Race, Place, and Youth Identity: Critical Ethnographic Participatory Action Research on Youth Perceptions of Race and Racism in the Rural West

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Abstract

This qualitative study combined critical youth participatory research and ethnographic methods to investigate rural youth relationships to race and racism, which are currently undertheorized. The research question guiding this inquiry was: How do rural youth describe the salience of race and racism in the United States (U.S.) for themselves personally, and for the U.S. as a collective? This ethnographic study included 12 high school-aged youth, six global majority youth and six white youth, from the rural Inland Northwest region of the U.S. All participants/co-researchers had previously been students in the researcher's middle school class between 2017-2020. Data included transcripts from five participatory summer sessions during which participants/co-researchers shared their own experiences with race and racism in and out of school, learned from peers, and envisioned ways adults can better support youth in the future. Conversations included small and whole group formats. Individual follow-up interviews with youth were conducted after the summer sessions concluded. Data were analyzed using grounded methods including open, inductive coding, participant checks, and triangulation. Findings include youth rationale for engaging in race talk, distinct ways global majority youth and white youth experience race, critical analysis of race at school, as well as youth-generated recommendations for making schools more truthful, welcoming spaces for youth to be and learn.

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This dissertation was a community effort years in the making and I am thankful to have become a researcher in my own community, in this way. My major professor Dr. Vanessa Anthony Stevens helped me become a better teacher, colleague, mother, and friend. I am endlessly thankful that she said yes to joining me in middle school and later invited me into her own teaching and research. My committee members- Dr. Philip Stevens, Dr. Sydney Freeman, and Dr. Janine Darragh- encouraged me, helped sharpen my work, and asked me critical questions that supported my growth as a teacher/researcher and human. My dissertation sisters- Eulalia Gallegos Buitron, Angel Sabotta, Lysa Salsbury, and Iva Moss Redman are powerful thinkers and mothers, and their many edits, prayers, and positive messages made the most challenging days feel less lonely. Writing regularly with Sarah Deming, another sister on my path to a Ph.D., made the long days, weeks, and months it took to craft a dissertation possible. My colleagues at 'Wheatfield' helped to raise me as a teacher, alongside my own children, I am lucky to share this messy, beautiful adventure with them. Working with the Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives team helped me to become a more truthful teacher. Thank you to Kenneth Morris Jr., Nettie Washington Douglass, Erica Mock, and the FDFI family for entrusting me to help share the legacies of Anna, Frederick, and the family with young people near and far. The Indigenous Knowledge for Effective Education family at the University of Idaho taught me to be responsible and answerable in my relationships, research, and pedagogy. Our shared work in Indigenous education sustains me and makes me hopeful for the future. My colleagues and students in the College of Education, Health and Human Science welcomed me into higher education and have shown me how much fun it can be to teach and research in a place full of grownups. As a preschool and middle school teacher at heart, I had to see it to believe it!

Lastly, and most importantly, I am grateful for the members of the Rural Youth Research Collaborative. Your voices and visions are powerful, thank you for trusting me with your stories.

Dedication

Conducting this research with members of the Rural Youth Research Collaborative, former students who I have had the good luck to know and work with over many years, has been one of the most joyful seasons of my life. This time was also a period of deep grief over the losses of loved ones Hobart Darter, Nick Ogle, Annie Marie Boysen-Ross, Kaylee Goncalves, and Dawn Picken- five people who made my world feel brighter, more joyful, and full of possibility. Over the summer of 2022 and into fall my co-researchers' dedication to justice, humor, courage, and empathy offered a strong counterbalance to the grief I felt with news of each person's passing. My persistence in this research during a challenging season in my life was fueled by the urgency and beauty of these young researchers' stories and future visions. I am deeply thankful for the time teaching, learning, and doing life alongside them and their families over many years.

I am grateful to my community and family, who encourage and support me in countless ways and for whom I ultimately engage in this work. To the women in my circle of family and friends- your belief in my ability to do hard things and the badass examples you set doing the same in your own lives astounds and inspires me. To my parents Sue and Richard Boysen, and their partners Nick Beschen and Dr. Susan Norwood-Boysen, your steadfast support as I learned to navigate life as a mother scholar has been a gift- thank you. To my brother Jess and his children Kaylea, Kayla, and Kalib- thank you for making me an auntie. To my brother Paul, sister-in-law Ashley, and their boys Beau and Ellis, who keep me grounded in the love and fun of our extended family. To Erik, Isabella, and Jackson- this was a true family effort! Without the three of you supporting me, feeding me, hugging me, joining me in this work as though partners, and sharing your own joys and struggles I would have surely given up long ago. Thank you for making sure I knew that I could and should tuck myself away to learn, dream, research, and write for this season. I love you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction, Talking about Race with Rural Youth

Becoming the Rural Youth Research Collaborative

On a cold February afternoon in 2018, I circled up in a rural middle school classroom with my co-teacher, Dr. Vanessa Anthony-Stevens, and our 7th-grade students to wrap up a trimester-long course on slavery and abolition in the United States. As we settled into the circle, students began to reflect on the experience of speaking and learning about race and racism at school, an experience that was a rare chance to consider a topic commonly associated with stigma and fear. Partway through the conversation, after Vanessa posed a question about how we might make the course better for students the next year a white student, Stewart[1], expressed disappointment that he had not learned the right words to say:

> *Stewart (white):* Hey, so Vanessa?
>
> *Vanessa (white):* Yeah?
>
> *Stewart:* Wasn't your question about how we can make this class better? I feel like we weren't actually taught what the correct terms are in this class. And that was, like, the number one thing that I wanted to learn.
>
> *Vanessa*: That's a fair comment and question…I don't know what the correct terms are. Because language is something that lives with people and communities and people and communities are changing, it depends on where we are. I think you all talked about, um, the 'N' word and the way that it's been used differently and the way that we use it and apply it and depending on who says it, it has a different meaning. That's…my sort of complicated answer, and my less complicated answer is- we probably should spend more time on that.
>
> *Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German):* Adding on to you, Vanessa… it depends on the person. Language is something that's very powerful, and a lot of people have different, they prefer different words. Like I know that my grandma's okay with being called an Indian, whereas I don't like that because it's not the correct terminology in my opinion. And I think that, like, the way that people use the 'N' word in, like, music and culture is changing and, like, depending on the human being, you're gonna have to use different words in different context …there's no correct way, um, with words, like it just really does depend on the person you're talking to.

---

[1] All youth names are pseudonyms.

As a teacher, hearing Stewart's concern that he had not learned the right words to say was hard for me because understanding race was about far more than saying the right words. I wondered how to make the concepts we were grappling with more accessible to students. Vanessa encouraged him to consider context with nuance and complicated the idea that there are right words to say. Parker, who is Cree, Assiniboine, and German, illustrated this point with her own experience of language living with people in complex, dynamic ways.

During the three-month-long course leading up to this conversation, students-- 80% of whom were white and all of whom had attended a rural k-8 school in Northern Idaho -- struggled to understand our collective past in connection with our collective present. Some students could describe racism as simultaneously occurring on individual, systemic, and cultural levels, demonstrating emergent racial literacy, while others failed to move beyond a simplistic concept of racism as individual meanness or something that existed in the past but was no longer relevant (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). I sensed that my students were anxious with both planned and unplanned talk about race, perhaps in part due to a societal preoccupation with denying the salience of race and in part due to a lack of experience talking about race at school. This stood in stark contrast to my earlier teaching experiences in racially and ethnically diverse classrooms in New York and Los Angeles, where race and culture were discussed openly and regularly by students and teachers, albeit not always in the most accurate, helpful ways. My concerns were based on what I observed in my own rural classroom, but they were not unique to my situation. Americans, particularly white Americans, often fail to acknowledge and engage with the remnants of history we live with today (Asante & Dove, 2021; Helms, 2020; McKinney, 2005). This is due, in large part, to a standard historical narrative that omits stories that do not uphold the dominant perspective, obscuring important connections between past and present. (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2015; Ibrahim, 2008; Muhammad, 2022).

Rationale for the Study

Conversation about the salience of race and racism in America, public and private, is fraught with ideological tensions, often contradictory and knotted. There is clear and persistent evidence of institutionalized racial inequity with deep historic roots (Crenshaw, 1995, 2017; Patel, 2015). Many Americans believe we can best resolve issues of racial

inequity by avoiding race talk altogether (Benson & Fiarman, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Pollock, 2004b). Yet scholarship indicates this silence serves to maintain white supremacy and racial division, rather than resolve them (Banks, 2021; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Castagno, 2009, 2014; Moffitt et al., 2021). Generalized discomfort around race talk, particularly in overwhelmingly white spaces is problematic and reinforces the status quo. The polarized public conversation about whether, and how, to talk about race and racism with youth also centers on adult perspectives. Youth voices, particularly those of rural youth, are notably absent from this debate. While there is related research on attitudes about race and racism among rural white folks (Anthony-Stevens, Boysen-Taylor, et al., 2022; Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; Lensmire, 2017), teacher experiences with race talk in schools (Benson & Fiarman, 2019; Castagno, 2009; Pollock, 2004b), and navigating conversations about race in teacher preparation (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; B. Tatum, 1992), there is a lack of research that explicitly addresses understandings of identity, race, and racism among rural youth in and out of classroom spaces. To begin to remedy this situation, I sought to build on the foundation of our three cycles of collaborative action-research in middle school in 2017-2020 (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2022), investigating rural youth experiences with and perspectives on race and racism in this study.

Since 2015, I have been learning about rural youth perceptions of race and racism, in and out of school. Prompted by a schoolwide curricular mapping project in my role as a middle school teacher, I had the opportunity to envision a new 7th-grade humanities course. I was in my sixth year of teaching at the time and had worked in a wide variety of educational settings, including large, diverse urban schools in the South Bronx and Los Angeles. Guided by my work as a teacher and personal commitment to constructivist, culturally responsive teaching, I approached the curriculum mapping project with the goal of increasing the diversity of stories, voices, and histories my students learned about to build historical and racial literacies. As is the case in many other schools, American history, African American history, and African American literature were under-represented in the K-8 curriculum (Chandler, 2015; King, 2016) at “Wheatfield”[2], a predominately (85%) white public charter

[2] The school name is a pseudonym.

school located in a rural college town in northern Idaho. Our curriculum at the time leaned heavily toward environmental studies and community service, but those issues were often framed in Eurocentric ways. In my own class, I incorporated a curriculum developed educational non-profit EL Education, whose expeditionary school model is used at Wheatfield, to create an interdisciplinary English language arts/social studies course with an inquiry focus. This course paired an EL unit, titled *The People Could Fly*, which focused on the writings of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, Virginia Hamilton, and Harlem Renaissance poets with a study of modern-day slavery and abolition that I developed to connect past and present. The curriculum unit I used was originally developed by EL for use in primarily urban contexts. I do not believe that any curriculum should be used as-is without making adjustments based on what I know about the materials I am using, my teaching context, and my students' varied entry points, background knowledge, and interests.

I struggled to balance staying one step ahead of student needs and being fully present during our time learning together. Urgent questions about what was happening in the classroom as students learned to discuss race together (many for the first time) led me to seek guidance from a diverse range of local and national experts in anthropology, sociology, history, law, non-profit advocacy, community organizing, and education. As my students and I learned from a wider variety of voices, we built cultural and racial literacies (King, 2016; Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). I also wanted to build mutually beneficial relationships, so I made it a practice to ensure the students had the time, supplies, and support to write to the people we worked with each semester, summarizing what they appreciated or wondered about after a visit. I also asked if there was any way we could support their work, a question that led us to take up many authentic projects over the years, including social media videos promoting *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* writing bios for award nominees, curriculum development projects, and the creation of digital timelines and books showcasing diverse Idaho histories. But first, let me share a little about our partners.

Well before regular Zoom meetings became part of the k-12 educational landscape during the COVID-19 Pandemic, I learned to use Skype so that students could connect with Kenneth Morris Jr., a modern-day abolitionist working to prevent human trafficking. Ken is a descendant of Frederick Douglass, Anna Murray Douglass, and Booker T. Washington, and

carries on his family's freedom-fighting legacy. Ken connected us with Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives co-founder, Robert Benz, who was working on educational outreach efforts to prevent human trafficking. In year two, we began working with Christine Platt, an author and the managing director of the Anti-Racist Research and Policy Center at American University, based in Washington, D.C. The support of a growing group of collaborators from a wide variety of disciplines and contexts who had varied racial/ethnic backgrounds and geographic locations helped my students and me to think about our histories and daily lives from a wider variety of perspectives. These were the early days of a community of practice focused on racial justice and equity that continues today (Wenger, 1999). We operated with shared engagement, purpose, and commitment to transformation, all aspects of what Lave and Wenger (1991) described as a situated learning community, where people come together with an intentional focus, a commitment to learn together, the opportunity to ask questions and problem-solve, and the intention to make change.

Starting in the second year that I taught the new 7th grade humanities course, Dr. Vanessa Anthony-Stevens invited my students and me to our local land grant university, where she works in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, to gather with professors of education, American Indian Studies, anthropology, and sociology to learn about the social construction of race, racial terminology through time, and the durable, flexible ways race has been used to justify thefts of land and labor from Indigenous and African American communities by settler colonizers. The workshops on the Roots of Racism that Dr. Anthony-Stevens organized have become an annual event for Wheatfield's 7th-graders. During these sessions, my students and I learned about ways our multifaceted histories have been strategically silenced and rewritten to assert dominance and maintain power. My own process of (un)learning and learning about history, culturally responsive teaching pedagogy, and critical research in education deepened during this time (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2015; Ali & McCarty, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Paris & Winn, 2014). I will be the first to say that some of those lessons took me a long time to learn. I view and experience this work as a continual process of becoming a teacher and it can feel vulnerable and frustrating at times. As one example, it took me years to realize that beginning a course centering African American narratives when the first enslaved Africans arrived in North America was starting

too late for students to understand and appreciate the rich cultures present in Africa prior to colonization. In fact, this timing may have reinforced false negative stereotypes about African and African American peoples. To remedy this issue, I developed a unit on Ancient Africa as the new starting point for the class. This change helped students to build important background knowledge and appreciation for the complexity and diversity of African peoples, languages, and contexts. I am thankful to know better now, and I carry responsibility for my prior teaching-- limited as it was by my own educational foundations.

The answers to my original urgent questions about how to better support discussions about race, civics, and history in the classroom, led me to dislike the word “expert” and to start using the term “guest teacher” instead. Viewed through the lens of critical theory, the term “expert” privileges those with power, primarily those with academic and institutional credentials, often to the exclusion of community cultural knowledge and the knowledge of women. This is one aspect of what is included and excluded in the official (standards, curriculum, and master narratives) and hidden (ways of being in and ‘doing’ school) curricula that inform social and cultural education in schools (Apple, 2013; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1980; Giroux & Penna, 1979; Patel, 2015). Informed by the work of these critical theorists and my own experiences, the classroom became a community and knowledge building project where my students and I learned through shared dialogue and inquiry. Guest teachers, families, and students asked compelling questions, suggested curricular additions, and contributed to course changes. During four years of curricular evolutions (2016-2020), our learning community discussed and developed new opportunities for students to investigate ancient African cultures and technology, conduct critical historical inquiry using primary sources, research hidden histories of Idaho, and connect past-present-national-local in our work. It was messy, generative, and community-building.

Action research between 2017-2020 allowed Vanessa and I to connect what we saw in the classroom to literature on identity, culturally responsive teaching, and the ways that white teachers approach or avoid race conversations at school (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Castagno, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Pollock, 2005; Tatum, 1992; Tatum, 1997). In 2017, Benjamin Doucette, a college athlete and secondary social studies teacher education student, was a student in Vanessa’s Teaching Culturally Diverse

Learners course and was assigned to my classroom for his practicum as a participant observer. He quickly became our co-teacher and helped us gather and analyze data related to youth perceptions of race and racism in connection with the process of historical inquiry we facilitated. Through grounded analysis of data, we saw many connections with Pollock's 'race wrestling' (Pollock, 2004b). We observed students struggle with race as important because it was a contentious topic in the media and in everyday conversations where race talk is avoided or obscured based on the ideology that race is unimportant and that all people are equal (a position that denies the everyday salience of race). Together we grappled with the ways we spoke about, thought about, and taught about race in the classroom.

After each winter's class ended, many students would stay in touch with me and Vanessa through email, conversation, a writing group for young writers of color facilitated by guest teacher/author Christine Platt, various academic conference presentations, and text chains where we shared personal celebrations and discussed current events related to our conversations in 7th-grade. Informed by our previous teaching and current events, the class began to feel more relevant over time. In the second year of the class, Donald Trump was elected president and proceeded to use rhetoric that seeded racial division and reinforced white, patriarchal views; a media focus on police violence against people of color sparked Black Lives Matter protests across the nation; and far right legislators pushed back against calls for justice and a national racial reconning by attacking diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts through anti-Critical Race Theory (anti-CRT) bills (O'Connor et al., 2023). The public debate about whether and how to teach about history and current racism in America has chilled teachers' willingness, and in some cases their capacity to discuss race and identity with students (Pollock et al., 2022). These events deeply concerned us, and we reached out to one another to process what was happening and think about how to respond, even as we have moved into new roles, schools, and life stages. This ongoing connection was supported by life in a small town. I often run into former students and their families, particularly since my son was a student in one of the three classes, as was Vanessa's daughter. Our connections to each other were reinforced by life in a rural place where our roles and relationships were frequently intertwined. We would run into each other at the grocery store, say hello at sporting and social events, and wave to each other near the high school in the morning as we

head to work and school. At the time of this work, my former middle school students were in high school, and I had recently become a faculty member in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the local university.

Youth voices, particularly rural youth voices, are rarely part of discussions and decisions that impact youth. In the summer of 2022, my former students and I formed the Rural Youth Research Collaborative as a space to intentionally center youth voices. While the dissertation process spurred on and supported this action, this dissertation is a small piece of larger work in which we have been engaged and will continue. Our collaborative was born from the desire for space to gather as co-researchers continuing our work understanding and discussing our experiences with race and racism. We are invested in the work of dismantling racism. This present study examines understandings of identity, race, and place that former students shared during our Summer Sessions on Race, held during July and August 2022.

Study Purpose and Research Question

To better understand how youth experience and understand race I conducted this ethnographic, participatory research project with former middle school students who were participants in classroom research between 2017-2020. The goal of this study was to add to a growing body of literature about how race is experienced, understood, and enacted in predominantly white spaces (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; Bucholtz, 2011; Castagno, 2014; B. E. Cross et al., 2018; Lensmire, 2017; Nayak, 2007; Tanner, 2018). All 48 youth from the original research project were invited to participate. The purpose of this study was to examine the development of rural youth identity over time, in and out of school spaces, including how race is discussed or avoided by youth. This study is informed by scholarship on critical youth studies, race, place, and rurality. Findings build on previous research into perceptions of race and racism.

Research Question

The specific question guiding this study was:

- How do rural youth describe the salience of race and racism in the United States (U.S.) for themselves personally, and for the U.S. as a collective?

To these ends, I set out to create a space where youth could share stories, ask questions, and imagine futures. Analysis of our conversations focused on youth perceptions, language-textual meaning-making, and relationships between identity and place (Fairclough, 2003; Maira & Soep, 2005; Nayak, 2004; Tatum, 1997).

In upcoming chapters, I outline the theoretical and conceptual work that informed this study, gave me pause, and makes up the conceptual constellation I developed for investigating youth identity. I navigated this work with a desire to learn and teach about difficult histories and their legacies with nuanced, truthful collaboration as my north star. Toward that end, I also relied on other interconnected stars that helped me examine the varied ways individuals and communities impact and are impacted by the social construction and ongoing maintenance of race. These guiding stars were theoretical work on identity, race, and place.

Chapter 2: The Literature on Youth Identity, Race, and Place

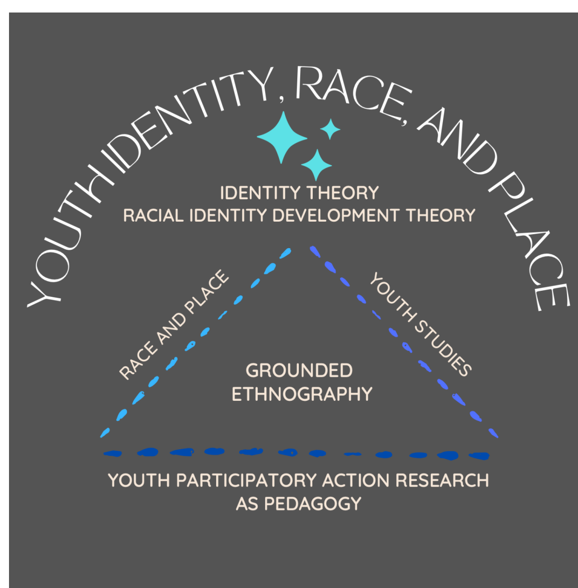
A Conceptual Framework for Inquiry

The conceptual and theoretical stars I use as guides in this study form a conceptual framework for examining youth identity, race, and place. Solnit (2008) described constellations in a way that resonated with me as I gathered the lenses and theories that collectively form the foundation for this study. She wrote, "The stars we are given. The constellations we make. That is to say, stars exist in the cosmos, but constellations are the imaginary lines we draw between them, the readings we give the sky, the stories we tell" (p.165). As a qualitative researcher with many existing theories and frameworks from which to choose, I drew lines between those I view as most applicable, complementary, and necessary for nuanced inquiry given my topic, purpose, context, and positionality as a researcher embedded in my community. These theories and lenses, in combination, form a strong foundation from which to examine youth identity in context, over time. They are arranged visually in Figure 1 (below). This design is supported by a youth-centered, participatory orientation on which I elaborate in the upcoming methods section.

To investigate rural youth understandings of race and racial identity, I drew primarily on identity theory and racial identity development theory. Identity theory addresses the ways people become aware of, communicate, enact, and reflect upon their identities (P. J. Burke & Stets, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Because identity is intersectional, I did not expect participant experiences to align neatly with theory. Instead, I viewed theories and lenses as useful reference points to consider alongside participant experiences to see where they aligned, diverged, and complicated existing literature. The lens of Youth Studies acknowledges youth as experts on youth identity (Ali & McCarty, 2020; A. L. Best, 2007; Bucholtz, 2002). Examining identity, race, and place critically (Ali & McCarty, 2020; Giroux, 1980; Paris & Winn, 2014; Steinberg & Ibrahim, 2016) was a way to account for the influences of histories and epistemologies that shape identity development toward a transformative purpose. Within Youth Studies, Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2003, 2013) and Critical Whiteness Studies (Lensmire, 2017; Nayak, 2007; Tanner, 2018) offered additional lenses that bring into focus the influence of racialized policies, institutional practices, and social norms on identity development and experience. Specific to

Youth Studies the concept of Youthscapes (Maira & Soep, 2005) illuminates the connections and complexities of global, national, cultural, and local influences on youth.

