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## **A Content Analysis of Educators' Perceptions of Anti-Black Bias: Implications for Black Students**

*Monica R. Brown, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

Schools in the United States are becoming more diverse. During the 2020-2021 school year, 50.7 million students were projected to be enrolled in public schools. During the same school year, approximately 7.6 million (15%) were projected to be Black students (Hussar et al., 2020). The percentage of student enrollment is consistent with the previous decade; however, the number and percentage of Black student enrollment in public schools have decreased since the late 1990s (Hussar et al., 2020). Despite this decrease, Black students are consistently disproportionately represented in at-risk categories (e.g., achievement, behaviors, and persistence; de Brey et al., 2019) that contribute to school failure. Researchers have called for an investigation into the reasons for the disparate outcomes of Black students for decades (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Jamil et al., 2018).

### **Black Student Achievement, Behaviors, and Persistence**

Racial disparities in educational and behavioral outcomes have been reported for decades. For example, Same et al. (2018) and the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2017) reported that Black students had less access to high-level courses (i.e., math and science), were more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions and were more likely to be taught by more inexperienced teachers than their White peers. The differences in achievement, as well as opportunity, continue to be a concern for many educators and researchers

(Hanover Research, 2017; Hung et al., 2020). Those opportunity differences could serve as one possible explanation for the poor outcomes experienced by many Black students. Additionally, many researchers (Dumas, 2016; Martin, 2019; Pearman, 2020; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019) point to anti-Black bias as a reason for Black students' unequal and inequitable treatment (i.e., school discipline disparities, implicit bias, lack of resources, less qualified teachers, educational policy, etc.) and outcomes in school.

While there are a multitude of factors that contribute to the achievement of any student, it is clear from previous research that Black students consistently underperform compared to their White peers (Lewis & Hunt, 2019). According to Hung et al. (2020), however, achievement gaps cannot be explained by economics alone. Instead, Hung et al. posited that the combination of attendance at high poverty schools and Black students' segregation from White students has led to an opportunity gap. It is this opportunity gap, according to Hung et al., that explains the achievement gap more completely.

Millions of public school students receive one or more out-of-school suspensions each year (Camera, 2020). Kupchik (2022) emphasizes the disproportionate harms to Black students due to the excessive use of suspensions and expulsions. For example, the U.S. Department of Education (2018) reported that Black male and female students accounted for 25% and 14%, respectively, of suspensions; yet they each only accounted for 8% of school enrollment. Black male and female suspensions were higher than any other racial/ethnic group for that year. Conversely, White students made up 25% and 24% (male and female, respectively) of enrollment but represented just 24% and 8%

of suspensions, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The suspension gap was over 4 to 1 – Black students were four times more likely to be suspended than White students. The most troubling aspect of these suspensions is the number of days of instruction lost by Black students versus their White peers (66 to 14 days, respectively: Losen & Whitaker [2018] per 100 students). This loss of instruction has a detrimental impact on Black students' ability to persist.

Again, the reasons for Black student underachievement have been discussed for decades (National Task Force on African American Men and Boys, 1996; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1999). However, scholars (Lopez & Gaëtane, 2021) now recommend considering the impacts of anti-Black bias and White supremacy on the lives of Black children to help explain the disparate inequities that they experience in schools. This is not a new concept. Anti-Blackness has been historically embedded in our educational institutions, policies, and practices (Dumas, 2016).

### **Anti-Blackness**

According to Dumas (2016), anti-Blackness is a form of oppression that devalues Black life through daily practices, policies, and interactions. In the American educational system anti-Blackness raises concerns of equity for Black children with and without dis/abilities (Annamma et al., 2013; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016) and may account for many of the achievement and other disparities experienced by Black students. Anti-Blackness is perpetuated in schools through school alienation (Brown, 2005; Brown, et al., 2003) and disproportionate discipline practices (Bell, 2020; Losen, 2018; Losen & Whitaker, 2018; Wright & Counsell, 2018). These inequitable practices marginalize

Black children in a multitude of ways. Wright and Ford (2016) reported an impact on Black children's self-image; Zimmerman (2018) reported classroom engagement impacts; and Scott (2014), Wright and Counsell (2018), and Zimmerman (2018) reported deficits in academic and developmental progress.

