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WHAT BLACK STUDENTS NEED FROM WHITE TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

RENEE S. ANDREWS

127 Pages

Black high school students who attend majority-white schools are educated in environments that are contradictory to their cultural backgrounds. Because the teachers at these high schools tend to be mostly white, Black students in these environments typically feel a lack of connection or that they do not belong. In this qualitative study, I explored the relationships between Black students and their white teachers. Data sources for this study included interviews of both Black students and their teachers. From the data, I found that Black high school students need the following from their teachers: (1) check in on them regularly; (2) talk to them to determine any unmet needs; (3) use kind, caring tones when speaking to them; and (4) respect them in tone and treatment. The implications of my findings could be beneficial to students, teachers, and school districts as they work to understand how best to support and understand the needs of their Black high school students and their success.

KEYWORDS: Black students; white teachers; critical whiteness; white gaze; needs

WHAT BLACK STUDENTS NEED FROM WHITE TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE
INQUIRY

RENEE S. ANDREWS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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2023

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WHAT BLACK STUDENTS NEED FROM WHITE TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE
INQUIRY

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CHAPTER I: DEFINING AND FRAMING A PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Through Kenya's Eyes

Being an assistant principal in a high school means that most of my time is spent working with or talking with students. In my high school, I am currently the only Black administrator and only one of three certificated Black staff in the school. Most of the staff are white and have been there for over 15 years. Being the only Black administrator in the building, I have found that although my specific grade level of students are juniors, I receive a high number of students from all grade levels that come to my office to talk, problem-solve, and vent. Most of these students tend to be Black.

One of my juniors is a 17-year-old Black female, Kenya, who has a very troubled home life. She lives with her father and stepmother. Her siblings are separated between her biological mother and father. Kenya has poor attendance, and when she does come to school has a high number of unexcused absences from certain classes, is failing several classes, and has a large number of discipline referrals for disrespect, insubordination, and aggressive actions.

Instead of heading directly to class, Kenya can be found in my office as soon as she arrives at school. Throughout the day and during lunch duty, Kenya can also be found by my side. Because she developed a relationship with me since the first week of school, Kenya has confided in me about pretty much everything, from her relationship problems at home, relationship problems with her boyfriends, her fears, and more often about her not going to class or her grades.

The discussions about why she is cutting class are numerous and her reasons are quite sad. The main reason she cuts some classes is because she feels that those

particular teachers do not like her. I asked her to tell me more about what this looks like. She acknowledged that she knows she may not have the greatest history in school, but this year she had a goal of trying to do better. She stated that particular teachers always seem to make smart or “slick” comments to her like “Well, look who decided to show up today!” or “It’s about time you came to class!” when she does decide to come to class. She explained that those comments are embarrassing, especially when said in front of her peers. When this occurs, she refuses to do anything in that class and, on occasion, has turned around and walked back out of the classroom.

In addition, Kenya shared that she has overheard some teachers talking negatively about her and other Black students. She stated that when she does get the nerve up to ask for help on work or concepts she does not understand, those teachers either refuse to help her and use her previous behaviors or absences as reasons why they will not help her. Kenya’s teachers’ verbal and physical language shows their disinterest in helping her. However, in the same classes, Kenya has witnessed teachers seemingly happy to help the white students and recognized that negative comments are never directed at them.

Stories shared by Kenya are not uncommon as other Black students have shared similar experiences with me. During these conversations with me, students begin by speaking about dropping out, going remote where they do not have to deal with most of their current teachers, getting their schedules changed so that they do not have to have those teachers anymore, or requesting to be registered at our local alternative school. These issues, according to the students, are issues that they have been facing their entire high school career. They are frustrated and at a breaking point. Something must

be done to salvage and repair the relationships between Black students in our school and the teachers before we lose those students, or their frustrations and feelings begin showing up in more demonstrative ways.

Unfortunately, I am seeing patterns in the teachers that are frequently discussed in these conversations with my students. Many of these teachers, who are predominately white, have been teaching in the school for more than 15 years. So, there is a sense of an “if it’s not broke, don’t fix it” mentality. Moreover, they seem to exhibit similar behaviors, like negative body language and making condescending comments during staff and professional development meetings focused on student voice, culturally relevant practices, school culture student survey results, and anything related to improving relationships across racial diversity in the building. Something hopeful is that there is a small population of teachers in the building who are interested in learning more about how to create or salvage their relationships with Black students to increase the likelihood that students will not only improve their attendance in their classrooms but also increase their level of positive engagement in the class.

Problem of Practice (PoP)

When we asked the students individually about their class cuts, they verbalized that they felt those teachers did not like them and were unwilling to give them the help they needed. Also, the students shared that because they feel the teachers do not like them, they disengage when they do attend those classes and do not participate in classroom activities. Not surprisingly, when we looked at the students’ grades in those classes, most of them were failing. We concluded that there was an apparent

disconnect and lack of relationships between these high school students of color and their predominately white teachers.

Laboratory of Practice

The city in which the laboratory of practice is located is a Midwestern State that is one of the oldest communities in Illinois and has an approximate population of 113,000. Demographically, the city has a population where 28% identify as Black, 60% as white, 6% as Multiracial, and 6% as Asian. Fourteen percent of the city is living in poverty, and the city just recently elected its first Black, female mayor.

Sandalwood School District is the district in which Green High School, the laboratory of practice, is located. For privacy, the pseudonyms Sandalwood School District (SSD) and Green High School (GHS) have replaced the actual names of the school district and the high school. Sandalwood School District (SSD) serves approximately 13,000 students. About 70% are eligible for free and/or reduced lunch. SSD's demographics include a student population where 57% of enrolled students identify as Black, 20% as white, 12% as Hispanic, 10% as Multiracial, and 1% as Asian. Black students account for most of the district's minoritized student population, and they make up 31% of the student population at Green High School.

The laboratory of practice, Green High School (GHS) is one of three high schools in our city, ours being considered the "good high school". Our award-winning school has a history of high academic achievement, low teacher turnover, and the school with the most student diversity. According to the 2020 state, 93% of our freshmen were on track to graduate on time with an 89% graduation rate, 12% student mobility, and 19%

chronic absenteeism. Our student demographics are 42% white, 31% Black, 36% low-income, with an 85.2% white teacher population.

CHAPTER II: MAKING INTUATIVE THEORIES OF ACTION EXPLICIT

Assembling the Team

Prior to the beginning of this process, the GHS team, which for privacy and confidentiality reasons will henceforth be referenced as Team Go (TG), consists of the principal, Mrs. Rutherford, and all three assistant principals, Ms. Lewis, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Scott, and I (see Table 1). We met and had many discussions related to the current culture of our school.

Mrs. Rutherford is white and has worked with the district for 15 years. She lives outside of the city in a small majority white, middle class community, and is completing her second year as the principal of GHS. Ms. Lewis, the assistant principal, is also white. She resides within the SSD community and has worked for the district for nine years. She is completing her third year as an assistant principal at GHS. Mr. Johnson is one of the two male assistant principals. He lives within the same small white community as the principal and has worked in the district for 19 years. He is completing his first year as an assistant principal at GHS. Mr. Scott, the second male assistant principal, is also white. He, too, lives within the SSD community and has worked for the district for 36 years. He is retiring at the conclusion of the school year and is completing his fourth year as assistant principal at GHS.

Table 1

Demographics of Team Members

Team Member's Name	Black	White	Lives Within the District	Total Number of Years at GHS
Mrs. Rutherford		X		15
Ms. Andrews	X		X	2
Ms. Lewis		X	X	9
Mr. Johnson		X		19
Mr. Scott		X	X	36
Mr. Fargo		X		4
Mr. Banks		X		4
Mr. Shoe		X	X	0

By the end of the first year of this process, there was a high staff turnover among the TG members. Both Mrs. Rutherford and Ms. Lewis resigned to go to different school districts. Mr. Scott also retired. As such, TG's membership changed to comprise myself, Mr. Johnson the remaining white male assistant principal, Mr. Fargo, the new principal who is from a small, all-white, rural school district and had previously served as an assistant principal at GHS approximately four years ago, Mr. Banks, a white male and new assistant principal who had taught at GHS for the past 4 years and prior to

that taught for many years at one of SSD's more urban schools, and lastly, Mr. Shoe, another white male new assistant principal who has yet to graduate with his administrative certificate and previously taught in a neighboring upper middle class school district that has a student population that is 90% white. As a new team, we continued the in-depth conversations about the state of our school and the issues we face. We established a unanimous consensus that the work that the prior TG had started around Black students and the issues that center around them cutting classes must continue as a priority.

In our initial meetings, through hours of in-depth discussions, we came up with many issues impacting our Black students, such as discipline, academic struggles, lack of motivation, attitudes towards school, and poor attendance to classes and school. We knew those challenges were the current issues facing our school, but we wanted to get to the root cause of why these situations were occurring. We agreed that the issues we had unearthed were distinctly rooted in deficit thinking among our teachers. For example, teachers verbalizing that if (Black) students would work harder, they would be doing just as well as other students and if their parents cared, they would be doing better in school. As a result, the team decided to utilize the 5 Whys as established by Sakichi Toyoda (Liquid Planner, 2022) to rebut this mindset. The 5 Whys is a technique that can be used to solve problems. First, you start with the issue at hand, and you begin to ask why the issue is an issue. Next, you use the answer from the previous response to ask why again. You continue asking why five times and you typically draw a deep conclusion to the issue (Liquid Planner, 2022).

Using the 5 Whys method (Liquid Planner, 2022), we determined that poor teacher-student relationships were negatively impacting a large number of our Black students. After narrowing down our problem, our goal was to illuminate the factors causing the poor relationships between our teachers and our Black students, followed by determining the “systems that surround those problems” (Perry et al., 2020, p. 27). As a team, we hypothesized that if we could work on saving and strengthening the relationships between the teachers and our Black students, then students’ success could be improved.

Tacit Assumptions Made by My Team

As noted by Mintrop (2016), the noticeable indication of the problem that came about through our discussion was the number of Black students that were cutting certain classes on a regular basis. When we asked the students individually about the class cuts, they verbalized that they felt as if those teachers did not like them and were unwilling to give them the help that they needed. Students shared that some teachers did not give them sufficient attention in class compared to their white peers, some teachers would not allow Black students to make up tests for a better grade but allowed their white peers the opportunity to do so. Again, some teachers would provide white students additional help such as walking them through problems to find errors and reach the right answers while not doing the same for Black students. Rather, the teachers would simply tell the Black students they do not have time to go over the problem with them. Some teachers even went to the extent of marking Black students absent although they were present, leading the students to take screenshots with the date and time to prove that they (the students) were indeed in attendance. Also, the

students shared that because they feel the teachers do not like them, they would typically disengage and do not participate in classroom activities when they attend classes. They usually put their earbuds on or use their cellphones to help them zone out and not pay attention during class. Not surprisingly, when we looked at students' grades in those classes, most were failing.

After lengthy discussions about the current state of teacher-student relationships at GHS, the TG came up with several assumptions. These were:

1. Many of our white teachers were afraid of the Black students for several reasons, including students' tone, how they dressed, etc., And so, the mere fact that they were of a different race than the teachers made them seem unfamiliar with outside of the school walls.
2. Some of the teachers had been teaching at GHS for so long that they are rigid in their unwillingness to change to make things better between them and their students.
3. Many teachers were not willing to build relationships with students who did not follow their directions, challenged their authority or were not academically strong.

After speaking to the students and taking our observations into account, the team concluded that there was a clear disconnect between our Black high school students and their teachers.

Exploration of These Data

In accordance with the lack of teacher-student relationships at my school, research indicates a disconnect among Black students and their teachers (Hyland, 2015; Naman, 2009). Studies have been conducted that have yielded results that show that among groups of students with disabilities and boys, ethnic minority students, which

includes Black students, are among the groups of students that experience less than positive relationships with their teachers (Decker et al., 2007). Study results such as those previously mentioned could be used to show that teacher-student relationships are more important than previously thought in forecasting outcomes for Black students (Decker et al., 2007; Stevenson, 2019) Findings from survey research conducted at a high school in Iowa by Modlin (2008) showed that a personal disconnect between Black students and their teachers. Hyland (2015) and Modlin (2008) further found that “without proper research and investigation, this personal disconnect, if allowed to go unchecked, could lead to a decline in student achievement and grades and could potentially lead to an increase in poor attendance and dropout rates” (p. 19). These findings directly relate to our work in my school as our students of color feel disconnected from their predominately white teachers.

Further, my team reviewed the discipline referrals of the Black students in our school and found they received many referrals from the same group of teachers. Many of the referrals were coded for disrespect, insubordination, and aggressive actions. The team continued to discuss certain situations including observed teacher-student interactions, situational descriptions in referrals of Black students, and both student and teacher’s verbal accounts of classroom interactions, in which we could conclude that there was a definite disconnect between Black students and their teachers in our building. Disconnections that were found included situations in which students had missed certain classes at least 20-30% of the time, were regularly disrupting class, refused to talk to or reply to teachers, were inattentive, or were regularly physically and verbally frustrated in class. This evidence directly connects to our PoP because many

of our teachers do not have a positive relationship with Black students resulting in an increase of disciplinary referrals.

