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The Experiences Of Rural School Counselors Seeking To Implement Antiracist Practices: A Phenomenological Investigation

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THE EXPERIENCES OF RURAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS SEEKING TO IMPLEMENT ANTIRACIST PRACTICES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to two of my very first students, Chris and Jennifer. This work is for you and thank you for continuing to inspire me to do this work. Your ‘nana’ is always so proud of you both.

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I want to begin by thanking my dissertation committee, but especially my two co-chairs. Dr. Augustine, you have—and continue to hold space for me and encourage me to grow as a counselor educator and antiracist scholar. Your endless support and supply of fidgets got me through my toughest days in this program, and I am forever grateful. Dr. Parris, you continue to inspire me every day as a white woman who truly puts action behind her words when striving for social justice. Thank you BOTH for holding space for the many tears, making me laugh so hard my cheeks hurt, and encouraging me to grow and continue doing this work. This dissertation would haven't been possible without you both. Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study conducted through a CRT lens examined the lived experiences of rural school counselors who implemented or sought to implement antiracist school counseling practices in PK-12 schools. Literature currently exists on the experiences of school counselors implementing antiracist social justice practices (Smith-Durkin, 2022), counseling competencies for antiracist school counselors (Stickl Haugen et al., 2022), school counselor preparation (Ieva et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; Mason et al., 2021) and antiracist school counseling frameworks (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Mayes & Byrd, 2022), but none of the existing literature prior to this study examines how antiracist school counseling might look in a rural context. The results of this study provide insight and knowledge into the best practices for rural school counselors as well as ways to overcome potential barriers for current rural school counselors seeking to implement antiracist practices. The findings of this study shine light into future training and practice for rural school counselors to continue to push for antiracist school counseling practices.

Index Words: Rural, school counselor, school counseling, antiracism, antiracist practices

THE EXPERIENCES OF RURAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS SEEKING TO IMPLEMENT ANTIRACIST PRACTICES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

School counselors serve as advocates for their students in addition to supporting the academic, career, and social/emotional well-being of all students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019). Part of this advocacy role involves school counselors ensuring equitable opportunities and outcomes for their students, specifically Students of Color, through antiracist work. As antiracism becomes encouraged ethically by national school counselor organizations such as ASCA (ASCA, 2022a), it is imperative that school counselors understand how to effectively implement antiracist school counseling practices to support and protect Black and Brown students. Antiracist school counseling literature is relatively new and evolving (Smith-Durkin, 2022). Additionally, the current literature is primarily conceptual and does not address the unique experiences of school counselors in rural settings.

In addition to systemic inequities and inequitable distributions of generational wealth, Black and Brown students in rural areas are subject to color-evasive ideologies such as school mission statements and community mindsets that everyone is 'equal' and should be treated equally rather than promoting equity and social justice. Color-evasive ideologies are the 'denial of racial differences by emphasizing sameness (Neville et al., 2013, p. 455). Throughout this paper, I intentionally chose to use the term *color-evasive* rather than the commonly used term *color-blind* because color-blindness is unattainable and reinforces racial prejudices and inequality (Neville et al., 2013). As a result of color-evasive ideologies, Black and Brown students are subject to additional racial trauma and stress which negatively impacts their mental health and academic outcomes (Gavin Williams et al., 2023; Grimes & Roosma, 2022). School counselors are trained to be social justice advocates, which involves addressing educational

inequities that may be grounded in issues of race or ethnicity at the individual, community/school, and national level (American Counselor Organization [ACA], 2018; Singh et al, 2010). In a study conducted by Grimes and colleagues (2014), rural school counselors felt more able to implement social justice work if they were part of the community itself. If a rural school counselor is not part of the community, they may struggle to implement social justice work due to the tight-knit culture that exists within a rural community (Grimes et al., 2014). While rural school counselors have been able to navigate their unique dynamics to achieve social justice advocacy work, race is still rarely talked about among staff, students, and families due to color-evasive ideologies that are still present despite growing diversity rates and calls for antiracist practices (Gavin Williams et al., 2023).

As rural school counselors continue to understand and analyze social justice and equitable practices, a critical race theory lens can be used. Critical race theory (CRT) can be utilized to expose racism and racist actions, practices, and policies that occur in education systems that affect Black and Brown students (Washington et al., 2023). In the current study, I used CRT to understand and analyze the literature that exists on rural education and the inequalities that exist within PK-12 rural schools. I also used tenets from CRT to understand and analyze the data related to the pushback and/or barriers that rural school counselors face when implementing antiracist practices. A foundation of CRT in my study not only strengthened my argument for the need to explore antiracist school counseling practices in rural schools but also helped me understand and expose the racist actions and policies that hinder a rural school counselor from implementing antiracist practices.

Statement of the Problem

Literature revolving around antiracist school counseling is evolving each day and is relatively new. Literature currently exists on the experiences of school counselors implementing antiracist social justice practices (Smith-Durkin, 2022), counseling competencies for antiracist school counselors (Stickl Haugen et al., 2022), school counselor preparation (Ieva et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; Mason et al., 2021) and antiracist school counseling frameworks (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Mayes & Byrd, 2022), but none of the existing literature examines or describes how antiracist school counseling might look in a rural context. Rural school counseling literature is scarce, and studies that have examined rural school counselors' experiences in social justice actions are outdated (Grimes et al., 2014), and no study to this date has examined the rural school counselors' experience in implementing antiracist practices. Additionally, studies such as Grimes and colleagues (2014) did not take into consideration the current socio-political context that affects the work of school counselors in rural areas. Lastly, Grimes and colleagues (2014) co-reasearchers were exclusively white which centers whiteness and excludes the lived experiences of Black and Brown school counselors who pursue social justice advocacy work in rural areas. With unique experiences and challenges that rural school counselors face such as tight-knit communities that consist of generations of families (Grimes et al., 2014; Grimes et al., 2020), color-evasive approaches to racism and diversity (Sutherland et al., 2022), and limited mental health and professional development resources (Grimes, 2020), it is imperative to explore the unique experiences of rural school counselors in implementing antiracist school counseling practices.

Purpose and Research Question

With more attention being brought to antiracist school counseling practices, and being encouraged ethically by ASCA, there is a significant need to best prepare and inform school counselors on how to implement these practices in various settings. The results of this study provided insight and knowledge into the best practices for rural school counselors as well as ways to overcome potential barriers for current rural school counselors seeking to implement antiracist practices. School counseling educators will also be able to use this information to best prepare and inform students who may enter rural schools to advocate, serve, and fight to protect Black and Brown students.

Research Question

The current study sought to answer the following research question:

1. What are rural school counselors' lived experiences with implementing and/or attempting to implement antiracist school counseling practices in PK-12 schools?

Research Design

To best understand the lived experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist school counseling practices, I conducted a qualitative phenomenological study conducted through a critical lens also known as critical phenomenology (Weiss et al., 2020). Qualitative research is exploratory in nature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2023). More specifically, phenomenology is a qualitative design that seeks to understand and make sense of a phenomenon and the meaning that people bring to it (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2023). Phenomenological research uses co-researchers as the main instrument because they are the experts in their own lives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout this dissertation, I have intentionally chosen to use the term *co*-researcher rather than *participants* to shift the power

differential in alignment with CRT, antiracism, and phenomenology. A critical phenomenological approach aims to not just understand the experience of co-researchers but also move towards political activism and social change (Weiss et al., 2020). As the researcher, I conducted the current study through a critical phenomenological lens to analyze and interpret the data, as well as provide concrete strategies to ensure findings and implications are geared towards how rural school counselors can change systems and implement antiracist practices in PK-12 schools (Washington et al., 2023).

Due to the gap in research on the experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist practices, an exploratory study was necessary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, to best understand the lived experiences of the unique population and examine the social structures that impact the context in which the co-researchers operate, a critical phenomenological approach was not only appropriate but necessary. For these reasons, I felt that Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach conducted through a critical lens was the most appropriate research methodology that would provide thick, rich descriptions and highlight the lived experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist school counseling practices as well as analyze the social structures that influence the lived experiences of the co-researcher.

In the current study, I purposefully selected a sample of under 10 co-researchers as recommended by Hayes and Singh (2023) for phenomenological research. I collected data through the process of individual interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were structured to ensure congruence in the questions being asked of each co-researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The structured nature of the interview also sought to protect the co-researcher from undue harm and additional emotional labor. Following interviews, the audio was transcribed through a secure transcription online service (i.e., Otter.ai) and listened through to ensure accuracy, and co-

researchers were be asked to review and provide revisions if needed to the transcript before being approved and ready for data analysis.

Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach was used to analyze the data collected through interviews to provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon experienced through the words of the co-researchers rather than the researcher. In alignment with critical phenomenology, I modified parts of Moustakas (1994) to better fit the aims of CRT such as engaging in critical self-reflexivity and using the tenets of CRT to aid in the development and clustering of themes. I also ensured that my themes, overall findings, and implications focused on changing systems and promoting antiracist practices in PK-12 rural schools to support, benefit, and protect Black and Brown students and were rooted in the tenets of CRT.

Definition of Terms

Antiracism

Antiracism can be defined as the active approach to dismantling racist practices and policies, racial hatred, and oppression of People of Color (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022).

Rural

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2006) defines rural by the distance the territory is from an urbanized area. Specifically, NCES (2006) categorized rural into three sections, including: (a) rural fringe - territory less than five miles from an urbanized area, (b) rural distant - territory that is between five and 25 miles from an urbanized area, and (c) rural remote - territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area.

School Counselor

School counselors are certified/licensed educators who work and collaborate with parents, school staff, and invested parties to support the academic, career, and social/emotional wellbeing of all students in PK-12 schools (ASCA, 2023b).

Social Justice Advocacy

School counselors engage in social justice advocacy by addressing and reducing barriers created by oppressive systemic school structures, policies, and practices in efforts to improve equity within the school at the individual student/client, community/school/organization, and public arena level (ACA, 2018, Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Singh et al., 2010).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of literature related to school counseling in rural areas as well as the roles and responsibilities of school counselors implementing antiracist practices. The literature is examined and presented through the lens of CRT. An overview of CRT begins this chapter, followed by an exploration of rural schools. A critical lens is used to examine the inequalities that persist in rural PK-12 education and highlight the systemic barriers that negatively impact Black and Brown students. In addition, I highlight the current literature that examines the lived experiences of school counselors in rural areas and their experiences with social justice advocacy. Lastly, I examine and present the current literature that exists for antiracism, specifically antiracist school counseling. The chapter concludes with the basis for the current study.

Throughout the literature review and paper, I purposely lowercase the term *white.* White has been capitalized often by white supremacists (Daniszewski, 2020), and in line with my beliefs and pursuit of antiracist practices, I purposely chose to lowercase *white* in my paper. The choice to not capitalize *white* is also supported by researchers and publishers such as Brookings which purposely reports and publishes information that uses terminology that capitalizes the races and ethnic origins of people who are historically marginalized and not *white* (Lanham & Liu, 2019).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) was first introduced by legal scholars in the mid-1970s in response to the failure of Critical Legal Studies to adequately address race and racism in the U.S. jurisdiction (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Derrick Bell, a leading theorist in CRT, argued that

legal studies specifically lacked the voice and narratives of Black and Brown people (Bell, 1995). Critical race theory continues to evolve throughout law but was first introduced to education by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) built upon ideas introduced by Bell (1995) that centered elevating the voices and experiences of Black and Brown people in education and exposing racism and racist policies within education systems. Solarzano and Yosso (2001), theorists credited for introducing CRT in education, explored how racism is engrained within PK-12 systems and introduced five themes in PK-12 education systems. Solarzano and Yosso's (2001) themes (see Table1) include: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination; (b) the challenge to the dominant ideology; (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective. Decuir and Dixson (2007) expanded upon these themes by introducing five tenets of CRT in education (see Table 2). Decuir and Dixson's (2007) five tenets include: (a) counter-storytelling; (b) permanence of racism; (c) whiteness as property; (d) interest convergence; and (e) critique of liberalism.

Counter-storytelling focuses on Bell's (1995) idea that elevates and centers the lived experiences and voices of Black and Brown people that run counter to dominant ideologies of whiteness (Decuir & Dixson, 2007; Singh et al., 2020). Additionally, the goal of counter-storytelling is to provide a counter to master narratives that are often white-centered or white-washed, and deficit-focused. Within education, this focuses on centering the lived experiences and voices of Black and Brown students, teachers, administrators, parents, and vested parties within the school. This also includes creating and providing intentional spaces for counter-storytelling for Students of Color (Washington et al., 2023). School counselors can do this through creative counseling approaches such as narrative counseling (DeVance Taliaferro et al.,

2023), journaling (Utley & Garza, 2011), photovoice (Harley & Hunn, 2015; Williams et al., 2016), bibliotherapy (Byrd et al., 2021), or infusing hip-hop (Washington, 2015). Counter-storytelling allows Black and Brown students to be experts on their experiences and understandings and shift the focus from the dominant narratives and deficit ideologies (Mayes & Byrd, 2022). Lastly, decentering whiteness and allowing opportunities to focus on the lived truth and experiences of Students of Color is an important factor in fostering the mental and emotional wellness of Students of Color. Rather than being silenced by the dominant, white-centered or white-washed narratives and stereotypes, Black and Brown students can reclaim their truth and tell their stories of resistance to combat these narratives when school counselors create intentional spaces and implement practices that allow for counter-storytelling. By doing so, counter-storytelling can be used as a tool for healing (Baker-Bell, 2017) especially when surrounded by Black and Brown peers and educators who create space for loving, support, and encouragement (Jones, 2023).

Permanence of racism can be described as the acknowledgment of racism and racist practices throughout society and education systems (Decuir & Dixson, 2007). Racism has been embedded into social systems within the United States and trickled into the foundation of the educational system (Edirmanasignhe et al., 2022; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). Permanence of racism also emphasizes the fact that racism cannot be removed from current systems because the systems were built with racism at its foundation. An example of this in education is school policies that are created to penalize students who wear headwraps or durags. Another example includes the systemic barriers and hierarchy such as course prerequisites and gifted programs that excludes Black and Brown students from educational resources and advancement opportunities (Edirmanasignhe et al., 2022). Such procedures and educational opportunities have

historically been catered to the educational needs of white students rather than Students of Color (Edirmanasinghe et al., 2022). In addition to the structure of PK-12 school systems that are rooted in colonialism (Ladson-Billings, 2021), Black and Brown students are also likely to experience racism through interactions with students, staff, and school counselors in PK-12 systems (Mayes & Byrd, 2022). Policies and experiences like these negatively affect the academic achievement trajectory for Black and Brown students and their physical and mental health (Trent et al., 2019). School counselors have a responsibility to examine their self-awareness of the permanence of racism throughout school structures and policies that impact their Students of Color (Washington et al., 2023). Self-awareness can guide school counselors' willingness to act as change agents and implement anti-racist advocacy efforts in their schools (Washington et al., 2023).

