Forgotten Voices: Experiences of Five Female Public School Teachers in the Rural South

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, FORGOTTEN VOICES: EXPERIENCES OF FIVE FEMALE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS IN THE RURAL SOUTH, by ABIGAIL S. RUTH, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

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ABSTRACT

FORGOTTEN VOICES: EXPERIENCES OF FIVE FEMALE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS
IN THE RURAL SOUTH

by

ABIGAIL S. RUTH

Under the direction of Dr. Janice B. Fournillier

Schools in the United States are re-segregating at an alarming rate under the guise of education reform and school choice initiatives (McNeal, 2009). In rural communities, charter schools have been found to function as public segregation academies, often replacing or supplementing the private schools established immediately following the *Brown v. Board* ruling (Chapman, 2018). This interpretive phenomenological study explores the experiences of female public school teachers in rural communities and clarifies how educational segregation, in the form of both private schools and charter schools, in rural communities in the southern United States affect these experiences. The research questions that guide this study are: 1) What are the experiences of female teachers who work in public schools in rural communities? and 2) How does educational segregation within the local community affect the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural districts? Data analysis took place through a hermeneutic circle approach, and the findings are presented in composite narratives. Results indicate that the experiences of female teachers who work in public schools in rural communities differ based upon their self-imposed identities as either "insiders" or "outsiders". Findings are discussed in terms of implications for education leaders, public school teachers, and community members in rural communities.

Keywords: rural, southern United States, educational segregation, segregation academy, public schools, interpretive phenomenology

FORGOTTEN VOICES: EXPERIENCES OF FIVE FEMALE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the students of East Feliciana Parish Schools. You taught me more than I could have ever taught you, and you deserve the best that this world has to offer. Thank you for changing the trajectory of my life.

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Chapter 1- Introduction

"Power in the hands of the reformer is no less potentially corrupting than in the hands of

the oppressor." – Derrick Bell

Introduction of the Issue

Historically, rural communities in the southern United States have resisted school

integration in various ways. After the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of*

Education, which mandated desegregation of public schools, parents and community members

utilized attendance zone gerrymandering, district secession, student choice plans, in-school

tracking, and private segregation academies to ensure that White students did not attend school

with their Black peers (Houck & Murray, 2019; Richards, 2014; Wilson, 2016). These practices

have continued in different forms into the present day and particularly affect students and

teachers in rural communities. For the past 20 years, United States education policy has focused

on standardizing education and schooling across the country. By framing education as a generic

process that occurs regardless of context, policymakers have not accounted for the unique needs

and characteristics of students, teachers, and schools in rural districts. Instead, schools have

become less accountable to the communities they serve and "increasingly accountable to

institutionally determined state assessment goals" (Schafft, 2016, p. 150). Beyond meeting high-

stakes testing goals and teacher accountability standards, it is unclear how rural schools and rural

school districts should best educate their students or serve their communities effectively.

Educators in rural communities and rural education scholars understand that standardized

schools cannot adequately serve students' needs in rural communities throughout the United

States (Corbett, 2016). Just as neoliberal policies have sought to normalize individual students

and teachers, they have also attempted to downplay the differences between schools and school

districts. Even within rural settings, schools, school districts, and communities differ significantly, and experience unique challenges that other rural areas may not encounter. Gagnon & Mattingly (2015) found that only 14 states measure rural equity gaps and provide rural-specific strategies to improve education within their states, showing that state policymakers are often just as blind to rural issues as federal policymakers. Instead, rural students, teachers, schools, and school districts receive "less legislative attention than metropolitan area schools, although the problems of rural poverty are just as serious" (Dayton, 2003, p. 101).

Educational researchers interested in rural education should prioritize research that shows how neoliberal policies affect rural schools and school districts because these schools and school districts are frequently overlooked. While much of education research and policy attention is focused on urban and suburban school districts, rural schools and school districts continue to fall further out of policymaker's field of vision. Critical research that shines a light on rural schools and school districts' issues can help correct this oversight. Simply conducting research and publishing findings is not enough, but it is a first step. After all, if members of the educational research community do not prioritize rural education, how can we expect policymakers, who must focus on issues outside of education as well, to prioritize or consider issues in rural schools?

Currently, schools in the United States are re-segregating at an alarming rate under the guise of education reform and school choice plans (McNeal, 2009). These plans typically include the use of charter schools to provide alternative educational options to students and parents. In rural communities, charter schools have been found to function as public segregation academies, often replacing or supplementing the private schools established immediately following the *Brown v. Board* ruling (Chapman, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural communities and understand how the existence of educational segregation in rural communities in the southern United States may or may not affect them within and outside of the school building. It is my hope that this research will amplify the voices of teachers in rural communities advocate for the support of public schools and public-school teachers within rural communities and contribute to the existing literature on rural schools and school choice policies.

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of female teachers who work in public schools in rural communities?

2. How does educational segregation within the local community affect the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural districts?

Definitions

Below are terms used in this study. It is important to understand these definitions at the beginning of the study for consistency and understanding.

- Charter School- a public school that is governed by an independent board and utilizes admissions applications and/or lottery systems to determine enrollment.

- Community- A group of people, businesses, schools, or towns that share a common environment and display similar characteristics.

- Rural- located more than 25 miles from an urbanized area, as defined by population density.

- School Choice- ideology and/or program that promotes publicly funded education options other than public schools.

- Segregation Academy- private school created to segregate White students from students of color.

- United States South- states that made up the former Confederate States of America (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia).

Researcher Positionality

As a researcher utilizing an interpretive phenomenological framework, I must acknowledge what led me to this field of study and how my own experiences relate to those of my participants. I come from a family of public-school teachers. My great-grandmother taught in a one-room schoolhouse in rural Tennessee. Her son, my grandfather, was a rural elementary school teacher and principal. His daughter, my mother, was an elementary school teacher in rural and suburban communities. I was raised to revere public schools and taught that public-school teachers were pillars of their communities. Simple events like going to the grocery store became a celebration of my mother's career, as we inevitably ran into and caught up with several students that she taught over the years. As a child, I attended rural public schools in an area that was experiencing dramatic population growth. At this time, my hometown is considered a suburban part of metro Atlanta, but I distinctly remember being considered a 'country girl' when I began my undergraduate studies. I realized that I had had far fewer opportunities in my rural schools than my suburban and urban peers did; thus, I began college at a disadvantage and became embarrassed of deficits that I had no way of overcoming at the time. Following college, I joined Teach for America, where I taught public school in a rural community in Southern Louisiana. It was here that I began to understand the effects of neoliberal reforms on rural schools and communities and the feelings of isolation and unimportance that many rural public-

school teachers can attest to. I also learned that outsiders to rural communities might have good intentions when initiating change and reform, but they can easily do more harm than good unless they fully understand the communities in which they work. Thus, I consider myself both a rural community insider and outsider for the purposes of this study.

The year after I stopped working in that rural community, a charter school opened within the school district. I did not experience how that change affected the community firsthand, but I watched the changes from afar through social media and news articles. I saw students, teachers, and community members split into two different factions, each judging the other for the decisions they had made. I saw the demographics of the school district change as students from the local segregation academy began to consider attending public schools for the first time. Most importantly, I saw both tremendously positive changes and equally significant negative changes occur due to this phenomenon. This phenomenon piqued my interest in studying neoliberal reforms and their effects on public schools and school districts. However, when I began my doctoral studies, I quickly realized that there was very little literature concerning school choice initiatives and rural communities.

In my view, the shifts that occur in a school district with only one school at each grade level far surpass those in a school district with multiple school options prior to the introduction of a charter school. I believe that this difference is because rural schools are often sources of community pride and something that the entire community has in common. Conversely, suburban and urban communities often encompass several different school attendance zones, making schools less of a whole community rallying point than in rural areas. I believe that unless a person has experience within a rural community, it is hard to understand just how much they differ from their suburban and urban counterparts, which is what has motivated me to try and

make that understanding possible for others. It is my hope that this study will provide a window into the experiences of rural public-school teachers. In so doing, it will serve as an outlet in which they can share their experiences, make their realities known, and demonstrate the importance of public education and public-school teachers in rural communities.

Research Significance

While educational researchers can find journals that focus on nearly every niche aspect or category of education, mainstream education research is still not as inclusive as it should be. Rural education, in general, is overlooked compared to urban and suburban education. Schafft (2016) searched the top five educational research journals published between January 2004 and January 2014 and found only five articles with a rural focus. Conversely, there were 64 articles with an urban focus. Similarly, Biddle and Azano (2016) found that only 15 journal articles dealing with rural education issues were published outside of journals focusing solely on rural education between 1990 and 2015. Thus, while rural school issues are frequently attributed to geographic or funding inequalities, the rural school problem is also the result of decreased attention to rural communities and their needs (Biddle & Azano, 2016).

Recent educational research trends have shifted the focus away from rural deficits and instead focus on rural communities' opportunities; however, there is still a sense of negativity regarding rural schools and school districts (Biddle & Azano, 2016). There is also an unacknowledged assumption that focusing on rural education would take attention away from urban or suburban issues, which are often more visible. Educational researchers concerned with rural issues must use their platform to make visible "the differences between rural contexts for schooling and the urban and suburban contexts for which policymakers seemed to be crafting education policy" (Biddle & Azano, 2016, p. 313). By doing so, they can move rural education

research away from the scholarly periphery and legitimize the use of place as a lens through which marginalized perspectives can be considered. While students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community members in rural areas can advocate and speak for themselves, researchers can help amplify their voices within the scholarly community and aid in ensuring that rural perspectives are valued. Currently, there is a plethora of research concerning the use of neoliberal policies as tactics to further segregation in public schools; however, there is very little research regarding how this takes place in rural communities. In a political climate where school reforms are frequently one-size-fits-all mandates, awareness of the difficulties reform measures cause for every category of schools and school districts is a necessary first step to affecting change.

The lack of existing literature regarding rural communities and the rural experience results in a lack of attention to and awareness of the unique experiences that public-school teachers in rural communities undergo. This insufficiency serves to essentially silence the voices of public-school teachers in rural districts, ensuring that their input is neither heard nor valued in the educational research and policy communities. Fournillier and Edwards (2020) assert that voices explain the nature of experience; thus, individual voices are essential to reflecting, questioning, and defining experiences within a particular space. In the case of rural schools and communities, challenges and triumphs cannot be adequately documented or conveyed without including and accurately relaying the experiences of public-school teachers. This study will serve to partially fill that gap in the existing literature by amplifying the voices of educators who live these experiences every day. However, while this study will begin this conversation, additional studies focusing on the experiences of public-school teachers in rural communities are needed to bolster this genre of research and ensure that these important experiences do not go unnoticed.

Study Overview and Conclusion

Rural schools and school districts are often overlooked in mainstream educational research. Thus, more research is needed to illuminate how school reform initiatives affect, are experienced, and are perceived in rural communities. This qualitative study will focus on understanding this phenomenon and is centered on the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural communities in particular. The study will strive to answer two research questions: 1) What are the experiences of female teachers who work in public schools in rural communities? and 2) How does educational segregation within the local community affect the experiences of female public-school teachers who work in rural districts?

Chapter 2- Literature Review

"Treating different things the same can generate as much inequality as treating the same things differently." – Kimberle Crenshaw

Introduction

In this chapter, I will first address how I conducted research on the history and current state of schools in rural districts and the issues facing teachers within those schools and districts. Secondly, I will share a brief history of education in the United States South, including the emergence and entrenchment of systematic racism within the public education system. Finally, I will explore the characteristics of rural communities and school districts and the unique challenges they face, which allow educational segregation to disproportionately impact them.

This review compiles and synthesizes existing research regarding the history of education within the United States South, the continuation of educational segregation following *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the unique characteristics of, and challenges faced by, rural communities and school districts. The review is composed of qualitative, quantitative, historical, and theoretical studies published within the last 20 years. Older referenced works provide valuable first-person commentary on the state of desegregation efforts in United States public schools during the 1950s-1970s. Sources were compiled from research databases, including ERIC and Google Scholar, and consist of articles published in educational research journals, law reviews, and printed materials in the form of books and memoirs. As there is a significant amount of research related to the history of United States educational segregation and rural education overall, I have focused this review on literature that specifically relates to the topics explored in this study.

History of Educational Segregation in the U.S. South

       The Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* is commonly considered the impetus for public schools' desegregation in the United States. However, while *Brown v. Board* legally ruled that the racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional, parents, teachers, and community members who favored segregated schooling did not quietly or calmly accept their defeat.   Multiple strategies to prevent the integration of American public schools were deployed following the Court's ruling in all areas of the country, and in 1955, the Supreme Court stepped in to order the states to start expediently planning and implementing desegregation strategies in *Brown v. Board II* (Houck & Murray, 2019). However, while de jure segregation was no longer a legal option, de facto forms of segregation continued to flourish. In the North, housing patterns allowed parents and school districts to essentially maintain segregated schools even after school districts were found to have intentionally supported racially segregated and unequal schools through reviews of their own financial records and stated policies (Chapman, 2005). Alternatively, school district secession from larger, countywide systems became a common means of separating students in states like Alabama, Arkansas, Virginia, Louisiana, and North Carolina (Taylor et al., 2019; Wilson, 2016). Houck and Murray (2019) found that creating new school systems allowed for communities to "exert control over the composition and financing of school systems themselves" (p. 390), rather than attempting to advocate for their beliefs in the existing larger, more politically and racially diverse systems where their desires would have likely been shut down. Additionally, gerrymandering attendance zones in existing school districts allowed students to be separated through legal means. Richards (2014) found that districts located schools and drew their attendance boundaries to "intensify segregation and undermine integration efforts" (p.

1122). The advent of school choice plans during this time further attempted to provide separate but equal schools lawfully. While the availability of choice options provided alternative "escape valves" for some families, students of color who were less geographically mobile or unwilling to submit to verbal and physical threats were relegated to their existing neighborhood schools, which White students rarely chose to attend (Richards, 2014, p. 1153). However, while each of these methods for maintaining separate and unequal schools in the United States were prevalent nationwide, the use of private schools as a segregating tool was particularly rampant in the United States South (Chapman, 2018; Taylor et al., 2019). This practice continues today in rural school districts and communities throughout the same region. Indeed, the historical significance of segregation academies and the mechanisms used to create them is important to acknowledge when studying the modern education system in rural communities in the United States South.

Historically, private schools were used to further segregation in the South for many different reasons. Typically, school districts in the South covered large geographical areas with low population density (Clotfelter, 2004). Their large size made the use of district gerrymandering, system secession, and public choice options less feasible than in other more densely populated areas of the country. Private schools, on the other hand, "offered White families an especially effective means of avoiding exposure to non-Whites in schools, particularly in counties with very high minority concentrations" (Clotfelter, 2004, p. 74). In fact, private schools were so effective at maintaining segregated schools that their numbers increased in the South starting in 1960, despite declining in the rest of the country (Clotfelter, 2004). While private schools are traditionally granted little to no public funds, state governments in the South utilized various methods to transfer public funding to these schools to maintain the support of their vocal, White constituencies. Alexander and Alexander (2004) found that the de facto

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discrimination inherent in private schooling was rendered de jure using state funding because it enabled private citizens to make "blatantly race conscious private choices with public funds" (p. 1139). Prior to the desegregation of public schools following *Brown v. Board*, the issuance and use of state-sponsored tuition vouchers for private schooling was virtually non-existent. However, by 1975 approximately 750,000 students attended segregationist academies in the South that public funds supported in various ways (Andrews, 2002). Of great importance to the literature review is the history of the legal and funding mechanisms that enabled private segregation academies and public school choice initiatives to become widespread, embraced, and lasting fixtures in their communities.

Judicial and Legislative Events that Preceded Segregation Academies

Both the original *Brown v. Board* ruling in 1954 and the 'all deliberate speed' language in *Brown v. Board II* mandate in 1955 led to countermobilization efforts to limit the scope and effectiveness of integration-oriented school policies throughout the South (Andrews, 2002; Houck & Murray, 2019). Many Southern states simply ignored the Supreme Court's ruling or indefinitely delayed implementing policies that would satisfy the mandates while others formally moved to nullify or protest the decision (Day, 2016; Harris, 2006). While *Brown v. Board II* was formally declared in May 1955, by the end of 1956, the governments of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia had formally declared the decision "unconstitutional and thus not applicable within their borders" (Day, 2016, p. 424). Concurrently, significant events in the Civil Rights movement were taking place in 1955-1956, including the Emmett Till lynching, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the Autherine Lucy Riots (Day, 2016). These events led to national and international attention regarding the struggle to integrate public schools and changing sentiments in much of the United States. However, a Gallup Poll from

February 1956 showed that only 16% of Whites in the former states of the Confederacy

approved of the *Brown v. Board* decision, while 71% of Americans outside of the South

approved of *Brown* (Day, 2016). This sentiment was also evidenced in policy formation and

implementation. By the end of the 1955-1956 school year, only 537 of 4,791 school districts

affected by *Brown* were desegregated, and only 10% of the region's Black children attended

desegregated schools (Day, 2016). Very little progress continued to be made in the immediate

years following the rulings, as just 2% of Black students attended majority-White schools ten

years later despite Justice Thurgood Marshall's prediction that Southern schools would be

desegregated within five years of *Brown v. Board II* (Taylor et al., 2019). Instead, Southern

politicians and community leaders heralded the idea of states' rights and "justified their

opposition to desegregation by asserting that the states and not the federal government had the

right to determine if segregation would prevail or not" (Harris, 2006, p. 2). One way their cause

was furthered was the creation of Citizens' Councils, which was a middle-class version of the Ku

Klux Klan that originated shortly after the *Brown v. Board* decisions (Andrews, 2002). The goal

of the Citizens' Council was to employ "legalistic tactics to resist school desegregation and the

Civil Rights movement more generally" (Andrews, 2002, p. 916). While Citizens' Councils

worked to combat integration at the micro-level, dealing with individual schools and

communities, the states' rights rhetoric was more widely championed through the creation of the

Southern Manifesto.

On March 13, 1956, 99 members of the 84th United States Congress officially approved

the Declaration of Constitutional Principles, more commonly known as the Southern

Manifesto. The Southern Manifesto was a document that formally stated opposition to *Brown v.*

Board, desegregation, and the Civil Rights movement (Day, 2016). Luckett (2016) states that it

was designed as a call-to-arms and created to tighten "the reigns of Jim Crow around quality public education and the supposed promises of American democracy" (p. 462). While the judicial impetus to the Southern Manifesto was the rulings of *Brown v. Board* and *Brown v. Board II*, the ideals espoused by this document's signers had been increasing in popularity in the White, Southern community since the early 1950s. In the postwar period that began in 1948, profound economic growth within the United States resulted in low inflation, low unemployment, and high worker productivity (Day, 2016). During this time, the South's population and industry grew and expanded more than any other region in the country (Day, 2016). However, while economic gains could have served to unite communities, "concerted political opposition to the larger aspirations of civil rights workers for full Black social equality and educational opportunity thwarted any meaningful chance for a truly integrated American society" (Day, 2016, p. 422). Instead, federal support of public education did little to counteract a long history of racial disparity within the United States, and divisions between Whites and Blacks grew (Day, 2016).

With the expected ruling of *Brown v. Board* on the horizon, Southern state leaders were tasked with either accepting federal authority and implementing policies and programs that would ensure substantive improvements to Black education or defying the Supreme Court and continuing to champion the issues of states' rights (Luckett, 2016). Their answer to this dilemma was the creation of the Southern Manifesto, which was drafted over three weeks by Democratic senators from Texas, Mississippi, and North Carolina (Day, 2016). It "encapsulated all of the political and legal arguments made against *Brown v. Board* on the federal, state, and local levels of politics" (Day, 2016, p. 430). One of these arguments was that the *Brown v. Board* decision was without precedent in American Common Law due to it not being based upon the concept of

stare decisis, which insinuates that the Supreme Court had misinterpreted the Fourteenth

Amendment (Day, 2016). Another argument questioned the Supreme Court justices' integrity,

suggesting that they were partisan and basing decisions on unproven theories rather than legal

principles (Day, 2016). Lastly, lawmakers asserted that the *Brown v. Board* ruling destroyed the

purported harmonious race relations and "quality separate and equal public schools that were

built in the South since the Civil War" (Day, 2016, p. 431) and compared Civil Rights workers to

Communists who were trying to violently uproot the Southern way of life. The majority of

Southern delegates accepted these arguments and ideals as the drafters sought to satisfy both

committed segregationists and moderate lawmakers committed to protecting states' rights (Day,

2016). Overall, most Southern lawmakers considered the Southern Manifesto to be a logical way

to satisfy their constituents and protect their elected positions (Day, 2016).

       Just prior to the creation of the Southern Manifesto, Representative Adam Clayton

Powell, Jr., a Democrat from New York, had proposed legislation that would withhold federal

funding from any school district that refused to comply with the *Brown v. Board* ruling by

initiating desegregation plans immediately (Day, 2016). This legislation became known as the

Powell Amendment and was attached to the Kelley Bill, which designated $100 million of

funding for the construction and rehabilitation of public schools, particularly in the country's

most impoverished areas (Day, 2016).   The Powell Amendment directly challenged the

delegates who championed the Southern Manifesto's ideals, as many of them represented

districts that were among the poorest in the country and could have gained the most from

increased federal education aid (Day, 2016). However, According to Day (2016),"Despite the

substantial loss of federal aid, southern education officials stressed that they would rather forgo

funding rather than desegregate" (p. 427). Rather than dealing with the Powell Amendment

when it was initially proposed, the Democratic Speaker of the House, a member of the Southern delegation, postponed consideration of the Kelley Bill and Powell Amendment until after the creation and ratification of the Southern Manifesto (Day, 2016). This delay resulted in the passing of the bill passing in the House of Representatives but it was defeated in the Senate, thus, protecting the states' rights to refuse or delay desegregation plans indefinitely (Day, 2016). However, eight years after its defeat, the Powell Amendment became a "major facet of the 1964 Civil Rights Act" (Day, 2016, p. 433).