After the discussion on the hypothesized disconnection concluded, we talked about the change process, equitable schooling, and the question posed by Mintrop (2016), “What do actors within the organization need to learn or unlearn?” (p. 117). Channeling Mintrop (2016), I shared with my team that teachers needed to learn to treat students with “respect, dignity, and fairness” and that “overly controlled, disrespected, and de-intellectualized teachers are not likely to be receptive to the message of equity” (p. 116). We knew that navigating the road towards change would need to be taken carefully and intentionally. As such, we determined that the teacher actors would need to confront their implicit biases (Batchelor et al., 2019), unlearn manifestations of whiteness (Leonardo, 2002; Lynch, 2018; Matias, 2017), and learn how to build relationships with Black students (Picower, 2009; 2021).

New Statement of My PoP

Because many of our teachers are veterans at GDHS, they tend to reminisce and remember the days when most of the school’s population was white and upper middle class. During those times, they were accustomed to systems and students that made them comfortable and leadership that did not ask them to change or reflect on the impact of their practices or approaches. Mintrop (2016) states that because of teachers’ defensive reactions, “leaders can’t simply change people by telling them what they think is wrong with them or what they believe are the root causes of their behavior. Leaders can’t change attitudes by simply scolding them or confronting them with their “failures””

(p. 118). In other words, my team will need to reinvent the way we engage in critical conversations with our teachers in order to mend the student-teacher relationships at GHS. Upon reflection, when considering our organizational context in which we hope to see change occur, we all sighed collectively in frustration. We knew that change in our current organization would be challenging but were hopeful it was possible. We understood the need to be careful in our approaches to sustain change and desired to work to saturate our efforts with equitable data use. Also, we need to ensure that we use information directly from school-based data and from student voices with the goal of building authentic relationships between our students and teachers for the sake of the futures of our Black students.

CHAPTER III: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM AND CHANGE PROCESS

Literature Review

Across the United States (U.S.), Pre-K through 12th grade teachers are mandated to teach specific content knowledge and standards and are answerable to their yearly evaluations to determine if they are making growth in ensuring that students are learning. In fact, Hargreaves (1998) found that there is a great deal of research to be found on effective teaching practices and that teaching cannot truly be dissected into a prescribed progression of steps that will lead to student success. Teaching is more than what is taught. According to Hargreaves (1998) the best teachers are emotional and compassionate and have the ability to connect with their students. These teachers tend to be very passionate about building relationships with their students as well as using a variety of ideas to ensure that their students are learning (Hargreaves, 1998). According to Azer (2005), to ensure that students are learning, good teachers must demonstrate caring attitudes, provide instruction that is clear, provide constructive feedback in a timely manner, assist students in learning from their mistakes, and ensure that students are encouraged to ask questions and are engaged. When it comes to specifically leading or teaching students that are historically marginalized, Rivera-McCutchen (2021) expresses that the idea of caring for the students should be authentic and not superficial and should be rooted in practices and habits that confront and dismantle inequities in schools and the systems that lead them. These statements guide my thought process as I reflect on observations and conversations with my team regarding possible reasons students are disconnecting from and not attending certain

classes. Are some teachers robotically engaging with their Black students and passionately connecting and engaging with their non-Black students?

The purpose of the literature review in this chapter is to examine the literature that looks at relationships between teachers and students and the effects such relationships or a lack thereof can have on students in the classroom; understand implicit bias and its possible impact on how white teachers view, engage with, and teach Black students. The literature review will then examine the conceptual framework of critical whiteness studies, focusing specifically on colorblindness and white gaze. The literature review will then examine how whiteness manifests itself in Pre-K-12 schools by closely exploring white saviorism and whiteness as a norm. Lastly, the literature review explores what committing to building authentic relationships with Black students entails.

The Effects of Teacher-Student Relationships

Positive teacher-student relationships can have long-lasting and positive implications for students socially and academically (Kaufman et al., 2010). Teachers have the ability to impact the academic, social, and emotional experiences of their students. Research has shown that when there is a positive relationship with a student, that the teacher provides more frequent communication and valuable guidance to the students as opposed to criticism (Kaufman et al., 2010). Kaufman et al. (2010) found that students that reported having close relationships with their teachers attended school more often, increased their engagement in class, and did not need as much direction within the classroom. In order for teachers to begin to build authentic, positive relationships with their students, teachers must first see their students as individuals

(Cranton, 2006; Sparks et al., 2015). Cranton (2006) and McGrady & Reynolds (2012) share that teachers should stop measuring students against social norms that can lead to teachers predetermining how students will behave and their possible level of academic achievement. Predetermining how students will behave and how much a teacher supposes they can achieve can negatively impact the teacher's ability to relate to the students therefore having a negative effect on efforts to build authentic relationships with their students.

Positive teacher-student relationships can also be connected to low occurrences of behavior infractions and conflict in students. Newkirk (2019) found that the likelihood of externalizing and internalizing problems among children who experienced behavior problems may decrease when there is a close teacher-child relationship. This would be extremely beneficial in the classroom because if students are focused on learning and teachers are focused on teaching and not behavioral issues, students are better able to learn.

Dennie et al. (2019) stated that positive teacher-student relationships highly impacts students emotionally, academically, and socially and that positive interpersonal interactions with their teachers can lead to increased academic achievement and motivation. Dennie et al. (2019) further state that exchanges between teachers and their students that are respectful, consistent, and fair lead to deep, positive relationships in the classroom.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationships and Student Outcomes

Additionally, there is a correlation between positive teacher-student relationships and student outcomes. It is believed that positive teacher-student relationships can

lead to a sense of emotional security (Decker, et al., 2006). When students feel emotionally safe, there are increased opportunities for students to meet expectations and master concepts because they can focus on learning.

While previous research has shown that a positive teacher-student relationship can have indubitable effects on students socially and academically, the opposite has been found to be true when there is an unfavorable or conflictual relationship between teachers and students. In a study on the impact of conflicted teacher-student relationships on students' achievement, it was found that students that had conflicted relationships with their teachers experienced less than expected achievement scores. These students also exhibited serious underachievement that could be tracked over the course of years throughout their educational careers (Spilt & Hughes, 2015). Mason et al. (2017) found similar results in their study of student achievement and the correlation to the type of relationship that students may have with their teachers. They found positive relationships between teachers and their students to be a critical factor in both behavioral and academic outcomes in their students as well as maintaining a sense in students that they belong. This could prove to be a very important conceptualization, as to the importance of taking the time to build strong, quality relationships with their students.

Research has further found that racial dynamics may contribute to conflictual relationships between students (Newkirk, 2019). The current teaching force is made up of approximately 80% white females, while the student population continues to become increasingly more diverse (Loewus, 2017). This vast difference between the racial composition of teachers and their students, especially students of color, has been found

to lead to challenges in relationships as opposed to those relationships teachers have with white students (Newkirk, 2019). According to Spilt & Hughes (2015), Black children have been found to be twice as likely to experience conflictual relationships as they advance from first to fifth grade and White teachers were shown to give more “negative evaluations of externalizing behaviors exhibited by Black students than White or Hispanic students” (p. 311). Based on research it can be hypothesized that these negative evaluations and conflictual relationships are likely to continue and possibly get worse as students continue on to high school if teachers and implicit bias are not inspected and remediated.

The probability that students of color encounter escalated incidences of negative interactions with their teachers than their counterparts might lead to questions about the possible impact implicit bias may have on teacher’s relationships, expectations, and perceptions of students of color. As Newkirk (2019) concluded, “it is conceivable that implicit bias and racialized perceptions may interact with teacher-student relationships in the classroom” (p. 19).

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is defined by Staats (2015) as “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (p. 7). Those attitudes and stereotypes are usually developed within the cultural communities (Kumar et al., 2015) that define our cultural identities (Kumar et al., 2015) and shape our viewpoints and beliefs. People are typically oblivious to or are not willing to acknowledge their implicit bias or the implicit associations or beliefs that they have towards other groups of people (Warikoo et al., 2016). Implicit associations are housed

outside of our conscious awareness and do not always align with our intentions or explicit beliefs. This can be problematic, especially for teachers, because unconscious associations coupled with the experiences of teachers can impact discipline situations which can lead to disparities based on the race of the student (Staats, 2015).

Shifting to PreK-12 public schools where the students are increasingly students of color, yet most teachers are white, implicit bias or implicit associations can have negative implications (Warikoo, et al., 2016). Students' experiences in school that are impacted by racial disparities is an urgent matter (Warikoo, et al., 2016). One of the ways that implicit bias is measured is by using the Implicit Associations Test. The results of the test can be used to explore the possible implications of implicit racial associations in schools and classrooms with students of color.

Pre-service teachers are those teachers that have little to no prior teaching experience but are entering their student-teaching experience. Studies conducted have shown that many of the white pre-service teachers that were placed in culturally diverse classrooms did not have many if any experiences with those outside of their race. Their negative attitudes towards culturally diverse populations were based on negative stereotypes rather than experience (Glock et al., 2019). Pre-service teachers with negative attitudes towards culturally diverse students and settings showed more negative implicit bias towards minority students than pre-service teachers that imagined a school with low diversity. Those pre-service teachers with negative attitudes towards culturally diverse students activated higher levels of negative expectations of the students, expectations that working with these students would require more effort and more work and would lead to high levels of stress (Glock et al., 2019). Pre-service

teachers with implicit biases towards racially diverse students that are placed in schools that are racially diverse could negatively impact student learning for their students of color including low expectations, preconceived ideas of how the students will behave, and an unwillingness to adjust instruction as needed. In her teacher preparation program experience, Matias (2016) has sadly found that although her white teacher candidates shared that they were ready to teach students of color in urban schools, that many of them had “no previous interactions with people of color” (p. 198). Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for white teacher candidates to be ill-prepared to work with students of color due in some part to their lack of exposure to students of color. A lack of experiences with students of color can allow teachers’ unconscious associations of people of color can have a negative impact on how they interact with and instruct their students of color (Staats, 2015-2016).

Researchers have suggested that teacher preparation programs can take steps to support pre-service teachers in dealing with diversity and positively impact pre-service teachers’ negative implicit bias towards racially diverse students. Teacher preparation programs should work to provide students with frequent contact with ethnically diverse students throughout their program (Glock et al., 2019). Study findings, however, have shown that when many pre-service teachers were immersed in classroom experiences with diverse students including students from marginalized populations, their implicit attitudes and knowledge changed for the better towards negatively judged groups. (Kolano & King, 2015). Institutions can invest in empathy training, culturally responsive practices, and teacher dispositions. Whitford & Emerson (2019) state that “by proposing that pre-service teachers, particularly White pre-service

teachers, can benefit from knowledge and understanding of empathy as a tool for discerning patterns in their personal attitudes, beliefs, and values in culturally and linguistically diverse populations” (p. 673). This can only be beneficial to those teachers in the classroom because when white preservice teachers self-reflect on their own racial identities and take ownership of how it impacts their interactions and the “power dynamic with others” (Picower, 2014, p. 120), then they can effectively teach their children of color.

Similarly, to pre-service teachers, many studies have found that white practicing or in-service teachers have negative attitudes towards culturally diverse student populations. One meta-analysis found that as a result of these negative attitudes or implicit racial associations, Black and Latino students are referred to special-needs testing more and gifted-and-talented programs less than their White and Asian American counterparts. (Warikoo et al., 2016).

According to Warikoo, et al. (2016), “implicit associations are the automatic cognitive associations people have between a given social group and certain feelings, concepts, and evaluations” (p. 508). Generally, people are not aware of the implicit associations that they hold or are not willing to acknowledge that they have these beliefs. However, these implicit associations can rear their ugly heads in culturally diverse classrooms, especially when teachers are under high levels of stress or are in low-resourced schools that are “cognitively demanding” (Warikoo et al., 2016, p.510). The implicit racial associations can have negative impacts on teachers’ interactions with their Black students and those interactions can have consequences on students’ academic performance (Jacoby-Senghor et al., 2016) how students perceived

themselves and their abilities (Lloyd, 2021), their self-esteem, and their motivation levels (Jussim & Eccles, 1992). The interactions can also negatively impact teacher's peers as they bear witness to this behavior and can unfortunately also perpetuate or mimic this behavior with their students.

The expectations that teachers have for students can negatively or positively impact students and their academic achievement and growth. If teachers hold implicit bias towards racially diverse students, their expectations for those students tend to be low (Warikoo et al., 2016) and those low expectations negatively impact minority students resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy (Ferguson, 2003). A self-fulfilling prophecy, as described by Ferguson (2003) is "one that makes a bias in a teacher's expectation regarding a student's performance affect the student's performance" (p. 469). Results of teacher's biases towards students of color have shown to result in poor quality of instruction, negative interactions with students, underestimation of students' potential, less informative feedback, and higher levels of referrals to special education programs (van den Bergh et al, 2010). In contrast, van den Bergh, et al., (2010) states: "Expectations can be communicated to students in several ways. Teachers may create a warmer socioemotional climate for students for whom they have high expectations and also may give students increasingly more difficult and challenging learning materials" (p. 520). Communicating low expectations is generally unintentional and nonverbal. However, according to van den Bergh et al. (2010) "students may nevertheless clearly perceive and internalize teacher expectations, alter their classroom behavior and motivation as a result, and thereby achieve in keeping with their expectations" (p. 521). In sum, research concluded that relationships between teachers

and students are important and have positive implications in the classroom. When trying to get to the root cause of why white teachers may find it challenging to build positive relationships with Black students, researchers have found implicit bias to be a possible culprit. Still, they have also looked at critical whiteness as another possible factor in this challenge.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Whiteness Studies

Pivoting to my evolving conceptual framework, research and studies have also proven that white teachers have found it challenging to build relationships with students of color, particularly Black students resulting in ill effects on those students and their success in school.