Other studies have reported on the impacts of anti-Black bias. For example, both Parker (2017) and Samuels (2016) reported on the criminality attached to Black boys, specifically in schools, indicating that educators tend to watch or surveil Black boys more closely because of an expectation that they would behave in ways that were violent, disruptive, and/or unsettling in some way. Parker further noted that educators tended to "classify Black boys as 'bad' through disciplinary actions, isolating their seats, and writing up 'bad' behavior to create documentation in a cumulative file, they create permanent records of criminality" (p. 3).

### **The Impacts on Black Students**

While researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have concerned themselves with the disparities in suspensions, expulsions, opportunities for achievement, etc., it is equally important that they understand the physical and emotional toll that these aspects have on Black students. As such, racial anxiety, racial trauma, and stereotype threat should be considered forms of slow terror (Westenfeld, 2020) that accumulate over time against Black students. This accumulation can set Black students up for school failure. These are particularly important in the school environment as they can contribute to the negative outcomes (e.g., low achievement, disproportionate suspension, disproportionate referral for special

education services, higher pushout rates, etc.) experienced by Black students.

### **Racial Anxiety**

Godsil and Richardson (2017) explained that racial anxiety occurs for those from minoritized backgrounds (e.g., Black people) when they believe that they will be viewed negatively by others before and during interactions (e.g., the stress that Black students experience in interactions with White teachers). This could be in the form of targeted discrimination and/or hostile treatment from White teachers and other school personnel. According to Godsil and Richardson, the racial dynamics in schools can undermine their achievement and/or trigger disproportionately harsh discipline. Tropp and Page-Gould (2015) and Devine and Vasquez (1998) indicated that Black students may experience racial anxiety believing that they will be subjected to stereotyping, discrimination, rejection, and/or invalidation by White teachers. Additionally, Godsil (2015) indicated the problematic nature of racial anxiety as it often results in a negative feedback loop. That is, the Black student and White teacher both feel anxious about the interaction, feeling that it will be negative. When it is, and it often is, the behaviors (i.e., lack of eye contact, tone of voice) of both reflect the negative interaction.

### **Racial Trauma**

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2011) defined traumatic events as those that can cause horror, terror, or helplessness. Visible events such as pandemics, and/or physical or sexual abuse can be considered traumatic events. However, there are other forms of trauma that are not as visible. For example, Resler (2019) wrote about racial trauma as a type of

traumatic stress. She indicated that it is a stressful impact or emotional pain experienced due to racist and discriminating acts. According to Villines (2020), racial trauma results when an individual is repeatedly exposed to racist, biased, and discriminatory acts. In 2007, Carter also posited that some Black Americans who experience racial discrimination can develop racial trauma. Additionally, Williams et al. (2018) likened racial trauma to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as defined in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) because the recurring events (e.g., racial assaults, threats, and/or violence) that Black individuals experience could damage their overall well-being.

Despite U.S. schools' discrediting of these forms of trauma (Alvarez et al., 2016), the Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center (2021), reported that experiences with racism, discrimination, and oppression can in fact cause trauma. Race, for example, could be classified as one of those experiences that cause trauma for students. Racial discrimination, racism, and racial threats/incidents are pervasive in schools across the U.S.; therefore, it makes sense that Black and other racially minoritized students would experience moderate to severe levels of anxiety (Henderson et al., 2019). Oftentimes, the psychological and emotional stress associated with those repeated events can leave the individual struggling with unsettling emotions, memories, and anxieties that linger.

### **Stereotype Threat**

Steele (1997) posited that a person (e.g., a Black student) often experiences stereotype threat when they perform tasks that others may perceive as negative (e.g., lazy, unmotivated) about their group. Black

students who identify most strongly with their racial group are typically most impacted by stereotype threat. Thomas and Jones (2008) found that African Americans were at greater risk of experiencing stereotype threat because of the widely held negative stereotypes related to their academic performance. That is, when the negative stereotypes about their racial group are triggered, they may experience anxiety and self-doubt which could cause them to underperform on academic tasks.