While the Southern Manifesto did not initiate resistance to the *Brown v. Board* decisions, it was the "catalysis for the counterrevolution against the Civil Rights movement that came to be known as massive resistance" (Day, 2016, p. 420). At the time of its creation, most Southern states wanted to enact or had already enacted legislation that would enable local school districts to close schools and parents to abandon public schooling rather than allowing schools to be desegregated (Luckett, 2016). Additionally, Southern leaders had been resisting advancing any measures that would provide Black citizens a sense of equality since before the Civil War (Luckett, 2016). However, the Southern Manifesto did serve as a "restatement and recommitment to the principles that had empowered White hegemony in the South" (Luckett, 2016, p. 469) and acted as a form of unification of the Southern delegation. It prevented "citizenship for another generation of Black southerners," (Day, 2016, p. 434) which served to further residential and public-school racial segregation even beyond the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Due to the uneven implementation of desegregation measures and the continuation of civil discontent across the United States after the rulings in *Brown v. Board* and *Brown v. Board II*, the federal government initiated broad measures that were created to increase federal

oversight of education and definitively mandate policies that court rulings alone had been unable to enforce (Chapman, 2018). Prior to this creation of federal oversight in 1964 and 1965, seven out of eleven Southern states' public schools were still over 99% segregated (Bullock and Rodger, 1976). The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, which prohibited discrimination in any institution that received federal funding (Chapman, 2018). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965 and, along with other purposes, was used to ensure that state and local school districts either comply with desegregation mandates or face financial sanctions and legal action (Andrews, 2002; Chapman, 2018). The federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was created to oversee and facilitate ESEA and had the power to sanction districts who were noncompliant and incentivize districts to comply through funding, programs, and other resources (Andrews, 2002; Chapman, 2018). While the Civil Rights Act and ESEA succeeded in ushering in desegregation in areas where it had previously not been attempted, the preponderance of separate and unequal public schools was not reduced in most of the South until sometime between 1968 and 1970 (Bullock and Rodgers, 1976). However, while de jure White supremacy and public school segregation were effectively reduced after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and ESEA, de facto segregation and racial disparity continued to be prevalent throughout the South (Day, 2016).

Andrews (2002) states that "courts, in particular, have played a critical role in shaping the dynamics of United States social movements" (p. 915). This belief holds true when considering the continuation of de facto segregation even after the creation of the Civil Rights Act and ESEA. In the years that followed their implementations, United States' courts continued to hear cases related to school districts that utilized loopholes and technicalities to continue to operate separate and unequal schools. In some cases, courts ruled that the school districts were in

defiance of federal guidelines, while in other cases, the courts reinforced the legality of certain forms of segregation (Houck & Murray, 2019; Munford, 1973). In 1968 and 1969, the Supreme Court issued decisions in the *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* and the *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* cases, respectively (Clotfelter, 2004). Prior to the *Green* decision, school districts were allowed to desegregate their schools using 'freedom of choice' plans, in which students could choose to attend any school within the school district even if that meant that schools remained nearly as segregated as they were before implementing the plan (Munford, 1973). The Supreme Court ruled that freedom of choice plans were unconstitutional "if they did not eliminate racially identifiable schools" (Munford, 1973, p. 14) and required school boards to reassign students to schools in a way that achieved racial balance. Prior to this ruling, 90% of Southern school districts purported to be desegregated through freedom of choice plans, which prompted swift legal action by the United States Justice Department and NAACP (Munford, 1973). Fifty of these legal motions pertained to the Southern District of Mississippi and formed the basis of the *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* case, which involved 33 school boards and 30 school districts in Mississippi (Munford, 1973). In 1969, the school boards and districts referenced in *Alexander* were ordered to immediately desegregate their schools. This order resulted in White enrollment dropping by 25% in less than a year (Munford, 1973).

While the *Green v. County School Board and Alexander v. Holmes* cases lead to mandated desegregation of schools, two widely followed cases in the early 1970s resulted in the protection of de facto forms of segregation. In the 1973 *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* ruling, the Court found that basing school funding on local property taxes did not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the United States' Constitution, which allowed for wealthy, White portions

of large school districts to secede, form their own district, and take the majority of existing tax revenue away from the original district (Houck & Murray, 2019). In the 1974 *Milliken v. Bradley* ruling, the Court ruled that desegregation plans could not span across district boundaries, further incentivizing parents who opposed desegregation to form their own school districts in order to legally separate their children from Black students (Houck & Murray, 2019). These two cases essentially landlocked minority districts into their boundaries and property tax bases "thereby preventing educators and policymakers from applying broad, regional desegregation plans" (Houck & Murray, 2019, p. 391). While *Brown v. Board*, *Brown v. Board II*, various court cases, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act and ESEA all contributed to furthering the cause of racial integration in United States' public schools, they were not enough to counteract the "the vitriol of White backlash or myriad of practical legal questions that would arise" (Houck & Murray, 2019, p. 391) in their wake. De facto segregation remained rampant across the United States South and was accomplished and sustained through numerous and varying mechanisms both within the public school system and outside of it (Alexander & Alexander, 2004). One of the most prevalent of these incarnations occurred through the proliferation of private schools created solely to provide a segregated, often publicly funded educational option for Whites in districts that had been forced to desegregate. These segregation academies are the precursors to the school choice initiatives that are currently re-segregating United States' public schools, and many are being replaced or supplemented by the addition of public charter schools within their communities. The mechanisms used to establish segregation academies in the early 1960s are now being used to justify the creation of charter schools in rural communities; thus, understanding their history is a necessary step in studying the current educational climate.

Figure 1: Timeline of Segregation Academy Formation and Proliferation

The governments of multiple Southern states declare Brown v. Board and Brown v. Board II not applicable within their borders. The Southern Manifesto is approved by the U.S. Congress

1956

The Supreme Court rulings in Green v. County School Board and Alexander v. Holmes effectively eliminate dual school systems. Private segregation academies continue growing in the Southern U.S.

1970

The Supreme Court upheld the use of tuition vouchers for private, religious schools, paving the way for government funds to continue to be used on segregation academies.

2002

1954

Brown vs. Board legally rules that the segregation of children in public schools is unconstitutional

1965

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is passed. This sanctions school districts that are not integrated. The first private segregation academies are formed in the Southern U.S.

2000

Private segregation academies in the Southern U.S. continue to play as large of a role as they did in the 1970s.

The Creation of Segregation Academies

In the first decade after *Brown v. Board*, private school enrollment in the South did not change much overall (Clotfelter, 2004). However, from 1964-1969, "enrollment in private schools in the South grew ten-told, and those numbers continued to increase quite dramatically during the next decade and beyond" (Chapman, 2008, p. 45). The early portion of this change corresponded with the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and ESEA in 1965. As state governments and public school systems were unable to continue delaying implementing desegregation policies, parents in Southern communities turned to private schools as never before, and all-White segregation academies became community fixtures in states like Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, particularly in rural communities (Clotfelter, 2004). The

phenomenon continued to rapidly increase following the 1968 and 1969 Supreme Court rulings in *Green* and *Alexander*, which "effectively eliminated dual school systems" (Clotfelter, 2004, p. 77) across the South.

In Mississippi, private segregation academies emerged in the communities directly affected by the *Alexander* ruling beginning in the middle of the 1969-1970 school year (Andrews, 2002). Prior to the *Alexander* decision, only two school districts in the state had implemented desegregation plans or policies, which meant that the ruling caused widespread changes in nearly all public school districts across the state (Luckett, 2016). Existing private schools saw staggering increases in enrollment early on, but numerous new private schools were also established (Andrews, 2002). These new schools created a comprehensive system of private academies across the state (Andrews, 2002). By 1970, there were 236 private schools in Mississippi, although there had only been 17 in the entire state in the early 1960s (Luckett, 2016). This network of private academies served approximately 20% of the White primary and secondary students in the state in the fall of 1970 (Andrews, 2002). Overall, private school enrollment in the state quadrupled between the 1968-1969 and 1969-1970 school years, with the growth primarily occurring through the formation of new schools rather than the expansion of the established institutions (Andrews, 2002). Although certainly comprehensive and widespread in Mississippi, this phenomenon was not exclusive to this state alone but was instead mirrored across the Southern United States. In North Carolina, private school enrollment increased by one-third between 1970 and 1971 (Clotfelter, 2004). Similarly, in Memphis, private school enrollment "increased from 13,000 to 33,000 between 1970 and 1973, following a court order involving busing for desegregation" (Clotfelter, 2004, p. 79). Similar figures were reported in South Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia (Allen, 2019; Clotfelter, 2004; Luckett, 2016).

Interestingly, while private schools and private school enrollment exploded across the South in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it decreased across other parts of the United States (Ryan, 2004). This trend held even through the later decades of the twentieth century as the share of students attending private schools in the entire United States dropped by more than three percentage points, but the share in Southern states increased by four percentage points (Clotfelter, 2004). This discrepancy can be attributed to White flight to private schools experienced after public school districts were desegregated in the South as well as increased wealth in Southern states and decreased participation in organized religion across the nation (Clotfelter, 2004; Ryan, 2004). While private schools had historically "claimed a larger share of enrollments in the Northeast and Midwest than the relatively impoverished South" (Clotfelter, 2004, p. 77), the majority of private schools in the Northeast and Midwest were affiliated with the Catholic church or other religious institutions. Many of the new private academies that were founded in the South during this time were also affiliated with churches or religious groups, but that affiliation was typically due to the pooling of resources rather than a desire for religious instruction (Ryan, 2004). Allen (2019) details the creation of one such school in South Carolina. Clarendon Hall was established in 1965 as a private segregation academy for White families in Clarendon County, SC, following public schools' desegregation (Allen, 2019). While the school was officially founded by the Summerton Baptist Church, the motivation for the creation of the school was to avoid integration (Allen, 2019). However, school leaders insisted that the school was founded to afford a "superior elementary and secondary education in a nondenominational Christian environment" (Allen, 2019, p. 459), even though it was created immediately following the adoption of a bussing mandate in the local public school system and the fact that it did not enroll a single Black student for decades.

The creation of segregation academies and their affiliation with religious institutions was more prevalent in rural communities due to their remote, often isolated locations. Whereas parents in urban communities typically had multiple options for their children's education within a relatively close geographic area, parents in rural communities often had only one option- the local public school. This lack of alternatives contributed to the establishment of hundreds of new schools in rural communities where White families felt they had no other option if they opposed desegregation (Clotfelter, 2004). Alternatively, parents in more densely populated areas could choose to move to a nearby different, more segregated public school district or enroll their children in already established private schools, both of which options were often not feasible for parents in remote, rural communities (Andrews, 2002).

These differences between rural and non-rural communities are also observed in demographic data. Clotfelter (2004) found that while metropolitan areas in the South had less than average segregation than the rest of the United States, segregation in nonmetropolitan areas was much higher. The prevalence of segregation and lack of alternative schooling options is reflected in the role that private segregation academies play in furthering segregated schooling in rural areas compared to metropolitan areas. Even today, in rural areas of the South, private schools account for 42% of total school segregation, while in metropolitan areas, they only account for 16% of total segregation (Clotfelter, 2004).

While affiliation with religious institutions enabled additional private schools to open in rural communities in the late 1960s, the Citizens' Council was also instrumental in facilitating the creation of private segregation academies. The Citizens' Council, which was also known as the Association for the Preservation of the White Race, sponsored the creation of over 150 academies throughout the South between 1964 and 1969 (Andrews, 2002; Luckett, 2016). These

schools served an estimated student population of 42,000 across the South by 1970 (Luckett, 2016). In Mississippi, this meant that the share of non-religious affiliated private schools increased by 76% during this time (Luckett, 2016). However, while the Council facilitated the creation of private academies, its primary contribution was not direct sponsorship but instead was accomplished through informal ties within local communities (Andrews, 2002). The Council headquarters in Jackson, MS "served as a clearinghouse of information, maintaining a register of private schools and available instructors and administrators, as well as potential physical facilities" (Andrews, 2002, p. 923). While the creation of private segregation academies across the South during this time was facilitated and supported by numerous community entities, including religious institutions and independent community groups, the reasoning behind why these schools were created in specific communities as opposed to others is much less variable than how they were created.

Andrews (2002) states that "the formation of new institutions requires a historical explanation that accounts for the social and political origins of the institutions" (p. 931). In the case of the private segregation academies formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the United States' political climate during that period offers many aspects of that explanation. However, federal legislation and Supreme Court rulings do not explain why Southern White parents were so opposed to desegregating schools or why they chose to utilize private schools as their way to avoid desegregation. According to Andrews (2002), the community sentiments that spurred the creation of these academies were the result of political contention at the local, state, and regional level concerning the ideals associated with White supremacy, states' rights, and preserving the Southern way of life. This contention was particularly felt in rural communities, where residents often had little experience with people outside of their race. In 1960, the best predictor of school

integration was population density or urbanism, but by 1968 urbanism had become insignificant (Munford, 1973). Instead, the "Black percentage of population became the most important explanatory variable" (Munford, 1973, p. 20). This was due to the pressure placed upon nearly all school districts to begin desegregating by 1968. Parents whose children were most likely to attend successfully desegregated schools due to a large population of Black students in their surrounding community became more vocal and reactionary than parents whose students would continue to enjoy a White majority in their newly desegregated schools (Chapman, 2018; Munford, 1973).

As a result, private schools that were created in response to desegregation were more likely to be established in communities in which there was a high likelihood that desegregation policies would be or were already in place, Black citizens historically had or actively were protesting the continuation of segregated schools, and White citizens had both the resources and organizational capacity to actively resist desegregation (Andrews, 2002). As a result, White students were enrolled in private schools following desegregation orders at a much higher rate in counties where the Black population was a majority (Allen, 2019). Andrews (2002) also found that characteristics of community populations shaped White responses, concluding that the "proportion of Blacks in a school district is the single most important factor explaining White flight" (p. 919). However, this relationship was not observed nationwide. Clotfelter (2004) found that "for the South, but only for the South," (p. 89) did the percentage of White students enrolled in private schools increase in relation to the percentage of non-White population in the surrounding community. Outside of the South, there was no relationship between county racial composition and private school enrollment (Clotfelter, 2004). Furthermore, this relationship became more pronounced as the percentage of the non-White population in the surrounding

community grew. Clotfelter (2004) found that "there was a perceptible jump in the private share around 55%, followed by large increases at 65% and 80%" (p. 89). These increases meant that the percentage of White students attending segregated private schools was three times as high in counties with a population that was 80% non-White than in counties with a 55% non-White population (Clotfelter, 2004). Clotfelter's (2004) findings correspond to a 1970 Gallup Poll that state that 69% of Southern Whites would object to sending their children to a school that was majority Black, while only 43% would object if the school was half Black and only 16% would object if the school only had "a few" (Munford, 1973, p. 19) Black students. Thus, there was found to be a strong association between the percentage of the Black population and the number of White students enrolled in private segregation academies in states throughout the South (Luckett, 2016; Munford, 1973).

While the percentage of non-White population in the surrounding community was the most salient reason for the increase in White students' enrollment in private schools, it was not the only reason. The prevalence of Black citizens who actively participated in the Civil Rights movement also influenced resistance to desegregation measures (Andrews, 2002). When comparing rates of community activism during the Freedom Summer, Andrews (2002) found that "counties with greater levels of social movement mobilization in the 1960s had higher academy enrollments" (p. 929). Additionally, alternative school districts' availability also affected the percentage of White students who attended private segregation academies. Andrews (2002) found that in communities with multiple school districts, White parents more frequently chose to have their children continue to attend public schools even after they had been desegregated. These parents were able to avoid desegregation within the public schools by using tactics such as school district secession, district gerrymandering, or within school tracking.

However, this option was limited to few areas in the South as the majority of Southern school districts were rural, geographically large, and contained few school buildings; thus, private schools were the "most ready avenue for exit" (Clotfelter, 2004, p. 92). As previously discussed, in most rural school districts, private schools were the only option for parents who did not want their children to attend desegregated schools (Clotfelter, 2004).

Overall, the reason that private segregation academies flourished in the late 1960s and early 1970s can be attributed to White fear of Black advancement or control. Munford (1973) puts forward the argument that many White parents wanted to pass on a heritage of White supremacy to their children, and they feared that this would become more difficult if their children were regularly interacting with and receiving the same education as their Black peers. Instead, by leaving public schools and separating themselves in private segregation academies, parents could ensure that their children were not exposed to people or ideas that might have undermined their supremacist beliefs (Munford, 1973). While many private academies that were established in the South during the late 1960s and early 1970s assert that they were not founded as a response to desegregation, the "timing and location of the schools, as well as the candid admissions by those who created and attended them" (Ryan, 2004, p. 1638) show this is not true. Instead, their timing and locales indisputably show that maintaining segregation along with White parents' unwillingness for their children to be the minority population in schools were the main reasons for the schools' creation. In sum, Andrews (2002) found that the proportion of Black school-age children in the community, the amount of civil-rights mobilization, the prevalence of countermovement organizations, and the number of school districts within the surrounding area were the most significant predictors of the establishment of

private segregation academies in Southern communities. However, it is important to note the pivotal role funding played in the advancement of these private segregation academies.

Funding and Advancement of Segregation Academies

The widespread creation of private segregation academies would not have been possible without funding and resource donations from governmental and community sources. In response to desegregation, many states began to repeal their compulsory attendance laws, giving parents the option of withdrawing their children from schools that would no longer be segregated (Andrews, 2002). Mississippi repealed its school attendance laws in 1965 as a direct result of the Court ruling in *Alexander v. Holmes (*Harris, 2006). At the time, segregationists realized that while not all Black parents would choose to send their children to newly desegregated schools, some would. In the absence of other less costly options, White parents could choose to send their children to private segregationist academies, but those academies would have to be funded somehow. Andrews (2002) notes that "the formation of academies required the mobilization of substantial resources, in contrast to less costly strategies like antibusing protests or letter-writing campaigns" (p. 917). States realized the financial strain this would put on their constituents, many of whose votes they counted on for reelection, and responded by passing legislation threatening to close any schools that integrated and, in turn, utilize their funding to financially support segregated private academies (Chapman, 2018; Luckett, 2016; Ryan, 2004). Financial support was made possible by creating and disseminating "tuition and other forms of public aid to private and parochial schools" (Alexander & Alexander, 2004, p. 1133). Examples of states and municipalities using public funds to support private segregation academies directly were especially prevalent in rural Virginia and Mississippi.

In 1954, Virginia governor Thomas B. Stanley appointed thirty-two state legislators to the Commission of Public Education, which later became known as the Gray Commission due to its chairman's name (Tillerson-Brown, 2016). These legislators were White and held beliefs similar to those of their federal counterparts who signed the Southern Manifesto in that they saw the *Brown v. Board* ruling as a "clear abuse of judicial power" (Tillerson-Brown, 2016, p. 453) and an attack on the doctrine of states' rights. These legislators vowed to use any tactic possible to preserve the practice of segregated schooling in their state and set out to devise a plan that would allow White Virginians to continue to send their children to schools that were racially segregated (Tillerson-Brown, 2016). In 1955, the Gray Commission presented a plan to formally repeal Virginia's compulsory school attendance law, created a board that would maintain segregated schools throughout the state, and amended the state constitution to allow tuition vouchers for parents who did not want their children to attend their local public schools, regardless of the reason (Tillerson-Brown, 2016). Their recommendations were adopted at the 1956 state constitutional convention, which created the ideal conditions for establishing private segregation academies around the state (Alexander & Alexander, 2004; Tillerson-Brown, 2016). Prince Edward County, VA moved quickly to close all of their public schools, which resulted in the continuation of a racially segregated school system. Rather than attending different public schools, White students attended publicly funded private schools within the county, and Black students attended either public schools outside of the county, were homeschooled, or attended no school at all (Alexander & Alexander, 2004). Supporters of this system encouraged Black Prince Edwardians to "apply for money to start all-Black private schools" (Tillerson-Brown, 2016, p. 455) rather than protesting or formally opposing the new system. The tuition grants that supported the White private segregation academies were

composed of public tax dollars collected from both Black and White taxpayers but were primarily used to support Whites-only private and parochial schools (Tillerson-Brown, 2016). Additionally, to protect teachers who had lost their jobs in the public schools when they were closed, "the state retirement plan was revised to allow payments to teachers in approved private academies" (Tillerson-Brown, 2016, p. 454). A similar phenomenon took place in Mississippi.

In the early 1960s, the state of Mississippi approved the use of state funding for tuition grants that would enable White students to attend private segregation academies if their local public schools had been desegregated (Luckett, 2016). While these grants were not new, they had been reserved for Black students who were attending graduate school prior to the passage of *Brown v. Board* (Luckett, 2016). For example, if a Black student wished to attend law school, Mississippi's only option was the White-only University of Mississippi School of Law (Luckett, 2016). Rather than desegregate higher education, the state of Mississippi offered these students a tuition grant to attend a Black-only or desegregated graduate school out of state (Luckett, 2016). However, when public schools in the state were forced to desegregate, this funding was instead allowed to be used for the K-12 education of White students. During the 1964-1965 school year, the state of Mississippi "provided 525 White students over $80,000 to attend private schools so that they would not have to face a desegregated classroom" (Luckett, 2016, p. 471). As more school systems implemented desegregation plans, the use of tuition vouchers increased across the state (Andrews, 2002). During the 1969-1970 school year, 10,000 White students left the largest school district in the state alone and were offered tuition assistance from the state government (Luckett, 2016). While Civil Rights groups eventually challenged tuition vouchers, they were still instrumental in providing an initial boost to White families and the

private segregation academies that they supported (Andrews, 2002). However, private schools were not supported by tuition vouchers alone. Andrews (2002) found that the emerging academies were also able to secure support from private groups and individuals as well as more indirect sources of funding from state governments.

