A Systematic Review of Research on Race in Rural Educational scholarship since 2001

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This systematic review of literature on race in rural educational scholarship addresses the research question: How are race and racism typically represented (defined, discussed) in rural education literature? And two subquestions: What factors have been explored at length in regard to race and racism? and Where are the predominant gaps in the research literature? In answering these questions we reviewed literature published in three rural education journals from 2001-2022 and used a systematic approach to the data collection, extraction, and analysis. The overall findings about race yielded four themes: Race as– descriptor, located within a racial hierarchy, socially constructed, and an element of diversity/race as multicultural/cultural. Similarly, the overall findings about racism yielded three themes: Racism as– systemic and institutional, a factor, and structural. These themes provided an organizing framework to discuss the findings from the relevant studies. Each theme included the citation of articles representing the theme and illustrations of each theme. This approach allowed for a comprehensive display of what themes arose while also providing examples of how these constructs were articulated within the scholarship review. We then used CRT to analyze the overall findings related to race and racism focusing on two tenets, social construction theory, and colorevasiveness. We end with a call to increase focus on research that disrupts white supremacy, examines structural and institutional racism as it operates in rural education, and takes race-conscious approaches to research in rural scholarship.

Systemic racism has become an increasing focus across both public and academic discourses in recent years. This emergent focus includes a national rural postsecondary research agenda and calls for researchers to consider how race and rurality shape student access to and experiences to "critically think about how systemic racism perpetuates educational disparities in rural areas" (National Rural Postsecondary Research Agenda Working Group [NRPRAWG], 2021, p. 75). As scholars new to the field of rural education, and hoping to understand the landscape, we completed a comprehensive review of scholarly literature in the field of rural education relevant to the concepts of race and racism. We underscore our commitment to examine rural education and rurality while also increasing our intensity and intentionality to understand how race is examined in the rural educational research context (Swain & Baker, 2021). Our examination aligns with the recent initiative advanced by the National Rural Education Association (NREA)(2022) area of focus on spatial and educational equity in rural educational research. Thus, we join the call for an explicit focus on race(ism) in rural education. As co-authors who focus on race(ism) in education, and as mothers living in rural spaces with racialized school-age children, we are multiply invested in this much-needed conversation about the unique ways in which race and racism are theorized in studies that foreground the rural context of schooling.

In this article, we offer a systematic review on the concepts of race and racism in rural educational scholarship. We began our review by searching for direct mentions of race(ism) in the three leading U.S. rural education research journals, *Journal of Research on Rural Education*, *The Rural Educator*, and *Theory & Practice in Rural Education*. From this search, we identified 29 publications that specified the topic of race (2001-2022). In what follows, we provide a comprehensive summary of themes and gaps in the literature within rural educational scholarship on race(ism). Because this literature review centers race, utilizing an organizing framework and lens for viewing race, both the discursive and material outcomes, we assert that Critical Race Theory is a fitting theoretical frame to attend to the material effects of racism in rural education. The specific research question and sub-questions for this paper are as follows:

- How are race and/or racism typically represented, defined, and discussed in rural education literature?
  - What factors have been explored at length regarding race and racism?

o Where are the predominant gaps in the research literature?

Theoretical Framework

Our understanding of race and racism is informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) which provides a way to analyze and examine the relationships between race, racism, and power (Bell, 1992). Furthermore, its tenets and articulations (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson & Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) are useful to theorize and analyze the ongoing plight of racialized bodies and to disrupt and reject white supremacy. CRT as both framework and methodology provide several ways to examine race in rural educational scholarship. From this perspective, we view race(ism) as central to the operation of institutions in the U.S. and the social order. Ladson-Billings (1999) reminds us that racism is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order that it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture, and in schools more specifically (Leonardo & Boas, 2013; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Milner, 2008; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Moreover, CRT has become familiar as a theoretical framework in educational scholarship (Dixson & Anderson, 2016), and its use has extended how to examine the socially constructed phenomenon of race, which has discursive and material outcomes (Bonilla-Silva, 2022). We are interested in how people talk about race, or in other words, how the discourse around race and racism conveys meaning within educational contexts. For example, the current political milieu around antiracist teaching includes many conversations—social and political. These conversations inform material outcomes like legislation against teaching antiracism in K-12 public schools. Public and private conversations about CRT (discursive) have led to legislative (material) outcomes which inform pedagogical, curricular and policy decisions in districts and schools. CRT is one way we examine both the discourse and the outcomes of race in people's everyday lives.

CRT provides us with several tenets which benefit our analysis, especially due to the breadth of scholarship examined herein. We pause to review the major tenets of CRT (Crenshaw et al., 1995) while also noting that sub-tenets will be used in the analysis of the findings.