Figure 1: Conceptual Constellation



These distinct yet connected approaches helped me make sense of what rural youth in the Inland Northwest said about their identities and experiences as young people living in a racialized society and what their interactions while doing so indicated.

Identity Development

To analyze youth identity for this study I drew on work from many disciplines, critically considering the strengths and limitations of prior work as well as its applicability to my own research question and purpose. Early academic scholarship on identity development arose from the social sciences. Psychologists studied individual processes of self-definition (Marcia, 1980). Sociologists contributed to identity studies by studying "internal and external processes" (Mead & Morris, 1934) of social identity construction and belonging. Finally, anthropologists called for identity development to be documented and analyzed as a situated, culturally bound process (Best, 2011; Erikson, 1968; Holland et al., 2001). Individual identity has been described as interactional (Gee et al., 2001; Gordon, 2009), formed and reformed through everyday exchanges (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Blumer, 2012; Goffman, 1959). According to Holland et al. (2001): "People tell themselves who they are,

but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are" (p. 3). The intertwining interactions between self and others are influenced by context, socioeconomics, geography, and socio-cultural history. Work by Bakhtin et al. (1986), Freire (1970), and Vygotsky and Cole (1978), focused on critical examination of ways power relations and history significantly influence identity development and the performance of identity within human communities. Newer trends in identity scholarship, brought forth by decolonizing, feminist, and critical scholars, particularly those in the field of anthropology, approach identity development with greater nuance and attention to multiple perspectives by rejecting oversimplified, generalized claims about identity development as a "universal" process (Bucholtz, 2002). Current scholarship on identity also demonstrates a commitment to centering the local and specific. Attending to the local and specific is particularly important because context influences the way people are aware of, impacted by, and willing to discuss their experiences with and ideas about race and racism.

Identity Theory

Individuals develop their identities in relation to others: we are social beings with multiple, overlapping identities. Additionally, identities include our inner worlds and imaginations. Identity Theory is a multifaceted lens used to understand identity development and enactment. Burke and Stets (2009) describe Identity Theory as seeking to explain "...how the specific meanings that individuals have for the multiple identities they claim; how these identities relate to one another for any one person; how their identities influence their behavior, thoughts, and feelings or emotions; and how their identities tie them to societies at large" (p. 3). Identity Theory states that our identities are composites of our many roles (e.g., mother, teacher, teenager), group memberships (e.g., political affiliation, race, religion), and person identities (individual traits) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These identities function similarly. People learn who they are from observing others, acting in line with expectations, expressing variety, and being attentive to how others respond. These responses are based on social expectations for their roles. Some roles have flexible expectations, and some are quite specific. At the heart of Identity Theory is the idea that people want to be known, or in Identity Theorist terminology, to have their identities 'verified' by others during social interactions (Gee, 2000; Stets & Cast, 2007). When verification of identity does not happen,

people may retreat from interactions and question their roles (P. J. Burke & Stets, 2009). They may also develop negative self-perceptions as a result.

Our social identities function to help us to reduce uncertainty, establish and maintain connections to others, and exercise control. Learning that we share roles, group memberships, or person identities with someone else can bind us to them and nurture a sense of belonging. Aspects of identity can also serve as a wedge if we perceive that an aspect of our identity puts us at odds with another group. Identities can become easier to describe by referencing an alternate or opposing identity. The social structures and social norms we live with are made up of patterns of individual social interactions over time and are often framed as binary. Additionally, individual identity is influenced by the status and resources, or social positions, that accompany our role and group identities (Holland et al., 2001). In this study, I was interested in identifying patterns of interactions, within the stories youth shared, that illuminated the social structures and norms operating in participants' everyday lives. Identity Theory was practical for this purpose because it helped me to nest the observations youth make related to racial identity as an important interconnected aspect of their larger social identities.

Identity as Multiple and Intersectional

As described by Crenshaw (1991), identity is intersectional in nature with multiple aspects of identity overlapping uniquely for each individual. Social identity influences and is influenced by social interactions, according to the norms of the various spaces a person inhabits as a function of their many role, group, and person identities. According to Bucholtz (2011), "No single aspect of identity is independent of other aspects. Race and ethnicity are not separable from other components of identity such as gender, social class, sexuality, and so on, and an individual's identity cannot be arrived at simply by listing the social categories to which she or he is assigned" (p. 2). Identity is layered and dependent on an ever-shifting mosaic of influencing factors. For these reasons, considering multiple dimensions of identity situated in context is essential for those seeking to understand social identity and its impact on lived experience.

Situated Identity Negotiations

Erickson (2004) described identity as “performed or situated” (p. 150). The performance of identity can vary widely from context to context for the same individual. To illustrate this variability, imagine a person in the different personal and professional situations they might find themselves in during an average week. Cultural norms, status, race, gender, power, and politics influence the way we see ourselves, are seen by others, and enact our identities in various settings. Gee (2000) proposed approaching social identity as “...an analytic lens through which to reflect on interactions” (p. 116). Studying the tangible impacts of socially constructed identities on everyday life using the lens of identity theory offers insight into ways that individual roles, group membership, and contexts impact human experiences. We negotiate our identities in what Gee (2015) referred to as “big D Discourse”, or the particular contextualized conversations we are part of based on our roles (as an example there are particular ways that teachers and students relate at school) and through little d discourse which is the way we use speech and gesture. Gee (2015) held that social identity is performed in context-specific, or situated, enactments (Discourse) and can be analyzed through by attention to people’s language-in-use (discourse). As an example, in different situations (Discourses), a person might use language differently in ways that are uniquely suited to their conversation partners and roles by code-switching. That might look like using the same language in different ways (e.g.: a lawyer uses formal, domain-specific English at her law office and vernacular English with friends in her neighborhood) or speaking different languages in different settings (e.g.: a bilingual teacher speaks academic English and Mandarin Chinese at work but speaks Cantonese at home with his grandfather). By analyzing enactments of spoken or written language-in-use, the ways people situate their identities in context through language becomes visible (Paris & Winn, 2014).

Youth Identity

The concept of adolescence in the United States was born in the late 1800s as society and scientists reflected on and processed an era of tremendous social change brought about by colonization, immigration, and industrialization (Hall, 1904; Lesko, 2012; Petrone et al., 2021). Theories about the nature of adolescence were developed and used to support social programs and policies that taught people to interact and contribute to society in socially and

economically desirable ways according to the dominant norms of the day. Psychologists describe identity development as a process that occurs throughout a person's lifetime and as a crisis to be resolved (Erikson, 1968). In Erikson's view, the resolution of crisis, or confusion, is necessary to move on to the next of eight life stages. One critique of this way of conceptualizing identity is that this deficit framing, in which more is always needed, is a Western perspective that is individualistic and presumptive. There is not a universal experience of identity development across our lifespans, nor is there a universal teenage experience.

Marcia (1980) built on Erikson's work by conceptualizing identity development as an internal structure or drive that develops within individuals. It is an iterative, nuanced cycle of becoming. Abes et al. (2007) extended Erikson's work, mapping the complexities of identity formation to propose a model of multiple dimensions of identity that considers individual and social identity with relation to context. This latter model has been widely cited and applied in studies of identity development. While the focus of identity studies in psychology is primarily on the self rather than on social influences, Schachter and Galliher (2018) revisited Erikson's work 50 years after the publication of *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, calling for scholars to take up Erikson's "complex twining of the personal and the social" (p. 2) because the ways our internal and cultural understandings, expectations, and experiences interact have not been given adequate attention as they relate to one another. This is particularly important when we consider the ways that race, age, gender, sexuality, and other facets of identity manifest in each individual and in community. By giving attention to a fuller concept of identity development, this study builds on the prior work of researchers and theorists with an eye toward nuanced, critical inquiry.

From a sociological perspective, identity develops through social interactions influenced by culture, history, and place. Sociologists posit that globalization has changed the process of identity construction in many parts of the world by concentrating identity exploration activities in a socially constructed period of emerging adulthood called adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Furlong, 2009; Lesko, 2012). In other words, according to sociologists, the extended period between childhood and adulthood is a modern invention. They attribute the roots of this period of transition, in which the individual is preparing for

adulthood but is not yet fully responsible, to tensions between the needs of industrializing economies and from the efforts of labor and educational rights movements in the 19th and 20th centuries (Wyn, 2009). These movements coincided with the rise of individualism, a term coined in Europe in the early 1800s. A focus on individualism, along with the popular myth of meritocracy, can mask the influences of race, socioeconomic status, and socio-cultural norms on everyday life (Bauman, 2000; Gee, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Kotlowitz, 1992). To illustrate this point, consider how socioeconomic status, race, and socio-cultural norms may impact the duration and nature of adolescence. Burton's (1997) ethnography of African American teens in an urban context is an example of youth ages 11-18 who navigate the complexities of overlapping 'older child' status at school and 'adult' status outside of school while working to contribute financially to their families. The interlocking influences of wealth inequality, racial disparities in education, and a limited supply of low-wage jobs create a layered period that is not easily delineated or navigated. Youth in Burton's study struggled to identify as older children at school because of their experiences as working adults and struggled to be working adults because they also had lives as teenagers and responsibilities as high school students. This example complicates oversimplified characterizations of modern adolescence as a period of responsibility-free preparation for adulthood.

Anthropologists and sociologists differ when it comes to defining the cause of adolescence. Though modernity has certainly influenced the characteristics of adolescence in many parts of the world, anthropologists point out that this stage between childhood and adulthood is not a creation of modernity. Bucholtz (2002) highlighted the presence of "similar categories from a wide variety of cultures, from nonindustrial to postindustrial" (p. 528). There are communities today whose children do not have a similar period of development, moving from childhood to adulthood more abruptly, as well as communities in history pre-dating the modern period that have experienced a distinct and significant period between childhood and adulthood. Additionally, Bucholtz (2002) stated that anthropologists see adolescence as a time that is meaningful in and of itself, which differs from the view of psychologists who describe the purpose of adolescence as "preparation for adulthood" (p. 528). Research on adolescence in the social sciences is varied and shapes cultural

expectations for young adults in the United States. As I reflected on the theoretical foundations of identity scholarship, I critically considered what I believed was needed to engage in research on youth identity in this place, at this time.

Youth Studies

Instead of centering adult interpretations of adolescence and describing the purpose of adolescence as a transition on the way to adulthood, researchers of youth are beginning to center participant views (Furlong, 2009; Lesko, 2012). I aligned this study with the work of anthropologists who answered concerns about adult interpretations of youth identity by practicing what they term "youth studies." This approach to understanding youth experiences and identity centers youth perspectives, voices, and purposes (Best, 2007). Viewed through a youth studies lens, this adolescent stage of life is not characterized primarily as preparation for a far-off someday, but rather is acknowledged as meaningful to teenagers in the now. Additionally, youth are viewed as full people in and of themselves, rather than as people who are partially complete (Maira & Soep, 2005). Social science research from a variety of fields frames social identity development as a central process in the everyday lives of humans. Youth studies was the most relevant of these disciplinary approaches for this research because I was specifically interested in the ways young people develop, experience, and describe their racial identities over time. Understanding the lineage of research on adolescence and acknowledging its limitations, including misrepresentations of the nature of adolescence, helped me to plan for participant-centered inquiry.

Maira and Soep (2005) highlighted the paradox between ever-present representations of youth in popular culture and a persistent lack of thoughtful engagement with youth experiences by adults generally and researchers specifically. In the context of this study, the concept of youthscapes helps illuminate the connections between rural youth identities and the many streams of information and influence that shape their ideas instead of simply defaulting to flat stereotypes of rural teenagers. I was curious to learn about the flows of information youth felt were important. Historically, research with adolescents has served to reify normative, settler-colonial assumptions about the nature and purpose of this stage of human development. In their compelling reflection on the lineage of identity research with Indigenous youth, Petrone et al. (2021) critiqued the field of adolescent development drawing

on the work of , who described the field of adolescent studies as a "...space to manage anxieties about 'racial' progress, male dominance, and national strength and power" (p. 5). It is as if, when theorizing and writing about adolescence, researchers have channeled their own stereotypes, concerns, and worries about societal change into indictments of youth as instigators. A history of social scientists characterizing teen behavior as a rebellion against parental authority and/or a threat to social norms serves as a caution to utilize theories on youth development critically.

Critical Research with Youth

Critical theory focuses attention on the ways historically and socially situated power relationships shape our lives. The purpose of this critique is to bring about social change and disrupt oppression. When applied to studies of youth identity, race, and place, critical theory can be used to draw attention to the ways that history, power, and institutionalized norms influence the opportunities and challenges of everyday life for young people (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011). Holland et al. (2001) described the use of what they termed "critical disruption" as a process by which "contest, struggle, and power have been brought to the foreground" (p. 26). By critically considering forces that shape specific human experiences and consciousness, my goal is to contribute to the tradition of humanizing research with youth (Paris & Winn, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2010). Utilizing a critical lens when learning and researching with youth helped me ensure that attention to the influences of power, place, and history was threaded through every stage of the research process. Part of this critical practice included considering the influence of my own positionality on the research process, including the study design, interactions with participants/co-researchers, data analyses, interpretations, and findings. At the core of critical theory was a liberatory purpose because critical scholars view research as a tool to make visible and to transform oppressive social conditions (Ali & McCarty, 2020).

An important benefit of the process of engaging youth in identity studies described by Paris and Winn (2014), building on Bakhtin's work, who stated, "Bakhtin discusses how we are continually helping others further their understandings of themselves by answering their stories, listening, and being present in the conversation" (p. 193). Creating collaborative space to explore identity and perspective in the present can offer individuals space and

attention to process the ways power and personal experience shape their lives. This process can facilitate an essential shift in perspective, from focusing on what adults think adolescents are experiencing to what adolescents say about it themselves. While adolescence is functionally the period in which young people prepare for full adulthood, future ends are not the primary driver of youth identity exploration (Ali & McCarty, 2020; Bucholtz, 2011). The process of being and becoming is meaningful as a present-day process youth use to know themselves and locate themselves relative to other people. According to Bucholtz (2011), youth participate in the process of becoming who they are primarily "... to identify with and distinguish themselves from peers" (p. 12). This purpose is misinterpreted by adults, many of whom view youth identity exploration as a rebellion against adult authority and expectations. Instead, as Ali and McCarty (2020) articulate, youth research is in the process of shifting "...from constructions of youth as passive and troubled toward engagement with youth as active producers of selves and knowledges with their own desires, hopes, challenges, and ways of knowing and being" (p. 3). Researchers increasingly invite youth into collaborative, participatory forms of research (Anyon et al., 2018; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Mirra et al., 2016) designed to center youth voices and perspectives. New scholars to the field increasingly consider taking up collaborative and action research models for their emancipatory possibility. Ali and McCarty (2020) state that critical, transformative research is only possible when researchers commit to working responsibly in communities, building reciprocal relationships that convey an ethic of care. In this study, treating youth as co-producers of knowledge was central to defining and enacting a collaborative space for talking about race and racial identity.

Race

Race is real (and it is not)

We are experiencing a generational shift in the ways we understand race in the U.S. The mapping of the human genome in 2003 provided evidence that there is more genetic variation within racial groups than among them. Readily accepted ideas about natural racial differences rooted in scientific racism have changed dramatically as a result (Pollock, 2004b). From the 1600s until the Human Genome Project some 400 years later, it was commonly thought that racial differences were knit into people's DNA as a biological

inheritance that made some races superior and others inferior. Now, we know better. Kumashiro (2020), offers "...race is not something that just is; rather, it is something that must constantly be remade. Race is something believed by many to be biological in basis, but it is not: Genetically, there is more diversity within race groupings than there is between groups" (p. 24-25). Ladson-Billings, in Lynn and Dixson (2013), employed Critical Race Theory (CRT), a theory describing race and power as inextricably linked, to analyze the paradox that race is both real and unreal, explaining, "...while critical race theorists accept that scientific understanding of no-race or no genetic difference, we also accept the power of a social reality that allows for significant disparities in the life chances of people based on the categorical understanding of race" (p.39). Race is important because people construct and maintain racial categories and hierarchies that impact everyday life and opportunity, not because we are born with innate racial differences. The lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2003, 2013) and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) (Lensmire, 2017; Nayak, 2007; Tanner, 2018) bring into relief the impacts of racialized policies, practices, and cultural norms in unique ways. CRT illuminates the complex influences of racialization on the ways people of color experience, understand, and enact racial identity. CWS offers insight into the characteristics and expressions of whiteness including emotionality, ambivalence, and possibilities for identity learning (Jupp, 2018). These theories highlight the material, enduring nature of race in the United States, as well as the malleable, ever-changing characteristics of race.

Racial Identity Development Theory

Racial identity development theories and frameworks can also be used to examine the salience of racial identity. Everyone in a racialized society develops a racial identity (Tatum, 1995). However, the process of racial identity development differs depending on a person's group membership(s), intersectional identities, and the specific context(s) and places in which they live. We understand our racial identities through our experiences with family, friends, and those in our community. This includes learning about the ways others perceive us. We can be assigned to groups with which we do not identify as members, or we can identify with groups that do not recognize us as members. These assignments can impact our understanding of who we can be and can have profound consequences regarding self-image,

safety, education, and opportunity. According to Tatum (1992), one important aspect of racial identity development is the unique way adolescents of color develop an awareness of their racial/ethnic identities in contrast to their white peers. Adolescents of color, whom I refer to as global majority youth to acknowledge that globally, and in many parts of the United States- whiteness is not the norm (Campbell-Stephens & Campbell-Stephens, 2021), may be more actively engaged with this aspect of identity because of the frequent racialized messages they encounter in everyday interactions, media, entertainment, and public policy in American culture (Helms, 1993). For this reason, I expected to find some evidence that racial identity has developed more strongly for participants of the global majority than for participants who are white.

Literature on the identity development of multiracial youth by (Brunsma et al., 2013), alongside work that addresses the complex, nuanced negotiation of identity as context dependent and perpetually emergent (Erikson, 1968; Schachter & Galliher, 2018), pushed me to consider identity expression and development with complexity. I was also interested in whether what Ruggiano (2022) described as onlyness, or the feelings of isolation multiracial youth in predominately white, rural areas experience, would be relevant to the experiences of the global majority and multiracial youth in this study. Literature indicates that white adolescents, particularly those in predominately white settings, generally report less awareness of and engagement with their racial/ethnic identities than global majority youth, white youth typically report higher engagement with other aspects of identity because society does not racialize them (Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; Helms, 1993; McKinney, 2005). I was interested to see how participants' experiences aligned with, complicated, or diverged from what theorists described.

To research aspects of youth identity, which is negotiated in context, it is also important to consider the influence of place. As I observed while working across varied educational settings in rural and urban areas, context matters when it comes to developing identities, knowing who we are, and being that person in relation to other people is influenced by place and our relationship to it. In the next section I describe the foundational literature that I use to make sense of the complex interactions of identity, race, and place that rural youth experience.

Place

Placemaking and Racialized Landscapes

Social scientists observe that placemaking among humans is an ongoing, complex process by which, primarily through language, relationships between people and places are defined and negotiated (Massey, 2005). This process is intertwined with social identity development because who we think we are, and who others think we are, is inextricably bound to place (and to histories of place). Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003) described placemaking as a layered process that includes "politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions" (p.205). People construct relationships with place much like they construct their social identities: over time and through lived experience. Recent scholarship by geographers on racialized landscapes offers insights into the ways rural youth develop and experience identity specific to place (Anderson, 1992; Jackson, 1999; Kobayashi, 2013; Kobayashi & Peake, 2000). In Idaho, a predominately white region of the United States steeped in a recent (less than 200 year) history of white supremacy and western settler narratives that obscure Indigenous history and ongoing presence, racialized landscape scholarship was relevant to this study. Heading into this work I did not have specific assumptions about the way that youth would describe place in connection with their racial identities, but I did include participant-created identity maps to invite reflection on identity and place. The identity maps, alongside references to places (local and outside our immediate area) in transcripts of conversations and interviews, were the primary sources of place-based information in this study.

Youthscapes

Youth simultaneously interact with culture on local, regional, national, and transnational scales. Marie and Soep (2005) offer the concept of "youthscapes" I have previously mentioned, to describe youth spaces that encompass place, time, culture, power, politics, and social influence. Youthscapes, applied as a lens or method, can be used to view the dynamic spaces where youth participate in culture, are agents in creating community, and enact identity. Globalization has impacted identity formation processes, but it has not standardized them. When considering who humans are and who they may become, there is a disconnect between the modern "global" imaginary and everyday life contingent upon

specific places, spaces, and cultures. According to Nayak (2004), the postmodernist perspective that "...we are living in 'placeless' times" dismisses the presence of "...meaningful relationships between place and identity" (p. 175). Globalization has fundamentally changed the way people move about the planet, develop an awareness of diverse cultures, access resources, select media, and engage with one another. Despite this increase in global connectivity and complexity, localized experiences remain central to identity development, even as they are complicated by global flows of information.

Rurality

Rural communities in North America are often described in monolithic fashion as places that are white, peaceful, economically depressed, politically conservative, and Christian (Corbett, 2007; Eppley & Corbett, 2012; Tieken, 2017). Rurality is code for geographic isolation and for economic disadvantage. However, rural locations are also rich with embodied knowledge of natural places and complex ecologies (Eppley & Corbett, 2012). The rural United States is more diverse and varied, in terms of the intersectional identities and lived experiences of its peoples, than these oversimplified tropes suggest (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020). What we now call the United States sits within the homelands and present-day lands of over 574 federally recognized sovereign Tribal nations. The citizens of these sovereign nations collectively make up 1.8% of the U.S. population (*National Congress of American Indians Report,* 2019-2020). The legacy of settler colonization has lasting, everyday impacts for all Americans, but particularly for Americans from the global majority. Rural spaces, while often characterized as monolithic, are home to diverse communities simultaneously shaped by global, national, and local history, economics, natural resources, culture, and geography. Attending to the specifics of rurality in a particular context is a chance to move beyond blanket descriptions of rural places youth inhabit and contribute to, in favor of more specific descriptions that provided context for this study.

Rural Representation

For those working with and for rural youth, many of whom have absorbed the inaccurate stereotype that diversity is not present except in urban places, it can be hard to notice and describe the diversity of a predominately rural community. Nuanced research that

paints a picture of rural places matters because rural people and lands, making up 19.3% and 97% percent of the U.S. respectively, matter (U.S. Census, 2017). Rural people embody a diversity of experiences, making their lives in relation to varied rural landscapes. Rural culture, social relationships, and economies are significant in and of themselves and, in addition, they make urbanization possible. Despite abundant interconnections between the rural, suburban, and urban, much of what is common sense or taken for granted about rurality and rural people is derived from oversimplified stereotypes, rather than accurate, complex representations. One way to push back against stereotypes is by seeking to understand multifaceted rural identities and contexts on their own terms, rather than describing them only in contrast to the urban (White & Corbett, 2014). Rural places are not monolithic, and their unique manifestations are essential to consider when examining processes of identity development because context helps to shape social identity. For these reasons, I invited youth to describe in their own words the ways that rurality has influenced their understandings of race and racism.