While states provided direct funding to private segregation counties through tuition vouchers, they also provided support in more indirect ways. In Mississippi, these schools were also offered tax exemptions and school materials, which were transferred directly from public schools to their private counterparts (Luckett, 2016). In some cases, the entire student body of a previously segregated school enrolled in newly formed private academies and "took along the trappings of the old schools, its colors, its teams, mascots, symbols, its student newspaper" (Andrews, 2002, p. 922) and other aspects of the school, leaving behind little to nothing other than an empty building. Even when private academies did not directly replace public schools, the state often stepped in to provide instructional materials. In Mississippi, textbooks were purchased by the state but lent to students in both public and private schools "regardless of the racially discriminatory policies of participating private schools" (Anderson & Anderson, 2004, p. 1143). Over 34,000 students who attended 107 all-White private segregation academies benefitted from the use of state-purchased textbooks before the program was declared unconstitutional in 1973 (Anderson & Anderson, 2004). Students who remained in the public schools were left with few resources and were virtually abandoned by White school administrators, even when those administrators remained employed with the public school system (Munford, 1973). These administrators and White-controlled local school boards stopped applying for federal aid to help with problems associated with desegregation and reduced public

tax support for public education while giving covert aid to White private schools (Munford, 1973).

However, schools were not reliant on governmental support alone. The creation of private segregation academies following a decision to desegregate local public schools was contingent upon community support as well (Bullock & Rodgers, 1976). Private resources from the surrounding communities were also diverted from public schools to the new private schools, including donations of money, land, materials, and labor (Andrews, 2002). These donations came from private citizens, local churches, and local businesses, particularly banks, which provided loans for the initial capital needed to create new schools (Andrews, 2002). While private segregation academies could not have existed or survived without their local communities' support, not all people or businesses in the surrounding communities were as supportive as those mentioned here, nor were Black community members content to stand by in silence.

While many White students fled the public school systems in the wake of desegregation orders, almost all Black students followed their court-ordered reassignments (Munford, 1973). However, due to significant White withdrawals from public schools, most Black students remained in schools with student bodies primarily, if not entirely, made up of Black students (Munford, 1973). Black parents, Civil Rights groups, and the NAACP quickly realized that Black children were still receiving a separate and unequal education, and many filed lawsuits that successfully addressed tuition vouchers and other forms of public aid that were being utilized to support private schools (Andrews, 2002). The most notable example of Black resistance took place in rural Prince Edward County, VA, in 1962 after the public school system had been closed for three years (Tillerson-Brown, 2016). Over 600 Black parents wrote to

President John F. Kennedy and requested federal assistance in reopening schools for their children (Tillerson-Brown, 2016). These requests resulted in Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy remarking that "the only places on earth not to provide free public education are Communist China, North Vietnam, Singapore, British Honduras- and Prince Edward County, VA" (Tillerson-Brown, 2016, p. 457). In May 1964, the Supreme Court ruled that Prince Edward Country schools must officially reopen in *Griffin v. Country Board of Prince Edward* (Tillerson-Brown, 2016). On September 8, 1964, Prince Edward County Schools reopened with 1,500 students returning; only eight of them were White, a testament to the significant impact that private segregation academies made on the attempt to desegregate schools across the Southern United States (Tillerson-Brown, 1964).

The Lasting Impact of Segregation Academies

While private segregation academies were first founded in the late 1960s and early 1970s in response to desegregation mandates, many of them are still flourishing today. Andrews (2002) found that if the academies survived "several years" (p. 928), they were likely to continue in operation beyond the 1970s. This is especially true in rural Southern communities that continue to have a high proportion of Black residents and where race relations were historically strained. In these communities, private schools continue to be a major force in maintaining segregation in K-12 schools (Clotfelter, 2004). In fact, Clotfelter (2004) found that private schools in rural communities in the South played as large of a role in creating segregated schooling options during the 1999-2000 school year as they did in the late 1960s. One example of a rural private segregation academy that is still promoting school segregation is East Holmes Academy in Holmes County, MS. Numerous participants in the Holmes County Rural Organizing and Cultural Center's (1991) oral history project spoke of their experiences with

segregation academies when integrating the Holmes County, MS public schools, commenting that White parents removed their children from public schools in the late 1960s and sent them to multiple private schools that were set up all over the county using private funding. As of the 1990s, these private academies are still open and remain segregated. They are publicly defended by supporters who contend that they provide "better instruction" (Rural Organizing and Cultural Center, 1991, p 17) than the local public schools. In actuality, they are still promoting White supremacist ideals and the segregation of White and Black students. East Holmes Academy "refused to play a football game because the opponent's team included a black running back" (Rural Organizing and Cultural Center, 1991, p. 17) as recent as 1989. Another example of a longstanding private segregation academy is Clarendon Hall, which opened in 1965 in Clarendon County, SC. It did not admit its first Black student until the 1999-2000 school year, and as of the 2016-2017 school year, students of color make up only 6% of the total student body (Allen, 2019). As shown in the above examples, private segregation academies are not merely a thing of the past. In many cases, private school desegregation has only been undertaken at a token level even today (Luckett, 2016).

While private segregation academies themselves continue to abound in many communities, their influence on the use of public funds for private and parochial schools persists as well. The ideals used to justify racial discrimination in the late 1960s and early 1970s are now being used to call for the privatization of education again. These ideals include the concepts of "liberty, parental choice, competition, and neutrality" (Alexander & Alexander, 2004, p. 1132). While there are many different ways to ensure that these neoliberal concepts are being used to affect public education, tuition vouchers have become one of the preferred methods (Alexander & Alexander, 2004). Their reintroduction began in the Reagan era when President

Reagan introduced the concept of vouchers to help alleviate the financial burden of parents who wished to send their children to private schools but were unable to afford to do so (Chapman, 2018). His plan initially received significant pushback due to many private schools' religious orientation, but growing discontent with public education options bolstered support for vouchers (Chapman, 2018; Ryan, 2004). This growing discontent also led to the emergence of charter schools, which could offer students the benefits of private schools without charging tuition (Chapman, 2018). However, tuition vouchers and charter schools were not only supported by Whites or Republicans. Discontent with the continued failure to effectively integrate public schools, many Blacks also "expressed increasing support for vouchers, a position that would have been virtually unthinkable in 1954" (Ryan, 2004, p. 1643). Rather than being espoused only by citizens and government leaders who wished to uphold the ideals of White supremacy, private school tuition vouchers and other forms of neoliberal education reform have now become the preferred methods of people who are still fighting for democracy and racial equality in United States' schools (Ryan, 2004).

Conclusion

While the Supreme Court rulings in *Brown v. Board* and *Brown v. Board II*, along with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ESEA in 1965, initially provided a sense of optimism and hope that American public schools would eventually be desegregated, recent re-segregation trends show that true integration has yet to be realized (McNeal, 2009). Instead, *Brown v. Board* "made more of a symbolic as opposed to substantive impact" (McNeal, 2009, p. 564) as parents and communities fought to keep White children separated from their Black peers. *Brown v. Board* also indirectly led to the introduction of private school tuition vouchers, which played a role in dismantling the First Amendment's "wall of separation" (Alexander &

Alexander, 2004, p. 1152) between church and state. In 2002, the Supreme Court upheld the use

of tuition vouchers for private religious schools in their *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* ruling (Ryan,

2004). While tuition vouchers continue to play a role in supporting separate but unequal schools

even today, they are not the only mechanism through which public schools remain or become

more segregated. Public school choice initiatives, such as the creation of magnet programs and

charter schools, are essentially being used to achieve the same results as private segregation

academies.

Since the early 1990s, public school districts have begun to re-segregate, and the

Supreme Court has supported this transition. In the 1991 *Board of Education of Oklahoma City

v. Dowell* case, the Court ruled that districts no longer had to continue busing students to

maintain desegregation if the re-segregation of schools was due to personal choices, such as

White flight to private schools or charter schools (McNeal, 2009). This ruling allowed school

districts to essentially declare themselves fully desegregated, terminate their desegregation

mandates, and relinquish any former responsibilities to maintain integrated schools (McNeal,

2009). In the 1992 *Freeman v. Pitts* case, the Court ruled that re-segregation due to personal

choice was not unconstitutional and, therefore, not the federal courts' responsibility to monitor

(McNeal, 2009). These cases demonstrate that removing desegregation orders are permissible,

even if removing those orders would result in re-segregation, as long as the re-segregation is not

government sponsored (McNeal, 2009). This means that the era of mandatory school

desegregation has effectively come to an end, even though United States' public schools are re-

segregating at a rapid rate (McNeal, 2009).

As history has shown, court decisions and legislative mandates alone cannot ensure that

all United States students receive a fair, equitable, and integrated education, particularly in rural

communities with limited educational options (McNeal, 2009). Through the creation and continued support of public and private segregation academies, parents, communities, and even state governments have been able to ensure that their children attend schools that continue to be segregated and unequal (Clotfelter, 2004). As a result, trust in public schools has been eroded, and United States schools have continued to be segregated through public and private means (Alexander & Alexander, 2004). As long as racially motivated choice options abound, achieving equity in American education will only be possible by "changing the moral compass of citizens by instilling a strong sense of civic responsibility in ensuring that every child has access to a quality education" (McNeal, 2009, p. 572).

Rural Education in the United States

Rural schools and school districts have been disproportionately affected by the creation and proliferation of segregation academies when compared to their suburban and urban counterparts. This is because rural schools and school districts throughout the United States face unique challenges due to their remote locations, changing populations, and the changing economy. While often overlooked, they serve a significant portion of the children in the United States, particularly children of color and children living in poverty. Out of the 250 poorest counties in the United States, "244 are rural, and out of the more than 8 million children attending public schools in rural areas, 2.5 million live in poverty" (Monk, 2007, p. 156). Additionally, while 36% of public-school students in the United States are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program, that number is often significantly higher in rural areas (Jimerson, 2005b). The high poverty found in rural communities can be attributed to many different variables, including lack of industry and post-secondary educational attainment (Irvin et

al., 2016). Persistent poverty in these communities serves to exacerbate the challenges that rural schools and school districts face.

Despite broader narratives in society that have mischaracterized rural communities as predominantly White and homogeneous, they are home to a sizable portion of the United States' children of color (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Jimerson (2005b) found that, particularly in the Deep South, African American children are a significant percentage of rural school populations, accounting for "45% of the rural student population in Mississippi, 42% in South Carolina, and 35% in Louisiana" (p. 212). Winston (2003) notes that although African American poverty within the United States is typically characterized as taking place in urban settings, "African American children have a greater chance of living in poverty in rural communities than in inner-city neighborhoods" (p. 198). However, rural schools do not only serve African American students of color. Rural schools in the Southwest, Hawaii, and Alaska serve large numbers of Native American students, while states that border Mexico serve large numbers of rural Latinx students (Jimerson, 2005b).

More than 8.9 million students attend rural schools in the United States, which is more than New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and the next 75 largest school districts combined (Showalter et al., 2017). Additionally, over 21% of all public-school teachers work in rural schools, and over 29% of United States public schools are located in communities with a total population of less than 2,500 (Jimerson, 2005b). While rural communities are numerous, diverse, and located in every state within the country, they have similarities that set them apart from less rural settings (Eppley, 2009). These similarities include small populations, low population density, and geographic isolation, among others (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). However, highly visible urban problems continue to dominate the attention of state policymakers who seem to

overlook issues affecting students in rural districts (Showalter et al., 2017). Huysman (2018)

contends that "rural schools operate under the same laws and with comparable expectations and

goals as their urban and suburban counterparts but without the quantity or quality of support and

resources available from a school's central organization or the local community" (p. 31). This

review explores existing literature related to the unique challenges that rural schools and school

districts face and discusses the effects of neoliberal policies on rural schools and school districts.

Unique Challenges in Rural Education

While critics may argue that a myriad of problems occur universally in America's public

schools, according to Johnson and Howley (2015), "challenges tend to manifest differently in

rural settings, however, because (a) rural areas often exhibit such characteristics more intensely

than other areas and (b) geographic and organizational characteristics render one-size-fits-all

reforms problematic" (p. 225). After all, rural schools are often one of the only social

institutions in their local community and may also serve as one of the largest employers (Biddle

& Azano, 2016). As rural schools play such an essential role in their communities, their

challenges often affect the entire community that they serve in ways that differ from how the

same challenges would affect suburban and urban communities. Overall, educational researchers

have agreed that the concept of place is a "valuable lens through which to view educational

issues" (Biddle & Azano, 2016, p. 300). Thus, the concept of rurality will be used to explore

recruitment and retention, funding, enrollment, and curriculum challenges that are unique to rural

schools and school districts.

Recruitment and Retention

Rural schools and school districts typically have significantly higher vacancy rates than

their urban and suburban counterparts. Goldhaber et al. (2020) found that, on average, rural

districts have an additional 10.4 vacancies per 100 full-time teachers than suburban

districts. However, recruitment and retention issues are not relegated to teacher vacancies

alone. Rural districts also have a more difficult time recruiting and retaining skilled

administrators (Lamkin, 2006). One reason rural districts face more difficulties in this area than

other districts are differences in salary rates. Monk (2007) examined many of the factors that

lead to difficulty recruiting teachers in rural areas and found that concerning salary, "urban

salaries are approximately 21 percent higher than rural salaries for starting teachers and 35

percent higher for teachers with master's degrees and twenty or more years of experience" (p.

162). Similarly, Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) found that rural teachers make $10,000 less per

year when controlling for experience and degree level than their suburban and urban

counterparts. This discrepancy is often due to inequities in per pupil spending, leaving rural

districts unable to offer competitive salaries (Eppley, 2009). In many cases, "wealthier districts

entice new candidates with salary supplements, signing bonuses, and higher pay" (Jimerson,

2005b, p. 216), which most rural districts cannot do. Because of this, Miller (2012) found that

"higher teaching salaries in urban places relative to rural increase the opportunity costs of being a

rural teacher, and closer proximity to these salaries decreases the costs a teacher would incur in

switching jobs such as moving costs" (p. 2). Thus, rural districts that are less remote and located

near urban or suburban districts often have a harder time recruiting and retaining teachers than

remote rural districts.

Rural districts also have a harder time recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators

due to job conditions. Due to the smaller size of many rural schools, teachers are expected to

teach multiple subjects and grade levels, requiring additional preparation time, subject expertise,

and grading responsibilities (Berry and Gravelle, 2018). They may also have to split their time

between several schools, requiring increased travel time and student load (Berry and Gravelle, 2018). Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) found that the "qualitative effect of losing a teacher may be greater" (p. 3), meaning that if one teacher out of a two teacher department leaves, the remaining teacher will be tasked with work that would potentially be spread out among many colleagues in a larger school. Rural teachers also deal with "a lack of teaching resources, as well as out-of-date classrooms and labs" (Glover et al., 2016, p. 1). Administrators also face more difficulties working in rural schools, including lack of administrative support and the pressure of bearing sole responsibility for schools and districts' success or failure (Lamkin, 2006). Additionally, rural teachers and administrators frequently report feeling professionally and socially isolated due to a lack of peers in their schools or departments (Berry & Gravelle, 2018; Lamkin, 2016; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

The surrounding community of rural schools and school districts also plays a role in making recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators more difficult. Jimerson (2005b) found that lack of consumer amenities, such as shopping centers, movie theaters, and childcare facilities, dissuaded potential teachers and administrators from considering jobs in rural communities. Goldhaber et al. (2020) also found that being far from urban centers contributed to staffing challenges for rural schools. Not only are employees far from consumer amenities, but they are also forced to travel long distances to get to training or professional development workshops (Berry & Gravelle, 2018; Jimerson, 2005b). Additionally, rural communities' culture can contribute to teacher and administrator burnout, leading to retention issues. Teachers and administrators report having a difficult time separating their personal and professional lives, as they are expected to participate in community activities and fear negative backlash if they do not (Berry & Gravelle, 2018; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). While some teachers and administrators

may see the possibility of building a greater connection with parents and community members as a positive attribute of working in rural communities, many teachers and administrators reported feeling as if they had "no respite from the community's attentive eyes and ears" (Lamkin, 2006, p. 17).

While there are differences maybe differences in the degree to which the degree to which rural districts face difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators, this issue may be the biggest one facing rural schools in the United States (Brenner, 2019; Goldhaber et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Difficulty recruiting teachers leads to schools staffed with underqualified or transient workforces, while teacher turnover increases administrative workload and impairs instructional quality by challenging the curricular planning and implementation process (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). Thus, rural schools tend to be staffed with less experienced and less educated teachers and administrators than schools and districts in other locales (Howley et al., 2009). As the greatest retention issues are "typically faced by schools that serve the most disadvantaged populations" (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015, p. 3), this also becomes an equity issue. While there are advantages to working in rural schools and school districts, the challenges "seem to trump the potential perks" (Azano & Stewart, 2016, p. 109) of living and working in a rural area regarding employee recruitment and retention.

Funding

Rural communities are more likely than their urban or suburban counterparts to experience higher poverty rates, concentrated poverty, and poverty that spans generations (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). This persistent poverty and lack of well-paying jobs can lead to the out-migration of educated individuals, making it difficult for rural areas to attract new businesses and other community resources (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). Lack of businesses and

community organizations makes it difficult for schools to gain donations, sponsors, or community partner support, leading to a lack of after-school and other supplemental programs for students (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018; Winston, 2003). Additionally, distance from community resources such as libraries and museums means that schools and school districts must shoulder higher transportation costs when providing supplemental programs for students (Kinkley & Yun, 2019). Rural public schools also suffer from poor economies of scale, which can lead to inadequate school resources due to the inflated costs of obtaining supplies or services (Berry & Gravelle, 2018; Kinkley & Yun, 2019).

While rural schools and school districts must often pay more than their urban or suburban counterparts for similar resources, they also have fewer funds overall. Berry & Gravelle (2018) found that rural schools frequently operate "within a more restricted budget" (p. 2) due to lower tax bases in their communities. Restricted budgets can be attributed to eroding local tax bases in rural areas, specifically in states where local property and sales taxes make up a large part of school funding (Biddle & Azano, 2019; Howley et al., 2009). Dayton (2003) found that this dependence on local property or sales tax for school funding disproportionately affects rural communities as commerce centers are more frequently found in suburban and urban communities. Additionally, school districts must lobby communities to increase sales taxes to fund local schools, which varies based upon the local community's political will. Kinkley and Yun (2019) posit that this presents an equity issue because schools located in "communities that lack the political will to raise property taxes will be forced to reduce expenses and/or seek alternatives" (p. 59).

Similarly, state funding systems often disadvantage rural schools and school districts due to their lack of political influence (Dayton, 2003). States that award funding on a per-pupil basis

frequently underfund rural schools due to decreasing enrollment (Jimerson, 2005b). Federally, educational policy has shifted to focus more on competitive grants, which award funding based on proposals rather than financial hardship or district need and disproportionately disadvantage rural districts because rural districts lack personnel to research and comply with grant proposal guidelines (Seeling, 2017). Yettick et al. (2014) found that rural districts feared that "they might be losing out on federal grants because they were stretched too thin to fully inform themselves of funding opportunities" (p. 9). Rural school principals and school district superintendents have expressed concerns that funding inequities have a "devastating impact" (Dayton, 2003, p. 105) on rural students.

Enrollment

While out-migration in rural areas affects funding by constricting the local tax base, it also affects school enrollment. Jimerson (2005b) found that between 1996 and 2003, "37.9% of all rural schools faced declining enrollments of at least 10%" (p. 213). Enrollment decline is due to several different factors. In many rural areas, the local population is rapidly aging as younger community members choose to relocate to more amenity-locations (Biddle & Azano, 2016). Alternatively, many younger community members choose to leave for education or job opportunities (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Howley et al., 2009; Kinkley & Yun, 2019). Regardless of why younger community members are leaving rural areas, Howley et al. (2009) found that young people who leave rural communities are unlikely to return. Additionally, "rural areas that are losing population to out-migration are losing the younger, better educated, and more upwardly mobile people" (Jimerson, 2005b, p. 213). In communities experiencing elevated levels of out-migration, schools and school districts are forced to actively search for ways to keep schools afloat (Seelig, 2017). As previously discussed, state funding is often tied to

enrollment numbers; thus, declining enrollment leads to revenue crisis and increases per pupil costs (Seelig, 2007). This decrease in funding and increase in costs makes it more difficult for schools to offer a wide variety of courses and services to students and to stay afloat as individual entities (Howley et al., 2009).

One way that rural schools and school districts can address the difficulty of offering various courses to their students and increase their economies of scale is through consolidating schools within a single district or between districts. However, consolidation efforts are often met with intense opposition from community members because schools have historically played a prominent role in rural communities' lives, serving as community centers, a community's source of identity, and even a community's hopes for the future (Howley et al., 2012). School consolidation or closure often results in community decline, causing community members to be resentful of decisions to close or consolidate schools for decades (Howley et al., 2012). Consolidation also creates additional problems for school districts, such as considerably lengthening student bus rides and making after-school sports or other activities more difficult (Winston, 2003). It also leads to an increase in students opting out of attending public schools, "which ultimately reduced the district's revenue and enrollment numbers even further" (Seelig, 2017, p. 85). However, despite these challenges, consolidation and school closures are often pressured or even mandated by state policies which provide incentives for increasing school size (Howley et al., 2009).

