and ethnicity. The code *demographic changes* (n=9) indicated participants' emphasis on the drastic changes of the student population's demographic composition in the past 10 to 15 years. The last code, *color-blind racism* (n=9)*,* grouped excerpts where participants seemed to unintendedly express the dominant racial ideology that Bonilla-Silva (2018) termed

color-blind racism. I used Bonilla-Silva's framework in the broader sense—as the predominant post—Civil Rights racial ideology widely used to explain racial matters. The color-blind discourse uses a myriad of rhetorical mechanisms that claim neutrality about race through seemingly harmless arguments that deny the existence or relevance of race or racial bias.

Eventually, through subsequent rounds of analysis of the coded excerpts, two contrasting themes emerged for the first interview series. The first theme—*pride in Vanguard student diversity*—encompassed three of the four codes that surfaced from my analysis. The three codes that composed the first theme contained statements that fell within the same category (i.e., "the school is diverse," "demographic changes," and "ingredients for success"). The second theme was contained within the remaining code—color-blind racism—as it contrasted with the former theme of pride in school diversity. Although participants were explicit in their statements about race (i.e., "I don't see color," or "I treat all kids the same"), they were unaware that they simultaneously implied the subscription to color-blind racism. The use of a color-blind language is commonly justified as an attempt to avoid showing racial bias. At the same time, as evidenced in some of the research literature on racial bias, this rhetoric is often the hallmark of the racial bias that people attempt to deny (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Furthermore, by denying *seeing* race—and more particularly the race of their Latinx, Black, and Asian students—these teachers seemed to ignore that their unfavorable racial bias is likely to be implicitly expressed, invisible to them but with the potential to cause unimaginable harm to those students they explicitly claimed to have pride in teaching (this is further discussed in Chapter Five).

The framework color-blind racism inspired me to use the term as a code during the early stages of data analysis. Due to the prevalence and significance of the code in the data, *color-blind racism* emerged as a second theme. To expand on the meaning of this theme for the findings of my study, I use the four central frames of color-blind racism to make sense of participants' rhetoric; their unintentional disclosures of their ideas about race revealed during the interviews. In the next section, I further explain how I use Bonilla-Silva's (2018) four central frames of color-blind racism—abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization framework—to unpack the data. Table 6 lists the four main codes from the first interview series, their definition, the frequency in which they were detected during the focus groups, as well as the corresponding themes that emerged during the subsequent phases of data analysis.

Table 6

Codes, Definition, Frequency, and Themes During the First Interview Series

Codes	Definition	Frequency	Themes
Diverse School	Vanguard students are racially, culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse.	15	
Ingredients for Success	What teachers said they do to successfully educate Latinx, Black, and Asian students (e.g., giving extra-help classes, arriving early to meet with students, making personal connections with students).	11	*Pride in Vanguard student diversity*
Demographic Changes	The school population's demographic composition has drastically changed in the past 10-15 years.	9	

Color-Blind Racism	According to Bonilla-Silva (2018), color-blind racism is the predominant post—Civil Rights racial ideology widely employed to explain racial matters by claiming neutrality about race through seemingly harmless arguments about the existence or relevance of race or racial bias.	9	*Color-Blind Racism*

Both aspects of the two emergent themes confirmed what I had learned from the research literature on color-blind racism the school data published by the New York State Education Department (n.d.), as well as on Vanguard High School's website. Throughout the first theme, participants explicitly stated their pride on the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of Vanguard's student body, identifying their school as "racially diverse," as having had "drastic recent demographic changes," and as being "socioeconomically diverse." These claims about Vanguard's student racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity were reiterated in the New York State Education Department website, which revealed that over half of Vanguard students do not identify as White. The state website also revealed that, in the past 10 years, the Latinx population increased by 25% while the White population decreased by 60% in the school's population (the reference was omitted here to ensure confidentiality). The second theme—color-blind racism—confirmed the extant research literature on color-blind racism (Babbitt, Toosi, & Sommers, 2016; Bell, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1999; Leonardo, 2002; Nayak, 2007; Neville, Gallardo, & Sue, 2016; Picower, 2009), among other areas of research denouncing systemic racism (Giroux, 2003; Matias & Nishi, 2017; Roediger, 2007; Warren & Hancock, 2017).

Pride in the School's Diversity Versus Color-Blind Racism

How do White women teachers experience the phenomenon of educating Latinx, Black, and Asian students? After analyzing the data collected during the first interview series, I found that teachers in my sample shared (1) pride in Vanguard student diversity; participants emphasized their contentment for working in a school environment where over half of the pupils were young people of Color. Additionally, I found that participants unintendedly revealed racial bias through the use of the (2) *color-blind racism* rhetoric, by denying the relevance of the race of their Latinx, Black, and Asian students. Through this paradox of explicitly stating pride in their students' racial diversity while using the language of colorblindness, participants implicitly enacted their racial bias. While denying the relevance of their students' race, participants inadvertently exposed their endorsement of the ideologies of color-blind racism. The following paragraphs illustrate and explore the meanings of these themes.

The present analysis draws on Bonilla-Silva's (2018) seminal research, which postulated color-blind racism as an ideological rhetoric that uses various stylistic components in which "whites use to explain, rationalize, and defend their racial interests" I use his four central frames of color-blind racism to guide the analysis and presentation of the findings when applicable (2018, p. 192). The first frame of color-blind racism—*abstract liberalism*—illustrates the use of abstract language, often out of context, to explain racial inequity. The rhetorical styles of this frame oppose directly addressing racial inequity and instead resort to the language of liberalism to convey morality (e.g., arguments based on the free market ideology, equal opportunity, or choice individualism). The second frame—*naturalization*—suggests that racial phenomena are natural occurrences that can be explained away (e.g., segregation is a natural development common to all races). *Cultural racism*, the third frame, commits to culturally based arguments to

justify the racial status quo (e.g., Mexicans dismiss the value of education, or Blacks have too many babies). The fourth and last frame, *minimization of racism*, disregards racism by defending that discrimination no longer impacts the lives of minority groups (e.g., admitting that racism exists but that it is better than in the past, or making things look racial when they are not).

The following data analysis answers the overarching research question and two sub-questions in each of the three interview series. The chapter concludes with a summary and explores possible implications of the study's findings to improve the educational experiences of Vanguard's Latinx, Black, and Asian students.

Teachers' Voices from the Focus Groups

I recorded in my fieldnotes that the intimate setting of the interview with the fourth focus group held during my first day of data collection had a collegial atmosphere, and participants seemed relaxed and comfortable. They collaborated to answer the interview protocol questions: How you would describe your school? What are the ingredients for successfully teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students? As explained earlier in this chapter, I had emphasized to the school administration that my research sought to explore the lived experiences of White *women* teachers, but one of the participants in the fourth focus group was a man. Thomas—who identified as a White man—was an active participant in the dialogue throughout the group discussion, but throughout the data analysis in this section, I decided to not exclude his contribution to the conversation because it was intertwined with other participants' responses. Although Thomas' gender did play a role in the discussion, his contributions did not seem to influence the discussion about race. The content and the way in which Thomas and the other four women interacted in the group illustrate the interplay of the explicitly and implicitly stated themes.

The following excerpt illustrates how participants described their high school to someone like me, who was unfamiliar with Vanguard:

Bianca: Our school is big…

Teresa: Big, diverse.

Thomas: A melting pot.

Teresa: Yep. So big, so diverse…

The answer to this interview question was similar in all four focus groups—"our school" is racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse—but this group's dialogue best summarizes how the first interview question was answered in all focus groups. After a few minutes of discussion about the ways in which Vanguard is diverse, I probed for more descriptions of Vanguard's student population. Thomas—the male teacher who participated in the first interview series—started to dominate the discussion in the fourth focus group and, at this point, it was unclear whether he acted as the spokesperson for all participants, or if he was engaging in a stereotypical masculine role intended to marginalize the women's ideas. He volunteered:

It's actually more than stereotypical of society. In other words, if you look at Long Island as a whole, we have a tremendously segregated population. When you go to work in… for instance, I started my working career in New York City, not as a teacher but in another field. And you go to work in New York City, and this school [Vanguard] is like New York City. You see people from cultures, all ethnic backgrounds, all different religions, all different beliefs, all different socioeconomic. Yeah. All different socioeconomics. From rich to poor, it really is a good reflection…it's astounding how much it's a good reflection for our kids to be able to come here and go through this place interact with all the different students and teachers as well, but and then be able to go into

the real world. Whereas many of our own children, depending on where we live, can't necessarily do that. If you look at some of the schools in the surrounding area that are predominantly white, they're 90, some of them are as high as 95, 98% White. And we're not even close to that. Yeah.

Thomas correctly pointed out the high levels of school segregation on Long Island and how Vanguard was a unique district in terms of a racially diverse student body. His description of Vanguard explicitly revealed his pride of the school's racial and ethnic diversity, which I categorized as *pride in Vanguard student diversity* theme. However, Thomas word list to characterize his interpretation of the word *diversity*—culture, ethnicity, religions, belief systems, and socioeconomics—did not include *race*. Thomas attempted to establish a parallel between student diversity at Vanguard and in New York City, and to highlight this resemblance by elevating the school status to *diverse*. At that time, I did not think it was my place, as a researcher conducting the first of three interview series, to interrupt Thomas' monopoly of the discussion. Instead, I chose to divert the attention he commanded by making eye contact with the other teachers while I asked the next question. After Thomas finished speaking, I followed with implicit probes seeking to further the discussion around the second theme, *color-blind racism*:

> Researcher: Interesting. Anybody else would like to share their ideas? What else comes to mind when you are asked to describe your school to an outsider like me?
>
> Teresa: Our faculty doesn't reflect that same diversity…
>
> Bianca: That's true, yeah. I never actually realized that.
>
> Teresa: It's just an observation…
>
> Thomas: We're also not reflective of society as a whole because you typically have 50% males and 50% females and we're dominated by females [at Vanguard].

Bianca: Yeah…

These excerpts illustrate the contrast within the thematic emergence I indicated above, as well as

Thomas' race-avoidant rhetorical choice characteristic of color-blind racism. Michael (2015)

suggested that "sometimes we jump to explanations of class because it seems more logical and

easier to talk about than race" (p. 104), and this seemed to be the case with how Thomas changed

the topic of conversation. Nevertheless, Teresa was too quick to dismiss her own poignant

observation about the elephant in the room—the *demographic imperative* (Fix, Passel, & De

Velasco, 2005; Garcia, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009) within the teacher education programs, where

the majority of teachers are historically White and the majority of the student population has

become increasingly diverse (Schulte, 2011). Ladson-Billings (1994) exposed that this racial

mismatch hinders the ability of White teachers to adopt culturally responsive teaching practices

while educating half or more of their students who are likely to not be White. Teresa's

acknowledgment of the demographic imperative indicated the first appearance of the third

theme—*learning to see race*—which is further explored in Part II.

Teresa's comment—which inferred race without using the term—was briefly

acknowledged by Bianca but avoided by Thomas and the other participants who seemed ready to

switch the topic to gender. In an article about the psychology of racial dialogues, Sue (2013)

provided an explanation for Whites' evasion of such talks about race, which explains the

dynamic of this excerpt. Sue argued that "for Whites, to acknowledge or *see race* is to risk the

possibility of being perceived as racist, so great effort is expended to avoid talking about race in

order to appear fair and unprejudiced" (p. 666). Dwelling on Teresa's observation about the

racial and other demographic disparities between teachers and Latinx, Black, and Asian students

at Vanguard seemed to be out of the question for this group. Teresa appeared to be intentional

about her move to introduce race—albeit through the use of the word *diversity*—into the

conversation, but she quickly downplayed her comment by stating, "It's just an observation."

This interaction between participants of focus group four seemed to reveal a few

conflicting trends. First, Teresa's insightful remark cannot be dismissed, and perhaps it was the

first appearance of a third theme, which I discuss in depth in the Second Interview Series section.

Teresa's comment was followed by Bianca's response, when she expressed being surprised and

perhaps curious about Teresa's insight, by saying "I never actually realized that." However,

while disclosing that the subject of Teresa's remark was new to her, Bianca implicitly revealed

that her White privilege kept her oblivious to consider how race might have played a role in her

life and in the lives of her non-White students, whom she had educated during the past 10 years.

Moreover, Teresa dismissed the opportunity to further the inquiry about the meaning of the

demographic imperative for the group and did not attend to the opportunity to engage Bianca's

curiosity, backtracking from her bold and daring move by minimizing the relevance of her

statement ("It's just an observation"). Lastly, Thomas seized the opportunity to divert the

uncomfortable conversation about race to the more tolerable discussion about gender. As a male

teacher, Thomas may have thought that engaging in the discussion of gender could be perceived

as a bold move for a man, as well as being less controversial than engaging in race talks.

A few minutes later, I attempted to recover the thread of the conversation about the

demographic imperative, and, although I addressed Teresa, Thomas answered my prompt, and

the conversation was redirected from race to gender again:

Researcher: While being mindful of the time, I want to go back to something you said

earlier, Teresa. You mentioned that the majority of the teachers in this school do not

reflect the diversity of the student population. How do you think that this plays any role, if any at all, in the education of the students here at Vanguard?

Thomas: Actually, I think it's more positive than negative.

Researcher: What do you mean?

Thomas: I sometimes feel I, …because we do have some people [teachers] from other backgrounds and I see some of the kids not as respectful to them as they are to some other teachers.

Researcher: How come?

Thomas: Just their language, their body language, their control of a room in some cases…And not necessarily across the board, there are plenty of teachers that we have who are of different ethnicities.

Researcher: What do you mean by their body language?

Thomas: I think that that's probably fewer than more, that's definitely something in there. I also feel like in a lot of cases, being, being a male teacher versus a female teacher, I think a lot of times, depending upon the ethnicity, and I don't know which ones are which, but sometimes they're, they're [the students] a little more disrespectful to females than they would be to males.

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah, I agree with that. Right.

Thomas: What they would say to you, they wouldn't say to me necessarily.

Thomas managed to find a positive interpretation of the demographic imperative, by deeming it "more positive than negative," but he was not able to provide a deeper explanation for his argument.

The style of Thomas' exchange in this dialogue was characteristic of the color-blind frame abstract liberalism—he tried to appear reasonable, but his abstract argument merely turned the conversation away from the racial disparity between teachers and students. Additionally, through using random allegations of "body language" and "control of the room," he seemed to reveal an underlying negative bias toward "other teachers" with "different ethnicities" and toward women teachers. The abstract argument that Thomas seemed to attempt to defend was problematic no matter what. In retrospect, I could have probed his apparent bias toward a specific ethnic group of students and of "other" teachers. When he alluded to these groups of teachers and students, Thomas used body language to convey subtle messages that I noted but did not explore (e.g., raising his eyebrows and pointing his head toward the back of the room). Thomas refrained from explicitly naming the student groups he was alluding to ("depending upon the ethnicity, and I don't know which ones are which"), but the stereotype he alluded to seemed to be well known by the other participants.

Similarly to what was revealed by the teachers who participated in focus group four, participants in the three other focus groups unanimously described the school's racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity favorably. Their description corroborated my first finding—the thematic emergence of *pride in Vanguard student diversity* through comparing Vanguard to New York City schools. Participants agreed that such student diversity was a positive characteristic of Vanguard, which they seemed proud to reveal. Nevertheless, as with Thomas' emphasis on gender, the focus on socioeconomics seemed to be another topic that participants used to replace discussions about race. This excerpt from the first focus group illustrates this pattern:

Faith: I would describe this school as diverse. Probably more so than anything that

I grew up with. There are kids who have more than enough money and their own horses

and stables in their own backyards, and they are driving cars that I can't afford, and I've

been working for almost 20 years.

This teacher acknowledged the diversity of Vanguard and implied that the racial diversity is

greater than what she experienced growing up. Yet, at the same time, Faith did not elaborate on

the meaning and implications for working in a school where the demographic composition is so

different from what she experienced as a student. She immediately switched the conversation to

the wealth disparity within the student body and compared to her teacher salary. Later in the

interview, Faith spoke about living near the school and characterized Vanguard as encompassing

wealthy and poor residential areas, but she did not disclose in which of these two areas she

resided. For Faith—as well as for the three other participants who disclosed that they live in the

district— the socioeconomic disparity aspect of Vanguard seemed more salient than for the other

participants who did not reside near the school community. When I asked her to describe the

student population at Vanguard, socioeconomics rather than racial diversity is what first came to

Faith's mind, and she was insistent in comparing the wealth of some of her students to her own.

I attributed these teachers' emphasis on the wealth disparity of the neighborhood to two

reasons. First, I support Sue's (2013) explanation—mentioned earlier—that talking about class

can function as a diversion from seeing race and being perceived as racist. Michael (2015)

explained that "sometimes conversations about race bring up our own feelings of

marginalization, so we change the conversation to one about the ways we are marginalized by

gender, sexuality, or religion" (p. 104). Secondly, Sue (2013) and Michael's (2015) explanations

of underlying motives for avoiding race talks are examples of the evasive maneuvers that

Bonilla-Silva (2018) characterized as the abstract liberalism frame of color-blind racism.

Through de-centralizing race and placing the spotlight of the discussion about diversity on class,

Whites like Faith use this frame to exonerate themselves from seeing the reality of racism, failing to recognize that the structure of social class is intertwined with the creation of the social construct of race (Bagenstos, 2014; Feingold, 2020; Roediger, 2007).

Another interaction among the participants in the third focus group further illustrated how the teacher-student demographic mismatch went unseen and became a missed opportunity for the use of culturally responsive pedagogic approach in the classroom. I illustrate this argument with excerpts, and I use three different lens—color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), *white savior industrial complex* (Aronson, 2017), and the double image of White women (Hancock, 2017)— to unpack the dialogue that ensued when I ask participants to share their thoughts on what contributed to their successes in teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students:

Sarah: Personally, I am a very nurturing, caring teacher. I treat them as if they're my own children. I explain that to them and they respond really well to that…

Sophia: Showing that I'm actually caring because I don't think they always have that level of interest in their home life…They need me to teach them confidence, courage and understanding.