Whiteness is defined by Leonardo (2002) as an “assemblage, a racial discourse or perspective supported by material practices and institutions” that is constructed “based on oppressions, power, and falsehood that holds immense power over others...and is protected through colonialism, slavery, segregation, and oppression” (p. 31). Unfortunately, according to Matias (2016), although whiteness is an “underlying disease” (p. 194) in education, it is a topic that is rarely recognized in teacher education and throughout the field of education. According to Matias & Grosland (2016), whiteness “embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemologies, emotions and behaviors” (p. 66). This is detrimental to the field of education because new teachers are recycling the tenets of whiteness and basically refuse to address or try to understand the impact of whiteness due to “white emotionality” or a fear of being labeled “race traitor” (Matias & Grosland, 2016, p. 66).

To get teacher candidates to practice self-reflection as a means to dismantle whiteness, Matias has implemented activities that challenge teacher candidates to see and get to the root of how whiteness, white supremacy, and race impact teachers and students of color in the classroom. Unfortunately, those efforts have often been met with emotional resistance. Also, Lynch (2018) shares that white people have a choice in whether to participate in Whiteness “because it is not a racial identity but a construct of the actions and performances of White privilege”. This means that you can identify as White “but not participate or perpetuate rules and norms of Whiteness” (Lynch, 2018). In education, this means that white teachers can decide to do the hard work of confronting and dismantling whiteness and white supremacy to better understand, support, and educate their students of color. However, studies have shown that many white teachers continue to refuse to acknowledge race which then reinforces racism but allows them to continue to exist comfortably in their whiteness to the detriment of their students of color.

Matias (2016) shares that without a process to explore how to identify whiteness in K-12 education, “whiteness will, unfortunately, continue to mutate and manifest almost invisibly” (p. 66). In other words, without a major shift in acknowledging and addressing whiteness in education and having courageous conversations to unlearn in order to relearn, nothing will change. Students of color will continue to have their identities and backgrounds ignored and whiteness will continue to prevail.

Colorblindness

When asked if they see color, many people including teachers say they do not. Lynch (2018) ascertains that teachers should not only see race but be able to see

beyond it. However, when teachers are colorblind (Gordon, 2005), they claim to not see race and are denying the racial identity of their students. It is important to understand that colorblindness is not one's ability to not see color but is learned. According to Gordon (2005), "this resistance is learned and nurtured to protect the status quo, which privileges White people and occurs on both the individual and systemic levels" (p. 139). Further, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (2019) provides an example of using colorblindness in protecting the status quo when she discusses perceptions of the court case *Brown vs. Board of Education* as "dismantling particular regimes of epistemic powers" (p. 54) by "integrating colored bodies into previously white spaces" (p. 54). This act of "diversity" was seen as a "race-conscious exception to colorblindness" (p. 54). However, proponents contradicted themselves when they supported diversity when it came to allowing Black students into classrooms that were historically for white children only but were against following the same argument when it came to recruiting Black faculty (Crenshaw, 2019). In summary, colorblindness is not a new concept, but one that has and continues to be prevalent, even in education. Although teachers may think that they are doing something good by saying they do not see color, in actuality, they are hurting their students of color by not seeing or acknowledging the deep culture and experiences that they bring to the classroom.

In the classroom, we also see the denial or erasing of cultures other than the white majority has been found to be true when looking at a western Eurocentric curriculum with pre-service teachers where white interests are majorly being served (Aronson, et al., 2020). To disrupt whiteness by using counternarratives, Aronson et al. (2020) challenged white preservice teachers to take a closer look at the prevailing

stories about race and school experiences. What Aronson found was that some of the white preservice teachers did not take responsibility for what they did not know about counternarratives but blamed them on such things as their former teachers. Other preservice teachers found difficulty in having their normal social experiences challenged and sometimes refute those dominant narratives. In her work with preservice teachers, Cheryl Matias found that asking her students to “emotionally confront their own white privilege” (Matias et al., 2017) and realize that “silence is an act of white complicity it allows dominant ideologies in whiteness to go uncontested” (p. 23) proved to be quite challenging. Matias found that many of the preservice teachers “expressed how learning about race and racism reinforced their normative beliefs of how race and racism is a non-white problem” (Matias et al., 2014, p. 11). Having teachers examine Whiteness or discussing their own identities and thoughts can prove to be very personal and emotional, and some simply choose to avoid the discussions entirely. Lynch (2018) states that when asked to participate in discourse on race, white people tend to rely on “coded-language”. They use common terms, such as “*urban*”, “*inner city*”, “*diverse students*”, and “*underperforming students,*” to pepper the conversation in an attempt to avoid using a label like “Black students” speaking volumes of how race is conceptualized in the classroom.

Previous research has found that teachers bring into their classrooms their “epistemological assumptions formulated from their earlier experiences and teachings” (Douglas, et al., 2008). This can prove to be detrimental in the classroom as any preconceived ideas or conclusions about a certain group of people can significantly impact the way teachers see, teach, and treat their students, which puts the possibility

of a positive relationship at a disadvantage. To promote academic success in Black students with white teachers, teachers, according to Gershenson and Papageorge (2018) and Douglas et al. (2008) are recommended to ensure that they are holding Black students to the same academic standards as their white counterparts. Holding Black students to different academic expectations can hinder their academic growth and development. White teachers that teach Black students are encouraged to understand their own personal thoughts and ideas on race and biases because any negative biases and assumptions can have negative implications on their ability to meet the needs of their Black students. These same teachers should work to push Black students towards high academic achievement. Often because of a teacher's perception or ideologies regarding the Black students' capacity to learn, Black students are not pushed to reach their full academic potential. Lastly, it is suggested that White teachers of Black students not make judgements of students primarily based on their appearance. Typically, when Black students are judged on their appearance, they are not given the same chances to succeed as their White peers.

White Gaze

George Yancy (2013) found white gaze to be a concept that is not only historical, but also global with deep roots in the creation of America. He shares that Black bodies continue to be seen as simply that, Black, and are subjected to the negative stereotypes that are connected to those Black bodies. As a result, those Black bodies are forced to proceed through society in ways that make white people feel at ease. White gaze can be described as having to look, talk, and behave according to how white people look, talk, and behave, which is essentially whiteness manifested (Greco, 2021). In

education, white gaze looks like creating curriculum and epistemologies that assume a “white audience” (Sions & Wolfgang, 2021, p. 90). Sions and Wolfgang (2021) explain that white gaze sustains “white supremacy and is damaging to all students or learners but have specific and lasting negative impact on BIPOC students” (p. 90). In other words, in education, white gaze has the potential to continue the practice of making students of color feel invisible and measures everything acceptable by the experiences of white people, thereby upholding those long-instituted structures that benefit only those students that are white.

Manifestations of Whiteness in Pre- K-12 Schools

White Saviorism

In the classroom, whiteness can look like white teachers having a “white savior” attitude. This “white savior” attitude can lead some white teachers of black students to believe that if they could only change the lives of their students that they would feel successful. The problem with this line of thinking is that the teacher then consciously or subconsciously believes that there are good lives and bad lives and that the students primarily have those bad lives in desperate need of change (Waite, 2018). Whiteness is displayed in the classroom through use of certain curriculum that retains and focuses on and does not question the norm or majorities perspective while ignoring or downplaying the perspectives of marginalized groups. Lastly, another example of whiteness in the classroom is mono-lingual white teachers believing and quickly forcing non-English speaking students to hurry and learn English because it is problematic for those teachers to teach ELL, or English Language Learners who are not fluent in English (Pearce, 2012).

In her experience in teaching at Prescott Elementary School, a predominately African American student populated school, Picower (2014) grappled with her whiteness and the whiteness of other white teachers. In an article about her experiences (Brown, 2013), Picower (2014) says she was able to “identify and reflect” (p. 118) on her own whiteness and was afforded an opportunity to “join people of color and other exploited groups to change racist systems” (p. 188). Although she and some of the other veteran white teachers realized that their time at Prescott Elementary allowed them to reflect upon their own racial identities and build strong relationships with others that did not look like them, Picower (2014) and Sondel et al. (2019) argue that many of the newer white teachers had not had prior opportunities to reflect on their racial identities.

Whiteness as the Norm

Picower (2014) shared that when Gloria Ladson-Billings reflected on her own white pre-service teachers she found that the average white teacher had no idea what it felt like to be a “numerical or political minority in the classroom” (p. 118) and concluded that because whiteness was so prevalent that white teacher experiences were accepted as normal. Ladson-Billings did not place the oneness on the teachers per say but on the education that they received.

When it came to whiteness, Picower (2014) shared that most new white teachers saw whiteness as “the absence of race, or only recognize it in opposition” (p. 118) which makes them uncomfortable when issues of race arise. She also shared that when new teachers have only grown up and lived in spaces that are mainly white, they see themselves as being color-blind, not realizing that this color-blindness can keep them from seeing the rich cultures that students bring with them into the classroom and does

not allow them the opportunity to see the children of color for who they truly are. When this is the case white teachers are limited in “educational strategies that they can draw upon to teach” (p. 118) their students. Picower (2014) and McGrady and Reynolds (2012) found it eye-opening how differently the Black students behaved in new white teachers’ classrooms compared to how they behaved in the classrooms led by Black teachers. She stated that “there was something about the structure and relationships between the new teachers and their students [that] reinforced the worst stereotypes in both groups” (Picower, 2014, p. 119). Unfortunately, whiteness and the willingness to see culture as an issue ultimately led to some white teachers leaving Prescott Elementary.

Committing to Building Authentic Relationships

Culture and relationships are very important when working with and interacting with students of color and success with them, according to Picower (2014), “requires a commitment to the cause of social justice and a true desire to change the inequities that exist within the current structure of education” (p. 119). Matias (2016) sums it up nicely by stating that a commitment to social justice, exposing white teachers to people of color, and multicultural theories will not be enough to end whiteness in education. She ascertains that educators need to “self-invest in an antiracist education system, interrogations of how whiteness mutates, survives, and re-fashions itself” (Matias, 2016, p. 65), even if it means that they have to participate in discussions that make them uncomfortable.

A framework related to building authentic relationships with students of color that is centered around social justice is the theory of radical care. Rivera-McCutchen (2021)

writes that radical care is “informed by the historical and systemic legacy of racism in urban education” (p. 263). Educators that practice radical care in schools are explicitly concentrated on creating learning environments that are equitable with an urgent social justice focus for both the students and the community (Rivera-McCutchen, 2021). When educators lead with radical care, it increases their ability to create and maintain authentic relationships with their students of color that lead to positive experiences in school and increased possibilities of school success.

CHAPTER IV: THE INITIATIVE

The goal of the initiative is to build authentic relationships between Black students and predominately white teachers at GHS. To achieve this goal, the team will work to find out what Black students need from more of their white teachers in order to increase their attendance and participation in class. We also want to find out from those teachers that have successful relationships with Black students, what they did or are doing to forge these strong relationships that lead to high attendance and participation in their classes. To authentically capture the lived experiences of our students, I designed a qualitative study that included interviews with Black high school students at GHS. The goal of these interviews was to examine the lived experiences and perceptions Black students at Green High School have of their relationships with their white teachers. The findings from the study helped determine what our predominately white teachers needed to build positive relationships with their Black students. It is the hope that once these relationships are formed, they will lead to an improvement in Black students' attendance and participation or engagement in their classrooms.

While previous research establishes the benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship (Gelbach et al., 2012; Mason et al., 2017) this study first examined the possible mitigating factors that lead to the poor or a lack of positive teacher-student relationships. Moreover, in collaboration with my research team, we talked with students to hear their lived experiences with white teachers while attending GHS that have led to a lack of attendance and participation in class.

More specifically, we used information gathered from the students after implementation of the phenomenological activities explained above to determine possible changes in the patterns of students' lived experiences with their white high school teachers. The purpose was not only to determine possible changes in patterns in the students' lived experiences, but to determine how those experiences and nuances have impacted the teacher-student relationship and the outcomes from such relationships.

90-Day Cycle of Inquiry

In a 90-day cycle of inquiry, a sampling of Black students were asked to participate in interviews that worked (1) to conceptualize the student's view on the teacher-student relationship, (2) to understand their perception on their lived experiences as Black high school students in their urban high school with mostly white teachers, and (3) become cognizant of their ideas on what they need as a Black student from their white teachers to improve the relationship between them and their teachers as well as increase their attendance and participation in class. A sampling of teachers, that were recognized in the student interviews as having strong relationships with Black students, were interviewed as well to find out what they do to build strong relationships with their Black students. Positive relationships between teachers and students are integral to a healthy and effective learning environment (Roffey, 2012). The information gleaned from interviews with both students and teachers was compiled into themes and a list of strategies from both teacher and student perspectives was created. In the future, it is my hope that the compiled strategies will be used to provide professional

development to staff members on how to build positive relationships with Black students.