Chapter 3: Methods

Methodological Foundation

To answer the research question, based on what I have learned from the literature and my own experiences learning with and from young people, I selected a participatory, ethnographic study design. This approach is well suited to elicit the types of data and discussions that can illuminate rural youth experiences with race and racism in our specific context. I combined two distinct qualitative research approaches, grounded theory and ethnographic methods, into a participatory framework. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) described this combination as having the potential to resolve some of the limitations of each. Grounded Theory has the potential to be used too rigidly and ethnography's holistic approach to studying culture can soften the systematic approach in ways that are beneficial. Ethnography can be limited by the separation between data collection and analyses, a limitation that is resolved by the inclusion of Grounded Theory methods. These methods complement participatory action research because they prioritize attention to context, an openness to what participants/co-researchers have to share, and an ongoing commitment to data analysis that informs the research process. Used in combination, these methodological approaches enhanced this study's critical, participatory design. A critical lens was necessary for this work because identity and race are deeply rooted in power dynamics that create and maintain inequity based on race. As a critical researcher, I believe it is not enough to describe and understand racial inequity, I research racialization and racial inequality as a pathway to interrupting it. With this transformative purpose in mind, I offer an overview of each methodology and its application to my study.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory researchers use a process of data collection and analyses that informs the research process in an ongoing, generative cycle of engagement with themes and patterns present in the data (Bryant, 2012; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While it is important to be aware of and consider the utility of existing theories, I believed it was essential to remain open to themes that emerge from the stories research participants told. Holding too tightly to existing theories could limit my ability to listen well and hear what they were saying. I included

Grounded Theory as a methodological strategy to identify emergent codes and themes in the data, beginning during data collection and continuing into the analysis stages of this study. This approach supported close engagement with the data throughout the research process and helped me to develop a deep familiarity with the data. Engaging with the data early provided opportunities to determine whether there was a need to gather more relevant data and informed subsequent sessions as I adapted each week's plan and incorporated what youth shared and chose to focus on. Grounded Theory requires closeness to the data and the ability to read what the data are saying. As a new researcher, I needed adequate time to 'see' what participants were saying and spent four months transcribing and coding group conversations and individual 30-minute interviews before reconvening with youth to conduct a second round of coding together.

Critical Ethnography

Ethnography has the power to illuminate what Kirkland (2014) described as "the local, as opposed to the universal" (p. 181). In this study, the "local" were experiences rural youth in the Inland Northwest had with identity, race, and racism. Ethnographers take local context and history into account when studying understandings of race and racism, concepts that are deeply grounded in culture, history, and context. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "ethnographic researchers describe and interpret the shared patterns of a culture or group" (p. 95). Ethnography is a holistic research tradition used to document aspects of culture from the point of view of the participants, making ethnographic methods well suited to investigating socially situated and enacted identity among rural youth.

Critical ethnography was inspired by anthropologists working with Marxist and Post-Marxist critical theory. In the 1960s, a wide array of emerging social movements led to a philosophical expansion (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). Critical ethnography illuminates power structure and struggles that influence understanding of race and racism (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Scholars in critical ethnography work in a wide variety of settings taking particular care to situate their work in context, attending to historical, social, and cultural specifics (Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017; Castagno, 2009; Ibrahim, 2008, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Winn, 2014; Pollock, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Steinberg & Ibrahim, 2016; Weis & Fine, 2000). Critical ethnographic research highlights power disparities and seeks to

contribute to efforts for liberation and transformation. Collectively, I took inspiration from these examples of researchers engaged in truthful, urgent research that contributes to transformation of educational practices and policies that negatively impact youth, families, and communities.

The Shifting Field

The combination of qualitative research methods I used to investigate youth identity was informed by an ongoing, collective learning process within the social sciences. Shifting towards a more critical, nuanced, and holistic understanding of identity development over time, qualitative researchers increasingly seek to be transparent about the influence of their positionality on research design, interactions with participants, and interpretations of data (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013). This reflexive process pushes back against earlier presentations of researchers as impartial observers, acknowledging the salience of researcher identity in communities and the academy. As an example, scholars in the field of anthropology now critically consider and write about their positionality as it relates to and shapes their work (Holland et al., 2001). Overwhelmingly white, male British anthropologists historically conducted research projects designed to document "others," often justifying the processes of coloniality, which they assumed to be worthy (Wolcott, 2008).

The first anthropologists, sometimes called "armchair anthropologists," studied culture from afar through the categorization of artifacts and the interpretation of stories about people and places brought home by European explorers and missionaries (Gardner & Kenny, 2016). Starting in the 1900s, anthropologists ventured out to collect data 'in the field' outside their own communities and culture to answer their own research questions (Gardner & Kenny, 2016; Wolcott, 2008). This contrasts with a gradual increase in collaborative research designs where researchers partner with participant communities to investigate questions generated with or by the community the research involves (Mirra et al., 2016). Scholars are also increasingly conducting research in contexts closer to home, where they have relationships with some, if not all, participants and may be considered insiders. This closeness brings about different ethical questions to consider when researching identity than do the previous outsider status of historic anthropologists. To be clear: the borders between insider and outsider researchers are not crisp or static. Researchers must be aware of,

transparent, and reflective about the dynamic ways their identities are relevant in their research context(s) (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013).

For my work in this rural community, attending to my responsibilities as a community member, teacher, mother, and researcher are priorities I seek to balance. To that end, I worked to shift the way I interacted with youth who were previously in my class and became co-researchers. At the end of the day, I believe I am responsible for conducting participatory research in ways that mindfully re-center power with youth (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fine & Torre, 2021; Paris & Winn, 2014; Vanderbilt & Ali, 2020). A primary way to do that was to set up a space where youth felt free to talk and were eager to listen. Conducting critical ethnography, I listened carefully to youth stories set and shared in specific contexts. I learned how youth said race mattered to them.

Participatory Action Research

My work with youth in this project has been driven by questions and concerns about how to support youth well, in and out of school spaces, and is informed by youth questions, concerns, and ideas. Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) methods provides an orientation and tools imperative to centering youth perspectives in knowledge production. CPAR methods were developed to conduct research with community members, creating a constructivist space for those involved to acquire, share, and apply inquiry strategies and to decide how findings can be used for the purposes participants define. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is a variation of CPAR in which youth are co-investigators who learn about and suggest strategies for inquiry, and define authentic, motivating research questions for themselves.

A combination of CPAR and YPAR methods support researchers to rethink the research relationship and prioritize ethical, youth-centered research practices by acknowledging youth as subject experts on their own experiences. Using YPAR as pedagogy and praxis was a way to combine critical reflection and action while acknowledging youth as subject matter experts on their own experiences (Cammarota & Fine, 2010). Mirra et al. (2016) called for researchers working with youth to "...reconsider the why, how, and who of educational practice and research" (p. 3). By questioning assumptions about the purpose and

nature of research, researchers can thoughtfully align theory and practice. Researchers considering YPAR should be aware of and responsive to critiques about collaborative research with youth. According to Fox (2013),YPAR can be taken up in ways that are performative or poorly implemented by recreating school-like situations or reinforcing power differentials. With sensitivity to these concerns, I included youth in the planning process by inviting them to co-plan, facilitate group sessions, and to offer suggestions for how we should work as a collaborative. I took care not to give more weight or importance to academic knowledge than I did to participants' lived experiences and personal funds of knowledge (Hogg, 2011).

Another concern about youth research raised by Darlington et al. (2010) is that the formality of traditional research runs counter to goals of authentic engagement. Research generally begins with an academic person's area of interest, rather than with a community need. Even when research is co-imagined, individuals situated in academia determine the direction of research, guide the process, and often receive credit for the work (Ali & McCarty, 2020). This imbalance is important for participatory researchers to be cognizant of and attentive to. In this study, that meant choosing a topic I knew impacted youth lives that youth did not have many opportunities to talk about, inviting youth to participate in and give feedback on aspects of research they were interested in, and thinking critically about ways to meaningfully include youth at each stage of the process.

Positionality: Working in Relation

While ethnography used to be conducted in "the field" far from home, by scholars who were from elsewhere, anthropology and ethnography are changing. I am one of an increasing number of ethnographers who research in the communities we call home (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013). As a resident for the last 17 years, parent of teenagers and teacher in our rural college town, I am familiar with the cultural influences and societal norms that influence local youth identity development and expression. Because our community is relatively small (25,000 residents), I had the chance to interact with participants/co-researchers and their families over an extended period in a variety of local settings. I met many former middle school students while facilitating pre-school outreach programs and teaching K-5 reading before moving back into middle school teaching, the age

level I started teaching at. These conditions allowed us to build relational trust over time. These long relationships between teachers and students, along with many middle school discussions about being mindful of group dynamics, led to a tradition of joyfully welcoming new students who arrived in our school or caring for one another. An ethic of welcoming people and new ideas, along with the small size of our school, helped students and teachers to get to know one another well. Our school curriculum also included an adventure program that gave us the chance to regularly connect outdoors on day and multi-day adventures that included teachers, students, and family members. My youngest child was a student in one of the three classes invited to participate in this study, as were the children of several guest teachers and school staff members. As a result of our rural context and close relationships our collaborative includes my own child, the children of two higher education colleagues, the child of a “Wheatfield School” colleague, and children of families with whom I have close social ties.

Left unexamined, it is possible that this closeness could limit my perspective. I might fail to notice aspects of culture or unconsciously impose normative assumptions on my interpretations of data (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013). Adopting a critical, reflexive stance as a researcher was one way to be aware of my bias and the influence of my positionality on my assumptions and interpretations of data. I grew up in the suburbs of a regional city just 90 miles from my home and research location. I graduated from high school in that city over 20 years ago. All this is to say that I had to take care not to project my own experiences as a youth in this general region onto what participants’ experience here and now. I committed to listening well to participants to understand *their perspectives,* which were the focus of this study. I sought feedback from participants and mentors to ensure that I was interpreting data clearly, representing what participants shared as honestly as I could with the knowledge that no interpretation is accurate or free of bias. Through our extended time in relation, and over the course of this study, there were many opportunities to hear what participants had to say and follow up on earlier comments to clarify understanding. I have a wider view of these youth than might be possible in other teaching contexts because I have known them, their families, and community context through proximity over time. On

balance, I believe that researching in my own community, where I am known and am deeply invested in relationships, was an advantage rather than a liability.

Study Context

Indigenous peoples have lived in the place we now call Idaho for at least 16,000 years. Recent colonization by settlers of primarily European descent began in Idaho Territory during the 1800s. During the mid to late 1800s, Indigenous peoples were forced off large swaths of their ancestral lands by the U.S. government and into conflict with white settlers who came west for land and gold. My maternal Swedish ancestors were among those who settled on stolen Shoshone Bannock land in Southern Idaho. Early settlers and laborers of color[3] came to the area to hunt, mine, and work on the railroads during the early 1800s. Idaho Territory's lack of restrictions on settlers of color, particularly on African American settlers, compared with neighboring territories like Oregon, which enacted the Oregon Black Exclusion Laws in 1844, made Idaho a relatively appealing destination among western territories (Gill, 2011; Oliver, 2006). Chinese laborers were the largest single ethnic group in Idaho Territory in 1870, representing 30% of its 14,999 residents (Zhu, 1995). By the end of the 1800s, sweeping national laws and policies began to impact people of color in the territory, including the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Laws, the 1887 Dawes Act, and the internment of Japanese American citizens during the Second World War. These laws resulted in family separations, economic hardship, physical violence, forced internment, dispossession of land, and racial discrimination. Standard historical narratives in textbooks and media reports continue to center white, settler perspectives that maintain the erasure of Indigenous peoples and people of color (King, 2016; Sabzalian et al., 2021; Shear et al., 2015; Shuster et al., 2018). This erasure has important implications for the way history, race, and identity is experienced, discussed, and imagined in Idaho, the West, and the United States. Without acknowledging the fullness of our shared history, we are unable to fully engage with or understand our collective past and present.

The place that we now call Idaho is a juxtaposition, with a population that is predominately white, but increasingly diverse. White supremacists and anti-government

---

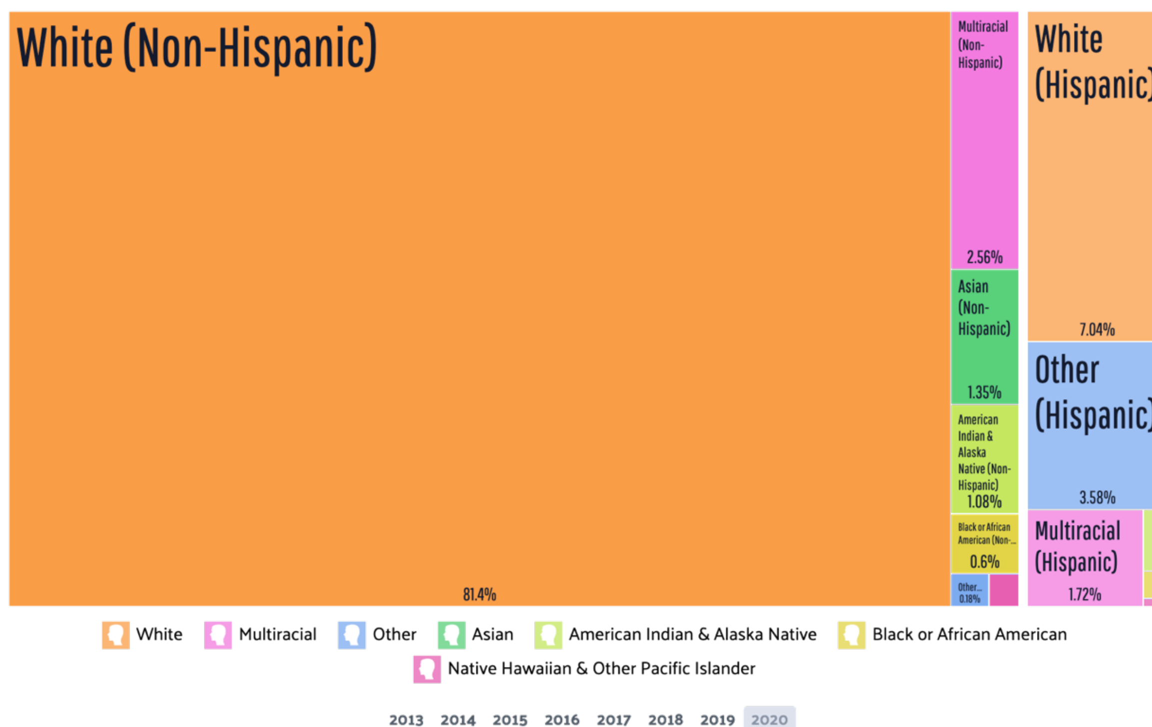
[3] When reflecting on the historical experiences of Global Majority people I use Settlers/Laborers/People of Color to align with literature and ways of speaking about the historical experiences of marginalization.

militia members have long been drawn to the region (Stabile, 2019). Idaho youth live and learn on the ancestral and present-day homelands of the Shoshone Bannock, the Shoshone Paiute, the Coeur d'Alene, the Kootenai, and the Nez Perce tribal nations. These lands include dozens of mountain ranges, fertile rolling hills, shrub deserts, gorges, glacial lakes and valleys, winding rivers, and grassy plains. Most (88%) of the state is considered rural and 28% of Idaho residents live in rural areas (*Idaho Department of Labor,* 2018). Of the 116 school districts in Idaho, 102 are considered rural (*Idaho State Department of Education,* 2017). Rurality in Idaho takes many different forms, even within specific rural places. The following description by Carr-Chellman et al. (2020) captures the complexities of overlapping visions of the cultural geography of rural Idaho:

> One of the most rural U.S. states, Idaho is known as a recreational playground, with the deepest river gorge in North America, abundant ski terrain, relaxing hot springs, and riverside hiking trails. However, these features mask the poverty hiding between the ski slopes and riverbanks (p. 2).

In the region of Idaho where this study took place, diverse overlapping local cultural geographies include ancestral and present-day homelands of sovereign tribal nations, a land-grant college town founded on unceded tribal lands, a rolling prairie tilled into submission for monocrop agriculture, heavily timbered mountains once home to the largest lumber mill in the world, and powerful rivers tapped for recreation, hydropower, and transportation. There are many socioeconomic and sociocultural realities present within a 60-mile radius of this study. Overall, 13% of rural Idahoans live in poverty (*United States Department of Agriculture,* 2019). Idaho's rural economy is heavily dependent upon trade/transportation, agriculture, natural resources, and other industries that vary based on local geography (*Idaho Department of Labor,* 2018). Idaho politics lean conservative, with a focus on local control and small government. At the same time, 70% of the land in Idaho is publicly owned, making it the 4th highest state in public land ownership by percentage. The specific rurality in the college town where this study took place is currently in the process of transitioning from a mixed resource extraction (lumber) and agriculture (wheat and pulse crop) economy toward a suburbanized, rural economy.

Figure 2: Idaho Demographics (Data USA, 2020)



The Idaho racial demographics from Data USA (2020) in Figure 2 (above) confirm Idaho's population status as overwhelmingly white, but with a population increasing in racial diversity. The Latinx population of the state, now at 12.7 %, grew 30.8% between 2010 to 2019, compared to a robust state growth rate of 14% during the same period. Although Idaho today is predominately white, people of the global majority have made significant contributions to communities throughout region since well before its statehood. These historic, imaginary, legislative, geographic, economic, and political conditions formed the backdrop of social interactions that shaped identity and were important to consider as the context of this study.

Data Collection

Purposeful Sampling

Inclusive, purposeful sampling was used to invite 48 former middle school students who were now all in high school. In addition to all being former students, all the invited research participants were involved in a three-year action research project (2017-2020) while in my middle school classroom at "Wheatfield School." The previous IRB-approved

collaborative action research project examined student engagement with middle school social studies curriculum investigating the roots of race and racism. While I considered the feasibility of inviting all 48 former students based on feedback from my committee, I could not make a strong argument for including some former students over others. Part of what was interesting to me was seeing who would be willing and able to join the summer sessions- if I narrowed the field to begin with, it might exclude youth who would want access to the project. Because we are part of a close-knit community where families had previously supported youth conversations about race, I believed it was my responsibility to stretch to accommodate any interested young person who wanted to participate. I also wanted to ensure that all three classes of young people could contribute to this project as a continuation of our previous work in middle school. I believed that each cohort would bring different insights and experiences to our conversations because of who they were as individuals and because of curricular iterations that made each year a unique learning experience. Invitations were shared with youth and their families through multiple means, including email, text, word of mouth, phone calls, and face to face conversations. Invitations included a brief overview of the project, consent and assent letters, and a tentative schedule. Once participants had been invited, I waited eagerly to hear who would join our summer sessions.

Co-researchers/Participants

In my invitations to families, I emphasized that youth should drive the decision of whether to engage in the work and should not be compelled to do so. Former students and their guardians had all previously agreed to participate in conversations and research on this topic in my classroom and, as far as I am aware, families were supportive of continued collaboration for all youth who expressed interest unless summer schedules prohibited participation. Some families expressed frustration that their children were not interested in participating because they felt the work was important. In those instances, I reiterated to families that only young people who felt personally motivated to be part of the work in this way, at this time should join the collaborative. I also reassured families that choosing not to participate did not indicate that the issues we discussed were not important to their child, but rather that youth did not feel that this was a good fit for them at this time. To ensure that any interested former student could join us, I worked to reduce barriers to participation by

accommodating participant schedules, meeting in a location that was accessible and comfortable, and encouraging youth to share transportation if they lived beyond the public bus loop. I shared with families and youth as an overview and followed up in the ways that youth and families preferred. If youth or families had questions, or logistical concerns we typically texted and emailed one another or had a face to face conversation. Figure 3 is the flyer I shared initially to give everyone a sense of what I was proposing.

Figure 3: Summer Session Flyer

SUMMER SESSIONS:
TALKING ABOUT RACE

WHO:
Any former student enrolled in Rebekka Boysen-Taylor's 7th-grade class between 2017-2020.

WHY:
This is a time and place for youth to discuss ways race and racism matter and how race and racism may matter in the future. This study is part of Rebekka's dissertation research and is approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho.

WHEN:
7/19, 7/26, 8/2, 8/9, 8/16
Plan to attend at least four out of five summer sessions to participate

DAY/TIME:
Tuesdays from 9:30-10:45* am
Breakfast will be provided

*If you want to participate, but scheduling is an issue, please reach out to Rebekka at rebekka@uidaho.edu. We may need to adjust our timing based on when motivated participants are available.

WHERE:
TBD, within walking distance of the free public bus route in Moscow.

In the end, eleven youth from the previous research group and one sibling/former student from 2021 made up our final group of twelve. The collaborative was far more racially and ethnically diverse than the classes the youth were part of in 7th-grade, with global

majority youth making up half of the group, compared to classes with 80-90% white students and 10-20% global majority students. This is significant in that nearly all invited global majority youth chose to participate, compared with a small fraction of invited white youth. Based on the data, I believe that this is due to their firsthand experiences with the topic we were gathering to discuss and to the relationships we have built with one another. I will discuss what participants in both groups said about their reasons for participating in more detail shortly, but for now, I am pleased to introduce you to the members of the Rural Youth Research Collaborative, as they described themselves (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Members of the Rural Youth Research Collaborative

Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Age
Robin	I am half San Carlos Apache, half Polish	she/her	15
Mateo	Colombian	male	16
Simone	Bi-racial (black/white)	Female, she/her	16
Flora	Black/African American	Female, she/her pronouns	17
Madison	White	Girl (but I've never felt strongly about it), she/her	17
Parker	Mixed, I come from two different native tribes (Cree and Assiniboine), and I am also German	my pronouns are she/they which means I switch between feeling female and also not feeling as male/female	17
Mark	White	he/him	17
Olive	White	whatever people call me	15
Andy	White	Male, he/him	14
Sam	White	Male, he/him	15
Nora	I am mixed. half white/half black	I am a female who goes by she/her	17
Stanley	White	Male	15

The Summer Sessions on Race

Once students agreed to join the study, we held a series of five weekly in-person sessions on Tuesday mornings during July and August 2022. The group size at each session varied between 5-12 youth due to family schedules, summer activities, and mundane

logistical challenges. During July and August summer sessions, and in individual interviews between August and October, I invited youth to share their experiences, understandings, and future visions related to race and racism. One way I did this was to create a spiraling series of invitations, or questions, for youth to discuss during weeks one through three.