Sarah: Yeah. It's the caring thing. I think that just the fact that they know I'll fight for them…

Sarah and Sophia entered the discussion by defending the position that their successes in teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students can be explained by their culture of care. However, their well-intended culture of care seemed packed with the cultural racism framework of color-blind racism. Sophia stated that she is "caring because I don't think they always have that level of interest in their home life," relying on the stereotype that Latinx students do not have caring households (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). When Sarah joined in with Sophia, by adding that "they know

I'll fight for them," I recalled another lens that could also be used to unpack the underlying meaning of their comments—the *white savior industrial complex* which is defined as "the confluence of practices, processes, and institutions that reify historical inequities to ultimately validate white privilege" (Anderson, 2013, p. 39). This term was coined to expose a pattern common to Whites—especially White women working in education—who wish to be recognized for "saving those less fortunate" while ignoring the "policies they have supported that have created/maintained systems of oppression" (Aronson, 2017, p. 36). The frame of cultural racism combined with the white savior industrial complex rhetoric denote a lack of racial competence that will inevitably seep from White teachers' lips to their Latinx, Black, and Asian students' ears, leading to "so much hurt, misunderstanding and mis-placements" along their educational journey (Michael et al., 2017, p.37).

In his article exploring what he called the double image of White women teachers' identity, Hancock (2017) exposed that the identities that White women teachers want to project are often perceived as the contrary by their students of Color. He argued, "while many White women teachers are 'nice' and 'well-intentioned,' they are not aware of the double image concepts where there is a culturally contrary perspective on their behavior and intentions" (p. 76). Hancock added that many white women teachers are "unaware that many diverse students don't see them as 'savior' or 'helper,'" but rather "understand their nice teachers to be oppressive and demeaning toward their culture." His argument can be summed up by the intention versus impact paradox characteristic of whiteness discourse, where the silence around race becomes a tool for oppression, an issue that stems from systemic racism but "individual teachers within that very system have a lot of power to influence the experiences of individual students" (Michael et al., 2017, p. 38). The teachers' dialogue continued:

Faith: I think the kids know what to expect from the teacher, and I have high

expectations for them. I tell them that, "If you have some difficulty, I'll help you get the

rest of the way, but don't just sit there with the attitude that you can't do something,

because it's your future that you have to care about. I went to school. I have a good job. I

am independent and that's where we need to get you guys to be."

Sarah: Right. Because I'm not an easy teacher by any means. I have high

expectations for these [Latinx] kids and I will do anything to help them, but I also won't

pass them along and give them answers.

Sophia: They need me to teach them confidence and courage and understanding. But

I know that not all teachers work this way. I think that, for teachers who have taught for a

long time and are set in their own ways, it's helpful to be mindful about what they say…

As many other interactions among participants throughout all focus groups, I chose to

highlight this excerpt because it clearly illustrates how the ideology of whiteness—white

supremacy—is continuously and inadvertently revealed under the guise of a culture of care. To

start, Faith joined in the conversation and her comment comparing her life to her students. A

closer look at the implications of this comment through the lens of color-blind racism would

identify Faith's style as the frame *minimization of racism.* By assuming that the challenges she

faced and overcame as a White, middle-class student and professional could be likewise

conquered by her Latinx, Black, and Asian student—if they would just check their "attitude."

Faith failed to consider that, unlike her, these student subgroups are likely to have experienced

racial discrimination that she—as a White woman with class privileges—is not likely to have

encountered.

When teachers such as Faith disregard the role of race and ethnicity—their own and that of their students—in the educator-pupil dyad, they also miss the opportunity to achieve the success they seek to reach through subscribing to the culture of caring they professed to have. Warren and Talley (2017) explained that "whiteness veils a White teacher's ability to recognize the multiple ways their attitudes, beliefs, and cultural perceptions disadvantage students of color" (p. 163), and they see this blindness is a matter of *passive racism.* This seems to be the case for both, Faith and Sarah, who promptly agreed with Faith's comment and continued the dialogue, proudly declaring that she has high expectations for her students of Color. Furthermore, Sarah's choice of words while referring to her students of Color as "these kids" had an unsettling tone that characterized their otherness in a negative way. Sophia's following remark with the depiction of her students as *needing* her to teach them "confidence and courage and understanding" also had the condescending tone characteristic of the white savior industrial complex, but she seemed to neglect to consider that teachers *need* students to have a job and that most teachers at Vanguard are paid relatively well for their work. Sophia's comment also pointed to the idea that she is in the minority at the school by stating that "not all teachers work this way"—implying that other teachers do not teach students these social-emotional attributes.

Reflection

My growing familiarity with the data, which resulted from the cyclical and careful analysis of the transcripts using the lens of the methodic four main frames of color-blind racism, allowed me to notice the emergence of the two themes I discussed in this section—pride in Vanguard student diversity and color-blind racism. However, by deepening my familiarity with the data, I also broadened my knowledge of how the lens of color-blind racism revealed layers of depth for the interpretation of the racial language participants used to describe their experiences.

Through this learning process, I realized that the two seemingly diverging themes from the first interview series could be seen as depicting one single overarching theme: color-blind racism. This perspective stems from Bonilla-Silva's (2018) conceptualization of color-blind racism as a phenomenon that is paradoxical in nature. Although it is a deliberate linguistic choice assimilated through culture, the use of the color-blind rhetoric inadvertently reveals the belief in a white supremacist ideology through the use of abstract, ambivalent, and contradicting linguistic maneuvers employed to deny the racial ideology that it endorses (e.g., the attempt to appear non-racial by denying to see color would not be necessary in the absence of racist ideas). In other words, participants' stated pride in the school diversity, which intended to convey neutrality about race, was disclosed through the use of a racial rhetoric that, while seeking to avoid race talk, unintendedly disclosed a racial ideology. Bonilla-Silva (2012) argued that the colorblind rhetoric works as a racial grammar used by Whites to normalize "the standards of white supremacy as the standards for all sort of social events and transactions" (p. 173) and that its use is an unmistakable revelation of the endorsement of racist ideas.

The juxtaposition of the participants' pride regarding the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the student body—explicitly stated during the focus groups—with the infrequent mention of these demographic characteristics during the first individual interviews reiterated their racist ideas. The choice—deliberate or not—to use the rhetorical strategy of advertising that they *don't see race* denounced their subscription to the racial ideology that the framework color-blind racism opposes. If teachers were as proud of the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of their student population as much as they proclaimed to be, why would race be left out of their dialogues? The answer to this question may be found in the next

interview series, with the emergence of another theme, which is discussed in Part II, with the explanation and analysis of the findings from the first individual interviews.

Part II

Second Interview Series – First Individual Interviews

In this section, I answer the first sub-question of the overarching research question—the successes and challenges participants reported when describing their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students at Vanguard High School. I attempted to make sense of participants' detailed life experiences as teachers of students from a racial and socioeconomic background different from their own. The semi-structured interview protocol I devised followed Seidman's (2013) guidelines for the second series of data collection and concentrated on "the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience in the topic area of the study" (p. 21), while asking them to reconstruct their experiences in detail. The questions for the second interview protocol attempted to elicit data to uncover participants' successes and challenges vis-à-vis the demographic mismatch between teachers and the majority of their students. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed flexibility to personalize interview questions to follow up on individual participants' remarks during the focus group interview series. I indicate when this occurs in the section where I illustrate the findings through interview excerpts.

Seven semi-structured interview questions offered participants the flexibility to volunteer their unique perceptions of their relationships with their students. This latitude also permitted participants to share all and any information they deemed important to disclose, or to expand on a former question anytime throughout the interview. The second stage of data collection was also conducted at Vanguard High School on a regular workday, during teachers' lunch or prep time. I

met with participants during a pre-set time limit of 45 minutes, which is the length of each of Vanguard's teaching periods. According to Dr. Turner—who facilitated my visits at the school—from the 16 women teachers who participated in the focus groups, 1 teacher was absent on the day she was schedule for the second interview series. The meetings with individual teachers were held in a conference room at Vanguard in two consecutive days—seven teachers were interviewed on the first day (one was absent) and eight on the second day. The interview protocol questions included the following topics, in relation to Latinx, Black, and Asian students: (1) why they became a teacher, (2) what brought them to Vanguard, (3) how their life and educational experiences informed or influenced their ability to successfully connect with these students' sub groups, (4) if they were aware of the impact of their words on their students, (5) their stories of successes, and (6) their stories of challenges.

Codes and Themes

The early stages of data analysis of this series followed the process described in Part 1. The interviews were professionally transcribed verbatim, followed by the firsthand analysis and a subsequent transference of the transcripts into Dedoose for several rounds of analysis, generating codes and themes. The first phase of the data analysis from the second series—on pen and paper—sought to generate codes that grouped and organized the transcripted interviews according to participants' answers to the interview questions. This first step generated nine major codes (see Table 8 for the list of codes) and provided the opportunity for my engagement, familiarization, and organization with the transcripts. The second phase of analysis focused on examining the excerpts grouped under the major six codes I identified during the initial phase—the three

remaining codes did not offer relevant data and were excluded during this round of analysis.

During a third phase of analysis, these six codes were merged into the four themes of highest

incidence, according to the meaning they had in common (e.g., the code *turning point events*

could sometimes be themed as another code, such as *challenges, successes*, or *critical thinking,*

depending on the shared meaning). The four themes I present in this section emerged during this

phase and they are explored below. To make better sense of the meaning of these four codes, I

embarked on a fourth phase of data analysis and re-coded the excerpts captured under each of the

four themes, which led to my arrival at two new thematic patterns that further unpacked and

interpreted the meaning of the themes *successes* and *challenges* from participants' responses.

Table 7

Summary of the Phases of Data Analysis, from Coding to Themeing

Codes From 1st Phase	Codes From 2nd Phase	Frequency of Codes on 1st and 2nd Phases	Themes From 3rd Phase	Codes From Themes 4th Phase
Color-Blind Racism	Color-Blind Racism	70	Color-Blind Racism	
Challenges	Challenges	56	Challenges (Derived from External Factors)	Poverty
				Immigration Status
				Mental Illness
Critical Thinking	Critical Thinking	53	Learning to See	
Successes	Successes	44	Successes (Derived from Internal Factors)	Hard Work
				Flexibility
				Empathy
Turning Point Events	Turning Point Events	20		
Relevant Professional/ Personal Experiences	Relevant Professional/ Personal Experiences	20		
A Typical Day		12		
Why I Teach Here		10		

Teacher/ Student SES Gap	9	

Thematic Emergences—Two Paradoxes

Through the process of further *themeing* the four primary themes (i.e., color-blind racism, challenges, critical thinking, and successes), I was able to deepen my understanding of their meaning and significance. Color-blind racism (*n*=70) continued to dominate as the overarching phenomenon I explored through my research, and it was discussed in detail in the discussion of the first interview series. It emerged as the most common manner through which participants described their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. This overarching theme featured statements laden with ideas that unintentionally—and often implicitly—revealed their racial ideology. The second most relevant theme, learning to see race (*n*=53), emerged from participants' expression of ideas that were initially coded as *critical thinking*, which identified instances where participants' discourse directly or indirectly indicated a burgeoning interest in thinking critically about race. I termed this theme *learning to see race* because it illustrates a noticeable pattern of racial literacy in the rhetoric of most participants— albeit in different degrees of clarity—which stands in contrast to the first thematic emergence *color-blind racism*. I borrowed the term from the title of one of Ullucci's (2011) studies that highlighted her research on race and poverty issues in schooling—*Learning to see: the development of race and class consciousness in white teachers.* This title summarized the findings of her study and inspired the naming of my second main finding, *learning to see race.*

As I progressed through the process of cyclical data analysis, I realized that the two main themes represented a *meaningful paradox*—meaningful because it represented a contrast where participants choose to see race instead of color-blindness, which I interpreted as a movement

toward racial literacy. The theme *learning to see race* appeared to fall outside the scope of the colorblind rhetorical paradox, unlike the pattern of juxtaposing pride about the student diversity with an infrequent mention of the racial aspect of diversity that emerged throughout the first series. The meaningful paradox differed from the *pride in Vanguard student diversity* because, rather than promoting a feeling of pride that was denied by the racial ideology revealed through the use of a color-blind rhetoric, learning to see race indicated the emergence of a process involving critical-thinking skills regarding race. As a theme, learning to see race illustrated instances throughout the interview transcripts where participants demonstrated intentionality in their efforts to critically examine the role of race in teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students. This theme depicts participants' deliberate and conscious push toward learning to see race, in contrast of other instances in their interviews where they used the colorblind rhetoric. In other words, learning to see race seemed to stand out as a theme on its own, contrasting with color-blind racism. There is one important caveat that is relevant to my findings—while both themes often appeared in the same interview, just sentences apart, color-blind racism was the dominant theme. Although I identified the emergence of learning to see race, I also recognize that this pattern indicated a burgeoning movement away from color-blindness, rather than a solid opposition to the racist ideology that the latter espouses.

The two other emerging themes from the second interview series—successes and challenges—also contrasted to form an interesting paradox where successes were attributed to internal or individual characteristics while challenges were assigned to external factors. I labeled this finding as the *accountability paradox.* I briefly explore this thematic emergence and the possible implications of this finding in the next paragraph. I revisit the implications of the accountability paradox in Chapter Five.

The Accountability Paradox

To further my understanding of what participants meant by *successes* an *challenges*—of what they thought to have a positive or negative impact on their ability to teach Latinx, Black, and Asian students—I decided to open a new Dedoose project, import the excerpts grouped under the themes *successes* and *challenges*, and code them again. The patterns of salient words grouped as codes revealed two distinct thematic groups. The first theme revealed that all participants attributed their successes to personal qualities—*internal sources*—but none considered that some individual qualities might also play a role in the challenges they identified to teach Latinx, Black, and Asian students. These themes highlighted participants' individual characteristics, and the most frequent were their hard work, their ability to be flexible (e.g., stay late or arrive early to modify assignments), their empathy (e.g., understand the hardships that students face and accommodate their needs), and their ability to successfully cultivate a culture of care (e.g., "students learn from teachers who show they care about them").

In contrast to attributing their successes to internal sources, most participants credited *external sources*—the second thematic emergence—for the challenges they believed that hindered their ability to successfully teach students of Color. The three major obstacles participants reported were poverty (e.g., homelessness, no access to technological resources), immigration status (e.g., undocumented students without the ability to support themselves in college, long work hours impacting their ability to attend school, history of interrupted education prior to immigration), and mental illness (e.g., depression, anxiety). Additionally, the most frequent challenge teachers identified was immigration status, which only referred to the Latinx student population—again, Asian students were not mentioned by any participant during the

interviews. Some participants discussed how the language barrier to communicate with Latinx students hinders their ability to successfully teach them.

Although I do not dispute that the challenges that participants identified are de facto obstacles for teaching students of Color, this theme also revealed that they did not adopt a critical stance to examine whether their gender, race, racial ideology, or socioeconomic background could unintendedly contribute to challenges in teaching students of color. As explained earlier, I call this thematic finding the "accountability paradox," because although all participants could identify that they had the power to create success while teaching students of Color, they did not hold themselves accountable for having the power to contribute to other challenges. Participants did not consider the possibility that their race, privileges, and especially the ideology underlying their color-blind racism rhetoric could harm their students of Color and have a negative impact on them. They also failed to contemplate whether their color-blind rhetoric colluded with the neoliberal ideology that upholds White supremacy, racial inequity, and consequently, the social issues they identified as challenges to teach their students of Color.

This accountability paradox is further discussed in Chapter Five, but before I proceeding to the next section, I feel compelled to acknowledge that the challenges participants reported are de facto obstacles for students of Color, known to impact education, physical and mental health, and socioeconomic status. These problems stem from the neoliberal socioeconomic and political agenda that upholds white supremacy, a view I have explained throughout my research. I acknowledge that, oftentimes, teachers are the target for unjust criticism and implicated on the failures of the educational system sponsored by forces beyond their control (Giroux, 2003; Sleeter, 2008). Nevertheless, the principles undergirding the theoretical lens I reviewed—critical whiteness studies, critical pedagogy, and color-blind racism—could be used to reframe these

problems: First, by recognizing that the color-blind rhetoric stems from systemic racism; second, through acknowledging that all school-age children are vulnerable and susceptible to the mandates of hegemony; and last, by understanding how students of Color are at greater risk to endure systemic oppression and educational inequities, especially the youth with intersectional demographic characteristics such as race; all other ramifications of poverty (e.g., food insecurity, homelessness), and problems stemming from immigration (e.g., poverty, child labor, limited or unaffordable access to higher education).

A Meaningful Paradox

The thematic paradox *color-blind racism* versus *learning to see race* combine to form the strongest finding of the second interview series. As explained in the final reflection of Part I, color-blind racism is a phenomenon that is paradoxical in nature, disclosed through ambivalent and conflicting rhetorical patterns that reveal a racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). My observation of the predominance of this phenomenon is indisputable as it had the highest incidence ($n=70$) than any other code or theme in the data. However, the emergence of the theme *learning to see race*—which contrasted with color-blind racism—suggests a pattern of dichotomous ideas that I see as meaningful and present in this section. In the following paragraphs, I illustrate, with excerpts from interviews with two teachers, how this overarching thematic finding I called "a meaningful paradox" unraveled during the interviews. First, I present the first theme, color-blind racism, and the four frames most commonly used to express this ideology. Next, I present the second theme, learning to see race, and conclude with an exploration of what these two themes might indicate.

First Theme—Color-Blind Racism and The Four Frames

    Brenda

Brenda, a veteran teacher with almost 35 years of experience, grew up in the vicinities of Vanguard High School, but due to some issues that she could not remember, her parents decided to send her to a private school because of some racial tensions in the neighborhood. She did not seem happy to participate in the interview, but I did not ask her if Dr. Turner had pressured her to meet with me. She met me in the conference room where I intended to conduct all the interviews, but rather than meeting with me there, she explained that we could talk at the student cafeteria, where I could have a sense of the students' interaction while we talked. We stood at one end of the cafeteria, where our conversation was private. Although the acoustic of the cafeteria was good and I could hear her well, I had difficulty understanding her answers to the questions I asked, and I could not decide if she was not answering my questions because my accent was getting in the way of her understanding me or if the interview topic was making her feel uncomfortable. When the verbatim transcript of her interview arrived, I read over it to make sense of what seemed to get in the way of our interview.