Moving Forward

As a result of this study, I will have strategies for my school that provide staff with what Black students need from them to improve the teacher-student relationship that leads to an increase in attendance and participation in class. The information yielded by this study will be helpful specifically to white educators who want to build strong relationships with Black students and who want to find ways to improve Black students' attendance and participation in their classrooms.

CHAPTER V: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A Qualitative Approach

A qualitative phenomenological research approach was applied in this study to assess Black students' lived experiences and perceptions of their relationships with their white teachers.

Qualitative research is the “systematic inquiry into social phenomena in natural settings” (Teherani et al., 2015). This type of research allows the researcher to intimately embed themselves in the context of the study including the setting, the participants, and the data collection (Yates & Leggett, 2016). Qualitative research looks at why events happen, what happened, and the meaning of those events to the participants (Teherani et al., 2015). Qualitative research typically studies human behavior and collects observational data as opposed to quantitative research that collects numerical data.

When determining which type of research to conduct, researchers should reflect on their larger philosophical views or paradigms they embrace (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), social constructivism, interpretivism, and critical research are a few examples of those paradigms. Social constructivism is a paradigm that supposes that people want to understand spaces that they work and live in (Creswell, 2014). It is from their experiences in these spaces that meaning is derived. Researchers that utilize this paradigm are looking for complex meanings and are not looking to categorize those meanings. Social constructivist researchers use broad open-

ended questions with groups of participants. They study the participants interactions and “focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants” (Creswell, 2014, p. 37).

Interpretivism is a paradigm that according to Pham (2018) believes that one phenomenon can have many interpretations. Researchers that use an interpretivist view seek to “gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its complexity in its unique context instead of trying to generalize the base of understanding for the whole population” (Creswell, 2007, Pham, 2018, p. 3). Interpretivist researchers should be careful to avoid their own bias when researching people and events and work to gain an understanding of the different views of those events through the cultures of the participants.

Lastly, the critical research paradigm is one that is rooted in “power, inequality, and social change” (DeCarlo, 2018, p. 7). Critical researchers believe that the goal of research should be to bring about social change. Critical researchers also share an understanding that “systems are biased against others, such as women or marginalized ethnic groups” (DeCarlo, 2018, p. 7). Researchers that use the critical research paradigm should work to expose and change power imbalances (DeCarlo, 2018).

Phenomenological Design

A phenomenological design was the best approach for this study as the goal of this type of research was to “interpret the participants’ feelings, perceptions, and beliefs to clarify the essences of the phenomenon under investigation (Delve & Limpaecher, 2022). This method enveloped my topic because I had previously led staff meetings and professional development meetings that focused on equity, student voice, culturally

responsive practices, improvement suggestions, and school culture student survey results and interestingly, these events were met with teacher absences, teacher disengagement, and physical and verbal outcries of everything essentially being the students' fault.

Phenomenology as defined by Creswell et al. (2007) is the collecting of views from a variety of participants to explain and describe what the participants have in common after experiencing the same phenomenon, in this case, and for this study, the phenomenon of positive teacher-student relationships as perceived by Black students. For the sake of this research study, I operated in the critical qualitative research paradigm and used a phenomenological design with the goal to enact change and improve student-teacher relationships.

Participant Sampling

The participants of this study included Black students at GHS. The aim of the study was to determine the students' lived experiences and perceptions of student-teacher relationships at GHS. Because Maxwell (2013) encourages qualitative researchers to purposefully select participants, for this study, about 24 Black students at GHS were invited to share their experiences and perceptions. The students included Black students who had attended GHS for a minimum of two years and had more than 5 documented referrals for disobedience to authority, were or had failed at least one core subject (i.e., Math, English, or Science), and had missed more than 17 days of school in the last year or had more than 10 documented referrals for cutting class. This criterion was important to this study as Math, English, and Science courses are core courses that students had almost every year of high school. Students might have encountered

the same teachers multiple times throughout their time at GHS and that scenario provided multiple years of opportunity for teachers to have developed relationships with the selected participants. Missing more than 17 days of school made a student vulnerable for being deemed a truant student along with 10 or more referrals for cutting class. These were both prime situations that warranted questions regarding why they were not attending or cut class which yielded answers that helped TG understand what led to students avoiding attending school or certain classes.

TG and I worked with the school's attendance clerk to run the necessary reports needed to identify Black students that met these criteria.

Ethical Consideration

Permission to conduct this research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and from the Superintendent of Sandalwood School District (SSD). Also, parents of students who were 17 years old or younger were asked to provide consent, while students who were 17 years or younger were asked to provide assent to participate in the study. The parents and students were informed that participation in this study was completely voluntary and that they would have the ability to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, students could decline to answer questions without fear of negative consequences. Parents and participants were informed that interviews would take place in a location of the school deemed safe by the student, during the school day and that students would receive a pass allowing them to go to the selected location.

Because I had a dual role as the researcher and assistant principal at GHS, it was imperative that I prioritized the well-being of the students. Previous researchers

had been dually known to their participants (Buchanan & Warwick, 2020) and like those researchers, I ensured that the participants were not mentally, physically, or morally harmed before, during, or after data collection by always treating the participants with respect and care.

To ensure confidentiality, all study records were locked in a filing drawer that only members of TG had access to and stored on my ISU OneDrive which only I had access to. Students' privacy was protected at all times. Any identifying information of the participants was saved and was not made available or shared with anyone who was not a part of TG. Pseudonyms were used in writing reports and findings, and identifiers such as participant's names and faces were not used or shared.

No final remuneration was be given to participants, but to ensure reciprocity, they received an article of school spirit wear as a result of their participation.

Data Collection Procedures

There are several ways of collecting data for when conducting qualitative research, however interviewing is the most common (Jamshed, 2014). Interviews allow researchers an opportunity to ask questions of participants that allow them to find out their views at a deeper level than other methods (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Interviews are seen as being a more natural and interactive approach to collecting data where interviewers can press participants for clear answers (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

Research has determined that there are four types of interviews: structured, open-ended (unstructured), semi-structured, and focus group interviewing (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Structured interviews use a set list of questions in a predetermined order and participants typically answer either yes or no in response to those questions, similar to a

job interview (Stuckey, 2013). In open-ended or unstructured interviews, the interviewer and participants have more freedom and flexibility. This type of interview allows the interviewer to follow up with questions from the participant's responses and for the participant to elaborate (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The third type of interview is the semi-structured interview. This type of interview allows the interviewer to have an outline of relevant areas to be covered, however it is the participant's responses that directs the interview. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to probe the participant as needed (Stuckey, 2013; Alshenqeeti, 2014). The fourth type of interview is focus group interviewing. This type of interviewing uses a sampling of individuals that are focused on a certain topic. Focus group interviewing requires "skillful chairing" (Alshenqeeti, 2014, p. 40) on the part of the interviewer as well as paying attention to the size of the group and the room layout of the space where the interview is taking place. This type of interviewing can be quite time-consuming (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The interview type that was used for the purpose of this study was the semi-structured interview.

Description of Research Protocol

To learn about their experiences and perceptions, a semi-structured protocol was designed and used to interview the GHS Black students who were purposefully selected for this study. The protocol included a scripted set of items that were asked of all students as well as probes that encouraged an in-depth conversation with each student. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed for students' responses to be captured as well as probed for more information related to their experiences and perceptions (Glesne, 2016). Semi-structured interview questions according to Kallio et al (2016) have been shown to be flexible and versatile in nature and allows for reciprocity

between the study participant and the researcher. In addition, such questions allow participants to express their individual thoughts and views.

The TG members checked the protocol for content validity to ensure that the questions assessed student experiences and perceptions of student-teacher relationships. When checking the protocol for content validity, each member of TG individually reviewed each question on the protocol and determined if they believed the questions were relevant to the topic at hand and were appropriate for use on the protocol.

The students were asked 15 semi-structured questions (see Appendix A). I individually interviewed two students a week for 12 weeks during the fall semester of 2022. I interviewed students at the beginning of the week in the school location selected by the student participants, and transcribed and coded the recorded interviews afterwards.

During the interviews, participants were asked questions regarding teachers that they felt they had an authentic relationship with, teachers whose classrooms they regularly attended, to find out what made them want to attend their classes. This information led to interviews with those teachers that the participants identified to determine how they built quality relationships with their Black students. Those interviews were followed up with classroom observations that crystallized the data.

Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic Coding

The data collection method used in this study resulted in a large amount of qualitative data that needed to be transcribed and analyzed. A major principle of

qualitative research is that data collection and data analysis should occur simultaneously (Sage Publications, n.d.). Sage Publications (n.d) explains that if data collections and data analysis do not occur simultaneously, that “it is not only “overwhelming” but also jeopardizes the potential for more useful data and valuable findings” (p.19). Once the two weekly interviews had occurred, I will immediately began to transcribe and analyze the data, taking notes and creating a system by which I began coding the data and then categorized common themes that appeared.

According to Miles et al. (2014), codes are defined as “labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 5). Codes are typically used to place like data chunks into categories which allows a researcher to analyze the data more in-depth and then draw conclusions about those data chunks (Miles et al, 2014).

Saldaña (2010) describes a type of coding, In Vivo, that has been shown to be useful in ethnographies involving children and adolescents. This type of coding allows researchers to take these typically marginalized voices and code their words in such a way that “deepens an adult’s understanding of their cultures and worldviews” (p. 74). In Vivo coding calls for the interviewer to assign an In Vivo code to every line of the interview, to words or phrases that are vocally emphasized by the participant or that stand out (Saldaña, 2010). To code the data, I began by creating titles for those using the students’ own words. For instance, when students mentioned “race” in their responses, I sorted through the data for those topics under the title “race”. Categorizing common themes under titles can help in managing and sorting the information gleaned

from the interviews. For the sake of my research study, I used thematic and In Vivo coding.

According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), thematic analysis is defined as the “process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data” (p. 3352). Because thematic analysis is considered a method, it is not bound to any “particular epistemological or theoretical perspective” (p. 3352), which provides flexibility to the researcher. There are two types of thematic analysis strategies that researchers can choose from: semantic and latent. Semantic themes simply focus on the explicit data they receive. Semantic themes are “not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written” (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3353). However, latent themes “looks beyond what has been said” (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3353) and looks for possible concepts or hidden ideas. In this particular research project, I utilized semantic thematic analysis.

Validity, Credibility, and Trustworthiness

Ensuring Validity and Credibility

It is of utmost importance that qualitative researchers work to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of their studies. Cypress (2020) defines validity as “the state of being well grounded or justifiable, relevant, meaningful, logical, confirming” (p. 7) and although highly debated, it is found to be appropriate to use in a qualitative research study. However, valid studies “should demonstrate what actually exists and is accurate, and a valid instrument or measure should actually measure what it is supposed to measure” (Cypress, 2020, p. 7).

Noble and Smith (2015) share that there are several strategies that qualitative researchers can use to ensure that their findings are valid. Those strategies shared by Noble and Smith (2015) that I used to ensure the validity and credibility of my qualitative study included accounting for personal biases, keeping meticulous records “ensuring interpretations of data were consistent and transparent” (p. 4), sought commonalities and differences in data to ensure that participants’ varying perspectives were represented, and member-checked or asked participants to review and comment on the transcripts or summaries and determine if I had appropriately reflected their thoughts on what was being investigated.

Accounting for personal biases is something that researchers need be aware of when conducting qualitative research. Because the researcher is integral to the process and the finalized study, it is impossible to completely remove the researcher from the process, thus remains a possibility of bias creeping in. However, according to Galdas (2017), researchers can account for personal biases by critically examining “their own role, potential bias and influence during formulation of the research questions, data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location” (p.3).

Keeping meticulous records ensures that your data analysis is reliable (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Qualitative researchers can ensure the validity and reliability of their findings by “demonstrating a clear decision trail and ensuring interpretations of data are consistent and transparent” (Noble & Smith, 2015, p. 4).

Seeking commonalities and differences in data is another way that researchers can ensure that their data is valid. Researchers can ask another researcher to code the same transcript and then the two researchers compare the codes which may lead to

revisions to the coding. This allows for clarification and confirmation of the findings (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, as described by Cypress (2017), “refers to quality, authenticity, and truthfulness of findings in qualitative research” (p. 8). Furthermore, Cypress (2017) explains that qualitative researchers must establish four things to ensure that the study is trustworthy. Those four things include credibility which can be achieved by triangulating the data, transferable, meaning the study’s findings can be applied to other circumstances, contexts, and situations, confirmable, meaning that the study’s findings are “based on participants’ responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher” (p.2), and lastly dependability, which means if the study was repeated by other researchers that the findings would be similar. To ensure trustworthiness in this study, I triangulated the data, I ensured that the findings of the study could be transferred to other situations, ensured that the findings were based on the responses of all participants, and that the findings were dependable.