- Racism is ordinary and a part of the everyday business of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001)

- Whiteness as property affirms the material value placed on being racialized white (Harris, 1993)
- Interest convergence explains how advancements for people of color happen only at the convergence of the goals of white elites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).
- Story and counter-storytelling are a challenge to normative narratives that are pernicious (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).
- Social construction theory asserts that "race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.7). Race is neither biological nor genetic and is invented and manipulated based on social conventions of which bodies belong in which racial category.
- Critique of Liberalism provides a lens for analysis of the slow progress of racial equality (Bonilla Silva, 2003)
  - *Color-evasiveness* reinterprets liberalism's construct of colorblindness, which is the "nonrecognition of race or the "recognition of racial affiliation followed by the deliberate suppression of racial considerations'' (Gotanda, 1991, p. 6). This discursive disruption emphasizes "a racial ideology of color-evasiveness, as we believe that conceptualizing the refusal to recognize race as 'color-blindness' limits the ways this racial ideology can be dismantled" (Annamma et al., 2017, p.148). Thus, "by naming this racial ideology as color-evasiveness, we demonstrate the social construction of race and ability while simultaneously confronting the social and material consequences of racism and ableism" (Annamma et al., 2017, p.154). Color-evasiveness prevents erasure of the ways ableism shows up in our attempts to deconstruct and address forms of oppression.

Our analysis centers social construction theory and color-evasiveness. Within this work, we purposefully include all of the central tenets of CRT to inform potential future analyses of the literature and to highlight possibilities of how rural educational scholars might use CRT as a theoretical framework within their scholarship. CRT provides a multifaceted analysis of the ways that race(ism) is discussed in

rural educational scholarship. Ultimately, the use of this theoretical framework assists in organizing the literature and providing a way to articulate how gaps in the literature could be taken up in future research.

Social Construction Theory: Defining Terms

To best articulate our understanding of race and racism, we provide definitions of several socially constructed terms so readers are clear about how this work is situated. We define race as a social construct with varied discursive and material outcomes. That is, while race is generally considered a benign method of factual description (eg., "that person is *white*"), the impact of a racial designation or categorization (ie., the *racialization* of one's body) has associated discursive meanings that improve and impede people's everyday life experiences. Likewise, racism is an intricate system predicated on the socially constructed racialization of human skin which doles out advantages and oppression through systems and institutions.

Race. Race is "not objective, inherent, or fixed. [Races] correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.7). The US Census provides many examples of the shifting ideological and political boundaries of racial categories over time (Hochschild & Powell, 2008), where persons formerly racialized as belonging to one group were racialized as belonging to an altogether different categorization in later decades. Haney-Lopez (1994) explains that "race mediates every aspect of our lives" (p.164) and that "the confounding problem of race is that few people seem to know what race is" (p.165). Haney-Lopez continues to describe how "... 'race' [is] a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant, elements of their morphology and/or ancestry" (Haney-Lopez, 1994, p. 165). Taking time to define race is imperative because while 'race' is socially constructed, it creates discursive and material conditions for racialized bodies. As a result, "human interaction rather than natural differentiation must be seen as the source and continued basis for racial categorization" (Haney-Lopez, 1994, p. 168), meaning that we must always remember that it is humans who assign and construct meaning to the racialization of human bodies and this meaning-making is almost always attached to power (Feagin & Ducey, 2018).

We align with scholars that define race as socially constructed, not biologically determined. We view race as inextricably linked to power and privilege (Johnson, 2005; McIntosh, 1988) and we critique the social acceptance of racialized categories that are ever-evolving to support racial hierarchies (Howard, 2022). As a result of this social construction of race, where the concept of race is treated as inherent, yet fluid, race is all at once used as a benign descriptive category for groups of people, a category for assessing and predicting material outcomes for racialized bodies, and a descriptor for predictable circumstances within a society built on racial hierarchies.

Racism. To define racism we begin with the definition offered by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), "...racism is ordinary, not aberrational" (p. 7). The pervasive reality of racism makes it difficult to address or cure and therefore the ways that racism operates are both concrete and vague because "...racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.17). According to Leonardo (2014), racism is also the structures, systems, and unconfronted operation of racial oppression of one racial group over another. Because racism is ordinary, concrete, and vague both at the same time and a system that allocates privilege and status, we view racism as both institutional and structural.

Definitions of the concepts of race and racism assisted us in contextualizing our review of literature, and it is our hope and goal that readers of this systematic review of literature understand how we as authors approach the use of these terms. Furthermore, explicitly examining race(ism) in rural educational scholarship is gaining momentum as evidenced by the most recent special issues focused on race(ism) in rural education. The 2022 special issue, "Race and Rurality in Education," in *The Rural Educator,* and the inclusion of "dynamics of white supremacy and identity" in the AERA Rural SIG's identified areas supports analyses of race and racism as current and necessary.