The excerpts I chose from Brenda's interview can be interpreted as examples of all four frames of color-blind racism: minimization of racism, cultural racism, naturalization, and abstract liberalism. In this exchange, I asked her to share with me what led her to choose to teach at Vanguard—a racially diverse school where more than half of the students were Latinx, Black, or Asian —since she knew the neighborhood so well (she grew up in the neighborhood but attended an all-White private school). She answered with the following explanation:

Brenda: Vanguard was not the way it is today. It changed over the time since I came

        here [to teach]. So, what I imagine would never have been what this is right now… [I

think she meant to say: "I never imagined that it would have become what it is right now."]

Researcher: I heard that the demographic characteristics of the students at Vanguard changed fast in the recent years…

Brenda: Yes. [A three-second silence followed, so I asked another question.]

Researcher: And do you think that your professional training or life experiences prepared you for this change in the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic makeup of the student population that you have witnessed over your teaching career here?

Brenda: I think there's a lot of stuff that happened to teaching, that you can say it's cerebrally, but it doesn't really actually parlay itself into reality, you know? I mean if you are a teacher, you get to have it, do a lesson plan but it's not really how you have to do it when you get a job. So, I think no matter what you plan for, your best advantage as a teacher is just plain experience and kind of learn as you go, absorb it as you go because, over 30 years, the kids change and you have to also change…

The way in which she dodged my question, Brenda minimized the relevance of the racial aspect of my question. She was clearly aware of the demographic shift in the neighborhood, but yet, she was not having that conversation. This rhetorical move to dismiss the relevance of race is characteristic of the color-blind frame *minimization of racism*. Next, I asked Brenda to describe a typical day as a teacher of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. She shared the following story that illustrated a challenge she had faced earlier in the school year:

Brenda: Well, a tough behavior…is like, there is a table way over at the door and has a girl that occasions herself over there with that boy. She's not a special ed student, but

she does have some issues and she's very defiant. So, even if you got there and talked to

her, she'll talk back to you and tell you that you are over reacting.

Researcher: What do you think she means by that?

Brenda: The problem is with her, the administration knows about her and stuff. So, if

she acts up, you tell the administrator early, because it's only gonna get worse. Like one

time I saw her being…she was on the floor sitting down and somebody, a friend, grabbed

her backpack, you know, it has a handle on the back, and they just dragged her all the

way out the door. Silly stuff like that, but I feel like if I let that go, someone over here's

gonna do something silly.

At the time of the interview, I was not sure how to interpret Brenda's story and could not

ascertain what she was trying to say, but the word that came to mind was *slipperiness*, a term that

Bonilla-Silva (2018) used to describe the rhetorical styles of color-blind racism. I asked if she

wouldn't mind telling me the ethnic background of this student:

Brenda: She's Black.

Researcher: Do you think that Black and Latino kids tend to get more in trouble than

White kids?

Brenda: No.

Researcher: [Hum…]

Brenda: No, I can't categorize it that way. Just 'cause I don't clearly see it. I have

these two White kids who probably got in trouble more than any of the other kids.

Researcher: One of the reasons I asked this question is because you mentioned earlier in

the interview that when you were a teenager, living in this neighborhood, there were

some racial tensions in the school, and I wondered if that is what you were alluding to…

Brenda: No. I mean, the school changed the makeup of the cafeterias, because you

have a tendency, as nature, to group with your own people, and stuff like that…

Through this remark, Brenda adopted a second color-blind frame, *naturalization,* by explaining

that the segregation in the student cafeteria is a natural occurrence. I moved to the next interview

question and asked Brenda to share one story when she thought she was successful in educating

Latinx, Black, and Asian students at Vanguard. She answered my question with the following

observation:

Brenda: Just wanna say… you keep on bringing up the issue of White, Black,

Spanish. I don't see it that way and that's a bit surprising to even have that kind of

conversation, cause it's what we try not to do, is to single out a kid because of that

issue…

After making this remark, Brenda immediately excused herself from my presence and left. She

came back after a few minutes explaining that she had to take care of a situation outside our

meeting area. By stating her surprise for having "that kind of conversation" and by stating her

efforts to not "single out a kid because of that issue," Brenda illustrated the frame of *abstract

liberalism.* The excerpts I selected above illustrated the four frames of color-blind racism, but

these were not the only instances during Brenda's interview.

Brenda's interaction with me was perhaps the most challenging of all series. She seemed

antagonized by my questions, to the point of having to take a break. I was not surprised when she

ignored my invitation to participate in one more round of interviews. Nevertheless, toward the

end of our interview, she appeared relaxed and more inclined to tell me stories she thought might

leave a good impression. Only once did she bring up the topic of race, to reveal that some time

ago, she had a special Black student who called her mom. Brenda also proclaimed the value of

individualism through the use of the *abstract liberalism frame,* emphasizing her love for all students, while "treating the kids as individuals because they can see your heart." Following this observation, Brenda acknowledged that teaching students from a background different from her own could be difficult for her at times. I asked why it was difficult, and she promptly responded, "Why? Because it's not just coming in and doing something like you're familiar with at home. I don't live in a neighborhood that looks like this school." Brenda was unable to see how her segregated life is a racial phenomenon—whether or not she talks about race—and that her racial isolation is related to her admitted difficulty to teach and reach the students of Color she claimed to love. I will discuss other possible interpretations of Brenda's interview in Chapter Five.

Sarah

Teaching was a calling for Sarah—she wanted to "make a difference" while pursuing a "fulfilling" career. She accepted the position at Vanguard because she liked the school environment, although she stated that she could have earned $20,000 a year more if she had accepted a teaching job in a wealthy, highly segregated Long Island neighborhood. Sarah is an energetic young teacher with around 10 years of experience. She grew up "in my own little bubble," an all-White middle-class neighborhood, but woke up to the "beauty of diversity" when she attended a racially and ethnically diverse college. When asked what makes her a successful teacher of Latinx, Black, and Asian students, she promptly answered, "setting the bar high; I have high expectations for all my students." Sarah explained that, her first teaching experience was at an almost all-White, wealthy school:

> Students could be jerks; they would do nothing, and at the end of the day, mom and daddy got them tutors for three weeks straight at $90 an hour because they wanted to fix their kids' mistakes. You didn't have leverage. I mean, here it makes a difference because

a lot of my kids can't afford tutors. So, I'm the only chance they have to do well…At that school, I wasn't needed the way I'm needed here.

When probing for more information about what she did to connect with and teach her students of color who needed her, Sarah explained that she builds a connection with them by arriving at work early, welcoming them to come into her room to talk to her about anything in their lives, and allowing their relationship to develop. I probed further and asked her to describe her students; to give me an example of the talking that went on between her and them; and whether they were Latinx, Black, Asian, or White. Sarah answered, "In terms of diversity, I don't know if it, like, plays a role in my daily life. I don't know, it's just like, they are my kids. The kids you like, the kids you know…" Sarah was not as direct as Brenda, but her implicit message was as clear as what Brenda conveyed very explicitly—they strive to not "single out" kids based on their race. Teachers asserted their belief that by cultivating the color-blind approach to denying the relevance of race, they were attempting to ward off any chances of enacting racism. Jones (2016) discussed the different ways in which a color-blind racial ideology is detrimental to people of Color and proposed that color-blindness is both not possible and the lack of possibility is damaging. He argued that it is not possible to not see the racial other and that holding a color-blind belief is a harmful "self-enhancing illusion" because it limits the ability to critically examine racial beliefs and actions as well as "alienates those whose race is being discounted" (p. 42).

The interviews with Brenda and Sarah are illustrate how the color-blind racism ideology transpired during the interviews. Throughout all 15 individual interviews, participants used the color-blind rhetoric to describe their experiences with Latinx, Black, and Asian students. And yet, they all seemed genuinely proud of and invested in working with a racially, ethnoculturally,

and socioeconomic student population. Most of them did not understand that race is an integral part of diversity. Although they used race-avoidance rhetoric, the racial ideology they disclosed, was sometimes contradicted when they seemed to progress towards racial literacy; this was the pattern I identified as "a meaningful paradox." The second interview series gave me a clearer perspective about this pattern. Listening to the detailed stories of what participants perceived as successes—what they struggled with the most, and about their sincere intent to teach children whose lives were so different from theirs—I also learned how the thematic expression *color-blind racism* could co-exist with *learning to see race*.

The participants who were able to see race—even though they used the colorblind perspective at times—seem to have had a repertoire of personal experiences that allowed them to question the racist tropes characteristic of dominant racial ideology. Learning to see race is a process—indicated by the verb in the gerund tense—that indicates some level of racial literacy acquisition, rather than reaching a milestone. By recognizing the thematic emergence of learning to see race, I am adopting an optimistic and hopeful outlook that this theme represents—racial literacy can be cultivated, and the progress toward learning to see race does not exclude having racial blind spots or defaulting to the uncritical use of the color-blind racist rhetoric at times.

Second Theme—Learning to See Race and Racial Literacy

Dana, Jessica, and Barbara's interviews differed from the other 12 teachers interviewed in Series Two because they brought up their students' race during the interviews, especially while answering the question about why they became teachers and why they chose to teach at Vanguard. Although they revealed different levels of racial literacy and awareness about the role of race for them, for their students, and for the teacher-student relationship, these White women shared stories about how personal life circumstances gave them a new set of lenses to examine

their views on race. These life circumstances included teaching in New York City schools,

raising children in the Vanguard district, and attending diverse schools for their own education.

Dana

From these three teachers, Dana was the only teacher who did not participate in the third

interview series because she had travel plans with her family scheduled for the period when I

would be conducting the interviews. Dana's early teaching job seems to have allowed her to

overcome her fears of the racial other for the first time in her life. She started teaching in her

early 20s and already had over 10 years of experience at the time of our interview. Dana stated

that she accepted the job at Vanguard because she "did not want to teach in a district that wasn't

diverse, because that's not our world." She arrived at this realization after she taught in a racially

diverse school in Queens, New York, for three years prior to getting a job at Vanguard.

Dana left her job in Queens because she spent three hours a day commuting to and from

work. The decision to work at Vanguard—her commute shortened to 30 minutes a day—fulfilled

her wish to teach at a Long Island school where she could "become a part of the school

community." Dana explained, "I'm constantly at school events, giving extra help to my students,

getting involved in every extracurricular activity possible and this was impossible to do in

Queens because of my commute." Working in New York City in her early career "made me into

a better person, more understanding and more informed," even though she "felt, to be honest,

initially nervous about teaching in the city, because, I was like, oh my God, they're going to eat

me alive; what if they are vicious?" Dana's rolling eyes and facial expression when making this

disclosure seemed to ridicule her past views. She continued with a discussion about how the

multi-racial friends and teachers she met at that job had influenced her in positive ways, and that

they were responsible for changing her initial negative perception of their inner-city students of

Color. She said that the opportunity to interact with racially diverse colleagues and students gave

her the opportunity to "learn all about the importance of being exposed to all the diversity of

Queens." Dana repeated a few times during the interview that her teaching experience in New

York City had turned her into "a better person, a teacher who appreciates cultural, racial, and all

kinds of diversity."

Nevertheless, when probed for a deeper exploration of whether or how the race, ethnicity,

and socioeconomic status of her students had influenced her choice of a teaching career and of

teaching at Vanguard, Dana was not able to further discuss how this importance of being

exposed played a role in her current teaching experience. During most of Dana's first individual

interview, I became increasingly curious to learn about how this young White teacher, whose

life-long education was entirely in segregated schools, could have been transformed in three

years of teaching at a racially diverse school in Queens. Her interview reminded me of the

teachers that Ullucci (2011) wrote about in her study—discussed in Chapter Two—who were

developing race and class consciousness. Dana changed her views of students of color while

teaching in Queens. Her acknowledgement of being mentored by multiracial colleagues also

seems to have impacted her teacher education and socioemotional development. It also indicates

some level of progress toward learning to see students of Color differently than when she started

working in Queens. I wondered whether and how Dana would have joined me in reflecting on

the meaning of her lived experiences teaching Vanguard's Latinx, Black, and Asian students if

she had participated in the third interview series.

Jessica

Another participant who seemed to be learning to see race was Jessica, a seasoned

teacher who, according to her, was as enthusiastic about teaching as she was at the time of our

interview, with only a few years away from retirement. Jessica is one of the teachers that attended Vanguard in high school, and she has taught there since the start of her career. Jessica said she appreciates the demographic diversity of the school, and through the years, she has become better informed about how the lives of her students—in particular the Latinx subgroup—impacts their ability to learn. She recalled that, as a young teacher, she had many shortcomings as a teacher: "I wish I could go back to some of those families in the first few years before I had my children and apologize cause, boy, I was arrogant, and I had no reason to be. I knew nothing; I realize it now." She is certain that her most informative experience as a teacher came through her own children in various ways. Jessica bought a house in the Vanguard district early in her career and her children also graduated from the school. One way in which Jessica learned about the lives of her students was through her children's friends. She stated that her kids introduced her to "a very diverse crowd of people." She explained,

> I sent my children here. I like to tell people that too. This was where I wanted my kids. We could have just moved over the border a little bit this way or a little bit that way and not been in the district. But I really did want to be here, and I'm glad. It was a good decision for us.

She recalled that her children's friends were racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse, in addition to having family compositions strikingly different from her own—single-parent households, families who struggled with job loss, food insecurity, homelessness, and families with two fathers or two mothers, or that were largely blended. Jessica admitted that her expectations of what and how her students' parents were supposed to do to support them changed when she met her children's school friends and learned about their assets, struggles, and unique ways of "making things work." Getting to know her children's friends and their lives with

single parents, or with parents whose jobs kept them away from their children for long periods of time, led her to revise her privileged assumptions and expectations of what was "good parenting" and how it played a role in children's lives and education.

Throughout her interview, Jessica related a number of experiences in which teaching racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse students at Vanguard informed how she teaches. She spoke about the "material deprivation" of poor students and the life demands on Latinx students whose survival require them to work long hours after attending school and hinders their access to education. Jessica was critical of some of her colleagues who "do not understand that when a Hispanic student is falling asleep in class and did not do their homework, it is most likely because they worked until 10 or 11 at night." She emphasized that teachers of immigrant, Latinx students must have "adaptability, which is what makes a school work even when the faces of the teachers don't match the faces of their students."

Jessica explained that her job as a teacher must include advocating for her students with the school administration and with her fellow teachers, to work toward bridging the wealth gap within the student body, and by providing them with the material resources they lack. Albeit knowledgeable and invested in addressing student's material resources and educational needs, and even the latter allusion to the demographic imperative seen on the faces of the faculty versus the students, Jessica did not discuss how the student's race, class, or immigration status factored in the teaching and learning experiences at Vanguard. She mentioned the importance of flexibility to accommodate the needs of students of Color "even when the faces of the teachers don't match the faces of their students," but she did not elaborate on the implications of this teacher-student racial mismatch that she spotted.

Barbara

During the interview with Barbara—the teacher who identified her race as Caucasian and ethnicity as Hispanic—I learned that she applied for a job at Vanguard because it is racially diverse. Her positive view of the school largely stemmed from the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the student population, which motivated her to buy a house near Vanguard, where her young children will attend high school. Barbara identifies herself as a White woman, while acknowledging that her mother was born and raised in a Latin-American country, which explains her naming her Latinx ethnicity. Barbara reported that she attended diverse schools all her life and that she wanted her Latinx children—she is married to a Latinx man—to grow up in a racially diverse community.

Barbara exhibited the most racially progressive views among all participants in my study. From the start of our individual interview, she was outspoken about her views of how the school should "do a better job of attracting racially diverse teachers to better educate racially diverse students so that they grow up and want to be teachers." Barbara revealed her opinion that, until recently, Vanguard over-classified African-American students as learning disabled and that the pejorative connotation associated with the special education label discourages these students from having a positive school experience. "No one wants to be classified as needing some special assistance," she explained, adding that:

> I think that we don't recognize that African-American students do have a different culture. They have a different way of expressing themselves. I think about this all the time when I have cafeteria duty every day during this period. I see the African-American kids—most of them sit together in one table over here. And then there's a few interspersed throughout. There is a large group of them, and I think most of them are

special education students as well. They are very loud, and they are very boisterous. And

they run around the cafeteria and chase each other sometimes. They use very foul

language sometimes, especially the girls. I sit there, and inside I am reacting like, 'Oh my

God, these kids…what's wrong with these kids?' But then I'm like, wait a minute, this is

their cultural way of expressing themselves; this is their way of communicating. Why am

I thinking that there is something wrong with it just because it is different from my

experience or from the social norm? And I think we have to be more open to that in an

educational setting. I feel like teachers are so afraid of losing control of their class that

they want to tamper the natural way that kids of different races express themselves…

To start, Barbara's awareness of the flaws of the educational system and her ability to see how

they are played out at Vanguard (e.g., the over-classification of African-American students with

learning disabilities) demonstrated greater racial literacy than all other participants. Moreover,

she shared her critical thought process through an illustration of how she opposed her own racial

biases. Barbara's style of communication during our interviews matched her descriptions of how

she communicated with her students; she was honest, unafraid of acknowledging when she had a

biased thought, and she was deliberate about questioning and opposing the negative racial bias in

her thought processes.

While Barbara seemed accustomed to engaging in critical thinking about race, Dana and

Jessica's racial literacy appeared to be limited to *learning to see* their students' race and ethnicity

through the incomplete lens of socioeconomic status—which does not suffice to explain the

impact of race in the lives of students of Color. Barbara's rhetoric was straightforward and at

ease while speaking about her perspectives about how her race and ethnicity impacted students'

views of her and of the school, as well as how it impacted their learning experience.