Researcher Positionality

As a young girl, I can remember being in school and wondering why so many of the Black students were always in trouble, sent to the office, or sent to detention, yet the white students never seemed to get into much trouble. Those of us Black students that were quiet and stayed to ourselves were often overlooked or ignored but never faced the same fate as those that were a bit more boisterous. I remember Black athletes being praised and lauded until their seasons ended and then they were right back to being in trouble like their other black peers and referred to as loud and disrespectful. In

high school, several white guys were caught drunk after a game and they received nothing but a “good talking to”, but the young Black men that were with them were suspended from school. I did not have the words at the time to define what I knew was wrong, so I continued to keep my head down and follow the rules.

As a mother of Black sons, I named and raised my boys to basically “fly under the radar”. When I was married, my husband and I had so many discussions on what to name our sons. I was adamant that their names not readily identify them as Black so that they would at least have a chance of getting interviews and considerations as no one would know that they were Black until they met them. Looking back at those conversations, I feel so much sadness and at times anger because my Black experiences led me to somewhat hide the Blackness and the pride that can come with that, a secret. As I have matured in age and in my career, I have endured and witnessed so much bias and stereotypes, especially from those in the education field. I have been told that I sound white on the phone at work. I have parents that were greeted by myself and my over 60, white secretary only for them to believe that she was the principal, and I the secretary. I never tire of the shocked looks on their faces when they are corrected and the stammering conversations that take place afterwards. I have witnessed those who are in positions to hire look at applications and toss them to the side simply because their name “sounded Black” and I could not help but feel overwhelming sadness that they would potentially miss out on so many opportunities and chances simply because of the ethnicity to which others tied their name. Now I have also seen where the ethnic sounding applicants were selected to interview to meet established quotas. Still not ok. However, I must admit that I found myself thinking the

same thing when a new superintendent and her cabinet were leading our district and my school was assigned to a lady named Revonda Johnson. No one had met her, but everyone just knew that she was Black. This news was exciting to others, including me, because never before had there been a person of color that supervised principals. We were quite surprised to find that she was not Black, but a very nice white lady from North Carolina. Wow, was I no better than the people that I had come to not care for? Those that would believe that one's name was synonymous with their race and ethnicity? That was certainly a wakeup call.

Being a single, Black, educated mother of four Black sons has made addressing bias, both implicit and explicit, a mission of mine. I have seen first-hand teachers that have been afraid of Black students because they were taller than them and louder than they were comfortable with. I have seen teachers be understanding with white students and then escalate situations with Black students and demand that they be removed from class. I have experienced teachers that verbalized that our students' parents did not care about their children because they did not show up to parent teacher conferences. Although I have been able to release teachers who's toxic thinking was hurting the Black and Brown students that they taught, I have always felt that something more needed to be done, not just to release them and put a band aid on the situation, but something that could be transformative and not only help the students but help those that made a choice to educate all students.

I have been working for years with my previous school staff on understanding poverty, how to see students in a positive light, and now working to help them become aware of and work on their implicit and explicit biases that are causing breakdowns in

relationships and low expectations for their students. In a previous class, I chose to read *For White Folks That Teach in the Hood....and the Rest of Ya'll Too* by Christopher Emdin and truly realized that this was a problem that was even bigger than I imagined, a problem that must be solved. I am ready to work towards finding solutions that truly work so that students of color have a fighting chance and their teachers have the understanding and tools they need to ensure that ALL their students are seen, heard, understood, accepted, and loved.... simply for being them.

There has been a recent surge in research and discussion around the topic of implicit and explicit bias as it relates to education. I know that there is much to learn about the subject, but I am hopeful that by better understanding the research and my own biases it will positively impact my role as an administrator and a researcher.

As a researcher, I am tasked with the responsibility to suspend judgement and bias and to ensure that I am not utilizing this study to confirm my hypotheses and beliefs around teacher-student relationships and the impact they have on Black students academically and behaviorally. As a parent, I have to be guarded against my wanting to protect all students as I do my own children and simply continue to be mindful that the research that I am doing can inform policies and practices that can support all children. As a researcher I must be mindful that my role in this study during interviews and the data collection process is to listen and gather evidence and not make judgements or claims against anyone involved.

Summary

This chapter has outlined a detailed description of the method that I used in this study. The detailed method was extremely helpful in gaining an understanding of Black

students' lived experiences while attending GHS as well as understanding what Black students needed from their white teachers to increase attendance and participation in class.

In the upcoming chapters, I discussed the implementation phase of the initiative as well as provided an analysis of the data collected. Upcoming chapters also described themes that were found as well as implications and recommendations for a new cycle of inquiry.

CHAPTER VI: FINDINGS

Implementing the Intervention

Prior to implementing the protocol, members of TG met to work on the interview protocol to ensure it had content validity. Each member of TG individually reviewed each question on the protocol. As a result of the individual reviews, the members of TG unanimously agreed that they believed each question was relevant to the topic at hand and were appropriate for use on the protocol.

Twenty-two Black students at GHS who were between the ages of 15-17 and had attended GHS for a minimum of two years, were purposefully selected to participate in an interview to determine their lived experiences and perceptions of student-teacher relationships at GHS. One of the questions that was included in the protocol asked the interviewees to talk about a GHS teacher that has a good relationship with them. Collectively, the students picked five teachers. Subsequently, all five teachers mentioned by the student agreed to be interviewed. Teacher interviews were conducted with an eye towards understanding the teachers' perspectives on how they approach building relationships with Black students at GHS. By conducting interviews with the teachers, I set out to determine distinct strategies they employ when building relationships with Black students.

Over the course of 12 weeks, all 22 parents provided consent for the interviews and the students provided assent. Each of the teacher and student interviews took place during school in a location selected by each participant. All teacher interviews took place during the day at a time that worked best for their schedules.

I utilized a semi-structured interview technique with the student participants. Each interview lasted an average of 20 minutes. The interview protocol included 17 questions (see Appendix A) and asked the students to speak relative to teachers that they felt they had an authentic relationship with or teachers whose classes they regularly attend. This was done to find out what makes the students want to attend those teachers' classes. The interview questions also focused on gathering information concerning the teachers that they felt they did not have a good relationship with and how such relationships have had an impact on their attendance and academic performance in those classes. The student participants were invited to suggest the types of white teachers- to Black students' relationships that might lead to stronger, more authentic relationships.

Interviews with teacher participants were also semi-structured (see Appendix B for interview protocol). Each interview lasted an average of 20 minutes as well. The interview protocol included 8 questions about the teachers' thoughts on and observations of the issues between Black students and their white teachers at GHS. The teachers were asked to share their thoughts on what white GHS teachers could do better/differently to improve their relationships with their Black students. All interviews were video recorded and transcribed initially via MS Teams with the permission of the students and teachers.

All the interviews were transcribed. The transcripts were printed and corrected for errors as I watched each video. I presented the uninterpreted student and teacher transcripts to all TG members so we could work on coding them together and identify and discuss possible themes.

Presenting The Findings

To recap, the goal of this study was to determine what types of relationships Black high school students need from their white teachers that could help improve their attendance and academic success in their classrooms. During the data collection phase, the Black students who participated in the interviews shared their lived experiences at GHS, while the teachers spoke about their experiences building relationships with their Black students. The data and results from the thematic analysis of the teacher and student interviews are presented below .

Throughout the interviews, students shared their classroom experiences, personal stories, and thoughts about what they felt white teachers needed to do or do differently to help Black students want to come to class and feel comfortable engaging with the material as well as their teachers. Overall, students were quite comfortable discussing the topics presented.

Throughout the teacher interviews, teachers shared their thoughts and perceptions on the challenges they have observed or experienced in building relationships with their Black students at GHS as well as what they feel their white peers need to do or need to improve to increase relationships with their students to ensure improved attendance and increased levels of engagement.

First, I present the demographic information of the Black students and the themes identified from their lived experience and teacher relationships. Then, I share the teacher demographics as well as their lived experiences building relationships with Black students and suggestions for this research project. I Some of the pertinent findings are displayed in tables. The information show the interview questions,

participant numbers, corresponding responses to the interview questions, and then followed by themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Students' Perceptions on How Black Students are Treated at GHS

Student Demographic Information

The students I interviewed consisted of eight juniors and 14 seniors ranged in age from 15 years to 17 years old. They comprised six males and 16 females (see Table 2).

Most of the student have attended GHS for all four years of high school I had no difficulty in finding participants as students eagerly shared their excitement with other students who asked to participate. I had to turn some students down due to time constraints and others because they did not meet all the criteria for participation.

Table 2

Student Participant Demographics

Participant	Grade	Age	Gender
Student 1	12	17	M
Student 2	12	17	F
Student 3	11	16	F
Student 4	12	17	F
Student 5	11	16	M
Student 6	11	17	M
Student 7	11	17	F
Student 8	11	16	F

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

Student 9	12	17	F
Student 10	12	17	F
Student 11	12	17	F
Student 12	11	17	F
Student 13	12	17	F
Student 14	12	17	F
Student 15	11	15	F
Student 16	11	15	F
Student 17	12	17	M
Student 18	12	17	M
Student 19	12	17	M
Student 20	12	17	F
Student 21	12	17	F
Student 22	12	17	F

Themes Identified from the Students' Interviews

The student interviews yielded a few major themes, including students' perceptions of how they are treated by their white teachers, their perception of what leads to a poor relationship with white teachers, and what a positive relationship with a white teacher looks like.

Students' Perceptions of How They are Treated by White Teachers

The first theme I identified from the student interviews was their perception of how they feel they have been treated by white teachers while attending GHS. One of the first questions that students were asked was how many times they believed they received positive acknowledgement from teachers from the time they arrived until the time they left school. As displayed in Table 3, most student participants (41%) said they received positive acknowledgements one to three times a day. Positive acknowledgments were described as a wave, a “good morning”, or being asked how their day or night had gone. After answering that question, many of the students commented that they never really realized the level to which they were not acknowledged and mentioned how sad they thought it was. One student stated, “I guess I never really thought about how many staff members speak to me throughout the day. But now that I realize that it’s not that many, it makes me wonder why they don’t when I see the teachers having full-on conversations with the white kids.” For many, while answering the question, they asked if they could include me in their answers noting that I was the most consistent when it came to the positive acknowledgment they received daily. One student stated, “Ms. Andrews, you always speak to me every time you see me, and you always have something nice to say to me and you encourage me to get my work turned in and when things feel hard, you let me know that I can do it!” Those students that reported receiving seven or more positive acknowledgments in a day say that they find themselves seeking out many of the same teachers throughout the day to get those positive acknowledgments. One student shared, “I know which

teachers like me, so if I need someone, I just go to them." Other student participants that are athletes responded that their coaches are typically the ones they seek out throughout the day for positive interactions. One male student shared, "My coach knows me and knows when I need to hear something good. I guess we spend so much time together during practices that he just gets me."

Table 3

Number of Times Students Received Positive Acknowledgments

Number of times students reported receiving positive acknowledgments	Number of students	Percentage of Students
1-3	9	41%
4-6	6	27%
7-9	5	23%
10 or more	2	9%

When asked to think about a teacher whom they had a poor relationship with and to tell talk about that relationship, the responses were specific and evoked visible emotions of sadness from the student participants (see Table 4). Student participants shared that teachers that they had poor relationships with tend to be sarcastic when talking with them.

Table 4

Black Students' Perceptions of Poor Teacher Relationships

Interview Question	Participant	Responses
Think of a teacher that you do not or did not have a very good relationship with. Tell me about them and your relationship with them.	Student 2, 6	"She is very sarcastic."
	Student 5	"When I ask a question, she makes me feel dumb for asking the question."
	Student 6	"She makes you feel like a terrible person for not doing something like volunteering."
	Student 8	"He doesn't really care too much about having a relationship with you."
	Student 9, 13, 19, 21	"When you give your opinion about a controversial topic in history class, he always tells you that you are wrong."
	Student 10, 11, 17, 22	"He is very demeaning towards Black students, and we get ignored a lot."

Those teachers used sarcastic words and tones that were condescending and at times embarrassing for Black students, especially when it takes place in front of their peers. Students shared how they were so embarrassed that they wanted to walk out of class

and in some instances cry. One student participant discussed being made to feel dumb when asking questions in one teacher's class. She shared that the teacher would make sure that the whole class knew she had a question and then would proceed to tell her that she should already know the answer to the question but noticed that she never responded in the same manner to her white peers that would ask the same or similar questions. This student stated, "It was so embarrassing! Every time I had a question, the teacher would stop and tell the class to listen because I had another question, and then she would sigh loudly and kind of roll her eyes. She never did this to the white kids in the class, she would just answer their question." Another student shared a classroom experience with a teacher whom she does not have a good relationship with where the teacher made Black students feel like terrible people for not signing up to volunteer. She shared, "The teacher was talking to us about volunteering for something on the weekend. The Black students started talking about how they didn't have rides, had to work, or just didn't want to volunteer for that event, while most of the white students signed up. The teacher looked over the list and spent the next 15 minutes demeaning us, and she kept looking at the Black kids, about how we should be ashamed for not signing up." The student stated that something like volunteering was a personal choice and that it was completely inappropriate for her to demean kids for not wanting to do it. One student participant shared that he felt one of his male teachers did not care too much about having a relationship with the Black students. He shared, "I think the only thing this teacher knows about me is my name. It is so uncomfortable in his class, because he barely addresses the Black kids, but he will sit and talk to the white students about their parents, sports that the white students are in, and the only thing he

usually says to the Black students is where their homework was or to tell them to stop talking.” This student stated that the teacher only talks to him about the content and nothing else. The teacher has never attempted to know anything about him and most students outside of the fact that they are students in his class during that hour.

