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A Qualitative Study on Educators' Perceptions of Anti-Black Bias in Schools

Monica R. Brown

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore in-service teachers' perceptions of the manifestations of anti-Black bias in schools and classrooms in their schools. The study adopted a qualitative (content analysis) design. The data were collected online through Qualtrics (online platform) and consisted of one open-ended question. The participants were special education M.Ed. students enrolled in a multicultural education course during the summer of 2020. The 18 participants were selected through non-random volunteer sampling. Content analysis was utilized to analyze the qualitative data. Forty-seven unique statements were identified within the 18 responses. From the 47 unique statements, four main categories were established that described anti-Black bias in school: normalizing Whiteness, denial of opportunity, over disciplining, and teacher labeling. Implications for educators and administrators in the U.S. are discussed.

Introduction

Schools in the United States are becoming increasingly more diverse. During the 2020-2021 school year, 50.7 million students were projected to be enrolled in public schools in the US. During the same school year, approximately 7.6 million (15%) were projected to be Black students (Hussar et al., 2020). Although the percentage of enrollment is consistent with the previous decade, the number and percentage of Black students in public schools have decreased since the late 1990s (Hussar et al., 2020). Black students rank near the bottom in most at-risk categories (e.g., achievement, behaviors, and persistence; de Brey et al., 2019) while representing less than one-sixth of public-school enrollment. Additionally, in 2016 Black students under 18 (31%) were more likely to be living in poverty – higher than any other racial or ethnic group (de Brey et al., 2019).

Black Student Achievement

Although the White-Black achievement gap narrowed in reading for 4th graders from 32 to 26 points from 1990 to 2017, the White-Black gap at grade 8 was still 32 points in 2017 (de Brey et al., 2019). Likewise, the 4th and 8th-grade gaps in math achievement were like reading. That is, there was a narrowing of the gap at grade 4 (i.e., from 32 to 25 points) but no difference at grade 8 (remained 32 points). Additionally, students with fewer absences from school were reported to have had higher scores in reading and math. In 2017, 42% of Black students in 8th grade reported zero absences in the last month of school. Asian students reported the highest at 62%. Forty percent of White students reported zero absences (de Brey et al., 2019).

Black Student Behaviors and Persistence

In 2015-2016, 2.7 million public school students received one or more out-of-school suspensions. Black male students accounted for 25% (n = 675,000) and Black females accounted for 14% (n = 378,000) of those suspensions (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2018). Black males and females each only accounted for 8% of school enrollment, indicating that both groups were disproportionately suspended from school in 2015-2016. This was higher than any other racial/ethnic group. White students male and female students made up 25 and 24 percent of enrollment but represented just 24 and 8 percent of suspensions, respectively (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2018). During the same school year, only 3.4% (n = 92,000) of White students received the same type of suspension. This suspension gap was over 4 to 1 – where 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. In fact, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, 2020) reported that Black students lost 66 days of instruction per 100 students during the 2015-16 school year while White students lost just 14 days. Surprisingly, the dropout rate for Black students (ages 16-24) decreased from 13 to 6 percent between 2000 and 2016, and White students from 7 to 5%. Black students were also less likely than White students to graduate in 2016 (92 and 94 percent, respectively; de Brey et al., 2019).

These racial disparities in educational and behavioral outcomes have been reported on 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, 2019), as well as serve as possible explanations for the poor outcomes experienced by Black students. Additionally, many researchers (See 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.

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. If just a small percentage (e.g., 1%) of the Black students enrolled during the 2020-2021 school year were impacted by anti-Black bias, there would be approximately 76,000 Black students negatively impacted by this anti-Black bias. Unfortunately, the number of Black children impacted by anti-Black bias in the schools is probably much higher than one percent.

Anti-Blackness is perpetuated in schools through school alienation (Brown, 2003; 2004; 2005) and disproportionate discipline practices [American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, 2018); Bell, 2020; Losen, 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 Gilliam et al. (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 fashion. 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 the student's file – thus creating a file 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 those things have on Black students. As such, **racial trauma (including racial anxiety) 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 Trauma

The American Psychological Association (APA, n.d.) defined trauma as a body's natural response to the threat, high stress, and danger. Typically, it is the outcome of some form of traumatic experience, event, or situation (e.g., pandemic, physical or sexual abuse). Resler (2019) referred to racial trauma as race-based traumatic stress. She indicated that it is a stressful impact or emotional pain experienced due to racist and discriminating acts. According to the APA (n.d.), individuals may experience short or long-term physical, socio-emotional, and/or psychological strain, a threat to their safety, or a disruption in their everyday thoughts, actions, and feelings when exposed to repeated racist and discriminatory acts (i.e., trauma). However, in schools, not all trauma is counted as such. The dominant view of trauma discredits these forms of trauma (e.g., racial and poverty; Alvarez, Milner, & Delale-O'Connor, 2016). However, according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine (2014), any condition, situation, or event that produces high levels of stress can produce trauma. Therefore, these forms of trauma must be provided with credibility.