Whiteness as property explores how white people are provided opportunities for advancement by the historical and present oppression of Black and Brown people (Decuir & Dixson, 2007). White people and whiteness are structurally privileged throughout society and education and come with unearned social and political advantages (Byrd et al., 2021; Washington et al., 2023). Whiteness as property can manifest in education through the white-centered curriculum that is presented in PK-12 education systems such as the choice of text, materials, and resources that center white voices and experiences and only addresses marginalized populations from a point of suffering or deficit perspective (Mayes & Byrd, 2022). Whiteness has also shown up in recent years with state laws that prohibit curriculum and resources that address CRT and further silence the voices and experiences of Black and Brown Students (Drake & Oglesby, 2020). School counselors have a responsibility to serve as social justice change agents in the face of adversity regarding CRT curriculum bans. School counselors

can intentionally select and promote the choice of texts, materials, and resources that "contribute to a comprehensive curriculum that centers minoritized identities, joy, and life" rather than deficit-ideologies and suffering (Mayes & Byrd, 2022, p. 5).

Interest convergence acknowledges that white people take a self-interest in advocating for Black and Brown people when it benefits them rather than due to altruism alone (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Washington et al., 2023). For instance, a school district might encourage their staff to take antiracist training to showcase the numbers of their school staff who are trained in antiracist practices as a point of boasting rather than incorporating antiracist practices throughout the school systems. Additionally, interest convergence addresses how People of Color in the United States are pressured to advance by assimilating to white culture and norms which inherently keeps power and privilege in the interests of white people (Decuir & Dixson, 2007; Singh et al., 2020). For example, Black and Brown students and educators will 'code switch' when in predominately white spaces to maintain the comfort of their white colleagues and advance in academic spaces that exist within hierarchies of white power and privilege (Crumb et al., 2023; Ragland 2020; Tierney, 1999).

Lastly, the critique of liberalism explores the false sense of hope that occurs when society and people ignore racist practices and inequities that occur (Decuir & Dixson, 2007). One example includes when school districts promote color-evasive mission statements of everyone being equal rather than acknowledging the distinct inequities that are ever-present. When school systems do acknowledge differences and inequities, it is done in a deficit-based manner rather than empowering and celebrating the joy and life of those with marginalized identities. Additionally, school systems fail to celebrate and affirm differences when providing students, especially those underserved and under-resourced, with the additional resources they need. For

example, many of the additional resources that are provided to students to help with preparation for standardized tests are catered to students who are economically privileged. While free test preparation material is advertised online, it is typically a short study guide or brief information on exam content. For example, the free ACT test preparation offered online is a guide for students on what the ACT is, how to purchase test preparation materials, and other facts about the benefits of the exam, but it does not include sample questions or suggested material that is covered. Instead, this is available only through purchased test preparation materials. This leaves students who are not economically privileged at a disservice compared to those who can afford test preparation materials. Additionally, extracurriculars are limited in rural areas and provide limited opportunities for Students of Color to explore and develop their unique talents and interests. These ideologies and practices ignore the presence of racism and ultimately protect "whiteness as a cultural norm and the dominant sociopolitical influence (i.e., power) that comes with whiteness" (Washington et al., 2023, p. 4).

Critical race theory can be utilized to expose racism and racist actions, practices, and policies that occur in education systems that affect Black and Brown students (Washington et al., 2023). To do this effectively, school counselors and school counselor researchers must demonstrate a critical self-awareness of race and racism and "whether their practices center racial equity and antiracism" (Washington et al., 2023, p.2). I used CRT to understand and analyze the literature on rural education and the inequalities within PK-12 rural schools. I also used tenets from CRT to understand and analyze the data related to the pushback and/or barriers that rural school counselors faced when implementing antiracist practices throughout data analysis, interpretation, and development of themes. A foundation of CRT in my study not only strengthened my argument for the need to explore antiracist school counseling practices in rural

schools but also helped me expose the racist actions and policies that hinder a rural school counselor from implementing antiracist practices. Lastly, I use the results of this research to center, elevate, and amplify the voices of the unheard and silenced which is a core tenet of CRT (Decuir & Dixson, 2007).

Table 1

Themes of Critical Race Theory in Education

#	Theme
1	The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination
2	The challenge to the dominant ideology
3	The commitment to social justice
4	The centrality of experiential knowledge
5	The transdisciplinary perspective

(Solarzano & Yosso, 2001)

Table 2

Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Tenet	Definition
Counter-story telling	Elevates the lived experiences and voices of Black and Brown people
Permanence of racism	Acknowledgement of racism and racist practices throughout society and education systems
Whiteness as property	White people are provided opportunities for advancement by the historical and present oppression of Black and Brown people
Interest convergence	People of Color in the United States advance by assimilating to white culture and norms. Additionally, white people take a self-interest in advocating for Black and Brown people when it benefits them rather than altruism alone
Critique of liberalism	False sense of hope that occurs when society and people ignore racist practices and inequities that occur

(Decuir & Dixson, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Washington et al., 2023)

Rural Schools

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2006) defines rural by the distance the territory is from an urbanized area. Specifically, NCES (2006) categorized rural into three sections, including: (a) rural fringe - territory less than five miles from an urbanized area, (b)

rural distant - territory that is between five and 25 miles from an urbanized area, and (c) rural remote - territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area. Urbanized areas are densely settled areas with populations of 50,000 or more surrounded by adjacent dense areas with populations between 2,500 and 50,000 (NCES, 2006). In addition to the official definition by NCES, rural also has socially constructed definitions, such as being predominately composed of individuals who are economically marginalized and lacking diversity in their communities and schools (Chambers & Crumb, 2021). Although the definition of rural varies depending on the source, rural areas consist of unique experiences and challenges that impact students in PK-12 schools.

Physical distance from an urbanized area is a primary factor in determining if a specific school or district is classified as rural. Physical distance from urbanized areas can result in physical isolation that directly impacts the number of educational resources available to the community such as opportunities for advanced placement courses and gifted education (Puryear & Kettler, 2017). To meet the needs of community members, rural communities rely heavily on collaboration across various institutions such as churches, schools, and local government bodies to provide necessary resources (Grimes et al., 2014; Hann-Morrison, 2011). Schools in rural areas are physically isolated from human and financial resources resulting in limited staffing, reduced mental health resources, and limited opportunities for advanced coursework (Bright, 2018; Grimes, 2020; Wimberly & Brickman 2014). Rural schools will collaborate frequently with local organizations to provide resources for their students through fundraising, community partnerships, and donations (Grimes et al., 2014).

While strong bonds within the community can provide immense support, the tight-knit culture that exists within rural communities can also provide significant barriers for people who

are deemed *outsiders* such as school staff and families that relocate to the rural area without any prior history (Grimes, 2020). For Students of Color, this can be an additional barrier to attaining feelings of acceptance and belonging in areas in which they are ostracized for being an *outsider*. For new school counselors interested in promoting antiracist practices in an area that is resistant to *outsiders* and progressive liberal ideologies (Grimes et al., 2014), rural school counselors will face resistance to implementing social justice change that could benefit and protect Students of Color. Rural school counselors have, however, found implementing social justice advocacy and change to be more successful when they established relationships and rapport within the school, family, and community (Grimes et al., 2014). While establishing strong interpersonal relationships with school, family, and community members can take time, it is imperative in their pursuit for social justice advocacy and systemic change and can aid in combatting the barriers faced when being perceived as an *outsider* in a small town. Additionally, the small-town feel can provide increased levels of connectedness and close personal relationships among those in the community (Petrin et al., 2014). As a result, school staff and students have the unique opportunity to develop tight-knit relationships with each other that are not commonly experienced in higher populated areas (Grimes et al., 2014; Morrissette, 2000).

Inequities in Rural PK-12 Education

The United States education system was built on racist and oppressive actions towards Black and Brown people that sought to exclude People of Color from white spaces. Following the abolishment of slavery in 1865, the ruling of Plessy v. Ferguson (1886) required the separation of schools for Black and white students, and this stayed in place until the ruling of Brown v. Board in 1954. Although the ruling of Brown v. Board (1954) deemed segregation to be unconstitutional, this did not stop racism or oppression of Black and Brown students.

Although racial inequities in schools were addressed in the law, oppressive systems did not change in a way that fostered increased equity. For example, many Black educators were dismissed, demoted, or forced to resign from their jobs in education following the desegregation of schools as a way to maintain white supremacy (Will, 2022). As a result, Black and Brown students went from being taught by educators who looked like them to white educators. This has contributed to the current disproportionate representation of Black and Brown educators in comparison to white educators in PK-12 schools today (ASCA, 2023a; Will, 2022). In a study by Gershenson and colleagues (2016) that examined teacher demographics in relation to teacher expectations and student outcomes, authors found that Black and Brown students who had at least one educator of a similar race were more likely to attend college and less likely to drop out, especially for Black and Brown students who are economically marginalized. As of 2023, Black teachers make up 7% of the national teacher population in the United States, and Black school counselors make up 11% of the national school counselor population in the United States (ASCA, 2023a), reflecting a largely white educator demographic. In rural areas where there are limited mental health resources such as school counselors, a predominately white school counseling population can negatively impact the mental health and academic outcomes of the incredibly diverse population that rural school counselors serve due to the lack of opportunities for role modeling, representation, encouragement, understanding, and support (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Gavin Williams et al., 2023).

In addition to a disruption in the employment and representation of Black and Brown educators, there was a disruption post-Brown in the overall interpersonal, institutional, and community factors that negatively affected the mental health and academic achievement of Black and Brown students (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). In efforts to protect white supremacy, many school

systems closed and white families moved to predominately white locations or enrolled their children in private schools, leaving Black and Brown communities physically isolated from access to a public school system (Smith, 2022). For Students of Color in rural areas where communities are already physically isolated, this left many Black and Brown students without access to education. The few Black and Brown students who were able to attend integrated schools were given harsher punishments such as being suspended at a younger age, for longer periods of time, and more frequently than compared to their white peers (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). Additionally, Black and Brown students faced consistent harassment, isolation, and violence from their white peers and teachers (Smith, 2022). Despite being in an integrated school, Students of Color were forcibly segregated within the school by being put in classes designed for lower-achievement level students and special education coursework based on 'racial stereotypes and white teachers and administrators' low expectations of their intelligence and capabilities' (Smith, 2022, p. 2324) while white students were placed in advanced level coursework and gifted education programs. Today, Black and Brown students continue to be underrepresented in gifted education programs and advanced placement classes (Ford et al., 2011), overrepresented in special education programs (Elder et al., 2019), criminalized and pushed out of schools through harsh disciplinary actions for minor infractions (Morris, 2016), and are less likely to attend four-year colleges and universities than white students (The Education Trust, 2020). What began in the 1950s has not stopped but rather led to the 'achievement gap' we see in education today. Research and leaders in education call this an 'achievement gap' but this phrasing puts the blame on Black and Brown students for not achieving at a level compared to their white peers in a system that was not built for them or to protect them. In actuality, the gap we see is the product

of white educators and communities seeking to protect whiteness and white supremacy in education (Smith, 2023).

Similar to general education, inequalities for Black and Brown students persist in rural education. Black and Brown students in rural schools underperform on standardized tests (Showalter et al., 2019), are less likely to be identified for gifted and talented programs (Hemmler et al., 2022; Morris & Monroe, 2009), and are more likely to face disciplinary interventions that keep them out of the classroom and school compared to white rural students (Graham, 2015). These inequities evolved because of systemic barriers created by white communities due to resistance and efforts to maintain white supremacy in education following post-Brown (Smith, 2023) and continues to be present in rural education today. Desegregation was followed by massive resistance in rural areas in which many schools did not comply with federal guidelines due to a lack of strictness enforcing the guidelines (Bissett, 2015). As a result, many years went by before schools were fully integrated in rural areas, (Bissett, 2015) and even when schools did integrate, there was significant barriers for Black and Brown families that impacted their mental health and academic opportunities due to persistent racism and resistance from white communities. In one rural county in North Carolina, Alamance County, the school district offered Black and Brown families a choice to either attend a predominately Black school or a predominately white school in the 1960s (Hughes, 2005). When Black and Brown students chose to attend predominately white schools, students were subject to consistent racial slurs and harassment by other white students and educators in addition to Black and Brown families receiving threats from the community in the form of burning crosses on their lawns, a practice associated with the Ku Klux Klan (Hughes, 2005). Throughout the next decade, the county divided due to a persistent debate between anti-desegregation and pro-desegregation resulting in

what is known today as the Alamance-Burlington School System (Bissett, 2015; Hughes, 2005). Alamance, which consisted mostly of rural regions and predominately white communities, was resistant towards desegregation and Burlington, which became a concentrated urban area within the county, consisted mostly of pro-desegregation and Black and Brown communities (Bissett, 2015). Similar to the case in Alamance, rural areas have been labeled as predominantly conservative and resistant to liberal ideas (Grimes et al., 2014) which inhibits educators from promoting work such as antiracist and social justice practices that directly work towards deconstructing oppressive structures that negatively impact the academic, career, and social-emotional outcomes of Black and Brown students.

Although rural education literature reports similar findings to general education, a unique characteristic of rural schools that promotes racism and negatively impacts Black and Brown rural students is the generational color-evasive ideology within rural communities. Color-evasive ideologies are the 'denial of racial differences by emphasizing sameness (Neville et al., 2013, p. 455). Rural communities often consist of generations of families with a long history of intergenerational ties to the land (Grimes et al., 2014; Sutherland et al., 2022). To understand what contributes to a sense of belonging among Black, Brown, and white residents in rural communities, Sutherland and colleagues (2022) interviewed community members that lived in one Southern rural area and found that white community members valued other community members as 'equals' rather than acknowledging differences in race and adopted a color-evasive approach to developing relationships. Furthermore, hard work and land ownership were valued as earning one's right to be accepted within the community despite differences in race or ethnicity (Sutherland et al., 2022). Another color-evasive ideology among white rural community members is the Confederate flag. Confederate flags, a racist symbol of white supremacy and

enslavement of Black individuals, can represent Southern-ness specifically among white rural communities (Sutherland et al., 2022), and are often publicly displayed throughout rural areas in the South. As a result of color-evasive approaches to race and symbols of racism, race is rarely brought up or talked about, especially by white residents, unless it is to prove sameness or tight bonds across racial groups (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2022; Sutherland et al., 2022).

Similarly, white students in rural communities reported that race was not a topic of conversation at home or in school (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2022). Researchers facilitated race-based discussions in predominately white rural classrooms and found that many of the students reported they were raised by their families to treat people, regardless of race or background, as equals (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2022). When reviewing students' journals, however, researchers discovered that Black and Brown students wanted to talk about race but feared speaking out against the majority and felt silenced as a result (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2022). Color-evasive approaches and interactions directly harm and silence Black and Brown students in PK-12 settings, and further promote whiteness in education (Chambers & Crumb, 2021).

School counselors, when compared to clinical mental health counselors, have been less likely to broach race and race-related discussions (Day-Vines et al., 2020), especially in rural areas leaving students to bear the burden of race with little support (Gavin Williams et al., 2023). In rural areas, this can be due to school factors (i.e., increased workloads, limited support, need for more time and resources) or the likely-hood of color-evasive approaches in education settings that downplay or ignore racial differences among students and culture groups (Hachfeld et al., 2015). Avoiding discussions of race perpetuates a system of racial oppression for Students of Color which in turn negatively impact their mental health and academic outcomes (Gavin Williams et al., 2023; Grimes & Roosma, 2022). Black and Brown students who experience

racism and racial trauma are more likely to develop symptoms of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and low self-worth (Grimes & Roosma, 2022). Additionally, Students of Color are likely to experience negative academic outcomes due to much of their mental energy being exhausted from facing consistent racist comments, systemic oppression, and lack of support from educational leaders (Grimes & Roosma, 2022; Mattison & Aber, 2007). When diversity and race are acknowledged and celebrated, however, Black and Brown students report more positive school climate experiences (Dollarhide et al., 2018) which in turn promotes academic achievement and decreases discipline referrals for Students of Color (Mattison & Aber, 2007).