Methods

Our work advances the field of rural education research by aligning with and implementing a study of literature specifically outlined by the NREA (2022) within the central topic of 'Spatial and Educational Equity' for further explication of our field: 1) Research from intersectional perspectives, 2)

attention to power within/across communities, 3) effects of remoteness/isolation, 4) effects of deficit portrayals of rural places and people, and 5) dynamics of white supremacy/identity. In framing this systematic review of literature, we situated our work within the areas of 1, 2, and 5. As a result, we offer recommendations to shape future research, provide prompts for novel contributions to the field and assist the rural education SIG in advancing its agenda for the next five years.

We borrowed structural and organizational tools from Sowl and Crain's (2021) systematic review of research on rural college access. The goal of a systematic review of literature is to learn "what is known, how it is known, how this varies across studies…" (Gough et.al., 2017, p.3). As a result, we conducted a comprehensive search relating to race and racism in the rural education scholarship for this review of the literature. In what follows we discuss our process of data collection, data extraction, and data analysis.

Data Collection

Literature Search and Inclusion Criteria. We made collaborative decisions to determine our approach and process for the literature search and inclusion criteria. First, we contacted librarians at each of our public universities to assist us with a comprehensive search of the top three rural educational journals: *Journal of Research in Rural Education, The Rural Educator,* and *Theory and Practice in Rural Education.* We asked our generous librarians to search each of these three journals using the terms "race" and "racism" bound between the years 2001 and 2022. The librarians undertook their search between January 2022 and February 28, 2022. The search included using race and/or racism as keywords, within the title, within the abstract, and full text. The initial results by all three librarians yielded overlaps. Once duplicates across the three lists were removed, 68 unique articles were identified and compiled in a shared spreadsheet.

Data Extraction. Next, we took the spreadsheet of 68 articles and searched the body of the article for both terms, race and racism. The initial 68 articles could have either term (race/racism), yet for the analysis we specifically looked for both terms in the articles. The process yielded 29 articles that had both race and racism included somewhere in the article.

Data Analysis

We collectively reviewed the 29 articles by assigning nine and fourteen articles to ourselves (individual authors) to read thoroughly. As a process for analysis, each researcher created summaries of their assigned articles and noted as part of those summaries the ways race and racism were represented, defined, and/or discussed. Results were compiled and shared in a collective document and table. As a research team we met for a full day to compare themes from our individual summaries, and determine key themes which emerged within and across the 29 articles. Because we only examined research in specified educational journals that self-identify as rural, we did not look for explicitly rural definitions. This process yielded four themes related to race and three themes related to racism that we discuss in the following section.

Findings

Our findings are organized by our research questions, first addressing the ways that race and racism were taken up in the articles and then addressing gaps in the literature. Next, we move on to our analysis of the literature. Our analysis is organized by connecting our findings to specific CRT tenets which provide insight into the themes which emerged. By presenting our findings in this way, we hope to extend the usefulness of this systematic review on race(ism) in rural educational scholarship.

How are Race and Racism Typically Represented (Defined, Discussed) in Rural Education Literature?

To answer this question, we first address the ways that race was taken up by studies in our sample and then how racism was taken up by this same sample of studies. The ways that rural educational scholars discussed or defined race was varied. This variation is noted in the section on the gaps in the literature and contributes to a conceptualization of the broader ways that race and racism are (not) discussed in rural education research.

Race. We found four themes related to the ways that race is operating or being discussed within studies in rural educational scholarship. Those are (1) *race as a description of participants, (2) race as located within a racial hierarchy, (3) race as socially constructed, and (4) race as an element of diversity.* These four themes demonstrate the ways that race is defined or discussed in the literature reviewed. Some

scholars explicitly included race in their papers and the titles of their work (Greenwood, 2009; Huffman, 2018; Irvin, et al., 2010; Locke, 2018; Smith et al., 2018). These rural educational scholars address race in various and inconsistent ways. As a result, we know there is a lack of explicit definitions of race in rural educational scholarship. Denoting the ways that race is and is not defined in the literature is an opportunity to be more explicit in the future, so the concept of race is better understood and contextualized in rural educational scholarship. In this section, we expound on the various approaches to discussing race in research.

Description of Participants. The use of race as a descriptor of participants in a study was the most frequent way that race was included in the studies reviewed (see Chambers et al., 2019; Longhurst & Thier, 2021; Oyen & Schweinle, 2021; Smith et al., 2018). Examples included sharing demographics of participants, percentages of a locale by race/ethnicity, or the use of race as a focal population for the study. Smith and colleagues (2018) highlighted the perspectives of Hispanic parents "to identify the major impediments to greater involvement of Hispanic parents with their children's schools" (p. 10). This example demonstrated race as a categorical descriptor of the focus population for the study. Another example of this theme was from Longhurst and Thier (2021), "Nationally, 25.2% of rural students identify with a race other than white. The range among states is very large" (p.100). These examples provided a brief picture of the ways that race was used as a descriptive category within the studies reviewed. We take this up further in the discussion section.