For example, in a study of 4,000 freshman students at 28 universities, Massey and Fischer (2005) reported that Black students (and Latinos in this study) who internalized negative stereotypes regarding their intellectual abilities, reduced their study effort by 30 minutes per week for each point increase in their internalization score. In another study, Nadler and Clark (2011) found that African Americans (and Hispanics in this study) showed moderate improvement in their cognitive task scores when the stereotype threat related to those tasks were dismissed or disguised. Finally, Mello et al. (2012) found that racially minoritized adolescents (e.g., African American, American Indian, Latino) reported lower school belonging scores when stereotype threat was triggered. They reported that the adolescents felt excluded from school just with the mere mention of membership in a marginalized group.

Fortunately, anti-Black bias has received widespread attention in past and present research and scholarship. Unfortunately, the eradication of anti-Black bias remains a challenge for practitioners and policymakers. It is important that school practitioners and policymakers identify the ways in which anti-Black bias is represented in schools and the impact it has on Black students' school outcomes. If they do not, generations of Black students may be denied the full benefits of the educational

experience. The purpose of this study was to ascertain school personnel's perspectives regarding how anti-Black bias is represented in the schools. Thus, a qualitative content analysis was conducted to address the open-ended question: In what way is anti-Black bias manifested in U.S. schools?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The frameworks used in this study are critical race theory (CRT) and Black critical theory (BlackCrit). CRT incorporates an analysis of race and racism by helping us (i.e., educators, researchers, policymakers, etc.) understand, analyze, and teach about racial marginalization in education (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999). While CRT allows us (i.e., educators, researchers, policymakers, etc.) to examine how race and racism are embedded in society (and education for the purposes of this study; ross, 2019), this study dealt more with Blackness than White privilege, supremacy, or Whiteness. BlackCrit allowed me to theorize Blackness, specifically anti-Blackness as it exists in U.S. schools. CRT alone would not have allowed me to reveal the antagonism toward Black bodies in U.S. schools. When conducting this study, I was particularly interested in the "lived experiences of Black children" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 416) as perceived by in-service educators. BlackCrit is necessary to this study as it addresses how anti-Blackness allows institutional practices (i.e., disproportionate discipline) to contribute to Black students' suffering. BlackCrit centers on Black students' experiences with structural and cultural racism (Dumas & ross, 2016). Within CRT, race matters. But with BlackCrit, "Blackness matters in more detailed ways" (Smith, 1993, p. 76).

## Researcher Positionality

This study, grounded in CRT and BlackCrit, examined school personnel's perceptions of the manifestations of anti-Black bias in schools. I approached this study with the understanding that I would be learning from educators currently working in the field and acknowledge that their perceptions may be different than my own. I left the K-12 classroom 21 years ago, so some things may have changed. However, I could not help but reflect on my own experiences as a special education teacher in this very same school district. The reflections from my 13 years of teaching prepared me for the possibility that the participants may perceive the school environment just as I had – as one of daily potential trauma and suffering for Black students. Due to the current racial tensions in the U.S., I decided to forego follow-up interviews with participants. My thinking was that I would not receive more candid responses than I did through the anonymous online survey. In fact, my presence as a Black professor might have been a deterrent to some graduate students' participation. Instead, I allowed the open-ended research question to guide the study.

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants were all current graduate students enrolled in one of four 5-week, online summer multicultural special education courses. Additionally, 78% ( $n = 14$ ) of the participants were special and general educators. The remaining 22% ( $n = 4$ ) of the participants were other school personnel (i.e., administrator, interventionist, or other). All the participants self-selected into the study and had no contact with the researcher. All potentially

identifying information (i.e., IP addresses) was removed on Qualtrics. All 18 participants responded to the open-ended question: In what way is anti-Black bias manifested in U.S. schools?

### Data Collection

Once the study was approved by the researcher's institutional review board (IRB; protocol #1615285-1), the instructors were provided with the recruitment flyer and they posted it in Canvas (an online teaching platform) for the participants to self-select into the study. There were 98 students enrolled in the four sections, however, only 18 students self-selected into the study. The recruitment flyer described the study to the participants and indicated that the question would focus on anti-Black bias in the schools. As there was only one question, the time to complete the questionnaire was dependent on the length of the participant's response. All data were collected online via the Qualtrics platform. If the participant had questions regarding the open-ended question, they could contact the researcher at the email provided on the recruitment flyer but letting them know that their identity would then be known to the researcher. Two participants emailed the researcher to inquire about the survey link. The link was provided, and their email was immediately deleted.