In addition to color-evasive ideologies, rural Black and Brown students are negatively impacted by the inequitable distribution of generational wealth in rural communities (Chambers & Crumb, 2021). Black and Brown families in rural areas have significantly higher poverty rates compared to rural white families (United States Department of Agriculture, 2018). More specifically, rural Black and Brown families are heavily concentrated in the southern part of America (Beale, 1996) and are economically marginalized due to a long history of enslavement and segregation that was purposefully created by white people to oppress Black and Brown people (Middleton, 2020). Additionally, Black and Brown educators who were laid off from their jobs in education soon after desegregation were subject to economic marginalization due to sudden unemployment and lack of ability to teach or work in education settings (Will, 2022). The lack of generational wealth and oppression of Black and Brown people across history provides a significant barrier to rural Black and Brown students' access to and chances for success in educational settings (Chambers & Crumb, 2021).

Wilcox (2021) took a closer look at racism in a rural southern school and community following the election of 2020. The study sparked as a result of a Facebook post that showed a

public-school bus that was transporting a school sports team that day, decorated in pro-Trump language and art. Trump, a previous president of the United States, has made many racist comments and actions towards Black and Brown communities, as well as other marginalized populations (Barbash, 2019). The Facebook post was followed up by comments from mostly Black and Brown parents and residents in the rural area calling for action from the school and school board (Wilcox, 2021). The resulting action was an apology statement from the principal that defended the actions of the students who had decorated the bus and did not apologize or admit to the harm it had caused to Black and Brown students and community members (Wilcox, 2021). Racial discrimination such as the one studied by Wilcox (2021) can inflict race-based traumatic stress (i.e., micro and macro level impacts of racism on People of Color) for Black and Brown students within rural communities which negatively impact their mental health and educational outcomes (Grimes & Roosma, 2022). Black and Brown students' parents spoke on how they and their children have lost trust that the predominately white school system and officials will protect them from racial discrimination and considered transferring their children to predominantly Black schools in the area (Wilcox, 2021).

Schools Counselors in Rural Schools

School counselors have a unique role in serving their students by supporting the educational success and mental health of their students. There are challenges, however, such as role ambiguity that can negatively impact a school counselor's ability to serve their students (Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016). For example, school counselors can be given administrative roles such as scheduling, discipline, and monitoring classrooms and hallways which limits the amount of time devoted to direct counseling services with students. School counselors in all regions face role ambiguity; however, this remains a consistent issue for many rural school counselors due to

a greater sense of misunderstanding among staff, colleagues, and those in the school community due to rural areas being resistant to the idea of mental health services, ambiguous professional boundaries, and playing roles of 'guidance' counselors (Grimes, 2020; Morrisette, 2000). Additionally, rural areas may not understand the role of school counselors as social justice change agents and addressing racism in schools, which in turn negatively impacts Black and Brown students. Additionally, Grimes (2020) found that rural school counselors reported having fewer financial and human resources which resulted in school counselors being tasked with additional non-counseling responsibilities and less direct service with students.

Due to the lack of mental health resources in rural areas, rural school counselors are often the primary mental health resource for their students (Bright, 2018; Grimes, 2020). The rural school counselor's role can be difficult to manage with challenges such as increased visibility in the tight-knit community which often results in dual relationships and unclear boundaries (Lonborg & Bowen, 2004; Morrissette, 2000). While limited resources and increased visibility can lead to feelings of burnout in rural school counselors (Morrissette, 2000), it also provides rural school counselors with the unique opportunity to develop deep meaningful relationships with their students and advocate in ways that might not be common for urban or suburban school counselors.

School counselors are trained to be advocates for their students, and social justice advocacy work in schools involves addressing educational inequities that may be grounded in issues of race or ethnicity at the individual, community/school, and national level (ACA, 2018; Singh et al, 2010). Grimes et al. (2014) explored the experiences of rural school counselors implementing social justice advocacy work and showed that rural school counselors felt more able to implement social justice work if they were part of the community itself. If a rural school

counselor is not part of the community, however, they may struggle in implementing social justice work due to their status as an "outsider" and the tight-knit culture that exists within a rural community (Grimes et al., 2014).

One way of bringing about social justice change is through broaching conversations about race, specifically racial, ethnic, and cultural differences and concerns (Day-Vines et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2020). Rural school counselors can serve as leaders in broaching these conversations, but these conversations rarely happen (Gavin Williams et al., 2023). In one study about rural school counselors' experiences broaching race, the co-researchers spoke to an initial desire to have conversations about race but faced barriers such as lack of support and pressure from invested parties, limited availability and resources to implement diversity programing, and color-evasive approaches to race and racism among staff (Gavin Williams et al., 2023). Co-researchers navigated these barriers by using data to support their need to broach conversations and diversity programming as well as building social capital. By increasing positive supportive relationships with invested parties, school counselors are more likely to address systemic inequities within the school and community as well as implement social justice practices (Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2022).

Antiracism

Antiracism can be defined as the active approach to dismantling racist practices and policies, racial hatred, and oppression of People of Color (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022). Antiracism is not a new concept but received increased attention within education following the gruesome murder of George Floyd in 2020. While this was not the first, or last, murder against People of Color, it did spark a movement that called to attention the racist realities that Black and Brown

people face daily. Many educators, as a result, turned a critical eye to their own practices and commitments to equity, social justice advocacy, and antiracism (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022).

Social justice advocacy in PK-12 settings involves addressing educational inequities that may be grounded in issues of race or ethnicity at the individual, community/school, and national level (ACA, 2018; Singh et al, 2010). Social justice advocacy also involves speaking up and out against inequitable practices (i.e., discipline, grading, retention) and treatment of students by other students and/or school staff (Singh et al., 2010; Smith-Durkin, 2022). School counselors can engage in social justice advocacy at various levels (i.e., individual, community/school, public arena) and their engagement looks different depending on the degree of student-level involvement (i.e., on behalf of, in collaboration with) (ACA, 2018). Antiracism builds upon social justice advocacy by naming the inequitable systems and practices that negatively impact Black and Brown students as racist and centered in whiteness. In contrast to social justice advocacy, antiracist work in schools involves working more in direct engagement with others (i.e., students, staff, school, community) rather than national advocacy to dismantle and stop oppressive systems and practices that negatively harm Black and Brown students.

School Counseling and Antiracism

One sector of educators that turned a critical eye was school counselors. School counselors have a unique role within the school that supports each individual student in their academic, career, and social-emotional needs (ASCA, 2022a). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), a professional organization for school counselors, released a statement following the murder of George Floyd that outlined the school counselor's role in antiracist practices (ASCA, 2020). ASCA (2020) stated that school counselors have a significant role in interrupting racism and working towards addressing and dismantling systemic inequity that

affects Black and Brown students' development. Some key elements of antiracist school counseling include critical self-reflection, the use of theories that are grounded in the understanding of Black and Brown people, and "changing school policies and practices that impact the schooling and counseling experiences of Black and Brown students" (ASCA, 2021; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022, p. 12).

Critical self-reflection is important in antiracist work because it requires school counselors to continuously reflect on their previous experiences, identities, and biases they hold and how that impacts their work and how they serve Students of Color (Mayes & Byrd, 2022) in addition to critiquing systems that negatively impact Students of Color. This may look like engaging in questions that create discomfort and growth, professional development that aims to increase cultural responsiveness and sensitivity, and recognizing the role of race, privilege, and bias in their life and self (Betters-Bubon et al., 2022). Critical reflection should be started prior to working with Black and Brown students and families and continued throughout their life and career (Betters-Bubon et al., 2022). When working with Students of Color, school counselors must engage in counseling theories that are grounded in the understanding of Black and Brown communities such as narrative therapy through a Black liberation theological lens (Haskins et al., 2023). Strategies for liberating school counseling practices include youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) and promoting freedom dreaming, a practice that calls Students of Color, Black and Brown families, and society as a whole to engage in radical imagination that recognizes the struggle for change while working towards a new future where Black and Brown joy, liberation, and freedom are centered (Mayes et al., 2022).

As a result of the new call for antiracist school counseling practices, ASCA reviewed, revised, and released new ethical standards that outlined the school counselor's role in being

systemic change agents and ensuring equitable outcomes for their students (ASCA, 2022a). An example of these changes included changing the wording of a section from *Underserved and At-Risk Populations* to *Marginalized Populations* because marginalized was a more appropriate term to encompass the section, and the term *at risk* puts the blame on the individual rather than the system (ASCA, 2022a). Additionally, authors added to the *Marginalized Populations* section the school counselor's ethical responsibility to ensure equitable access, inclusion, and systemic change to establish safe, equitable, affirming schools for students from marginalized populations (ASCA, 2022a). Additionally, sections that previously covered bullying and harassment were adjusted to include discrimination, bias, and hate incidents and the school counselor's ethical responsibility to protect students from these incidents (ASCA, 2022a).

With the current context of PK-12 school systems, it is of utmost importance that school counselors engage in antiracist school counseling practices to challenge and dismantle harmful racist systems that negatively impact Black and Brown students (Mayes & Byrd, 2022). If school counselors do not engage in antiracist practices, they run the risk of maintaining or returning to the status quo of systems and practices that harm and dehumanize Black and Brown students (Mayes & Byrd, 2022). Antiracist school counseling practices have been shown to have positive effects on students and the overall school climate. In a recent survey administered by ASCA, members were asked about their experiences addressing racism and bias in schools (ASCA, 2022b). In schools that had implemented diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), and antiracism programs and practices, school counselors noted an improved school climate, increased representation of Students of Color selected for awards and participation in advanced-level coursework, decreased opportunity gaps, and a decrease in disproportionate rates of discipline and suspension for Students of Color (ASCA, 2022b). Examples of practices that were

implemented include collecting and reporting data that exposed inequitable outcomes, delivering classroom curriculum that addresses racism and bias, and recognizing and responding to incidents of racism and bias among students and staff (ASCA, 2021).

While antiracist school counseling practices have been linked to positive outcomes for Students of Color, there are significant barriers that impact the school counselor's ability to implement these practices. Topics and theories such as CRT and DEI are being banned in many states, more specifically discussions and trainings that acknowledge the history of racism in the United States (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). Despite the recent uproar in anti-CRT and anti-DEI legislature, school counselors still have an ethical responsibility to implement antiracist school counseling practices (ASCA, 2022a). Many educators, however, might stray from partaking in such discussions or actions aligned with CRT, DEI, or antiracism for fear of losing their job security. Additionally, Counselors of Color may be hesitant to engage in these practices due to additional emotional labor and fear for their own emotional and physical safety especially in highly visible environments such as rural areas. While these topics are all lumped under the same umbrella in political propaganda (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022), it is important that antiracist school counselors understand that CRT and antiracism are not the same. Critical race theory is a theoretical and legal framework while antiracism is an action to dismantle racist and oppressive systems (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022). It is important to clarify the difference between these two as the teaching of CRT is being banned in various states across the United States, but the need to examine systems and structures throughout education that negatively impact Black and Brown students is crucial. Additionally, antiracist work can still be done and achieved despite the misunderstanding that CRT-bans prevent school counselors from engaging in antiracist work.

Summary and Research Question

In this chapter, I have provided a thorough review of the literature on rural schools, rural school counselors, inequities in rural PK-12 schools, and antiracist school counseling. Rural school counselors navigate a variety of unique experiences and challenges to meet the needs of their students (Fears et al., 2023). In addition to a history of systemic inequalities and education opportunity gaps (Chambers & Crumb, 2021), rural PK-12 schools exist within a unique environment that promotes color-evasive ideologies that negatively impact the educational and mental health outcomes of Black and Brown students (Sutherland et al., 2022). This calls for an antiracist approach from school counselors to support Black and Brown students in PK-12 rural schools. While the literature is evolving around the topic of antiracism and rural school counseling, there remains a significant gap in the literature on the experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist practices. As a result, I proposed the following research question to be answered in my current study:

R1: What are rural school counselors' lived experiences with implementing and/or attempting to implement antiracist school counseling practices in PK-12 schools?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

With more attention being brought to antiracist school counseling practices and encouraged ethically by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), there is a significant need to best prepare and inform school counselors on how to implement these practices in various settings (ASCA, 2022a). In this chapter, I outline the research study and methodology used to understand the experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist practices. The results of this study will provide insight and knowledge into the best practices for rural school counselors as well as ways to overcome potential barriers for current rural school counselors seeking to implement antiracist practices. School counseling educators will also be able to use this information to best prepare and inform students who may enter rural schools to advocate, serve, and fight to protect Black and Brown students. The chapter includes the following information on the study: (a) purpose and research question; (b) researcher reflexivity; (c) rationale for methodology; (d) methodology and design; (e) data collection methods; (f) data analysis; and (g) trustworthiness strategies.

Purpose and Research Question

The current study aimed to explore the lived experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist school counseling practices in PK-12 schools.

Research Question

R1: What are rural school counselors' lived experiences with implementing and/or attempting to implement antiracist school counseling practices in PK-12 schools?

Researcher Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher is a primary instrument within the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2023). For this reason, it is crucial that the researcher takes appropriate, intentional steps to prevent personal experiences and biases from impacting the research process. One way of doing this is through a reflexivity statement (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2023). I, the primary researcher, am a full-time doctoral student, previous rural school counselor, and identify as a white, cisgender woman in my late 20s. I worked for almost two years in a rural school district as a school counselor. Additionally, I grew up in a rural southern area and was raised with racist beliefs, biases, and attitudes that I adopted and carried with me until my early 20s. Throughout the past several years, I have engaged in critical self-reflection, increased my knowledge and awareness around the deeply embedded history of racism across the world and specifically in America, abandoned previously held beliefs and attitudes, and continue the journey every day towards expounding upon my antiracist beliefs and actions. This journey is a continuous process that will never end because antiracism is not something one can achieve or be. Rather, antiracism is an active approach taken to dismantle racist systems and practices that actively harm and oppress People of Color (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022). I am also aware that I will make mistakes in my journey but will continue to seek to do better to minimize harm to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

I started my reflexive journal early in my dissertation journey and critically reflected upon what it means for me to be a white woman pursuing antiracist research. One thing that has particularly resonated with me is that this research is not for me, but rather antiracist research focuses on centering the voices and experiences of Black and Brown communities throughout because they are the ones who should be most impacted by this research. As a previous rural

school counselor, I am aware of how my personal experiences and biases may impact the research process. For example, I go into this study with my own set of biases and assumptions about the barriers that prevent rural school counselors from implementing antiracist practices due to the barriers I experienced. Throughout the study, I implemented several trustworthiness strategies to manage my subjectivity. In addition to suggested readings from my dissertation committee, I am examined my biases using the Cultural Humility Self-Reflection Tool for School Mental Health Professionals (School Mental Health Ontario, 2022) to foster thorough self-reflection and frame my reflexive journal through a cultural humility lens. The tool was created to be a self-assessment for an individual to critically reflect and rate the degree to which they agree with each statement or engage in a specific practice honestly. When rating each statement, I intentionally rated each statement honestly and reviewed the results of this tool. I paid particular attention to the items that I provided ratings of *Never/Not at All*, *Rarely,* or *Sometimes.* I took note of these items and set goals that are targeted to growing my familiarity, experience, and understanding with the identified areas as well as methods to achieve these goals (i.e., professional development, additional reading, workshops, request supervision, etc.). While my experiences as a rural school counselor can be a strength in qualitative research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022), it is still important to be aware of how my experiences and biases impact how I view the experiences and data of my co-researchers.