Located Within a Racial Hierarchy. Race, as located within a racial hierarchy, was found in Crumb et al. (2021), Means et al. (2021), and Sims and Ferrare (2021). Means et al. (2021) stated, "Researchers must grapple with [their] own privileges including race" (p. 46). This is significant in that the authors called researchers to grapple with privilege and oppression relative to racial hierarchies. The use of "including race" signifies the use of race as more than a grouping of individuals, but as a form of analysis in scholarship to examine social stratification. Both Sims and Ferrare (2021) and Crumb et al. (2021) sought to understand how racial stratification impacts college access. For example, Sims and Ferrare (2021) posed the research question, "In what ways may race interact with place-based

differences to further the process of selecting a college major?" (p. 2). The inclusion of this research question, especially in a study on first-generation college students' major choices, indicated there was explicit attention to and development of an understanding of how race may inform access and decision-making related to the intersection of the race/rural or race/urban identity of participants within the study.

Socially Constructed. Race as socially constructed was explicitly demonstrated with a clear articulation of the ways that race is not biological in the following articles: Swain and Baker, 2021; NRPRAWG, 2021; Grant-Panting, 2021; Gallagher et. al., 2021. For example, Gallagher and colleagues (2021) defined race as "a socially constructed system of categorization [that] establishes a hierarchy within and between school contexts" (p.2). They go on to state "Because race is a socially constructed system of categorization, people are not inherently racist but socialized to uphold a racial hierarchy (which means they can be socialized to disrupt it)" (p.3). These explicit definitions of race contributed to the clarity of its use and meaning in the context of rural scholarship. Discussing race as socially constructed was both explicit and implied in the scholars identified within this theme. Swain and Baker (2021) utilized the words race, racialized, and race-conscious prolifically, yet an explicit definition of race is not included. However, the paper addressed the implications of race and utilized a race analysis theoretical framework. The use of this theoretical framework provided the foundation for the race discussion the two authors take up.

An Element of Diversity/Race as Multicultural/Cultural. Race, conceptualized as an element of diversity or culture, was evident in some of the scholarship (Reed, 2019; Roberts & Grant, 2021). The two quotes below are instances where discussions of race were used in conjunction with other aspects of social identities. "Multicultural education must be inclusive of the many cultures, yet far too often it is perceived as a race or language matter without consideration to other characteristics that represent diversity" (Reed, 2019, p. 16). Reed's use of race in this context articulated for us how race is an element of diversity. Another instance of this theme is Roberts and Grant (2021) who aimed to "build on the growing body of work that examines college and career readiness practices using critical perspective and foregrounds the role race/ethnicity,

gender and sexuality, disability, and geographic variability in rural students' college and career readiness" (p. 86). This sample from Roberts and Grant demonstrated a conceptualization of race as one element among many when addressing diversity. These two instances in the literature demonstrated a choice to include race as an aspect of social difference, without defining race.

The four themes in this section related to race provided clear examples of the ways that race was defined or discussed in the literature reviewed. Related to race as a *description of participants* we pause to denote how race as categorical or descriptor of participants is only done when the participants in the study included individuals who are non-white. We found this reinforces the misperception that rural spaces are racialized white – a finding later explicated in depth in the gaps in the literature section of this article. Furthermore, we find that in the context of this systematic review of literature the authors of the reviewed articles discuss race as socially constructed and that this social construction has a hierarchy that includes privileges and disadvantages depending on the race of the individual. One of the findings that was challenging to articulate was the ways race was positioned as an element of diversity or culture, when this was done race was not defined nor discussed. Overall, we find that defining race was inconsistent, yet there was range in the discussion of race with some being more thorough than others.

Racism. We found that discussions of racism were largely underdeveloped or absent altogether across the majority of the articles reviewed, even when articles explicitly focused on race or used the word racism. Our analysis of the examination of racism yielded disjointed findings. We found even when racism is stated explicitly as relevant to the design or focus of the study, few studies challenged racism as a social hierarchy or acknowledged that racism could be operating and influencing the assumptions of the study design, data analysis, or the results. However, one article, an invited piece by Howley and Howley (2018), was the most explicit about challenging racism. Making such statements as, "Finally we address racism as endemic and ubiquitous in White America, with more polite manifestations in polite society and more blatant ones down home" (Howley & Howley, 2018, p. 2). And, "Such arguments position latter-day racism as one more (fearfully strong) weapon in the neoliberal arsenal. In this view, capital has a stake in mitigating

overt racism while simultaneously sustaining and exploiting covert (systemic) racism" (Howley & Howley, 2018, p.5). These explicit statements by Howley and Howley (2018) provide context for the covert ways that discussion of racism was avoided in rural educational scholarship. Our findings related to racism yielded three themes: *racism as systemic and institutional, racism as a factor, and racism as structural*.