Figure 5: Summer Session Topics

The questions I generated for week one included: *Why did you join this work? Who are you? What are your experiences related to race? How will race matter in the future? For you? For us all?* In week two, the questions focused on how race matters: *Tell us who you are- Who do others think you are? (How do you know?) How important is race to your identity? What has your experiences with race taught you about race and racism? How do you experience race in daily like? (If you don't, why is that?) How did you think about race and place when creating your identity map?* In week three, questions centered on the future: *Will race matter for you personally? How? Will race matter to people in the U.S. collectively? If so, how? What is your prediction for the future of race and racism? Imagine a hopeful future related to race- What does it look like? Feel like? How did we get there?* During weeks four and five, youth planned the sessions, choosing to remain in a large group discussing their experiences at school and envisioning what changes teachers and schools need to make to become more welcoming, supportive places for young people.

In the group, youth shared stories, asked each other questions, and engaged in critical conversations about the salience of race and identity. These conversations typically began with a shared breakfast on the sunny outdoor rooftop patio of the education building on

campus, followed by group conversations in a large (thankfully air-conditioned) classroom a few floors below. We typically sat in a circle to begin, breaking off into groups of two to three for brief small-group conversations before returning to the larger circle. My primary role, as the organizer of the sessions, was to send text reminders Monday nights, bring breakfast, record audio, and take notes during the sessions, and offer framing/clarifying questions- particularly during sessions one-three and during individual interviews. Because I had previously been these young peoples' teacher, I wanted to shift the balance of power to center youth ideas and allow for a new relationship as co-researchers to emerge, in line with the work and recommendations of critical youth studies researchers (Ali & McCarty, 2020). To do this, I acknowledged the power differential explicitly. I encouraged youth to help determine focus of the sessions, take the conversation in new directions, use the time in ways that suited their own needs and desires, and to let me know what forms of reciprocity I could offer them. I described the general outline of the research process and invited youth to participate in whatever stages/ways they felt interested in after our sessions officially ended.

Data included audio recordings/transcripts of group conversations from five group summer sessions, individual 30-minute interviews that were also audio recorded and transcribed (see Appendix 1 for interview protocol), participant identity maps created during session two, and researcher notes. Conversations and interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed using Otter AI or Word's transcribe feature, and were edited for accuracy in Word. Cleaned transcripts were saved in Word within a secure One Drive folder and coded on a cyclical basis. Participant confidentiality was maintained using pseudonyms for specific people and places. Using an iterative, grounded approach meant that data collection and analyses overlapped for months. During individual and group member checks, I shared segments of transcripts and researcher interpretations with youth to elicit feedback. I took notes each time I met with the group or an individual, listened to each group transcript at the conclusion of our weekly sessions, kept notes when I went back later to transcribe audio recordings, and asked clarifying questions as needed throughout the summer, fall, and into the winter. I discussed new interpretations and possible themes with youth in person, via text, and during individual interviews. Continual immersion in the data over time helped me to notice connections and discrepancies on an ongoing basis as themes and complicating

examples emerged across the data. An overview of the research process can be seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Research Process Overview

Data Analysis

Data included participant created identity maps, transcripts and audio recordings of group sessions, individual semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom or in-person according to youth preference, researcher notes, and additional data gathered in post-session surveys. Youth were invited to review data for accuracy periodically during the research process during one-on-one check-ins with me in person or during their interviews and a group data review session in December. To ensure dependability, I used Grounded Theory methods to concurrently gather, organize, analyze, and identify emergent themes directly from the data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The approach supported dependability because, rather than only fitting data to an existing theory, I used an iterative process to code what was present in the data, inform the next week's research session, and identify themes from the data. Data were interpreted and analyzed in a

variety of ways, including initial open coding as I listened to participants sharing in real time and reviewed audio recordings, and an ongoing review cycle in which I simultaneously cleaned up transcripts and added narrative and in-vivo coding (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Discourse analysis of the ways youth situate themselves relative to context occurred once two open coding cycles of all data were completed (Gee, 2000, 2015; Gee et al., 2001). Youth were invited to review transcripts of our group discussions over pizza a few months after the summer sessions concluded and offered feedback on important topics, themes, and takeaways in the transcripts. This verified several codes and recommendations also present in the initial coding.

These analytic approaches allowed codes, categories, and themes from the data to be seen from different vantage points. This process was carefully documented and another researcher, using the same steps, should come to similar conclusions after analyzing the data. I purposefully do not say the *same* conclusions because, as a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge the subjectivity of the research process and of my positionality, context, and long-term engagement with co-researchers and the topic. While findings may relate to or support existing theories, a benefit of using a grounded theory approach is that emergent themes can be used to develop new conceptual frameworks and theories. Data in this study were organized, analyzed, and coded for themes at regular intervals throughout the research process to guide inquiry and generate theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Through the triangulation of data, comparing codes and themes across separately analyzed data sources (e.g., participants, interviews, artifacts, etc.), I took note of multiple points of evidence in the data indicating significant findings. Triangulation supported the dependability and credibility of the findings.

Discourse Analysis

Investigating youth predictions for the future, based on who youth see themselves to be in this specific place, at this moment embodies what Nayak (2004) described as "...place specific analysis of youth identities in changing times" (p. 27). In addition to ethnographic analysis, discourse analysis (Gee, 2000, 2015) offered additional ways to learn from the context-bound language of participants, who revealed a great deal through their skillful use of speech and gesture as they describe imagined futures. Attending to the language

participants used when describing past and future scenarios, as well as the cultural and personal experiences that informed their thinking, was an opportunity to understand the salience of identity. Each person's combined social and political identity, or their intersectional identity (Crenshaw, 2017), influences the ways they experience, speak about, or stay silent on race and racism.

Spradley (1979) described languages as "...more than a means of communication about reality: it is a means for constructing reality" (p. 17). The language youth use to talk about perceptions and experiences can reveal important insights about the ways race and identity matter in their everyday lives (O'Connor, 2016; Pollock, 2004a; Rymes, 2001). Engaging in discourse analysis of ethnographic interviews and artifacts, I sought to construct an understanding of the ways rural youth construct and enact their identities through language, silence, and gesture. Carefully documenting youth interactions and examples of social reproduction and disruption (Bourdieu, 2018; Fairclough, 1992, 2003) present in youth stories was an important aspect of data collection and analyses in this study.

Credibility

To ensure that I presented an accurate representation of the data, I engaged in a variety of research practices that support credibility, or the accuracy and truthful interpretation of findings. At the time of this study, I had known the participants/co-researchers for many years in my role as a community member for the last 17 years and as their former middle school teacher between 2017-2020. This prolonged time in relation to one another has allowed us to develop familiarity, trust, and mutual respect. A critical, constructivist teaching philosophy positioned me as a facilitator and co-learner alongside students, rather than as a source of knowledge. I view my work with youth as engaging in an intentional and ongoing process of learning and (un)learning how to teach, with humility and vulnerability. Member checks at multiple points were a way of inviting clarification around my interpretation of events and artifacts.

Navigating the Institutional Review Board Approval and Ethical Considerations

Though the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process was generally well supported and straightforward to navigate (despite persistent rumors I heard throughout my graduate

studies about the difficulties of gaining approval to research with youth). I found that the IRB largely focused on procedural concerns and protecting university interests, rather than the deeper ethical responsibilities I had to the people with whom I worked. As other critical youth researchers have noted, the IRB process privileged my own goals and ideas for the project over the goals and ideas youth brought into the work (Ali & McCarty, 2020). I was not permitted to refer to youth as co-investigators because they were minors, which misconstrued their role and contributions to the project. Readily accepted research structures and practices can be a challenge for participatory research projects because they center the academic researcher as the authority.

Planning a collaborative research project in the relative absence of my collaborators was also a challenge. I settled on planning our first three sessions and indicated that youth would choose topics and plan activities for sessions four and five. This design led to a request from IRB to submit an addendum and inform families of topics youth chose to focus on by week three. The reason IRB gave for this stipulation was that youth might decide to discuss interracial dating or stereotypes, and that parents should be informed if that was the case. While I complied with this requirement, and had already planned to communicate regularly with families, I found these examples of topics families would need to know about illustrative of the generalized discomfort people and institutions have with many topics' teens want to discuss, and with race talk specifically. In the end, youth chose to focus on ways that race and racism matter at school and helped craft the IRB addendum and an update we shared with their families.

Participatory Process

As a matter of responsibility and ethics, I prioritized relationships with youth participants over adhering closely to my initial plan and timeline. Participants were invited to offer input on session planning and to participate in any other part of the research process they were interested in. In our earliest planning conversations, we discussed ideas for the group's focus/purpose, the location and format of our summer sessions, and brainstormed ways to spread the word to former classmates who might also be interested in participating (as well as what snacks were needed). Throughout the project, youth were encouraged to share their ideas, critiques, and questions at any point, in whatever format suited them. Youth

were asked how our findings could/should be shared and some chose to continue with the project after the summer sessions ended by gathering to code data, co-presenting at an academic conference, and co-authoring an article. Working around youth schedules required flexibility and ongoing communication. Interviews took longer to conduct than I initially planned due to my co-researchers' school schedules and extracurricular activities, so I adjusted my initial timeline for completing interviews from the end of August going into late October. YPAR, despite its challenges, used as a pedagogical tool to engage youth around the issues that matter to them holds significant potential to honor youth voices, experiences, and perspectives in research. As this study demonstrates, including youth as integral members of the research process demands flexibility and creativity in research design and implementation.

Reciprocity

Because I believe the research relationship should be reciprocal, I was transparent about my plans to write about the work for my dissertation and to share the work in future conference presentations and publications. I shared ideas about individual benefits I could offer participants, which included providing and/or connecting participants with letters of recommendation, mentoring, tutoring, college/career planning, etc. I also invited the youth to share any ideas they had. Youth conversation about what was needed generally centered around the food I brought to fuel us during our weekly morning sessions, but also included requests for help with independent study projects and applications for internships and college. While the summer sessions were the primary form of participation, four youth chose to take on more active roles by asking to present their experiences with race in high school at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting in November of 2022 and by co-authoring a subsequent article with scholars from University of Idaho and Arizona State University (O'Connor et al., 2023).

Defining the Boundaries for Race Talk

We started the summer sessions by establishing shared expectations for things youth needed from each other to create a space where they could speak openly about their experiences with, and understandings of, race and racism. This was particularly important given the lack of spaces youth said they had to discuss race in their daily lives. Starting

together defining the terms of engagement, centered youth voice and rooted the work in an approach to talking about race youth outlined collaboratively. During our first summer session, I had written a few questions, or invitations for conversation, on 3 by 5 cards for youth to consider as we established the focus of our work together. Questions included- *What brought you to this group? What is your interest in discussing race? What do you need from our group? (norms) What are your hopes/goals/motivations for the summer sessions?* As we finished breakfast, I set the cards out on one of the picnic tables and invited the group to discuss them when they were ready. After a short conversation about whether to break up into small groups or discuss as a whole group Nora, who often takes on leadership roles during collaborative work in and out of school, quickly jumped in to lead the first group discussion, asking others what they needed during discussions about race:

> *Nora (mixed, half black/half white):* So, what do you all need? From our group? Like what are like the norms?
>
> *Madison (white)*: ...the horns.
>
> *Nora*: What are the horns? (laughing)
>
> *Rebekka (white, *this is me)*: And I'll just say like, norms is like the school word…and since I was saying it's not school that we're trying to recreate here, I actually forgot the like, real-life word for this that we would use in family or…
>
> *Madison*: Boundaries?
>
> *Rebekka*: Hey! There we go, maybe boundaries.
>
> *Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, German):* I love boundaries!
>
> *Nora*: What are, like the boundaries of our meetings and our time spent together?

In the excerpt above, I noticed that my suggestion that youth set norms might recreate our old school routines, so I backtracked to tell the group that this was a school term for the ways we work together, reiterating that our summer sessions were not supposed to be school-like. Unlearning old habits was and is an important aspect of my work with youth. This is because my own experiences at school, and much of my own teacher training, were steeped in a Eurocentric transmission model of education that positioned teachers as experts. My pedagogical approach, developed over many years teaching in an inquiry model, is constructivist and collaborative. I have found it to be a more inclusive, engaging, and

effective approach. Using participatory methods in my research helps and requires me to wrestle with what Vanderbilt and Ali (2020) described as the 'profound entanglements'- questions of power, authority, and relationality. In the summer sessions, this began with defining our collaboration as a place for youth to lead, centering their ideas and experiences. During the whole group discussion about boundaries, youth started off by asking for respect and honesty. They went on to identify several dispositions they felt were important, including humor, listening, and a willingness to be uncomfortable.

"Humor is a good coping mechanism."

The first recommendation made during the boundary conversation was the suggestion that humor is necessary in conversations about race. Nora (mixed, half-black/half-white) started us off saying she wanted to see "…respectfulness, respect all around. Making sure that like, obviously, we're gonna have fun, we're gonna make some jokey joke jokes (Madison chuckles), but don't get too racey with those jokes" (Parker and Madison both laugh, Stanley asks if we got that on audio). Building off Nora's idea, Madison (white) added "…just like, like, having room for both like levity and fun stuff…like actual stuff. I don't think we have to be like, serious, focused all the time to talk about this honestly. Like, humor is a good coping mechanism." Stanley (white) remarked how a serious tone can inhibit real conversation saying, "Being *all serious* can actually (pause) you are not having a genuine conversation when you're just trying to be all serious and clinical." Madison (white) continued, saying:

> It's hard to have a like serious completely academic discussion that gets anywhere very quickly, and where people feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts. Yeah, I think levity is important because it makes people comfortable, but boundaries are also very important because people shouldn't be expected to give up their thoughts, or give up their opinions, or give up like information about themselves that they don't want to.

Madison shared this in response to having observed white teachers put global majority youth on the spot in classes as representatives of their cultures and hearing friends who had been put in that position because of their race and culture explain how uncomfortable it made them. Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) added that she thought it was important to "respect people, respect their, their stories. Don't be a pile of toenail clippings I suppose."

Throughout this part of the conversation, youth braided the need for humor and a desire for truth together. To confront the serious nature and lasting consequences of white supremacy, settler colonization, and racism for global majority people, youth would use humor as a release valve. Throughout the five summer sessions, they embodied a combination of honesty and laughter.

"You should listen."

The second disposition youth believed was important was a willingness to listen, while cautioning against some white peoples' apparent need to impose their curiosity on global majority people. This exchange was the beginning of a trend among group members to snap back and forth between their present and the future while describing their visions for the future. Madison (white) and Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) called for white people to temper their interest in educating themselves by listening to global majority youth instead of peppering them with questions:

> *Madison*: It's like, I think white people hear "Oh, you should go educate yourself" and they hear that as "You should find a brown person and interrogate them (laughter), on the street. Any context. Very personal questions" (using dramatic, direct speech that became louder and more punctuated as she spoke) And it's like, that's not it! (Rebekka: That's not what we meant) You should go read a book (Nora: We meant you should go...) or listen to a podcast or something.
>
> *Parker*: or if a Brown person chooses to bring this up with you, …
>
> *Madison*: ...you should listen (said with emphasis). Instead of instead of interrogating or making it all about you all the time.

Madison and Parker used humor and exaggeration to highlight the difference between learning from global majority people and imposing on them. The final boundary for race talk, set by the group, broached the topic of safe space, typically defined as a space that is non-confrontation, non-triggering, and comfortable. Youth in this study defined safe space differently, describing discomfort as something to embrace.

"You just can't keep everyone comfortable all of the time."

As youth continued to set their boundaries for race talk Mateo (Colombian) defined a safe space for conversations about race as a space "where people were willing to be uncomfortable," an idea that came up across group and individual conversations. This led to

a series of energetic comments about the value of discomfort. Stanley (white) talked about teachers avoiding uncomfortable topics saying, “we just have to be fine with the fact that we're going to talk about uncomfortable things.” Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, German) added that “white people can learn about this without feeling personally guilty because if you are not being racist or perpetuating these things, you have nothing to feel guilty about,” to which Madison (white) replied:

> Yeah, and there's a difference between making people feel guilty and making them feel uncomfortable with (*Parker*: It’s hard to feel uncomfortable.) Yeah. You can't just keep everyone comfortable all the time.

Parker went on saying:

> If it makes white students uncomfortable, imagine how POC students feel (Madison: exactly) having to have like had their great grandparents be affected by this? What's a little bit of white uncomfortableness (Madison: Yeah) to like, generations of like trauma?

In this exchange Parker and Madison aptly called out the fact that that when people talk about comfort in conversations about race, they are talking about white comfort. As youth shared ideas, from their unique positionalities and perspectives, they collectively built their analysis of the utility of discomfort. In response to Parker and Madison, Stanley jumped in, describing the value of discomfort for white people in particular saying,

> That's very important cause that sticks with a person too, I feel like that's how, you’re gonna feel it (Parker: And you can feel it through generations.) if you're, if you're uncomfortable, you're not gonna like forget it. So, I feel like actually having a really uncomfortable conversation about that…although in the moment- uncomfortable, in the long term- is very useful for them. Like, cuz that sticks with you, and you remember that. I think that can make a person want to learn more about it. Because you're like, “Wow, this is actually a thing. What else is there to it?” and I feel like a little discomfort can be very useful.

The topic of white comfort expanded over the course of this conversation, and again during our second session, when Parker asked “White students, do you guys ever get afraid about talking about race? Because there’s like, I'm just curious.” This comment opened conversation, for the first time in our group, about what race talk was like for white youth and it signified an important shift in the focus of conversations about race, which typically focused on the experiences of global majority youth. Stanley (white) shared that “I feel like

it's, it's an- a different, a different type of afraid of talking about it. I feel, like I also feel awkward talking about like, race stuff or like pointing something out to a teacher and classroom of people that like, wouldn't support it and like kind of listen to the teacher." Stanley was referencing an earlier conversation about inaccurate, racist content in the curriculum, which he said he did bring up with his teachers, with varied results.

Mark (white) built on Stanley's remark about how it feels to talk about race as a high school student, extending the conversation to overall culture and feeling at the high school among students, reflecting that in middle school he would,

> …be fine talking about race but for the high school and it's like, you've got a whole lot more diversity in the way of like political views and like different backgrounds, but there's not a lot of like racial diversity. It still feels like kind of like, how do I know what I'm talking about? And will others support me, or will we have like some kind of disagreement? You have less set norms at the high school.

Mark's question- "Will others support me, or will we have some disagreement?" sums up the vulnerability and potential for connection that high school symbolized for him, and for many youth. While the vulnerability and possibility Mark describes was specific to race talk and racial identity it is just one facet of youth identity negotiation. As young people step into increasingly larger schools, they navigate an ever-widening circle of peers with whom they establish themselves as unique individuals and members of social groups. Academic content and social conditions in schools shape whether young people feel welcomed, represented, and included or lack a sense of belonging and acknowledgment.

"Why are you here?"

In addition to the boundaries youth created for race talk, it is important to consider their reasons for joining the summer sessions before delving into the themes that developed. Initial analysis of audio-recorded group session conversations of youth describing their reasons for participating in the collaborative illuminated a clear distinction between the reasons global majority youth and white youth described. In short-- global majority youth joined because they have experienced that race personally matters to them and white youth joined because they understand that race matters. In line with foundational literature on youth racial identity development by Tatum (1997) and Helms (1993, 2020), global majority youth

in this study described regularly experiencing and being made aware of their racial identities, while white youth did not.

Experience vs. Observation

This distinction, between global majority youth who experienced their race and white youth who did not, was an open and ongoing thread of conversation amongst youth during the sessions. When discussing ways race affected their everyday lives, Olive (white), observed that “we (white collaborative members) didn’t have as much to say because it didn’t affect us.” Across the data, white youth reiterated that they learned about race through observation and that hearing the voices of their global majority peers was critical to their own understanding of race, culture, and racism. During our conversation about the ways race matters, Mateo (Colombian) observed that the white peers he spoke with in a small group “said they weren't scared about their race. They didn't really experience it that much.” This stood in stark contrast to Mateo’s statement that he did “worry and experience it (race) a lot.” Based on stories Mateo shared across the summer sessions and his interview I suspect this comment was rooted in Mateo’s personal experiences with racialization and his growing awareness of racialized police violence. For white youth, race was an abstraction; for global majority youth it was a reality that was intertwined with worry, fear, and frustration. Over the course of five weeks, all six global majority youth in this study described experiencing racialization and racism in varied ways.

Relational Trust with Youth and Families

Youth who chose to participate in the summer sessions generally did so out of a combination of their desire to learn and speak about issues that were important to them, a commitment to work they felt could make the world better, and because of their trust in me, as their former teacher, to create a welcoming space for these conversations. Vanderbilt and Ali (2020) describe the foundation of trust as knowing people and being known as individuals over a sustained period. This process of being known has been my experience as a teacher and mother living in the same town for nearly 20 years. In terms of this project, relational trust with each young person and family, and with global majority families in particular, made this level of ongoing work possible. When asked about her reasons for

joining during an individual interview Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) described the significance of our relationship saying:

> I figured if I was doing something with my time, I'd want it to be useful in this, like a really positive place to put my time and energy into and I've worked with you in the past and every time I've done that, I've really enjoyed it. And I appreciate the work that you do, and of the space that you give students and young people generally speaking. So, I figured all in all that this couldn't have been a bad experience and that I was contributing to something that will be good for others.

Simone (bi-racial, black/white) also mentioned knowing me and thinking my "work was cool" were reasons to join the collaborative. Mateo (Colombian) described wanting to talk about race with peers, but not always feeling comfortable, and stated that "getting the opportunity to come together with people who did that expedition, and it impacted them in a way, because I feel like to me. It did impact me in a way in to where I was able to further my learning into not just about slavery, but about like racial discrimination." In referencing the previous expedition from 7th grade, Mateo reminded me that he has continued to extend his own learning about race and racism independently since that expedition ended. He also shared on another occasion that he has been disappointed when civil rights came up in his high school classes, only to have teachers gloss over the stories of people that deserved greater attention. Parker, Simone, and Mateo all highlight ways that their ongoing relationships with me and with the ways race matters drew us together for this work and have helped us to stay connected.

I share these reflections on relationality to demonstrate that white teachers, who often avoid race talk with youth, can play an important role in establishing spaces and relationships where global majority youth feel seen and supported. I have not always done this well, and I have made mistakes that I have had to apologize for because I am in my own process of learning to facilitate conversations with youth about race. I have learned much, particularly from global majority youth who have given me feedback about their experiences talking about race at school and about the ways they need me to support them during these conversations, but also from white youth whose fear, anxiety, and courage in conversations about race overlap in confounding ways. Despite these limitations, feelings of relational trust that developed over time with youth and families prior to the summer sessions were an

essential foundation in our process of becoming the Rural Youth Research Collaborative. During the summer sessions, parents of global majority youth reached out frequently to share that their children came home from the sessions excited to talk about their work. One parent summed up the energy she observed in her child after a session, describing her daughter as "loquacious." These reflections affirm the importance of establishing relationships over time and holding space for youth to discuss topics that they are invested in. Nearly every global majority person who was invited to the summer sessions participated, making it the most diverse local space any of us had talked about race in which shifted the dynamics of our conversations and importantly centered global majority voices.