Interestingly, Barbara reported that her attention to the impact of teachers' racial rhetoric on students of Color and her "straightforward communication style" left her feeling isolated at work, mostly due to unapologetically sharing antiracist ideas with students and fellow teachers. Barbara reported that, over the years, she has become weary of collaborating with other teachers because she has witnessed situations where they mocked Latinx students or openly discriminated against African-American students, especially those classified as learning or emotionally disabled. She explained, "I don't want to go in the common areas and hear what the teachers are saying because I have heard things in the past that were really upsetting to me. I have a big mouth, and I'll get involved, and I don't want to." Barbara emphasized that she does not feel discriminated against by her peers, although she admitted that, oftentimes, she feels alienated and excluded. Nevertheless, Barbara stated that her love for teaching at Vanguard is not diminished by feeling estranged by her colleagues and that she feels fulfilled through interacting with her students of color.

Reflection

The excerpts from the interviews with Dana, Jessica, and Barbara, were the most racially literate samples from all the transcripts. They represent short-lived moments of racial literacy in the vast context in which the color-blind racist ideas dominated throughout all interviews. Nevertheless, noticing and writing about White women teachers' movement toward learning to see race in different levels was inspiring, even though their burgeoning racial literacy was interwoven with the colorblind rhetoric that denounced their white supremacist racial ideology. This paradox has significance for my study, and I could not fail to observe the emergence of learning to see race as a meaningful development, particularly as it exists in a sharp contrast with racial color-blindness. I believe that the theme of *learning to see race* was meaningful because it

represents a movement away from the color-blind rhetoric, toward learning to see race, albeit at different levels within the spectrum that the law professor Guinier (2004) referred to as racial literacy. Guinier's concept of *racial literacy* expanded on Twine's (2004) original use of the term, which she used to describe the ways that biracial children would learn about the experiences of both races. Guinier (2004) expanded the meaning of the term on a seminal paper where she advocated for a shift from racial liberalism to racial literacy. She posited that racial literacy is about the process of learning, rather than knowing. This view of racial literacy relates to my interpretation of the code *learning to see race* because it implies the possibility of growth, change, and offers an optimistic outcome.

Part III

Third Interview Series – Second Individual Interviews

The third interview series sought to further expand and deepen my understanding of how White female teachers described their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students at Vanguard, a demographically changing high school context. I continued to follow Seidman's (2013) guidelines for phenomenological interviewing during this third series and sought to engage participants in a critical exploration of the lived experiences they collectively reported during the focus groups, and individually, during the second interview series. The goal of this third series was to address "the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). To meet this goal, I invited participants to reflect on (1) their role as teachers of diverse students; (2) how their work and life events may have influenced and contributed to their present experiences as teachers of Latinx, Black, and Asian students at Vanguard; (3) how they thought these students perceived them; and (4)

whether they thought they held implicit racial bias and, if so, which bias they held, and if they believed their bias could impact their students of Color.

As explained earlier in this chapter, all 15 participants in the second interview series were invited to take part in the third series, but only 9 were available to participate—the other 6 teachers explained that they were not available due to previously scheduled travel plans for the time when I would be conducting the interviews, during the Spring Break. Nevertheless, it is possible that some participants did not wish to return to avoid talking about race. The participants who agreed to return for the final interview seemed genuinely motivated to continue to discuss their experiences, declaring that participating in my research was "engaging," "interesting," or "thought provoking." These individual interviews were conducted outside the school, during the school's Spring Break, at a place of participants' choice near their Long Island homes—coffee shops, public libraries, or restaurants.

Process Versus Content

Unlike the first two interview series, this last series did not produce new or unique patterns of codes and themes regarding the content revealed by participants, which indicated that thematic saturation was reached. This series reiterated the thematic contents that emerged during the first and second series, even though the interviews during the third series were twice as long in duration and were not held at Vanguard—which dispelled possible questions whether they felt free to speak their ideas during the first two series held at the school. After the first two interviews, I wondered whether the seemingly repetitive data I was uncovering was due to the semi-structured character of the interview protocol, which might not have been direct enough to elicit more reflection on their part. Since the interviews were held on different days, I had time in between them to read the verbatim transcripts of the first two interviews before interviewing the

next participants. I realized that the problem was not with my interview protocol but with data

saturation. Some interviews lasted two hours, and regardless how much I probed, most

participants evaded race intentionally or unintentionally, as evidenced by their limited

experiences to think critically about race, especially their own race. Thus, talking about any other

demographic characteristic instead of race was the safest choice.

For most participants, the word *diversity* seemed to only mean *gender* or *class*.

Additionally, although the Asian student population at Vanguard make up around 5% of the

student population, not one teacher brought up these student groups when discussing challenges

and successes in teaching "students of Color." The reason for this omission is not clear. When I

probed for more information regarding the students' race, some disregarded my probe, while

others expressed discomfort, and a few were curious and joined me in a critical exploration of

how race could play a role in their lives and in the lives of their Latinx, Black, and Asian

students. I decided that the most important aspect of this interview series was to focus on the

process that unfolded rather than the content it reiterated through the overarching thematic

emergence of color-blind racism that was exposed through participants' rhetoric in all three-

interview series (extensively explored in Part I and Part II of this chapter).

The research literature on critical whiteness studies reviewed in Chapter Two established

how the White supremacy ideology has an often subtle but a constant strong hold on how social

institutions such as schools are designed to maintain the status quo. The lens of critical pedagogy

focused on how unveiling the ideology of domination trickles down from educators to students,

and how—especially teachers, due to their direct and daily interaction with students—the

educational system can be used to interrupt and change the impact of ideologies it is designed to

oppress (McLaren, 2017). By using the framework of color-blind racism to make sense of the

interview data, I was able to clearly see how the ideology of white supremacy can subtly

dominate the rhetoric of teachers when they are uncritical of their role as racial actors, and of

their responsibility to thwart the oppression of their students of Color. My decision to focus on

the *process* through which teachers enacted racial bias, as opposed to when they revealed

willingness or curiosity to talk about race, is intended to promote change, by highlighting

participants' movement towards racial literacy. This is the thematic emergence I chose to

highlight during the analysis of the data from the third interview series because it suggests future

directions for educational equity through teacher racial literacy development.

Through interview excerpts, the following paragraphs demonstrate how participants

reacted when I attempted to lead them to engage in critical reflections. The ultimate goal of this

interview series was to engage participants to join me on a critical exploration of the meaning of

their experiences, their intellectual and emotional connections between participants' lived

experiences teaching students of Color (Seidman, 2013). This Part III focuses on their ability to

use reflexivity, their thought processes, rather than on tracking the content of their rhetoric, on

identifying codes and themes that appeared in Parts I and II.

Coding and Themeing

My growing familiarity with the color-blind racism framework and with the participants'

rhetoric allowed me to notice the re-incidence of the thematic emergences *of color-blind racism*

and *learning to see race* more promptly in the third series. As in the first two series, the

interviews were professionally transcribed, printed, hand coded, and transposed into Dedoose for

several rounds of coding, re-coding, and themeing. The data set from this series was coded and

themed in more ways than the previous series because I sought to explore whether the

application of different frameworks to analyze the transcripts would lead to different results.

First, I followed the coding and themeing process using the color-blind racism framework as my guideline, as in the previous series. I coded the excerpts by grouping them according to similarities in content. Additionally, the code names corresponded with the interview questions (e.g., teacher role, influenced by students of Color, how students of Color see the teacher, the presence of bias, color-blind racism, learning to see race). Since I was familiar with this process, I focused on identifying the emerging themes *color-blind racism* and *learning to see race* that I had identified in the previous series. This process reaffirmed my previous findings that color-blind racism was the predominant theme while learning to see race somewhat emerged as a contrast. This pattern as indicated possible directions for change, which left me wondering whether the latter burgeoning theme might indicate a clearer path for how to assist savvy teachers to move toward expanding their racial literacy.

Although I never questioned the results from the thorough analysis of the data set, I also wondered whether re-coding the interviews through the lens of racial literacy would expand my knowledge of the phenomenon I sought to understand and further unpack the paradoxes of *color-blind racism* and *learning to see race.* I created a new project on Dedoose called racial literacy, and all verbatim transcripts were transposed and coded for three levels of racial literacy; absent, visible, and emergent. I borrowed these codes from the work of Epstein and Schieble (2019), who used racial literacy as the central framework in their study analyzing a White teacher work with her students of color, tracking the incidence of racial literacy in the teacher's discourse. I proceeded to use Epstein and Schieble's three-tiered racial literacy codes to further unpack the interview transcripts from the third series.

I also explored whether the thematic emergence of learning to see race that I identified in the second series intersected with another term used in the research literature to describe the

same pattern: *fertile paradoxes*. This term was coined by Jupp, et al. (2019) to identify a group of second-wave White teacher that "articulated a race-visibility within White race-evasive identities and contexts" (p. 27). The works by Jupp, et al. (2019), along with Epstein and Schieble (2019) validated my findings and the chosen frameworks of *color-blind racism* and *learning to see race*. Furthermore, I realized that looking at the data set from the third interview series through the lens used by Epstein and Schieble or by Jupp et al. did not result in newer or deeper findings than I had already achieved; it was a matter of choice in terms of terminology. To stay consistent with the data analysis from the first two interview series, I decided to abandon the racial literacy Dedoose project and to continue to using the frameworks of *color-blind racism* and *learning to see race*.

By using a different lens to unpack the data in the third series, I was able to focus on an important aspect of these interviews; the opportunity to make sense of participants' reflection on the meaning of the experience that they had reported throughout the three meetings. I sought to gauge whether teachers were able to engage in a critical reflection and how this reflection occurred in light of the themes of *color-blind racism* and *learning to see race*. The thematic emergence I found to be most relevant in this series was the participants' movement towards racial literacy. In the following Findings subsection, I discuss the instances in which participants in my study—White women teachers at Vanguard—engaged on or evaded the discussions of how racial bias might play a role in their relationships with Latinx, Black, and Asian students; which biases they acknowledged holding; and whether during the interview, they were able to engage in critical discussions about race.

In this interview series, participants had ample time to answer the interview questions and to "free-associate," presenting a broader and deeper account of their racial ideology landscape, as

well as the opportunity to take a few incursions toward unpacking their racial bias. My role as

the researcher changed slightly during this series, thanks to the positive rapport I had developed

with these 9 participants who participated in all the interviews. Additionally, without the time

constraints of having to conduct the interviews within the 45-minute school periods, I was able to

further the probes and re-phrase the interview questions when participants evaded the critical

discussions I sought to elicit. Sometimes, I offered more detailed explanations of why I was

asking each question, sharing the thought processes that led to my formulation of the question

and, when necessary, I illustrated the question with scenarios from participants' own previous

interviews or from my work experience and from the research literature I had reviewed. I noticed

that when I used examples of situations as illustrations of what I would like them to explore,

teachers were more open to join me on a critical analysis of the subject in question (see examples

in the next subsection).

This finding is representative of the most relevant thematic emergence from the third

series—*teachers' movement toward racial literacy*—which corresponds with the meaningful

paradox of color-blind racism and learning to see race discussed in Part II. I also noted that,

without my investment to keep participants engaged in the critical process and the deepening

exploration of their ideas, they often defaulted to the color-blind racism rhetoric to explain all

matters regarding their views of student of Color. They seldom brought up race spontaneously

into the conversation, but when I challenged their views, most participants did demonstrate

curiosity and interest to engage with me on a critical exploration of their racial views.

Teachers' Critical Voices

I started this round of interviews by asking participants to describe what they thought was

their role as teachers of Latinx, Black, and Asian students, and I prompted them to answer this

question from intellectual and emotional perspectives. The answers were not prolific, and I

attempted to establish a safe atmosphere prior to probing for deeper answers. Their responses

were quite homogeneous, ranging from "being a role model" or "to inspire," to individualistic or

meritocratic ideas (e.g., Faith said, "I try to make them understand that working independently

and having nobody to depend upon, I am able to do things that other people don't have the

ability to do"). These ideas are the hallmark of the abstract liberalism and minimization of racism

frames, such as telling students that they had an impoverished early life (e.g., Sophia said, "I

always tell the kids that I lived in a crummy neighborhood and that we had to eat lunch at 3:30

p.m. because my father worked a second job in the evenings") and that the students could

succeed if they applied themselves too. None of the participants initiated a discussion about their

whiteness or how privilege played a role in the successes they attained personally or as teachers

of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. My decision to not probe for depth during the start of the

interview was not meant to cater to their *white fragility* (DiAngelo, 2018) but to nurture a non-

threatening environment where participants would be able to engage in a critical discussion that

could foster a movement toward racial literacy.

The next interview question—how teaching at Vanguard has influenced you personally

and professionally—was evaded by three participants, Sarah, Faith, and Taylor, regardless of my

attempts to restate and interpret the question a second time. I featured a few excerpts of Sarah's

second interview on Part II. In this series, she answered this interview question with a vague

remark using the color-blind frame of abstract liberalism: "I am happier teaching these students,"

adding that her prior teaching experience at an all-White, wealthy school was not as fulfilling as

teaching at Vanguard. According to her, the wealthy students "didn't feel like they had to work

for anything; they were like, 'Don't worry. I'm getting into college anyway; my parents know

people'." I probed about what she meant by feeling happier about teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students, and her answer was vague, "I don't know. You get attached to these kids, and the difference you make, and it kinda makes you want to keep doing more, and keeps getting better, 'cause you're changing peoples' lives. I don't know what it is." I followed up by asking which student subgroups she thought she was more likely to help change their lives, but she answered my question with a long story about a student—no mention to whether it was a Latinx, Black, or Asian, as I had asked—who she noticed was using drugs, and she made a report to the guidance office asking them to help him. Sarah resorted to the White savior rhetoric, staying consistent with the worldviews she reported in the second interview series.

Another teacher, Faith, interpreted the question as an invitation to explain why "most people in my life would consider me to be the most open-minded person that they know but also realistic at the same time." Faith was very assertive about her self-perception of being well educated and of having "been to school a bazillion times," studied "a bazillion different things" and had "certifications up the wazoo." Nevertheless, she also admitted feeling that "I don't understand what I'm supposed to do with these kids…Intellectually, where I'm at right now makes me feel like I need to learn more if I'm going to do my job better." Perhaps Sarah's happy new experience at Vanguard and Faith's assertive-but-unsure position about the quality of their ability to teach Latinx, Black, and Asian students led them to avoid directly answering the question. Perhaps they had not previously considered whether or how these student sub-groups might have impacted their lives as teachers or as individuals.

Taylor

Taylor, a teacher who grew up in a wealthy town and attended segregated private schools her whole life, openly disclosed that the racial diversity of her students had never been a concern

on her mind. She reported being aware that her students were racially diverse, but she was unable to explore whether her students' race had any impact on her, on them, or on learning:

> I feel like I never really placed much thought on the fact that Vanguard was a diverse school, but I hope in the future my own kids will go to a school that's diverse because that's the real world, even though I know I did not go to diverse schools.

Taylor, along with Sarah and Faith, were not able to explore how teaching racially diverse students had impacted them even after I probed by asking the initial question again. I interpreted their evasion as characteristic of the color-blind racism frames of abstract liberalism and minimization of racism; if they have not thought about whether or how their interactions with racially diverse students have influenced their lives, they most likely have not "seen" or considered how these students' racial backgrounds impacted their experiences and education. Nevertheless, their color-blind worldviews seem to leave room for a certain level of flexibility and even curiosity about something they did not know yet in regards to the race of their students of Color.

In contrast to Sarah, Faith, and Taylor's answers to this interview question, the remaining six participants—Sophia, Daisy, Nyla, Teresa, Jessica, and Barbara—reported that they were impacted by working with racially diverse students, although their reports differed in the ways they were professionally or personally influenced by teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students. Some teachers stated that their perception of Latinx students had changed as they became eyewitness to the lives and struggles of these children who, as Nyla pointed out, "immigrate to the US to literally save their lives," in contrast to not questioning the stereotypes popularized by the media. Nevertheless, their accounts varied in intensity, depth, and length; they demonstrated different degrees of racial literacy development.

Nyla

Nyla seemed unsure about what to say when asked to share her thoughts about whether teaching Vanguard's Latinx, Black, and Asian students has influenced her life personally and professionally. After a brief pause that showed caution and hesitation to answer the question, she acknowledged that she has become "more compassionate and understanding as a human being" as a result of teaching Latinx students. During the second interview, Nyla reported that she started her teaching career at Vanguard and that she had seen the school become more racially and ethnically diverse since her arrival there as a teacher almost two decades ago. In fact, she attended Vanguard as a student and she feels as if she has never left the school: "I've been here forever I took off four years for college, and that's about it." For Nyla, diversity was normalized. This is how she answered the question about how teaching racially diverse students at Vanguard has impacted her life:

> Nyla: I don't know, also because I grew up in this community, and this is all
>
> normal to me, having diversity, and I've always had friends growing up that were
>
> different cultures. (…) Personally, I feel no matter what school I'm going to go into,
>
> whatever the population, they're kids that just want to be accepted and loved, and they
>
> want to learn. (…) Well, I think that diversity is a positive thing. I feel that I've learned a
>
> lot from them…
>
> Researcher: Like what?
>
> Nyla: About their different cultures, different things that they celebrate, or I try to
>
> maybe incorporate a little bit of what they do in class, like today…

Nyla proceeded to tell the story of how a Latinx student wondered aloud which direction Muslims turn to pray and she joined the student in finding the answer even though the question

was not related to the subject matter of the class. I was not sure whether telling me about a

situation that was unrelated to my question was intentional, so I asked the question again, but I

was not able to get a deeper answer aside from "yeah, I mean, yeah, I guess…I'm more

compassionate…and understanding." After an uncomfortable silence, I moved to the next

interview question.

Nyla grew up at the Vanguard community, but she said that the area where she lived was

mostly White at the time, and the only racial group other than Whites were a small cluster of

Black students that attended her school. Throughout her accounts, she did not seem to have had

many relationships with racial groups other than her own when she was a Vanguard student.