We emphasize that these three themes were challenging to parse apart. In particular, it was difficult to make sense of racism as *a factor.* We found this approach nebulous because it lacked a declarative statement of racism and the ways in which the author of the article was (not) acknowledging the role of racism in material outcomes that affected people's educational experiences. When named, we found that discussions of racism included analyses of material outcomes, although sometimes terms and assumptions about the meanings of racism (institutional, systemic and structural) were used interchangeably. Given our framework for understanding these terms, we attempted to make sense of the variations (despite the often implicit nature) of the discussions.

We understand institutional racism as policies and practices that may appear race neutral, yet the impact of these policies and practices varies dependent on the race of the group; most commonly advantaging those racialized white and disadvantaging those racialized as non-white. Additionally, systemic racism is interlocking systems with individual and institutional forms of discrimination. While racism as structural can have individual and direct violent outcomes, it is also intentionally and directly oppressive and seeks to divide and segregate. Thus, understanding structural racism most often requires a historical, cultural, and societal analysis of racism. Relative to *racism,* we only found one example that offered an explicit definition of both race and racism (Gallagher et al., 2021). The remaining scholars explicitly discussed racism as it related to their studies, and most often discussed it as part of the context of the work or the lived reality of participants.

Systemic and Institutional. Racism as systemic and institutional (Swain & Baker, 2021; NRPRAWG, 2021; Gallagher et al., 2021; Grant-Panting, 2021; Howley & Howley, 2018; Means et al., 2021; Nichols, 2021; Reed, 2019; Walker, 2021) was articulated in several explicit ways. Gallagher et al. (2021) specifically discussed racism and defined it as

"a system that maintains a racial hierarchy that itself controls the distribution of power and resources (Guinier, 2004)" (p.4). NRPRAWG (2021) stated, "It is essential that researchers critically think about how systemic racism perpetuates educational disparities in rural areas" (p. 75). Nichols (2021) provided two easily identified instances, "centuries of inhumane treatment of Black people in Mississippi greatly affected their access to education in a system deeply rooted in institutional racism," (p. 4) and "underprepared, unchallenged, ridiculed, deemed unworthy or incapable, systemic racism allowed those in authority to believe that it was within reason to leave these Black students behind" (p. 9). These examples of the discursive impacts of systemic or institutional racism within rural spaces exhibit how some scholars are explicit in discussing racism and its material impact on rurality. Furthermore, Walker (2021) named and analyzed the ways Latinx students at a Black Lives Matter protest understood and articulated anti-Black racism stating it "...pointed to a greater cultural understanding about anti-Black racism and police brutality" (p. 48). The points made by the authors about the systemic and institutional nature of racial hierarchies and racism move the conversation toward what Walker (2021) named as a "...relevant and timely issue as education researchers focus on dismantling systemic hierarchies that perpetuate racism in our institution and communities" (p. 50). The perpetuation of racism underscores the importance of enlarging how we as rural scholars discuss and define race(ism) in our work.

Factor. Those who included racism as a factor (Bridgeforth et al., 2021; Chambers et al., 2019; Villalba et al., 2018; Wilcox, 2021) made statements about racism such as "social behaviors in rural schools demonstrate that marginalized groups are excluded and limited in receiving equal educational opportunities because of long-standing histories and practices of racism and inequity in rural areas" (Wilcox, 2021, p. 23). Villalba et al. (2018) conclude that "...reports of racism and discrimination against Latina/o children have increased as a result of the rather sudden and dramatic Latina/o population growth" (p. 17). In these studies, racism is identified as a material or causal factor – something that had real life impact related to educational outcomes. Racism as a factor was also used to help explicate the results of the study, discussing the researcher's knowledge of the racism experienced by those within the study helped to better understand the outcomes of the study.