One trustworthiness strategy I utilized is critical readings suggested by my committee that revolve around white allyship and white women pursuing antiracist work. After each reading, I processed my feelings, beliefs, and biases in my reflexive journal. Another trustworthiness strategy I utilized is a peer debriefer who was separate from the research process, identifies as white, and engages in antiracist work. By intentionally selecting a white peer

debriefer rather than a Person of Color, I was able to process thoughts, feelings, and biases throughout the research process without causing additional emotional labor and harm to individuals within the community I aim to serve through this research. Additionally, I selected a peer-debriefer who was familiar with rural school counseling research to aid in the understanding and familiarity with the data I was collecting while remaining separate from the research process to provide an un-biased outside perspective. Lastly, I utilized an external auditor throughout the data analysis process to monitor how my personal experiences and identities impact the data. The external auditor was recommended by one of my dissertation chairs because she was familiar with the data management software (i.e., MAXQDA) and phenomenological research in social justice areas. The external auditor was a Woman of Color and was compensated for the work she completed in reviewing the data and data analysis process. In alignment with my beliefs and intentionality for antiracism and decolonizing research, I wanted to ensure that the external auditor was fairly compensated for their time, effort, and collaboration in the research process.

Researcher Paradigm

The current study was guided by my personal beliefs and alignment with critical race theory (CRT). Critical race theory can be utilized to expose racism and racist actions, practices, and policies that occur in education systems that affect Black and Brown students (Washington et al., 2023). Critical race theory was first introduced by legal scholars in the mid-1970s in response to the failure of critical legal studies to adequately address race and racism in the United States (U.S.) (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Critical race theory has since evolved and been used to explore how racism and racist practices are ingrained throughout education systems, practices, and policies (DeCuir & Dixson, 2007; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Racism is an ordinary part of societal functioning that is rooted in white supremacy and upheld by those who

benefit from it (Hayes & Singh, 2023). As a researcher, I believe that systems such as schools, vested parties, and politics can impact the lived experiences of Black and Brown students and how school counselors are able to promote and implement antiracist practices in their schools. The current study was conducted with a critical lens to seek and understand the various systems, relationships, and personal dynamics that impact the experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist practices. Additionally, I used Decuir and Dixson's (2007) five tenets of CRT to aid in the development and clustering of my themes. The tenets include: (a) counter-storytelling; (b) permanence of racism; (c) whiteness as property; (d) interest convergence; and (e) critique of liberalism. Incorporating components and tenets of CRT throughout my methodology assisted me in examining the racist actions, systems, and policies that hinder a rural school counselor from implementing antiracist practices.

Rationale for Methodology

To best understand the lived experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist school counseling practices, I conducted a qualitative phenomenological study conducted through a critical lens, also known as critical phenomenology (Weiss et al., 2020). Qualitative research is exploratory in nature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2023). More specifically, phenomenology is a qualitative design that seeks to understand and make sense of a phenomenon and the meaning that people bring to it (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2023). Phenomenological research uses the co-researchers as the main instrument because they are the experts in their own lives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach focuses more on the descriptions of the experiences from the co-researcher themselves rather than the researcher's interpretation. The nature of centering co-

researcher voices rhetorically aligns well with phenomenological methodology. The current study highlighted voices, such as rural school counselors, that are often excluded from research.

Within qualitative research, there are many philosophical assumptions of phenomenology and critical theories including ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological. As a researcher, I have my own understanding of how people make sense of the world around them, also known as an ontological assumption (Hayes & Singh, 2023). Ontologically, I believe there is not one single Truth, but rather, each person has a truth that they know to be correct, and their truth is influenced by the context in which they live (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Hayes & Singh, 2023). Additionally, their truth and reality are based on the power and identity struggles based on their race (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In alignment with critical phenomenology, I believe oppressive social structures and policies prevent People of Color from fully existing and moving towards liberation. My epistemological assumption, also known as how reality and knowledge is known (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2023), is that reality is understood and known by examining social structures, oppression, power and control, and that reality can be changed through research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In alignment with critical phenomenology, it is important that I examine social structures that impact the experiences of my participants and how it relates to their ability to implement antiracist practices to fully understand their reality. My axiology, also known as the roles of the researcher's values in research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2023), is acknowledged and continually reflected upon in my reflexive journal. I acknowledge that I have personal experiences and values within rural communities due to personal experiences, and work to increase my awareness of how this does and continues to impact my work with this study. Additionally, I acknowledge my value for antiracist work in school counseling as well as my own experiences engaging in antiracist practices in a rural

school setting. Lastly, I believe that no one can be an antiracist, rather it is a continuous journey of engaging in critical reflection and continuous learning as one strives to deconstruct oppressive systems, policies, and practices that impact People of Color. As a researcher, I believe that values can provide benefits and barriers in the research process. My values and experiences with rural areas and antiracist practices allow me to empathize with my co-researchers and fuel my passion to pursue this research study. My values also, however, can impact how I am able to hold space in interviews and interpreting the data. These values influence my pursuit of this research study and I continue to acknowledge how these values and experiences impact my work within this study in my reflexive journal, peer debriefing, and conversations with my committee. Lastly, my methodological assumption is grounded in understanding lived experiences of my co-researchers and examining literature, systems, and findings through a critical lens, also known as critical phenomenology. In alignment with my methodological assumption, critical phenomenology allows me to not only share the stories of my co-researchers, but also examine the social structures that impact their ability to implement antiracist practices in rural areas and ensure the implications of my study are geared towards promoting antiracist practices and deconstructing oppressive systems that negatively impact Black and Brown students. I intentionally chose critical phenomenology because it allows me to counter the dominant, white-centered narrative by intentionally focusing on the lived experiences of rural school counselors, especially Black and Brown rural school counselors who are often silenced or excluded from the literature and educational settings.

Critical phenomenology is a lens through which phenomenology can be conducted (Weiss et al., 2020). This phenomenological approach aims to not just understand the experience of the co-researchers, but also moves towards political activism and social change (Weiss et al.,

2020). Critical phenomenology acknowledges that social structures prevent people from fully existing and moving towards liberation. The researcher must aim to examine and understand the social structures that impact the lived experiences of the co-researchers, as well as develop concrete strategies for dismantling oppressive structures (Weiss et al., 2020). The current study examined the use of antiracist practices, which aligns with the philosophical beliefs of critical phenomenology. Antiracist school counseling practices focus on dismantling oppressive systems that negatively impact and harm Black and Brown students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022). As the researcher, I conducted the current study through a critical phenomenological lens to analyze and interpret the data, as well as provide concrete strategies to ensure findings and implications are geared towards how rural school counselors can change systems and implement antiracist practices in PK-12 schools (Washington et al., 2023).

Due to the gap in research on the experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist practices, an exploratory study is necessary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, to best understand the lived experiences of the unique population and examine the social structures that impact the context in which the co-researchers operate, a critical phenomenological approach is not only appropriate but necessary. For these reasons, I believe that Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach conducted through a critical lens is the most appropriate research methodology that will provide thick, rich descriptions and highlight the lived experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist school counseling practices as well as analyze the social structures that influence the lived experiences of the co-researchers.

Study Design and Protocol

Co-researchers and Recruitment

Following approval from the William & Mary institution review board (IRB), I sought a sample of co-researchers that fit the following criteria: school counselors who (a) have engaged or attempted to engage in antiracist school counseling practices; (b) are currently employed in a rural or frontier classified district or public, private, or charter school in the United States of America; and (c) have at least one year of experience within the school counseling profession. For this study, the word *co-researchers* was used rather than *participants* to shift the power differential from the researcher to the co-researcher in alignment with CRT and antiracism. Additionally, using the word *co-researcher* allows people to move beyond being *subjects* to be studied, and rather collaborators and co-designers in the research process. In the research call, I provided the following definition and examples to aid in the recruitment of rural school counselors who have attempted to or successfully implemented antiracist school counseling practices:

- Antiracism: the "active approach to dismantling racist practices, racial hatred, systemic racism, and the oppression of historically oppressed racial groups" (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022, p.7)
- Examples of antiracist school counseling practices include but are not limited to:
    - Engaging in self-reflective work to address conscious and unconscious biases, assumptions, attitudes, and preconceived notions (Mayes & Byrd, 2022)
    - Use of school counseling approaches and theories that center the narratives of Black and Brown students and celebrate their cultural differences (Mayes & Byrd, 2022)

- Active dismantling of school policies and practices that impact the academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary development of Black and Brown students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022)
- Use of data to uncover racial disparities and inequities in the school or community (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022)

I purposefully selected a sample of under 10 co-researchers as recommended by Hayes and Singh (2023) for phenomenological research. This sampling strategy was purposeful in nature because I was intentional about how I recruit co-researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To do this I shared my research call with various support networks, social media platforms, and membership organizations that consist of rural school counselors and educators across the United States of America. I intentionally sought to distribute my research call to social media platforms and rural support groups because many professional organizations for school counselors consist of predominately white members and provide barriers to joining such as high yearly membership fees that many rural school counselors are not provided the funds to join (Grimes, 2020) and have to pay for out of pocket. Social media, however, is something that is more widely accessible. Most counseling research distributes research calls through membership organization email listservs which leads to predominately white-centered and/or privileged experiences. My intentionality in choosing to distribute my research call in a non-traditional manner is decolonized and aligns with antiracism by shifting the power back to co-researchers who are often excluded or silenced from the literature (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

The research call included a short introduction about myself (e.g. institution, degree) and the research study as well as co-researcher criteria, eligibility, time required to participate, confidentiality statement, and my contact information. Co-researchers who agreed to participate

were sent an informed consent to sign and a secure form to fill out a short demographic questionnaire that gathered their information and asked them to confirm their rurality by self-reporting if their school or district classifies as rural based on the NCES (2006) definition. Additionally, I asked the co-researchers to provide the school's name and zip code for where they worked to cross-check the rurality of their workplace. I utilized a snowball sampling strategy by encouraging those who receive the research call to share the call with others who might qualify to participate in the study in hopes of reaching co-researchers I may have missed in the initial research call (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2023). All documents and information was stored in a secure drive that is password-protected and will be deleted five years after the completion of the study. Data will be stored for five years to allow for the use of the data in future research.

Co-researchers that met the qualifications and agreed to partake in an interview and member checking were compensated for their time with a $60 gift card of their choosing. I intentionally chose to compensate the co-researchers for a variety of reasons. I wanted to compensate the co-researchers for taking their valuable time to partake in the research process with me. I also wanted to provide incentives for partaking in the research process, especially for a study that may cause additional emotional labor due to talking about topics such as antiracist work and school counseling in rural areas. Additionally, co-researchers are often not compensated when partaking in a research study due to debates on the ethicality of doing so. In alignment with my beliefs and intentionality for antiracism and decolonizing research, I wanted to ensure that my co-researchers are fairly compensated for their time, effort, and collaboration in the research process.

Co-researcher Confidentiality and Safety

Throughout the study, I informed and reminded co-researchers of their rights, limits to confidentiality, and purpose of the study. I provided them with an informed consent detailing their rights, limits to confidentiality, and purpose of the study in addition to a demographic questionnaire upon agreement to participate in the study. After I have received the demographic questionnaire back and confirmed their eligibility to participate in the study, I worked with the co-researcher to schedule and time and date for a 60-minute Zoom interview. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the informed consent and ask the co-researcher if there are questions or concerns before starting the recording of the interview. Co-researchers were reminded that they were able to withdraw from the study or stop the interview at any time before the final paper was submitted and their data would be instantly destroyed.

When managing, analyzing, and reporting data, I aimed to protect the co-researcher's identity as much as possible. I asked the co-researchers to choose a pseudonym and I recoded any data that includes identifying information (e.g., school/district name, co-worker names, location). Identifying information was re-coded immediately upon transcription before other members of the research team reviewed the transcripts. All identifying information used to communicate with the participants was stored separately in a secure drive (e.g., OneDrive). The demographics of my co-researchers, I omitted the specific the specific school, district and state they worked in. In addition, I only reported their race/ethnicity, gender, grade level, rural classification, and years they have been working as a school counselor.

Data Collection Methods

To explore the lived experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist practices, I collected data through the process of individual interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Once I gathered co-researcher information and confirmed eligibility, the co-researchers were asked to schedule an individual time for an interview. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and was offered at various times throughout the day and conducted through Zoom to allow flexibility for the researcher and co-researcher. Interviews were recorded through Zoom audio and a secondary recording instrument to guarantee data collection. Video was recorded because Zoom was unable to record just the audio, but I immediately deleted the video recording after the interview was over. I took notes of relevant body language throughout the interview. Interviews were structured to ensure congruence in the questions being asked of each co-researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The structured nature of the interview also sought to protect the co-researcher from undue harm and additional emotional labor. Speaking about a topic, such as racism, may create emotional labor for the co-researcher depending on their experiences or identities. As a white woman conducting this research, I broached my identity at the beginning of the interview and my positionality within the research to promote transparency with the co-researcher.

The interviews were structured with the following questions which have been adapted from Smith-Durkin's (2022) interview protocol:

1. Opening: Please tell me about your journey to becoming a school counselor.
2. In your own words, how would you define antiracism?
3. What does it mean to engage in antiracist practices as a school counselor?
4. What led you to begin the journey of implementing antiracist school counseling practices?
5. How do/did you implement antiracist school counseling practices?

6. Tell me about a specific time you engaged or attempted to engage in antiracist school counseling practices.
7. Could you tell me about a time when you were able to successfully implement antiracist school counseling practices? What did that look like?
8. What barriers have you encountered when implementing or attempting to implement antiracist school counseling practices? How did you overcome or attempt to overcome these barriers?
9. What facilitators and supports exist that aid in your implementation of antiracist school counseling practices?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience engaging or attempting to engage in antiracist practices as a school counselor in a rural school/district that you haven't already or would like to elaborate on?

Following interviews, the audio was transcribed through a secure online transcription service (e.g., Otter.ai; data management software) and listened through to ensure accuracy. Following transcription, co-researchers were asked to review and provide revisions if needed to the transcript being approved for data analysis.