Building a Community of Practice

During the Summer Sessions Rural Youth Research Collaborative members demonstrated, and continue to embody, aspects of what Wenger (1999) described as a community of practice via their active learning, listening, and constructing their identities with one another as they engaged around a topic that was meaningful to them. Youth opted into the collaborative, bore witness to one another's stories, and advocated for change rooted in their lived experiences. This story is one of building identities and community simultaneously. The composition of each session was dynamic due to the nature of summer schedules, last-minute transportation issues, and family travel. Stanley (white), who was present for all but one session, described this ebb and flow positively saying it offered the group a "different perspective" in every conversation. While the conversation each week was distinct in terms of the individuals who were present and the focus of each session, threads of connection across the exchanges began to emerge as collaborative members referenced one another's stories, came back to issues they felt were important, and filled one another in on what was discussed in the previous sessions.

Presentation of Study Findings

Youth stories, concerns, and future visions contained data to support multiple themes. I organized them in the way that felt most relevant given the context of the conversations and the way that youth connected their experiences across the sessions and interviews. Due to the nature of the varied groups from one summer session to another, and individual propensities to share or listen, some are quoted more frequently than others. The findings from the

summer sessions and individual interviews are shared in Chapters 4-6 across four main themes.

- Understanding Race through Experience: Global Majority Youth
- Understanding Race through Observation: White Youth
- Critical Analysis of Schools: Classroom Power and Voice, Fragmented Standards, and Partial Histories
- Future Visions Shaped by Past and Present

In Chapter 4, I focus on ways global majority youth understand race through their experiences. In Chapter 5, I focus on ways white youth understand race through observation. Chapter 6 presents young peoples' critical analysis of schools, which goes hand in hand with their future visions for schools. Finally, Chapter 7 links the study's findings to the conceptual framework and theoretical underpinnings, as well as considers the significance and implications of the findings.

Chapter 4: Understanding Race through Experience: Global Majority Youth

Returning to the research question, this chapter focuses on the ways global majority youth described their understandings and experiences with race and racism. Their comments fell into three categories which include their motivations for participating in the summer sessions, the experience of race talk with a critical mass of global majority youth, and feelings of onlyness.

"I wanted to share my experience."

When I sent out invitations with information about the Rural Youth Research Collaborative Summer Sessions on Race, nearly all global majority youth I previously taught in middle school agreed to participate. Mateo (Colombian) expressed initial interest when I reached out to invite him, but he had an important question for me first. His mom texted me his question as they talked about it one evening early in the summer. Mateo wanted to know if there would be other people of color in the summer sessions. He had already experienced race talk in our mostly white middle school class and wanted to be part of a more diverse community to talk about race this time around. Mateo's question reflected his desire to share and learn about race with people who had also experienced race- a rare occurrence for global majority youth in this study. In a group conversation during session one, where participants discussed why they decided to join the summer sessions, global majority youth stated that they did not have many places to discuss race with people beyond their own families. Simone (Black/African American) shared that it felt "nerve-wracking" and "iffy" to join due to the personal nature of sharing experiences with race as we talked about her decision to join during a one-on-one interview after the session concluded. These feelings may have been present in part because Simone, and global majority youth, knew that conversations about race in mostly white spaces are inherently risky for them, and because they were unsure of who would be part of this group. While youth in the collaborative did attend a small school together, and presumably had some level of familiarity with youth one or two grades away from their own, when it came to discussing race there were still many unknowns for global majority youth. During her one-on-one interview Simone noted that "I never really had like, a space outside of family to like really discuss stuff like that. And especially not in school. Because I feel like a lot of people are scared to have these conversations." From my own

experience teaching middle school social studies, and what I have learned from the literature on teaching difficult histories, this did not surprise me. I knew that spaces for youth to openly discuss race and identity in the U.S. were typically few and far between, even before recent political efforts to silence race talk in schools (Castagno, 2008; Gill, 2011; Savransky, 2021). All global majority youth expressed a desire for a place where they would be understood and the chance to learn from people's stories as motivating factors in their decisions to join the collaborative.

The six global majority youth collaborative members often led group discussions, consistently built on others' thinking, and shaped the focus/goals of the group, I will discuss this in more detail when I discuss youth future visions. Active engagement by global majority youth created a space where the voices of young people who experience race as an everyday reality were at the center and where white youth learned about race and culture in relationship with global majority youth, an uncommon experience in our region and local schools. Overall, global majority students reported feeling more comfortable during the summer sessions than in previous conversations about race at school and were excited to talk, as evidenced by statements such as, "It's just a very welcoming environment that I don't think was very similar to, like it was a different environment than what I would be used to in an academic setting" and "with that (summer session) group, we got so engaged in what we're talking about." Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) explained that the sessions helped "broaden my understanding of how people are doing and that also helps me kind of feel like I have more of a community" and "every time I left the meetings, I felt better. It was kind of therapeutic in a couple of ways, sometimes talking about those things, and talking to people who could relate to them, and having the same drive as me, was nice. It was rewarding to do that." Flora (Black/African American) said that she viewed the sessions as "a very safe and open way for me to talk about topics that are usually avoided in places that you would think we should be able to talk about them, like school or English classrooms, but they are usually avoided because people don't want to be uncomfortable." Narratives shared by global majority youth highlighted ways that talking about race with their peers was beneficial, illustrating the importance of an affirming discursive space. Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) shared: "I like dissecting things, and I think racist people are really fun to dissect."

She went on to explain that thinking about racism, and the way it has changed over time and relative to place was important to her. She noted that in our "liberal" small town racism manifests in a more coded way than it did in the past or shows up in other areas. Parker's interest in "dissecting race" highlighted the relationship between race, place, and identity over time. Global majority youth seemed to feel that having space to talk openly about race, and their experiences with racism, supported the development of a community of practice, as described by Wenger (1998), including the key aspects of shared interest, engagement, and a commitment to learning from one another through dialogue.

In light of the contentious tone of many current conversations about race and racism in the U.S. leading up to and during this study (Savransky, 2021), it is important to note that global majority youth also shared positive stories about their racial and cultural identities, alongside stories of unwanted racialization and challenge. As two examples, Robin (San Carlos Apache and Polish) described her race/culture as something she enjoys talking about with others and Parker described her culture as something she feels strengthened by. Flora (Black/African American) shared ways that her recent experience in a two-week long summer program at Brown University for Black and Indigenous Youth investigating New England histories from diverse perspectives helped her to feel seen and understood (Curtis, 2022). Flora, who grew up in predominately white rural Idaho, attribute feeling seen and heard to being surrounded by people of color, including family, teachers, and peers, for the first time in her life. In a partner conversation with Robin, Flora shared that she "noticed the difference between how I personally feel talking about stuff with this group versus the group in Providence. So, I guess my hope and goal is to just like, bring that perspective in." In connecting her time at Brown to our summer sessions in Idaho, Flora described the experience of learning and speaking about race across multiple contexts. At Brown, in a global majority space, Flora's identity was affirmed in ways she had not experienced before which seemed to strengthen and energize her. Coming back to Idaho, Flora expressed that she felt more motivated and comfortable talking about race and wanted to continue the conversation. Initially, the desire for a space to talk about everyday experiences with race was a motivating factor described by global majority youth and the extended time in

conversation with one another and with their white peers was described as a positive experience in individual interviews after the sessions concluded.

Situated Identity Negotiations of Global Majority Youth

When asked about their experiences with race, most global majority youth described everyday racialization in line with research about the process of developing racial and cultural identities by Tatum (1997, 2017). In short, people have many facets to their identities, but for youth of color, race is brought to the forefront due to normative cultural whiteness working as an oppressive structure in their everyday lives, leading to a proliferation of inaccurate assumptions and stereotypes about their race by people of all ages. Negotiating identities beyond immediate family and people who know global majority youth well can be challenging. Nora (mixed, half white/half black) says she experienced unwelcome racialization beginning in high school when she stepped into a new, larger circle of peers and teachers. The k-8 school that Nora and her peers attended was small, with just one class of students per grade and a total enrollment of just below 200 students. Many of the collaborative members attended school together for most of their k-8 education before moving to the local high school, with its student population of approximately 750 in four grades. In her individual interview, I asked Nora about her experience discussing race in middle school and more recently with our group to learn what it was like for her. She described experiencing racialization by others in this new context, which she likened to the 'real world', or a place in which others would try to define her, accepting her self-definition:

> …not to dog on Wheatfield in a way, but it's very secluded to the outside world. A lot of the things that happen at Wheatfield would never happen in a normal school…good things. (*Rebekka*: laughing) It's very good. It's a privilege honestly, to be able to go to that school. But the fact of the matter is that as soon as like I as soon as I got into the high school, I started experiencing different things, like in middle school was…other people are giving me my mum weird stares or stuff like that. Once I got to high school, it's (racism) from people telling me that I'm not really Black, or stupid things like that. And it's like, "Oh, nice. Thank you for that." While like before I was considered all those things. I was considered whatever I wanted to be. So, like it was just a different level of acceptance on that end. And so, getting the high school I guess, opened my eyes to what the real world is really like.

Nora described her racial awareness expanding as she moved into high school, a process driven by the stereotypes and expectations others imposed on her. In this new setting, she

encountered racialization and judgement from peers who did not validate the way she saw herself and who felt they had a right to tell her who she was. Flora (Black/African American) described her own racial consciousness deepening as she negotiated being in a new environment with Black and Indigenous peers during her recent time at Brown University. The summer experience at Brown was Flora's first time learning with and from Black and Indigenous people. Flora explained the impact of her experience to me during a one-on-one interview:

> … after going to Brown and kind of starting to like allow myself to…find my beliefs...I think in the past I'd always just like had a shield on because I was like the only one and I didn't want to be that person. But yeah, it was nice to get to debrief with everyone and be like, "Oh yeah, it's okay to be offended." So that's how I'm looking for now- with more awareness.

Flora's racial identity and awareness expanded because of her shared time and space being and thinking with Black and Indigenous youth and adults. Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) described her developing racial awareness remembering the time before she understood race saying:

> I didn't really think about race when I was a kid right, like people were just people, and I didn't understand that I came from two separate backgrounds and I didn't understand that was going to be something I would have to like, explain to people frequently in my day-to-day life.

Global majority youth, and multiracial youth described their firsthand experience with individual, institutional, and cultural racism and of being positioned in particular ways by other people's perceptions of their identity and race. Individually, youth described the toll persistent racialization takes on them with statements like "it gets kind of exhausting to have to constantly explain my identity to people" and "it's just frustrating to have to remind people" of the way they identify in the face of frequent comments from teachers, friends, and acquaintances about their racial background which were often inaccurate or based on stereotypes. By reflecting on the impacts of socially constructed racial identities, particularly in terms of the many unwelcomed ways people position global majority youth- as an identity they do not claim, as representatives of their racial or cultural group, as too ______(racial/ethnic identity descriptor) or not ______ (racial/ethnic identity descriptor) enough, the significance of race in terms of its impacts on human connection are brought into

relief (Gee, 2000; Gee et al., 2001). Studying the tangible impacts of socially constructed identities on everyday life using the lens of identity theory offers insight into ways that individual roles, group membership, and contexts impact human experiences. In this context, where personal experiences with race were common and spaces to discuss those experiences uncommon, global majority youth were eager to share and learn from each other. In the words of Simone (bi-racial, black/white) during her one-on-one interview, the summer sessions offered a place where she "felt like people like listened to me, so it wasn't like I was talking to like nobody." In identity theory terms, what Simone describes is a place where her experiences and identity are validated. Nora (mixed, half white/half black) described similar feelings sharing that she valued "free talking about things that have like bothered me or others. Like that was very valuable to me, because I feel like I don't have, like, another place to talk about that." Nora described her experiences with racism in an individual interview saying:

> Like when people are racist to me, it comes in like… microaggressions. They're not like real like full blown, like calling me slurs, but they're like saying things, like one of my friends who I don't know, whatever they call him a friend, but he calls me a half breed…it's like not necessarily textbook racism, but it still is racist because it's still discrimination against my people.

The chance to "free talk" about these incidents was important to Nora and her peers. Being in conversation with one another about the ways that they experienced racialization and racism was a place where global majority youth regularly built on ones another's thinking and validated each other's experiences. As an example, this exchange, highlights the fluid meaning-making around how youth experience racialization as they navigate others, making assumptions about global majority youth:

> *Mateo (Colombian)*: Based off what Robin said (about non-native people stereotyping native people), what happens to me is whenever I tell people I'm from Colombia. They don't know where that is and they just assume I'm Mexican 'cause, I don't know, I don't know if this is rude, but white people seem to always assume that Mexico is like the only Spanish speaking country (*Sam*: Oh, yeah) in the world (*Sam*: Yeah, in all of South America you choose one place…) One place that's not even in South America! [laughter from the group as Mateo corrects Sam and continues] I don't know why. It's like wherever I go, even when I went to Chile…people still treated me differently and stuff because I look like it, but I can't speak Spanish 'cause I'm adopted, but people still assume certain things of me wherever I go…

> *Robin (San Carlos Apache/Polish):* Um, I guess like one I still go on like what Mateo said. Like my mom, she's Polish and my dad is Apache, so like sometimes, like it's kind of weird 'cause like, I don't. I'll go to my mom's side, and I'll talk to people on Mom's side, and I kinda just stand out. Me and my sister kind of stand out...When I was little, people would always come to my mom and ask her where did you adopt daughter from? And my mom was like, "I didn't adopt her, I'm her mom." And then I guess, I guess, like, not really fitting, cause like I have a Polish mom and Native American dad and there's always that one thing that's like "Your Native American right?" "Yeah, but I'm also Polish, half Polish." And they're like, "Oh, OK. OK." It's kind of, I don't know how to explain it. It's like I don't really fit in with either 'cause I'm mixed, you know? Um, I don't really know how to explain it. (Parker: Yeah, yeah.)
>
> *Mateo*: I feel like I don't fit it either because, I mean, I've been surrounded by white people my entire life, like I was adopted into a white family. I don't really feel like I fit in there, or I feel like fit in with other Hispanic people, same thing, as I said it's like assumptions, I guess I don't feel like I fit in anywhere cause...yeah.
>
> *Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German)*: Naw, yeah.

In this conversation, as youth described their experiences, they did so in connection with one another's stories, affirming one another's feelings and validating each other's experiences. Parker's interjections, "Yeah, yeah" and "Naw, yeah" function as affirmations for Robin and Mateo. This encouragement and validation, amongst global majority youth, was a form of recognition. During this exchange, as Mateo shares a stereotype about white people's lack of knowledge about the diversity of Spanish speaking cultures in the Americas, we see Sam (white) seeking to affirm Mateo's story even as he revealed his inaccurate spatial knowledge of the Americas. In response to Sam's comment, Mateo strategically deployed humor to skillfully correct Sam and continued telling his story. Sam's effort to show that he 'gets it' demonstrated his effort to understand Mateo's story, even as he reveals the same sort of ignorance at the root of Mateo's frustration. As global majority youth describe in this exchange, racialization is something they experience consistently and yet it manifests uniquely depending on context. For multiracial youth- racialization does not extend to a full recognition of identity with whiteness as an unacknowledged aspect of racial identity.

Throughout the sessions, global majority youth shared stories of navigating racism and racial bias. Several collaborative members described an increase in incidents of racialization as they stepped into new, larger circles of peers and community members. Nora (mixed, half white/half black) described as "using her white voice" on the phone at work to

“protect myself” from customers who she stated would “acted funny” when she spoke in her natural voice, which she described as deeper, and more bro-like, than her white voice. Simone (bi-racial) described her feelings about being told who she was by others saying, “I feel like people are trying to rob me of my own identity because they're like, oh, yeah, "You're this or that.” Simone made an important point, about the negative impact of the way others try to define her, likening it to taking something from her. Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) described hearing adults make racist comments in her presence, which she attributed to the fact that she is multiracial, with lighter skin pigmentation, saying “people don't really put me anywhere. So, they're like- Well, I can say whatever.” She went on to describe how the adults who make racist statements around her create a particularly challenging situation,

> I just, I don't know how to call out…I don't know how to correct that. And I don't want to, I don't want to get in trouble or, or cause like a scene you know? So generally, I just kind of don't say anything. I'm kind of like you know, like making an uncomfortable face, show a little bit of like, “I don't like that”, but without saying words, you know?

Navigating racism from children, peers, or adults requires a nimbleness that includes awareness of context, attention to power dynamics, and personal comfort levels resulted in a variety of responses, including strategic interruption, correction, and silence. Robin shared her approach to combatting misconceptions and stereotypes from peers and younger people, explaining that youth who learn she is Native American often stereotype her. She describes her strategic response to stereotypes shared by children at an outdoor summer camp where she taught who asked her Native American name- saying that she laughed and told them it was ‘Robin’. She noted that she thought these children had only learned about Indigenous people through films and the media, which offer inaccurate depictions of Indigenous peoples. As she continued to tell her story, her face lit up:

> I had one little girl come up to me. She said, “Do you have a spirit animal?” and I said, “Oh, no, I don't.” …And she said, “Oh, okay.” And then she, when they- her parents- picked her up, she got really excited! She went over telling her parents all about it and it made me really happy, just teaching all the little kids about stuff that wouldn't always be taught in schools.

Robin's creativity reminds me of the importance of looking for outliers in research data. Her response to stereotypes was unique amongst participants. According to Fine and Torre (2021), outliers call for careful attention. In Robin's case, her creative response to racial stereotypes and her way of embracing this the teachable moment is something special. Robin's joy in teaching children who did not know about her culture replaced stereotypes with connection. These examples shared in this section demonstrate global majority youth using their agency, silence, and intuition to respond to the routine racial bias they encounter. Using identity terminology, in all cases these youth were strategically situating themselves on the basis of their identities and their interpretation of the context and social situations they encountered (Gee et al., 2001).

Onlyness in Common

One sub-theme that became apparent as I looked at what global majority youth described, was their need to strategically navigate racialization as an everyday reality by using their own agency in creative, varied ways based on their specific identities and contexts. During the summer sessions, many global majority youth described feelings of "onlyness" -- growing up in a predominately white environment where racialization and othering was pervasive and persistent. These experiences are in keeping with Ruggiano's (2022) work documenting the stories of youth and families of color in predominately white, rural settings. According to Ruggiano, youth experiencing onlyness develop an increased awareness of self and their racial and cultural identities compared with white youth. Specific to the summer sessions, global majority youth described frequently feeling as though they did not belong, regardless of where they were. They attributed this feeling to a variety of factors including being a person of color in a predominately white place, having a multiracial/biracial identity, and having families with whom they did not share their racial/cultural identity through adoption. Youth shared many stories of "not fitting in" many times during our conversations on a variety of relational scales, including with families, friend groups, classes, schools, and communities. Statements such as "I feel like I don't fit in wherever I go," "I don't fit in with either (racial identity) because I am mixed," and "for my whole life, I've been like one of the only two people color in the class…I feel the difference (when in a group that is predominately people of color)…it made me want to go back." The

feelings of onlyness youth described in this study were not limited to their local context; several people also referenced feelings of onlyness or exclusion in other settings nationally and internationally, as though onlyness is something they carry with them wherever they go. In addition to onlyness, youth describe a sense of liminality, or between-ness, as they moved between contexts, identities, and their layered identities (Brunsma et al., 2013). The act of navigating transitions between overlapping aspects of identity in social and familial contexts was described by biracial/multiracial youth and by global majority youth whose families do not share their racial identities as the result of transracial/transcultural adoptions.

An interesting sub-theme within the data was that global majority youth who identify as biracial, multiracial, and/or adopted by white parents, described feeling more understood among peers and family members of color because they often were asked to explain themselves, or defend their racial identity, to their white peers and family members. During one of the summer sessions, as we talked about ways that race matters, Robin (San Carlos Apache/Polish) described the difference between conversations about race and culture with her extended family, saying that the white side of her family ask her lots of questions, while her Apache family members "are like oh, yeah, yeah, I understand." While Robin reported the ease of being understood by her Apache side of the family, in terms of her culture, this feeling is complicated bringing up tensions related to belonging and place saying:

> My cousins (who live off the reservation) are also mixed and so we mostly hang out together and then my other cousins (who live on the reservation) they'll still come around sometimes they'll be like, "Did you hear about the game the other day?" I'm like, "No", they are all like- "You have to be here." "All right." (Awkward laughter) But um, they, like- I'll do something. Am I like, too much of a city person, like what happened? …You know, I don't live on the reservation.

Robin frequently travels to spend time with both sides of her extended family and to participate in Apache culture through hunting, ceremonies, and being with family on her tribal homelands. Moving regularly between spaces and cultures offers Robin points of connection and challenges. Robin's relationship with her extended family is strengthened through her regular visits to her parents' home places. At the same time, in her previous story her cousins highlight the nuanced ways that culture and place are intertwined with identity with the comment "You have to be here." Robin's story tackled belonging, place, and

identity highlighting an example of a situated identity negotiation in real time, amongst family members. Simone (bi-racial, black/white), grew up near her mom's side of her family in Idaho, and described feeling most at home when she visited her dad's family in California:

> I just feel more connected to home and like, with my dad's side of the family, because I am biracial, but like I've always felt like forced towards my white side, just because like I was always around my white family members...I know I feel special when I'm in Cali because most people look like me.

Simone described a feeling of belonging with her family in California, which she described as the place where people look like her. In her comment about being "forced to her white side" Simone frames one place as a place of friction and one as a place of acceptance and fitting in. The language she uses to describe whiteness- "forced' is a nod to whiteness as power, contrasting with the sense of belonging and ease in her description of feeling "special" as part of a Black family and community. Like Simone and Robin, the experiences Mateo (Colombian) described span multiple contexts and address feelings of belonging. Additionally, Mateo highlighted challenges related to navigating identity, culture, and language:

> I don't feel like I belong, it's just like it's just wherever I go. Like I went to a Spanish speaking country, I didn't speak Spanish. I looked like it, but I didn't. I didn't feel like I belonged there.

Mateo went on to describe feeling like he does not belong in the U.S. either for the same reason – the assumptions others make about him. In this example, multiracial identity carries meaning beyond Mateo's immediate home, essentially going with him wherever he goes. Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) described the impact of onlyness at school, where she is frequently put in the position of representing her race and culture, stating:

> When you're in a classroom full of other kids that don't look like you, or don't have the same experience as you, you're kind of forced to do a lot of the heavy lifting and represent for people who do look like you are coming from a background similar, so you kind of always have this like expectation, kind of like the performance you have to give.