Structural. Those who positioned racism as structural included Greenwood (2009), Walker (2021), and Wilcox (2021). Racism as structural is most clearly articulated by Wilcox (2021) who took up the historical and contemporary representation of this issue. Wilcox explained, "The legacy of Jim Crow segregation and displacement is still present in the U.S. South, operating through structural racism that uses violence to oppress Black people and sustain a hierarchy of white male dominance over all others" (p. 24). In a similar vein, Greenwood (2009) implied structural racism, "While discourse in Indigenous education begins with an understanding of how identity and place have been impacted by colonization, discourse in rural education generally fails to acknowledge the deeper history of colonization in the places that rural people currently occupy" (p.5). Walker (2021) also named how "stereotypes of people of color, created and perpetuated by white people, sustain racism, and racial hierarchies and create purposeful oppressive barriers against interaction with one another" (p. 39). This point about "barriers against interaction" indicated how structural racism was maintained, separating those that are also oppressed from one another. These examples, both explicit and implicit, demonstrated racism as structural and referenced the oppression and violence that occurs as a result of racism in rural educational places.

In conclusion, we found that there was a great deal of ambiguity in how rural scholars named, defined and discussed the dynamic ways that racism operates in educational scholarship. We found the concept of racism to be the most difficult of the two terms (race and racism) to isolate and analyze. Only one study explicitly defined racism and very few others identified how racism operated at the institutional or systemic level. Yet rural educational spaces are replete with legacies of racial discrimination and segregation. Structural racism has oppressive and violent outcomes, and we believe this level of oppression negatively impacts all of our students, families, teachers, administrators, and educational researchers who grapple with the complexities of living, learning and navigating personal and political limitations which result from systemic and institutional racism. Thus, while we identify the most explicit examples of racism in rural education research, we assert that, in this field, an analysis of racism in the context of rural education cannot ignore the ways that racism has robbed

everyone of opportunities for a quality public education, regardless of race.

What Factors Have Been Explored at Length Regarding Race and Racism?

The factor most common in the literature was the naming of race as a descriptor. While themes were identified related to racism, no specific factor about racism was explored at length. We identified Swain and Baker (2021), Gallagher et al. (2021), Grant-Panting (2021), Greenwood (2009), Howley and Howley, (2018), and Walker (2021) as having the most in-depth exploration of race and racism in work published in the specified journals. Gallagher et al. (2021) is the introductory article to a special issue of *Theory and Practice in Rural Education*, an issue specifically focused on equity, inclusion, and diversity. In the context of defining race, Gallagher and colleagues discuss Critical Race Theory and the 2021 attacks against its use in public education. Several of the articles from the special issue of *Theory and Practice in Rural Education* were included in this systematic review of the literature. Swain and Baker (2021) are included in the same special issue and utilized the words *race*, *racialized*, and *race-conscious* consistently. Their exploration of race and racism was focused on the need for race-conscious approaches to rural educational research, especially in the American Black Belt. Situating the Black Belt as a former site of mass enslavement was the point of origination for their analysis of race and racism in the rural South. The use of a racialized theoretical framework is the reason we identified this article as one that explored race and racism at length.

Grant-Panting (2021) argued from their perspective as a Black feminist/womanist author about the necessity of creating capacity for impactful organizing on racial equity in rural communities. They describe complex lessons gleaned from their organizing work in response to the murder of George Floyd in connection with the Black Lives Matter movement and the ways the racial justice work took shape in a rural town in Texas. In particular, four takeaways are highlighted: (1) coalition building is key, (2) racial relationships in rural communities are interwoven as opposed to in cities, (3) storytelling is important, and (4) youth voice is needed. Grant-Panting called for more research that engages scholar activism in rural places and stated they have "not found an academic community to connect with," instead having to expend a great deal of energy "making the case for why rural communities need to

be included in the BLM movement narrative and in conversation both within and outside academia" (p. 102). Grant-Panting's personal perspective-taking as a Black womanist narrated the depth of analysis on race and racism along with the topic of the research.

Similarly, Greenwood's (2009) reflection detailed their personal wrestling with being a white scholar invited to analyze how colonization narrates the story of rural white people. Through this examination of Indigenous survivance, Greenwood questioned how, despite the storied history of colonization in rural places, "educational discourse generally overlooks the history of white colonization" (p. 5). As a result, rural (white) people are starting to identify as a marginalized group, due to global capitalism and low-wage jobs. "Rural people too feel subjugated" (p. 5). Greenwood ultimately concluded that as embodied and emplaced people we are all connected. Greenwood (2009) and Grant-Panting (2021) were similar in the depth of the first-person analysis of race within their work as rural educational scholars.

Conclusively, issues of race and racism were explored at length when a racialized theoretical framework was used for the analysis of the work. The studies named in this section are those that had a racialized theoretical framework. One major observation of the literature is the absence of theoretical frameworks for analysis. Bridgeforth et al. (2021) also addressed this glaring absence: "most of the studies in our literature review are atheoretical or conceptual in nature…education research does not always rest on theory (Kezr, 2005), and yet [when it does] we conclude the findings were more credible, robust, and compelling than other studies…" (p. 10). We agree that the atheoretical nature of rural educational scholarship related to race(ism) makes dismantling oppressive systems less attainable.