Nyla was unable to join me on a deeper discussion about teaching and learning in respect to race,

ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in any of the three interview series, although she seemed to

have the ability to learn more about race, as indicated by her insight about what brings Latinx

children to immigrate to this country. Nevertheless, by stating that "diversity is a good thing"

and that she likes learning about the "different cultures" of her students of Color, Nyla implied

that whiteness is neutral and that "culture" and "diversity" is something that non-Whites possess.

Nyla was one of the 10 teachers who participated in the year-long training on cultural

proficiency that culminated in the professional development workshop for all teachers. In fact,

on the day of the implicit bias training, when I was invited to audit the workshop prior to starting

data collection, I wrote in my field journal about a conversation I overheard between Nyla and

another teacher. The topic of their conversation was implicit bias, and Nyla was using her

personal experience with her name, which often led to parents of students to mistake her for a

Black woman, as an example of negative bias. Nyla was openly expressing strong negative

feelings about being mistaken for a Black woman because of what she described as her racially

ambiguous name. I could not help overhearing the conversation, and I was stricken by Nyla's

inability to see how her observation was charged with negative racial bias, but not in the way that

she identified. Nevertheless, through the interview process, Nyla demonstrated the potential to

move toward increasing her racial literacy. The underlying theme during her interviews was a

careful avoidance of entering the discussion of race or ethnicity, at the expense of not answering

the question posed—a rhetorical style of the abstract liberalism frame of color-blind racism.

Teresa

The thematic emergence of *learning to see race* in the following excerpt indicated

Teresa's movement toward racial literacy, an interaction that gave me the opportunity to watch

her thinking critically about race. Her answer to the question about whether she had been

influenced by teaching students of Color was "absolutely." She explained that throughout the

first 12 years of her career, "I took the trauma of my students home." Teresa discussed how her

personal experiences with otherness had made her more attuned to how the otherness of her

racially diverse students influenced her life:

> I try to relate to my Black students on a level of feeling out of place when I was young. I
>
> never felt like I belonged, ever. And I think that stemmed from the abuse I endured
>
> throughout my childhood. I hate to bring that back up, but it is the honest truth. Even
>
> though I was a White girl with fair skin, blue eyes, and blond hair, I was never a perky
>
> cheerleader that people thought I should be. The image everybody had of me was not
>
> what I actually experienced. But my point being that Black kids are not the stereotype
>
> that the media wants us to believe. Or just because a kid is Hispanic doesn't mean they're
>
> a part of MS-13. People say that these kids 'could get a job and get out of the ghetto if
>
> they want.' Yes, they can, but where are they getting the job? They just went to the worst

high school where they had to worry about being shot, maybe their father is not there, the

mother is not there, they are being raised by someone else…They're already behind the

eight ball like 14 times…And now, all of a sudden, this kid is going to rise up? For what?

What does he see? What does he have to look up to or look forward to? And then you go

to the school and you hear teachers doing and saying things that make them feels they're

not worthy.

She took a deep breath after this explanation. Up to this point, Teresa's perspective had a

strong clinical focus, which stemmed from her life experiences, struggling with childhood

trauma, and feeling re-traumatized every time stereotypical expectations were projected onto her

throughout all her life. Nevertheless, the stereotyping she experienced was different from the

racial prejudice her Black and Latinx students are likely to endure. Teresa's explanation

accentuated her views of the psychological baggage of prejudice and stereotype. However, she

also offered an interpretation of racial discrimination of Black and Latinx students based on a

material explanation of how they are denied opportunities, indicating a certain level of awareness

about racism as systemic. Furthermore, she seemed to have adopted a deficit-based view of

students of Color, along with the assumption that all Latinx students share stereotypical negative

life experiences with deprivation. Nevertheless, Teresa was able to extrapolate from her

experience with trauma and stereotype and make a critical inference of how the racial prejudice

endured by her racially diverse students was determined by systemic racism. This excerpt

illustrated how a critical analysis of one's personal experiences could be a catalyst for *learning*

to see race, to influence and be influenced by the experiences of the racial other. It also

illustrated a convoluted pattern of racial illiteracy interspersed with moments of racial literacy.

Later in the interview, I asked Teresa how she thought her students of Color perceived her as a White woman:

Teresa: That's a good question. I don't know. Maybe they think that because I'm white, blonde, my life is perfect, that things are easy for me. And I guess I can understand that. But it's not true, and I've told them that.

Researcher: If that was the case, do you think that perhaps they could be referring to the fact that you have the privilege of being a White, middle-class woman?

Teresa: In their eyes? Yeah. I mean, I do have a great life. I'm not going to…But it's far from perfect. And I tell them this as well, "I work so hard for what I have and I'm not just talking about financially. I work hard for my relationship with my husband, with my kids, with the people I work with…

Researcher: Relationships require work, you are right about that…

Teresa: And I work hard on myself, my own happiness, and my own stuff that goes on inside. And that's the part that they don't see, the struggle that I have on the inside. And if they work as hard as I do, they would get to where I got…

Researcher: Do you believe that if your students of Color worked as hard as you did, they would get to where you are?

Teresa: Yeah.

Researcher: I ask because I sometimes wonder whether it is realistic to expect Black or Latino kids, like you mentioned earlier, to have the same access to the things that their White peers have…

Teresa: I'd like to think so, but…the reality is that they'd have a much more difficult

time getting the services that I was fortunate enough to be able to get, just because of my

connections in general…

Researcher: Do you think it's possible that you could have had more access to resources

because you were White?

Teresa: I don't know if that would be a fair assessment because maybe if I was

Hispanic or Black and I grew up exactly in the same situation…I don't know.

Researcher: How about if the situation was today?

Teresa: Definitely not…There is a part of me that really doesn't want to believe that.

There's a part of me that really wants to believe that everybody has a fair chance, but

there's also the real side and I know that people don't get the same chances. And that

feels so bad…

Researcher: And how do you deal with this feeling, knowing that your students might

see this picture clearly…

Teresa: I try to right the wrong in the ways that I can, by treating everybody the

same, regardless of Asian, Black, White, Hispanic, whatever cultural background that

you have. When you're good, you're good. When you're bad, you're bad, period…

The rest of my interview with Teresa repeated the pattern of advocating for meritocratic and

individualistic ideas that derailed her from seeing race to turning on the color-blind rhetoric and

then returning to seeing race again. At the end of our interview, she thanked me for the

opportunity to participate in my study because and "asked interesting questions." She added, "I

don't always have the opportunity to explore these ideas."

Reflection

The third interview series offered me the opportunity to share a deeper connection with participants and explore how their life circumstances interacted to create the experiences they reported throughout the interviews. The theme *meaningful paradox* that emerged in the second interview series—as the juxtaposition of color-blind racism and learning to see race—recurred in this third series, which reiterated participants' movement toward a growing racial literacy. By following Seidman's (2013) guidelines for the third interview series—to engage participants to reflect on the meaning of the phenomenon researched—I arrived at the conclusion that, in terms of the content that was revealed throughout this interview series, color-blind racism continued to dominate the thematic findings that pervaded all the interviews of this study. Notwithstanding, participants also demonstrated a burgeoning tendency to learn to see race, which I continued to interpret as a meaningful paradox, a process that indicated participants' movement toward racial literacy. This assessment was reiterated by recognizing their demonstrated willingness to endure the discomfort of talking about race and their courage to engage in a critical exploration about the meaning of their experiences as racial beings engaged in teaching the racial other. This is further explored in Chapter Five.

My awareness of the phenomenon I observed throughout the three series and described in this dissertation study increased with each phase of interviews, and I felt that the curiosity that ignited the quest underlying my dissertation study was fulfilled through the results. Furthermore, upon completing the data analysis of the third series, I developed clarity about recommendations for practice and future research. Throughout writing this Chapter Four, I realized how much I had learned and grown in knowledge about how the White women teachers I interviewed think about their role as teachers of students of Color and how this knowledge could contribute to their

growth in racial literacy. I realized that the participants who attended all three interview series

may have enjoyed participating my study as much as I enjoyed conducting it, and that they also

may have changed and grown through the interview process. Perhaps the trust that comes with an

increased rapport allowed them to become more inclined to—or perhaps less defensive—

exploring racial ideas if the data collection did not spread out through three meetings, with a time

lapse between each series. This is further explored in the next section and in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

The answer to my overarching research question—how do White women teachers

describe their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students in a

demographically changing high school context?—can be found in each interview series and in

their sum. Collectively and individually, participants revealed a complex racial rhetoric, often

supported by ill-informed assumptions about the racial other—the majority of their students. For

most White women teachers in my sample, the lack of exposure to firsthand life experiences with

the racial other throughout most of their early lives left them underprepared to deeply

understand, connect with, and to overcome the challenges that stem from not seeing how their

color-blind racism ideology impact their ability to teach Latinx, Black, and Asian students.

Having had little to no opportunities to engage in critical explorations of the significance of their

racial identity throughout their lives, they assimilated the racial ideology that has dominated the

United States since the pre—Civil Rights era but resorted to the subtle expression of their bias

through the subtle color-blind racism rhetoric instead of blatantly expressing their White

supremacist views.

Color-blind racism is the overarching thematic finding of my research. It encompassed

the rhetorical styles used by participants to describe their lived experiences as teachers of Latinx,

Black, and Asian students, and also revealed their racial ideology. This finding has serious implications for educational equity, and this knowledge adds to what is already known through the extant research literature that preceded my study. Nevertheless, the second main findings of my study, learning to see race, contrasted with the former finding by interrupting the colorblind pattern. Most participants indicated the ability to engage in a critical discussion about race, demonstrating different degrees of movement toward a growing level of racial literacy. A greater level of racial literacy was connected with teachers' reports of having more and positive experiences with the racial other throughout their lives. These participants also indicated that their lives were impacted by working with their students of Color, and they were more likely to enlist their courage and curiosity to join my invitation to question their ideas and beliefs.

The interview data analyzed in this chapter revealed my choice to emphasize the two main themes I called a "meaningful paradox." I recognize that the process of participants' movement toward racial literacy can be interpreted as laden with ambivalence, often convoluted, and as having feeble ties with the reality of how race impacts the lives of participants as well as of their Latinx, Black, and Asian students. However, I understand this finding to be part of the picture I describe in this dissertation study rather than the whole picture. Through the interviews, I learned that most participants were learning to see race, albeit at different levels. Through identifying White teachers' movement towards the development of racial literacy, this study added to the critical voices found in the second-wave White teacher identity studies (Jupp et al., 2016) that seeks to inform education research and teacher education through emphasizing an "important pedagogical turn toward whiteness pedagogies for teaching and learning with White preservice and professional teachers" (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 1153). I continue this discussion of the findings in the following chapter.

Chapter Five includes a brief summary of the study, a discussion of how my findings contribute to the literature and the theoretical framework, surprising findings, limitations, areas for future research, and recommendations for practice and policy.

Chapter Five
Conclusion

"Well, I think that diversity is a positive thing.

I feel that I've learned a lot from them [students of Color]."

~ Nyla

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine how teachers make sense of implicit bias in the teacher-student relationship, the level of awareness they have of their own racial biases in the classroom, and what successes and challenges they experience as educators of diverse students. In this chapter, I offer a comprehensive overview of this dissertation study. First, I summarize the problem of practice, the purpose statement, the research questions, and the methodology. Then, I reappraise the findings from Chapter Four and discuss how the expected and surprising findings relate to the theoretical frameworks that guided this study. I suggest how my study contributes to the literature, the limitations of my research, the areas for future research, and the recommendations for practice and policy. Moreover, I discuss my views of how the research studies I reviewed and conducted can be combined to offer opportunities for a much-needed support for teachers to move toward racial literacy. Lastly, I summarize the chapter and offer concluding remarks.

Summary of the Study

This dissertation study explored the lived experiences of White women teachers as they described the successes and challenges while teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students in a racially diverse high school context. I invited participants to join me, collectively and individually, on a critical examination of their teaching role with respect to teaching students of Color. Chapter One introduced the problems of practice,

considering how the re-segregation of public schools coupled with the demographic mismatch between White women teachers and students of Color has negatively impacted the educational experiences of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two expanded and deepened my understanding of how these problems intersect and how White women teachers are positioned to either oppose or reinforce the inequities that persist for students of Color. Chapter Three presented the research plan and a description of the phenomenological qualitative methodology I chose, which followed Seidman's (2013) guidelines for using three interview series as a method for data collection. My selection of the methodology of the study were grounded on the tenets of the frameworks undergirding my research—critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies. The three-interview structure offered a seamless opportunity to integrate these frameworks with the interview process—starting with eliciting participants' collective experiences in the context of their school, followed by the first individual interview that brought forth concrete details of teachers' lived experiences, and concluding with engaging participants in a critical reflection of their lived experiences as White educators in the context of a racially diverse school. I also revealed the interview questions and probing techniques used throughout three phases of interviews as well as my White Latina immigrant positionality working as an insider/outsider researcher.

Chapter Four described the extensive circular process that characterizes the phenomenological method of data analysis, with several cycles of transcript reading and coding as well as applying and comparing different frameworks to make sense of the data. Chapter Four was organized in three parts, each dedicated to the presentation of the findings during the three interview series. In Part I, I discussed the main thematic emergence from the four focus groups, the paradox of *pride in Vanguard student*

diversity versus *color-blind racism* rhetoric. I also realized that this pattern of dichotomy is characteristic and descriptive of the phenomenon that Bonilla-Silva (2018) identified as color-blind racism. The thematic emergence of color-blind racism was dominant throughout all interview series, but in Part II, I discussed the emergence of a second and contrasting theme, which I called a "meaningful paradox." Although color-blind racism surfaced as the code with the highest incidence in Part II, the emergence of the contrasting theme *learning to see race* indicated that some participants' lived experiences with the racial other fostered a movement toward a nascent racial literacy. Even though it was a theme for 5 of the 15 White women teachers I interviewed, learning to see race momentarily disrupted the dominance of color-blind racism, indicating the potential for an increased movement toward racial literacy. A second thematic emergence in the second interview series—further explored in the discussion section below—also revealed a paradox summarized by a trend in which participants identified their successes in teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students to *internal sources* versus attributing their challenges to *external sources.* In Part III, I focused on the discussion of the process of learning to see race that emerged during the interviews, rather than on the content, the predominant thematic emergence of color-blind racism extensively discussed in Parts I and II.

Chapter Four posed the greatest challenge in my dissertation journey, in light of multiple social factors that have drastically changed the world—from the polarization of society resulting from the re-branding of White supremacy to the pandemic that exacerbated the educational inequities historically endured by students of Color. As a learner, my exploration of how unexamined Whiteness will inevitably uphold White supremacy offered me a life-changing opportunity to see my whiteness reflected on the

stories of the White women educators I interviewed. This experience was impacted by my positionality as a White Latina—a woman—immigrant, working as a social worker in a public school with a similar teacher-student demographic mismatch as the school where I conducted my research.

The next section restates the problem of practice I identified in Chapter One, along with the statement of purpose that guided my study, followed by the methodology I used, and the discussion of the findings of this study.

The Problem of Practice and the Statement of Purpose

In Chapter One, I identified the major problems of practice that guided my study. First, school segregation by race, ethnicity, and social class that has historically plagued the United States is getting worse (Heading in the Wrong Direction, 2015; Logan & Stults, 2011; McCardle, Bliss, & Grudzinski, 2018; Wells et al., 2009). Some researchers have posed that this segregation is by design—the educational system is intended to sustain the neoliberal political agenda that established the White supremacy ideology, which are two of the major underlying sources of the inequities imposed onto students of Color (Giroux, 2017; McLaren, 2017; Morton et al., 2017). The impact of school segregation on Latinx, Black, and Asian students includes the isolation in predominantly low-income schools that lack resources, access to highly qualified teachers, challenging courses, and to other privileges easily accessed in schools attended by high-income peers (Frankenberg, 2013; Mickelson, 2010; Welner & Carter, 2013).

School re-segregation is a problem of practice that is compounded by a second problem; the demographic imperative—a demographic gap in the U. S. public schools, where 79% of teachers are White and 52% of students are non-White (NCES, 2018). This demographic mismatch poses a high risk for students of Color, as "the disproportionately

high numbers of White female teachers in the current education system places these

teachers in a prime position to proselytize for White supremacy through the illusion that

whiteness is good and well intentioned" (Morton et al., 2017, p. 6). I concur with Jupp et

al. (2016) in recognizing "the demographic imperative and the resegregation of public

schools as historical exigencies" (p. 1152). My research focused on a third intersection of

these two problems of practice, which poses an often-overlooked third problem for the

education of Latinx, Black, and Asian students that takes place in the sociocultural

context of teaching and learning.

One aspect of this third problem of practice stems from the role of whiteness in

the classroom context of how White women teachers' unexamined racial bias informs

their relationships with students of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Lewis,

2011; Michael, 2015; Morton et al., 2017; Picower, 2009; Ullucci, 2011; van den Bergh,

Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010; Warren & Talley, 2017; Yoon, 2016).

This is where my study fits and extends prior research on this topic. The research

literature I reviewed deepened my understanding of how White women teachers' racial

identity and literacy impact the experiences of students of Color in the classroom and

throughout their lives (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Sleeter, 2001; Steele &

Aronson, 1995; Tatum, 2017). Teachers play a critical role in the racial socialization of

students, coming in second only to their families. According to Warren and Talley

(2017), they

> serve as one of the major socializing forces in the lives of their pupils; they
>
> facilitate the immersion and enculturation of their students to the social norms and
>
> conventions of the world beyond their communities. They have a power to orient
>
> the mindsets of their students. This power to direct and define the worldviews of

minority students must not be abused. In a racial world, acknowledging these dynamics is critical to the achievement and well being of minoritized students. (p. 151)

Warren and Talley's (2017) argument about the paramount importance of White teachers' power in the lives of students of Color is a reoccurring finding in the extant research literature denouncing different aspects of educational inequities, from the over-representation of Black and Latinx students in low academic tracks (Oakes, 2005; Roda, 2015) to the over-identification of their for need special education services (Fletcher & Navarrete, 2011; Skiba et al., 2008) and/or receiving harsh discipline referrals and school suspensions in comparison to their White student counterparts (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Skiba et al., 2011). Warren and Talley proposed that educational inequities stemming from the broad neoliberal sociopolitical agenda are often and unintendedly disseminated through teachers' implicit and explicit racial ideologies that "weaken the achievement and health outcomes of diverse students" (p. 151). Their understanding of teachers' power to perpetuate oppression through their unexamined whiteness is shared by numerous scholars (Giroux, 2017; Jupp et al., 2016; Lewis, 2003; McLaren, 2017; Miller, 2017; Morton et al., 2017; Warren & Talley, 2017).