Parker described the weight of representing her identity, which she feels in addition to balancing her energy across school, sports, friends, and family. Together, these stories underscore the impacts that race and culture have on everyday life in the rural U.S. for global

majority youth. Regular experiences with racialization were a feature of daily life for the global majority youth, creating feelings of onlyness that interfered with a sense of ease and belonging. Joining the summer sessions offered global majority youth, who regularly experience racialization, a space to process and collectively think about how to respond.

Chapter 5: Understanding Race through Observation: White Youth

This chapter focuses on the ways white youth described their understandings and experiences with race and racism. For white folks, who are not made aware of their race in everyday life, engagement with race is optional. This is an important distinction between white youth and their global majority peers. White youth described their motivations for opting into the collaborative, the desire to contribute to a better world, race evasive language used by white youth, and their experience learning how race matters from global majority peers.

Opting into Engagement with Race

White youth shared their motivations for joining the research collaborative, which included an interest in the topic, an intention to better understand the experiences of global majority peers, the desire to educate themselves to contribute to a better world, and just needing to do something different in the summer. Many white collaborative members described being brought up with a colorblind ideology that reinforced to them that all people are equal. This liberal framework proports to uphold equality through neutrality, denying the salience of race through a focus on individual rights and action, obscuring the many ways that race matters by effectively refusing to see race or racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; M. A. Burke, 2017). Youth in this study explicitly wanted to talk about the ways that race matters and did not carry forward a belief commonly associated with colorblindness, that talking about race is racist. They associated their interest in learning about the ways race matters with a desire to be a better white person. The k-8 school these young people attended was grounded in concepts including service and compassion, empathy and caring, responsibility for learning, diversity, and inclusion, and making the world a better place. While these concepts, deployed in an educational setting by white teachers, could be problematic in term of reinforcing American myths about the importance of individual action, they also offered youth space to consider their own positionality alongside their actions. As their former teacher, I noticed that the ways that white youth described their motivations for engaging in the summer sessions drew on these concepts and extended the previous Discourse (Gee, 2015), or ways of speaking, relating and interacting, at Wheatfield into a new setting. Words like *important* and *good* came up again and again in my interviews with white members of

the collaborative. Madison's (white) answer to my question about why she decided to participate captured the general scope of responses from white youth and included a dash of humor, something that youth had agreed is an essential part of good conversations about race:

> Oh, it was partially the donuts (laughter) but not just the donuts. It seems like important research, that like no one else is doing that. We are in a good position to be a part of and, like, I'm not doing *that* much this summer.

White youth demonstrated a variety of entry points when discussing race (aside from the 7th grade course they had in common) and shared the desire to learn from their global majority peers, whose experiences they said they might otherwise not be aware of or understand. This desire, to learn from global majority peers and to be in good relationship with them, is often cited in the literature about white antiracism as a key motivator for whites who describe themselves as allies (Jupp, 2018; Nayak, 2007; Tanner, 2018; Tatum, 1997). It is also important to note that white youth engaged with the topic of race because of interest convergence, or the alignment of their interests to be good white people with the interests of global majority people whose engagement with race is never optional (Bell Jr., 1980). In the next section I will describe the ways I saw this desire manifest in what youth shared.

A Better World

One of the motivating factors for participation by white youth, found across the data from group sessions and individual interviews, was a desire to discuss and learn more about race to make themselves and the world better. Madison (white) shared her reason for joining saying, "It's good to know what's happening in the world around you and how to be a good person and make the world better than it is." The ways white youth described these aspirations varied in terms of criticality and complexity and can be seen across the following statements. Sam (white) shared his philosophy that "...it's always good to like, keep an open mind. So if I train myself to do that, it'll make me a better person." Olive (white) expressed her desire to "become someone who understood better and how to do better." And Mark (white) referenced his awareness of white privilege and desire to interrupt systemic racism recounting that, "I guess this was an opportunity to kind of fight my advantages as a white person and like, help change the system. So, I thought that if can do any good, I should

probably help out." Madison (white) directly connected structural racism to her purpose for joining the summer sessions saying:

> It's obviously like a very, like, big, important topic that kind of affects everything. Like the world, and also our lives specifically, like most structures, all of them in America have some race element in them. So, it feels like if you don't get that, you kind of just don't get what's going on at all.

Learning and talking about race for white youth was connected to their desire to better understand the world and make it a better place, even as their starting points and depth of self-awareness and criticality varied. White desires to be 'good' in conversations about race can be rightly viewed with skepticism, given the prevalence of white innocence, ambivalence and fragility, all of which serve to maintain white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). At the same time, the white youth who chose to spend their summer mornings in this group showed up, listened well, and learned through discomfort with their global majority peers. They were engaged in an active process of working with anti-racism as identity work that served to further their knowledge of themselves and their peers.

Race Evasive Language

Even as white youth opted into research about race, they avoided using racial terms, functionally upholding taboos about race talk. When they described their reasons for joining the summer sessions on race white youth commonly referenced global majority perspectives using phrases like "different viewpoints" and "it's important to not assume people do something just because they look a certain way." As another example, Mark (white) described his lack of experience with racism saying "I don't really like experience, like how people are treated because of race, just because like..." at which point he hesitated and gestured toward himself, rather than simply naming his whiteness. Even within an anti-racist space, whiteness was recentered in this way through language and silence. White youth were not the only people to avoid naming race, there were also times global majority youth omitted race labels using phrases like "because of who I am," though these did not generally meet the criteria of being race-evasive because the purpose of this replacement was not avoidance, but rather brevity. On the other hand, when white youth omitted race labels, they often demonstrated strategic race evasiveness, requiring intention and effort (Chang-Bacon, 2022).

Remembering back to the discussion I highlighted in the introduction, in which Stewart (white) was upset that he had not learned "the right words to say," white youth in the collaborative demonstrated some anxiety or uncertainty about naming race. They were careful with their words. While they were invested in antiracism, they did not want to say the wrong thing, and seemed unsure of how what they said would be interpreted by the group at times. This could be connected to a lack of experience thinking about race relative to their global majority peers, in part because of their whiteness did not require them to identify themselves in racial terms and in part because in a colorblind society, talking about race is actively avoided and discouraged (Benson & Fiarman, 2019; Castagno, 2008; Helms, 2020).

From Knowing Race Matters to Knowing How Race Matters Here

White youth described ways they learned about race, consistently referencing the value of hearing the stories global majority youth shared. They also referenced the necessity of hearing multiple perspectives to learn about things beyond their own experiences. Mark (white) tied his analysis of the ways white privilege and race matter in Idaho saying:

> …with our (Idaho's) political views being so conservative it feels a lot more like white privilege matters. I've heard from people who aren't white who live in Idaho, that there are places that they don't really feel safe, which I don't really, I can't really relate to as a white male. I feel like I'm fairly safe unless I'm doing something that I shouldn't be... Like male privilege plays into a role as well as the conservative views also play into traditional gender roles.

Mark's critical, intersectional analysis of the ways that identity, politics, and gender relate to safety demonstrates an understanding he says was informed by the stories of global majority Idahoans and conversations with his family. When reflecting on what white youth said they took away from the sessions, I noted connections to McKinney's (2004) concept of interracial interactions and relations, or 'crossings.' Prior to hearing global majority peers describe their everyday experiences with race and racism, these issues were relatively abstract concepts for white youth. When faced with the experiences of their peers, however, those concepts became more tangible. Andy (white) described this when he compared his experience in the summer sessions to experiences in his former middle school class saying:

> I feel like the discussion (in middle school) was a bit more kind of hard to convey, like there were far less, like people of color in my class, or in the group…the majority of people in my class were white and so we were kind of, a bit more dancing around these subjects.

According to Andy, being in a diverse conversation was an important aspect of the summer sessions. According to McKinney (2004), the process of building interracial relationships with peers and sharing stories in a safe setting with shared purpose may be a key component of effective antiracist efforts. Crossings may allow white youth to move beyond their own experiences through relationship building with global majority peers. Mark (white) explained:

> A lot of the time, it's thinking about race from your own view. But the summer sessions gave me a lot more chances to see it from someone else's shoes and their life experiences and listen to how race has impacted their life.

Listening to his peers helped Mark to expand his knowledge and deepen his understanding of the ways race matters to his global majority peers. In another conversation Mark stated that while he did not observe or experience race in his everyday life that travel, media, and reading helped him to understand race. Even so, he had not developed firsthand awareness of ways race operates in our local context, and hearing the stories of global majority youth was a new avenue to expand his understanding. Olive (white) offered a similar reflection on the value of listening to others in terms of her own expanding consciousness:

> I think honestly, I just had more questions generally about how people see things and how people experience things and being in that group, I heard a lot of stories that I didn't think about a lot until then, until we had like those conversations.

Olive highlighted cross-racial dialogue as helping her see beyond her own experiences and worldview and understand how race impacts her global majority peers. When I asked her what understanding she had developed during our individual interview she shared that she "I had kind of thoughts about like certain moments in school or in general life about how other people would have seen it, rather than just my perspective." Stanley (white) also highlighted the value of crossings in his reflection describing how shared dialogue deepened his understanding of the world:

> One of the best ways to discuss and learn about race is with a conversation between multiple people because it's easy to just kind of have that conversation in your head a lot. And by doing that, you end up with a kind of tunnel vision view of what race is, and how the world ought to be and what the world is and all of that, which isn't really what it is at all. So having a conversation with a group of people, especially a diverse group of people that may disagree and may just have a different view and perspective and experience with the world is very important.

In these reflections, white youth attributed an expanding understanding of how race matters with the chance to consider new perspectives and expand their worldview. Learning about race in their own community from global majority peers, through open conversation, made race less abstract. I share the sentiments of white collaborative members and learned a great deal from global majority members, who became our teachers through story.

Chapter 6: Critical Analysis of Race at School and Envisioning the Future

For global majority and white people in this study, observations about race and racism consistently linked back to school spaces. Youth described the way that they experienced the less structured space of the summer sessions as an important feature of the summer sessions that allowed their conversation to flow and deepen compared with school. All youth in the collaborative shared stories that highlighted ways that race matters in the explicit and hidden curriculum as well as in daily interactions at school. Chapter 6 follows themes that arose as youth planned and ran sessions four and five. During these sessions, youth first focused on school as a site of challenge and a space for future transformation. Youth critiques of school included ways teachers wield power and control voice live, the impact of fragmented instruction and standards, curricular gaslighting, and being taught inaccurate history from a white perspective. Their future visions, rooted in their concerns, include teaching American history honestly, normalizing race and culture talk with youth, and increasing diverse representation of teachers, staff, and curricula.

Power and Voice, Fragmented Standards, Partial Histories, and Curricular Gaslighting

Collaborative members' conversations about race consistently linked back to their experiences at school, a place where youth spend much of their time, nine months a year, and where they are taught to make sense of and navigate social worlds. As they listened to one another's stories, they nodded, made encouraging comments, and built on one another's thinking. These were affirmations of identity. Youth were processing what often went unacknowledged in their daily routines at school. They demonstrated that they recognized and respected each other's stories. They were simultaneously developing and demonstrating critical, racial, and cultural literacies. As youth planned for sessions four and five, they talked more and more about their experiences at school. These conversations questioned power and knowledge in school, in line with work by critical theorists including Foucault, Bakhtin, and Freire.

Over multiple cycles of coding, the range of issues youth described included challenges related to authoritarian/transmission teaching, curricular gaslighting, fragmented standards and instruction, their school being run by white people, and the need for well-

facilitated spaces to learn and talk about race. All youth in the collaborative shared stories that highlighted ways in which school fell short of their needs to learn, be seen, and connect with one another. Their critiques were specific to their current educational environment, but they are not unique in the world of education. Schools are places where social behavior and expectations are modelled, taught, and enforced and, therefore, are a primary site of identity negotiation. They are also places where the dominant culture is presented as a norm that teachers, families, and students should aspire to (Helms, 1993; Ruggiano, 2022; Tatum, 1997). I argue that what youth described during the summer sessions and the interviews that followed is reflective of the general state of educational spaces in the U.S.

Power and Voice: "It's hard to have a different or voice a different opinion in the classroom."

The first issue that youth highlighted in their high school experience was the authoritarian approach to teaching they felt many of their teachers demonstrated. Simone (bi-racial, black/white) shared that she noticed high school was different from middle school because her high school teachers were not open to discussing course content or instructional methods with students. Simone explained, "It's a very like, 'I told you this, so this is how it's going to be, like I'm the teacher, so I know better' type deal." What Simone described is a 'banking' or transmission approach to education (Freire, 1970), in which teachers are experts with knowledge to transmit to students. This approach was interpreted by youth in this study as denying their voices in the classroom. When considering how they characterize their high school experience, I noted that what they had experienced at Wheatfield School was often aligned with a constructivist or inquiry model. Stanley (white) added to this, connecting power to an authoritarian teaching style. As he explained:

> I also feel like it's just a teacher has, and it's kind of part of this being so vague, the teacher has so much power over their classroom. It's hard to have a different or voice a different opinion in the classroom…that is part of the school, and just this in general harboring a very powerful, like, kind of absolute teaching environment for the teacher in question.

What Stanley described is a place where critical inquiry and youth voice is limited because teacher knowledge and voice is centered. Youth expressed that this environment and teaching style was particularly challenging for them to navigate when they encountered historical

inaccuracies and erasure in curriculum and teacher explanations. While most youth collaborative members said that their teachers were not open to feedback, Robin (San Carlos Apache/Polish) described a strategy she has used to approach teachers who shared inaccurate information. In my interview with Robin, we were discussing ways race matters at school when this topic came up:

> *Rebekka (white *me):* How has race, or does race matter to you in school?
>
> *Robin:* Um, I mean, sometimes in school...especially in history, history is always (pause). I really like history and but there's always like some things that will be like, I know that is wrong, is not true. And I want to say something, but I don't end up saying anything...
>
> *Rebekka*: So, the biggest way (race is important at school) is when you know that things aren't being characterized accurately in your own education, and like, you have the feeling like you want to correct or say like "That's not right" but then you don't want to?
>
> *Robin*: I don't know, I just feel like, I want to correct it, but I don't. I guess I don't know how to correct it. At the same time, I don't want to because there's always gonna be, at least in my experience, is always gonna be that one person who's going to argue with me, and I don't feel like arguing with them. So, I'll just listen to it, and I'll tell the teacher in my own time, but not when it's happening in the class.
>
> *Rebekka*: Is it usually the teacher who's saying the thing that's not true?
>
> *Robin*: It's usually like in the books or something, or like, wherever they're reading it from. And then they'll say, like, something and I'll be like, and I'll recognize it and after the class is over, I'll go to the teacher and I'll tell them, and they'll be like, "Oh, yeah, okay. I'll make sure that I correct that for my next classes."

Strategies like Robin's may initiate shifts in the narratives taught in school if and when teachers are willing to listen to student feedback, but they can be risky to employ in an authoritarian environment where teachers perceive themselves to be content experts tasked with transferring their knowledge to their students and wielding the power of grading. While the example conversation between Robin and her teacher appears to signify the teacher's openness to revision and willingness to hear Robin's critique, it is unclear whether Robin's teacher did change their instruction, engage in self-education, or seek out new resources related to Robin's concern. The teacher's comment may have been a discursive move that helped them evade a deeper analysis or the way race and power operate in the telling of history. It is hard to tell whether their assurance, that they would "correct it for the next

class," was a pacifying comment to make Robin feel better without shifting practice or a commitment to rethinking instruction. It would be interesting to follow up and ask the teacher if/how their instruction changed after this conversation.

Fragmented Instruction and Standards

During session three youth narrowed their focus for sessions four and five down to talking about race at school, so when I returned to my office after that session I grabbed a selection of materials from my office, including young adult trade books from diverse authors, informational texts, curricular materials, books on research, and printed documents from the Idaho Department of Education, including the Idaho State Social Studies Standards to share with them. During session four, as youth entered the room on the second floor, I placed stacks of books and printed materials on a table at the edge of the room and mentioned that they were the sorts of things teachers and researchers thinking about how to teach social studies, literature, or history might use. I stated that these were materials I personally use or know about, and that another teacher/researcher would draw on a different selection of materials based on their own training, interests, and relationships. A few young people picked up trade books, with global majority youth sharing their excitement about materials that represented diverse stories and experiences. Eventually, youth picked up and started to discuss the Idaho State Standards for Social Studies, with a few students noting that the standards themselves were fragmented. They asked each other how standards were used, how teachers knew what they meant, and if anyone knew whether or how teachers taught the standards. Ironically, during this conversation I had slipped away to a corner of the room with headphones on for the first of many Idaho State Social Studies Standards Review zoom meetings, as I had recently joined the committee tasked with revising Idaho's standards. I would not hear this parallel conversation in the room until later that day when I listened to their transcript alone in my office.

After a period of quiet, as youth looked over different items (punctuated by whispers about things they liked and things that caught their attention), Madison (white) said, while holding up a copy of the standards and pointing to them:

> I feel like this isn't the worst start, but I feel like there should be more focus on connecting the different topics and like carrying the different like cultural and social development throughout the other topics. Not just talking about it, and then assuming that they'll remember to think about it the whole time.

Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) replied, “Yeah, and it like blocks it up into chunks,” which Madison observed “…makes it harder to think about the different aspects.” Madison and Parker went on the describe how this fragmentation and lack of guidance about how to teach the standards, showed up in the ways their teachers taught social studies, using a lesson on Indigenous history as an example:

> *Parker:* We also didn't do any specifics, like we didn't talk about what tribes in particular he was talking about.
>
> *Madison:* Yeah.
>
> *Parker:* It was just I think part of why it was so general was because there wasn't time, because they just didn't seek to find time…
>
> *Madison:* …there were things they considered more important.

As they connected history class to the standards, they also hit on a new theme that was at the root of the issues they were describing. With one or two exceptions, their school was run by white people and the history they taught was from their perspectives.

White History: “It's really important to know how it went down- and not just from one person's experience of it.”

Another topic present across youth conversations was that the curriculum and content of their history classes was described by youth as ‘white history.’ Mateo (Colombian) introduced the idea of white history in a whole group conversation as he described a unit he had completed on the Great Depression:

> _______ (teacher’s name) was focused on what she thought, like what white people experienced, but like there's a lot more to the Great Depression. She was like “This is exactly what happened in the Great Depression, but everyone experienced significantly.” She didn't talk about other races or anything, experience in the Great Depression. And so, it was just interesting, I guess the way that teaching nowadays is mainly just white focused... the world, mainly has white teachers and they think, they talk about history, like they're doing it right now, they are mainly focusing on white people and sure, they touch on it (global majority histories in the U.S.)- only for like, an hour or so. And then for the rest of the year...

In this comment, Mateo connected teacher demographics, worldview, and the way these things manifest in the classroom. During a conversation about why white teachers often avoided difficult history Stanley (white), Madison (white) and Simone (bi-racial, black/white) speculated that fear and comfort was an important factor:

> *Stanley:* I think a lot of teachers are just scared to teach it,
>
> *Madison:* yeah, because they never learned how to teach it.
>
> *Simone:* I think a lot of our teachers are scared to have conversations, like these kids are scared to be wrong.

As these young people built on one another's thinking, they also built a nuanced collective understanding of the layers of anxiety, fear, discomfort, and systemic conditions like a lack of adequate training for teachers, which prevent open, honest conversation about race. Olive (white) connected the lack of diversity in the perspectives taught in schools to the importance of multiple perspectives saying, "I feel like schools only teach maybe one view, and it's really important to know how it went down- and not just from one person's experience of it." The exclusion and marginalization of diverse perspectives and histories troubled all members of the collaborative, many of whom pointed out that the histories of global majority people were only taught during "extra time" or on one special day, rather than as a regular part of the curriculum. For instance, Madison commented that in a recent class the teacher took "one day where he covered all Native American issues like one PowerPoint lecture, 40 slides." This curricular imbalance was a great source of frustration for youth. Shortly I will share what youth think is needed to shift the perspective in schools for the benefit of all students. Before moving on, youth had a few other concerns to share.

Curricular Gaslighting

Youth described teachers who distorted and minimized historical injustices in lessons they taught, instead of providing time for students to consider the facts and context of historical events from multiple perspectives. One example of what that I categorize here as curricular gaslighting, because it presents a distorted version of history as fact, was described by Madison (white), who was learning about history of Japanese internment during the WWII, a history that is particularly close to us in Idaho, where many internment camps were located. Toward the end of a lesson about internment, her teacher explained to her class that

some Japanese American "people were kind of okay with it actually." Madison went on to say that she thought the teacher was "trying to skip over, he kind of, he just sugar coated a lot of what happened, was kind of like "Well, not everyone hated it completely. (Stanley: Wow!) Did you think about that?" This statement can be viewed as gaslighting because it manipulates the experiences of Japanese Americans instead of creating space for youth to consider whether Japanese Americans, many of whose families had been in the U.S. for multiple generations, could have been "okay" with walking away from their communities, businesses, belongings, and homes. A more thoughtful investigation into this history might include an analysis of primary sources from Japanese Americans themselves along with space to consider a variety of statements made by Japanese Americans reflecting their experiences with and reflections on internment. Analysis of statements by Japanese Americans suggesting they were "okay" with the government rounding them up and moving them to detention centers would necessarily include considering the context of the statement, including whether the statements were made under duress or to demonstrate loyalty to America at a time when the vast majority of Americans supported internment out of a combination of fear, suspicion, and xenophobia.

In another example of curricular gaslighting, Flora (Black/African American) shared her frustration with the oversimplified, biased way she was taught about the Black Panther Party. Flora described an interaction with a teacher saying he told the class that "the Black Panthers were violent, bad people" and "Like really not good people" and I was like "But you just said they weren't good people, and you didn't really explain why or anything!" She later researched the history of the party on her own after seeing the Marvel Comics Black Panther movie, which renewed her interest in learning about the party, explaining:

> The Black Panther thing just always felt very wrong, and I was like, kind of ashamed of it, because that's just what I was taught. But the movie was pretty empowering and like the language in it was pretty cool. So, after that, I just kind of felt more interested in the Black Panther Party as a whole, so I kind of was able to do more research with like less bias.

A thoughtful examination of the Black Panther Party could have included conversation about their platform and purpose, foundational history that led to the group's creation, conflict within the party, and the government's concerns about the success of Black Panther solidarity

building efforts with other groups to critique capitalism through the lenses of race, class, and gender. This fear fueled U.S. government efforts to terrorize members of the Black Panthers and destabilize the party. Flora's teacher offered messaging that delegitimized Black resistance to oppression and Black identity and caused Flora to feel shame. This instance of curricular gaslighting, by a teacher who is positioned as an authority of the historical record, is deeply problematic because it distorts historical fact and negatively impacted Flora's racial identity.