### Data Analysis

The open-ended question was analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2014). The qualitative analysis allowed me to ascertain participants' thoughts and feelings regarding anti-Black bias in schools so that I could understand their, and possibly their students', experiences. The demographic characteristics (see Table 1) were reported

as descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency [number]). Content analysis allows the researcher to systematically analyze documents – in this case, responses to an open-ended question. The categories for this study were derived inductively from the data during analysis. However, a sound hermeneutical perspective (Kuckartz, 2014) was still used, as the researcher had solid prior knowledge and understanding of the concept (i.e., anti-Black bias). Similar unique statements were grouped together into categories. When necessary, categories were divided into subcategories. This was specific to the denial of opportunity category. This process was continued until all responses were categorized.

**Table 1***Participant Information*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
	<b>(N = 18)</b>	
<b>Race or Ethnicity</b>		
African Origin (i.e., Black American, African American)	4	22
White, non-Latinx	11	61
Indigenous Peoples (i.e., Hawaiian, Alaskan, Latin American and Caribbean, Australian, New Zealand, Native American/Native North American)	1	6
Latinx (i.e., those from Latin America and speak Spanish)	2	11
<b>Age Range</b>		
26 - 30	3	17
31 - 35	2	11
36 - 40	5	28
41 - 45	2	11
46 - 50	2	11
> 50	3	17

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
	<b>(N = 18)</b>	
<b>Years as Educator or School Personnel</b>		
0 – 5	9	50
6 – 11	4	22
12 – 17	2	11
18 – 23	1	6
24 or more	2	11
<b>Primary Role</b>		
Special Educator	13	72
General Educator	1	6
Administrator	1	6
Interventionist	1	6
Other	2	11
<b>School Setting</b>		
Elementary Setting	9	50
Middle School Setting	5	28
Secondary Setting	1	6
Preschool or Early Childhood Setting	1	6
Not Currently Teaching	2	11

**Intercoder Reliability**

To ensure validity for this study, percent agreement was utilized to report intercoder reliability. According to Feng (2014), it is the most widely used because it is easy to use and simple to perform. This study included one research question with just one variable (i.e., anti-Blackness). From this one variable, four categories emerged when the researcher coded the data. However, to ensure the validity of the coded data, the researcher employed a graduate assistant (GA) and doctoral student to assist with reliability checks. They calculated the intercoder reliability (ICR) by hand, as there were only four categories. They utilized a scoring rubric to check the coded categories where 2 indicated agreement on all categories for the participants' responses, 1 indicated agreement with some of the

categories, and 0 indicated disagreement with the categories. Prior to data collection, the ICR agreement threshold was set at 90% for each participant's response, as well as the overall categories coded for the research question. If any category did not reach the 80% threshold, it was targeted for follow-up analysis. None of the categories required follow-up analyses. Overall, the ICR score for this study was 100% (i.e., 1.000).

### Ethics

All instructors, as well as the students in their courses, were told that their participation was voluntary. They were also informed that they could decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty from their instructor. Anonymity was guaranteed so that neither the instructors nor the researcher could link a participant with their responses. In fact, the Internet Protocol (IP) location button was deactivated in Qualtrics to remove any concerns regarding a participant's anonymity. The IRB at the researcher's university reviewed and approved the study prior to beginning the study.

### Findings

There were four main categories that emerged from the data and that describe the ways in which anti-Black bias is manifested in the schools: normalizing Whiteness, denial of opportunity, over disciplining, and teacher labeling. Most of the unique statements centered around the cultural disconnect between Black students and the system (e.g., educators, the curriculum, teaching practices). Table 2 presents the four categories along with the frequency and percentage of unique statements for each.

**Table 2**

*Table of Categories with Frequency and Percentage of Unique Statements*

Categories (sub-categories)	F (N = 47)	Percent
Normalizing Whiteness	19	40.4
Denial of Opportunity (Overidentifying (Underachievement)	11 (3) (3)	23.4
Teacher Labeling	9	19.1
Over Disciplining	8	17.0

*Note:* Number of unique statements for sub-categories are included in the main category total.