While many rural schools and school districts face dropping enrollment numbers and pressures to consolidate or close, others are experiencing an influx of diverse students with unique needs. Between 1995 and 2004, "rural schools in the United States reported a 55% increase in minority students" (Howley et al., 2009, p. 522). This increase can create additional

stress for rural schools due to expanding enrollment and the need to provide services such as English Language Learning classes for the first time (Jimerson, 2005b; Kinkley & Yun, 2019). Further complicating this issue, Irvin et al. (2016) found that African American, Latinx, and Native American youth in rural areas tend to experience higher poverty levels than their peers in urban or suburban areas and White students in rural areas. These students also attend schools that are more segregated by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background (Irvan et al., 2019). Thus, as rural communities become more diverse, teachers and school leaders must understand how students' identities, cultures, and social positions contribute to and inform their needs (Corbett, 2016).

Curriculum

Due to teacher recruitment and retention issues and funding and enrollment difficulties, rural schools and school districts also face difficulties providing expanded curricular offerings to their students. Fewer qualified applicants for vacant positions can lead to a lack of diversity in course offerings and has resulted in rural students having access to fewer advanced or upper-level courses than their urban and suburban counterparts (Irvin et al., 2019). In fact, "93 percent of twelfth graders in urban areas were enrolled in schools that offered calculus, as against 64 percent of rural twelfth graders" (Monk, 2007, p. 159). One way to address the lack of advanced course offerings at the high school level is through dual enrollment programs (Howley et al., 2009). However, Kinkley and Yun (2019) found that rural schools are increasingly engaging in partnerships and distance learning programs to address the lack of curriculum diversity at all grade levels. While service sharing allows students in several rural schools to attend classes with one qualified teacher, thus expanding course offerings, stretching limited funds, and forestalling consolidation, this practice is not without downsides as well (Howley et al., 2012). Teachers

often find it difficult to assist students individually, observe student work, or provide timely feedback and also report feeling as if they must utilize direct instructional methods rather than collaborative or project-based approaches (Howley et al., 2012). Students report difficulty obtaining teacher feedback, lack of engagement in courses, and difficulty mastering material (Howley et al., 2012).

Rural schools also have a more challenging time providing college and career guidance to students than their suburban and urban counterparts. The U.S. Department of Education (2018) found that while rural schools perform as well as suburban and urban schools when comparing graduation rates, they have significantly fewer students who go on to complete post-secondary degrees. This discrepancy may be attributable to the distance rural students have to travel to attend post-secondary institutions, which may require students to move or find alternate forms of transportation, increasing logistical and fiscal opportunity costs (Irvin et al., 2016; Schafft, 2016). Additionally, lack of access to comprehensive curriculum and advanced courses may cause students to believe they are not well prepared to succeed in college (Irvin et al., 2016). Students in rural areas are often discouraged from attending college due to associated costs, instead opting to accept jobs in their local communities directly after graduating from high school (Corbett, 2016). Overall, the lack of college attendance for rural students leads to a "holding pattern" (Corbett, 2016, p. 278) in local communities, as economic development decreases due to a lack of skilled and educated citizens.

Conclusion

Rural schools and school districts are unique entities that differ amongst themselves and differ from schools and school districts in other locations. While this review has focused on the needs of and challenges faced by rural schools and school districts, it does not purport to

determine whether rural schools are more or less disadvantaged from their urban and suburban peers. Instead, this review seeks to show how the "unique context of rural schools requires tailored policy solutions" (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015, p. 3). As new policies are implemented and new challenges develop, it will be necessary for education researchers to critically evaluate how these changes affect rural schools and school districts and to advocate for solutions that help ameliorate the issues that rural schools and school districts will continue to face. Researchers must document failures as well as successes and explore how challenges continue to play out in rural communities. This study aims to document how educational segregation in the local community affects public-school teachers in rural communities' experiences, both positively and negatively.

Chapter 3- Methodology

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." – Maya Angelou

Introduction

Schwandt (2015) describes research methodology as "a theory of how inquiry should proceed" (p. 201). Researchers can think of their methodology as a road map or plan of action for how their research project should unfold. Consequently, the methodology should inform the researcher's choices throughout the course of research and link the use of methods to the desired outcome (Crotty, 1998). It considers both the philosophical assumptions of the researcher and the method of inquiry. Accordingly, a single methodology can be differently defined based upon the researcher's perspectives on critical issues in the philosophy of social science (Schwandt, 2015). Crotty (1998) also notes that "every piece of research is unique and calls for a unique methodology" (p. 13). Thus, methodologies vary based upon both the researcher and the aim of the research itself. The methodological choices made in this study were based upon my theoretical perspective and aim to explore the experiences of female public-school teachers in the rural South.

Ravenscroft and Allison (2018) assert that research is shaped by its purpose, sociopolitical context, and the proposed audience. As researchers, we bring assumptions that shape our research's meaning, purpose, and interpretability (Crotty, 1998). These assumptions must inform our methodological choices so that our research can fulfill its purpose and answer the questions that we set out to answer. This is because there is an "inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197) to constructing knowledge through research. Our assumptions were not created in isolation, just as our research findings will not be viewed in isolation. Instead, knowledge is continuously constructed through interaction with shared

understandings, practices, and perspectives. Therefore, although methodologies can be considered generic in that they are composed of the "general logic and theoretical perspective for a research project" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 35) thoroughly understanding and addressing our ontological and epistemological assumptions must be a priority for researchers constructing their own methodologies.

Epistemological and Theoretical Frameworks

Ontologically, the relativist perspective informs this study. Relativists believe that there are many truths and facts dependent on the observer's view rather than the existence of singular truths. No facts or beliefs are more or less true than others, but they can be more or less informed or sophisticated. Reality is "apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature, and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Based on this perspective, individuals may live in vastly different worlds than each other, depending upon their view of reality. However, constructions of reality can be altered as they are "historically and culturally affected interpretations rather than eternal truths" (Crotty, 1998, p. 64). In studying the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural communities as they relate to educational segregation, I am choosing to focus on how participants' experiences converge and differ based upon their unique versions of reality. While each participant is a part of a singular community, her own historical, social, and cultural past experiences influence her perception of reality and her reaction to that reality. The interpretive phenomenology methodology is focused on understanding participants' experiences and how their contexts, or realities, influence those experiences. Thus, interpretive phenomenology is

compatible with the relativist perspective as multiple versions of truth and reality can exist and are dependent upon participants' lifeworlds.

Epistemologically, the constructivist perspective informs this study. Constructivists believe that knowledge "is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Therefore, knowledge is not passive but is instead constructed by humans as they interact with the world around them. In this view, knowledge is considered political and value-laden, meaning that it embodies aspects of the human experience (Schwandt, 2000). In research, knowledge is constructed throughout the process and is open to continuous revision as additional information is uncovered. Thus, there is not a singular, expected research outcome, nor is this study replicable even if all participants and methods remain the same. Each participant and I, as the researcher, continue to expand and reconstruct knowledge, which leads to ever-changing perspectives, beliefs, and conclusions. This reconstruction of knowledge is influenced by experiences, which interpretive phenomenology seeks to understand the significance of.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that a person's theoretical perspective is their "way of looking at the world, the assumptions people have about what is important and what makes the world work" (p. 24). In this study, the critical inquiry theoretical perspective informs the research as it focuses on promoting critical consciousness, understanding societal norms and structures that sustain and reproduce oppressive ideologies, and empowering marginal groups to overcome oppression and transform hegemonic societal power (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Critical theorists do not disengage from the communities they research but instead regard themselves as fellow citizens and work with their participants rather than study them

(Carspecken, 2005). Critical theorists believe that research is an ethical and political act that typically benefits the majority group; thus, critical theorists seek to disrupt hegemonic interests through their research. They believe that politics and political agendas should be explored and accounted for, and that advocacy and activism are essential components of conducting research. By employing a critical inquiry approach, researchers consider how historical, cultural, and societal structures have influenced current practices and work towards disrupting the status quo. Similarly, interpretive phenomenology focuses on analyzing how historical, social, and political forces and events have influenced participants' understanding of their own experiences. By exploring and highlighting the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural communities through the use of an interpretive phenomenological methodology and a critical inquiry approach, the participants and I advocate for and empower other teachers and rural communities to raise their concerns and make themselves heard, even though their voices are often silenced or ignored.

Interpretive Phenomenology

In making methodological choices for this study, I focused on my end goal. What did I hope to learn and achieve in completing this study? In doing so, I was drawn to phenomenology as I seek to understand how female public-school teachers experience working in rural schools and communities and how those experiences are influenced by educational segregation in the surrounding community. I was particularly drawn to the interpretive phenomenology methodology due to its focus on the significance of experiences for each unique individual rather than phenomenon as a whole. As each participant has her own subjectivities and intersecting positionalities, the experiences cannot be consolidated into one homogenous account. Instead,

the unique experiences must be explored individually before common themes can be expected to emerge.

Phenomenology is a methodology that originates from philosophy. Its primary focus is to capture participants' experiences by seeking to understand the meaning of phenomena, events, and interactions in their lives. Phenomenology allows researchers to focus on "understanding unique individuals and their meanings and interactions with others and the environment" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 726). Phenomenologists believe that there are multiple ways of interpreting experiences, which can only become clear to us when interacting with others. In doing so, phenomenologists "do not assume they know what things mean to the people they are studying" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 25) but instead believe that a person's reality is socially constructed and can be unique to that person. Thus, phenomenologists emphasize subjective aspects of people's lives and behavior. Phenomenologists seek to understand experiences in depth by garnering meaningful insight into their participant's lives. The goal of phenomenological researchers is to "construct an animating, evocative description of human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 11) as they occur in participants' everyday lives. Thus, phenomenologists aim to obtain thick, rich descriptions of experiences that will enable readers to fully understand their participants' lifeworld.

However, phenomenology is not a singular, uncomplicated methodology. The overarching concept of contemporary phenomenology is typically attributed to Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher (Frechette et al., 2020). Husserl believed that researchers should discover the essence of a phenomenon or experience using a descriptive approach. In this form of phenomenology, which is referred to as descriptive phenomenology, researchers must bracket their assumptions in an attempt to understand the phenomena as the participants themselves

experienced it. Descriptive phenomenology aims to arrive at a singular, descriptive, universal interpretation of a phenomenon (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). However, Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, disagreed that universal descriptions of a phenomenon were possible and instead became concerned with context. Heidegger believed that "human beings are interpretive beings capable of finding significance and meaning in their own lives" (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 174). Thus, another branch of phenomenology, which came to be known as interpretive phenomenology, was created based on Heidegger's beliefs. Researchers who seek to utilize phenomenological methods in their inquiries must examine the philosophical basis of their own beliefs and what they are attempting to explore. As there are two primary forms of phenomenology, with several subcategories in each, many different methodologists purport to explain phenomenological inquiry. Researchers must choose one version and "stick with the logic proposed by the methodologist" (Giorgi, 2008, p. 3) so that their research will not be ambiguous in its purpose or structure.

Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology is focused on interpreting the significance of a phenomenon for a person rather than purely describing that phenomenon (Frechette et al., 2020). It also attempts to uncover what a phenomenon's meaning is and how that meaning influences the participants' choices and other experiences. In doing so, interpretive phenomenologists analyze historical, social, and political forces that have influenced the participants' experiences (Heidegger, 2011). In interpretive phenomenology, context is significant (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Interpretive phenomenologists believe that "social contexts are embedded within an individual's being" (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 5) and thus essential to understanding a participant's experiences. Heidegger coined several terms to explain aspects of his version of phenomenology. One is lifeworld, which means that individuals' realities are influenced by the context of the

world around them (Heidegger, 2011). Another is dasein, or being-in-the-world, which means that humans cannot separate themselves or their experiences from the social, cultural, and political contexts of their lives (Heidegger, 2011). Being-in-the-world alludes to the term situated freedom, which means that while humans are free to make their own choices, those choices are influenced by the context of their daily lives (Heidegger, 2011). As evidenced in these terms, a central tenet of interpretive phenomenology is that context, or situatedness, affects every aspect of a person's life and experiences (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Unless a researcher uncovers a participant's situation in and understanding of the world, he or she will never be able to understand how that participant interprets reality or fully comprehend the meaning of their perception of experiences.

Another way interpretive phenomenology differs from descriptive phenomenology is that it considers the researcher's knowledge to be a valuable part of the inquiry process. Heidegger (2011) believed that it is impossible for researchers to bracket their prior knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon completely. This is because their prior knowledge, both personal and of the research literature, is what leads them to conduct research in a particular area (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Thus, a researcher's personal knowledge is "both useful and necessary" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730) for interpretive phenomenological research. In interpretive phenomenology, the researcher and the participants work together to co-construct meaning and understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Both researcher and participants bring understandings shaped by their own background and experiences and, in the process of interacting with each other, construct research findings (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Because of this, there is no one true meaning that will be produced by an interpretive study but instead multiple meanings that are logical, plausible within the study framework, and representative of

the realities of the study participants (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Therefore, the goal of an interpretive phenomenological study is to "identify the participants' meanings from the blend of the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon, participant-generated information, and data obtained from other relevant sources" (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 175).

Ensuring rigor in phenomenological research requires transparency and consistency. For interpretive phenomenological research specifically, strategies for ensuring rigor include maintaining "congruence between the adopted paradigm and chosen methods, prolonged engagement with the participants and the phenomena, multiple methods of data collection, and auditable records" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 20). Prolonged engagement with participants and the phenomenon ensures saturation, which is attained when new data will not contribute to any further understanding of the phenomenon (Frechette et al., 2020). The use of multiple data collection methods ensures method triangulation, which enables multiple constructions of the phenomenon and enhances the depth and richness of the data. Triangulation also reduces bias in the data, which is more likely to be present if only one data collection method is utilized. Multiple forms of data collection are also necessary for researchers to accurately utilize a hermeneutic circle approach to data analysis (Frechette et al., 2020). Generalizability is not a primary objective of interpretive phenomenological research as the main goal is to understand an experience in as much depth as possible. This goal allows for smaller sample sizes, as depth is more important than the breadth of data. Similarly, reliability is shown not through consistency across different studies or observations but instead through consistency between recorded data and what actually occurs in the field or is discussed in interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Finally, to ensure research is considered rigorous, researchers must be transparent about how their experiences and prior understandings impacted the methods of inquiry and research

findings. The final manuscript must include mention of the researcher's subjectivities, allowing readers to evaluate "the potential or actual interaction between researchers' characteristics and the research questions, approach, methods, results, and/or transferability" (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 5).

Theoretically, interpretive phenomenology is inherently critical (Crotty, 1998). This is because it is based on social constructionism and founded on the assumption that interpretation is always influenced by "socially accepted ways of viewing reality" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730). Thus, interpretive phenomenological frameworks allow researchers to uncover aspects of an experience that would have been overlooked in a descriptive study, allowing readers to see reality in a new way. As socially accepted ways of viewing reality are hegemonic and reflect the experiences of privileged members of society, researchers who choose to study the experiences of marginalized members of society are undertaking critical research. These researchers must be prepared to critique dominant ideologies and analyze how those ideologies impact their participants' experiences. In this way, interpretive phenomenology can be considered emancipatory research if the researcher explicitly seeks to uncover how "dominant belief systems serve to mask, gloss over, ignore, or trivialize the realities of the participants" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 731).

In studying the experiences of female teachers who work in public schools in rural communities, I am seeking to understand from the perspective of the participants how educational segregation affects their day-to-day lives both personally and professionally. Interpretive phenomenology allowed me to understand the significance of this phenomenon in my participants' lives and uncover how educational segregation has affected or influenced their choices and experiences. Interpretive phenomenology also allowed me to

critically study the historical, social, and political forces that led to educational segregation

within each community and how they have also affected my participants' experiences.   My goal

was to understand the contextual experiences of female public-school teachers in rural

communities and work with my participants to ensure that their stories are heard.

Research Questions

Before beginning a study, phenomenologists must identify their objectives and draft

research questions. Frequently, research questions will use the terms 'lived experience' verbatim

(Frechette et al., 2020). Crafting specific research questions for this study was a challenge as

"questions that are very specific are difficult for the qualitative researcher because the issues

posed may not arise in the time available to study them" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.

57). However, overarching research questions serve to center and focus methodological and

analytical choices. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What are the experiences of female teachers who work in public schools in rural

     communities?

2.   How does educational segregation within the local community affect the experiences

     of female public-school teachers in rural districts?

Participant Recruitment and Selection

In phenomenological studies, the phenomenon, or object of study, and research questions

influence the theoretical approach that a study takes and dictate the methods used and the types

of participants researchers seek to recruit (Groenewald, 2004; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Essential

criteria for selecting research participants include: the research participant has experienced the

phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to

participate in lengthy interviews and follow-up interviews and grants the researcher the right to

tape-record and publish the data in a dissertation or other publication. Sample sizes in interpretive phenomenological studies are typically less than ten people as "the richness of the data collected takes precedence over the actual size of the sample" (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 6).

For this study, I utilized criterion sampling to recruit participants. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet predetermined criteria of importance (Patton, 2001). I first compiled a list of all school districts within the southern United States that were rural and had both a charter school and a private segregation academy located within the district attendance zones. Then, I contacted 19 superintendents of districts that met my criteria by e-mail and asked permission to contact teachers in the district to participate in this study (See Appendix A for initial superintendent request). I received initial permission to contact teachers from four school districts, however one district did not provide contact information for teachers upon request. After receiving permission to contact teachers, I submitted the necessary documentation to the Georgia State University IRB to gain approval before contacting potential participants. Potential participants were contacted through e-mail and asked to complete a Qualtrics survey to indicate interest, complete screening questions, and consent to being contacted as a potential participant (See Appendix B for Qualtrics survey). The criteria for participation included the following:

1. Currently work as a teacher in a rural public school system that contained both a charter school and a private segregation academy within the district attendance zone.

2. Worked in a classroom teacher role for at least the past two years within the school district.

3. Never worked in an administrative or district-level role within any school district.

4. Willing to complete two to three semi-structured interviews and submit two to four journal reflections.

These criteria were chosen due to my desire to understand the experiences of public-school teachers in rural districts that are experiencing educational segregation. Classroom teachers will have different experiences than paraprofessionals, administrators, or district-level employees while teachers who have taught in the district for at least two years will have a better understanding of the educational landscape of the local community. These criteria ensured that potential participants had the necessary experiences and understanding to speak to the issue.

I contacted teachers from three districts throughout the Southeast and received 17 responses from teachers who met the criteria for participation (See Appendix C for study introduction e-mail to interested potential participants). Eight potential participants did not respond to follow up e-mails regarding participating in the study, three potential participants indicated that they could not participate in the study due to time constraints, and five individuals agreed to participate in the study (See Table 1for participant information). Initial interviews were scheduled and began taking place in February 2023. Two individuals participated in the initial interview but despite multiple follow-up attempts did not complete the study. An asterisk denotes that the participant did not complete the study. Three participants completed all aspects of the study.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

Participant	District	Years in district	Race	Gender	Age	Relation to Community
Ms. Allen*	Clinton	4	Black	Female	30s	Insider
Dr. Dennis	Jackson	15	White	Female	50s	Insider
Dr. Jennings	Jackson	2	Black	Female	40s	Outsider
Ms. Reynolds*	Clinton	8	White	Female	50s	Outsider
Ms. Thompson	Jackson	2	Black	Female	30s	Outsider

Data Collection Process

While van Manen (2017) states that "there is no step-by-step model that will guarantee phenomenological insights and understandings" (p. 777), phenomenological researchers still tend to use similar data collection and analysis methods. Data collection can begin after research questions are drafted and participants are selected. The primary mode of data collection in phenomenological research is unstructured or semi-structured informal interviews lasting 60-90 minutes, allowing for in-depth discussion (Frechette et al., 2020; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher is responsible for "creating a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). During these interviews, researchers will typically start with guiding questions and be sure to obtain the participant's description of a typical day or experience of the phenomenon in detail. Participants will be asked to "describe interactions, workload, relations to others, experiences of the body, and experiences of time" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729) to place the experience in context. Additionally, follow-up interviews may be utilized to firm up initial understandings. Interviews will continue until "the topic is exhausted" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 46) and should be audio recorded, when available, contingent upon participant consent.

In this study, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant. The initial interview was guided by an interview protocol that consisted of probing questions developed to uncover significant aspects of participants' experiences (See Appendix D for interview protocols). The second-round interview protocol explored experiences that individual participants mentioned in their initial interviews and was used with all participants to gather information about how their experiences were similar and dissimilar. Due to the ongoing Covid-

19 pandemic and to ensure participants were not inconvenienced, interviews were conducted and recorded virtually through WebEx.

The second method of data collection that I utilized was participant journals. Participant journals are important forms of data that should be collected in phenomenological studies. These journals can stimulate conversation in interviews and encourage reflection on the phenomenon or experience that may not be as easily identified during conversation or observation (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Following each interview, I e-mailed participants a journal entry prompt and asked that they respond in writing. Initially I planned to send unique questions to each participant, but I found that the topics brought up in each participant's interview were so similar that standardized follow-up questions were appropriate (See Appendix E for journal entry prompts). I also kept a researcher journal with field notes from my interviews and observations I made throughout the study.