Where are the Predominant Gaps in the Research Literature?

Several gaps exist in rural educational scholarship relevant to race(ism). Our analysis of the literature exposed gaps related to definition of terms, such as the lack of defining 'race' and/or 'racism.' When we searched articles for the use of race, or analyses of race(ism), we found very few definitions of race or racism. Gallagher et al. (2021) explicitly defined terms and applied those definitions within the scope of the article. Another gap involved the racialized context of research in rural studies. We found that many scholars are completing research

studies that include the word race, or focus explicitly on a racialized group of people, yet do not include an analysis of race and racism in the study design or the findings. Another gap in the literature was using race as a point of critical analysis from within a racialized social structure rather than a categorical description of participants. There was little discussion of how race may have influenced the outcomes of the study or impacted the study participants and findings.

Notably, the most explicit and frequently used examples of the terms race and racism were from articles published within the last 10 years. While this systematic review of literature covered a period of two decades, we noted that scholars have only recently become more explicit with their use of race as more than a categorial description of participants and overall discussion of racism in general. Of the 29 articles reviewed, only three concretely discuss racism before 2019: Greenwood (2009), Howley and Howley (2018), and Villalba et al. (2018). As a result, we concluded that scholars are progressively addressing race(ism), but there is still much work to be done.

A systematic review of literature reveals the presence and absence of topics across a field of scholarship. One area of potential focus for increased scrutiny is related to those racialized as white in rural spaces. We noted that even when race-related terms were included in a study, authors consistently did not include an analysis of people racialized as white located within a racial hierarchy. The absence of an analysis of the racial categorization of white persons within a racial hierarchy reinforces the presence of a racial hierarchy, with persons racialized as white being at the top and the racial hierarchy itself outside the scope of study. For instance, a study might address how students racialized as Black are underserved within school spaces, but fail to address how (and why) students racialized as white are being overserved. This in turn normalized rural spaces as white because the only time race was included as an element of the study was when those other than white persons are included in the study. Conversely, Greenwood (2009) and Howley and Howley (2018) are the only two articles that examined 'white' as a racial category with any material reality. Among the 29 articles reviewed, when an analysis of race was taken up, it was more likely to be focused on racial groups other than those racialized white. We consider this a major finding that is complex and worth interrogating – especially because rural educational spaces are so commonly mistakenly racialized as

white (Howley & Howley, 2018; Greenwood, 2009; Swain & Baker, 2021).

Discussion

We offer this systematic review of research on race from 2001-2022 to extend and build a scholarly discourse on the topics of race and racism in rural educational scholarship. To frame the discussion of our findings, we return to Critical Race Theory as our theoretical framework. First, we remind the reader that CRT has multiple tenets and our analysis here drew from our selection of social construction theory and a critique of liberalism, specifically colorblindness/color-evasiveness. We utilize a theory that provides a lens to examine race in discursive and material ways (Bonilla-Silva, 2022). We organize what follows by the analysis of our selected tenets within the literature.

Social Construction Theory

The social construction theory of CRT posits that race is neither biological nor genetic and is invented and manipulated based on social conventions of who belongs in which racial category(s) (Bonilla-Silva, 2022; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Social construction theory assists us in understanding the absence of the practice of defining race(ism). That is, because the system of racial categorization is socially constructed and rural is racialized white (Bridgeforth et al., 2021), there is no need to provide an explicit definition of race because the discursive meanings are clear. In our review, we found several studies where the social construction of rurality included non-white bodies (e.g., Chambers et al., 2019; Longhurst & Their, 2021). We noted that most frequently when non-white bodies are the focus of the research questions or analysis, researchers explicitly named race (i.e., race as a descriptor) but did not offer robust discussions about the role of racism broadly or specifically. Thus, race is indicated has having differential material outcomes (the results of the study) without an interrogation or challenge to the disparate effects of violence and oppression influencing the setting of the study. In other words, social phenomena are being studied without addressing the broader social context, which discursively and insidiously reframes disparate racial outcomes as a facet of biological or genetic difference.

We found ourselves wondering why an analysis of the discursive and material realities of race(ism) was rare across rural educational studies. What

factors might be constraining scholarship in this area (e.g., the practice of color-evasiveness; the lack of funding or access to explore such topics; perceived or real threats for explicitly naming racism and white supremacy)? We invite scholars across the field of rural education to join us in identifying the conditions necessary to move these critical analyses forward.