Data Management

To protect the confidentiality of the co-researcher, co-researcher data and information was stored in a secure drive (e.g., OneDrive; data management software) that is password protected. Only the research team (i.e., my dissertation committee and external auditor) and I had access to the data. Data will be stored for five years after the study is complete to allow for further analysis and research studies and will then be permanently deleted. Co-researchers were asked to identify a pseudonym at the beginning of each interview. Transcripts and data

information were re-coded to include the co-researcher's pseudonym and other identifying information was deleted. Data codes, themes, and descriptions from the transcripts were stored in a secure drive (e.g., OneDrive; data management software). Only final themes, subthemes, and selected descriptions/quotations were used for the final writeup of the study for publication. The rest of the data will continue to be stored in a secure drive and deleted five years after the study is complete.

Data Analysis

Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach was used to analyze the data collected through interviews to provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon experienced through the words of the co-researchers rather than the researcher. Moustakas (1994) encouraged the use of phenomenology to interpret interview transcripts and extract themes across interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas's (1994) steps to data analysis include: (a) bracketing my own biases and experiences with the phenomenon as much as possible; (b) collecting data from several people who have experienced the phenomenon; (c) reducing information to significant statements or quotes (i.e., horizontalization); (d) development of themes (i.e., clustered horizons); (e) develop textural and structural descriptions; and (f) extracting a resulting essence from common experiences within the phenomenon.

In alignment with critical phenomenology, I modified parts of Moustakas (1994) to better fit the aims of CRT. For example, I read and analyzed each transcript through an antiracist lens. An antiracist lens in school counseling research includes engaging in critical self-reflexivity to enhance the researcher's awareness of how race has been constructed and racism perpetuates through PK-12 systems, policies, and procedures that directly harm Black and Brown students and uphold white supremacy (Washington et al., 2023). By utilizing an antiracist lens, the

researcher can begin to pursue and promote research-informed practices that "humanize racialized students and promote antiracism in PK-12 schools" (Washington et al., 2023, p. 5). With my reflexive journal, I engaged in critical self-reflexivity throughout the data analysis process which allowed me to monitor how my experiences and biases shape my interpretation of the data. In addition to critical reflexivity, I used the tenets of CRT to aid in the development and clustering of my themes. I ensured that my themes, overall findings, and implications focused on changing systems and promoting antiracist practices in PK-12 rural schools to support, benefit, and protect Black and Brown students and were rooted in the tenets of CRT.

Trustworthiness Strategies

A variety of strategies were used to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the data collected and proposed findings. As recommended by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell & Poth (2018), I incorporated Tufford and Newman's (2012) bracketing model that included reflexive journaling and memos. I attempted to bracket my own experiences and opinions I have about rural school counseling and antiracism using a reflexive journal. Additionally, throughout the data collection and analysis process I wrote memos to examine and reflect upon my engagement with the data (Tufford & Newman, 2012). As mentioned previously, I also utilized a peer debriefer before, during, and after data collection that identifies as white, is familiar with rural school counseling research and engages in antiracist work to prevent additional emotional labor on a BIPOC individual.

In addition to bracketing, I also reviewed transcripts thoroughly multiple times to familiarize myself with the data and examined for themes across the transcripts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure that I was capturing an accurate description of the experiences of the co-researcher, I utilized member checking throughout the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Co-

researchers were be given their transcripts to review, revise if necessary, and approve before being analyzed for themes. Co-researchers were also provided with a brief synopsis of themes extracted to approve before presenting the findings. If a co-researcher disagreed with the findings, I would ask the co-researcher to provide a response describing what specific parts they disagree with and offer the opportunity to provide clarification and suggested revisions that better describe their lived experiences. While this did not occur, I would have brought the response to my committee to discuss necessary revisions and provide the revised synopsis of themes to the co-researcher for approval before presenting the findings. To highlight the experiences of the co-researchers, results were provided in the form of thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon in addition to co-researcher quotes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2023).

Lastly, to increase the dependability of my study, I utilized an external auditor that is familiar with the topic I am studying but was not involved in the research process. The external auditor was utilized to ensure the proposed study is carried out properly and the findings accurately represent the phenomenon I am studying (Hayes & Singh, 2023). The external auditor was asked to review the audit trail, including the data collection and analysis processes, and the attempts to bracket researcher bias (Hayes & Singh, 2023). The external auditor was recommended by one of my dissertation co-chairs because the individual was familiar with the data management software (i.e., MAXQDA) and phenomenological research in social justice areas. In alignment with my beliefs and intentionality for antiracism and decolonizing research, I ensured that my external auditor was fairly compensated for their time, effort, and collaboration in the research process.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This phenomenological study conducted through a CRT lens examined the lived experiences of rural school counselors who implemented or sought to implement antiracist school counseling practices in PK-12 schools. Literature currently exists on the experiences of school counselors implementing antiracist social justice practices (Smith-Durkin, 2022), counseling competencies for antiracist school counselors (Stickl Haugen et al., 2022), school counselor preparation (Ieva et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; Mason et al., 2021) and antiracist school counseling frameworks (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Mayes & Byrd, 2022), but none of the existing literature prior to this study examines how antiracist school counseling might look in a rural context. The goal of this study was to provide insight and knowledge into the best practices for rural school counselors as well as ways to overcome potential barriers for current rural school counselors seeking to implement antiracist practices. The study was guided by the following research question:

1. What are rural school counselors' lived experiences with implementing and/or attempting to implement antiracist school counseling practices in PK-12 schools?

Co-researcher Demographics

This study included the experiences of six co-researchers. Co-researchers shared demographic information using a Google form. Any identifying information shared was stored in a password-protected Microsoft Drive. The demographic information was stored in a location separate from co-researcher interview data so it could not be identified to any co-researchers. The co-researchers also selected a pseudonym at the beginning of the interview, and all

identifying information in each transcript was changed to protect the anonymity of the co-researcher.

The research sample included six female-identifying individuals. Of the six female co-researchers, three identified as white (50%; n = 3), two identified as Black or African American (33.3%; n = 2), and one identified as two or more races (16%; n = 1). Only one of the six individuals identified as being of Hispanic or Latino descent (16%; n = 1). The sample is relatively comparable to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) 2023 membership profile in which 74% of ASCA members identified as white, 11% identified as Black, and 10% identified as Hispanic (ASCA, 2023a) which suggests that the sample is likely representative of the school counseling profession. Co-researchers ranged in experience working as a school counselor from 1-2 years to over 10 years of experience. Additionally, four of the co-researchers worked in a rural remote classified school or district (66.7%; n = 4), one worked in a rural distant classified school or district (16%; n = 1), and one worked in a rural fringe classified school or district (16%; n = 1). All of the co-researchers identified as working in a public-school setting, and the sample consisted of school counselors who had experience in elementary, middle, or high school. The school counselors worked in a variety of states across the United States but to protect the anonymity of the co-researchers, the states that the counselors worked in will not be provided but instead, the regions (e.g., Southwest, Northeast) in which they worked in will be provided. Table 3 details the co-researcher demographic information.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of School Counselor Co-Researchers

Pseudonym	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years of Experience	U.S. Region	Rural Classification	Grade Level
Natalie	Female	Black or African American	3-5	Southwest	Rural Remote	High
Billie	Female	Black or African American	10+	Southeast	Rural Remote	High
Renee	Female	Two or More Races/Hispanic or Latine descent	10+	West	Rural Distant	Elementary
Rose	Female	White	2-3	Midwest	Rural Fringe	High
Sam	Female	White	10+	Midwest	Rural Remote	Middle
Lynn	Female	White	10+	Midwest	Rural Remote	High

Review of Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted individual interviews with six individuals who identified as a school counselor currently working in a rural classified PK-12 school in the United States with at least one year of experience. Interviews were audio and video recorded via Zoom. After each interview, I completed initial field memos, reflexive journals, and uploaded the audio to a secure online transcription service (i.e., Otter.ai). Following transcription, I sent the completed transcript to the co-researcher for member-checking. Once the co-researcher provided the transcript back with edits or confirmed that edits were not needed, I coded each transcript through inductive coding in a secure data management software (i.e., MAXQDA). To code, I coded by sentence and highlighted key terms and phrases throughout the transcript, and noted keywords that summarized the sentence(s) or term(s) in the margins of the transcripts. The codes were then imported into a secure Google Sheets spreadsheet and initial codes were reviewed to

ensure accuracy and clarity. When developing initial codes, categories, and themes, I continued to reference the literature for antiracist school counseling practices and CRT tenets. The initial codes were collapsed into preliminary categories (i.e., words or phrases that captured all related codes), and preliminary categories were organized into broad categories that were then organized into themes presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

List of Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: Counselor Disposition	
• Awareness	• Intentionality
Theme 2: Barriers	
• Permanence of racism • Insulated perspective	• Reactive approach
Theme 3: Effective Practices	
• Advocacy/Leadership • Promote student and family voice	• Increased awareness through exposure
Theme 4: Support	
• Collaboration	• Continuity

Throughout data analysis, I referenced my field memos, and continued to write in my reflexive journal to document initial thoughts, feelings, reactions, and times where I noticed my biases arising. For example, because of my experience with administrative pushback, I expected to hear co-researchers talk about pushback from administrators and was surprised when I didn't hear of this in the first interview I did. I took note of this in my reflexive journal, and maintained awareness of this bias as I moved forward with data collection and data analysis.

I began meeting with my peer-debriefer weekly when data collection began until data analysis was complete to process and review data collection and analysis. I utilized a white peer debriefer as not to subject a Black or Brown individual to potential additional emotional labor and vicarious race-based trauma. Additionally, my peer debriefer was purposely selected because they were familiar with rural school counseling research and aligned with antiracist school

counseling practices. When data analysis began, my peer debriefer and I continued to meet weekly to discuss my codes, categories, and themes to ensure my implicit biases or personal experiences were not impacting the findings. Lastly, once data analysis was complete, I reviewed the findings with my dissertation co-chairs and sent the data to an external auditor who examined the data to ensure the findings accurately represented what was captured. The external auditor was a Woman of Color with training in qualitative methods and socially just educational practices. In alignment with my beliefs and intentionality for antiracism and decolonizing research, I paid my external auditor for her time, effort, and collaboration in the research process.

The findings are a culmination of the co-researchers' voices and lived experiences. This chapter presents findings from data collected through structured interviews with a sample of six rural school counselors who implemented or attempted to implement antiracist school counseling practices. Using Moustakas' data analysis steps for a phenomenological approach within a CRT lens, I uncovered four themes and 10 subthemes emerged from the data. Specifically, the themes were (a) counselor disposition, (b) barriers, (c) effective practices, and (d) support.

Themes

Theme 1: Counselor Disposition

The first theme, counselor disposition, demonstrated the school counselor's attitudes, beliefs, traits, and characteristics that were aspects of their personal and professional functioning (Miller et al., 2020). Each of the co-researchers spoke to their own beliefs, attitudes, traits, and characteristics that impacted their journey to promoting antiracist practices, many of them speaking to how their role as school counselors called for antiracist practices. Rose explained:

> I think for our role as school counselors, a big part of counseling anyone is understanding that people come from all sorts of different backgrounds and continuing to have your office be that space of unconditional, positive regard, and their safe space.

Similarly, Natalie described how implementing antiracist practices came naturally to her, "I didn't realize I was doing it. Right? I wasn't calling it that. I was just doing what I felt like was best for my students."

Multiple co-researchers stated that their passion for antiracist practices was further strengthened by educational backgrounds and personal experiences. Renee explained:

> Now being in the doctoral program for educational leadership, it's also very much based on equity and social justice. And so it's kind of like after all these years, like reigning a little spark in me, and just like, kind of, because I'm so immersed in it, it's all we talk about, and so, you can't like you, you can't help but not to engage in the practices and, you know, try to educate other people and make other people aware of things.

Additionally, many of the co-researchers spoke specifically about a catalyst event (e.g., participation in research and professional development around antiracist practices). that increased their awareness of systemic barriers and overt and covert acts of racism that impact People of Color. This catalyst event inspired the co-researchers to intentionally pursue antiracist practices and further self-awareness and critical understanding of the world around them. Rose explained:

> When I was in undergrad, and I was learning about some of the experiences of others, and of people that I would call my friends...and then hearing from them directly, like some of the things that they've experienced really hurt my heart. And so it kind of just

felt like a natural, like of course I want to do what is right by others, and I want to help how I can.

Multiple co-researchers spoke about an appreciation for diversity and a desire to promote antiracist practices. Some of the co-researchers worked in predominantly white areas with little-to-no diversity. In describing her desire to promote diversity in the school and community, Lynn explained, "We need more diversity, also just in people who haven't lived there their whole life." Additionally, Billie described a desire to increase awareness and antiracist practices and "expand it to the larger part of the school community" rather than just within the school counseling department.

Counselor dispositions were talked about extensively among the co-researchers and fueled their passion for seeking to implement antiracist practices in their schools. Many of the codes were initially categorized as being counselor dispositions before *counselor dispositions* emerged as a theme. When analyzing the data, there were specific codes and categories that fell within counselor's disposition but were salient enough to constitute their own subcode, and as a result two subthemes emerged: (a) *awareness* and (b) *intentionality*.

Subtheme: Awareness

Extending beyond counselor disposition, co-researchers explained how promoting antiracist practices meant being aware of their own biases and continuing to further their understanding of racism and the impacts it has on students and education systems. Renee explained, "You have to understand the concept of racism, and also equity, all of those things, you know, when working with students and families, especially of diverse backgrounds, and so you have to be very self-aware." Despite many of the co-researchers describing that they felt the

work they were doing was ‘not a big thing,’ many did say they were actively seeking to do better by increasing their own awareness and understanding of antiracist practices.

Co-researchers spoke about how they engaged and continue to engage in experiences and discussions that promote exposure and self-awareness. Natalie spoke about how being engaged in antiracist research and “staying in the know about what’s going on in the world” helped increase her self-efficacy in promoting antiracist practices. Additionally, Renee spoke about how taking self-assessments helped open her eyes to the biases she didn’t know she had:

> With my mindset, like “oh, yeah, I'm definitely like, not racist. I'm open minded. I accept everyone,” you know, type of thing, but then the results of my survey, like it showed that I have certain biases, and then I was really pretty shocked by it. And so I think that like, that's where it goes back to the self-awareness where you really have to know yourself like, am I being judg--am I judging somebody right now or, and so, it's honestly, it's just about your approach with people. And so I think people just need to be reminded of that in order to be aware and also, like, implement those types of practices where, you know, you're, looking at inclusion and equity and things like that for our students.

Subtheme: Intentionality

The co-researchers spoke about intentionally engaging in antiracist practices and programming, as well as meeting the needs of students. Natalie explained how she intentionally seeks to understand the needs of her students through needs assessments, “Like using a needs assessment [to] kind of really see what’s happening on our campus and what our students have to say versus us trying to make those decisions.” Similarly, Billie spoke about how she intentionally

advocated for antiracist programming with administration and leadership and continues to advocate despite pushback:

> I have spoken with members of my administrative team and members of the district, trying to bring people from outside of the system into the system to do programming for training for our teachers, in how to interact with students, same thing for just countywide—just thinking of ways of bringing people in to do those things. Have those things happened yet? The answer is no, but I am actively trying to use the things I learned...and trying to make things better.