Interactions between the teacher and students are pretty cut and dry and always about the content or instruction. This student does not feel comfortable asking questions or asking for help because there is no relationship between the two of them. Several student participants made mention of their history teacher and how when they are discussing controversial topics, such as slavery and topics involving race, that he will tell the Black students that they are wrong in their thinking and in their response to questions asked. One student stated, “How is he going to tell me that I am wrong about something that my people went through? He doesn’t know what my family has been through, but he is going to tell me that how I feel and think about it is wrong!” This infuriates the students as they shared that they did not understand how a white person could tell a Black person that their views and opinions were wrong when it came to issues that were sometimes identical to what they and their families lived every day. These students had previously requested to be removed from this class altogether or requested that they be placed with another teacher. None of their requests were granted. Several other student participants divulged that they have a teacher that is very demeaning towards Black students and that they get ignored a lot. They shared things like “we raise our hands all the time and he rarely calls on the Black students. We know the answers too!” They shared instances where the teacher said things like they might want to drop their class because they may not have the knowledge base to

be successful in his class. One student shared that “the teacher knew I had come from the high school that they think is bad and the kids are dumb, and he told me that I might want to go to see my counselor about dropping his class because there was no way I could pass his class because I came from that other high school. I felt so embarrassed because this was said in front of the whole class. I’m not dumb! I’m so tired of teachers thinking that we are not smart kids!” The student participants also shared that this teacher consistently mispronounces their names, never correcting himself when the student correct him, and he also asks Black students about “the hood”. One student noted, “Ms. Andrews, why do white people always think that all Black kids are from the hood? What our parents can’t have good jobs and live in neighborhoods around here? I get so sick of that, thinking that all Black people grow up and live in the same places.” They also share their frustration in rarely being called on in class when they follow directives to raise their hands to answer questions. Some of these student participants shared that they have altogether stopped trying to answer questions in class because they already knew they would not be called on. One student shared, “I just stop raising my hands altogether, because I know she isn’t going to call on me.”

Students’ Perceptions on What Leads to Poor Relationships

Student participants were asked what they felt led to poor relationships with their white teachers. Most of them took quite a bit of think time before answering. As illustrated in Table 5, their responses were varied and specific.

Table 5*Students' Perceptions of What Leads to Poor Relationships*

Interview Question	Participant	Responses
What are some of the reasons for the poor relationships between black students and their white teachers?	1, 5, 17, 23	"They can't really connect to how we feel about certain things."
	1, 3, 6, 19, 20	"They fear us"
	4, 7, 8, 12, 18	"Cultural differences"
	10	"Black students do not feel comfortable or feel they have the same relationship with white teachers that they do with Black teachers."
	17, 18, 22	"Teachers don't think it's their job to care about the students."
	18, 19, 21	"Teachers use inappropriate words around us."
	19, 22	"Teachers showing that they don't like certain students."
	21, 22	"Teachers do not give Black students the same understanding and chances that they give the white students."

Several student participants shared that some of their white teachers cannot connect to how their Black students feel about certain things. When asked to explain their thinking, one student participant shared that some teachers do not stop to think about or understand that Black students, in this case, have very strong feelings about topics such as respect, relational connections, and their culture. Student participants share that there tends to be issues when they voice their opinions or feelings when they feel that they are not being respected. They spoke of specific instances where situations have escalated because of the disrespectful tone in which the teacher spoke to them, and they refused to respond, or they responded in kind in a disrespectful manner and as a result the teacher started yelling at them. However, in the end, the students shared that it was the Black student that was reprimanded and disciplined. They continue to share that when asked about the altercation, that no one seemed to care that the Black student was disrespected, only that the Black student disrespected the white teacher.

Fear of Black students was another reason student participants gave that they perceived led to poor relationships with some white teachers. Some student participants shared that some white teachers were quick to call for security when Black students raised their voices or stood up to walk out, but said they observed non-Black students react in the same manner and the teacher did not respond the same way. When Black student participants were spoken to about discipline referrals, their assistant principals would read the referrals and some of the referrals would contain phrases such as “I was fearful that...”, “...spoke to me in a way that made me afraid that she was going to...”, and “he got up and I thought he was going to hit me, so I called for security to have him removed”. Upon hearing those words, Black students shared that they were very upset

because they would never put their hands on a teacher and that when they stood up, it was to leave the situation and not to approach the teacher. Some shared they did not understand the differences in the treatment of them compared to their white peers that do the same things. They shared that after hearing the words in the referrals and the teachers' reactions to them, they made it a point to not say anything or participate in class. They did not want to give the teacher another opportunity to make them look like a dangerous kid or have security called on them.

Cultural differences were the next thing that student participants perceived led to the poor relationships between some white teachers and their Black students. Student participants made mention of teachers trying to say that the way they speak is wrong or constantly correcting their grammar. They mentioned how some white teachers thought students that wore certain colors or do-rags were in gangs, and that white teachers did not understand the moods of Black students who would not want to take their hats off at times or remove their hoods, concluding that the students were merely being defiant. What other students and the Black staff in the building understood was that at times a male Black student's haircut was "messed up" (had patches in it from trying to cut it themselves because they could not afford to go the barbershop) or a Black female student's hair "wasn't done" (sometimes their hair wasn't completely braided or their hair got wet and was "nappy") and therefore was trying to escape laughing and ridicule from their peers by "hiding" under the hat or hood. Student participants shared that they felt white teachers did not understand the importance appearance is in their culture and how some treated others for things such as issues with their hair.

Several student participants mentioned that they felt another reason some white teachers have poor relationships with Black students is because Black students feel more comfortable going to Black teachers and staff than going to their white teachers. Student participants were clear that they choose to seek out the Black teachers and staff, including this researcher. Because of aforementioned situations and events, Black students do not seek out most of their white teachers when they need someone to talk to or have a need. When asked why, student participants shared that when you are a Black student and you go to talk to a Black teacher or staff member, there are some things that do not need to be explained, the Black teacher or staff just knows because they can relate to the homelife and or experiences of the Black student. Student participants shared that they feel that Black teachers and staff are really interested in helping Black students solve problems and are patient compared to trying to talk to a white teacher who appears to be bothered by you asking them a question or they pass you off to someone else, sometimes not even attempting to help.

Student participants shared that teachers not thinking that it is their job to care about them was another perceived reason for poor relationships between Black students and their white teachers. Some student participants shared that they have heard some teachers say that it is not their job to care about them and that their job is to just teach. Upon hearing that many student participants shared that that makes them not even want to engage with those teachers. They had difficulty understanding how any teacher could teach kids that they did not care about.

The next perceived reason that student participants shared was teachers using inappropriate words around them. Student participants shared detailed incidents of

white teachers saying the n-word in front of them, which in turn caused not only black students but other non-black students to become infuriated. One student participant also shared incidents where white teachers kept referring to Black students as “you people” which is an insult signifying that Black are beneath them (white people). White teachers showing that they do not like certain students was another perceived reason why there are poor relationships between white teachers and Black students. The examples given were teachers that roll their eyes anytime a Black student has a question, teachers answering Black students in a tone that shows that they are bothered by their questions, and a couple of student participants mentioned overhearing teachers talking to one another and stating that they didn’t like certain Black students (stated their names).

Lastly, student participants spoke of how there is sometimes a difference in the understanding of Black students by white teachers as well as a difference in the number of chances Black students are given compared to their white peers. They shared examples of Black students being cut off by a white teacher while trying to explain themselves or explain what happened and being told by the teacher that he/she did not want to hear what they were saying. But Black students have seen countless examples of white teachers not doing the same to white students in the same scenario. They watch the teacher listen and give the white students the benefit of the doubt. Also, it has been observed that when a Black student is talking, they may get one warning to stop and then they are either written up or sent out of the classroom, while white students talking in the same class are given a number of chances to stop talking or are never told to stop.

Students' Views on Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Several student participants shared what they thought positive teacher student relationships looked like teachers checking on them every day. They explained that so often they would walk into the classroom and not be greeted by the teacher or asked how they were doing. One student participant shared one instance when he was going through a dark time personally and was feeling quite down and alone and was having thoughts of hurting himself. He said that all he really wanted to do was feel seen and feel that someone cared. He wanted so bad for that teacher to ask him how he was doing, but she did not. Other students shared just how impersonal and cold it felt for years never having teachers check in on them about things that had nothing to do with school or homework. They discuss how not all of them have parents that they feel they can go to and talk about some of the things that they are dealing with in their lives, and they wished that their teachers would have just asked the simple question, "how are you doing?" They say because there were not adults that were around that checked in with them they had to talk with their peers and they sometimes ended up making very bad decisions because they did not feel comfortable initiating conversations like that with their teachers because they felt that the teachers only cared about them as students in their math or English class, not students that are human and may need an adult to just open the door to a conversation.

Most student participants mentioned that communication was a major characteristic of positive teacher and student relationships (see Table 6).

Table 6*Students' Perceptions on What Good Teachers Relationships Look Like*

Interview Question	Participant	Responses
What do you think are good characteristics of a positive teacher student relationship?	Student 1,5,9,17,20	"Check on them every day."
	Student 1,2,5,6,8,12,14,17, 21,22	"Communication for sure!"
	Student 4, 7, 9	"Teachers and students should try to understand one another."
	Student 5, 6, 10,14,18,21	"Teachers should treat students like they are people too!"
	Student 7,11,15,19	"Teachers and students should be able to trust each other."
	Student 9,11,13,14,16,18,20,21,22	"Teachers should respect their students."

Student participants acknowledge that students share in the responsibility of communicating with their teachers but felt strongly that teachers needed to make students feel comfortable talking to them. Some of them shared that they notice that

white teachers seem to never have a problem talking to their white peers, often talking to their peers about their families and asking them about certain games or events that they had attended. But they notice the stark difference in the conversations, if any, that are held with Black students. They share that Black students are not spoken to or if they are spoken to it is not often in the friendly way that they spoke to their white peers and the tone in which they spoke to the Black students was in a more direct, unemotional way. Black students were more apt to given directives or asked very direct questions like “Where is your homework?” “Put your paper in the basket over there”, or “It’s about time you made it to class on time”. One student stated that they felt like they were animals in the zoo, always being given commands. Several students mentioned that they would feel much more positively about their teacher if they were spoken to in the same manner that they have observed their white peers being spoken to. They would feel more comfortable having a conversation with their white teachers. They would feel more comfortable even initiating conversations with their teachers and would even feel comfortable asking questions in the class. But seeing that they do not get spoken to in the same manner, most choose to remain silent.

A few of the student participants shared that they just want to be acknowledged by their teachers. They want the teacher to acknowledge that they even exist. Some of them spoke of feeling sad after months and months of a new school year and some of their teachers do not even acknowledge their existence. They say that they walk into class behind or in front of their white peers and some teachers do not say anything to them but will say good morning to a white student and say that student’s name and ask them how they are doing. They say it is equivalent to a slap in the face to not even be

acknowledged by their teachers, but the teachers acknowledge other students right in front of them. They share how feeling invisible makes them not even want to come to those teacher's classroom or makes them want to just walk out of class. Some share the whole experience of a lack of communication makes them feel so sad and many share that they do not understand why their teachers are like that towards them and other Black students. They ask the question, "Aren't teachers supposed to care about all their students?"

Several student participants felt that to have a good relationship, both teachers and students should try to understand one another. They shared that they feel there can sometimes be a disconnect between teachers and students because students do not always feel that teachers understand them and what they go through, especially if they are Black students with a white teacher. They shared that white teachers should take the time to listen to the students to try and get a better understanding of why they may react and respond the way that they do and why they might not be able to make it to school or class. It is not always that they just do not want to be there, it could be that there are really things happening with the student, but if they do not talk to the students or try to understand, they may just think that the student is skipping. On the other hand, student participants said that maybe Black students need to try to understand their white teachers better. Some of them shared that not all white teachers have terrible relationships with their Black students and just maybe other white teachers are trying to understand and build relationships with Black students may not know how to make improvements. One student suggested that white teachers that want to build quality

relationships with Black students may need other white teachers to talk to them or model for them how to build those successful relationships with their Black students.

Another perception shared by student participants was that teachers should treat their Black students like they are people too. They want to be treated with kindness and understanding, just like they see the white students being treated. Several student participants equated how white teachers treated Black students to how commands are given to a dog and that they felt dogs probably got better treatment than them. They shared that their treatment can sometimes be harsh and just full of commands with questions or concern for tone and how what they are saying is being received by the black students. One student participant shared that he thought white teachers that want to do better should sometimes audio record themselves and listen to it to truly hear how they are speaking to their students and then ask themselves if it was ok for someone to speak to someone they love in that manner. They shared several situations that their feelings were so hurt that they went to the counselor to be removed from their class and when it was not possible or the counselor refused to do it and asked the Black student to just “be understanding” of the teacher, they stopped going to the class altogether or refused to participate in class when they were there.