Critique of Liberalism: Colorblindness/ Color-evasiveness

Colorblindness is a sub-tenet of the broader critique of liberalism within CRT. A critique of liberalism highlights the slow progress of racial equality (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) and posits the practice of color-evasiveness as a method of weakening or subverting racial progress. To provide a thorough understanding of color-evasiveness we pause to provide an excerpt from the work of Annamma et al. (2017) whose scholarship is founded upon the work of race scholars. This excerpt articulates how color-evasiveness reconstructs colorblindness while passively obstructing racial progress:

> Here, blindness is imagined as something one is struck with or victim to – something that happens to them. Yet, that ignores the power of white supremacy, and whiteness situated within it, to actively evade discussions on race. As Bonilla-Silva (2006) found, there are purposeful rhetorical moves employed to avoid the discourse of race, racism, and racial inequities and maintain white supremacy. One must, 'repress, avoid, and conceal a great deal in order to maintain a stance of "not noticing" color' (Frankenberg 1993, p. 33). This is not the passive characteristic that the term color-blind suggests; instead, this actively (re)inscribes racial stereotypes (Williams and Land, 2006). This sense of passivity is not benign. The implication of passivity and the use of blindness within the racial ideology of color-blindness locates the problem and the power within an individual; one can simply ignore race, and racism will go away (Gotanda, 1991). In other words, the underlying argument for the racial ideology of color-blindness is that everyone will be treated fairly if race was discounted (Annamma et al., 2017, p.154).

In our analysis of rural educational scholarship, we assert that color-evasiveness is operating when race and racism are often not critically defined, analyzed, and/or conceptualized within the discussion, recommendation, or implications of the study.

According to Annamma et al. (2017) color-evasiveness is present when race is absent from a given context. The prescriptive solution to maintaining white domination is the refusal to interrogate the material and discursive realities of race and racism. As previously stated, we found that many scholars are completing studies that include the word 'race', yet do not include a critical analysis of race(ism)'s impact on the study participants, findings, or even directions for future research on the presentation of disparate racialized outcomes. We view these rhetorical moves as manifestations of color-evasiveness. In other words, instead of explicitly analyzing the disparate material outcomes of racialized groups within a racist structure, racial analysis is avoided altogether or diluted among other factors. Thus, color-evasiveness is present when analysis ignores the consequences of racism, even when doing so could be relevant and instructive to help explain the findings. Color-evasive practices support white supremacy because avoiding racial analyses discounts the material consequences of racism and maintains a dominant racial ideology of rural as belonging solely to those racialized white.

Conclusions

This systematic review of literature on race(ism) in rural educational scholarship addressed the research questions:

- How are race and/or racism typically represented, defined, and discussed in rural education literature?
  - What factors have been explored at length regarding race and racism?
  - Where are the predominant gaps in the research literature?

In answering these questions, we reviewed literature published in three rural education journals from 2001-2022 and articulated a systematic approach to the data collection, extraction, and analysis. The overall findings about race yielded four themes: Race as – *descriptor, located within a racial hierarchy, socially constructed, and an element of diversity/race as multicultural/cultural.* Similarly, the overall findings about racism yielded three themes: Racism as – *systemic and institutional, a factor, and structural.* These themes provided an organizing framework to discuss the findings from the relevant studies. Each theme included the citation of articles representing the theme and illustrations of each theme. This approach allowed for a comprehensive display of what themes arose while also providing

examples of how these constructs were articulated within the scholarship review. We then used CRT to analyze the overall findings related to race and racism focusing on two tenets, social construction theory, and color-evasiveness. This approach enabled us to achieve what Gough et al. (2017) named as the purpose of a systematic review of research: to learn "what is known, how it is known, how this varies across studies…" (p.3). As a result, what we know is that explorations of race(ism) are included in rural educational scholarship in limited ways. We also know that these terms are progressively becoming more frequent in recent educational scholarship. We also know that gaps in the literature exist across studies. The gaps most pronounced in our field are the lack of operational definitions of race and racism, the absence of critical theoretical frameworks within articles examining racialized categories and outcomes, and rural scholarship missing analyses of the race/ethnic category of white.

These findings cause us to reflect on the NREA (2022) areas of study within the topic of spatial and educational equity, specifically research from intersectional perspectives; attention to power within/across communities; and dynamics of white supremacy/identity. Overall, we, along with; NRPRAWG (2021); Means et al. (2021) and Swain and Baker (2021) echo the recommendation that rural scholars should increase our focus on research that disrupts white supremacy, that examines structural and institutional racism as it operates in rural education, and that takes race-conscious approaches to research in rural scholarship. In providing an explanation of and demonstrating tools from the CRT framework, we hope this discussion not only points to present needs but opens up directions of possible lenses that could inform research designs, as well as analytical and theoretical contributions of future scholarship in this area. Ultimately, we hope this review of literature provides an overview of scholarship on race that is relevant, timely, and accessible to stakeholders so that it will drive discourse between rural educational scholars, advocates, community members, and those that deeply care about rurality.

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