Race, for example, could be classified as one of those invisible factors 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). For example, Carter (2007) posited that some Black Americans who experience racial discrimination can develop racial trauma. The 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical

Manual of Mental Disorders (5th edition.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013;) compares racial trauma to other psychological traumas [i.e., posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)] that include negative alterations in cognition and mood, intrusive symptoms, avoidance, and physical reactions (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014). Oftentimes, the psychological and emotional stress associated with racial trauma leaves the individual struggling with unsettling emotions, memories, and anxiety that linger.

Racial Anxiety

Godsil (2017) defined racial anxiety as the stress responses people experience before and/or during interracial interactions (i.e., 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 (2017), 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.

Stereotype Threat

In 1995, Steel and Aronson identified stereotype threat as a confirming or self-characterizing of a negative stereotype of one's group (i.e., Black students/individuals). Steele (1997) further explained that stereotype threat is a form of social-psychological threat that a person experiences (e.g., a Black student) when performing a task that may elicit a negative stereotype (e.g., lazy, unmotivated) about the student's group membership. Those Black students who identify most strongly with their racial group are typically most impacted by stereotype threat. Kellow 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.

In a study of 4,000 freshman students at 28 universities, Massey and Fischer (2005) reported that a process of disidentification in response to stereotyping undermined Black students' grade performance. That is, Black students (and Latinos in this study) internalized negative stereotypes regarding their intellectual abilities, and that in turn reduced their study effort by 30 minutes per week for each point increase in their internalization score. In another study, Nadler and Clark (2011) conducted a meta-analysis and found that when stereotype threat related to cognitive tasks was nullified (i.e., dismissed or disguised) African Americans (and Hispanics in this study) showed moderate improvement in their cognitive tasks scores. 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 US 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 to understand, analyze, and teach about racial marginalization in education (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999). While CRT allows us 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 US schools. CRT alone would not have allowed me to reveal the antagonism toward Black bodies in US schools. This study was particularly interested in the lived experiences of Black students (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016, p.416; ross, 2019) 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, p.417). As CRT posits, 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-Back 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 (and co-teacher) 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 students' participation. Instead, I allowed the open-ended research question to guide the study.

Method

Participants

Data were collected online via the Qualtrics platform. 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.

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 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. 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. That is the qualitative analysis of qualitative data. 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 (Sutton & Austin, 2015). 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 was still used (Kuckartz, 2014), 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

Variable	**Number (N = 18)**	**Percent**
Race or Ethnicity		
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,	1	6

Australian, New Zealand, Native American/Native North American)		
Latinx (i.e., those from Latin America and speak Spanish)	2	11
Age Range		
21 - 25	1	6
26 - 30	3	17
31 - 35	2	11
36 - 40	5	28
41 - 45	2	11
46 - 50	2	11
> 50	3	17

Variable	**Number (*N* = 18)**	**Percent**
Years as Educator or School Personnel		
0 – 5	9	50
6 – 11	4	22
12 – 17	2	11
18 – 23	1	6
24 or more	2	11
Primary Role		
Special Educator	13	72
General Educator	1	6
Administrator	1	6
Interventionist	1	6
Other	2	11
School Setting		
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

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 institutional review board (IRB) at the researcher's university reviewed and approved the study prior to beginning the study.

Results

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 (i.e., educators, the curriculum, teaching practices, etc.). See Table 2 for the four categories along with the frequency and percentage of unique statements for each.