As explained in Chapter One, my intent was not to blame teachers as the ultimate cause of systemic educational inequities. I discussed how the neoliberal ideology fomented White supremacy and continues to ensure that educational institutions, such as public schools, reproduce segregation and educational inequities (Bartolomé, 2004; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2017; Giroux & Schmidt, 2004; McInerney, 2009; McLaren, 2017). Far from blaming White women teachers, my research sought to better understand how they made sense of the demographic imperative and racial bias at

Vanguard.

The ultimate purpose of this study was to examine the racial narratives of White women teachers through the collective and individual lived experiences they described as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. I sought to understand how participants made sense of their role as teachers with respect to race, what meaning they conferred to their teaching experiences in a racialized context, and if they were able to engage in a critical exploration of whether, if at all, their whiteness influenced their ability to teach and learn from their students of Color. The thematic emergences I uncovered from analyzing the data indicated that while most participants disclosed their racial ideologies through the frequent use of the rhetoric of color-blind racism, some displayed a movement toward racial literacy acquisition. For most participants, engaging in a critical discussion about how their race might impact their and their students' lives was a worthwhile endeavor, as demonstrated by their participation in all three interview series. By engaging in all the interviews, they revealed a certain degree of investment in learning to see race, a finding that may suggest future directions for education and the professional development of White teachers.

Research Question and Methodology

The research question and sub-questions I sought to answer through my dissertation study are the following:

1. How do White women teachers describe their lived experiences as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students in a demographically changing high school context?

1a. What successes and challenges do they report having in their increasingly racially diverse classrooms?

1b. How, if at all, did their personal and professional life experiences impact and were impacted by their relationships with Latinx, Black, and Asian students?

The overarching research question and sub-questions were investigated through a phenomenological methodology, by using a qualitative, inquiry-based research design that embraced a constructivist worldview. Using qualitative methods of data collection, I devised three semi-structured interview protocols, each corresponding to one interview series, following guidelines proposed by Seidman's (2013) model for phenomenological research. The researchers' memos and fieldnotes contributed to the process of data analysis. I met with participants from April through May 2019, as explained in Chapter Three.

After each interview, the recordings were professionally transcribed verbatim through Rev.com and thoroughly reviewed prior to my next meeting with the participants. This approach allowed me to add questions to the semi-structured protocols to clarify and expand on each participant's stories revealed in the previous interview. The goal of the first interview series was to place participants' experience in the context of Vanguard, a racially diverse and demographically changing high school. Although 24 teachers initially agreed to participate, only 17 attended the first interview series. Fifteen teachers were interviewed in the second series, which was designed to elicit concrete details of participants' present experiences. Only nine teachers returned for the third interview series. While the first two series of interviews were held at Vanguard—lasting 45 minutes, the duration of a teaching period—the third series was conducted at libraries, restaurants, or coffee shops, and lasted from 90 to 120 minutes, allowing for thematic saturation to be reached. The third interview series focused on engaging participants in a

critical reflection of the meaning of the experiences they reported throughout the three series. Without the time constraint of Vanguard's 45-minute teaching periods, the third interviews allowed participants ample time to share their experiences and, for some teachers, to engage in a critical dialogue with the researcher about the interview topics.

Discussion of Findings

For two years, I struggled with how to make sense of the data I collected for this study. During this time, I gained familiarity with the transcripts first by hand coding, re-coding, and then by transposing the data into Dedoose—a data management web-based program to support qualitative data analysis—and repeating this process for each interview series. Through this process, I was able to arrive at the findings I presented in Chapter Four with confidence to interpret the data and the implications of this research study. Nevertheless, I struggled to overcome some difficulties. First, the philosophical nature of the phenomenological methodology can pose a challenge for novice researchers attempting to apprehend the meaning of the lived experiences contained in participants' accounts (Ehrich, 1996). Second, the large number of interviews I collected demanded time and dedication to code and theme. Third, my quest to make sense of a racialized phenomenon in which I participated as an insider and outsider took an emotional toll on my work.

As an insider, my position as a social worker in a demographically changing public high school, working directly with teachers and students for the past 19 years, afforded me a sense of familiarity with the context in which I conducted the interviews. My racial identity and my ethnicity position me as an outsider for the White participants in my study. However, as a White-looking woman—albeit one who speaks with a Brazilian accent—I benefit from unearned White privileges and by sharing participants'

whiteness, I played the role of an insider. To all participants in my study, I was an outsider who had no previous knowledge of Vanguard High School prior to conducting my study, and although I work at a public high school, I hold the position of school social worker, not teacher.

Positionality

My dissertation journey impacted me in different ways and, personally, learning to see race in a greater depth was the most painful and satisfactory aspect of my racial literacy development. I attended a number of race-debiasing or cultural proficiency workshops and dove into the research literature intersecting with education equity, systemic racism, whiteness, neoliberalism, and others. Through my growth in racial literacy, I was able to make sense of my new racial and ethnic identities as an immigrant in the United States, where the Latinx label can take different meanings according to the race of the other. For example, at the end of the first individual interviews—always after I stopped recording—most participants asked me about where I immigrated from, as my accent gives away my immigrant status. When they learned that I was born and raised in Brazil, participants sometimes commented that I did not look too Hispanic, or that they knew I was Hispanic because my accent gave it away, while others were surprised to find out that I was not Eastern European. Only two participants knew that my native language was Portuguese, and three asked me why I moved to the United States. I gave them short but honest answers to all their questions, with the same honesty they answered my questions throughout the interviews.

During my pre-immigrant life in Brazil, I was socialized as a White woman, with parents of mixed descent, mostly from Europe; one of my grandparents was German born and immigrated to Brazil after World War I, but all other grandparents were born in

Brazil, first or second generation. My country was colonized by Portuguese Europeans, who decimated the indigenous tribes through waves of genocide. This was followed by the enslavement of the greatest number of Africans in the world—four million—during a period of 300 years, starting as early as 1530 and ending in 1888. Another meaningful event in Brazilian history was the military dictatorship that started in 1964. Brazil endured 21 years of a brutal dictatorship that was sponsored by the United States (Tavares, 2012). I was born and spent the first half of my life under that oppressive regime, which favored and disseminated the White cultural values of the United States in spite of the language barrier (e.g., Brazilian cultural production was scrutinized for subversive content and replaced by equivalent cultural products from the US, some of which were translated to Portuguese).

This history of brutality and domination—first through the hands of European colonizers and following through the covert control of the U.S. government, using the iron-hands of White male dictators—created a socioeconomic racial system based on the hierarchy of skin color, a Latin-American trend that Bonilla-Silva (2018) referred to as *pigmentocracy*. Growing up in a society with stark racial inequities, where the socioeconomic status by large follows the color scale—the darkest skin is also the poorest—Brazilians who look like me are susceptible to uncritically endorse the Latin-American style of systemic racism and disseminate the racial ideology of White supremacism through rhetorical resources. Although the form through which racism is expressed in Brazil is unique to the country's culture, it is just as insidious, pervasive, and oppressive as the racist expressions in the US and globally.

I chose to disclose my immigrant status to participants because the intersection of my role of a social worker in the field of education with my White Latina immigrant

background have shaped my racial identity. My personal journey to develop and expand my racial literacy contributed to the understanding of how a critical exploration of the racist beliefs I was raised to uphold allowed me to shift my ethnic and racial experiences with respect to others' races and ethnicities. This experience can be understood in light of Sealey-Ruiz's (2018) framework intended to guide the development of racial literacy for pre-service and in-service teachers, which she called the "archaeology of the self." Price-Dennis and Sealey-Ruiz (2021) confirmed, "It is a theoretical concept and practice that asks individuals to excavate biases, stereotypes and prejudicial beliefs that are held within."

In retrospect, my process of learning to see race and developing racial literacy included the use of the archaeology of self, as described by Sealey-Ruiz (2018), to examine my racial-self. I concur with her argument that teachers must question their sense of self and their role in the classroom—that they must know their own racial stories, think critically and deeply of how others' race, class, different religious practices, and sexual orientation impacts them so they will not traumatize others. This informed my understanding of the findings I presented in this chapter and my views of how this study can inform future practices in teacher education and professional development.

A Brief Review of the Thematic Paradoxes

My discussion of the findings from this dissertation study relies on the two theoretical frameworks that guided the conceptualization of my research: critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies. By adding the third framework of color-blind racism to analyze the data, I was able to expand the use of the critical whiteness studies framework. I achieved this goal by applying the four frames of color-blind racism—abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism—to

interpret the meaning of the phenomenon. Table 8 presents an overview of the thematic

emergences from the three interview series discussed in Chapter Four, which are further

examined in this section.

Table 8

Summary of the Three Interview Series, Main Codes, and Emerging Thematic Paradoxes

Interview Series	Codes	Thematic Paradoxes
First Interview Series	Color-Blind Racism	The Color-Blind Paradox
	Pride in Vanguard Student Diversity	
Second Interview Series	Color-Blind Racism	The Meaningful Paradox (a)
	Learning to See Race	
	Challenges – External Factors	The Accountability Paradox (b)
	Successes – Internal Factors	
Third Interview Series	Color-Blind Racism	The Content Vs. Process Paradox
	Learning to See Race	

First interview series. The focus group interviews answered the overarching

research inquiry how White women teachers describe their lived experiences as educators

of Latinx, Black, and Asian students in a demographically changing high school context.

In Part I of Chapter Four, I presented the thematic findings from the first interview series,

where participants unanimously described the context of their experience as a "diverse"

high school. However, the pride in Vanguard student diversity they revealed was

contradicted by a discourse that denied the significance of race. The demographic

characteristics that participants assigned to diversity included only gender, socio-

economic status, and immigration status. In most interviews, participants avoided the

word *race* even when the interview protocol questions referred to "Latinx, Black, and

Asian students" or "students of Color," which were used interchangeably throughout this

study, as explained in Chapter One. This race-avoidant approach to participants'

description of Vanguard's student population used the rhetorical maneuver characteristic

of color-blind racism and the whiteness ideology that it implies.

Second interview series. Color-blind racism continued to emerge as the dominant

theme in the second interview series. However, the next thematic emergence, which I

labeled *learning to see race*, seemed to work as a brief interruption of the color-blind

rhetoric, and I interpreted this as a dichotomy that represented a "meaningful paradox."

This view stems from the understanding of racial literacy as a process, a pedagogic

journey that must be purposefully cultivated. I further discuss the implications of this

process in the following sections of this chapter.

The second paradox from the second interview series emerged from what teachers

identified as the underlying causes of the challenges and successes they reportedly

encounter as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. Before discussing this

paradox, I feel compelled to offer a disclaimer. The three most frequent challenges that

participants identified for teaching students of Color were poverty, immigration status,

and mental health problems. I do not dispute that these problems pose some of the

greatest challenges for teachers of all students. These challenges stem from the capitalist,

neoliberal social design that upholds White supremacy and negatively impacts the lives

of students of Color in numerous ways. I recognize that teachers do not have the power to

eradicate such challenges. However, they have the power to not collude with the causes

of the systemic inequities they identified, through learning to see race and to understand

how color-blindness contributes to other unseen problems for their students of Color.

The second paradox of this series emerged from a contradicting pattern in which

participants attributed their successes to internal sources—their hard work, flexibility,

and empathy—but identified the sources of challenges to external sources—poverty, immigration status, and mental health problems. I called this thematic finding "accountability paradox," because although all participants were able to credit themselves for creating successful experiences while teaching students of Color, they did not hold themselves accountable for the negative impact that their disregard for race could contribute to the challenges they identified. While participants were critically aware of some of the challenges their students of Color faced, which impacted their ability to teach, they were not critically aware that the same challenges they identified as obstacles for teaching students of Color are upheld by the ideology that their color-blind racist rhetoric disseminates.

The accountability paradox reiterates the theme of color-blind racism because it uncovered teachers' inability to see how race impacts the challenges they reported. The majority of participants did not demonstrate awareness of whether poverty, immigration status, and mental health problems—in addition to the educational inequities they endure as a direct outcome of their interactions with teachers (e.g., over-identification in low academic tracks, labeled in need of special education services, receiving harsh discipline referrals)—are the byproduct of systemic racism. In other words, they did not seem to question how the students whose lives are impacted by these challenges might be impacted by the racial ideology underlying the choices of words and actions of their privileged White middle-class teachers.

Another way to unpack the accountability paradox is through the lens of the White savior industrial complex, which is "the confluence of practices, processes, and institutions that reify historical inequities to ultimately validate white privilege" (Anderson, 2013, p. 39). Participants' emphasis on the source of successes as internal

qualities could be connected with the romanticized White savior mentality, when teachers "save the day." Anderson's discussion of the "dangers of deficit thinking" highlighted White women teachers' tendency to engage in the rhetorical pitfalls of the White savior industrial complex, such as by appropriating the language of social justice and using abstract challenges (e.g., poverty, immigration status, and mental health problems). In other words, they often believe these challenges can be overcome through their dedication to teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students.

  Third interview series. The data from the final interviews reiterated the findings I presented in the first two series, indicating that thematic saturation was reached. As explained in Chapter Four, after coding the transcripts from this interview series and through applying different theoretical lenses, the thematic finding I identified as a *meaningful paradox* was confirmed: Color-blind racism represented the main content that emerged from the data analysis, but learning to see race represented the process through which participants moved toward racial literacy. The third interview series offered the opportunity to explore whether participants were able to critically process or reflect on the role of race in their lived experiences as teachers of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. The opportunity to speak at length with participants outside the limited 45-minute time slots of one teaching period at Vanguard, in the relaxed ambiance of the public spaces where I met with participants, created a safe learning space. The teachers who returned to the third series were aware that my research sought to make sense of their teaching experiences in regard to the race and ethnicity of their students of Color. I understood that participants' courage, vulnerability, and dedication involved in the decision to engage in the third interview series as driven by the intent to oppose colorblindness, a pattern that added strength to the theme *learning to see race.*

Not every White woman teacher who joined my critical inquiry in this third series demonstrated familiarity with self-reflection or had meaningful life experiences with people of Color. This points to the deficit of pre-service and in-service trainings for racial literacy development. Nevertheless, in every interview series, and especially during the third series, there were indications of some level of critical thought process regarding participants' race with respect to their students' race. I wonder whether the structure of the interview series—introducing the inquiry of my study to the group, and following with individual meetings that progressively expanded on the depth of questions about race—was conducive for creating a space where participants felt safe to discuss their lived experiences with respect to the race of their students.

I also questioned whether our discussions would have been deepened if the meetings had continued through creating a safe space for participants to engage in the archaeological dig of their racial selves. I wondered how long it would take until their racial ideologies would have tipped the scale from the rhetoric of *color-blind racism* to *learning to see race.* Furthermore, it would be helpful to anticipate possible roadblocks that could derail White teachers in achieving the goal of growing their racial literacy. While White fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) can raise Whites' defensiveness when the dynamics of race are identified, White teachers could also endure the racial stress that often is experienced during the journey toward racial literacy.

Bentley-Edwards et al. (2019) discussed the racial stress of pre-service White teachers who work in urban classroom settings where most students are Black and Latinx. They posed *racial stress* as "the threat of well-being when an individual feels unprepared and too overwhelmed to negotiate a race-related interpersonal encounter" (p. 3). Warren and Talley (2017) also emphasized the compounding impact of the stress resulting from

the teaching profession to the racial stress of White women teachers who struggle with

racial literacy. While recognizing the inherent discomfort of the emotional labor required

by the process that leads to racial literacy, Warren and Talley also argued that numerous

White women teachers "have learned how to do their work in a way that is humane and

affirming of the cultural diversity students of color bring to the urban classroom" (p.

169). Their argument echoes my hope for the future of White women teachers, including

the participants in my study.

The next section discusses how I interpreted the expected findings of my study in

relation to the theoretical frameworks of critical whiteness and critical pedagogy, which

guided how I conceptualized and structured my study, as well as the framework of color-

blind racism that guided the analysis of the data. Also discussed is the unexpected finding

of learning to see race. The participants who had past experiences with racial diversity

were learning to see race, which has implications for why the educational system must

provide aspiring teachers with more opportunities to be exposed to racial diversity, both

in their own educational experiences growing up and in their teacher training.

Research Findings and Theoretical Frameworks

The major findings of my study were expected, considering the theoretical lens

the literature had offered (e.g., critical whiteness studies, critical pedagogy, and color-

blind racism). In the first interview series (see Chapter Four), I interpreted that the

juxtaposition of the emerging themes *color-blind racism* and *pride in Vanguard student

diversity* reiterated the prevalence of color-blind racism as a phenomenon that uncloaked

how White supremacy permeated the racial discourse in education. This finding reiterated

what is known in the literature through the seminal research of Bonilla-Silva (2018) and

the studies that popularized the framework of critical whiteness studies (Frankenberg,

1999; Leonardo, 2002; Roediger, 2007; Shome, 2000) that were initially conceptualized

by African American intellectuals (i.e., W. E. B. Du Bois, James Baldwin). If my

research consisted in collecting data from only one interview, the race-evasive pattern of

color-blind racism would have been the only finding of my study. However, the data

gathered through a second interview of the three-series revealed a visible pattern—

learning to see race—that I deemed meaningful because it had the power to briefly

interrupt the participants' uncritical leaning on the White supremacist rhetoric underlying

color-blind racism.