The third method of data collection that I utilized was document analysis. Documents can provide valuable information about the context of experiences that may not be apparent to the researcher and provide background information that participants may not have been privy to or have forgotten (Bowen, 2009). For this study, I reviewed school district and school level documents regarding educational segregation, including school district state report cards, school district websites, charter and private school websites, school board meeting minutes, promotional materials, newspaper articles, and parent communication materials. These documents allowed me to understand how additional educational options, such as charter schools and private schools, were presented and received by parents, community members, and outsiders. These documents also enabled me to contextualize participants' experiences and understand the surrounding communities' views towards public education.

Data Analysis and Representation

The goal of data analysis in an interpretive phenomenological study is to transform the data collected into a textual expression of the essence of the studied experience (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The resulting text should be reflexive, meaningful, and move beyond description to interpretation. It should describe and interpret the truths and realities present in the participants' experiences. For this study, data analysis began simultaneously with data collection and continued after data collection was complete. During data collection, I listened and re-listened to interview recordings and created interview transcripts for each participant. I then utilized these transcripts to analyze trends, highlights, and differences using memos or observer comments in fieldnotes. Journal prompts were generated based upon themes notated in my interviewer field notes. After data collection was complete, I continued to immerse myself in the data by listening to interview recordings and reading observation notes, documents, and interview transcripts in their entirety numerous times. Throughout the analysis process, I cross-checked my interpretations against primary data sources to ensure that they remain faithful to the participants' own words and constructs. This served to ensure authenticity in the research findings (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

One aspect of nearly all plans of analysis in interpretive phenomenological studies is the hermeneutic circle. Hermeneutics purports that "new understandings are created through the bridging of the researcher's and the participant's horizons of significance" (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 4), or their understandings of the phenomenon. The hermeneutic circle involves a back-and-forth movement from parts of the data to the data as a whole, allowing for a more complete understanding or interpretation of the phenomenon or experience. Hermeneutics asserts that "the part is never detached from its relations to the whole" (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 3) and that the

meaning of a phenomenon is always shaped by both individual experiences and their contexts. It is the use of a hermeneutical approach to data analysis that typically distinguishes interpretive phenomenological research from other forms of phenomenology and qualitative inquiry. I used a hermeneutic data analysis approach by ensuring I continuously returned to all my primary data sources, rather than relying on single interpretations of experiences or events. In doing so, I was able to continuously reflect upon my participants' experiences without overlooking or dismissing the context in which those experiences occurred.

Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) provide a six-step example of conducting data analysis in interpretive phenomenology. As previously stated, this is not the only way that interpretive phenomenologists analyze data but is instead just one example that I have chosen to emulate within my own research. Stage one involves immersion in the data, with the researcher constructing texts for each participant based upon interview transcripts, field notes, journal entries, and other collected data. Stage one aims to garner a preliminary interpretation of the data, which can be documented in memos and linked to relevant sections of the text. It is in this stage that recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, allowing the participants' own voices to become integral parts of the data. I created cases for each participant in NVivo which contained each of their interview recordings, transcripts, and journal entries which allowed me to view each participant's data as a whole, rather than as separate entities. Stage two involves understanding and identifying first-order constructs, which are participants' ideas expressed in their own words. These constructs "capture the precise detail of what the person is saying" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 13) and are checked against primary data sources. In stage two I utilized NVivo to create a codebook and mapped sections of participant data to the relevant codes. In doing so, I utilized participants' own words to understand their experiences. Stage three

involves abstraction or identifying second-order constructs and grouping these into themes and sub-themes. Second-order constructs are generated by combining the researcher's theoretical perspectives and personal knowledge with the participants' first-order constructs. This stage is where the context of my participants' experiences began to play a role in how the data is analyzed. I utilized my interviewer field notes and research journal along with document analysis to contextualize my participants' experiences based upon what I learned about their backgrounds, their previous experiences, and their school districts and communities.

Stage four involves synthesis and theme development. Themes are developed from the results of stages one through three of analysis, grouped together, and further elaborated upon based upon reading and rereading the data. This stage involves using the hermeneutic circle, "continuously moving backwards and forwards between the literature, the research texts, and the earlier analysis, moving from parts to whole" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 14). See figure 1 below for a graphical representation of the hermeneutic circle.

Figure 2: Hermeneutic Circle (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 10)
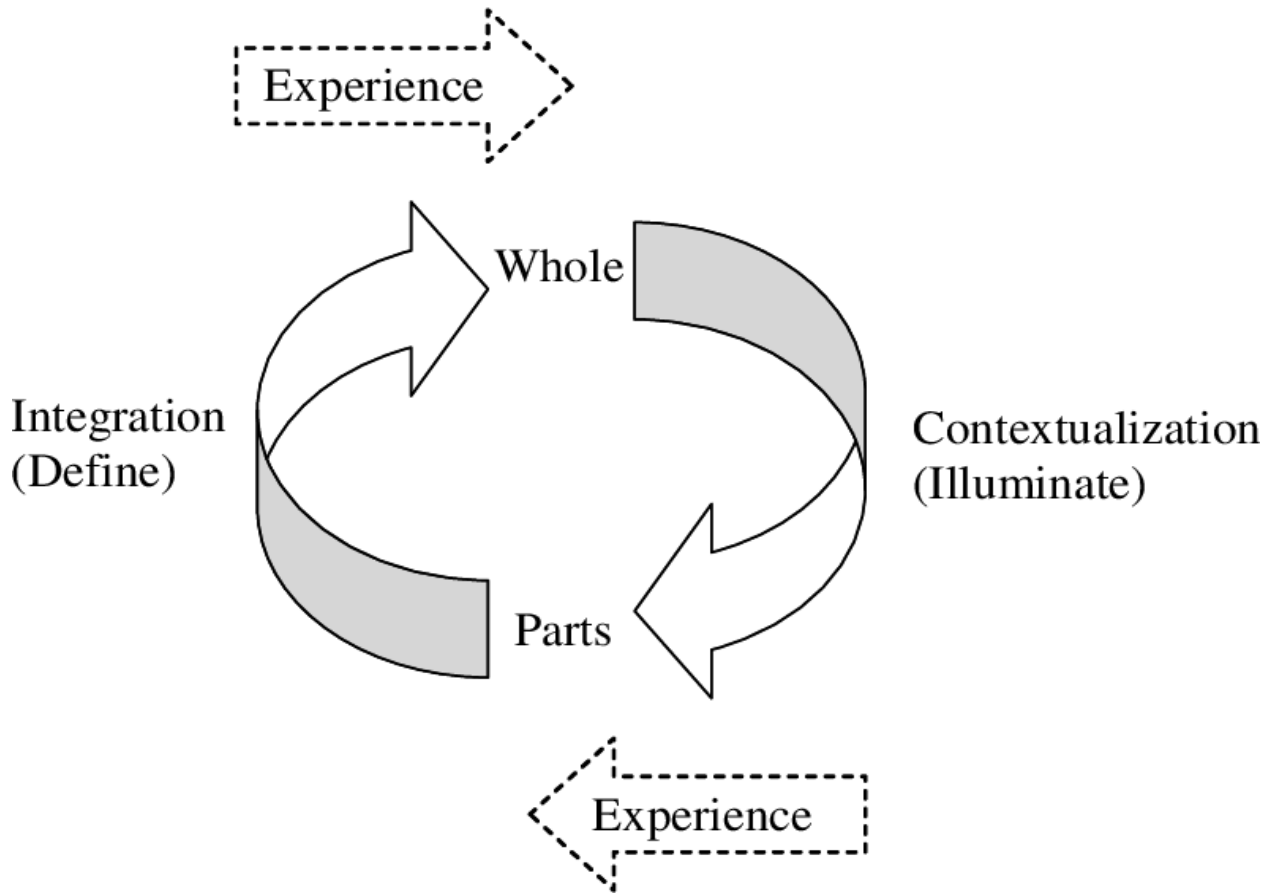
In stage four I utilized the first-order and second-order constructs that were created in stages two and three to organize my data into sub-themes. Once initial sub-themes were created, I went back to primary data sources to ensure that these themes were consistent with my participants' own words about their experiences. Sub-themes and their corresponding first- and second-order constructs are shown below in Tables 2 and 3. The numbers in parenthesis notate the number of times these constructs were referenced in primary data sources and the number of sources they were referenced in.

Table 2: What are the experiences of female teachers who work in public schools in rural communities?

Negative experiences with school and school district	Negative emotions regarding being a public-school teacher in a rural district	Unique experiences due to rural location	Positive emotions regarding being a public-school teacher in a rural district
Frustration with administration (28, 6) Frequent turnover (23, 7) Resistance to change (9, 3) Targeted (8, 5) Overt racism (7, 4)	Discouraged (27, 6) Looked down on (20, 6) Anger or confusion (13, 5) Overwhelmed (12, 4) Underestimated (12, 4) Isolated (9, 6) Forgotten or overlooked (7, 4)	Diversity vs non-diversity (23, 10) Frustration with students, parents, or community (20, 8) Low academic achievement (15, 6) Poverty (12, 6)	Feel supported by community (17, 5) Part of a community (16, 5) Making a difference (8, 4) Proud (8, 5) Rewarding career choice (8, 5) Unexpected career path (7, 4) Growth and changing for the better (6, 1) Familiarity (5, 3)

Table 3: How does educational segregation within the local community affect the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural districts?

Community and views of community affected	Negatively affects identity	No bearing on experiences	Positively affects identity
Takes students or teachers away from public schools (8, 5) Question motives of community members (5, 3)	Question career choices (7, 4) Struggle with being stereotyped (5, 2)	Does not affect (2, 2)	Deepens pride of being a public-school teacher (7, 3)

Observe students struggling with stereotypes (1, 1)	Question willingness to remain in rural community (4, 2) Question willingness to remain in teaching profession (4, 2)		

Stage five involved illuminating and illustrating the phenomenon using identified sub-themes to reconstruct the participants' experiences using their own words. This was done to describe the phenomenon and highlight key findings. During stage five I created narratives for my composite setting and composite characters utilizing sub-themes and my participant's own words from their interview transcripts and written responses. Composite narratives are created by combining data from multiple sources and presenting findings as the account of a single individual (Willis, 2019). This enables researchers to "present an authentic yet anonymous story" (Willis, 2019, p. 471). After this stage, member checking occurred through the process of sharing preliminary data analysis with participants and ensuring that they either agree with or have the opportunity to change any preliminary findings. I shared the composite setting and composite character narratives with each participant and asked for their feedback. I received affirming feedback from participants and did not need to make any content-based changes to the composite narratives. Stage six involves integration or testing and refining the themes. Utilizing feedback from my participants, I critiqued my data analysis to ensure I had accurately portrayed my participants' experiences. I also organized the sub-themes from each research question into over-arching themes that fully describe the experience of being a female public-school teacher in a rural district containing educational segregation.

Following these six stages of data analysis, the research product should be "simple and straightforward, such that readers who have experienced the phenomenon may analyze their own reality with the identified themes" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 11). The findings should be represented as reflective texts that inspire readers to critically examine the meaningfulness of human experiences and events (van Manen, 2017). The findings of this study are represented as two composite narratives, which serve to combine the experiences of all participants into two distinct stories that encompass their experiences and understanding of educational segregation within their communities (Willis, 2019). One composite narrative represents the perspectives of 'insider' teachers while the other represents the perspectives of 'outsider' teachers. These two distinctive perspectives were identified during data analysis as categories in which each participant's experiences and understandings fell within. Mason-Bish (2018) stipulates that insider and outsider positionalities are dynamic and constantly changing depending on the context, thus participants who identify as insiders in this study may be considered outsiders in other contexts. The use of insider and outsider composite narratives allowed for participant anonymity, as no singular narrative was based on just one participant's experiences but instead are a combination of multiple participants' experiences. This allowed participants' experiences to be represented truthfully, using their own words from interview transcripts, while still ensuring that the overall experience of being a female teacher in a rural community is conveyed in a way that does not divulge participant identity.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical issues that arise during interpretive phenomenological studies are similar to those that arise during many types of qualitative research. Initially, researchers must ensure that they sufficiently inform potential participants of the benefits and risks of participating in the

research study and let them know that they can walk away from the study at any time. This informed consent process must take place before data collection can begin and must be confirmed in writing (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The informed consent document for this study can be found in Appendix F. Participants were provided with this document through the initial Qualtrics survey and were asked to provide their signature prior to the data collection process. Additionally, researchers must ensure that their participants' confidentiality is maintained by using pseudonyms and by changing specific contextual details that may reveal the participants' identities. This is particularly important when the phenomenon being studied is uncommon and the pool of qualifying participants is small. As the participant pool was small in this study, participant confidentiality and anonymity were of utmost importance. All participants were given pseudonyms, and their experiences were relayed in composite rather than singular narratives. Walker (2007) states that researchers must give "due consideration to the sensitivity of the material and extended self-exposure" (p. 40) that may be required of participants when planning and undertaking a research study. Researchers must do their best to do no harm to their participants and to avoid exploiting any vulnerabilities. For example, engaging in in-depth interviews that involve sensitive or painful experiences may cause participant distress. Therefore, it was essential that I was mindful of how participation could affect participants during and after the study. While data collection and analysis are my primary goals, participant welfare had to take priority over research findings.

Limitations and Delimitations

No study is without limitations and this one is no different. One limitation was the difficulty in recruiting and retaining study participants. While I had previously reviewed research detailing how teachers in rural communities typically have a larger and more time-consuming

workload than teachers in other locales, I did not take this into account when I planned my study (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Goldhaber et al., 2020; Huysman, 2018; Showalter et al., 2017). I did not realize how few teachers had the time or bandwidth available to participate in interviews and complete writing prompts. This affected the inclusivity of my study and affected my ability to be representative of rural teachers overall. Eight participants originally expressed interest in joining the study but pulled out prior to data collection due to time constraints. As a result, all participants were female, one of my participants had a minor child, and one was married. Thus, my participants were not representative of the demographics of public-school teachers in rural communities as a whole. Due to the difficulty of recruiting representative participants, I chose to focus my research on female public-school teachers in rural communities rather than public-school teachers of both genders.

A second limitation was the resistance of district administration and teachers to speak to community outsiders. Throughout the recruitment process, I received multiple e-mails questioning my intentions in studying the experiences of rural teachers from both district superintendents and teachers. When asking participants for recommendations of other teachers to contact within their schools, I was told by participants from both school districts that teachers were hesitant to talk to me due to my location and race. There were assumptions made about me due to my own identities that hindered the rigor and completion of this study. Due to these factors, the diversity of participants was not as robust as I would have liked.

A third limitation was the culture of politeness that is pervasive in Southern culture, particularly when discussing delicate subjects such as race. Participants were hesitant to discuss anything concerning race or racism with me, even when asked outright. Instead, evasive, neutral, and vague responses were given. The preponderance of avoiding difficult topics in

conversation has been well documented by researchers who study Southern culture. Ross (2013) refers to it as the politics of politeness while Glymph (2008) prefers to describe it as a veneer of manners. In my case, this led to a more superficial discussion surrounding racism and segregation within schools and communities than I would have preferred.

The delimitations of this study include ensuring a small number of participants and focusing solely on the experiences of public-school teachers in rural communities. Due to the nature of interpretive phenomenological research, a small sample size is appropriate. The aim of interpretive phenomenology is to gather in-depth data rather than a large breadth of data (Frechette et al., 2020). Thus, I ensured that potential participants met multiple criteria before inviting them to join the study so that the data collected would be focused on one particular sector of teachers rather than teachers of multiple identities. My research questions also delimited this study. While I anticipated my participants to have differing experiences, I did not anticipate how profound of an impact their self-identities would have upon their experiences and their understanding of those experiences. Less targeted research questions may have spurred me to collect data that more fully explored participant identities. However, the aim of this study was to understand the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural communities and how educational segregation within their communities influenced those experiences. My research questions focused the scope of this study and enabled me to gain a more in-depth understanding of my participants' experiences rather than gather a larger range of data.

Conclusion

The effects of educational segregation on public schools and public-school teachers and the unique challenges that rural public schools face have been studied extensively. However, there is minimal research regarding the effects of educational segregation on rural public schools

and public-school teachers in rural communities. In this qualitative study, I utilized an interpretive phenomenological methodology to explore the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural communities that contain both charter schools and private schools that act as segregation academies Throughout this study, I partnered with five female participants who have experienced working in a rural public school district that is educationally segregated. I utilized hermeneutic methods of analysis and presented research findings in the form of composite narratives. In doing so, I sought to fill a gap in the existing literature and broaden academic understanding of the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural communities.

Chapter 4- Findings

"For while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is

never new, it always must be heard."- James Baldwin

Introduction

The use of interpretive phenomenology and the hermeneutic circle led to a deep

understanding of participants' experiences as female public-school teachers in rural districts that

are experiencing educational segregation. The five participants represented two rural school

districts in two separate states that contained many similarities. Each district contained one

public high school, one public middle school, and three to four public elementary schools. Each

district also contained one public charter school and one private school that fit the criteria for a

segregation academy. For the purposes of this study a segregation academy was defined as a

private school that was founded within five years of the 1968 and 1969 Supreme Court rulings in

Green and *Alexander*, which "effectively eliminated dual school systems" (Clotfelter, 2004, p.

77) across the South. The school must have also enrolled primarily white students from its

founding to present day. The private schools in these districts were both founded in 1970, the

same year that their corresponding public school districts began integration. Both schools

currently enroll over 85% white students, while their corresponding public school districts enroll

over 85% black students. However, the districts differ in the characteristics of their charter

schools. One district has a charter school that enrolls over 90% black students while the other

district's charter school enrolls over 70% white students. While the public schools and private

schools in these districts are extremely similar, their charter schools are being used for different

purposes. For the purposes of this study, a composite setting was created to provide additional

anonymous information about the participants' communities and add context to the participants' experiences.

These similarities and differences in context initially concerned me as I felt that participants' experiences of working in rural districts that contain educational segregation would vary greatly based upon the use of charter schools. However, I found through my analysis that while charter schools played a part in forming teachers' experiences, private segregation academies were much more influential. Additionally, I was concerned that participants in different states would have widely different experiences as public-school teachers in rural communities. This concern was unfounded as participants from both rural districts experienced remarkably similar feelings and phenomena during their time as public-school teachers. While these distinctions did not provide as many differences as I anticipated, one characteristic that vastly influenced participants' experiences was their self-proclaimed designation as being an insider or an outsider in the community in which they worked. I will explore these labels further in the composite character narratives, which combine the experiences of all five participants into two distinct narratives. One composite character represents community insiders while the other represents community outsiders. For the purposes of this study, participants' designations as either community insiders or outsiders were based upon their self-described identities within their communities.

Overview of Themes

Data analysis resulted in 24 second-order constructs that came together to create four sub-themes that answered my first research question: What are the experiences of female teachers who work in public schools in rural communities? Nine second-order constructs combined to create four additional sub-themes that answered my second research question: How

does educational segregation within the local community affect female public-school teachers in rural districts experiences? These eight sub-themes intertwined to result in four over-arching themes that describe the experiences of female public school teachers in rural districts that contain educational segregation, seen below in Table 4. These over-arching themes will be expanded upon following the introduction of the composite setting and characters, which will provide context to each theme.

Table 4: Over-arching themes and their sub-themes

It Doesn't Have to Be This Way	We Matter Too	Everything Comes Back to Context	These are My People
Negative experiences with school and school district Negatively affects identity	Negative emotions regarding being a public-school teacher in a rural district Negatively affects identity	Unique experiences due to rural location Community and views of community affected	Positive emotions regarding being a public-school teacher in a rural district Positively affects identity No bearing on experiences

Cumberland County- Composite Setting

Cumberland County is a remote, rural county in the Southeastern United States. Its total population is 20,000 and its population per square mile is 40. Only 12% of the population over age 25 has a bachelor's degree or above, far lower than the national average of 35%. While the national poverty rate is 11.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022), Cumberland County's poverty rate is more than double at 24%. The county is primarily made up of farmland, with agriculture being its largest industry. Other prominent employers include the public school system, a state prison, and a local food processing plant. Racially, the county is 60% Black or African American, 39%

White, with 1% made up of other races. There is one major town, which is the county seat, and three smaller incorporated communities.

Cumberland County is picturesque in many areas, but in others there are glaring signs of poverty. The downtown area consists of shuttered storefronts intermixed with small local business including tax services, hair salons, and boutiques. The largest store is a Wal-Mart Supercenter, which was newly built in 2015. There seems to be at least one church on every street corner, although many do not appear to still be in operation. Outside of the main town, the scenery quickly changes to fields of crops. The smaller incorporated communities are barely noticeable, with the largest containing only a gas station, a dollar store, and a boarded-up outbuilding. The largest gathering places in the county are school buildings, which consist of three public elementary schools, one public middle school, one public high school, one charter school, and one private school.

Cumberland County's public school system is consistently ranked in the bottom 50% in the state in student achievement and all schools have been graded "F" for the past five years. 100% of their schools are designed as low-income schools, and all qualify for Title 1 funds. While the county is 60% Black or African American overall, 85% of students enrolled in the public school system are Black or African American. Within the past 10 years the school system has consolidated two neighborhood high schools into one, resulting in Cumberland County High School. This consolidation was due to lagging attendance numbers and lack of funding to maintain additional facilities. Teacher and staff turnover is higher than average, with the district employing six superintendents over the past 10 years.