### Normalizing Whiteness

Normalizing Whiteness ( $n = 19$ ) was expressed in a large percentage (40%) of the statements. The participants emphasized multiple ways in which Whiteness is normalized in schools: (a) Black students need to conform to Whiteness, (b) the system is racist (i.e., policies, practices, and structures that value Whiteness), and (c) avoidance of conversations about race. They indicated that Black students were expected to conform to a system that is built on and rewards Whiteness. For example, Respondent 1 indicated that "they are expected to conform to a system in which they are considered below the 'standard' taught that to succeed they have to do so despite their 'blackness', not because of it." Respondent 9 stated that "teachers want students to act White." They also indicated that Black students may be at a disadvantage because of the cultural mismatch between themselves and their teachers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), 79% of teachers were White during the 2017- 2018 school year. Respondent 3 remarked that "classes are taught by mainly



white female teachers.” Also, they indicated that Black students exist in a system that is normed on Whiteness, in that the curriculum, teaching practices, and expectations for behavior do not benefit them. For example, Respondents 10 and 12 (respectively) stated that “I think that it is manifested in schools based on the curriculum being used” and “curriculum, teachers, schedules, expectations, and behavior management are set up in a way that benefits White students more than students of color.” Finally, some indicated that refusing to talk about or celebrate those who are not White, normalizes Whiteness. Respondent 3 responded that “We need to not be afraid to talk about race in our classrooms” and that “it’s (race) is a difficult conversation, but it needs to be had.”

### **Denial of Opportunity**

The participants also identified denial of opportunity ( $n = 11$ ; 23.4%) as an expression of anti-Black bias. The responses focused primarily on the present losses experienced by Black students (i.e., educational supports, resources) and how those losses could translate into lesser educational outcomes in the future (i.e., college degree attainment, economic advancement, marginalization). Respondents 5 and 12 (respectively) summed this up nicely with: “The educational system in America has historically been a site of anti-blackness in which African American children suffer from a lack of distribution of resources” and “This causes marginalization and disenfranchised students of color from the full benefits and [sic] education could provide.” Two sub-categories emerged from the denial of opportunity category (i.e., underachievement and overidentifying). Each had three unique statements and are discussed in the following sections.

### ***Underachievement***

While not having many unique statements in this category, underachievement still accounted for 27.3% (3/11;  $n = 3$ ) of the unique statements in the category. The respondents believed that anti-Black bias was expressed in Black students’ lower grades and academic achievement, as well as poor performance on standardized tests. It is interesting that just two of the 18 participants made statements that fell within this category. They indicated that Black students received “significantly lower grades and academic achievement”, “significantly lower performances on standardized tests, and “poor grades.”

### ***Overidentifying***

Like the previous sub-category, overidentification accounted for 27.3% (3/11;  $n = 3$ ) of the unique statements in this category. Three respondents believed that Black students experience anti-Black bias by their disproportionate identification and referral to special education. They stated that this occurs when a “higher percentage of blacks identified as special education or other disabilities” or “by placing them in special education for issues that those services don’t fit” and having “disproportionate rate of referrals to special education.”

### **Teacher Labeling**

The category with the second most unique statements ( $n = 9$ ; 19.1%) was teacher labeling. That is, the teachers typically assigned some negative label to their Black students. Participants indicated several ways that they perceive Black students fall victim to teachers’ labeling of them. Most of the statements focused on the teachers’ perceptions/labeling of their Black

students. Specifically, Respondent 2 stated that there is a belief that “black students, especially black boys, are behavior problems; are lazy, etc.” Likewise, Respondent 6 stated that “young black youth are stereotyped, treated differently, frowned upon, viewed as gang members, troublemakers, lazy, and criminals” and “teachers talk bad about students.”

### Over Disciplining

This category accounted for 17% ( $n = 8$ ) of the unique statements from participants. All the statements regarding discipline indicated that they perceived those Black students received (a) more suspensions, expulsions, and arrests at school, (b) differing expectations regarding behavior, and (c) harsher punishments than their White peers for the same or lesser behaviors. For example, Respondent 7 stated: “The way the[y] discipline black students and the way the[y] discipline white students. It isn't usually equal. The white students usually get less discipline than [than] black students for the same behavior/problem” and Respondent 17 indicated that “Black students are punished more harshly for the same actions in which their peers engage.”