The thematic finding of learning to see race revealed a race-visibility burgeoning

trend, in which participants occasionally interrupted the color-blind racist rhetoric by

indicating the use of critical thinking and learning to see race. This finding also reiterated

the research literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which highlighted the success stories of

White women teachers working with students of Color (Michael, 2015; Ullucci, 2011;

Yoon, 2011). This past literature occurred in school contexts that are mostly Black and/or

Latinx students. Therefore, my study extends what is known about White women

teachers because of the racially diverse school context of Vanguard High School. Indeed,

I understood the co-incidence of the patterns emerging from the discourse of individual

participants—color-blind racism and learning to see race—as a paradox that is

significant, partly because the school was racially diverse and participants had pride in

that diversity. As explained, this paradox was also meaningful because it demonstrates a

movement toward the development of racial literacy, which might not have occurred in a

racially homogeneous school environment. This finding also parallels the research studies

that identified the "complex cultural production of race visibility inside White teachers'

personal or institutional-level race-evasion" labeled as "fertile paradoxes" (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 1167).

The second thematic pattern that emerged from the second interview series—the accountability paradox—represented the conflict between participants' identification of successes as a result of internal factors—which they could control—and of challenges as a result of external factors—which they could not control. While participants were able to identify and criticize the structures that challenged their ability to succeed in teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students (e.g., poverty, immigration issues, mental illness), they were uncritical of whether and how these might collude with the ideologies that keep those same structures of inequity in place (i.e., neoliberalism and systemic racism). As aforementioned, participants' identification of their successes as a result of internal sources—personal traits—could also indicate an underlining pattern identified in the literature as White savior industrial complex, when White women, especially in education, wish to be recognized as saviors of their students of Color (Anderson, 2013; Aronson, 2017; Frankenberg, 1999).

The accountability paradox also reiterates the relevance of the lens offered by the framework of critical pedagogy. Through daily interactions with students of Color, White women teachers hold the powerful position to make critical choices through interrogating and interrupting the ideologies of oppression that create and sustain the inequities these students endure. White teachers have the choice to consciously espouse a pedagogy that invites teaching and learning through critical thinking and dialogue, instead of unconsciously disseminate the pedagogy that perpetuates educational inequity through uncritical, inequitable, and racist teaching practices. Through the lens of critical pedagogy, educators can learn how the dominant neoliberal and White supremacist ideals

trickle down from educators to students, and learn that through daily interactions with students, they have the power to interrupt these systems that maintain educational inequities (McLaren, 2017).

This present study was founded on the knowledge of racialized injustices in the field of education—such as the demographic imperative and the re-segregation of schools—and fits into the category of second-wave White teacher identity studies, which I explore in the next section. These studies are informed by the knowledge that systemic racism undergirds these injustices, while focusing on the "future work with White preservice and professional teachers" (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 1176). In other words, through uncovering the meaningful paradox that emerged from the themes of color-bind racism and learning to see race, my research emphasized the *process* through which participants indicated a movement towards racial literacy. Furthermore, I hope this research will add to what is known in the literature and contribute to the production of knowledge that seeks to influence the future education development of White teachers and encourage racial literacy development.

How this Study Contributes to the Literature

The overall findings in this study expand and confirm what is already known in the literature, especially the research that falls within the category of second-wave White women identity studies. Jupp et al.'s (2016) review of 65 studies conducted from 2004 through 2014 indicated the emergence of a second-wave White teacher identity studies that emphasized race-visibility ($n=45$) rather than race-evasiveness ($n=20$) in the field of education. Their meta-analysis acknowledged that the first-wave White teacher identity studies focused on White teachers' race-evasiveness, an intervention they saw as "foundational and necessary" (p. 1162) to inform the following wave of studies. Jupp et

al. (2016) posited that the first wave criticized the "racialized injustices of education, called out the insularity of White privilege, denounced the falsity of White race-evasive identities, and provided a much-needed discussion of racism, whiteness, and White privilege as it related to teaching, learning, and schooling in the United States" (p. 1160). Meanwhile, the second-wave White teacher identity studies

> provided an area of study for scholars of color and White scholars to confront questions of racialized inequalities and injustices, as well as to produce knowledges that sought to influence teacher education and White teachers' understandings of themselves as racialized actors in schools. (p. 1175)

My study expands and contributes to the second-wave White teacher identity studies through the findings I presented in Chapters Four and Five. Throughout data analysis, I uncovered how participants in my study relied on the color-blind racist rhetoric to make sense of their teaching experiences. However, their rhetoric sometimes switched from color-blindness to learning to see race, indicating an interruption of their racial rhetoric and representing a movement toward racial literacy. These two patterns combined to form what I labeled as a "meaningful paradox," because the second theme interrupted the former theme, revealing participants' engagement in the critical-thinking process necessary for racial literacy development.

Implications for Racial Literacy Training in Schools

The implications for practice that I present in this section do not represent an attempt to psychologize or individualize racism, or to collude with or to justify the White fragility explored in Chapter One. Whites may display White fragility as powerful means of racial social control that, in spite of the seemingly weak and defensive sensibility, is based on a sense of superiority and entitlement that protects White advantage and holds

racism in place (DiAngelo, 2018). Similarly, I do not intend to condone the aversive

racism underlying the rhetoric of "well-intentioned White Americans who possess strong

egalitarian values and who believe that they are nonprejudiced" (Dovidio & Gaertner,

2014, p. 3). Instead, I intend to explore some of the roadblocks that could be addressed to

assist White women teachers who dominate the education workforce to move toward

racial literacy. The demographic imperative is a fact, and while recognizing that a

teaching workforce representative of the student demographic composition is the ideal

step in disrupting the educational outcomes of students of Color, more efforts are

necessary to recognize the signs of colorblind racism and provide White teachers with

teaching moments to develop racial literacy.

 While writing this section of the chapter, I returned to the research literature to

gain clarity over the findings of my study. I sought to use the literature to inform my final

reflection on the reported lived experiences of the White women teachers I interviewed,

especially the nine participants in all three interview series. I questioned whether their

reliance on the color-blind racism rhetoric to describe their experiences as teachers of

Latinx, Black, and Asian students revealed a defensiveness against coming across in the

interviews as holding racist views. In other words, while the use of a color-blind language

could have indicated the conviction about the superiority of whiteness, it could also have

revealed an uncritical and illiterate positionality regarding their race and their students'

race. In the latter case, through claiming to not see race and associating colorblindness

with distancing themselves from being perceived as racist, the deployment of such

rhetoric could also be an attempt to ward off racial stress.

 For example, when Brenda—a veteran teacher I discussed during the analysis of

the second interview series in Chapter Four—stated her surprise "to even have that kind

of conversation, cause it's what we try not to do, is to single out a kid because of that issue," her discomfort was such that she felt the need to leave the room where our interview was taking place. The work of Stevenson (2014) offered me a new perspective on the meaning of Brenda's difficulty to continue with the interview, and I wondered whether her visible discomfort—or racial stress—motivated her use of the color-blind racism frames discussed in Chapter Four. In the next sections, I further explore this topic and provide recommendations for racial literacy development to ward off color-blind racism and racial stress, and to move toward learning to see race.

Meaningful paradox as a teaching moment. First, my findings suggest that the lived experiences of White women teachers are permeated with the ambivalent struggle of "seeing and not seeing" how race relates to their successes and challenges in teaching their students of Color. I view this dichotomy as a meaningful paradox representing the opportunity to move toward racial literacy development. This timely opportunity must be capitalized by the schools of education committed to training racially literate pre-service teachers as well as by the school districts determined to educate all students through in-service professional development of White teachers. The body of research to which my study contributes leaves no doubt that, as the point of contact between the broader education system and each child, White women teachers hold the powerful position to implicitly and explicitly disseminate racist ideologies underlying educational inequities (Fasching-Varner, 2013; Henry Jr. & Warren, 2017; Miller, 2017 Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021; Warren & Talley, 2017). White women have the choice and the power to promote changes, and as indicated through the second-wave White teacher identity studies, many are ready to move from color-blindness toward learning to see race.

Warren and Talley (2017) articulated White women teachers' potential for change as a professional imperative:

> There are numerous White female teachers who have learned how to do their work in a way that is humane and affirming of the cultural diversity students of color bring to the urban classroom. Learning from their work, rather than making excuses for the failure of White women to be effective in these settings, constitutes a professional imperative. Ultimately, disrupting the abysmal student outcomes of U.S. public schools to provide an adequate education to racially diverse students includes reinscribing the critical role teachers play, and their preparation to demonstrate evidence of cultural responsiveness. (p. 169)

The path toward change has been clearly identified by the research literature, and the teaching force seems ripe for change. The political unrest in the United States, since the presidential election of 2016, has brought racial problems to the foreground (e.g., racism, xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiments) and promoted the discourse of hate that has dominated the nation. The visibility of these problems has exposed the urgency of systemic changes. The rise of Black Lives Matter as a movement predominantly supported by young activists suggest their readiness to engage in critical dialogues about racial and social justice. Their White teachers must meet this demand, and racial literacy seems to have become the professional imperative that holds the potential to oppose the educational inequities co-existing with the demographic imperative.

Racial stress as a teaching moment. White women teachers' struggle with learning to see race can manifest through various rhetorical maneuvers that enact and reinforce White supremacy (e.g., color-blind racism, White fragility, implicit or explicit bias, aversive racism, White privilege). Although the deployment of these mechanisms

can be associated with a conscious ideological belief in the superiority of Whites, it could also indicate a defensive measure to avoid confronting feelings of shame related to the inexperience with or knowledge about race and the racial other. Bentley-Edwards et al. (2019) examined the racial dynamics surrounding the stress of White teachers with respect to their effectiveness to teach students of Color. The author defended that White pre-service teacher often experience racial stress by acknowledging their shortcomings to understand and negotiate race-related interactions. This pattern can be generalized to professional teachers. Rather than viewing their deficits about racial matters as a rigid state, their defensiveness may result from racial stress and could be seen as representing an opportunity for racial literacy development.

Stevenson (2014) viewed racial stress "as a signal or alarm that presents a unique wake-up opportunity to problem-solve racial conflict" (p. 41). He posited that Whites often feel overwhelmed by the challenges to navigate "the daily stress of racial decision making" (p. 40) and that, without guidance, teaching may rely on the "racial magical thinking" inherited from systemic racism, from the deprivation of knowledge, or from the absence of positive interactions with the racial other. Stevenson defined *racial magical thinking* as the infantile and ill-informed assumptions about the racial other common to those who live segregated lives.

My experience interviewing participants in this study led me to concur with Stevenson's argument. White teachers' experience with racial stress could stem from feeling unprepared or inept to have racial encounters through real or imagined interactions. These encounters offer the opportunity to reframe stressful experiences into meaningful and opportune moments for learning to see race. In this case, when the deficit of racial knowledge and experiences are acknowledged, White teachers can become

critical of the predominant racial views and move toward racial literacy by learning to see their own race and understanding how it relates to the racial other. This also suggests that teachers must be exposed to racial diversity before they step foot in the classroom.

Raising race questions as a teaching moment. Another way in which my study expands on what is known in the research literature is by suggesting the use of dialogue as an approach to encourage and support White women teachers' development of racial literacy. This dialogic process occurred throughout the three-interviews over a two-month period. I borrowed the idea of "raising race questions" from Michael's (2018) book by that title, documenting her year-long research with six White teachers. Michael's use of inquiry as "a process of constant engagement with a question, is the commitment to sit with a difficult query and to keep asking it over time. It is a rigorous and systematic process of research, experimentation, and community building around challenging dilemmas" (p. 2). My 20 years of experience with inquiry as a tool in the psychotherapy setting allowed me to feel comfortable with the discomfort that oftentimes threatens to prematurely halt this form of dialogical engagement. Additionally, I understand the value of pursuing a critical inquiry about uncomfortable topics, such as race, over a period of time, allowing the space between the meetings to deflect the defenses.

The discomfort common in dialogues about race can be traced back to most Whites' illiteracy about the history of whiteness, White supremacy, and systemic racism. My own experience with racial literacy required that I actively pursue acquiring information about the history of race and racism as well as to intentionally seek opportunities to engage in discussions about how race and racism impacted my lived experiences and the lives of others. I presume that similar pursuits toward racial literacy would benefit White teachers too. As I explained earlier, the framework proposed by

Sealey-Ruiz (2021) encourages White women teachers to engage in an "archaeology of the self"—a process of racial reckoning with the emphasis on seeking opportunities to dig deeply to understand where ideas about race, class, different religious practices, and different sexual orientations come from. Through a process complementary to Sealey-Ruiz's archaeological dig of the self, Michael (2018) advocated for White teachers to develop a positive racial identity that would foster their ability to having meaningful relationships with the racial other and feel "whole." For Michael, "racism has a fracturing effect on individuals and communities, and we cannot repair these fractures without really understanding how racism functions, both inside and outside of us" (p. 3).

Schools of education have the choice to oppose White supremacism, and the means to effectively confront educational inequities by adopting curricular choices grounded on critical pedagogy that is devoted to the development of racial literacy. These experiences could include creating opportunities for educators in pre-service and in-service training to engage in daily conversations about race in same-race groups, warding off the racial stress associated with Whites' color-blindness, as well as avoid exposing non-White educators to the microaggressions and racial trauma known to impact people of Color through interactions with Whites (Comas-Díaz & Neville, 2019). Hurtado (2021), during her lecture at the American Educational Research Association, proposed that conflict-producing discussions about race in higher educational institutions is a beneficial experience welcomed by most students. Through the access to these forums, White teachers can grow in racial literacy and develop the ability to hold themselves accountable for the impact of unexamined racial rhetoric in the lives and education of their students.

Limitations

In Chapter Three, I discussed some of the limitations inherent to qualitative phenomenological studies as well as to the present study and its replicability. By conducting this dissertation study, I reiterated the knowledge from the research literature emphasizing that the researcher's role is informed and impacted by their positionality, which is associated with their life experiences with respect to their and others' race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual identities, socio-economic status, and other demographic characteristics. The unique positionality of a researcher—such as my own positionality, which I discussed throughout this study—cannot be replicated, and considering the impact of the researcher's positionality on phenomenological studies, it poses a limitation for the duplication of this study.

One of the limitations posed by my study design stems from the fact that the data I collected and analyzed originated from a single school setting, located in a specific region of the United States, with a particular demographic profile that differed from most public schools in the area where Vanguard High School is situated. If I conducted a new study with the same study design but in a different geographic area, with different teaching staff or with a student body of different racial/ethnic composition (e.g., mostly White or Asian student groups), the findings could have been different. Another limitation of this present study is the size of the sample—large enough for phenomenology but not large enough for the generalizations of the findings to extend to all White teachers in other school settings. The generalizability question will be up to the reader to discern if the findings relate to their specific context or not.

Future Research

In addition to the careful consideration of the limitations described in the preceding section, my future research pursuit could utilize the study design I developed for this dissertation study to uncover the lived experiences of non-teaching staff from Vanguard High School or from a similar school setting. The support staff personnel— such as guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, aides, administrators, clerical and all others—are instrumental in the education of students of Color. It would be interesting to examine whether their racial rhetoric differ from their White teacher colleagues. Furthermore, considering that there may be racial, gender, and socio-economic differences related to the different positions and staff categories in K-12 schools, the experiences of the support staff in public schools could reiterate the results of my study or reveal new and unique findings. A research study that focused on examining the lived experiences of non-teaching staff, with respect to their race and the race of students of Color, could provide important information for schools to target racial literacy development for different school personnel and ensure the educational and racial equity of all students.

Another future research direction could focus on conducting a similar study methodology in an alternative suburban school context, with different demographic characteristics within the student body. Similarly, I would consider conducting a study that focused on interviewing teachers of Color in a predominantly White school setting. Alternatively, these studies could use a qualitative methodology other than phenomenology, such as ethnography or case study. Lastly, I also would consider focusing on one of the findings from this study, such as the accountability paradox. This study could interview teachers from different racial backgrounds, and it would be

interesting to compare the results and learn whether teachers from different demographic backgrounds would acknowledge how their power and role impacts the lives and education of students of Color.

Concluding Remarks—A Soapbox Moment

In this dissertation inquiry, I explored the meaning of the lived experiences of the teacher-participants, and this process offered a golden opportunity to further my racial literacy development. By finding color-blind racism as the overarching theme that emerged across all three interview series, I learned how systemic racism subverts whiteness and how it is propagated through the ideological expressions of well-intentioned educators whose lives, education, and professional development had diminished opportunities to develop their racial identity. The thematic emergence of color-blind racism uncovered participants' tendency to not see how their cultural deficits and limited life experiences were missed opportunities to "feel whole" (Michael, 2015) by learning to see their own race and to experience the expansiveness that can only unfold from appreciating the contrast of otherness.

Whiteness ideologies are often disseminated through color-blindness as a "mindless convenience" for most Whites (Stevenson, 2014) whose racial identities can go unrecognized, leading to the denial of how racism has serious consequences for the lives of people of Color. Considering the impact of White women teachers' racial rhetoric in the lives of students of Color—discussed throughout this study—racial literacy development and the commitment to culturally relevant practices could be seen as a matter of public safety in education. This view would highlight a sense of urgency for professional educators to take full responsibility for how their ideological blind spots impact and threaten the lives and education of students of Color.

The second thematic emergence I uncovered, mostly during the two series of individual interviews, represents a meaningful phenomenon indicating that some White women teachers are learning to see race. The importance of this finding for the future of education cannot be underestimated. As the dominant working force in education, White women teachers are an integral part of the problems of practice I have identified, but my research revealed that some are ready to work toward racial literacy development, and to hold themselves accountable for their impact in the lives of their students of Color. Schools of education must seize the moment and recognize their responsibility to support and empower White teacher educators through training program methods that include creating the venue through which teachers' racial literacy would be at the center of their professional development. Additionally, education policies that lead to second-generation segregation must catch up with this emerging racial equity movement to allow teachers to do this work properly.