In 2005, a group of parents within the community investigated starting their own school through the state's charter school association. By 2007, Cumberland Community Charter School

was enrolling students. Although the charter school purports to produce academically excellent students from within a diverse community, the student demographics tell a different story. The charter school enrolls 55% Black or African American students, less than the community's overall percentage. While this violates a still-active federal school-desegregation order, the federal courts have not interfered. Currently the school does qualify as a Title 1 school, however the percentage of students who are designated as low-income is much lower than public-school students. In order to enroll, students must submit an application in a timely manner, be chosen in a random lottery, and not have any prior discipline referrals at previous schools, including short-term suspensions. Comparatively, Cumberland Community Charter School students perform better on state standardized tests than their public-school counterparts.

Cumberland County is also home to a private school that serves students in grades Pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. Richmond Academy was founded in 1970, one year after the Cumberland County School District was federally required to de-segregate the public school system. Richmond Academy students excel in academics in comparison to the local public school and charter school students, with average SAT scores approaching 400 points higher than their public-school counterparts. While their mission statement states that they seek to provide a quality education based on the philosophy that every child can learn, the school demographics do not support that claim. The student body consists of only 8% students of color, far less than either the charter school or public schools in Cumberland County. Even more disturbing, the school had not enrolled a single African American student until 1993.

Composite Character Narratives

As previously discussed, participant experiences varied significantly between those who considered themselves community outsiders and those who considered themselves community

insiders. To ensure participant anonymity I chose to present the participants' experiences in their own words through composite character narratives. Dr. Owen, a composite character, sees herself as a community outsider. Alternatively, Ms. Carter, another composite character, believes she is a community insider. These characters were created with participants in mind, but identifying information has been removed and participant experiences have been combined to create these narratives.

Dr. Owen- Community Outsider

I started teaching in Cumberland County four years ago. It feels like it's been so much longer, but that's all. I think I'm kind of in denial about how long I've been here because I'm not sure I'll ever fit in. I never thought I'd teach in a place like this, much less live here. We had to move for my husband's job, and I remember thinking, how different could it be? *Kids are kids are kids, no matter where you are.* But that's just not true. I know that now.

Before I began working here, I taught in the mid-west. My undergraduate degree is in education- I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I even got to do my student teaching with one of my former teachers! After I had taught for a couple of years, I decided to get my master's degree, and it wasn't that difficult, so I decided to get my Ed.D. too. Well, that was an entirely different experience but I'm glad I did it. It is definitely an accomplishment I'm proud of.

The first thing I noticed when I got to Cumberland County was the poverty. I mean, I had taught in rural districts before. I knew they never had enough funding. But this was on a completely different level. Then you notice the segregation. It's both obvious and not obvious at the same time. *You see a huge Confederate flag when you first drive into town* but then you also see people of all races interacting at community events, like our Pecan festival and things like that.

My first day of work I was absolutely floored by what I experienced. *It was a complete culture shock.* The expectations of the teachers are unbelievable. I was hired to teach high school math, but they did not have enough teachers. *So, they had me teaching in person and facilitating online courses at the same time.* Like I was teaching my own Algebra 1 class but then also making sure that the students who were learning Trigonometry online were on task and answering any questions they had. *And this was pre-Covid!* So, it wasn't like the students were used to learning online. Then the next year they realized that the online learning wasn't working, so I didn't have to do that anymore. A new superintendent came in and brought their own way of doing things, so I had to start teaching completely differently. They wanted us to conduct a small group in the back of the class, while at the same time you have students in other groups working independently or on computers *who don't understand what they're supposed to be doing or what the 20-minute lesson was on. It's just set up for them to fail*. And I don't want that.

It is so frustrating because every time we get a new superintendent or a new administrator, they change major parts of our jobs. But at the same time, everyone seems to want to keep the status quo when it comes to helping the kids. *It's kind of like keeping the status quo is more important than improvement because improvement is a change and change is scary. I could be a person that brings great stuff to the school, but it's not encouraged at all and I'm sure I'm not the only teacher that that's the case for.* I mean, even their hiring practices are designed to keep things the same. They were looking for a new superintendent last year after our old one quit, and one of the required qualifications was residing in Cumberland County! Obviously, what is going on here isn't working, so why not bring in someone new? But that isn't even a consideration.

Some of my co-workers are great and they really care about the kids, but others act like this is social hour. Their kids are failing the state tests and they're worrying about what they're doing this weekend. *They're too busy worrying about what they're doing over there, or what they have going on in their house, or trying to be their friend.* I mean if they talked to the kids the way they do here in my old district, *people would've been fired. And parents would've gotten outraged.* So many things are different here, it's hard to even keep track of them all. And I haven't even talked about the private and charter schools yet!

It is absolutely insane to me that the amount of segregation that occurs here does not alarm anyone. I mean, basically all of my students are Black. The White kids that go here *are only here because their parents can't afford the private school*. And then the charter school takes away some of our best students every year too! I mean, it's gotten so bad that the superintendent put an ad in our local newspaper asking parents to please consider enrolling their students in the public schools. But that same paper published a letter to the editor a month later that blamed public-school teacher for our students' failing test scores. It actually said let's not blame these scores on our students, it's the teachers, staff, and administrators who have failed. So how are the schools every going to get better or become less segregated when that is the rhetoric about public schools around town?

I've wanted to be a teacher my entire life. And I absolutely loved my job before I came here, but *now I don't know if I can do it anymore.* I think it's really hard being an outsider in this community *because I know the difference.* I know that not all schools, school districts, and communities are like this. Most of the other teachers *are from this area, you know, if not directly from Cumberland County, somewhere nearby. They have family that lives here, and you know, they know the kids and they know their aunts and they know their parents*. This is normal for

them. And sometimes *it makes me feel less than*, because if they can stick it out why am I having second thoughts about doing it? I have chosen to work in public schools throughout my entire career, but I don't think anyone should have to attend or work in a school like mine. I want to help the kids. I love them. I'm so proud of them, and they deserve so much better. They've overcome so much and so many of them are excelling. But how much longer can I be here and put up with this? It's not even about getting paid, not that we get paid what we're worth anyway. *There's no money worth my mental health, there's not a salary worth my mental health*. That's where I'm at right now and I hate feeling this way.

Ms. Carter- Community Insider

I started teaching in Cumberland County four years ago, but I've lived here basically all of my life. I think it was a wonderful place to grow up. Yeah, it doesn't have much, but we played outside, and we all knew each other. It was kind of idyllic, really. I went to South Cumberland Elementary School, Cumberland Middle School, and Central Cumberland High School. I loved school! *Everywhere you go around here you see Cumberland County shirts.* There is just a lot of community pride and I'm proud to be from here. I would have stayed here the whole time, but I had to go away for college. I knew I wanted to be a teacher ever since I was 10 years old, so I had to go to college, but I always knew I'd come right back. Not a lot of people leave here, not permanently anyway. My principal is from here too. She was a teacher when I was a kid. I never had her, but *two of our teachers were in her kindergarten class*.

I know I don't really have anything to compare it to, but I think the public schools in Cumberland County are doing an excellent job. It's hard sometimes because other people in the community don't always see that. *I just think public school, I think it's almost like people have a bad taste. Something will get out and it's like oh yeah, that's the public school. Well, no, that's*

just one situation. There are stereotypes about places like this that I didn't realize when I was a kid. And our test scores aren't great, I get that. But it's not all bad. We have some amazing teachers here, and amazing students. We have people who really care about all of the children in this community. But it's so much easier for people to focus on the bad stuff. On social media I see so much negativity. *I'll see on there parents talking about I'm gonna take my child out, I'm gonna home school. Sometimes I want to comment but I don't, you know. Okay, you're a hairdresser. I'm a teacher. You were trained to be a hairdresser. I would never go in and say I'm going to cut your client's hair. So let us do what we're trained to do!* Everyone sees it too. In our last newsletter the superintendent even mentioned showing all of the naysayers what we are capable of. I like that idea, but I don't know if you can even change people's minds around here.

Like I said, I went to the public schools growing up. *I think it's normal for our community, they go to public school.* There wasn't even a discussion about going to a private school. I didn't realize it at the time, I didn't even know it existed, but that's the White kid's school. I didn't think anything of it, but now as a teacher it does bother me a bit. Now they act like they are open to accepting Black kids, but they make it so it's almost impossible. First, they require kids to take an entrance exam. Then, if they don't already know who you are, you can be asked to do an interview, "if needed." I did finger quotes because we all know what that means. They want to see what you look like. But then, if you make it past that, you have a probationary period where they can kick you out for any reason. I mean, they are so crazy that they have in writing that they reserve the right to prohibit admission to any student who has given birth to or fathered a child. Where did that even come from? A few years before I graduated from high school, they started a charter school too. It's taken a lot of the White kids who couldn't afford the private school out of our public schools. It's taken some of our Black students too, but not that

many. So, it's like we're here teaching these kids, and they know, and we know that everyone else thinks they're better than us.

That's not okay with me. *My children are, you know, they're just as important as the other children in private school, in charter schools. They're just as capable.* But they don't get the same opportunities or have the same resources. I try not to let that bother me, but it does. I don't want them to know that people don't care about them, but that's how I feel. I just do my best to be the best teacher I can be and push them to be the best that they can be. *Maybe they do come from this small rural town and have never been to the big city, but I can still give them those experiences.* I try to teach them about places outside of our little town, because no one did that for me. Some years it's been harder than others to do that. The years we have community and parental support things are great, but other years not so much. We've had so many changes in administration and if the parents don't like who the superintendent is they disengage. We got a new superintendent two years ago and things are changing for the better. *New superintendent, new school board, and I just see the parent involvement picking up. I think the community is taking back ownership of their school system.*

I think I'll be a teacher in Cumberland County until I retire. No, it's not the biggest, shiniest, best school system, but it's mine. And like I said, things are always changing for the better! There are great things happening here and I remind myself of that when I start to feel forgotten or looked down on. I think it's important, being from here and going to these schools, that I continue to support them. Our children need good teachers who are part of the community, not teachers that come for a year or two and then leave. The kids can tell when you really care, and they can tell when you've checked out. They need love and validation. *I just feel like I can give them that love, not only as a teacher but just as that person that can love them and make*

them feel welcome and make them feel that they can learn, and they can do. These are my

people, and I'm going to be here for them even when others are not.

Discussion of Themes

It Doesn't Have to Be This Way

Throughout this study teachers classified as both community insiders and outsiders

lamented that the situation in their schools, districts, and communities could be drastically

improved through minor changes. Common complaints from all participants were frustration

with administration, administrators,' and districts' resistance to change, frequent turnover in both

administrative and teaching roles, and the overt racism found throughout the community. Two

participants also mentioned feeling targeted by administrators and other teachers, which led both

to question their career choices and whether they should continue working as public-school

teachers in a rural community.

Participants were frustrated with administrators for multiple reasons. One of the most

mentioned frustrations was how disconnected administrators were from the work teachers were

doing in the classroom. One community outsider explained the disconnect between

administration and teachers when stating, "*a lot of people that make these decisions, they haven't*

been in the classroom in 20 years, or they only been in the classroom for 3 years before they

moved to administration." Participants felt that administrators were not realistic in their requests

toward or expectations of teachers. Another community outsider asserted that administrators

needed to work with teachers rather than against them. She said, "*besides expecting us teachers*

to do our jobs help us do them." Teachers that were new to the rural South were sometimes

shocked at how their administrators handled situations within their schools. One community

outsider shared a story of a time when she was appalled at her administration's approach to dealing with a student's behavior.

> *So, then I finally call the office and umm, and then the superintendent was there, and she came in and screamed at the top of her lungs for about 10 minutes at all of the kids. I mean she wasn't even targeting this one student who was misbehaving, she was just giving them all, all of her anger, for a very long period of time. And I was terrified. And you know I decided well that's the last time I'm going to be calling the office for help unless I just have to.*

Teachers who had previously worked in other districts were particularly frustrated with administrators because they had prior experience with administration that they respected and trusted. This was one of many situations where community insiders and outsiders had different experiences and expectations. Outsiders often felt that their schools and districts realized that there were problems but did not want to acknowledge or work on their issues. One outsider mentioned trying to plan an event with students from another state and facing intense backlash from school and district administration. She stated that,

> *They were just no no no no no no. And you know it was like their thinking was that, and of course they never would say this, all they would say was no, but I'm positive that the thinking was that this other school would make judgements about them. That they weren't as good. And umm, they didn't want anyone to see that.*

A different outsider complained that administrators focused on keeping up appearances rather than what was important. She asserted, "*we have to start focusing on these children and what their needs are.*"

Participants of all backgrounds noted that their schools and districts experienced frequent turnover in all positions. One outsider lamented *"I've been here 8 years and I've had 6 different principals. We've had five different superintendents, no 6, sorry. One that was just part-time and one that was just pulled out of retirement to be there because no one else would do it."* A community insider, who worked in a different school district, *stated "since I've been here, I've had 3 superintendents, with 3 totally different philosophies".* Frequent turnover in both superintendent and principal positions created issues for teachers, students, and parents. An insider explained that each new superintendent came in with their own agenda. She stated, *"having the superintendent change, that was a big thing and of course each one has their own programs that they want you to do so you get used to one curriculum, one program, and then new superintendent, new program."* An outsider agreed and mentioned that principal turnover also affected students.

> *The principals affected a lot. Every time there's a new principal the student behavior plummets for a significant period of time until they get to know the new principal and, so that's always really hard. And when their behavior plummets you know their academics, everything plummets. So, every time there's a new administrator it's like I just dread it. Even if it's keeping one that's not so great, it's better than a new one.*

However, a different community outsider had a possible explanation for why turnover was so frequent and stated," from *my understanding, and I don't know if this applies to other systems, but they only give principals three years to turn the low performing schools around.*" While every participant complained about frequent administrative turnover, several mentioned teacher turnover as well. They explained that teachers rarely stayed for more than two or three years in their districts, particularly if they were not originally from a rural Southern community.

Sometimes teacher turnover was positive, but many participants mentioned that they felt that teachers left for better environments. One outsider explained, "*In my opinion, the best employees eventually leave after a shorter period of time.*" However, this frequent turnover enabled two participants to gain employment. One community insider, who was not a certified teacher at the time she was hired and had no previous experience in classroom teaching, stated "*I went to the job fair, and they called me the next day and interviewed me for the position, and I got the position on the spot.*" Frequent turnover not only affects teachers when their administration changes, but also affects administration when they are faced with filling positions for each school year.

Participants were concerned about the amount of overt racism they observed in their schools and school district. Outsiders were shocked that schools were still segregated. A community outsider lamented, "*where I'm from public schools mean a whole different thing than they mean here. Here they mean schools that are serving the Black population and private means serving the White population.*" Before teaching in the rural South, she worked with students from multiple states and countries. When asked how understandings and discussions of race differed between her current and former students, she explained that she had never seen a school or community so focused on race. She described conversations between students and teachers by stating "*the conversations with the students were so much about color and race.*" The focus on race within the community was also apparent when participants were asked how their community supported public schools. Two teachers believe that support for public schools in their district is based primarily on race. An insider, when asked if support for public schools is drawn between socioeconomic or racial lines said, "*Socio… Well, both.*"

Participants also felt that some teachers or staff members were targeted unfairly by the administration. While one outsider noticed this happening to other teachers and stated, "*people are taken advantage of and made to feel less than on a regular basis*," the two other community outsiders were personally affected by administrative bullying. One of these community outsiders felt that she was unfairly given a difficult class because of her plans to leave the district. She said, "*I felt like I was given the benchmark class on purpose because in January they knew I was probably going to leave*." A different community outsider felt as if she was constantly being blamed for her students' behavior, regardless of the steps she took to correct it. When asked how that made her feel she stated, "*it's made me feel like a straight up outcast. Like I'm not, you know, they don't perceive me as a teacher. They don't perceive me as the educator that I'm supposed to be but I am*." These experiences led both participants to question their career choices, and both described looking into positions outside their districts, in education and other fields. One felt that her time as a public-school teacher in a rural district had changed her as a person. She stated, "*I think working in the rural South as an educator has made me very mean, very just mean and tough and I was such a free spirit*." The other admitted to looking into teaching at the local private and charter schools. However, another community outsider, who did not experience administrative targeting, had already done so and decided to stay at the public school. She said, "*they're just not much better. So, it's like from this crazy that I know to this crazy that I don't know and then I have to learn it*." When asked if they considered careers outside of education, both community outsiders who had experienced administrative targeting said they had. One stated, "*I don't even want to teach anymore and that's just the honest truth*" while the other wondered, "*do they really need me here*." One outsider's experience was

particularly hard on her, and by the date of her last interview she had decided to completely leave education. She described her last semester of teaching and said,

> *I'm like extremely numb. I have no feelings towards educational passion. Since January I've just been dragging in here. I would snooze my alarm for like a whole hour before I left for the morning. And you know I have to get my baby up so he can go to daycare. I came in late, I just stopped bringing a lunch. I'm just ready to go. Anything I've been invited to I've declined. It's just, it has sucked the life out of me wholeheartedly.*

We Matter Too

Both community insider and community outsider participants frequently voiced that they felt as if they were not appreciated or recognized in their communities and broader locales. Participants struggled with the way they were stereotyped in their communities due to their position as public-school teachers. They expressed feeling isolated, forgotten, underestimated, and looked down on. These feelings led participants to experience emotions such as anger, confusion, discouragement, and overwhelm. In reviewing interview transcripts and journal entries, the words of the participants all echoed a common theme: that they were doing great work, that their communities and students deserved great schools and teachers, and that rural public schools and teachers matter.

One community insider, a veteran teacher, spoke of how she felt she was seen as a public-school teacher in her community. She said, "*when I look at public school as a whole, I still think a lot of people have a negative feeling towards it.*" An outsider mentioned being looked down on by both community members and outsiders. She believed "*outsiders view rural communities and the schools in rural communities as limited.*" All the teachers spoke of feeling isolated and mentioned a lack of necessities in their communities. Two participants' interviews were

interrupted due to their internet disconnecting, including one of whom was using the internet in her classroom. One insider posited that the isolation and remote location of her district attributed to lower test scores, independently of the lack of resources she noted in her community. She stated,

> *Many of my children have never been out of Cumberland County, and if they have, they've only been to the next town, which is not a very big town either. So, you know, I only have one or two that have ever been to Atlanta or ever been to Orlando, you know, so they don't have those experiences and those tests show they're struggling.*

Participants also felt that their schools and communities were forgotten, overlooked, and underestimated. Three participants mentioned the lack of monetary resources that their districts had compared to previous districts they had worked in. An insider spoke of the lack of community partners in her district and the way she felt forgotten. She stated, "*we don't have a whole lot of businesses so there has been times in the past I would think okay, does anybody care that we're here.*" Both community insiders felt as if they and their students were underestimated by people within and outside of their communities. One of these insiders was in her early 20s when she began teaching high school and felt as if members of her school and school community expected her to fail. When discussing how her first year of teaching went, she excitedly explained that it went well and said, "*it made me feel good that they actually listened to me and took my advice, you know, with me being so young.*" The other community insider felt that her students were underestimated by people outside of the local community. She said,

> *I would put my students up against anybody. I have some that are above grade level, you know, and it's just like they have limited resources, but they make do with what they have. I think our children are just as qualified as the ones in Atlanta.*

Participants frequently described feeling looked down on by community members and outsiders. All participants mentioned groups in their communities who did not typically send their children to public schools. While most were initially reluctant to detail the types of people who shunned or denigrated public schools in their communities, many spoke of the groups in generic terms. One insider said, "*Well, I only heard through conversation, I really never have seen it, but I know that honestly a lot of farmers and stuff like that, I don't see a lot of their kids in public schools.*" When asked to clarify her response, she said most of the farmers she referred to were wealthy and White. An outsider explained that families with higher incomes typically sent their children to the charter school or the private school in town. An insider agreed that this was the case but questioned their beliefs. She wondered, "*why take your child from public school? I mean, what's wrong with public school? I mean, you're paying hundreds and thousands of dollars to get an education that they could get in public schools.*" One insider and one outsider felt people outside their communities looked down on them as well. The outsider felt as if community outsiders pitied rural public schools due to the worsening teacher shortage in the United States. She stated, "*they're viewing us like they feel sorry for us.*" However, the insider believed that outsiders felt sorry for rural public schools, teachers, and students because of stereotypes. She articulated her feelings poignantly, comparing how outsiders view public-school teachers and students in rural districts to sensationalized news stories.

It's kind of like when a tornado hits. It's like they try to find the woman in curlers in the trailer park, you know? It's like, yes, we do have some people that are uneducated and that are illiterate. But I would think probably every town and community has that, you know? But like I said, those are the ones that people see or remember.

These experiences of feeling stereotyped or 'less than' other teachers, school, or communities led to strong emotional responses from participants. Two participants mentioned anger, both in themselves and in others in their school communities. A community outsider felt as if anger was a pervasive and commonly found emotion in her school. She shared that she observed "*a lot of undercurrents of anger… and just kind of a common acceptance of violence*." Alternatively, a different outsider experienced anger herself when faced with judgement from co-workers and supervisors. She found that, "*there are different issues that overshadow what we're really supposed to focus on*" and explained that the lack of focus on students was infuriating to her. Other teachers felt more discouragement than anger, albeit in different ways. One insider and one outsider, who both worked in the same school system, were discouraged because they felt they were unable to adequately help their students due to school and district priorities. The insider stated, "*I feel like I'm not able to help them. And disappointed that I can't figure it out*." The outsider expanded upon that feeling and said, "*I could be a person that brings great stuff to the school, but it's not encouraged at all and I'm sure I'm not the only teacher that that's the case for*." When asked for clarification she states that "*everyone's a little afraid at my school. The teachers. Umm, and we don't question much of anything and umm, and we don't try and do as much as we could, we try and do what the administration expects.*" A different insider felt discouraged due to lack of community involvement and negative labels. She mentions how state rankings and test scores affect teachers and says, "*we get labeled by the state and it's like okay, but my children can read, they are capable. It's just discouraging sometimes.*" Similarly, community and parental involvement also discouraged her. She described special events put on by the school and stated, "*we have had like programs or different things, and nobody showed up. There'd be more teachers there than parents or community members*."