Another way that co-researchers showed intentionality was through addressing incidents of racism and expanding close-minded perspectives. Sam and Lynn both spoke about how they would "share personal experiences" in which they witnessed acts of racism to expand students' awareness of race and racism that existed within and beyond their rural town. Sam explained,

> When I lived in [city], with my husband, and he was Black, and I was white, and we would drive into the city...And I was driving.... we got stopped, and I'm pretty sure we just got stopped because I was white, and he was Black. And like, they thought he was going to take me or something, I guess. I mean, that's the only reason we got stopped. And so when kids would say, 'Oh, no [city] isn't-- or that didn't happen, like people don't get stopped for no reason.' I'm like, 'yeah, they do. I mean, it happened to me, I can tell you this, that happens.' So I guess that'd be another way. I tried to, again, using kind of my own experiences to explain to them that, you know...that these things go on.

Theme 2: Barriers

A significant theme that emerged from the data was internal and external factors that impacted the school counselor's ability to implement antiracist practices, termed *barriers*. Co-

researchers spoke about how various systems, specifically poverty, lack of resources, and being the only school counselor, created significant barriers that impacted their students and their ability to implement antiracist practices. Lynn, who spoke towards the challenges of being the only school counselor in her school, explained:

> She [wanted] some more restorative practices kind of thing. I'm like, 'Well we don't have any of that set up,' and I'm--I'm also feeling like, 'uh, well, what am I supposed to do?' You know, again, 'what do I have control [of]?'

Rose elaborated on how society in general created a barrier that impacted her students and her work:

> Our societal system is kind of-- what is like a big barrier. And then we take all that and then we bring these students into school, and we have to, like, figure out how are we going to set them up for success in climbing up that mountain?

Societal systems like state laws, lack of knowledge about implementing antiracist practices, lack of support, and limited resources to assist in programming negatively impacted the co-researcher's self-efficacy to do antiracist work. Natalie, a school counselor who had experience implementing and researching antiracist practices spoke on how state laws created specific barriers for current and beginning school counselors:

> We have the [state] model in [state] that we follow. So we use the ASCA as a supplement, but we're required by law to use the [state] model. Well, the [state] model does not talk about antiracism. It doesn't hit multicultural and social justice counseling competencies at all. There's a few little dibble-dabbles on like equity and, you know, those cool words that we use, but nothing to really help a school counselor in [state] who has to deal with certain laws that restrict what we do to be confident in their role.

Barriers was a significant theme that emerged from numerous codes. When analyzing the data, there were specific codes and categories that fell within barriers but were salient enough to constitute their own subcode and as a result three subthemes emerged: (a) *permanence of racism*, (b) *insulated perspective*, and (c) *reactive approach*.

Subtheme: Permanence of Racism

Permanence of racism emerged and was labeled with assistance from my theoretical framework, CRT. Permanence of racism can be described as the acknowledgment of racism and racist practices throughout society and education systems (Decuir & Dixson, 2007). There were various systemic barriers that negatively impacted Black and Brown students such as harsher disciplinary actions, increased rates of credit recovery, and lack of strong discipline for incidents of racism in the school. These barriers were identified in my literature review as being examples of racist education and systemic policies created to directly oppress Students of Color. Additionally, there were overt and covert acts of racism that the co-researchers spoke to witnessing in their school and community. Renee described,

> When I was working at the elementary school as a counselor, it's like, say 99% Latino population. And we had like an African American student that moved into our district into our school. And there was a lot of stuff going on. Like the kids, like a lot of the students didn't accept him, they would call him names.

All but one of the co-researchers spoke about how their communities were primarily conservative and opposed antiracism and DEI practices and efforts. Natalie explained, "I live in a very conservative area, and you know, lots of politics you know, so those are some huge barriers there, especially when you are trying to fight for things that matter." Sam described how the

conservative nature of her state and community impacted her day-to-day work and resulted in ignorance from people in her community:

> Between a couple of community members that are pretty conservative and worried about 'wokeness' I guess, I also live in [state], which is a very conservative state in that there—I mean, we can't even say [wokeness]. Like there's certain words we can't even say or address because of issues. They just don't want to talk about things that happened in the past. It's like we're supposed to just move on.

Subtheme: Insulated Perspective

Many of the co-researchers spoke on how insulated perspectives and internalized racism promoted a system that maintained the status quo and left people, including the co-researchers, afraid to 'rock the boat.' Co-researchers spoke about how many of the community members and students only knew what they knew because they had limited exposure or experience beyond their community and school, which resulted in an insulated perspective and internalized racism. Additionally, some co-researchers spoke about how religion had instilled an "everyone is equal" mentality among the community and within themselves at times. The phrase 'don't rock the boat' came up multiple times when co-researchers spoke about their own hesitation to implementing antiracist practices or challenging systems that had been upheld by generations of people who grew up and continued to live in the area. In addition, many of the co-researchers spoke to a sense of apathy from others or fear of upsetting others when trying to promote diversity or antiracist practices. Lynn described:

> The biggest barrier is just apathy and not wanting to rock the boat. 'Oh, well, we don't want to start promoting all this stuff about race, because then some parent will be upset.' Well, nobody's upset yet, but some parent might be, you know. So we tend to just 'let's

> stick our head in the sand.' I think that's kind of a big barrier. You know, 'Just don't do it too much. Don't do anything too much.'

When co-researchers attempted to challenge the status quo or promote antiracist practices, they were met with pushback from students, parents, school leaders, and/or community members. Sam, who had started a DEI curriculum in response to racist comments made in the school described how pushback affected her work:

> I'm kind of embarrassed to say that I had a parent with some backlash about it. And that's when I feel like I kind of backed off a little bit with the teachings because I had a student, a parent who tried to prove me wrong with all of the different things I was using.....And so I kind of backed off, I feel like. And I've kind of re-done how I do things, but I still do teach that.

Subtheme: Reactive Approach

Co-researchers shared how much of the work they were doing was limited due to most antiracist work being reactive instead of proactive. Billie explained:

> I live in a county where we are very reactive versus proactive. So things are an issue when they're an issue, even though they may be underlying, you know, things that people are aware of. Unless someone just makes a big stink about it, it really isn't necessarily addressed.

Due to a lack of programming in place and a lack of antiracist resources, many of the co-researchers weren't implementing antiracist practices unless it was in response to an incident of racism within the school. The most common practice used by co-researchers to address incidents of racism was restorative justice practices. Sam explained how she addressed an incident of racism through restorative justice practices:

> He was upset because someone had called them the N-word or somehow the N-word got brought up and he said, ‘Well, you know, they, my friends, sometimes they call-- they say that and it's okay--I let them say it and it's okay. But this time, I didn't like it. And I was really mad, and he used it in a really derogatory way.’ And so I had to do some work with this group of high school--and this was high school boys. And so I had to do some work with that and the understanding just of how hurtful that was and that, ‘no, just because he says that word, you-- you know if he would say that word in a song or sing it or listen to it, you don't get to use that word, and that's okay.’ Like, ‘he has his right to change his mind about that.’

Multiple co-researchers spoke to a desire for a more proactive approach towards implementing antiracist practices and programming but were met with additional barriers that halted their efforts. One of these being a lack of follow-through from administration. Billie explained:

> So in trying to get programming at the school, as I said, I've spoken with administrators, and I've even shared what possible individuals that can come in. Other members of my counseling team have done the same. But it really hasn't gone beyond the conversation stage. And we'll check in about it every once in a while, like, ‘Hey, how did this go? Were we able to get this group that we mentioned,’ and that didn't work out, then there was an individual that I was trying to get that I had spoke [to].....I mentioned him to assistant principal, but again, like nothing really happened with that.

Theme 3: Effective Practices

Despite facing many barriers, co-researchers engaged in various effective practices to address school climate and culture, to build community, and provide a safe space for Black and

Brown students. These practices were deemed effective because they were defined by the literature as school counseling behaviors that promoted antiracist practices. Many of the co-researchers were able to promote diversity and equity through small-group, classroom, and school-wide programming. For example, Sam was able to incorporate a curriculum regarding diversity in her school which allowed her the opportunity to broach conversations of race and racism to increase her students' perspectives of the world. Sam explained,

> [I was] trying to teach my kids that—of the differences out there, and that just because we grew up in a small school with mostly white kids, that's not going to be the case. And that there were a lot of misinformation about different groups of people out there. And I didn't want them to be misinformed. So I started there.

In addition to programming, co-researchers would meet with the administration to evaluate school handbooks, policies, and curriculum and make changes to promote equitable outcomes for their Black and Brown students. Rose explained that her and her co-counselors "are often consulted on policies, or ideas, or programs, or policies and...the rules [they are] going to have in [their] school" by their administrative team. When analyzing the data, three subthemes emerged to describe the effective practices that co-researchers engaged in: (a) *advocacy/leadership*, (b) *promote student and family voice*, and (c) *increased awareness through exposure*.

Subtheme: Advocacy/Leadership

The ASCA Ethical Standards (2022a) and antiracist school counselor frameworks (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Stickl Haugen et al., 2021) describe the school counselor's role in serving as leaders and advocates to promote antiracist work and provide equitable educational outcomes for Black and Brown students. For some co-researchers, they described this

advocate/leadership role as something that came "naturally." Rose explained, "So the other part of a school counselor, I think is we play—like we're naturally in the leadership of the school role." Similarly, when asked about how she engaged in antiracist practices, Billie explained,

> [It's] in how I interact with students in terms of dealing with the things that they bring forth in the meetings. Advocating for them. Whether that's going to a teacher or bringing together students who have a conflict with other students regarding racist concerns.

In addition to serving as advocates for their students, co-researchers also served as leaders and advocates in the school by promoting their role and antiracist practices within their school. Natalie explained:

> Some of my teachers will call and be like, 'this kid needs to get out of pre-AP.' And I'm like, 'But why,' you know, 'what do you know about their life and what's going on in their life right now.' And, you know, they're like, 'Oh, nothing,' I'm like, 'oh, but they don't want to get out.' So you know, and then just having to kind of talk to them about 'different experiences in, you know, making sure the student has access to the appropriate education that they need. And just because they're not making the 98, like the rest of your kids doesn't mean they don't belong there. And so --or their attendance isn't the best, so they need to get out. There is some truth to that, but then there are also, you know, exceptions to that as well.

Subtheme: Promote Student and Family Voice

Another effective practice some co-researchers engaged in was centering and promoting the voices of Black and Brown students and families. Critical race theory (Decuir & Dixson, 2007) and antiracist frameworks (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Stickl Haugen et al., 2021) emphasize the importance of centering and promoting the voices and lived experiences of People of Color,

also known as counter-storytelling. Co-researchers intentionally sought to create safe encouraging spaces within their counseling office where Black and Brown students and families felt comfortable sharing their lived experiences. Rose explained:

> That safe space for them to just come in and I can listen to what they got going on. And you know, for some time during their day being like that place where they can go and be themselves and feel encouraged.

Additionally, some co-researchers would seek opportunities to bring the voices of Black and Brown students and families into conversations to seek input and feedback to influence antiracist programming. Natalie explained how promoting student and family voice exemplified how she engaged in antiracist practices:

> I literally like bring the student into the conversation like that is how I engage in antiracist practices and also my-- the families that I work with, any opportunity that I get to learn more about them, or help them or have them help me kind of navigate what the heck I'm doing to support them and their child like, that is me engaging in antiracist practices, so bringing their voice and their experiences into this program.

Subtheme: Increased Awareness through Exposure

To address insulated perspectives in their school and community, some of the co-researchers would seek opportunities to increase awareness through exposure. Lynn spoke about how she teaches a sociology class within the school which allowed her to create class activities and assignments that increased students' awareness and exposure to other cultures and experiences beyond their own. Lynn explained:

> We also at one point, were able to take the sociology class, we would go and visit a big school. Most of my students have never been anywhere else, besides their tiny, tiny little

> school....we got a chance to go up there and tour and it was even eye-opening for me, I mean, it's just so huge, and such a different schooling than what we have, but watching the kids' come in and interacting with people who were different from them.

Additionally, some of the co-researchers would share their own experiences to increase awareness and knowledge in students. Sam explained, "I've kind of even just told them my own story to kind of teach them I guess." Sam also spoke to how she felt she was able to successfully increase some students' awareness and understanding about racism and marginalized populations by sharing additional resources (i.e., data, videos, articles) with her students:

> I feel like I probably did make—I hope I made a difference. And I have had a couple of them tell me the, 'You know, I didn't have any idea that that's how it was, or that these things happen to people just because they were Native American, or they were a difference race.'

Theme 4: Support

Co-researchers spoke to specific support and facilitators that aided in their ability to implement antiracist practices. When co-researchers felt supported or were provided support from leadership (i.e., administration, district-level, state-level, national-level), they felt more confident and able to implement antiracist practices. When asked about potential barriers she encountered to implementing antiracist practices, Renee responded, "I feel like I have a lot of support in the work that I do. So, I don't think I really encountered that." Other examples of support provided included professional development, grants, and general support for their role as school counselors.

Additionally, social media, national organizations, and counseling teams were listed as examples that aided in the co-researcher's ability to implement antiracist practices because they

felt a sense of support and community with like-minded individuals. Natalie described social media as “a way to learn” more about how other school counselors are trying to “dismantle things that have...marginalized people.” Billie explained that her counseling team not only supported one another but encouraged each other to seek out ways to continuously “do better, because [they] don’t want to be stagnant, ever.” Two subthemes emerged from the data that described specific supports and facilitators that aided in the co-researcher's ability to implement antiracist practices: (a) *collaboration* and (b) *continuity.*

Subtheme: Collaboration

In addition to feeling supported from colleagues and invested parties, all but one of the co-researchers spoke to the importance of working collaboratively with invested parties such as counseling teams, administration, outside agencies, and community members. By working collaboratively with invested parties, co-researchers felt more able to implement antiracist work because it reduced the workload being solely on them. Rose spoke to how having a united counseling department was a big support that aided in implementing antiracist practices:

> I feel like they're a good resource for me to utilize when we're,-- you know, so it's not just all on me like I can bounce my ideas off with them and they can give their advice and support and with most things we usually agree on our course of action so I feel like having a united counseling department is helpful.

Billie also spoke to how having a strong student services team aided in their ability to meet the needs of their students; “[My team] is a strong group of individuals who are like-minded in our efforts to be supportive of all that we have in the school... We work collaboratively as needed on different situations to help students.”

Subtheme: Continuity

Over half of the co-researchers worked in their school and/or school district for over 10 years. Additionally, many of the co-researchers spoke to working within the same district and area they grew up in. As a result, many of the co-researchers developed strong relationships and trust with the school and community they worked in. The co-researchers spoke to how their continuity in the district aided in their ability to implement antiracist practices because they had the trust and support of the school and community members. Lynn explained:

> Part of the support would be, first of all, continuity-- that I've just been there forever. Again, things that you could do now, I couldn't have done in year two. So being there for a long time, you establish that relationship and that connection. Like I said, support is like a lot of my students now are what I call grand-students. I had their parents in school. So, actually, I've got a couple of great-grands now, you know. So kind of building that relationship also allows you to do some different things because the parents are going to trust you that you're really trying to do the best thing for their children, that you did the best thing for them, you know, that's a plus in a small school.