Additionally, one respondent (#5; Indigenous woman) remarked about the physical and psychic assaults that Black students endure at school. Typically, people think of assaults as physical, but Wilkerson (2020) used the term psychic assault to describe an assault where the person is not touched. Instead, just the threat of being physically assaulted can terrorize the person. This whole notion of psychic assault is interesting because there are so many Black students in schools across the U.S. who are put into the position of proclaiming their innocence when teachers and/or students

have accused them of behaviors they may not have engaged in.

### Discussion

The present study focused on the ways in which educators perceive anti-Black bias to be represented in schools. The participants in this study indicated that normalizing Whiteness overwhelmingly contributed to anti-Black bias in schools. Additionally, they identified denial of opportunity, teacher labeling, and over disciplining as additional contributors to anti-Black bias. These findings, discussed below, are consistent with previous literature on anti-Black bias in the school context.

### Normalization of Whiteness

The respondents mentioned that Whiteness has been normalized in the schools. According to Dillard (2020), this normalization can cause educators to react in ways (e.g., lower expectations of non-White students, retaliation, anger, disproportionate disciplinary actions, etc.) that harm Black students. The respondents in this study indicated that educators and other school personnel may want Black students to “act” White (i.e., be a good Black) to succeed. At school, Black students are perceived to be “acting White” when they consciously adopt the attitudes and behaviors consistent with school rules and standard practices that are perceived and interpreted as typical of White students rather than retain the attitudes and behaviors of their racial group and risk school success (Goff et al., 2007; Ogbu, 1992; 2004). Even though it may jeopardize their school success, many Black students reject these attitudes and behaviors because they do not fit with their cultural norms.

## Denial of Opportunity

A second finding had to do with denial of opportunity. The research refers to this as the opportunity gap between Black and White students. Recently, there has been a shift away from achievement gap, as it focuses primarily on outcomes. Instead, educators and other stakeholders are focusing on students' access/lack of access to resources and how it impacts their ability to succeed in school. For example, students from racially minoritized backgrounds tend to be disproportionately represented in lower-level courses (Same et al., 2018) and special-education programs (Elder et al., 2021), and their academic achievement (de Brey et al., 2019), graduation rates (National School Boards Association, 2020), and college-enrollment rates (Miller, 2020) are typically lower than those of their White peers. This mirrors the perceptions of the respondents in this study (i.e., lack of distribution of resources, racially minoritized students must compete for scarce resources, low Black student enrollment in college and college attainment, lack of educational support, disproportionate referral to special education, etc.) regarding the ways Black students are denied equal and equitable opportunities to succeed in school when compared to their White peers.

## Teacher Labeling

The third finding addressed teachers' labeling (i.e., lazy, troublemakers, behavior problems, criminals) of students. Researchers have posited that the gap between White teachers and Black students is due to social conditioning that promotes negative attitudes toward their Black students (Douglas et al., 2008). According to Pearman (2020) and Starck et al. (2020), teachers are just as biased as non-teachers.

Because teachers have significant contact with Black students, these researchers suggested that teachers' anti-Black thoughts, feelings, and attitudes could have an impact on Black students' academic, social, and behavioral successes at school.

In 1982, Washington found support for establishment bias (similarity with White female teachers). She found that Black children were viewed more unfavorably, regardless of gender, than their White peers. In her study, the race of the student was considered the most critical variable in teacher perceptions. Similarly, Minor (2014) reported that the teachers in their study perceived Black students to have lower academic ability and social and behavioral skills when compared to their White students. She also found that teachers believed that behaving well for Black students had a larger influence on their perceptions of Black students' academic ability than it did for their White students. Like the study conducted by Minor, Zimmerman and Kao (2019) found that teachers were more likely to penalize Black children in math even when their noncognitive skills and test scores were the same as the White students'. Overall, they found that Black girls and boys were differentially penalized in math.

## Harsh Disciplining

Finally, a fourth finding was that Black students were disciplined more and more harshly than White students. These findings are consistent with previous research. There is no debate regarding the racial disparity related to discipline in school. For example, Bell (2020) indicated that Black students received 39% of out-of-school suspensions but made up just 16% of the enrollment. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Education (2018) reported that Black boys and girls are suspended

three to six times, respectively, the rates of their White peers. In 2018, Losen and Whitaker reported that 11 million days of instruction were lost due to out-of-school suspensions during the 2015-2016 school year. Black students lost 66 days versus just 14 days for their White peers. Additionally, Losen (2018) reported that Black students with disabilities lost 76 more days of instruction in U.S. schools due to suspension or expulsion than their White peers with disabilities.