Next, student participants explained that teachers and students should be able to trust one another. Some of them stated that teachers should trust Black students to go to the restroom and come right back to class instead of asking for an adult escort. Others said teachers should trust Black students enough to know that they are not always wrong or at fault. One student participant said that white peers sometimes know that a white teacher does not like particular Black students and so they pick with the

Black students until they get a rise out of them and then when the teacher intervenes they automatically think the Black student was to blame and while the Black students receive the discipline, the white students are never even questioned, it is just assumed that the Black student was at fault. Some student participants also felt that Black students should work towards trusting white teachers more. They stated that Black students should trust that most white teachers want to help them but sometimes it is hard because the Black student has had so many negative interactions with white teachers that they do not trust any of them to look out for them or provide help when needed.

Lastly, student participants shared that teachers should respect their students to have more positive relationships with Black students. They mentioned situations that involved disrespectful tones and body language directed towards them as Black students that does not seem evident in their interactions with their white counterparts. Some student participants spoke of a lack of respect being one of the main reasons for their disinterest in staying at GHS or the top reason for wanting to hurry up and graduate to get away from most of the teachers at GHS. Most of them mentioned that they did not feel respected until I, the researcher, started working at GHS. They shared that I listen to them, am patient with them, and they felt I genuinely wanted them to be successful. They stated that if more teachers in the building would do that, there would not be all of the class cutting and not coming to school because students would want to be around those teachers that made them feel respected, seen, and heard.

Teachers' Perceptions of How Black Students are Treated

Teacher Demographic Information

Throughout the student participants' interviews a total of five GHS teachers were mentioned by students as being white teachers who they currently have or have had that have built effectively positive relationships with Black students at GHS. As seen in Table 7, all the teachers have worked at GHS for more than one year and most of them are women. The teachers stated that they were honored to have been mentioned and were excited about sharing their thoughts and experiences.

Table 7

Teacher Demographics

Participants	Gender	Number of years taught in the district	Is GHS the only school the teacher has taught at in this district	Subject taught
Teacher 1	F	8	No	Math
Teacher 2	M	8	Yes	History/Psychology
Teacher 3	F	9	No	History
Teacher 4	F	2	No	Business/ Broadcasting
Teacher 5	F	15	No	Health

Themes Identified from the Teachers' Interviews

Like the student interviews, the teacher interviews yielded several themes including their relationships with their Black students, how they build relationships with their Black students, the needs of Black students, the impact of poor white teacher-Black student relationships, and the importance of a positive teacher-student relationship.

Teachers' Relationships with Their Black Students

During their individual interviews, teacher participants were asked to describe their relationships with their Black students. Some described their relationships with their Black students as being "positive", "open and honest", while others shared that their relationships with their Black students include being "understanding" towards their students and "flexible" (see Table 8).

Table 8

Types of Relationships Teachers Have with Their Black Students

Interview Question	Participant	Responses
What type of relationship do you feel you have with your Black students?	Teacher 1, 2, 3, 5	"Positive"
	Teacher 1	"Understanding"
	Teacher 3	"I'm Flexible"
	Teacher 4	"Open and honest"

How Teachers Build Relationships with Their Black Students

Teacher participants were asked to share how they build relationships with their Black students (see Table 9). Many of them spoke of being intentional about having conversations with their Black students to find out more about them to get an idea of who they are outside of the classroom. One teacher participant explained that she makes sure that she acknowledges her privilege as “a middle-aged privileged white woman” both to herself and in front of her students. She stated, “I acknowledge my privilege even when it’s uncomfortable to do in front of them.” She shared that she does that to acknowledge that things and situations may, unfortunately, be different for her than it is for her Black students as he works to help them navigate this world.

Table 9

How Teachers Build Relationships with Their Black Students

Interview Question	Participant	Responses
What do you do to build positive relationships with your Black students?	Teacher 1	“I try to see the whole person and not just a student.”
	Teacher 2	“I work hard to get to know them and try to support them.”
	Teacher 3	“I try to be a good listener. I try to get to know them individually at some point, so I have an understanding of what life’s like at home and their interests.”

(Table continues)

(Table continued)

Teacher 4	“I acknowledge my privilege even when it’s uncomfortable to do in front of them.”
Teacher 5	“I make sure I talk to them about more than school. I want to know about them and find any commonalities that we may have. It makes them know that I am interested in knowing who they really are.”

The Needs of Black Students

Teacher participants were asked whether they felt the needs of Black students differed from those of their white peers. All teachers agreed that there were differences to some extent (see Table 10).

Table 10

Teachers’ Perceptions of the Needs of Their Black Students

Interview Question	Participant	Responses
Do you think there is a difference in the needs of Black students compared to white students?	Teacher 1	“Yes, I’ve learned that I need to show my Black students that I see them for who they are and acknowledge that we are different and that I want to understand them and let them know that I am on their side. As a white teacher I need to show some humility.”

(Table continues)

(Table continued)

Teacher 2	<p>“I think sometimes there might be. Being in the society that we’re in, and especially teaching the subject that I do, students learn that there is imbalance of power, and that imbalance has created differences in opportunities and social mobility and other things that create situations in which students do sometimes have different needs.”</p>
Teacher 3	<p>“Compared to the other district high schools that I have worked at, once they trust you, they let you know their needs. They let you in, they ask for help, but they have to trust you first. They don’t want to seem needy and stick out. The trust is harder to get here.”</p>
Teacher 4	<p>“Family dynamics tend to be a little different on average with my Black students versus my white students. And so, I think that makes a big difference as far as support from home, I tend to see more Black students supporting family bills than white students.</p>
Teacher 5	<p>“Definitely! My Black students need more encouragement at times to participate in class and answer questions. It’s like they hold back as if they are not as smart as the other students in the class. They also have a need to feel like they belong. Once they feel that they are respected and that they are made to feel as an important part of the class, they tend to have high attendance and classroom participation.”</p>

Teacher one stated that throughout her teaching career she learned that she needed to show her Black students that she sees them and that it was important for her to let them know that she is their advocate. She also thought that as a white teacher of

Black students that she needed to show humility. Teacher two spoke about the societal issues that we currently face and how there seems to be an imbalance of power and that the imbalance has created differences for black students and has oftentimes created situations in which the needs of Black students differ from those of their white peers. He stated:

I think sometimes there might be. Being in the society that we're in, and especially teaching the subject that I do, students learn that there is imbalance of power, and that imbalance has created differences in opportunities and social mobility and other things that create situations in which students do sometimes have different needs.

Teacher three shared that compared to the other high schools that she worked in this district, Black students seemed to need to trust you before they let you in and honestly share with you, their needs. She spoke about how difficult it can be to gain the trust of her Black students but once you get it, they truly trust you. Black students in her opinion do not want to stick out from their white peers and do not want to come across as needy. Teacher four shared the observed differences in family dynamics in her Black students compared to her white students. Differences include the support coming from home and she sees more Black students having to contribute to the finances in the household compared to their white counterparts. Lastly, teacher 5 shared that she “definitely” thought there were differences in the needs of her Black students and her white students. Those differences included her observations of Black students needing more encouragement to participate in class or answer questions. She stated that it is as if they feel that they are not as smart as the other students. Teacher five stated:

My Black students need more encouragement at times to participate in class and answer questions. It's like they hold back as if they are not as smart as the other students in the class. They also have a need to feel like they belong. Once they feel that they are respected and that they are made to feel as an important part of the class, they tend to have high attendance and classroom participation.

She shared that she is intentional about making sure that she provides encouragement and respect to her Black students and that once they feel encouraged and respected, she sees a big difference in their levels of engagement and participation in class.

The Impact of Poor White-Teacher- Black-Student Relationships

When teacher participants were asked to share their perceptions on the impact that poor white teacher-Black student relationships were having on Black students, all teacher participants shared nothing but negative impacts (see Table 11).

Table 11

Teachers' Views on the Impact Poor Relationships Have on Black Students

Interview Question	Participant	Responses
What impact do you feel these issues (between Black students and their white teachers) are having on Black students' academics, attendance, discipline, and their engagement levels in those classes?	Teacher 1	"...students skipping the class, not wanting to be around the teacher...avoiding the human that's in charge of the room. Students say "I'm not doing that assignment. I'm not doing that" for so and so " I'm not doing that thing for them as a favor to that teacher". Students shut down.
	Teacher 2	"I absolutely believe that it would. It creates a lot of tension."
	Teacher 3	"Those kids will be late. They'll skip. They give up. They drop the class. They act up more. They shut down. They put their heads down on the desk, put headphones on, all that kind of stuff."

(Table continues)

(Table continued)

Teacher 4	“If they don’t respect somebody, they ain’t gonna do nothing, it’s just not gonna happen.”
Teacher 5	“They refuse to do any work. They miss a lot of class. They will walk out of class. They will be disruptive.”

Teacher one stated that she observed students refusing to do work or follow expectations of those teachers that they have a poor relationship with. She stated that students also tend to skip class, not wanting to be near the teacher in charge of that classroom. She shared, “ Students say “I’m not doing that assignment. I’m not doing that” for so and so “ I’m not doing that thing for them as a favor to that teacher”. Students shut down.”

Teacher two shared that he believed that these poor relationships tend to cause a great deal of tension in the classrooms and between the teacher and student. Teacher three shared that in these poor relationship situations that students will skip class and drop the class. She stated that the students tend to act up more in those classrooms, tend to put their heads on their desks or put their headphones on, and ultimately shut down. Teacher four stated that if students did not respect the teacher there was no way they were going to do anything. She said, “it just ain’t gonna happen.” Teacher five shared that students in this situation will walk out of class, miss a lot of class, be disruptive and refuse to do any work.

Teachers' Views on the Importance of Positive Relationships

The final question asked of teacher participants was about their views of the importance of having a positive teacher-student relationship, especially for Black students with white teachers (see Table 12).

Table 12

Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Positive Relationships

Interview Question	Participant	Responses
What more would you like to share about the importance of a positive teacher-student relationship especially as it pertains to Black students.	Teacher 1	"Students can't learn without some sort of positive relationship. I think like I said, especially Black students. No relationship, no trust. If they aren't learning in your room, you have to build that relationship and from that relationship you'll get more out of that students. A lot more engagement, a lot more learning."
	Teacher 2	"It's important. Students might not be super appreciative of what you do. But, how you interact with them on a daily basis and what you are like, they remember the and they feel it. It matters, even if they don't tell you that it matters. I just want them to know the I want the best for them and sometimes they don't always see that in the moment but that's the goal, to help them out."
	Teacher 3	"It's a game changer! I would not want to do this job if I didn't have relationships with kids. I mean it's the reason I am here. The kids come before academics. I love my job so much and I love these kids so much! "

(Table continues)

(Table continued)

Teacher 4 “I think it is just the ultimate at the end of the day! It doesn’t matter if a student can dissect a sentence, but it does matter if they know how to be respectful in public, or they think to themselves before getting angry. I try to tell them as much as I can so that my Black students do not feel like they are already a step behind.”

Teacher 5 “It should be the reason that all of us are here. I don’t know if I could teach effectively if I didn’t have a relationship with my students. I know what it is like to not fit in and feel like I belong, so I intentionally make sure the my students of color feel like they belong in my class.”

Teacher one shared that she felt that Black students tend to find it difficult to learn without some sort of relationship between them and the teacher. She explained that teachers need to be aware of their students and if they are not learning in their classroom, that they need to work on building a relationship with that student in order to get more out of them academically. Teacher two spoke about how having a relationship with your students is important. He shared a story about how you never know the impact of what you do and how you are with your students can have on those students. He said that he recently had a student come back to visit and shared with him that although he never told him while he was a student, he really appreciated how he made him feel and all of his support and that it really helped him as he moved on to college. Teacher two also shared that he wanted his students to know that he wants the best for them and that he knows that everything he does matters to his kids. Teacher three shared that a positive relationship with your students is a “game changer”. She shared

that if she did not have positive relationships with her students that she would not want to do this job, and it is the reason that she came here. She shared that she believes that the kids come before academics and that she loves her kids and her job so much. Teacher four shared that positive relationships are the “ultimate thing” at the end of the day. She shared:

It doesn't matter if a student can dissect a sentence, but it does matter if they know how to be respectful in public, or they think to themselves before getting angry. I try to tell them as much as I can so that my Black students do not feel like they are already a step behind.

Lastly, teacher five shared that positive relationships with students should be one of the reasons why teachers teach. She stated that she did not know if she could do her job without positive relationships with her students. She also shared, “ I know what it is like to not fit in and feel like I belong, so I intentionally make sure that my students of color feel like they belong in my class.”

CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION

Thematical Team Findings: Analyzed

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the disconnect and lack of relationships between Black high school students and their predominately white teachers, examine what some white teachers are doing differently to build positive relationships with Black students, and finally, what do Black students need from white teachers that can lead to improved attendance and engagement in those classes. Many themes emerged from the data analysis process from both students and teachers, and they will be analyzed thematically in this chapter.