Additionally, having continuity gave some co-researchers confidence to be able to address the needs within their school and community without fear of pushback. Renee stated:

> I've been here for a long time. So I'd kind of do like my own thing, and nobody really bothers me. Like, nobody says, 'oh, you can't do that.' Or you know what I mean? Like, I don't really ask like, 'oh, is this okay? If I do X, Y, or Z?' Like, if I see like, the need that is that the school site or in the community, I just address it.

Summary

Information provided by six co-researchers in the current study provides insight into the various experiences of rural school counselors who implemented or attempted to implement antiracist practices in PK-12 schools. Through data analysis, four themes and 10 subthemes were revealed. A discussion of these findings and implications for school counselor practice and training can be found in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In this critical phenomenological study, I investigated the lived experiences of rural school counselors who implemented or attempted to implement antiracist school counseling practices in PK-12 schools. The goal of this study was to better understand how rural school counselors engage in antiracist practices, what barriers and/or support systems impact their ability to implement antiracist work, and how they overcame or attempted to overcome barriers they faced. Additionally, the purpose of this study was not only to understand the phenomenon but also propel towards political activism and social change. In this critical phenomenological study, through the use of structured interviews conducted on Zoom, I captured the lived experiences of six rural school counselors who work in different academic levels (i.e., elementary, middle, high school) across the United States. Through data analysis, four themes and 10 subthemes emerged. In this chapter, I will provide: (a) a summary of the research findings in the context of the existing literature, (b) a discussion of implications for practice, school counselor preparation, and future research, and (c) limitations of the current study.

Summary of Findings in the Context of Existing Literature

School counselors serve as advocates for their students and support the academic, career, and social/emotional well-being of all students (ASCA, 2019). Part of this advocacy role involves school counselors ensuring equitable opportunities and outcomes for their students, specifically Students of Color, through antiracist work. Additionally, previous literature states that rural school counselors encounter unique experiences and challenges that influence their engagement in social justice advocacy (Grimes et al., 2014) but no literature prior to the current study explored the experiences of rural school counselors who have implemented or sought to

implement antiracist practices. To understand and analyze the data, I utilized Decuir and Dixson's (2007) tenets of CRT in addition to Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach to aid in the development of codes, categories, and themes. Throughout the chapter, I provide examples on how the tenets of CRT showed up and supported the findings (see Table 4). The findings from the current study expand on the literature to fill this gap and was guided by the following research question: What are rural school counselors' lived experiences with implementing and/or attempting to implement antiracist school counseling practices in PK-12 schools?

Table 4

Examples of CRT Tenets within Current Study

Tenet	Definition	Examples in Current Study
Counter-story telling	Elevates the lived experiences and voices of Black and Brown people	• SCs promoting Black and Brown student and family voices
Permanence of racism	Acknowledgement of racism and racist practices throughout society and education systems	• SCs experiences with systemic barriers, racist systems, racist structures, incidents of overt and covert racism
Whiteness as property	White people are provided opportunities for advancement by the historical and present oppression of Black and Brown people	• SCs speaking to school handbooks, policies, and curriculum being white centered and created inequitable outcomes for Black and Brown Students compared to white students
Interest convergence	People of Color in the United States advance by assimilating to white culture and norms. Additionally, white people take a self-interest in advocating for Black and Brown people when it benefits them rather than altruism alone	• Lack of follow-through and perceived apathy from admin when advocating for antiracist programming in their school • A SC's experience witnessing exchange students assimilate to predominantly white culture in efforts to 'fit in'
Critique of liberalism	False sense of hope that occurs when society and people ignore racist practices and inequities that occur	• SCs spoke to religion instilling "everyone is equal" mentality • Insulated perspectives

Theme 1: Counselor Disposition

The first theme that emerged in this study was *counselor disposition.* Counselor disposition is defined as the school counselor's attitudes, beliefs, traits, and characteristics that are aspects of their personal and professional functioning (Miller et al., 2020). Stickl Haugen and colleagues' (2021) framework of antiracist school counseling competencies outline the attitudes, knowledge, characteristics, and behaviors that school counselors should have when seeking to implement antiracist practices in their school. Additionally, Stickl Haugen and colleagues (2021) described the perceptions and awareness around individual, interpersonal, and systemic anti-racist contexts that school counselors need to develop to effectively engage in antiracist work. In relation to antiracist practices, ASCA (2021) outlines the school counselor's role in enhancing self-awareness through critical reflection on how their cultural worldviews (i.e., values, beliefs, assumptions, biases) influence their practices. Additionally, school counselors have a responsibility to examine their self-awareness of the permanence of racism throughout school structures and policies that impact Black and Brown students (Washington et al., 2023). The literature parallels the data that emerged from the current study in which the co-researchers spoke to their own beliefs, attitudes, traits, and characteristics that impacted their journey to promoting antiracist practices.

Additionally, co-researchers spoke about ways they continuously engage in critical self-reflection to increase their self-awareness (e.g., implicit bias surveys, professional development, engagement in reflective consultation with colleagues) and how they intentionally engage in antiracist practices to meet the needs of their students. Intentionality is supported by CRT and antiracist literature that emphasizes the importance of intentionally creating spaces to hear from

Black and Brown voices (e.g., students, families, community members) about their experiences and suggestions for programming that directly impact them, and implementing intentional practices, such as photovoice (Harley & Hunn, 2015) and narrative counseling (DeVance Taliaferro et al., 2023), that allow for counter-storytelling for Students of Color (Bell, 1995; Decuir & Dixson, 2007; Washington et al., 2023). Mayes and Byrd (2022) also emphasized the importance of intentionally selecting and promoting material and programming that center and celebrate Black and Brown experiences and joy rather than deficit-ideologies and suffering.

Theme 2: Barriers

The second theme that emerged from the study was *barriers* which included the permanence of racism, insulated perspectives, and a reactive approach to antiracism. These internal and external barriers impacted the co-researcher's ability to implement antiracist practices and negatively impacted their Students of Color. Co-researchers spoke to the various systemic barriers that negatively impacted Black and Brown students in their school such as harsher disciplinary actions, increased rates of credit recovery, and lack of strong discipline for incidents of racism in the school. Their experience expands previous literature that exposed the inequities, racist systems, and racist structures highlighted in the literature review that exist and continue to negatively impact the mental health and academic success of Black and Brown students, especially in rural areas (Graham, 2015; Morris, 2016; Trent et al., 2019). Their experiences are supported by the CRT tenet, *permanence of racism*, that acknowledges racism has been embedded into social systems within the United States and trickled into the foundation of educational systems and, as a result, cannot be removed (Decuir & Dixson 2007; Edirmanasignhe et al., 2022; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). Additionally, co-researchers spoke to incidents of overt and covert racism they witnessed and heard their students experience,

mirroring previous literature that explained the likelihood of Black and Brown students experiencing racism through social interactions in PK-12 schools (Mayes & Byrd, 2022).

Existing rural school counseling literature explains the complex benefits and challenges that comes with working in tight-knit communities that consist of generations of families (Grimes et al., 2014; Grimes et al., 2020). Additionally, rural communities have been labeled as predominantly conservative and resistant to liberal ideas (Grimes et al., 2014), which inhibits school counselors from promoting work such as antiracist and social justice practices. Co-researchers in the current study faced insulated perspectives in their school and community that resulted in pushback from students, parents, leadership, and community members that inhibited their attempts to implement antiracist practices. These incidents of community members, administration, and other students ignoring or having apathy towards incidents of racism or race are supported by the CRT tenet, *critique of liberalism,* that examine the false sense of hope and belief that occurs when people adopt an 'everyone is equal' mentality that co-researchers credited to religious upbringing. Co-researchers also spoke to the politics and laws within their states and district that promoted an anti-CRT and anti-DEI culture, creating fears of 'rocking the boat' in many educators when thinking about implementing antiracist work. The pushback on CRT and DEI has continued to emerge in school counseling literature in addition to state bills and laws that have banned CRT in their respective states (ASCA, 2020). Two of the co-researchers worked in states that had laws that banned CRT and failed to acknowledge DEI in their state school counseling programs and, as a result, created barriers for the co-researchers seeking to implement antiracist practices.

Another barrier faced by the co-researchers was the reactive approach to incidents of racism and lack of sustainability for antiracist programming. Their experiences expand previous

literature that found that proactive conversations on race and racism rarely happen in rural schools (Gavin Williams et al., 2023) and resources to support antiracist programs are not easily accessible in rural areas (Grimes, 2020). Co-researchers also spoke about how they would advocate for programming in their schools but faced a lack of follow-through and perceived apathy from the administration. Their experiences align with the CRT tenet of interest convergence that emphasizes people, specifically white people, take a self-interest in advocating for Black and Brown people when it benefits them rather than being motivated by altruism alone (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Washington et al., 2023).

Theme 3: Effective Practices

The third theme that emerged from the study was the *effective practices* that rural school counselors were engaged in that supported and promoted antiracist work. Their practices were supported by previous literature as being effective practices that promoted antiracist work or addressed the barriers they faced in doing so. Existing literature and ASCA outline the distinct role school counselors have in serving as advocates and leaders within their school to promote and implement antiracist practices (ASCA, 2022; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Stickl Haugen et al., 2021). Co-researchers expanded upon previous literature by describing incidents in which they served as leaders and advocates in the school by promoting their role and antiracist practices within their school. One of the co-researchers, Rose, spoke about how she would review the school's handbook policies and procedures annually with administrators to speak about how current policies and procedures negatively impacted Black and Brown students, and advocated for the elimination of oppressive systems (e.g., eliminating barriers to graduation by offering more credit recovery options). Additionally, co-researchers spoke about intentional efforts to promote Black and Brown student and family voices. Their experience and practices are

supported by previous literature that emphasize the importance of centering and elevating the lived experiences of People of Color when implementing antiracist practices and programming (Decuir & Dixson, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Stickl Haugen et al., 2021). Their experiences are also supported by the CRT tenet, *counter-storytelling*, as being an effective practice that seeks to center and elevate Black and Brown student and family voices as a tool to intentionally counter the dominant, white-centered narrative that exists within education (Decuir & Dixson, 2007; Singh et al., 2020; Washington et al., 2023).

When co-researchers were faced with insulated perspectives and pushback due to the insulated perspectives, they sought ways to intentionally increase awareness in others, most commonly students, through exposure and sharing their own lived experiences. In a framework of identity development for white antiracist counselors created by Shand-Lubbers and Baden (2023), the researchers outlined specific mechanisms for change which included exposure, eye-opening discussions, and guiding relationships. The framework supported the experiences of co-researchers who spoke about ways they would intentionally find opportunities to increase the exposure of their students through field trips and educational resources which proved to be successful in increasing the students' awareness of other cultures and experiences of racism, as reported by the co-researchers. The co-researchers also creatively found ways to have courageous, eye-opening discussions about topics of injustice, racism, privilege, oppression, and related issues which aligns with the school counselor's role in antiracist practices as outlined by ASCA (2021). Lynn, for example, taught a sociology course at her school and would incorporate discussions about race and racism in ways she couldn't as a school counselor because it was supported by the sociology curriculum. Despite the barriers and pushback faced, the co-researchers showed a commitment to implementing antiracist work even if it meant creatively

working around systemic barriers and challenges (i.e., infusing curriculum outside of traditional school counseling lessons; exposure through field trips; promoting Black and Brown Student voice through student advisory councils to influence programming).

Theme 4: Support

The final theme that emerged was *support*. Support described facilitators that aided in the school counselor's ability to pursue or implement antiracist practices. This included professional development, grants, and general support from invested parties, including administrators, district leadership, counseling teams, peers, community organizations, and state/national counseling associations. Additionally, co-researchers spoke about how working collaboratively with others helped to decrease the load and responsibility off of solely them, which was extremely helpful for those who were the only school counselors in their school. As previous literature has explained, being the only school counselor and physically isolated from resources can provide additional strain on the school counselor's role and capacity for advocacy work (Bright, 2018; Gavin Williams et al., 2023; Grimes et al., 2014). Working collaboratively with invested parties (e.g., counseling teams, administration, religious organizations, outside agencies, and community resources) and leadership has been a common theme among rural school counseling literature to support meeting the needs of students and schools in rural areas (Grimes et al., 2014; Hann-Morrison, 2011).

Another support that aided in the co-researchers' ability to implement antiracist work was their continuity within their role at the school. The co-researchers explained how they had gained trust and support from the community and invested parties because of their long-standing role. Their experiences expand upon previous literature that stated the importance of establishing relationships and rapport within the school, family, and community in promoting social justice

advocacy work (Grimes et al., 2014; Fears et al., 2023). By intentionally forming rapport and trust with invested parties in the school and community, which can be fostered over consecutive years of working within the school, school counselors are more likely to have support in implementing social justice change and antiracist work. Rural areas consist of tight-knit communities which can create an insider versus outsider dichotomy, which can present a barrier to those seeking to establish rapport and trust to aid in the implementation of antiracist practices, especially for newer school counselors who did not originate from the area they are working in (Grimes, 2020). Many new school counselors who are deemed outsiders, as a result, must work consistently in the same area to establish rapport and trust with the community and school. Literature shows, however, that rural schools struggle to retain school counselors, resulting in school counselor shortages (American Civil Liberties Union, 2019; Boulden & Schimmel, 2022). To support continuity for rural school counselors, district and school leadership should consider creating retention plans for individuals doing antiracist work. Suggested interventions to promote retention include (a) reducing counselor caseload by hiring additional school counselors; (b) providing professional development funds to attend school counseling conferences to connect with colleagues and learn more about best practices for antiracist work in their setting; (c) providing opportunities for school counselors to connect with interest groups for antiracist work to promote collaboration and support; and (d) developing partnerships with universities to recruit counselors-in-training who are interested in working in rural settings (Boulden & Schimmel, 2022).

Implications

Implications for Practice

The current study explored the experiences of six rural school counselors who implemented or attempted to implement antiracist school counseling practices in their PK-12 schools. The results of the current study suggest considerable implications for the school counseling profession. School counselors have an ethical responsibility to ensure equitable access, inclusion, and systemic change to establish safe, equitable, affirming schools for students from marginalized populations (ASCA, 2022a). The study's findings show that while rural school counselors are aware of this role, there is still room to grow in their understanding and self-efficacy of implementing antiracist practices. Many of the co-researchers thought of their work as not being 'significant' or 'not a big thing' likely because their work was not always addressing policy and systemic issues. Rather, they focused on intentionally creating safe spaces for Students and Families of Color, engaging in critical reflexivity, and advocacy/leadership work in their school. Previous literature and the counter-storytelling tenet of CRT emphasize, however, that not only is foundational work such as critical self-awareness, promoting student and family voice, and advocacy a huge part of antiracist practices (ASCA, 2021; Decuir & Dixson, 2007; Stickl Haugen et al., 2021) but also has significant positive effects on promoting mental health and academic success for Black and Brown students and reduces the effects of institutional barriers that harm Students of Color (Mayes & Byrd, 2022; Mayes et al., 2022). While it is important to address systemic policies and barriers that negatively impact Black and Brown students, the foundational work is just as much, if not more, important in the process of promoting antiracist practices.