Every participant mentioned feeling overwhelmed when it came to the amount expected of out them, their schools, and their students. The two insiders and one outsider described feeling overwhelmed by the obstacles they and their students had to overcome to ensure learning takes place in their classrooms, while the two other outsiders were overwhelmed by the current state of their schools and districts as well as the educational system overall. An insider described the pressure put on public-school teachers in rural communities to fill a variety of roles.

Well, like I said these children come with a lot of baggage so they would come in and you know I had to make sure they ate breakfast. Most of them hadn't done their homework so we'd go over that. Seeing what they needed, what they didn't have. Pretty much they were behind where the state said they should be, so we spent a lot of time remediating, doing small groups, pulling them, and pushing them.

One insider and one outsider were overwhelmed by the instructional and behavioral needs of their students, with the outsider comparing putting a classroom management system in place to "*talking to a brick wall.*" The insider felt as if her students were so behind that she could not use typical instruction strategies in her classroom. She said, "*I'll try to research alternative methods but it's hard sometimes to do that*" and mentioned that she began using special education instructional methods for all her students. A different outsider was overwhelmed by what she found when she began teaching in her district. She explained, "*my first year was a complete shock and it it's been a very significant adjustment just being here.*" Likewise, another outsider was overwhelmed by the culture of rural communities. While she enjoyed the collegial atmosphere of the community overall, she found that the expectations put on teachers to fully assimilate into the local community were too much. She stated, "*I felt like I was smothered, like just no boundaries, just smothered.*"

Participants' experiences as female public-school teachers in rural districts led them to feel as if they were overlooked, forgotten, or uncared for. They detailed experiences where they felt overwhelmed, angry, confused, and discouraged due to their positions in their schools, communities, and the educational system overall. While some of these experiences are similar to those that occur in suburban or urban districts, each participant explicitly stated that these experiences and feelings were the result of being a female teacher in a public school located in a rural community. They felt as if their students, themselves, their schools, and their communities were treated as if they did not matter as much as their suburban and urban counterparts. While several participants mentioned that they understood why outsiders may overlook or underestimate their schools and communities, each believed that their schools and communities deserved more attention and recognition.

Everything Comes Back to Context

Throughout the study both community insider and outsider detailed the challenges they faced due to teaching in rural public schools. They also spoke about the effect that educational segregation within their local communities had on themselves and their students. Participants described dealing with poverty and low academic achievement, and feeling frustrated with students, parents, and other community members. Educational segregation affected the diversity of the public schools, teachers' feelings towards community members, and stereotypes about public-school students. Their experiences were shaped by the context of their schools and communities, with multiple participants explaining that their rural locale and their communities' small populations made these issues more noticeable and more significant. When it comes to the experiences of female public-school teachers, the context of the schools and communities in which they teach matters.

Every participant addressed the poverty experienced by their students and local communities. One outsider explained that most of her students came from families experiencing poverty, which affected their preparedness for school. She noted that they lacked "*access to basic school supplies*," including broadband internet. An insider detailed how poverty affected her students during the Covid-19 pandemic. She explained,

Over half of my class didn't have internet. They didn't have tablets. They didn't have, so they were at a disadvantage not only because of Covid but because they didn't have what they needed so that put them even further behind.

Another outsider spoke about how poverty within the local community not only affects her students in regard to their education, but also their free time. She said, *"there isn't very much funding that goes into like a rec center or something for them to do after school or helping to make more jobs for the younger people*." A different outsider explained how poverty affected not only the students, but teachers as well. In a previous school district, she had access to a supply closet that contained "*every school supply you could think of*," but in her current school she was only able to get basic necessities by "*spending money out of my own pocket*." Having previously taught in a larger district, this outsider asserted that the lack of resources was due to the sparsely populated, rural location of her current district. She said, "*I think that they're usually under the assumption that they are a small area, so they don't require funds in large amounts*" and stated that this was one of the biggest differences she noticed between the two school districts she had experienced teaching in.

Pervasive poverty and lack of resources contributed to lower academic achievement in the participants' schools. One outsider noted that there was a large focus on academic achievement within her school but felt as if her students were perpetually at a disadvantage due

to their community's characteristics. She acknowledged the school district was trying to improve academics, stating "*we've had professional learning, workshops, and different programs to try and improve the academics. Most of the things that people seem concerned about are the academic standing of the school.*" However, she felt that these efforts were not enough. She explained that primary language spoken in her school and community was African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which put her students at a disadvantage when compared to students who were primarily exposed to Standard American English (SAE). She despaired,

They're at a disadvantage because what they hear isn't what they're being tested with or what they're reading, and they just don't relate to it because of that. But no one here is addressing that in terms of a language issue, they just think they're not smart enough. That's just a sad thing because they're being measured by how well they do on all of these tests that are in English and it's just like, it makes me want to scream.

A different outsider felt as if her students were in an even worse position than they were previously due to the Covid-19 pandemic. She states, "*whatever the students were lacking, were missing, it's kind of exponentially grew during the pandemic.*" However, she does not believe that this is a reflection on public schools or public-school teachers, instead stating that public school is what you make of it. She explains, "*either he or she makes it or does not.*" One insider and one outsider felt as if lower academic achievement resulted in a more challenging environment for public-school teachers and students. The insider asserted that public schools are at a disadvantage when compared to private schools because they "*still have to follow state guidelines*" and focus on standardized testing more than fundamental skills, even when their students are performing below state level and are perceived as "*a struggling school.*" Alternatively, the outsider felt as if teachers at her school were complacent about the low

academic achievement in their community. She stated, "*all of our test scores are in the 50s and the 40s and sometimes 30s but here we are trying to figure out what does this teacher do in their personal life*." This focus was not one she experienced in her previous school district, and this frustrated her. She exclaimed, "*our focus should've been the children*."

While this outsider was frustrated with the attitude of some of her co-workers towards academic achievement, she was not the only participant who expressed frustration with students, parents, co-workers, or other community members. One insider felt as if parents did not stress the importance of education to their children. She explained, "*a lot of parents let their kids miss*" days of school and stated that this occurred in response to the district shortening summer break in recent years. An outsider felt as if parents and the surrounding community did not support public-school students and teachers as much as they previously did. She lamented that their support "*was a lot stronger back then than it is today*." The other insider concurred and felt as if her community unfairly judged public schools without really understanding them. When asked what she would change about her community she stated, "*I would want the community to maybe visit the school more, see exactly what's going on and become more involved*." She mentioned that her principal, who she held in high regard, cautioned teachers to keep school happenings private because outside community members frequently demonized the public school without having the full information regarding situations. She explained, "*don't let the community get a hold of it. Because they'll take it and run. And they'll take this little problem and multiply it 10 times*". Another outsider was frustrated with her co-workers for reasons beyond their response to the academic achievement of their students. She believed her co-workers were not professional and did not have the best interests of their students at heart. She detailed instances where she was shunned for not going to after school social events and felt as if her co-workers valued forming

relationships with other teachers more than becoming more proficient teachers. She was initially surprised by this but, when asked how she felt about more recent interactions with co-workers, stated, "*I don't think anything surprises me in Cumberland County anymore.*"

All participants believed that the rural location and characteristics of their communities led to a decrease in diversity within public schools and the emergence of educational segregation within the community. However, their acknowledgement of the lack of diversity and visible racism in their community differed based upon their categorization of being a community insider or outsider. Insiders were less likely to acknowledge racism or segregation within their communities. One insider, who grew up in and attended public schools in the district where she taught, believed that the local public schools were diverse. She stated, "*in public school you meet a lot of different personalities. People from all different backgrounds.*" However, an outsider in the same district described the differences between students in the public schools and local private schools as striking. The schools were highly segregated, primarily by race but also by socioeconomic status. She stated, "*I have always been dedicated to the disadvantaged, everywhere I work. And so, I was offered a job at the private school here but I, I just, it's not the population I was meant to serve.*" In the other school district, insiders also downplayed the extent of segregation and racism in the local community. The community insider believed that the public schools were integrated and that the local private and charter schools were too. She stated, "*The students are mixed up and classes have students of all races and abilities.*" However, the two outsiders' accounts were quite different. One outsider did not explicitly state that the public and private schools were segregated based upon race but did admit that "*the main thing between private and public schools is the money*" and believed that only some schools had integrated, not all. The other outsider felt as if racism was pervasive in the local community. She

explains, "*I mean when you first ride into Cumberland County there's like a huge confederate flag hanging right over, you can't miss it*." She also notes that her public-school students are primarily students of color and that White students who attended schools were "*in the same economic bracket as the rest of the students*."

Educational segregation was noticeable in both communities, with teachers noting that it was particularly observed when alternative school options, such as charter schools, were introduced to the local community. Teachers in both districts noted that charter schools primarily took students away from the public schools within their districts rather than private schools. One insider explained that in her district the opening of a charter school caused many of the high performing students to leave the local public schools. She states, "*it was kinda almost having an African American like private school, but it really isn't private*." An outsider, who works in the same district, agreed that the charter school took a lot of great students form the local public schools and explained that the principal of the charter school was originally the principal of a public school within the district. She explains, "*she is one of the most brilliant people in this state that I've worked with. Umm, and she's very dialed in with education and education reform*." Thus, the opening of the charter school in their district caused the public schools to lose not only high achieving students, but also high achieving employees. In the other district, participants echoed their counterparts' experiences. A different outsider noted that she had seen parents remove their children from the public schools to attend the local charter school and an insider agreed, stating "*the charter school really pulled from us.*" She also mentioned that the charter school's enrollment particularly increased during the tenure of one particular superintendent. She explained, "*we kind had a lot of people pull their children out*."

The success of charter schools and the blatant nature of educational segregation within their communities led several participants to question the motives of community members. Both insiders and outsiders spoke about the blatant segregation that occurs within their communities. One insider stated that most students who chose not to attend public schools were White, explaining that private schools were most preferable but "*charter schools kind of be their second choice.*" When asked how that made her feel, as a product of local public schools and a current public-school teacher, she said "*I'm one of those people that kind of like I don't mind. Sometimes I wonder like why take your child from public school?*" One outsider was dismayed by how unquestioned educational segregation was in her district. She said, "*when I came here, I didn't really realize how much racism is just alive and well.*" She explained that this blatant racism affects students as well, noting that public-school students feel as if they are only welcome at the private school if "*they're good at sports.*" Another outsider felt similarly. She explained that the public school where she taught was built in a certain location in order to be in competition with the charter school, which was located in a small community within the larger school district.

While teachers, schools, and school districts throughout the United States experience hardships, are affected by school choice initiatives, and are in competition with private schools for high achieving students, these circumstances are more noticeable and more pronounced in rural communities. Students and teachers in rural districts are less able to cultivate partnerships with local businesses or community groups because their communities lack ample businesses or resources. Similarly, the opening of a single charter school affects the entire school district due to the small enrollment numbers at the local public schools to begin with. Pervasive poverty, history of segregation, and the acceptance of racism in rural, Southern communities greatly influences

experiences of female public-school teachers within these communities and separates their experiences from the experiences of female public-school teachers in different locales.

These Are My People

While participants often spoke of their negative experiences while working as public-school teachers in rural communities, they also expressed numerous positive experiences. Each participant had chosen to work in a rural public school for a reason, and the majority of them felt an innate sense of pride based upon their identity as a public-school teacher in a rural district. All of them mentioned feeling like a part of a larger community, and many could not imagine working anywhere else. Participants enjoyed working in communities familiar to their own upbringing, feeling supported by the local community, observing growth in their students and communities, and making a difference in the lives of students. Most participants felt that being a public-school teacher in a rural district was a rewarding career, although an unexpected career for some of them.

For one participant, working in her district was like coming home. She had attended public schools within that district her entire life. This insider explained, "*I went off to school and then I came back.*" As a teacher in her district, she taught family members of her own classmates and found the familiarity to be a positive experience. One participant, although an outsider to her district, had grown up in a rural community and attended rural public schools as a child. When asked why she chose to be a public-school teacher in a rural district she said, "*the main reason why I work in a public school is its mainly something that I'm familiar with.*" She elaborated by saying that she specifically chose to work in rural public schools because of the students and said, "*you feel like you want to give back to that type of sector because you were*

once a product of that sector, and wouldn't you want to pour into these students to encourage

them to succeed?"

Even participants who were not from rural locales spoke about the sense of community

that pervaded their schools and school districts. One outsider stated, "*Everyone's community*

based, everyone wants to be a family, they consider themselves just one huge happy family." She

stated that the community support and parental involvement in her district was one of her

favorite parts of being a public-school teacher in a rural district. A different outsider and an

insider both enjoyed getting to know their students and families, which they expressed made

their jobs easier. The outsider said, "*Once you get a reputation it's great in a small area because*

kids talk to other kids, and they instantly know what everyone thinks." This tight knit community

allowed teachers to build relationships and reputations that spanned multiple school years. The

insider agreed and explained that this allowed her to build relationships with students who she

did not even teach. She described how being a part of this community influenced her career

choices by saying, "*I've told some of my friends that are teachers, I drive almost 30 miles one*

way because I feel appreciated, and I can see the outcome of my work". A different insider also

enjoyed working in a small community and said, "*I end up being surrounded by people who want*

to actually see children succeed." Teachers also spoke of feeling supported by community

members beyond students, parents, and their co-workers. One insider began teaching before she

was certified, although she had previously earned a bachelor's degree. Her principal and school

district leadership encouraged her to further her education and supported her in doing so. She

explains that her district,

Offered to help to further my knowledge and get my certification and become a certified teacher. They did just that and even when I finished my master's degree, they pushed me to get my specialist and I did that too. So now they're encouraging me to get my doctorate.

Both insiders and outsiders spoke about local community members' support of public schools, including support from local festivals, news stations, fire departments, police departments, and universities. One insider described the experience as making her feel "*like oh okay, well they do care. They took time to come by.*" An outsider explained that there was not preferential treatment for students from any type of school at large community events and competitions, which was an important show of community support for public schools.

While most participants felt their districts had much to improve on, one participant, an insider, felt that her school and school district had made significant improvements throughout her career. These improvements primarily coincided with changes in leadership and administration. This insider explained, "*I have seen a lot of growth not only in our children but as a whole, the whole school system.*" Even participants who believed their districts should improve felt as if they were currently making a difference in the lives of students. A different insider spoke of the moment she knew she wanted to continue working as a public-school teacher in a rural district and said, "*I remember that I got a chance to see a light bulb click on for students, it was in their mind, and I just knew then it was for me.*" She described how she felt when prior students returned to her school and visited her. She said,

When I see that they're furthering their education into what they told me they wanted to do in the first place, when I gave them the extra push and I see that they pursue it, it makes me feel good that they actually listened to me and took my advice.

Participants spoke about how working in rural public schools, specifically, was a rewarding career choice. One outsider chose to work in the public school in her community because she felt called to work with the student groups that the public school serves. She explained, "*it was never a consideration truthfully once I found out who the population was at the private school vs the public school. Those are my people, you know, to serve.*" She describes her first year working in the district and how she felt she was making a difference. She says, "*it's like I could see this hunger with the kids to have people talk to them about something that was real or encourage them to do their very best.*" An insider also felt that being a public-school teacher in a rural district was rewarding due to the types of students she worked with. She detailed working with a non-verbal student and said, "*by the end of the year, his first words to me were my name and I just almost started crying.*" She was extremely proud to be a public-school teacher in her community and described how improvement in the district had set her students up for success.

> *Children that I taught are now in high school and are getting the Star Student or are getting their scholarships and they're in competition with the charter school. And you see the most awards go to public school. And that makes me proud.*

For several participants, working in a rural public school was not initially in their plans. Two participants wanted to be scientists and earned their bachelor's degrees in science disciplines. One participant originally planned to work in the business field. Another participant worked as a teacher throughout her career, but she never anticipated teaching in the rural South. One insider and one outsider both had the opportunity to work as teachers and tutors during their undergraduate studies, which led them to consider teaching as a career path. Other participants started out as substitute teachers and decided to pursue full-time work in education. Another was

teaching at the undergraduate level and decided to work in her school district after visiting a school and meeting other teachers. While most participants did not initially plan to be public-school teachers in rural communities they expressed contentment with their career choices and acknowledged their unique position as being public-school teachers in rural districts. However, at the time of this writing, two of the five participants had chosen to leave rural public education. Both of these participants were categorized as community outsiders. One of these chose to leave the education field entirely and found work in a field related to her undergraduate degree.

Conclusion

Throughout this study my goal was to determine how female public-school teachers experience working in rural schools and how educational segregation within the local community affected their experiences. My data analysis shows that while female public-school teachers in rural districts have similar experiences, these experiences vary greatly depending on their identity as either community insiders or community outsiders. Participants who identified as insiders were less affected by educational segregation and more positive about their experiences, while participants who identified as outsiders experienced culture shock, were strongly affected by educational segregation, and recalled more negative experiences than their insider peers. All participants expressed the belief that the rural location of their schools and school systems greatly influenced their experiences, both positive and negative. The following chapter will discuss the findings of this study and provide constructive recommendations for national, state, and community leaders that can positively impact the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural districts.

Chapter 5- Discussion

"When someone is cruel or acts like a bully, you don't stoop to their level. No, our motto is,

'When they go low, we go high.'" - Michelle Obama

Introduction

The two goals of this dissertation were to determine how female teachers in rural

communities experience working in public schools and how educational segregation within

communities affects the experiences of these public-school teachers. The themes that arose

during data analysis helped answer these questions, but also spurred additional questions

regarding how the self-identities of female public-school teachers in rural districts affect their

experiences. All participants acknowledged experiences that led to feelings of pride and love for

their public-school students, regardless of their identity of being an insider or an outsider.

However, insiders expressed significantly more positive experiences with their schools and

communities than outsiders. Conversely, outsiders focused primarily on negative experiences

with their schools and communities. The findings of this study can contribute to increasing the

amount of research focusing on rural schools and school districts in the education literature.

These findings will be discussed in this chapter, along with recommendations for future policy

changes in rural schools and school districts and implications for future research.

Discussion

The Elephant in the Room

Throughout my discussions with participants it became clear that there was one topic that

insiders and outsiders both did not want to discuss: race. Prior to beginning this study, I assumed

that questions surrounding educational segregation would inevitably lead to discussions about

participants' own racial identities. However, only one participant voluntarily discussed how her

racial identity affected her experiences and that of her students. In fact, Matias & Liou (2015) found that teachers often feel uncomfortable talking about race because "discussions of race and education, specifically in K-12 teaching, are silenced by colorblind practices and policies" (p.601). In this study, participants did not refer to race unless specifically asked. While outsiders were more likely to admit that racism and segregation were occurring in their communities, insiders spoke of racism as a thing of the past. Bonilla-Silva (2001) asserts that this is because contemporary colorblind rhetoric espouses the belief that race and racism do not play an important role in current social and economic realities.

Racially, White participants were more willing to discuss race and issues of racism than Black participants, which can possibly be attributed to my identity as a White woman. When asked about the racial and socioeconomic make-up of the public, charter, and private schools within her district one Black participant began an internet search so that she could provide accurate data. When asked for her perspective, rather than statistics, she stated she had never considered the racial make-up of schools, which was shocking given the stark educational segregation present within her community. Other Black participants provided abstract answers that downplayed the prevalence of educational segregation and, while White participants' answers still far underestimated the extent of educational segregation in their communities, they did acknowledge that it took place. In this way, it would seem as though Black participants adopted a colorblind racial perspective even as people of color which is known as false consciousness. Neville et al. (2005) assert that false consciousness "reflects an internalized, culturally sanctioned belief that encourages individuals in a stratified society to adopt the viewpoint of those in power" (p. 31). By attaching little importance to discussions of race, participants devalued the impact of racial inequalities within their own rural communities. This

led to participants' identities as insiders or outsiders to be seen as a potentially larger impact on their experiences than it may have otherwise. However, the findings in this study support the assertion that public-school teachers in rural communities experiences vary greatly depending on their identity as either community insiders or community outsiders.

When They Go Low, We Go High

Both insiders and outsiders consistently expressed pride in their students and expressed frustration due to the way their students were perceived in the community and state. All participants expressed less frustration about the fact that educational segregation exists in their communities than they did regarding the way their students were talked about and treated. One outsider participant said of parents that choose to send their children to charter or private schools, which further educational segregation, *"Well, they do have freedom of choice where to send their kids. So, it doesn't really affect me at all*." Insiders and outsiders both recounted numerous stories of uplifting their students and increasing their confidence in themselves. They also spoke of focusing on their own students and schools rather than focusing on what their students and schools may be missing. One insider participant, when asked how she felt about educational segregation, stated, "*I think I should feel a type of way, but you know I'm like, I'm one of those people that don't mind*." She did not agree with educational segregation, but instead felt as if that was none of her concern. Her concern was doing the best she could for the students she had with the resources she was given, not worrying about what could have or should have been.