Matias and Nishi (2017) argued that pre-service preparation programs tend to focus on White teachers' acquisition of teaching strategies to improve their toolkits of culturally responsible pedagogies while neglecting to engage in "an honest self-reflection on their own White selves" (p. 120). They established a connection between "all these 'strategies'[and] the persistence of the 'achievement gap' [which] continues in racially obvious ways" (p. 120). For Matias and Nishi, many White educators have historically neglected to see "the saliency of how race impacts that achievement gap perpetuates systemic racism" (p. 120). Their view is shared by other scholars who also emphasized that White teachers' critical investigation of their sense of self—an *archaeological dig of the self* (Sealey-Ruiz, 2021)—must precede all efforts to establish a relationship with and successfully teach their students of Color. Some of the research literature reviewed in this

dissertation study (Michael, 2015; Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021; Sealey-Ruiz, 2021; Stevenson, 2014; Warren & Hancock, 2017; Yoon, 2016) share Matias and Nishi's (2017) poignant message for all educators who consciously or unconsciously uphold the whiteness way of existence. They indicate that, without holding ourselves individualy accountable for our racial identity, for endorsing whiteness, and for the impact of uncritical "good" intentions, educators may acquiesce to the neoliberal logics undergirding systemic racism and remain collectively blind to their role in perpetuating educational inequities (Henry & Warren, 2017).

Reviewing and recommending programs or methods for racial literacy development is outside the scope of this dissertation study. Nevertheless, I understand that racial literacy development is of paramount importance for individuals and educational institutions committed to becoming part of the solutions against educational inequities impacting the lives and education of students of Color. The wisdom within Guinier's (2004) view of racial literacy as a process, rather than a state to be reached, was key to my own racial development, and I believe that this view can be used as a guideline for choosing such training programs. Additionally, the lens of critical whiteness studies and critical pedagogy undergirded every step of my study; the research literature I revealed detailed how these frameworks can be used to make sense of the dominant power structures and how schools can function to oppose oppression and nurture social justice.

Embracing Racial Stress and Growing Pains

Racial literacy development can be challenging and stressful for many Whites, but it should be welcomed as growing pains, a worthwhile pursuit that will make us feel more whole (Michael, 2015). Most of the challenges I faced throughout this study were related

to my whiteness, while my successes were rooted in my otherness as a Latinx immigrant woman. Some of the greatest challenges I encountered were connected to overwhelming feelings of ineptitude or the impostor syndrome that threatened to thwart the completion of my work. For some time, feelings of White guilt and the ensuing racial stress led me to question whether my early life as a White woman, my lighter skin color, and the whiteness culture I was acculturated into, rendered me incapable of finishing my work. After feeling paralyzed to write for some time, I dove into the literature, and the work of Thompson (2003) allowed me to move forward. She explored how White scholars' journey toward anti-racist understandings will only count "as we take on new lived possibilities" (p.20). I credit the following excerpt for being able to complete this work:

> Antiracist traditions provide us with useful critiques of existing situations, but tools developed to challenge racism will not always serve equally well to envision new racial possibilities. Critical tools are shaped to an important degree by the relations they are meant to disrupt. If we are to pursue as yet unimagined possibilities, we cannot rely on procedures and blueprints geared to what we know at present; we have to start by changing what is. Emergent approaches to change take up the possibilities found in change itself. Using the best tools available thus far to *begin* to shift our perceptions, investments, and involvements, they seek to alter situations enough so that, from the resulting experience and understanding, we can explore fresh possibilities of responsiveness. (p. 20)

My dissertation pursuit was shaped and informed by the critical tools that informed my work, and, as I acknowledge that as these tools have flaws, my work is also flawed, in the sense that it is a scholarship project hosted and created by an educational system historically connected to systemic racism. However, as I discussed earlier

throughout this study, all levels of schooling "permits us to see schools as sites of *both* domination and liberation" (McLaren, 2017, p. 57). This dialectical view of schools as a "cultural terrain that promotes student empowerment and self-transformation" (p 57) offered me the opportunity to reconcile the limitations of my work with the personal and professional growth that ensued from conducting this dissertation study.

I now understand that my initial drive to pursue scholarship leading to the investigation of how White women teachers made sense of their lives with respect to the racial other was fueled by a genuine question that, ultimately, revealed the wish to understand my own racial identity. This experience was painful at times, but it was all-around amazing! I have grown to understand how race underlies every aspect of my existence, and this awareness is the seat of humble-wisdom that I learned was key for my development. Over time, I have become increasingly aware of how White supremacy undermines justice, in all social, economic, cultural, and interpersonal realms. I recognize that, as Tatum (2017) illustrated, if I am not intentionally and deliberately working to get off the "whiteness walkway," I will be colluding with racism. By conducting this study, I learned to cultivate daily opportunities to stay mindful of the pervasiveness of whiteness underlying my motivation for action. This awareness has evolved into a daily practice through which I strive to pause and check myself for unseen racial bias and of the impact of my actions.

Without the generosity of White women teachers who courageously volunteered to participate in this study, I would not have accomplished the learning expedition that culminated in the research reported here. I am grateful for their courage, openness, and solidarity to my project. I vow to continue this learning experience and to encourage

White women educators—such as the brave teachers who participated in my study—to

embark in their own racial literacy journeys as well.

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Appendix I
Informed Consent

Department of Education/Doctoral Division
100 Hempstead Avenue
Rockville Centre, NY 11570
(516) 323-3164

Title of Study: Exploring the Lived Experiences of White Women Teachers in Racially and Ethnically Diverse Classrooms

This study is being conducted by: Alaísa Rigoni Grudzinski, Doctoral Candidate, Molloy College.
Faculty advisor: Allison Roda, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Education, Molloy College.

Key Information about this study:

This consent form is designed to inform you about the study you are being asked to participate in. Here you will find a brief summary about the study; however, you can find more detailed information later on in the form.

This study will examine the lived experiences of White (European American) women teachers as educators of Latinx, Black, and Asian students. It intends to explore how they make sense of the problem posed by racial bias, their successes and challenges in addressing the inequities students of Color face in school. Participants will be asked to engage in one 45-minutes focus group and in two 45-90 minutes individual interviews. There are no known or foreseen risks to participating in this study, but teachers may find the interviews to be helpful to them in better understanding their own conditions and practices.

There will be no financial compensation for participants. Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms, as individual names, the name of the school, and the neighborhood will not be revealed in the transcripts or any future reports. The sessions will be audio recorded for purposes of transcribing; the audio files will be deleted at the end of the study. Participation in this interview is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Why am I being asked to take part in this study?
This study seeks to interview teachers in a racially and ethnically diverse public high school on Long Island, NY. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences

of White women teachers educating Latinx, Black, and Asian students at a racially and ethnically diverse public high school on Long Island, NY.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to engage in one 45-minutes focus group with other tenured teachers from your school who have also volunteered to participate in this study. You will also be asked to participate in two following 45-90 minutes individual interviews.
As a participant in this study, you will be asked to share with the researcher your experiences of success and the challenges you face as a White woman teacher in educating students from racially and ethnically diverse groups, such as Blacks, Latinx, and Asians.

Where is the study going to take place, and how long will it take?
The first and second interviews will take place in your own school, during school time. The school principal has agreed to provide you with coverage for your class, during one period of the school day in order for you to participate in the focus group, which will last 45 minutes. Following, the researcher will ask you to participate in two individual interviews for 45 to 90 minutes. The first individual interview will take place during your free periods throughout the school day. The second individual interview will take place after school hours at your preferred location. The total time commitment for each participant in this study, focus group and individual interviews, should not exceed 180 to 200 minutes.

What are the risks and discomforts?
There are minimal risks to participate in this study, and it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research; however, to minimize any possible distress, teachers who do not want to answer a question will be encouraged to skip it or end the interview at any time. Teachers who agree to participate in this study may find the interviews helpful to better understand their own conditions and practices. The questions may ask teachers to reflect on issues at the school and the district, which may be positive or negative. The interview questions may also ask a participant to recall challenging teaching situations, but it is unlikely that the recall of challenging teaching circumstances would cause distress. Furthermore, teachers may enjoy sharing their opinion and experiences with the researcher.

What are the expected benefits of this research?
Individual Benefits: A possible benefit to participants in this study is the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills that may increase their awareness of how unconscious racial bias could influence the teacher-student relationship and impact education equity.

Do I have to take part in this study?
Your participation in this research is your choice. If you decide to participate in the study, you may change your mind and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are already entitled. There are no costs to participate in this study. **Subjects will not be compensated for their participation.**

What are the alternatives to being in this study?

Instead of being in this research, you may choose not to participate.

Who will have access to my information?
Information gathered during the audio-recorded interviews and the actual records of the transcribed interviews will be kept by the researcher in a secure location in the Doctoral Suite at Molloy College and will not be distributed to anyone else. Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms, as individual names, the name of the school, and the neighborhood will not be revealed in the transcripts or any future reports.

How will my information be used?
Information gathered during the audio-recorded interviews and the actual records of the transcribed interviews will be kept by the researcher in a secure location in the Doctoral Suite at Molloy College and will not be distributed to anyone else. The information gathered during the audio-recorded interviews will be analyzed and coded to determine emergent themes, patterns, and discrepancies within the data.

To ensure that this research activity is being conducted properly, Molloy College's Institutional Review Board (IRB), whose members are responsible for the protection of human subjects' rights for all Molloy-approved research protocols, have the right to review study records, but confidentiality will be maintained as allowed by law.

Can my participation in the study end early?

Participants are free to not answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Will I receive any compensation for participating in the study?
Subjects will not be compensated for their participation in this study.

What if I have questions?
Before you decide whether you'd like to participate in this study, please ask any questions that come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact Alaísa Rigoni Grudzinski at 516-302-6207 or agrudzinski@lions.molloy.edu; or Allison Roda, Ph.D., at 516-323-3128 or aroda@molloy.edu.

What are my rights as a research participant?
You have rights as a research participant. All research with human participants is reviewed by a committee called the *Institutional Review Board (IRB),* which works to protect your rights and welfare.

If you have questions about your rights, an unresolved question, a concern or complaint about this research you may contact the IRB contact the Molloy IRB office at irb@molloy.edu or call 516 323 3000.

Molloy College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are freely making a decision whether to be in this research study. Signing this form means that

1.   you have read and understood this consent form

2.   you have had your questions answered

3.   after sufficient time to make your choice, you have decided to be in the study,

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____   _____

Your signature   Date

_____   _____

Your printed name   Date

Please sign if you give permission to be audio recorded.

_____   _____

Your signature   Date

_____   _____

Your printed name   Date

_____   _____

Signature of researcher explaining study   Date

Alaísa Grudzinski
_____

Printed name of researcher explaining study

Appendix II

Interview Protocol – First Series: Focus Group
The Sociocultural Context of Teaching and Learning

Date _____

<u>For all respondents:</u>
The Principal Investigator will explain the study to the participants—teachers at Vanguard High School. The consent will be read, and the subjects' questions answered. The subjects will sign individual consent forms. A dated and signed copy will be given to each subject.

<u>Brief Project Description:</u>
Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study. My research is on the sociocultural context of teaching and learning, and I am trying to find out what helps educators succeed or feel challenged as White teachers in this racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse school.

To start our focus group discussion, I will pose a question to the group, and anyone can jump in and start the conversation, at any point in time. Feel free to join your colleagues when you agree or disagree. My goal is to hear as many ideas as possible in the little time we have for this discussion. Everything you say during the focus group should be kept in confidence and not be shared with anyone after this session is completed.

Please state your first name and the subject you teach when you speak for the first time.

_____
Q 1: How would you describe Vanguard to someone who doesn't know your school?
_____
I am interested on learning about how teachers are responding to the demographic changes in the school:
Q 2: What do you think are the key ingredients for your success, as teachers, in educating racially diverse student groups (such as Blacks, Latinx, and Asians)?

Appendix III

Molloy College

Demographic Questionnaire
The Sociocultural Context of Teaching and Learning

Date _____

Time _____

Location _____

Release form signed?   (   ) YES   (   ) NO

Name of participant_____

Age_____. Gender_____

Ethnicity_____. Race_____

Years of teaching_____. Subject area_____

City, state, and country of birth_____

Languages Spoken_____

Where did you attend school?

  Elementary:

_____
(Name of school)   (Location – city and state)

  Secondary:

_____
(Name of school)   (Location – city and state)

Higher education

_____

(Name of school)   (Location – city and state)

_____

(Name of school)   (Location – city and state)

_____

(Name of school)   (Location – city and state)

Appendix IV

Interview Protocol – Second Series: First Individual Interview
Racial Bias in the Sociocultural Context of Teaching and Learning

Date _____

Time _____

Location _____

Consent form signed?   (   ) YES   (   ) NO

Name of participant_____

For all respondents: The Principal Investigator will explain the study to the participants—teachers at Vnaguard High School. The consent will be read, and the subjects' questions answered. The subjects will sign individual consent forms. A dated and signed copy will be given to each subject.

<u>Brief Project Description:</u>
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this second round of interviews for my dissertation study. Just as a reminder, my research is on the role of race in sociocultural context of teaching and learning. More specifically, I want to explore the successes and challenges that you experience as a White teacher in this racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse school.

To get our individual interview going, I would like to ask you some of the same questions I asked the group, to hear your opinion on the subject. Sometimes during our interview, I may share with you some statements that were made by you or by your peers during the focus group, so I can have a better understanding of what was said and whether they relate to your own views and experiences.

I would like for you to think about this interview as an opportunity to stop to think about what happens in the school context of the relationship between teachers and students. Please feel free to ask for clarification any time you do not understand my questions.
_____

Q 1: Why did you decide to become a teacher?
      Probe: What led you to decide to teach at Vanguard?
_____

Q 2: Can you describe one of your most typical days as a teacher at Vanguard High school teaching Latinx, Black, and Asian students? Please start from the time you wake up, including your worries and dispositions.
_____

Q 3: How has your life or educational experiences informed or influenced your ability to connect with and teach Latinx, Black, and Asian students successfully?
      Probe: What gets in the way of teaching racially diverse student groups?
      Probe: What are some of your success stories?
_____

Q 4: Have you ever wondered about the impact of your words and attitudes on the racially diverse students you teach? Please, explain.

Q 5: Can you tell me one of your success stories in teaching your diverse students?

    Probe: Do you believe that your personal history and life experiences are connected to your success story? If yes, how so? If not, why not?

Q 6: Can you tell me a story that illustrates some of your challenges in teaching diverse students?

    Probe: Do you believe that your personal history and life experiences are connected to your roadblocks in teaching these student groups? If yes, how so? If not, why not?

Appendix V

Interview Protocol – Third Series: Second Individual Interview
Exploring the Lived Experiences of White Educators in Racially Diverse Classrooms

Date _____ .
Time _____
Location _____
Consent form signed?   (   ) YES   (   ) NO

Name of participant_____
For all respondents: The Principal Investigator will explain the study to the participants—
teachers at Vanguard High School. The consent will be read, and the subjects' questions
answered. The subjects will sign individual consent forms. A dated and signed copy will be
given to each subject.

Brief Project Description:
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this third round of interviews for my dissertation study.
Just as a reminder, my research is on the sociocultural context of teaching and learning. More
specifically, I want to explore the successes and challenges that you experience as a teacher at
Vanguard. I would like for you to think about this interview as an opportunity to reflect on the
meaning of your experience as a White teacher in this racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically
diverse school. I would like to join you in an exploration of your intellectual and emotional
connection with your diverse students. Please feel free to ask for clarification any time you do
not understand my questions.

_____
Would you please start by stating your first name and the subject area you teach?
_____
During the focus group, you and your colleagues described Vanguard. During our first individual
interview, I asked you to describe one of your most typical days as a teacher, why did you
become a teacher, and how your life and educational experiences influenced your ability to teach
diverse students successfully, as well as possible challenges. Today, I would like for you to think
and talk about your intellectual and emotional connection with your students who come from a
different racial, ethnic, or socioeconomically background than yours.

_____
The context of our interview is Long Island, which is a highly segregated region. However, you
are teaching at Vanguard, where the majority of students are Latinx, Black, and Asian. I would
like for you and I to look more closely at how the factors in your life interacted to bring you to
your present situation as a teacher at Vanguard.

_____
Q 1: How do you understand your role, as a White teacher, in the lives of your Latinx, Black,
and Asian students?
     a): Intellectual sense
     b): Emotional sense

_____

Q 2: Can you please share your thoughts about how teaching Vanguard's Latinx, Black, and Asian students may have influenced you?
      a): personally
      b): professionally?

_____

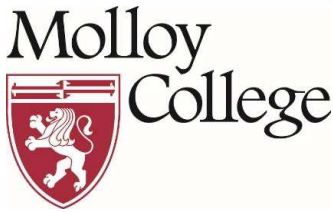**Q 3:** How do you think your Latinx, Black, or Asian students perceive you?
      Why do you think they see you this way?
      How do you think the fact that you do not look like them may influence their relationship with you?

_____

Q 4: Do you think you have implicit racial bias?
      Probe: If so, in what ways you think your bias may impact your students of Color?

Appendix VI
IRB Approval Letter

Molloy College

Institutional Review Board
1000 Hempstead Avenue
Rockville Centre, NY 11571
www.molloy.edu

Tel. 516.323.3711

Date: March 1, 2019
To: Dr. Allison Roda and Alaisa Grudzinski
From: Patricia A. Eckardt, Ph.D., RN, FAAN
               Chair, Molloy College Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: **MOLLOY IRB REVIEW AND DETERMINATION OF EXPEDITED STATUS**
Study Title: **Exploring the Lived Experiences of White Educators in Racially Diverse**
               Classrooms
Approved: **March 1, 2019- March 1, 2020**
Approval No: **01071821-0301**

Dear Dr. Roda and Ms. Grudzinski:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Molloy College has reviewed the above-mentioned
research proposal and determined that this proposal is approved by the committee.

It is considered an EXPEDITED review per the requirements of Department of Health and
Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects 45 CFR 46.110 (6) (7)
categories.

Please note that as Principal Investigator (PI), it is your responsibility to be CITI Certified in
both the Responsible Conduct of Research and Human Subjects Research and to submit the
evidence in order to conduct your research.

You may proceed with your research. Please submit a report to the committee at the conclusion
of your project. Your project is approved for ONE YEAR.

Changes to the Research: It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to inform the
Molloy College IRB of any changes to this research.

A change in the research may change the project from EXPEDITED status that would require
communication with the IRB.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Eckardt, Ph.D., RN, FAAN