Table 2

Categories With Frequency and Percentage of Unique Statements

Categories (sub-categories)	**F (*N* = 47)**	**Percent**
Normalizing Whiteness	19	40.4
Denial of Opportunity	11	23.4
(Overidentifying)	(3)	
(Underachievement)	(3)	
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 [i.e., Black students need to conform to Whiteness, the system is racist (i.e., policies, practices, and structures that value Whiteness), avoidance of conversations about race], in schools. 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 in order to succeed they have to do so in spite of 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 (i.e., that 80% of teachers are White and female). 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 [an] education could provide."*

Sub-Categories

Two sub-categories emerged from the denial of opportunity category. 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 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 discipline black students and the way the discipline white students. It isn't usually equal. The white students usually get less discipline then [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. Wilkerson (2020) described psychic assaults as the looks of contempt and/or disdain that one feels when they have been accused and/or condemned for something, rightly or wrongly (p. 221). This whole notion of psychic assault is interesting because there are so many Black students in schools across the US 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.

The respondents mentioned that Whiteness has been normalized in the schools. According to Boykin (1992), White educators work within a dominant, Western, epistemological framework that often predisposes them to have lower expectations of Black students. The respondents in this study indicated that educators and other school personnel may want Black students to "act" White to succeed. Acting White has been a burden placed on Black people since the times of slavery. Acting White often saved a Black person's life during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras. It required Black people to act and react the way White people wanted them to, otherwise, they would be punished. 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 (Ogbu, 1992; 2004). Even though it may jeopardize their school success, many Black students elect to reject these attitudes and behaviors because they do not fit with their cultural norms.

The second finding had to do with denial of opportunity. The research refers to this as the opportunity gap between Black and White students. The Glossary of Education Reform (2013) referred to opportunity gaps as "inputs----the unequal and inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities." The Glossary of Education Reform indicated that students from racially minoritized backgrounds may be subject to prejudice or bias that denies them equal and equitable access to learning opportunities. For example, students from racially minoritized backgrounds tend to be disproportionately represented in lower-level courses and special-education programs, and their academic achievement, graduation rates, and college-enrollment rates are typically lower than those of their White peers. This is like 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.

Another finding had to do with teacher labeling (i.e., lazy, troublemakers, behavior problems, criminals). 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, they [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 found that Black students had 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 Minor study, 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 like White students. Overall, they found that Black girls and boys were differentially penalized in math.

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 Office for Civil Rights (2014) reported that Black boys and girls are suspended, three to six times, respectively, the rates of their White peers. In 2018, the ACLU reported that 11 million days of instruction, during the 2015-2016 school year, were lost due to out-of-school suspensions. 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 US schools due to suspension or expulsion than their White peers with disabilities.

One strength of this study is that teachers appear to be aware of the anti-Black bias that exists in the schools. However, it does not get at how teachers and other school personnel might begin to 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 actual school, classroom, and teacher observations might yield richer results.

Limitations

The present study is not without limitations. Two of the main limitations of the current study were sampling method and sample size. Due to COVID-19, all courses at the researcher's institution were taught online in the summer of 2020. Therefore, the researcher utilized Qualtrics and allowed the participants to self-select into the study. This sampling method could result in some selection bias in the study and could impact the results, as those who typically elect to participate are those who have something the most to say. Future research might involve the researcher (or research assistant) visiting the potential participants' courses and providing more information about the study. This more personal approach could prove beneficial when recruiting for the study. The second limitation, and perhaps connected to sampling method, was sample size. Although there were 98 students enrolled in four sections of the course, just 18 participants self-selected into the study. Just 18% of the students chose to participate in the study. For this reason, the results should not be generalized to larger populations. Future research should seek to obtain a larger sample size that is more representative of a larger population and then can be generalized to that larger population. Perhaps other researchers could draw from all summer courses and not limit the study to a specific type of course.

Additionally, the study was conducted in one, urban, predominantly White institution of higher education (PWIHE). Results of studies conducted at other, more divers IHEs, in different regions of the US, 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. The required nature of the course, and the fact that all the participants were educators, could also impact participants' feelings regarding the study topic.

Finally, this study used content analysis of a single open-ended question. This approach is useful when there are many participants. There appear to be no maximum number of questions required to conduct a content analysis, however, other qualitative approaches (e.g., focus groups, interviews) could be a more valuable method to gain further insights into the participants understanding of the topic.

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

Implications

Educators

Normalizing Whiteness was overwhelmingly mentioned as a reason for anti-Black bias. This has important implications for in-service educators. We may not be able to create a complete cultural connection between Black students and their teachers, but 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 have to 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.

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 all 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, etc.) 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. So, 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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Author Information

Monica R. Brown
Professor of Special Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
4505 S. Maryland Parkway
Las Vegas, NV 89154-3014