Rural school counselors should continue to educate themselves on antiracist practices and the history of racism, especially within their community. Rural school counselors can begin by seeking professional development such as regional, state, and national school counseling-related conferences. If rural school counselors do not have funding provided by their district to attend professional development, they can access antiracist resources through their ASCA membership (i.e., ASCA-U trainings, ASCA-OnAir webinars) or for free on the ASCA website. To learn more about the history of race and racism in their community, rural school counselors should build strong relationships with Black and Brown communities in their district and create spaces to listen, center, and uplift Black and Brown voices who have generational ties to the community, intentionally shifting the focus from dominant, white-washed narratives. Rural school counselors must build relationships beyond the school and in the community when engaging in social justice advocacy (Grimes et al., 2014) and antiracist practices. Through increased knowledge and continued critical reflexivity, rural school counselors can feel more confident and able to implement antiracist practices in their unique setting despite potential barriers.

The findings from the current study also provided valuable insight into the barriers experienced by rural school counselors seeking to implement antiracist practices and ways to navigate barriers and promote effective practices. Unique to rural areas is the insulated perspective that exists within tight-knit communities, which creates resistance and pushback to new ideas, especially for school counselors who may be newer to the area and treated as an outsider before gaining trust and rapport with the school and community (Grimes et al., 2014; Grimes, 2020). The co-researchers in the study highlighted the importance of developing rapport with invested parties (e.g., parents, teachers, administration, school board, community members,

colleagues and peers) inside and outside of the school to increase the support for social justice and antiracist work. Additionally, doing so might take time and require school counselors in rural areas to work in the same school or district for many years to develop trust from a community that consists of generations of families (Grimes et al., 2014; Grimes et al., 2020). Rural school counselors can begin building rapport beyond their traditional counseling role in the school by attending events such as school sporting events, religious organizations, and community events that allow the school counselor the opportunity to become a familiar face among students, parents, and community members (Fears et al., 2023; Grimes et al., 2014). Rural school counselors can also consider hosting events at their school that promote school-family (e.g., back-to-school nights; curriculum fairs) or school-community engagement (e.g., career fairs) to foster relationships with families and community members.

The study also highlighted how students in rural, tight-knit communities may carry insulated perspectives due to lack of experience, knowledge, or exposure outside their school and community. Rural school counselors can find opportunities to increase students' knowledge and awareness about marginalized communities and racism through exposure and additional materials and resources that enhance students' critical awareness and understanding. Co-researchers talked about finding opportunities to take field trips to bigger schools and universities to expose students to diversity outside of their small town to increase the student's awareness, experience, and understanding of other cultures and engage in critical eye-opening discussions with students afterwards. School counselors may consider similar field trips to local 4-year colleges or universities outside their community to create opportunities for students to be exposed to diverse populations, especially if they exist in a predominately white area. To increase students' knowledge and awareness about race and racism, rural school counselors can

utilize techniques such as bibliotherapy to introduce books that cover topics of race and racism and create space for discussion around topics such as structural racism and white privilege (Bruneau & Tucker, 2023). Additionally, rural school counselors can reference resources provided for free by ASCA that direct school counselors on how to talk about race and racism and incorporate these conversations into classroom curriculum, small-groups, and individually with students (ASCA, n.d.).

The current study also highlighted the importance of centering and promoting Black and Brown student and family voices in alignment with antiracist practices. Rural school counselors are encouraged to continue to find opportunities to promote counter-storytelling for Black and Brown students and families, especially when creating and promoting antiracist practices. One way this can be done is by creating spaces to bring in Black and Brown student and family voices to inform antiracist programming and finding opportunities to empower them to be leaders in programming. For example, Natalie created a student advisory council that consisted of Black and Brown students who met with her regularly to discuss different programs and incentives to promote in their school. Natalie would listen to their ideas and advocate when necessary but would encourage students to serve as leaders in implementing certain events. School counselors can consider creating similar advisory councils led by Black and Brown students to meet regularly with the counselor and support in the development and implementation of programming that celebrates and promotes diversity in the school.

Lastly, the findings of the current study emphasized the importance of finding a collaborative team of support for antiracist work. Antiracist work can be isolating and difficult when pursuing it on one's own, but by surrounding oneself with people who align with antiracist principles and work, school counselors will feel more supported and empowered to do antiracist

work (Gavin Williams et al., 2023; Stickl Haugen et al., 2021). This support system can include the school counseling colleagues/teams, administration, teachers, parents, or even widespread through interest networks, affinity groups, or social media platforms and peers. Rural school counselors are encouraged to surround themselves with like-minded peers who are passionate about antiracist work in addition to getting involved in national organizations that have interest networks and affinity groups for antiracist school counseling practices such as ASCA. Additional support is also necessary for BIPOC school counselors, especially those who are pursuing antiracist work. Co-researchers spoke to being tokenized and asked to support Black and Brown students over their white co-counselors, leaving them with additional work, emotional labor, and larger caseloads. It is crucial that BIPOC school counselors are provided additional support such as BIPOC school counseling affinity groups to they are supported in providing the extra, often invisible, support to Black and Brown students. Additionally, white school counselors should engage in critical self-reflection to ensure they are not intentionally pushing BIPOC students to their Black and Brown colleagues immediately due to their own biases and assumptions about not being able to provide support due to the color of their skin.

Implications for School Counselor Preparation

School counselor preparation programs have a significant role in preparing future school counselors to implement antiracist practices in their respective settings. Existing research has suggested how to ingrain antiracist work into school counselor preparation programs (Mason et al., 2021) but does not emphasize how to train counselors for the unique experiences and challenges that exist in rural communities to do this work. Counselor educators should consider incorporating material (i.e., articles, podcasts, guest lectures) that examines the unique experiences of rural school counselors, the challenges they may face, and how to navigate them,

especially when implementing antiracist work. As a current school counselor educator, I have been intentional about including literature that examines and uplifts the voices of rural counselors and incorporating class discussions about how certain counseling topics or practices may look different in a rural setting.

The findings from the current study also support the recent shift in fields, such as counselor education, to train and teach from a cultural humility lens rather than cultural competence (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Lekas et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2020). The co-researchers spoke to incidents in which they engaged in ongoing critical self-reflection and centered the voices of Black and Brown students and families in their programming, both of which are cultural humility practices. In contrast to cultural competency training which encourages counselors to acquire knowledge to become experts in working with diverse populations, cultural humility is a process-oriented approach that promotes client-centered care (Lekas et al., 2020). Additionally, cultural humility training encourages ongoing self-reflection, openness, and humility through "the recognition of their own bias, privilege, and the limits of their knowledge and expertise" (Lekas et al., 2020, p. 2). Counselor educators should consider ways in which they can promote cultural humility practices and training across coursework, rather than solely in classes that cover multicultural counseling theories and practices. One way they can do this is by creating a crosswalk to review each course to ensure that cultural humility training and practice is integrated into each course. An example of cultural humility practices could include critical self-reflexive journals to examine their own power and privilege as it relates to their work with Black and Brown students to encourage ongoing critical self-reflection.

Findings from this current study provide valuable insight for counselor educators to consider potential barriers and ways to overcome barriers to implementing antiracist work in

rural areas. Counselor educators should consider ways they can strengthen school counseling students' understanding and self-efficacy of antiracist practices by intentionally crafting assignments and material to increase students' knowledge, critical reflexivity, and skills in antiracist work. An example of this is encouraging students to take self-assessments such as Gonzalez and colleagues' (2021) *Multidimensional Cultural Humility Scale* to examine areas they are confident and less confident in and develop professional development goals based on these insights. In addition, counselor educators should consider incorporating service-based projects that have school counselors in training create antiracist programming for a rural school/district to increase their self-efficacy in incorporating antiracist practices in rural settings. The project should include: (a) a critical examination of school data to identify opportunity gaps; (b) a review of policies and procedures to identify barriers to learning for Students of Color with consideration of barriers unique to rural areas; (c) identifying indirect and direct student services to address gaps and barriers; and (d) ways of evaluating services and programming to adjust for future programming (ASCA, n.d.). School counselors in training can then incorporate this project into future fieldwork courses such as practicum and internship to gain further experience implementing antiracist practices in rural settings. Lastly, counselor educators can increase the self-efficacy of school counselors in training regarding addressing incidents of racism and barriers by creating opportunities for role plays in their techniques and skills coursework, centering incidents of racism or pushback from school or community members.

Lastly, counselor educators should emphasize the importance of community and collaboration when doing antiracist work by guiding students towards support networks created for antiracist school counseling especially for rural school counselors who may be the only school counselor in their school or district. Counselor educators can begin by introducing

students to various support networks and affinity groups that are offered by ASCA, such as the rural school counselor affinity group, to promote further collaboration and community with school counselors that work in rural areas across the United States. Additionally, counselor educators can create a resource list to provide school counselors in training with information about other affinity groups, support networks, and social media pages that serve as a resource for beginning school counselors, rural school counselors, and school counselors who are passionate about antiracist practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study explored a significant gap within the literature that continues to require expansion. Before this study, only one study had examined the experiences of school counselors seeking to implement antiracist practices (Smith-Durkin, 2022). This study was the first to be conducted after the recent push for antiracist school counseling practices but is currently an unpublished dissertation and did not interview rural school counselors. Additionally, most of the antiracist school counseling literature continues to be mostly theoretical and conceptual. While the current study provided valuable insight and information into the experiences of rural school counselors implementing antiracist practices, there is still a gap within the literature beyond dissertations that examines the experiences of school counselors, especially rural school counselors who are often excluded from the literature, implementing antiracist practices. Future research should continue to explore this gap through phenomenological and case study research and distribute the information in peer-reviewed journals available for school counseling educators and practitioners. As the author of the current study, I hope to add to the literature by condensing the information in this dissertation into an article to be submitted to a flagship school counseling journal. Additionally, the current study was conducted during a time in which there is

significant pushback and legislature that constricts the use and concept of DEI and CRT. As a result of the pushback, future research may consider diving deeper into the effects of anti-DEI and anti-CRT ideologies and movements on students, the work of school counselors, and antiracist practices.

The current study only examined the general experiences of rural school counselors but did not examine how the experiences differed between white school counselors and School Counselors of Color. Additionally, the current study did not include male voices or other underrepresented genders (i.e., nonbinary, transgender, two-spirit). Future research should consider exploring these gaps and the intersectionality of co-researchers as it relates to their experiences in rural settings and implementing antiracist practices (e.g., rural remote vs. rural fringe settings for Counselors of Color; white vs. racially/ethnically marginalized counselors). Lastly, future research should also explore the experiences of Black and Brown students in rural areas and how they perceive antiracist practices implemented by their school counselor to better inform practice and training. One way researchers can do this is by collecting information from rural school counselors who have implemented antiracist practices in their school and creating focus groups consisting of Black and Brown students to explore their experiences and perceptions of their school counselor's antiracist practices and programming.

Future research can also explore the effectiveness of antiracist school counseling training in increasing self-efficacy and understanding of implementing antiracist practices in rural areas through a quasi-experimental approach (i.e., pretest-posttest design). I hope to create a training that is informed by the current study's findings and deliver this training to rural school counselors in the United States through local/regional/state/national conferences and professional development sessions and collect necessary data to measure whether the training successfully

increases the knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy of the school counselors. One way of assessing this can be through the use of the Antiracist School Counseling Inventory created by Stickl Haugen and colleagues (2023). By collecting pre- and post-data using inventories such as Stickl Haugen and colleagues' (2023), I can assess the effectiveness of the training in increasing self-efficacy and understanding for rural school counselors and adjust the training based on feedback and findings from the research.

Lastly, future research should also further explore how antiracist identity development is created and fostered in rural school counselors. Grimes (2020) explored professional identity development in rural school counselors, but no other research has explored how rural school counselor's professional identity for antiracism is created and fostered. Understanding this phenomenon and creating a model to support antiracist school counselor identity development in rural areas will provide valuable insight to inform training and current practices for rural school counselors who want to strengthen their antiracist practices.

Research Limitations

Qualitative phenomenological research provides valuable insight into the lived experiences within a certain phenomenon, but it also comes with limitations. One of the most significant limitations is researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a previous rural school counselor that worked during the movement for antiracist school counseling practices, I am aware of how my previous experiences and knowledge may have impacted how I conducted the present study and interpreted the data. While this can be a limitation, new phenomenological research acknowledges that the researcher’s personal experience with the phenomenon can lend insight and foster rapport with co-researchers (Ayton et al., 2023). To increase the trustworthiness of my study and as recommended by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell & Poth

(2018), I incorporated Tufford and Newman's (2012) bracketing model that included reflexive journaling and memos. I attempted to bracket my own experiences and opinions I have about rural school counseling and antiracism using a reflexive journal. Additionally, throughout the data collection and analysis process I wrote memos to examine and reflect upon my engagement with the data (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Another trustworthiness strategy I utilized was a peer debriefer who was separate from the research process, identifies as white, was familiar with rural school counseling research, and engages in antiracist work. By intentionally selecting a white peer debriefer rather than a Person of Color, I was able to process thoughts, feelings, and biases throughout the research process without causing additional emotional labor and harm to a member of the community that this research aims to serve. Lastly, I utilized an external auditor throughout the data analysis process to monitor how my personal experiences and identities impact my interpretation of the data and to ensure credibility of the data. While many trustworthiness strategies were implemented, this does not free the study from potential research bias. Future research should consider the use of consensus coding to promote trustworthiness in the initial codes developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

An additional limitation of this study is the political climate and pushback against educators promoting CRT, antiracism, and social justice (ASCA, 2020). With educators being in the public eye, school counselors may be hesitant to implement or associate themselves with antiracist work for fear of risking job security and emotional and physical safety. Not only may this have impacted my research call and resulted in a reduced number of co-researchers, but it could have swayed my findings, as many co-researchers may have identified as passionate about antiracist work but struggled to implement antiracist practices due to political climate or

pushback from relevant parties (e.g., school board, administration, community). Additionally, potential co-researchers could have seen the call and not been aware they were doing antiracist work, similar to some of the co-researchers who explained they didn't think their antiracist work was "something big" or "significant." Most of my co-researchers were recruited through social media, and the social media post originally did not include specific examples of antiracist work. The post was eventually revised to include examples. For future research, I will consider providing more specific examples of antiracist work, in addition to the ones I provided, that are focused on foundational work frequently listed by the co-researchers such as engaging in critical reflexivity and increasing their knowledge and awareness of biases, race, and racism.

Lastly, the lack of male representation in the current study is a limitation to consider. Males make up about 13% of ASCA members (ASCA, 2023a). While the number is respectively smaller than the 87% of female members, there are still voices that are left unheard and not considered which could impact the findings of the study. Future research should consider exploring the experiences of male school counselors and school counselors from other underrepresented populations (i.e., non-binary, disabled, LGBTQIA+) to add to the literature and further understanding of their experiences implementing antiracist work in rural areas.

Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of rural school counselors who implemented or attempted to implement antiracist practices in PK-12 schools. The current study demonstrates the various ways rural school counselors have sought to and/or successfully implemented antiracist practices in their school. With more attention being brought to antiracist school counseling practices, and being encouraged ethically by ASCA, there is a significant need to best prepare and inform school counselors on how to implement these practices in their respective settings.

The results of this study provides insight and knowledge into the best practices for rural school counselors as well as ways to overcome potential barriers for current rural school counselors seeking to implement antiracist practices. The findings of this study shine light into future training and practice for rural school counselors to continue to push for antiracist school counseling practices.

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