Youth were also frustrated with teachers who they said made excuses for people's actions because they were 'okay for the times.' Examples of this included teachers defending John Smith (who was an adult and a white colonizer) for his pursuit of Pocahontas (who was female, indigenous, and underage) as well as many references to lessons about Columbus. Mark (white), Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German), and Stanley (white) discussed their history teacher's approach to teaching about Columbus:

> *Mark*: I don't really have teachers who have defended Columbus, but I think normally they try and avoid the nastier parts of him. So, it feels like you're learning about him, but you're really missing out on the whole point because it's like Columbus was a bad guy, but then they won't tell you why.
>
> *Parker*: All of the horrendous things.
>
> *Stanley*: They're like "Columbus did a lot of bad things" but,
>
> *Mark*: they kind of like skip over the genocide and all his other crimes.
>
> *Stanley (mimicking a teacher): "*If it weren't for him, we wouldn't be here talking about how bad he is. So maybe he wasn't all that bad."
>
> *Stanley and Madison:* That's not a good point!
>
> *Parker:* And you see the repercussions of it through students talking about him in class. They're like, what is the point in changing Columbus Day? If it offends you, just don't celebrate it.

Youth described several situations where misinformation in class led to stressful interactions between peers. I categorize these incidents as instances of curricular gaslighting because they actively distort history by denying atrocities, rationalizing abhorrent behavior, and victim blaming. Even when teachers or books simply have the facts wrong, correcting them is risky business for youth. Robin (San Carlos Apache/Polish), who says she loves learning about

history, described correcting an inaccurate statement made by her teacher in a lesson about Columbus during class one day. “I raised my hand, I said "That is not true. Like, it actually happened way worse…” Robin did not describe her teacher’s response because this was not the focus of her story. Instead, she went on to say that after class, a white student came up to her and told her they thought she was wrong:

> I tried to explain it to them, and eventually they did understand. But I just…I don't like being put in that situation. Yeah, of having to really explain to someone who's gonna disagree with me about it…but then least they agreed with me in the end.

Inaccurate and incomplete teaching can reinforce divisions between youth at school, in this case along racial lines. Robin reported that this incident, “…kind of like set me back. I was like, “Whoa.” And I was like, “Okay, I'll do this on my own time.” In order to offer a more critical, educational environment, “Teachers have to be willing to have possibly uncomfortable but very real, genuine conversations was about race and history, even the more bad parts,” according to Stanley, who also acknowledged that he thought his teachers only taught what they learned and might not have enough time to get into deeper conversations about the content they teach.

As youth discussed their experiences at school and the limited histories they had learned about, they returned to a lack of diversity among teachers in their school. They talked about many ways that students were missing out by only learning from white teachers. Students felt that both white youth and global majority youth would benefit from a more diverse group of teachers and mentors who could help them to feel seen or to learn about experiences they were not familiar with. They also discussed an equity issue related to school staffing,

> *Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German):* We only have one teacher at our school who isn’t white...There is a Spanish teacher, ________ (*Mateo*: and ________ [also a language teacher]). And there is also a substitute teacher, or teacher in training…they are not white, but they are not permanent teachers…and all our counselors are white.

This observation highlights the intersections of race and class, demonstrating keen awareness of complex social and structural inequities. Parker’s observation deepened the collaborative’s critique of schools staffed by white teachers teaching white history. This collective analysis

of life at school informed recommendations youth made for the future schools they want to see. I will present these in more detail shortly.

Curating and Cultivating Youthscapes

Before moving on to the futures youth want to see, it is helpful to pause and consider relevant connections between place and identity. During individual interviews, I asked youth where the information that influences their thinking came from, as well as how being from a rural place has mattered in terms of their understandings of race and racism. In line with the youth research highlighted in Youthscapes (Maira & Soep, 2005), youth in this study described being influenced by a varied of local, national, and global flows of information with a focus that is simultaneously local and global. In line with rural scholars (Eppley & Corbett, 2012; Lensmire, 2017; White & Corbett, 2014) several collaborative members pushed back against oversimplification when I asked whether being in a rural place influenced their ideas about race, pointing out in a variety of ways that rural could mean many things. Madison (white) talked more about identity than race specifically, and pointed out that asking about the rural invoked the urban:

> It is hard to completely isolate where parts of your identity come from, or at least it can be because of how interconnected everything is. Like. I don't know, it's not like, what does rural mean if there's not a city to compare it to? Like we kind of define our world by comparison so it's hard to define something on its own?

Madison complicated the idea of rurality and pivoted to wonder about how we make sense of who we are through comparison. Youth in this study shared that their local environment and family were important in terms of shaping their perspectives but the most frequent way our local context was discussed was as a limiting factor when it came to cultural diversity, even then, youth pointed out that our rural was not as limiting as they perceived surrounding smaller towns that are less diverse might be, with the exception of local tribal communities. Mark (white) spoke about the interconnectedness of culture, politics, and diversity, explaining "local culture and the political climate play a lot into who lives there and therefore the racial climate- you know, how welcoming or concerned with equality it is..." He went on to describe that this limitation matters more when people are very young because they do not travel or read enough to learn about a wider variety of places and experiences. He described how, as he got older, his access to ideas and views that helped him expand his understanding

increased thanks to social media, travel, and reading. Olive (white) shared that she learned about culture through "cooking videos from all around the world. That's just what I've kind of cultivated on my page and I think that's been one of my favorite things is seeing how different places treat food or the culture that goes into it." Olive's use of the word cultivate demonstrates her active efforts to learn about places and people beyond her immediate context through thoughtful use of technology.

Global majority youth described a lack of diversity in our rural context differently than white youth, referencing a lack of global majority peers and role models as a limitation of our local environment. Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) also spoke about curating her social media feed during her individual interview:

> *Parker:* I mean, everything's kind of everywhere with social media. You can find an endless amount of anything that like, people really have the ability to create small communities that they can connect with. And I mean, I didn't realize that I had the power to kind of like, because I only have Instagram, right? and I didn't realize it for a long time, but I have the power to kind of curate what kind of feed I want because Instagram's really good at doing that, like, depending on who you follow, and the more content they post, you're going to just consume more of that. And I was like, "Wait a minute, I can follow people that that look like me or have similar backgrounds as me, so I don't feel as lonely anymore!" like within my own actual like in-person community.
>
> And so, I started following different Native American content creators. And I consume lots of their media now and I can relate to a lot of it or like, their senses of humor are similar to my mom and mine, are like when I go back home, I'm like, wait, what you just posted- It's something that we do, you know, as a family and so when I say media, I'm kind of trying to find spaces for myself.
>
> *Rebekka (white):* I love that! I'm writing it down. "I'm trying to find spaces for myself."
>
> *Parker:* Yeah, beforehand I was just consuming a lot of media with only white people in it. And it was just kind of lonely feeling. I mean, even if you could connect to a character who's white, it's nice to see your own image reflected back at you occasionally. Yeah. Like positive, I guess positive renditions too, not, not bad ones.

These explanations from Olive and Parker helped me to move beyond oversimplified claims about the teen social media use and its ill-effects to better understanding the active role that youth collaborative members took when it came to the media they consumed and the ways that media impacted their sense of identity and cultural consciousness. Curating a social

media feed was an affirmation of their identity and interests. Sam described his social media feed as a mix of global soccer, Black Lives Matter, and local businesses, summarizing his influences as "…a huge range from local to global." This specific example highlights the varied interests, voices, and stories that youth can access via social media. These examples show that rural youth, with access to global flows of information, do not feel that their rural location is particularly salient, except perhaps when it comes to their relationships. Youth do not understand rural according to prevalent binary tropes about rural places that make it seem as though there is one rural experience and push back against oversimplified conceptions of rural places in line with the work of critical rural researchers (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; Eppley & Corbett, 2012; Lensmire, 2017). Thinking back to descriptions of developing racial awareness and experiencing racialization by global majority youth, which they often described as tied to encountering new people, moving to a larger school where people did not know them as well, and movements between places where their racial and cultural identity was more salient. Many white collaborative members pointed to a lack of exposure to diversity as limiting white people's understanding of global majority people, which makes sense in the context of our specific rural place, which is predominately white.

Youth observations about race at school in the curriculum and in classroom conversations were critical and centered on analysis of power including whose voice matters at school, issues with curriculum and the presentation of historical facts, and the focus on what youth described as white history. In the next section, I will illustrate how youth turned their critiques into future vision for affirming school spaces. One important note before I share these future visions is that open nature of these unstructured sessions provided the groundwork for conversations that were more expansive, deep, and youth driven than their previous experiences talking about race at school (in my 7th grade classroom and in school more generally).

Flexible Space for Conversation and Planning

When asked to reflect on what the summer sessions were like, nearly every person, across identity groups, highlighted the value of unstructured space to talk and listen together, their joy each week was evident as they eased into conversation. The idea of unstructured space was appealing to youth but a more accurate way of characterizing what they referred to

as unstructured would be flexible or less structured than school. As they talked, youth made sense of their own identities, situated themselves relative to others, and built community through a shared interest and experience. When the sessions were over, youth often lingered, continuing their conversations in smaller groups as they left the education building. When I asked Andy (white) what it was like for him in our sessions, he shared that as the youngest member of the collaborative he felt that in addition to not personally experiencing race, himself he did not have as much to contribute during conversations as other members because they centered on experiences in high school, where he had not yet been a student. Andy noted that he thought the structure supported youth conversations because “we got onto topics we probably wouldn't have gotten on to if it had been a bit more structured.” Olive (white) shared that, compared with previous, academic conversations about race in middle school, “this was just more conversation, which really helps people to open up more.” In addition to having the chance to talk about race and racism, being heard was an important aspect of the summer sessions, particularly for global majority members. When asked what the summer sessions were like for her, Simone (bi-racial, black/white) shared that she “felt like people like listened to me so it wasn't like I was talking to like nobody.” Nora (mixed, half white/half black) reported that she appreciated “…cool people talking about things that happened to them that weren't cool…I kind of decided, I was like I'm going to express. I'm gonna give my point of view on this.” As someone who regularly cultivates spaces in and out of school for youth, hearing them describe the benefits of a less structured, more supportive space for discussing race impressed upon me the importance of spaces that are youth-centered in terms of purpose and design. Their comments also speak to the importance of informal, authentic dialogue to create an inviting space where youth feel free to express themselves (Gee, 2015).

Throughout the sessions and during our individual interviews, youth described aspects of the summer sessions that were important to them. These included the opportunity to share personal experiences, listen to one another, ask questions that they would not have been comfortable asking in other settings, and enjoy the freedom of an open and flexible format. The boundaries youth co-created for talking about race built a strong foundation for these conversations. When asked about their future visions of the ways race and racism may

matter, youth frequently snapped back to the past and present. While brainstorming possible topics for sessions four and five during session two, as youth listed a broad variety of possible topics to focus on, including racial terminology, how to respond to racism and microaggressions, police violence against people of color, ownership of museum exhibits and artifacts, history and heritage months, and connections between past and present. This list demonstrates the wide variety of issue youth are aware of and wonder about. Through conversation youth pointed out that the roots of the issues they were concerned about and interested in started at home and at school. Simone introduced the idea that to create a better future, backtracking would be necessary because racism is taught.

> *Simone* (biracial, black/white): …racism is something that's taught so in order to go forward, we have to go backwards and backtrack and unteach, so.
>
> *Parker* (Cree, Assiniboine, and German): Then how do we change education?
>
> (several people laugh)
>
> *Flora* (Black/African American): Oh gosh! I don't know, I guess it just starts with exposure, well also- not having the governor ban critical race theory and fund education is a wonderful start. Just exposure in general, like getting speakers to come in instead of just having just having like white teachers. It's a lot worse to have someone telling you about your own history, and then like to have someone who has like a connection to it because, I mean, when I was at Brown, we had a lot of speakers over the course of two weeks, and we noticed that with like the white speakers, it would be more of them standing giving a lecture- most of the information in the lecture would be a little offensive, like they wouldn't have the correct terms. We corrected someone wants and they're like, 'Well, I have black friends and colleagues, so I think I'm okay' (laughing). We're like 'No,' we noticed that it was a lot more of like, 'I'm telling you about this. You don't know.'" But when we have like, people of color come in, they… it was like sit in the middle of the room. And they would have us do activities and it was a lot more like a conversation than it was telling us.

In this exchange Parker's question, "How do we change school?" led Flora to share her vision for increasing teacher diversity. This recommendation arose from her experiences learning from Black and Indigenous teachers, whose pedagogy and lived experience were distinct from white teachers and were important to her. Youth brainstorming is illustrated in Figure 7 below along with the final list of topics chosen by youth in Figure 8.

Figure 7: Initial Brainstorm of Topics for Sessions Four and Five

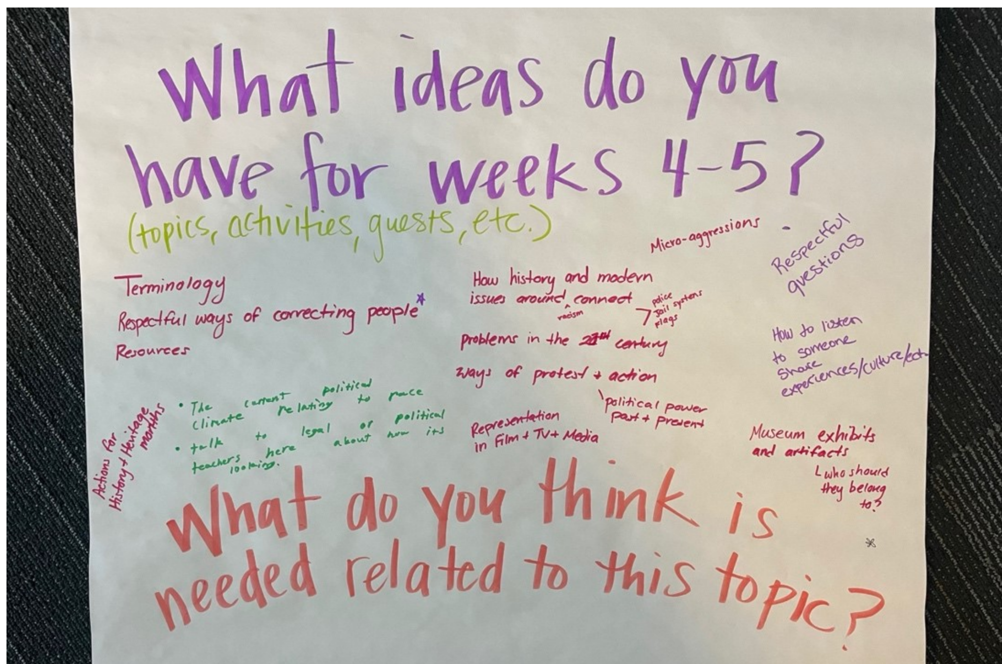
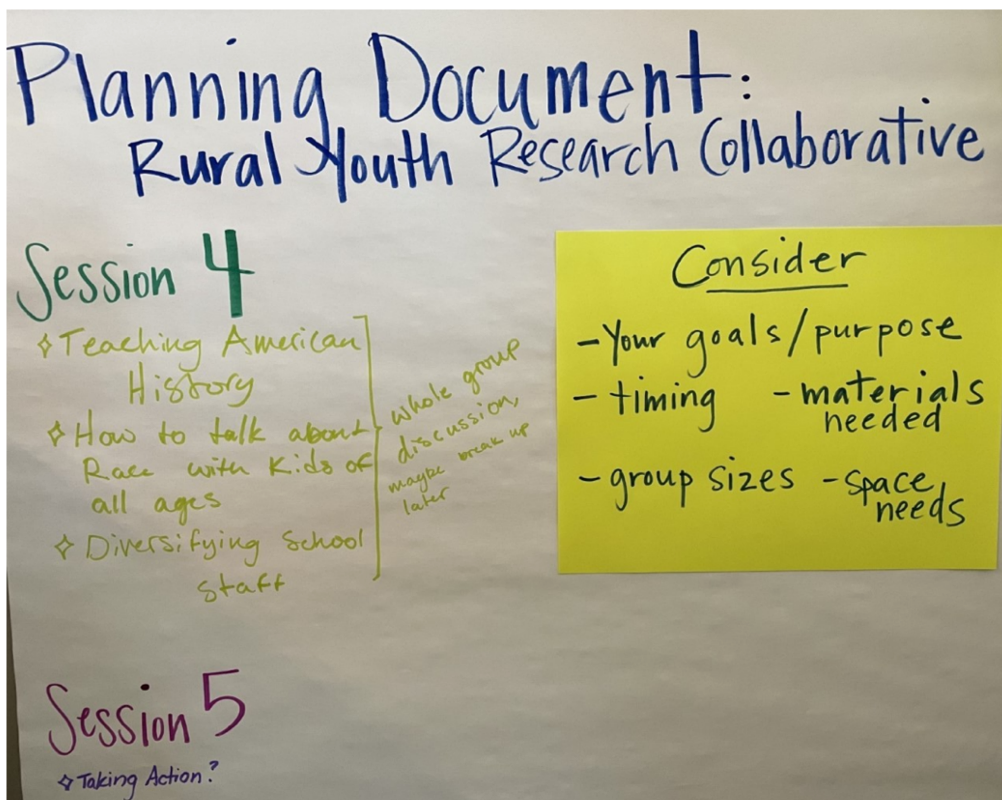


Figure 8: Topics Selected for Sessions Four and Five



Future Visions Shaped by Past and Present

Returning to my original research question, about how youth experience and understood race for themselves and for us all, youth descriptions of school as they have experienced made clear that school is a place where race matters. Once youth took the time to unpack their own experiences as students, they focused their attention on future visions for what school could be like. Many times, as youth began talking about what they envisioned, they quickly snapped back to their own experiences in school, grounding their arguments, again and again, in personal experiences. Their approach to contextualizing what they wanted to see was strategic and effective at engaging one another and building consensus. As these conversations unfolded, youth validated one another's experiences and learned from each other. Youth identified three focal areas: honestly and inclusively teaching American history, the need for diverse teachers and resources to resolve the lack of representation and perspectives in school, and a call for teachers to talk about race and culture with students starting at a young age and continuing throughout their k-12 education. These focal areas were identified by youth during the sessions and were referenced during many individual interviews as significant ways to better support students.

Honest American History

Youth collaborative members called for teachers to offer a fuller, more honest history of the U.S., which they said necessitated teachers taking the time to consider their own relationships to race and culture. They also noted that teachers need training and support to teach in accurate, affirming ways. Andy (white) recommended that teachers "examine what biases you have….and make sure that you're taking that into account and correcting for that." Mark (white) called for a more expansive, nuanced view of race and culture saying, "It's important to talk about, not just race, but culture in the classroom." Madison (white) built on these comments by connecting a lack of teacher training and current political struggles to what youth are currently experiencing in schools:

> There's like kind of something to be said for not really knowing how to teach these things but I think the worst way to deal with it, which is kind of what a lot of legislation is doing by like banning things, is just full on ignoring the problem. And that just won't work at all.

In her analysis, Madison connects individual teaching to legislative efforts, demonstrating an understanding of the connections between political action, teacher training, and classroom practice. In the adult debate about race and identity in schools, this clarity is often obscured. As a result, the limited ways we understand and discuss our histories influence our ability to relate to each other, address discrimination, repair historical and contemporary injustice, and find our way forward together. A recent dramatic uptick in Civil Rights complaints in schools suggests that more attention, not less, should be focused on helping teachers and youth to engage well with history, current events, and one another (Green, 2023). This recommendation is particularly important because school is a place of socialization where youth learn about nested individual, community, and national identities that cannot be understood without an accurate understanding of history (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2015; Chandler, 2015; King, 2016; Muhammad, 2022; Sabzalian et al., 2021). When teachers share incomplete stories and opinions as though they are truth, there is lost trust and a lost opportunity to engage youth in critical thinking about the past that informs their treatment of one another, which can ripple into young peoples' relationships with and treatment of one another.

Normalizing Race and Culture Talk

During our second to last session, youth called for teachers to talk with their students about race and culture and support children to develop racial literacies starting at a young age. Members of the collaborative believed it was important to normalize conversations about race by talking about race more often to diminish the taboo associated with race talk. Simone (bi-racial, black/white) felt that to really listen and learn, people need to open up to each other and let go of their fear around this topic:

> I feel like it shouldn't be such like a touchy topic. Like it'll always be a touchy topic, but it shouldn't be something that people are scared to talk about. Because like everybody's scared to say something that's like incorrect or wrong, or that's taken the wrong way. Like if you're respectful about it, it shouldn't be able to be taken the wrong way. I feel like we should be able to have conversations and teach people and learn from other people without being so defensive.

Building on Simone's thinking, Madison (white) added that it needs be done in an age-appropriate way saying, "Not like, throwing kids directly to things that are too complicated

for them to understand (*Parker*: No, no, no), but teaching about it in a realistic way…starting small, you teach a kid how to cross the street before you teach them how to drive.” As the conversation continued, more collaborative members jumped in to share their ideas about race talk in school:

> *Mark (white)*: Starting early is important too because that makes a big impression and it’s a lot easier to learn younger.
>
> *Madison (white)*: Kids are better at learning empathy.
>
> *Stanley (white)*: Yeah, it’s also important to remember that, like, there were kids that went through all of this stuff too so they can learn about it. Because there were ones that lived through it.
>
> *Mark*: And especially the kids who are minorities, they might be suffering racism and not understand why, so getting them better resources and helping them understand why might help them in life.
>
> *Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German):* Yeah, yeah. No, it’s good. And I mean, exposing kids to different minority groups I feel like is also a good thing, so they know the world is not white, and also not glorifying minority groups at a young age. (*Madison*: Exactly.) I feel like it's really important. (*Madison*: Yeah, not having like stereotypes, just not having stereotypes in general. Knowing that a lot of people can be a lot of different ways.) This is kind of off topic. Like I was looking at this, and it says, ‘Indians are so often imagined and so infrequently understood’ and I think that’s like huge with minority groups. Like if you see them as a little kid, it’s more of like an imaginary glorified version.
>
> *Mark*: Yeah- like cowboys and Indians or something.
>
> *Parker*: Yeah, and not actually a person,
>
> *Mark*: rather than a cultural group.
>
> *Madison*: So, if you read stories or hear from people where it's minorities just living their lives…I think that would be a very good development.

As I listened to these youth discussing future visions with one another, grounded in their own experiences and knowledge, I was struck by the difference in tone between their conversation about race talk at school and the contentious conversations that have increasingly dominated politics and state legislatures over the past few years. This conversation is an example of why it was so important to invite and center youth voices: their collaborative knowledge building processes, mutual commitment, and curiosity about the experiences of their peers model a way forward that can include all of our stories. Contrast

this example with the fractured debates that reside in political echo chambers and do not support shared understanding or problem solving. What the young people are telling us is that the unwillingness and inability to talk about race and culture in ways that increase understanding are maintaining racial bias and stereotypes. According to Madison (white), an important reason for resistance to talking with young children about race is that-

> A lot of people are worried that it will make them hate America. But I think just not telling them is much more of a disservice, it builds resentment, it just builds up falsehoods in their minds that are harder to break down once they get into the more complicated things.