Both insiders and outsiders referenced rising above the beliefs about and expectations of their students, both as public-school students and students from rural communities. They recounted instances of empowering their students, even when they did not feel empowered themselves. Outside opinions and labels did not phase these teachers. Instead, they persevered in

caring for their students regardless of the obstacles put in their way. In this sense, all participants embodied the expression "When they go low, we go high." Throughout every interview and written response, no participant ever denigrated their local charter or private schools. Some expressed frustration that they were being used in a way that segregates students and their communities, but they only spoke positively of the students and teachers at these schools. Public-school teachers in rural districts understand what it feels like to be labeled and stereotyped, but these participants chose to focus on building themselves up rather than tearing others down, regardless of their personal beliefs and feelings towards their schools and school districts.

The Power of Positivity

While both insiders and outsiders spoke positively about their students, especially when compared to the labels and stereotypes that had been placed upon them, insiders spoke more positively about rural schools, school districts, and communities overall. While they expressed frustration and even anger regarding isolated incidences, they believed that their colleagues and administration were generally focused on educating students and improving both their schools and districts overall. Insiders were more forgiving and less judgmental towards school leaders, district leaders, and outsiders to rural communities. Additionally, they cared more about excelling within the status quo than working towards future changes. In one district, educators voiced concerns at a school board meeting about the lack of communication between district administration and teachers. However, rather than demanding changes for the future, insider participants expressed their desire to return communications to previous levels. In many ways, insiders were more focused on the present than the future.

This positivity enabled insiders to feel secure in their roles as female public-school teachers in rural districts. Insiders did not express a desire to leave rural education or education

in general, but instead focused on their desire to improve conditions within their own communities. They were less focused on test scores and more focused on the social and emotional needs of their students. This is not to say that outsiders were not focused on social and emotional needs as well, but outsiders expressed more concern about academic achievement and test scores than insiders. While seemingly counterintuitive, this lack of focus on traditional accountability measures resulted in insiders expressing greater pride and contentment in both themselves and their communities. Lassater et al. (2021) found that "when data are used primarily for accountability purposes, it can have a detrimental effect on the school's data culture and lead teachers to feel vulnerable and unsafe" (p. 49). By focusing on the positive aspects of their rural schools and school districts, rather than continuous improvement and accountability measures, insiders were able to feel secure in their role as female public-school teachers in rural districts and adopt a more favorable outlook on the future of their careers, their students, and rural students and communities overall.

However, by only focusing on the positive aspects of rural schools and communities, insiders were ignoring the reality of their own context. Rural communities in the South, much like Cumberland County, are rife with very real issues. Lack of funding, difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers, and struggling local economies are not fixed by positive thoughts. Outsiders expressed frustration that insiders were not willing to acknowledge deficits or areas for improvement, while insiders believed outsiders were too negative. While the power of positivity served to unite insiders and inspire students, community members, and other teachers, it also downplayed the realities of life in the rural South. In this way, it can do a disservice to students and teachers in rural communities by minimizing the issues that those students and teachers face and alienating outsiders who may have resources or ideas that could be of service.

Students Before Self

Insider and outsider participants all had the best interests of their students in mind. However, outsiders seemed to focus on the academic needs of their students more than anything else. Outsiders focused on providing students with improved instructional and extracurricular opportunities, often going above and beyond what was expected of them. While insiders also went above and beyond their responsibilities, they seemed to have a greater sense of work-life balance. Insiders spoke of spending time with friends and family members and being involved in community activities far more than outsiders. In fact, the majority of instances when outsiders mentioned family or friends throughout the study was in reference to how they were not able to spend enough time or a sufficient quality of time with their loved ones. The lack of a community to rely on outside of their school buildings led outsiders to feel isolated and out of place. While many outsiders threw themselves into their work, they disregarded their own needs and, occasionally, even the needs of their families. Outsiders expressed greater feelings of stress, burnout, and hopelessness than insiders and each of them had considered leaving rural education, or education in general, during the course of this study.

These feelings led to higher turnover amongst outsider teachers versus insider teachers. However, outsiders should not be blamed for the conditions that led to their struggles. While they may have experienced issues differently than their insider counterparts, their experiences and feelings are valid. Outsiders often compared their students, schools, and school districts to those in their previous communities, several of which were not rural. They were not afraid to challenge the status quo, and in doing so often drew criticism from their peers or administrators. By striving to improve the educational conditions for their students, they made their own working conditions worse. Two of the three outsiders spoke about being bullied and mistreated due to

their outsider status. All felt as if they were silenced or reprimanded when they brought up concerns to their peers or administrators. However, Lowe (2006) states that while school leaders often blame others for asserting their schools are failing "they must accept the responsibility and be willing to be held accountable for the effectiveness level of their school" (p. 28). Instead, outsiders experienced backlash and ostracization for standing up for their students' rights and needs. As a result, their experiences were generally more negative than their insider peers' experiences and led to a much higher rate of discontent while working as female public-school teachers rural school districts.

Recommendations

While this study explored the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural school districts, I do not feel that it would be appropriate to provide recommendations for the teachers themselves. While participants' identities of insiders or outsiders influenced their experiences and their understanding of those experiences, many of the situations that participants referenced were the result of circumstances and policies that are out of their control. Participants' experiences were primarily influenced by circumstances and policies that were the result of their school boards' and school district administrations' decisions. Because of this, the following recommendations are directed towards decision makers in rural school districts and communities. Their decisions have the power to greatly affect the experiences of the teachers within their schools and communities, and this is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly.

Challenge the Heritage Narrative

Resistance to school integration in the rural Southern United States has been well documented throughout the education literature (Andrews, 2002; Clotfelter, 2004; Houck & Murray, 2019). Indeed, public schools are becoming increasingly segregated through various

means. Felton (2017) found that 254 school districts are no longer under federal court order to desegregate since 2000, even though overall educational segregation is increasing. This change is disappointing because without federal oversight local school boards are prone to make decisions that directly and indirectly segregate students by race. As discussed in this study, both charter schools and private schools are frequently used as vehicles to provide legal segregation academies for parents in rural districts and rural communities that do not support integration. As of 2017, there were at least 747 public charter schools in the United States that enrolled a higher percentage of White students than did their corresponding traditional public schools (Dalton, 2017). Two of those charter schools are located in the rural school districts included in this study.

While there is little legal recourse to the use of charter schools in this way, rural school and district leaders should increasingly speak out about the dangers and downfalls of educational segregation. Many of these segregated charter and private schools in rural areas of the Southern United States proudly assert that they provide or were developed to continue a 'heritage' of excellence or academic achievement. In these cases, a heritage of excellence means traditions of racism, elitism, and exclusion. The insider participants in this study seemed to accept this verbiage and corresponding reality as a normal part of society within their rural communities, but the outsiders recognized that students were purposefully being segregated under the guise of parental choice. Rural school and district leaders must acknowledge the elephant in the room that is racism and exclusion and disseminate information that explains the danger in and fallacies about educational segregation in their communities.

Much of the impetus behind educational segregation is due to fear (Alexander & Alexander, 2004). Oftentimes, White parents in rural communities have been exposed to racist, hegemonic information their entire lives and do not realize that educational segregation does not

positively impact their students (Alexander & Alexander, 2004). In fact, Felton (2017) found that while researchers observed that the racial test-score gap does not completely disappear when schools are integrated, Black students' scores go up while White students' scores stay the same. Sharing these types of statistics with parents within their communities is one way that rural school and district leaders can not only educate parents and community members, but also make them aware of the fact that educational segregation is not and should not be commonplace. If public-school teachers in rural districts experiencing educational segregation do not recognize that using charter schools and private schools as public segregation academies is problematic, we cannot expect people who are less informed about the educational landscape of the United States to distinguish that either.

Continuity Over Continuous Improvement

Participants from both rural school districts spoke at length about the effects of teacher and administrative turnover on academic achievement, student behavior, and teacher morale. Teacher recruitment and retention is a well-documented issue in rural school districts and has been for the past three decades (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Goldhaber et al., 2020; Monk, 2007). According to a local news article, one of the school systems observed in this study replaces at least a third of its teachers in a typical year. Buckman (2021) found that, particularly in schools that are experiencing low academic achievement scores, "teacher and leader stability remain a necessity to increase the performance" (p. 19). However, participants from both rural districts in this study asserted that their school and district leaders were frequently and repeatedly replaced in an effort to spur school improvement. Rather than continuously searching for the next best thing, rural district leaders and school board members should concentrate on continuity rather than continuous improvement. In doing so, their schools and school districts will improve as

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teachers and administrators become comfortable with and improve upon curricular and behavioral systems.

One way to decrease teacher turnover is to decrease administrative turnover. Buckman (2021) found that "the percentage of returning teachers increased as the same principals remained in the school, and there were higher percentages of returning teachers each year when there was no principal turnover" (p. 19). While participants in this study did not specifically refer to principal turnover when discussing teacher turnover, almost all of them believed that superintendent turnover affected both teacher and student retention in their rural districts. Kamrath (2022) studied the implications of superintendent turnover in rural school districts and his findings support this. He found that the majority of teachers in rural districts felt superintendent stability was needed for school success, and nearly all teachers in rural districts (84 out of 89, or 94%) felt superintendent stability was needed for school stability (Kamrath, 2022). However, while continuity is preferable to a revolving door of administrators, rural district leader and school boards must not become complacent but instead recognize when change would be more advantageous than the status quo.

Outsider participants frequently lamented the resistance to change that they found in their rural schools and communities. While they acknowledged that too much change was not helpful, they were also frustrated that beneficial changes were often blocked from occurring. In their opinion, rural communities are tight-knit and small, and community traditions are often deeply valued. However, this strong commitment to community "lends itself to biases, entrenched opinions, and a fear of new strategies that may need to be implemented" (Kamrath, 2022, p. 20). The biases and entrenched opinions in the rural districts included in this study were referenced by outsider participants as reasons they considered leaving rural education and education in

general. This is because "the engrained way of 'how we do things here' often reaches from the community into the school boards that govern the schools" (Kamrath, 2022, p. 20). To attract and retain teachers and administrators, rural school district leaders and school board members must work to balance the desire for continuity with the need for improvement. This can be done by thoroughly vetting new teachers and administrators, offering meaningful support, and giving new teachers and administrators in rural school districts ample time to settle in and make a difference.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study contribute to implications and suggestions for future research around the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural schools and school districts. As revealed in this study, female public-school teachers in rural communities' experiences and their understanding of these experiences are influenced by their own self-identity and sense of belonging. In this case, participants' identities as either insiders or outsiders in their rural schools and communities directly affected their understanding of their experiences and their feelings regarding educational segregation. However, further research is needed to determine what other factors influence the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural districts and whether insider and outsider identities are as significant in non-rural and non-public school settings. Additionally, quantitative research that uncovers the degree to which self-identity and sense of belonging affects the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural school district would be beneficial when determining how rural schools and school districts can best improve teacher satisfaction and morale. Future studies that assess the effectiveness of the recommendations given, including publicly challenging educational segregation and curbing teacher and

administrative turnover within rural communities, could provide evidence of successful or unsuccessful changes in rural school districts.

Conclusion

This qualitative study utilized an interpretive phenomenological methodology to determine how five female public-school teachers experienced working in rural schools and how educational segregation within the surrounding community affected those experiences. Through semi-structured interviews, participant journal entries, and document analysis, a composite understanding of the experiences of female public-school teachers in rural districts was crafted. While the rural context within which the study took place greatly influenced participants' experiences, their connection to and affiliation with their communities was of greater importance. Students, teachers, and schools in rural school districts and communities are frequently overlooked within the education literature, but this study encouraged five female public-school teachers from rural school districts to tell their stories. One participant lamented, "*Does anybody care that we're here*"? While historical data shows that educational researchers often overlook rural schools and school districts, this study will play a part in filling the current research gap. My aim in completing this study was to educate policy makers and educational researchers as to why they should care about students, teachers, and schools in rural communities, and my hope is that this study is one small step towards bringing that goal to fruition.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Superintendent Request

Good morning Mr. XXXX,

My name is Abigail Ruth, and I am a PhD candidate at Georgia State University in the Educational Policy Studies department. I am completing my dissertation research which focuses on the experiences of public school teachers in rural communities and I am looking to add more perspectives to my study. Currently, there are very few educational research studies that focus on rural communities and, as a former rural public school teacher, I feel that it is important to document the perspectives of rural teachers.

My study has been approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board and I would love to include the experiences of XXXXX XXXXX teachers in my research! Teachers who participate will remain anonymous, as will their school district/employer. All research activities will take place outside of school hours and will not require access to students, student or employee records, or school buildings. I will be happy to provide you with a consent form and further study details before contacting teachers within your district.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request. Please let me know what additional information you would like and/or what my next steps should be. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Best,

Abigail S. Ruth, M.Ed.
Graduate Assistant | Panther Parent Pride Program
Doctoral Candidate | Educational Policy Studies
Georgia State University
555 N. Indian Creek Drive, CL1204
Clarkston, GA 30021

Appendix B: Qualtrics Survey

Name:

E-mail address:

I am currently employed at:
- XXXX Elementary
- XXXX Elementary
- XXXX Elementary
- XXXX Middle School
- XXXX High School

My position is:

I began working in XXXX Schools in:
- 2018-2022
- 2015-2017
- Prior to 2015

I have previously worked as an administrator or in a district level position.
- Yes
- No

I am willing to participate in two to three semi-structured interviews between February 2023 and June 2023.
- Yes
- No

I am willing to complete two to three written responses between February 2023 and June 2023.
- Yes
- No

I have reviewed the attached informed consent document and give consent to be contacted by the researcher (Ms. Abigail Ruth).

Please note that answering yes does not mean that you will definitely participate in the study, but that you agree to be contacted further and are interested in possibly participating.

Click Here to Read Informed Consent Document
- Yes, I would like to participate in the study, if possible.
- Yes, I have reviewed the form but have more questions before I agree to participate in the study.
- No, I would not like to participate and do not wish to be contacted again.

Appendix C: Initial Participant Communication

Good morning,

I hope that you are doing well! My name is Abigail Ruth, and I am a Ph.D. student at Georgia State University.

Prior to beginning my graduate studies, I worked as a teacher in a rural school district, and I have decided to focus my own research on documenting the perspectives of rural teachers. Did you know that only 7% of educational research focuses on rural teachers and students? This means that policy makers at both the state and federal levels are uninformed about how to best support you.

My dissertation study is entitled "Forgotten Voices: Experiences of Public School Teachers in the Rural South" and has been reviewed by the Georgia State IRB. Participant confidentiality will be ensured.

If you are interested in learning more about the study, please respond through the included Qualtrics link (listed below). Upon the submission of the questionnaire, I will contact you via e-mail to discuss study participation in more detail.

Qualtrics Link: https://gsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form

I am looking forward to hearing from you soon!

Abigail S. Ruth, M.Ed.
Graduate Assistant | Panther Parent Pride Program
Doctoral Candidate | Educational Policy Studies
Georgia State University
555 N. Indian Creek Drive, CL1204
Clarkston, GA 30021

Title: Forgotten Voices
Principal Investigator: Dr. Janice B. Fournillier
Co-Investigator: Abigail S. Ruth

Participant Pseudonym Name: _____

Interviewer's Name _____ **Date of Interview** _____

INTRODUCTION
> • Thank you …
> • Introduce myself …
> • Purpose of the interview …

The purpose of this study is to explore public school teachers' experiences in rural communities in the United States' South. The purpose of today's interview is to inquire about your experiences as a public school teacher. You are being interviewed because you have volunteered to participate in the study. The interview will include three parts. The first part will center on your experiences as a public school teacher. The second part will center on how you have experienced changes within your school and school district and the third part will focus on how you have perceived support of public education within your local community.

Interview Questions – Public School Teacher Experiences (Part 1)
1. Tell me about your experiences as a public school teacher in this district.
> a. Why public schools?
> b. Why a rural public school?

2. How long have you been a teacher in this district/school?
> i. How did you come to work in this specific district/school?
> ii. What made you decide to work here over other districts/schools?
> iii. Did you work in another school/district before this one? If so, how do they differ?

3. What was your experience in your first year (or several years) working as a classroom teacher in this district/school?
> i. Describe what a typical day/week looks like for you.
> ii. Describe a memorable experience in your first year (or several years) working as a classroom teacher in this district/school.

4. What experiences thus far have been the most significant to you while working in this district/school?
> i. Can you provide specific examples?
> ii. How did those experiences make you feel?

5. What experiences thus far have been the most challenging for you while working in this district/school?
        i. Can you provide specific examples?
        ii. How did those experiences make you feel?

6. What experiences have been most surprising to you?
        i. Can you provide specific examples?
        ii. How did those experiences make you feel?

Interview Questions – Change Experiences (Part 2)
1. Tell me about any changes that you have experienced during your time working here.
        i. Please describe your experience with this change.
        ii. Do you believe the change was positive or negative overall? Why?
        iii. How did this change make you feel?

2. How did those changes affect your day-to-day life?
        i. Please describe an experience that exemplifies how your life has changed.
        ii. How do you feel about how your life has changed?

3. How did those changes affect the community overall?
        i. Please describe an experience that exemplifies how your life has changed.
        ii. How do you feel about how your life has changed?
        iii. Do you believe that your identity as a public school teacher has affected how you have experienced these changes?

4. Do you think those changes affected you more or less than other members of the community?
        i. Why or why not?
        ii. Can you describe a specific experience that led you to believe that you were affected differently that others?

5. What else would you like to share with me about your experience with changes made in your district/school?

Interview Questions – Public Education Support (Part 3)

1. Tell me about what you have learned about the culture of public schools through working in this community.
        i. If you have worked in other districts/schools, how does the culture of this district/school differ from those?
        ii. What do you feel contributes to the culture of this district/school?

2. Please describe an experience that you feel signifies how your community supports public schools.
        i. How did that experience make you feel?
        ii. Did it change your perception of the community or community members? How so?

iii. Can you provide any other specific examples?

3. If applicable, please describe an experience that you feel signifies how your community does not support public schools.
      i. How did that experience make you feel?
      ii. Did it change your perception of the community or community members? How so?
      iii. Can you provide any other specific examples?

4. Has your perception of being supported changed at any time during your career? How so?
      i. If so, what event or phenomenon do you feel caused that change?
      ii. How did that event or phenomenon result in that change?

5. What else would you like to share with me about public education support in this community?

WRAP-UP Thank you for participating in the interview…
      • Remember that the thoughts you shared with me today will be used to …
      • Remember that your identity will remain private. What was said will remain confidential.
      • I will send you the transcript to review…
      • My contact information is … if you have any questions or concerns …

Appendix E: Journal Entry Prompts

Journal Entry One:

How would you describe teacher, principal, and superintendent turnover in your school/district? If there is frequent turnover, where do employees typically go (other schools/districts or do they leave education)? In your opinion, do the best employees stay or leave? Please provide specific examples, if possible.

Journal Entry Two:

While often used interchangeably, desegregation and integration are two distinct processes. Desegregation is the ending of segregation by race, while integration refers to all racial groups consciously mixing and receiving fair treatment within a desegregated environment. Based on your own experiences, are the public, private, and charter schools in your community desegregated or integrated? Please provide answers for each type of school and provide specific examples or experiences that explain your reasoning.

Appendix F: Informed Consent

Title: Forgotten Voices: Experiences of Public School Teachers in the Rural South

Principal Investigator: Dr. Janice B. Fournillier

Student Principal Investigator: Abigail S. Ruth

Purpose
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore public school teachers' experiences in rural communities in the United States' South. You are invited to participate because you have self-identified as a public school teacher in a rural community. A total of up to ten people will be invited to participate in this study.

Your role in the study will last no more than 10 hours over a period of six months.

You will be asked to do the following: participate in three interviews (60-90 minutes) that can take place over the phone or online (Zoom) and provide up to four written 500-750 word reflections. Reviewing the interview transcript may take up to an additional 60 minutes of your time. Participating in this study will not expose you to any more risks than you would experience in a typical day.

This study is not designed to benefit you. Overall, we hope to gain information about the experiences of rural public school teachers in the United States.

Procedures
If you decide to take part, you will be interviewed three times for a period of 60-90 minutes. Interview questions will focus on your experiences as a public school teacher in a rural community, how you have perceived community support of public education, how you have experienced changes within your school and school district, and how you interpret your experiences. You will be asked to provide up to four written reflections of 500-750 words that will correspond to topics discussed during the interviews. These written reflections may take 60-90 minutes. You will be asked to review the interview transcripts, which may require an additional 60 minutes of your time. Study participation will span six months. You will interact with the Student PI throughout the study.

Interviews will be conducted over the phone or online (Zoom). Interviews will be audio/video recorded and transcribed. Interview data will be stored in a firewall and encrypted computer in the Student PI's home office.

Future Research
Researchers will remove information that may identify you and your institution. Researchers may use your data for future research. If we do this, we will not ask for any additional consent from you.

Risks
In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. No injury is expected from this study, but if you believe you have been harmed, contact the research team as soon as possible. Georgia State University and the research team have not set aside funds to compensate for any injury.

Benefits
This study is not designed to benefit you. Overall, we hope to gain information about the experiences of rural public school teachers in the United States.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. You may refuse to take part in the study or stop at any time.

Confidentiality
We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:
  • Dr. Janice B. Fournillier, PI and Abigail S. Ruth, Student PI
  • GSU Institutional Review Board
  • Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

The information you provide will be stored on a password- and firewall-protected computer. When we present or publish the results of this study, we will use ensure that all identifying data is kept anonymous.

Contact Information
Contact Dr. Janice B. Fournillier at jfournillier@gsu.edu
  • If you have questions about the study or your part in it
  • If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu.

Consent
We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.
If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant   Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent   Date