One strength of the current study is that teachers appear to be aware of the anti-Black bias that exists in the schools. However, it does not address how teachers and other school personnel might lessen the impact of this bias on their Black students. Conversely, a weakness of the study is that this study relied on a small number of participants. It may be better to replicate the study with larger sample sizes. Additionally, a different methodology that involves school, classroom, and teacher observations might yield richer results.

### **Limitations**

The present study is not without limitations. The limitations for this study were consistent with those associated with content analyses. First, because this study was a qualitative content analysis, there is some level of subjectivity in the interpretation and understanding of the data. Intercoder reliability (ICR) was performed on the categories, but the reporting of percentage of agreement has inherent limitations (i.e., inadequate). A more formal statistical test may have been warranted. This could have removed any doubts, if any, regarding the reliability and validity of the results and conclusions of this study. Second, the researcher utilized hand coding which could be subject to human error.

Additionally, the study was conducted in one urban, predominantly White institution of higher education. Results of studies conducted at other, more diverse institutions in different regions of the U.S. could yield different results. In addition, participants were enrolled in a multicultural (diversity) course which could yield a specific type of response from the participants. They may have responded in a way they felt was acceptable given the course content. All the students enrolled in teacher education programs at the author's institution are required to take this course, and others on campus can take it as a diversity course.

Despite these limitations, this study uses a qualitative lens to provide important information regarding anti-Black bias in schools. This information is especially important given the current educational landscape in the U.S.

### **Implications**

#### **For Educators**

Normalizing Whiteness was overwhelmingly mentioned as a reason for anti-Black bias. This has important implications for in-service educators. Although, complete cultural connection may not be able to be drawn between Black students and their teachers, there are things teachers should consider when teaching Black students. Educators can work towards becoming antiracists. As Kendi (2019, p. 44) stated, "antiracists treat individuals as individuals. They must behave as if their Black students are equal to their other students and implement practices that reduce or eliminate racial inequity and inequality in their classrooms."

The results also indicated that teachers' perceptions of Black students contribute to anti-Black bias. This has

potential implications for how teachers are trained during their preparation programs, as well as their in-service training at their schools. Pre-service teachers might consider taking several diversity courses throughout their preparation program rather than just the one required course. They might also consider the types of placements they request when doing their internships and student teaching prior to being hired. Once hired, perhaps they can participate in on-going anti-bias trainings to help them understand the impact that their biases have on Black students and how they can mitigate those biases.

### **For Administrators**

Likewise, there are implications for administrators. Administrators set the tone for the school, hire the teachers, and oftentimes make the final decisions regarding policies and practices within the school. They typically wield most of the power at the site level. Administrators need to identify and eliminate policies that produce and/or sustain racial inequity between Black and other students (i.e., zero-tolerance policies, disproportionate representation in special education, disproportionate suspension, and expulsion rates). Preferably, there should be an effort towards implementing policies that produce and/or sustain racial equity and equality between Black and other student groups.

The findings suggest that there is much that needs to be done before Black students can experience the learning environment as White students do. It also suggests additional avenues for further research. It might be instructive to study cultural disconnection from the point-of-view of Black students to ascertain whether they believe this is the cause of most, if not all, of the inequities they experience at school. Many of the participants were

special educators; however, there was minimal mention of Black students' overidentification into special education as a form of anti-Black bias. A closer look at this might be warranted.

### **Conclusion**

Anti-Black bias in schools is real. School personnel (e.g., teacher, administrators, staff) must be aware of how the labels they place on their Black students as well as the normalization of Whiteness can negatively impact the experiences and outcomes (i.e., being over disciplined, over referred to special education, denied opportunities, and underachievement) of Black students in their classrooms and schools. Although "acting" White may be a way for Black students to combat some of the bias they experience in school, White teachers with this expectation of Black students must realize that becoming and/or acting White requires Black students to assimilate into the oppression that is the U.S. education system. For many Black students, this simply is not an option. Until educators begin to implement antiracist practices and advocate for antiracist policies, Black students will continue to be denied the full benefits of the educational system.

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