Madison clearly articulates that avoiding honest conversation about our past and present creates and maintains false perceptions that make it difficult to understand our history and the world we live in. What Madison and her peers described is the active, regular maintenance of white supremacy through silence, erasure, outright lies, and divisive ideas. Imagine what would happen if we insisted on humanizing conversations about race and culture rooted in honesty, openness, and responsibility. To make this vision a reality, teachers need support and space for their own learning and self-reflection (Anthony-Stevens, Boysen-Taylor, et al., 2022; Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; Castagno, 2008, 2014; Helms, 2020; Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). Schools must support ongoing attention and space for this work because it is iterative and does not have an endpoint.

Representation Matters at School

In addition to helping current teachers bring discussions about the past and present salience of race into the classroom, collaborative members also called for more diverse teachers and resources in schools. In terms of conversations about race, the experiences of white youth learning from the stories and knowledge of global majority youth during the summer could indicate that for white youth, learning from global majority teachers is important because, in Mark’s (white) words, “it's a lot more impactful if you're hearing from someone who has some personal connection to what they're talking about too.” When discussing the impacts of diverse teachers on white youth, one collaborative member shared:

> That would also be good, even for white students to like learn how to not have that sense of entitlement. If they are able to see things from multiple perspectives from a young age, they won't assume that they're always right. And that their way (laughter) that they've experienced the world is the way that everyone must experience the world.

This comment highlights the fact that our educational opportunities, in and out of school, shape our worldviews and our ways of understanding who we are. Increasing the presence of diverse teachers and school staff would also support global majority students who very rarely learn from non-white teachers. Simone (bi-racial, black/white) pointed out that for her, TV and books were an important way of feeling culturally connected:

> Having TV shows that are about African American struggles that are written by African Americans and like books as well, was kind of helpful for me. It's just made me feel connected in some way. Because it's like, but yeah, that version looks like so I think that that would be important for kids growing up and even adults sometimes just because, like it's nice to have somebody that you know has similar struggles to you.

In light of this, we might imagine how Simone and her global majority peers would feel if they had teachers who they knew had experienced similar struggles while in school. Parker (Cree, Assiniboine, and German) and Flora (Black/African American) noted the importance of diverse books for this same reason, saying: "Yeah, books, they make the difference" and "they can make a kid feel seen." As ideas about how to best make change were shared youth noted that diversifying teachers and staff would take time, so in the short term they felt that schools could rely on guest teachers, speakers, media, and books. Holding up one of the books from my office, *Everything You Wanted to Know About Indians But Were Afraid to Ask: Young Readers Edition* by Anton Treuer, Parker said: "But if we had books like this in schools, I think it would be pretty effective in like diversifying education and allowing people to have a proper understanding of someone's culture" and went on to call for "expanding on resources, asking for speakers and other such things, a diverse set of like books and or videos. Having teachers have extended training on race and empathy." Olive (white) noted that white students also benefit from having diverse teachers because it would help them to expand their perspectives. These recommendations align with researchers working to understand how to build and embed pipelines for more diverse teacher preparation and retention support for global majority teachers to serve a diversifying student

population (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Rios & Longoria, 2021; Sleeter, 2001; Sleeter et al., 2015).

"What can we do about things?"

While youth made clear, informed, pragmatic recommendations for schools and teachers, they struggled when I asked them how they thought race would matter for them and for us all in the future. During her interview, Parker explained:

> Young people oftentimes get stuck with a question like, *what can we do about things?* because most of us, most of the people in that group couldn't vote yet, most of us haven't. We're not even in college. And so, I think answering that kind of question is hard, especially like if we want to do something within the school system, and that's a little bit easier, but it's still difficult because there's a lot of pushback from other people, especially adults or administrators, you know…answering that question and figuring out how to walk around it can be difficult, and I think that's where we got caught a couple times when trying to come up with a plan, since we're like talking about race and education.

Parker's question, *what can we do about things?* highlights the limitations youth face when they are not treated as full people with the right to advocate for the things they want to change. It also reminds me of my responsibilities as a teacher- to learn from and alongside my students. By listening well to what students say about school, teachers can help make classrooms more welcoming spaces. By understanding that the classroom is not the only place of learning and connections, teachers can begin to work in more expansive ways that meet youth needs and interests. The summer sessions taught me to let go of the structure I was taught to cultivate in my work as a teacher to recognize young people more fully as experts on the issues that they live with every day. With unplanned space, and the expectation that youth could shape our sessions, determine the direction of conversation, and decide what to spend their time on. In the next section, I discuss what teachers and researchers can learn from this group more broadly, along with limitations of the study and implications for future research.

Future visions shaped by past and present developed across the data as youth snapped back and forth between the past, present, and future. Grounding their insistence that schools need to do things differently in their own lived experiences, youth advocated for honest American history, normalizing talk about race and culture, and increasing representation of

diverse teachers and staff in schools. In this chapter, I shared ways youth described and promoted their future visions for schools as they took the lead determining their focus and purpose in the final weeks of the summer sessions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Implications

Nationally, regionally, and locally debates continue about whether and how to talk about identity and race with youth. This conversation unintuitively omits the voices of youth, who, as this study demonstrates, have plenty to say about the ways race matters in their lives. In our current context as of this writing-- of ongoing racial inequity and discrimination, legislative efforts aimed at chilling conversation about race in school, and political efforts that University of Idaho President Scott Green has aptly referred to as 'conflict entrepreneurship'-- documenting the experiences of youth related to race and identity is an important acknowledgment of the urgent situation young people, and global majority youth in particular, find themselves in. To build understanding of the ways that race, place, and identity matter to youth in rural Northern Idaho, one question guided this ethnographic, participatory inquiry:

- How do rural youth describe the salience of race and racism in the United States for themselves personally, and for the U.S. as a collective?

In this chapter I will describe some of the limitations of this study and then return to the conceptual constellation I used for investigating the research question. Next, I will describe what I see as the significance and implications of the study for various stakeholders based on the findings.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The first was the feasibility of a voluntary study for youth who have full schedules and responsibilities. While 25% of invited participant/co-researchers is a significant participation rate for a study of this kind, additional resources, and support in the form of youth researcher stipends may have supported greater participation. Youth participated based on their own personal experience with and/or commitment to the issues we discussed, as well as their availability. This means that the views of youth who felt ambivalence about race, a common sentiment among white people in particular, are not represented here (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Moffitt et al., 2021; Nayak, 2007). These views are important for researchers seeking to better understand youth relationships to race. Future work should be done to engage a wider variety of perspectives. Another limitation was the

degree to which my own preferences and interests in planning were prioritized by the structures and requirements of academic research (Vanderbilt & Ali, 2020). This limited the influences of youth on the study design, which is a significant drawback for a participatory study focused on youth perspectives and experiences. This is significant because youth in this study highlighted the importance of unstructured spaces to co-create shared understanding. More significant youth participation earlier in the process, supported materially and financially, may have changed the focus and trajectory of the work in meaningful ways. As described in the methods section, I believe the IRB process may have inhibited youth participation by limiting youth engagement in the study design and failing to acknowledge youth as co-researchers. Finally, the time frame we worked within, given our many interests and obligations, impeded our ability to engage in the full research process together. A longer-term study would allow for more meaningful engagement by youth throughout each stage of the research process, include a broader sampling of youth perspectives, and support youth to develop and pursue their own research questions. Even with these limitations, this study engaged youth in the process in meaningful ways, compared with more common examples of research on, rather than with, youth.

Significance and Implications

In this section I begin by describing significant linkages between the conceptual framework and findings. The themes that arose in collaborative members' conversations were rooted in their lived experiences which in turn informed their visions for change. Decisions about schooling systems and practices frequently ignore the voices of youth and prevents them from thriving as individuals and community members.

A Conceptual Constellation for Youth Research

My conceptual constellation included identity theory and, specific to race, racial identify theory which help to explain the ways we know who we are, perceive those around us and relate to one another in a racialized society in which whiteness is framed as the norm despite the fact of whiteness as a global minority group (Campbell-Stephens, 2021; Helms, 2020; Moffitt et al., 2021; Tatum, 1992, 1997). Consistent with the literature on racial identity development, global majority youth described navigating persistent racialization by others (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1993; Ruggiano, 2022; Tatum, 1997). As a result, they

experience feelings of onlyness and isolation. Also in keeping with the literature, white youth did not report regularly experiencing or being made aware of their racial identity (Jupp, 2018; Lensmire, 2017; McKinney, 2005; Moffitt et al., 2021; Tanner, 2018). This lack of awareness prevents global majority youth from being seen and experiencing belonging, prevents white people from understanding their own cultural and racial identities as well as the experiences of global majority peers, and inhibits open conversations about race and culture.

Place was important to consider in this study because the ways people experience identity is both bound to our specific, local context, as well as to larger flows of information that transcend the local (Maira & Soep, 2005). In this study the local was important because our predominately white, rural setting can obscure actual diversity and serves to homogenize rurality as only a white place (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; White & Corbett, 2014) when in fact diversity is present in our past and present. In addition, youth described connections between being known as individuals and having their self-described identities accepted by others. In the context of this study that experience was present during childhood and decreased as youth stepped into widening school settings. The ways youth describe place can be as a source of more accurate, inclusive teaching and learning if we take the time to look beyond standard historical narratives and oversimplified ways of speaking about our local. At the same time, place needs to be considered as a space beyond the physical. Youth in this study described curating digital networks to expand cultural knowledge and affirm their identities (Gee, 2017). The cultivation of digital worlds by youth is an area for future study. Place, whether local or digital, was described as important by youth in this study as it influenced their sense of agency and identity.

Youth studies was utilized to bring critical attention to youth perspectives on identity (rather than adult perspectives on youth) and the ways that historical and current power relationships influence identity development and enactment (Best, 2011; Maira & Soep, 2005). As is clear across the findings, youth identity is inextricably tangled up in hegemonic power relationships and struggles that shape ways people experience the world, see themselves, relate to others, educate themselves and others, describe history, and communicate social norms to one another. Adults concerned with education cannot begin to

understand what youth need and want without including their voices and building the trust necessary to support open, honest communication.

Youth at the Center

Across identity groups, youth in this study described ways they believe race matters for them and more broadly for the U.S. as a collective. They called for more focus on helping young people learn about race and culture from and with one another, supported by teachers and materials that reflect varied identities and perspectives. Following this recommendation would support healthy identity development for youth from across racial and cultural groups which would in turn support relationships and community building. The recommendations youth made for the futures they envision centered on the place where they spend much of their time, school. Youth highlighted ways that curricula, teachers, and classroom discussions about race and racism do not currently meet their needs, as well as steps schools can take to remedy the challenges they described. In their future visions, they called for teaching truthful, inclusive American History, diversifying representation at school, and talking with students about race early and often. If we return to common narratives about teenagers and their concerns-- these critical, community-building recommendations may come as a surprise. Youth in this study defied common stereotypes about youth as a disengaged group in need of surveillance and demonstrated the ability to engage deeply with the content and structure of their learning environments (Maira & Soep, 2005). These visions demonstrate the importance of belonging for young people and their agency in planning for change.

First and foremost, this study was significant for collaborative members as a space to share ideas, hear one another's stories, ask questions, and discuss ideas for challenging the status quo at school. Additionally, the shared experiences youth co-created during the summer sessions highlight the value of interaction in the process of youth identity construction and enactment (Bakhtin et al., 1986; Erickson, 2004; Loyd & Gaither, 2018). Specifically, youth in this study expressed that they felt heard and learned from each other in a space where they were willing to be uncomfortable and share their stories. Spaces like this are few and far between.

Youth can contribute to and benefit from a community of practice where they are seen, known, and have vital roles to play (Cammarota & Fine, 2010). Affinity spaces and youth-led research projects have the potential to simultaneously support youth identity, affirm youth agency, further social justice efforts, and inform the development of more humanizing educational environments and practices. The ideas shared by youth in this study were rooted in their own critical analysis of the ways race and racism do matter and liberatory visions for ways schools should support youth, exemplifying the patient impatience that accompanies purposeful, transformative inquiry (Freire, 1970). Young people should be supported to imagine and shape the spaces they need and should be included in research on issues that impact them because they are the subject matter experts on their own experiences.

Reimagining Schooling

This study holds significance for teachers, teacher educators, and school leaders who determine how to teach, as well as how to resource and lead schools. This study's findings reaffirm the need for schools and teachers to work closely with youth, families, communities, and teacher education programs to seriously consider, plan for, and enact recommendations that youth make in ways relevant to their specific context. This is particularly salient, given the steadily increasing racial diversity of schools in the United States and the racial homogeneity of teachers and school leaders. General recommendations made by youth include training teachers to knowledgably and honestly teach our multifaceted history, diversifying school staff and curricular materials, and supporting teachers to talk about race with youth to build racial literacy, are supported by research in teacher education. Using instructional models and pedagogies that engage youth and community knowledge, concerns, and histories is a first essential step (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2015; Banks, 2021; Cammarota & Fine, 2010; King, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Muhammad, 2022; Schmitke et al., 2020). These recommendations stem from current conditions in schools rooted in colonial constructs that attempt to segment and standardize knowledge and learning (Banks, 2021; Sleeter, 2005). These colonial practices and ways of being in schools are upheld by teachers who are taught to evade race talk in the service of diversity and inclusion.

As youth made their recommendations, I noted how quickly they were able to move from offering personal examples of problems they wanted to address to logical recommendations for educators and schools. It should be apparent that, as an educational researcher, I do not dispute the need for critical research alongside lived experience and everyday problem solving. In terms of better supporting youth, though, I believe that the tendency to prioritize so called "evidence-based" school reforms that promise change over time, when everyday solutions are a close as a conversation with youth, serves to maintain the status quo more than it serves young people. In this study, youth were experts on their own experiences, describing future visions for school and making recommendations about ways to get from where we are now to their future visions for more inclusive, supportive learning environments.

Educators should recognize youth agency and expertise when it comes to young peoples' experiences at school. This will require teachers to examine their epistemologies, positionalities, and pedagogical approaches to teaching. It also demands that all teachers engage in ongoing work unlearning and learning about U.S. and local histories and deeply consider their relationship to race, as well as that of their students.

One way to thoughtfully share power with youth and learn together is by using YPAR as pedagogy. Researching school practices with youth has the potential to foster humanizing, transformative learning for teachers and students within the school day. Mirra et al. (2016) state that "if we really do believe in the full humanity of young people, that their voices are valid and should be heard in the spaces that make decisions about their schooling experiences, the YPAR is not an extracurricular endeavor but an imperative mandate" (p. 153). Training and supporting teachers to engage youth in YPAR projects offers a compelling path toward school renewal and improvement bringing youth, researchers, educators, school leaders, and community members together in a community of practice. To address urgent racial disparities in education and in society, and help students learn about and navigate their civic responsibilities, schools must cultivate varied ways to listen well to students, prospective students, and families about what they want and need in their learning community. Schools must be prepared to respond to what they learn for the benefit of current

and future students. Listening without action has the potential to significantly erode trust and compound already urgent issues.

Significant attention should be given to training and retaining culturally proficient teachers and school leaders, particularly those from underrepresented groups, because a more diverse teacher workforce offers students chances to learn from teachers with whom they do not share an identity, who act as windows into new lived experiences and perspectives, and the chance to learn from teachers they can relate to and identify with, who act as mirrors reflecting experiences and perspectives they hold in common (Bishop, 1990). This may include restructuring teacher preparation programs, offering intensive induction support for new teachers helping them apply their training to their specific classroom context, and increasing teacher leadership roles within schools so that mentor teachers are able to grow in their practice by mentoring others without leaving the classroom. While many teacher preparation programs are not yet meeting the needs of global majority teacher education students, there are researchers and programs doing great work in this area that teacher educators and higher education administrators can learn from and build on the work of (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2020; Anthony-Stevens et al., 2022; Lees & Nelly, 2022). The Indigenous Knowledge for Effective Education Program (IKEEP) at the University of Idaho utilizes mentorship networks, offers robust induction support, teaches culturally revitalizing and sustaining pedagogy, and centers Both/And pedagogy to balance community and cultural values with academic skills-- promising practices teacher education programs should consider.

Practicing teachers need ongoing support and space to grow in all aspects of their craft. Much has changed since veteran teachers learned about pedagogy and content. It is time to ensure that teacher knowledge is relevant and up to date. The history typically taught in k-12 classrooms is largely shaped by what teachers were taught as children while engaged in what Lortie (1975) described as the “apprenticeship of observation” (Borg, 2004; Lortie, 1975; Tomlinson, 1999) and, to a lesser degree, by the history they learn to teach as preservice teachers. This study’s findings demonstrate the specific need for professional development on social studies content that is truthful, multifaceted, and engages youth in strategically building critical thinking skills that help them connect global, national, and local

issues, as well as link past and present. Ongoing professional development that addresses gaps in teacher content knowledge and training in culturally responsive social studies methods is sorely needed (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Nieto, 2009; Sabzalian et al., 2021; Shear et al., 2015; Shuster et al., 2018). Schools should consider ways to partner teachers with libraries, museums, historical societies, universities, cultural organizations, and tribal nations to connect classrooms and the community. Curriculum and classroom materials should reflect varied identities and perspectives and be relevant and engaging to students (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2015; Banks, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Sleeter, 2001).

As an example, over many years I have worked with digital librarian Marco Seiferle-Valencia to create historical inquiry curriculum and a state history e-book centering voices typically excluded and omitted from the standard historical narrative (Seiferle-Valencia, 2020; Seiferle-Valencia & Boysen-Taylor, 2023). We began by creating detailed lesson plans to support critical historical inquiry into what we often refer to as hidden histories but more recently have prefered to craft more flexible resources that teachers can adapt to their specific contexts. Finally, schools must provide teachers and school leaders with ample time and support to reflect on their own relationship to race as they learn to facilitate conversations about race that meet youth needs in developmentally appropriate ways. These collective efforts must be ongoing and interrelated because these skills are not developed overnight. There is not a point at which these efforts will be complete -- this is not that sort of work. Schools must commit to building relationships with youth, families, and communities through dialogue over time.

Reconceptualizing Research

For those seeking to understand youth lives, YPAR is a useful approach for shifting the focus from adult interpretations of youth issues to what youth themselves describe. Mirra et al. (2016) highlighted the epistemological struggle at the heart of YPAR to meaningfully include youth in all YPAR aspects via youth-driven research, action, and participation. I felt the daily tensions of this epistemological struggle as a new researcher seeking to engage in research with youth as partners instead of participants. Youth centered participatory research holds significant potential for researchers seeking to learn about issues that impact youth. Using YPAR as pedagogy and praxis is a way to combine critical reflection and action

(Cammarota & Fine, 2010). Many of the taken for granted assumptions about what research is, who conducts it and its purpose needed to be carefully considered and shifted (Ali & McCarty, 2020; Mirra et al., 2016). As I learned to utilize theories and methodologies in alignment with my research interests, I was able to observe ways youth responded when encouraged to speak about the things they deemed as important and invited to imagine and contribute to change in their areas of concern.

Participatory research critically engages with and challenges taken-for-granted ideas and practices related to knowledge: whose knowledge counts, what knowledge is valid, and who is considered an expert (Fine & Torre, 2021). This study adds to a body of research demonstrating that youth partners can be effective, thoughtful co-constructors of research (Ali & McCarty, 2020; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fine & Torre, 2021; Mirra et al., 2016). The participatory process used in this study supported identity development and resulted in youth-generated recommendations about how teachers and schools can better support young folks. During this study, collaborative members made savvy observations in line with those of educational researchers, drawing on their everyday lives as data to support what they shared. Participatory research with youth requires investment in relationships and attention to the issue of reciprocity, as well as an openness to listening well to what youth and families have to say to teachers and researchers. By centering the voices of those closest to the things we study and who are most impacted by research, policy and practice, researchers can engage in more relevant forms of inquiry and make better recommendations. Given the lack of research on youth experiences with and perceptions of race and racism in rural spaces, more research across varied rural contexts is needed to understand the diversity within rurality.

Epilogue

This dissertation offers a brief window into just one phase of an ongoing, multi-year effort to build community, support youth, and better understand how identity, race, and place intersect in salient ways for young people. Members of this community derive sustenance from our ongoing connections to one another. As I write this, in April of 2023, youth from the collaborative have been, and continue to be, involved in a wide variety of activities learning about race and responding to racism far beyond the 7th grade classroom where our shared work originally took root. Four members of the collaborative, two white and two

global majority, were co-presenters of a session titled “Slavery, Abolition, and Critical Race Wresting in a Rural Middle School Classroom” at the Annual International Globalization, Diversity, and Education Conference Youth at Washington State University in 2019. Members of the collaborative play an active role in their high school Human Rights Club. Since 2017, two collaborative members formed a Young Women Writers of Color group, led by author and mentor Christine Platt. For these young women, being mentees has been a transformative experience as they learn from a Black woman with whom they share struggles and strengths that inform their storytelling.

Collaborative members share their work with one another and with the world through speeches, presentations to pre-service teachers and peers, school assignments, activism, and publications. In November of 2022, four collaborative members presented their ideas and recommendations during a town hall session titled “A Critical Democratic Dialogue About Anti-CRT Policies with Scholars, Teachers, and Youth” at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting in Seattle, Washington. These young people went on to work with scholars from across the country to publish an article inspired by the panel (O’Connor et al., 2023). The Rural Youth Research Collaborative is currently seeking institutional support to engage youth more formally in ongoing research projects driven by their own research questions and to compensate them for their labor and expertise. As youth carry this work into the future, I look forward to continuing to learn from them and seeing their efforts manifest in our rural community and beyond.

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Appendix 1: Draft: Race, Racism and Rural Youth Individual Interview Protocol

Each participant/co-researcher and I met according to their setting preference (in person, on Zoom) for a short (30 minute maximum) semi-structured, audio recorded interview. Interviews were transcribed using Otter AI software or Word Dictate. Youth approved pseudonyms to be used in public presentations of findings.

Topics:

I. Rural Youth Experiences with Race and Racism
II. Rural Youth Understandings of Race and Racism
III. Race and Place

Interview Questions:

- Is there anything you want to discuss or ask about as we start?
- What brought you to the group this summer?
- What was it like for you?
- How did you feel discussing race in this setting (at this time, in this group, in this setting)?
- Follow up questions related to youth identity map.
- Follow up to clarify/confirm my initial interpretations of co-researcher/participant statements during the sessions.
- How much do you think being in a rural place shapes your ideas and experiences?
- Any new insights, understandings, or questions?