Students' Perceptions of How They are Treated

Overall, Black students felt that they were not treated well at all by some of their white teachers. They shared stories of being talked to in ways full of sarcasm and being made to feel dumb for asking questions in class. Largely, students felt demeaned, were made to feel guilty for not doing something such as volunteering on their own time, were told that they were wrong when offering opinions on historical topics that they could relate to and feeling like their teachers do not care about having a relationship with them. Student participants had strong feelings about their treatment by white teachers and said that they found it hard to go to those classrooms every day and while some never tried, other students made attempts to be removed from the class. In an article on everyday antiracism, Carter (2008) explains that ignoring the contributions attempted by Black students can lead to students shutting down and not participating at all, which is like how student participants shared that they responded when they were ignored or told

that their opinions were wrong. Several students spoke about often being ignored in the classroom. They get ignored when they attempt to participate in class and often ignored when they enter their classrooms. Students being made to feel ignored or invisible and marginalizing Black students' contributions in the classroom relates to Yancy (2013) and Sions & Wolfgang's (2021) idea of white gaze. Overall, the student participants' perceptions of how they are and have been treated at GHS are quite negative. Students shared that although they found their treatment to be largely negative, they appreciated having some teachers and staff in the building that they could go to and feel safe and heard. They say that although they find it difficult to deal with this treatment daily, they found comfort in knowing that they could come to a trusted staff member to vent or get guidance.

Students' Perceptions of What Leads to Poor Relationships

Another theme that emerged from student interviews was students' perception of what leads to the poor relationships with their white teachers. Student participants were very explicit in their explanations of what they perceived led to poor relationships with some of their teachers. Four of the twenty-two student participants spoke emphatically about their thoughts that some white teachers cannot connect to how they feel about certain things. They shared instances where white teachers asked them why they were getting so upset during a discussion on Black Lives Matter. One student participant voiced that she was upset because she was amazed that a white teacher was equating the movement to simple looting and rioting when the Black students were trying to help the teacher understand that there was more to the movement than how some chose to react to police brutality. The students feel that in spite of trying to do what teachers ask

them to do, which is participate in class discussions, their passion and their connection to certain topics is squelched when they feel that their thoughts and ideas do not matter or that teachers do not stop to really listen to their point of view. They stated that it harms the relationship between them, and their teachers and it causes them to shut down.

Five out of the twenty-two student participants discussed the idea of teachers fearing them as a reason for their poor relationships. Connecting to my conceptual framework of the idea of critical whiteness (Matias & Grosland, 2016), measuring behaviors of Black students to the behavior expectations of white people can lead to white teachers being fearful of Black student.

Moreover, in the cases of some of the student participants, they overheard conversations where white teachers were explaining to school safety officers that they were afraid that the Black student was going to harm them, and they have been read referrals written by white teachers that stated that the student was a danger to the classroom because they raised their voice or because they put their hands into a fist while trying to calm themselves. Student participants that mentioned this perception shared that it is hard to have a relationship with someone that thinks you are “some kind of animal” or is “scared of you”.

Five of the twenty-two student participants discussed cultural differences as a perceived concept that leads to poor relationships with their teachers. They explained that they felt that some teachers wanted them to behave, think, and perform “the white way”. They thought the teachers did not respect that they were not raised like them with the same opportunities and the same experiences. One student referred to the struggle

as “it’s the white way, or it’s wrong”. This notion of the only right way being the white way also connects to the idea of whiteness. Matias & Grosland (2016) state that whiteness “embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemologies, emotions and behaviors” (p. 66) and the student participants stories are examples of it. According to some of the student participants, some of their teachers have not accepted that the demographics of the students at GHS have changed and is now more diverse than ever. Because the student participants have observed their white teachers praising other white students for how they behave while telling Black students that they should act more like them further shows that the way white students behave is the measure by which all other students, not just Black students, are measured and anything opposite of that is considered wrong.

Three of the twenty-two student participants shared that the perception of white teachers using inappropriate words around them was a reason for the poor relationships between them and their Black students. One student participant became visibly upset when sharing a story about her enriched English class (she was one of two Black students in the class), and they had to read *Of Mice and Men*. She reflects on having to hear her teacher and the other students repeatedly read the word *nigger* aloud and then have the teacher continue to use the word while discussing certain chapters. She remembered feeling like everyone was looking at her and the other Black student seeing how they would react. She did not understand how this was appropriate and why they were still reading books that have offensive words such as that in 2022. She continued to explain that she tried to talk with the teacher about how she felt, but the teacher said it was literature and that she would poll the class to see if they wanted to

cancel the book and if they did not, they would continue reading the book. The student said, "I wanted to burst into tears on the spot, but I would not let her see that she had hurt me." The class voted not to cancel the book and so in response, the student stopped going to class and their relationship has been fractured ever since. This example given by the student participant correlates to my problem of practice that there is an apparent disconnect between some of our Black students and some of their white teachers. This example further correlates to a review of literature that speaks to the racial perspective of some white people that operate from the perspective of oppression and using power over others (Leonardo, 2002). Teachers that use the n-word or other racially offensive words or phrases in their classes, especially with students of color, are quite possibly insensitive to the racially oppressive history of such words and phrases and their impact on people of color. This insensitivity can be equated to embracing the white expressions and experiences (Matias & Grosland, 2016) that can have a negative impact on relationships between Black students and their white teachers, resulting in students not wanting to be in class, not wanting to engage with those teachers, and students not engaging in class.

Students' Perceptions on Positive Relationships

The last theme that emerged from the student interviews was their perceptions on what a good relationship with their white teachers looks like. This portion of the interview evoked a great deal of smiles from the participants. Their moods were upbeat, and they often laughed or giggled while describing their perceptions. Five out of the twenty-two student participants said that a good relationship with their teacher looks like the teacher checking on them every day. In an article on the Ethic of Care,

Sykes & Gachago (2018) discuss Tronto's (2013) work on the ethics of care by explaining that Tronto's definition of the Ethic of Care includes attentiveness and responsiveness. Tronto (2013) defines attentiveness as caring about others' unmet needs and being able to see from others' perspective. Tronto (2013) defines responsiveness as listening to those that you care for which could result in further unmet needs. Sykes & Gachago (2018) argue that within the tenets of the Ethics of Care, there could be conflicts "such as competing needs, power differentials and the potential for abuse in care relationships." When students spoke about teachers checking on them every day, they mentioned that some teachers start the class by checking in on students or they might pull students aside to check in with them. This example shared by student participants connects to Tronto's idea of attentiveness by listening to students.

Student participants also shared that during some of the conversations with their teachers if there was a need that the student had the teacher would work to ensure that need was met to the best of their ability or that the student was given resources or someone more qualified to provide assistance. Student participants shared that they appreciated that their teachers would go above and beyond to help them and by helping them they were able to focus more in class. Linking past research to my analysis, students appreciating their teachers for helping them is an indication that there is a positive relationship present between the students and the teacher, which according to Dennie, et al (2019) could result in students feeling a "sense of emotional security". Six of the twenty student participants shared that they had good relationships with some of their white teachers because the teachers treated them like they were people.

However, students also spoke of how in some classrooms they are simply treated like a robot, “commands, commands, and more commands” is how one student participant described it. But, teachers that students had good relationships with had kind caring voice tones when speaking with students, they communicated to students that they are trying to understand them from their point of view, that they saw them as more than just a student, realized that they had feelings just like the teachers. The students found it easy to talk to these teachers and found the teachers to be understanding when things would come up that kept them from doing their homework or completing a project on time. They shared that they tried never to miss those teachers’ classes because the teachers made them feel wanted in their class and that sometimes they simply needed to feel like they mattered.

Nine out of the twenty-two participants stated that respect was a major thing when it came to good relationships with some teachers. Linking past research to my analysis, Dennie et al. (2019) stated that exchanges between teachers and their students that are respectful, consistent, and fair lead to deep, positive relationships in the classroom. The examples shared by student participants lends itself well to the respectful exchanges and the impact it has had on the relationships between the student participants and some of their teachers. Many of them shared some old sayings that they were taught that “respect is a two-way street” and that “respect is earned, not given”. Students spoke of how some teachers have been respectful in their tone and treatment of students and that goes a long way in creating a positive relationship. They mentioned that when they knew that a particular teacher respected them, even when the student was upset or frustrated, they never took it out on that teacher. Other

student participants spoke of teachers not only respecting them with their words and tone, but they also respected their thoughts, opinions, and ideas and how many of these teachers share that they have learned something as a result of the student sharing their thoughts and how they appreciated gaining a different perspective from the students.

This was a very feel-good portion of the interview as some students apologized for going on and on about their perceptions as they spent a good amount of time answering the question because there was so much good to share. Overall, the students very pleased to share their perceptions on what they felt good relationships between Black students and some of their white teachers consisted of.

Next, we analyze the themes that emerged from the teacher interviews. Those themes included: Teachers' relationships with their Black students, how they approach building relationships with their Black students, The needs of Black students, the impact of poor white teacher black student relationships have on the students, and lastly the importance of a positive teacher-student relationship.

Teachers' Relationships with Their Black Students

Teacher participants were asked to describe their relationships with their Black students and four out of the five described their relationships as positive, one out of the five said their relationships included understanding, one out of the five described their relationships as including flexibility, while one out of the five described their relationships as being "open and honest". Two of the five teachers gave multiple descriptions. The responses were overwhelmingly positive and teacher participants smiled as they described their relationships with their Black students. The way that the teachers shared they cared for their students throughout this study and their concern for

the overall well-being for their students academically and socially is giving their Black students a higher chance for success (Bell & Gitomer, 2016).

How Teachers Build Relationships with Their Black Students

Each teacher was asked to explain how they approach building relationships with their students. It is worth noting that each teacher thoughtfully paused before responding to this question. Teacher participant one explained that she tries to “see the whole person and not just the student”. She explained that she understood that students had lives outside of her classroom and that because she only saw them for one hour a day, she knew there was more to them and the lives they lived. As a result of her only seeing her students for an hour a day, teacher one explained that she incorporates several different activities into her lessons throughout the year that allow her to gain more knowledge of who her students really are and in turn they are able to gain knowledge about her thus growing and deepening a respectful relationship between her and her students. Similarly, teacher three states she actively listens to her students and works to get to know her Black students individually as it gives her insight to their interests as well as their home life. From her experiences at the other area high schools, she learned that kids were going through hardships that she would probably never experience in her life, so she makes it a point to be more flexible and she works to adapt to the settings and the students around her to make them feel comfortable. The effort they put into learning more about their students links to McHugh, et al.’s (2013) thoughts on what teachers can do to have positive relationships with their Black students. McHugh, et al. (2013) outlines consistent interactions, such as those shared by these two teachers, shows students that teachers care about them and confirms that

those teachers are invested in them being successful both in and outside of the classroom.

Along the same lines, Teacher two shared that he intentionally works to get to know and support his Black students. Because of current societal issues, he works to combat those issues and show Black students that he is trying to understand and feels that it is very important to get to know them and understand how they think. Teacher two explained that he intentionally works to listen to his Black students so that he is better able to support them in and outside of the classroom. The efforts of this teacher to try and understand his students' perspective connects to Lynch's (2018) work on whiteness because teacher two is working to dismantle whiteness by not simply relying on or measuring students and their ideas against the largely supported white perspective and it seems that teacher two appears to be choosing not to participate in whiteness.

Similarly, to teacher two, teacher four is also choosing not to participate in whiteness (Lynch, 2018) by acknowledging her privilege. Teacher four stated, " I really think for me being a middle-aged white woman that even though obviously there are times in my life where I don't feel like I have privilege, that I do just because of the color of my skin." She also shared that she felt it was really hard for people to get the concept of what white privilege is and then to admit it despite their struggles, despite what income bracket they grew up in, that they in fact do have privilege being a white person. She continues to share that she believes ignorant comments made by some of not acknowledging their position compared to our students' positions leads down a road to where the students do not respect them. This teacher's thoughts connect to the work of

Matias et al. (2017) where they write that white people need to “emotionally confront their own white privilege” and realize that “silence is an act of white complicity it allows dominant ideologies in whiteness to go uncontested”. Teacher four shared that she talks about privilege with her peers and how not acknowledging it can hurt the relationships between them and their students of color. It could hurt the relationships because white people, who never really have to think about any other perspective other than their own, could be perpetuating white norms that will keep them stuck in their thinking which could possibly result in students of color not feeling seen, heard, or less than their peers. Lastly, teacher five stated that she typically talks to her students about more than just school. She does that because she wants to “know about them and find any commonalities that we may have. It makes them know that I am interested in knowing who they are” (Lynch, 2018). Like teacher three, teacher five made mention of the lessons learned from working at the other area high schools where the majority of students are Black. She shared that those experiences allowed her to realize that building relationships with her Black students was quite different than what she experiences with her white students. She realized that without a positive relationship with her Black students, it was going to be a “bumpy ride”, so she makes it a priority to connect with them. This teacher’s understanding that working to understand her students and seeing them as individuals (Cranton, 2006; Sparks et al, 2015) along with fair, positive, and respectful exchanges between her and her students can lead to lasting, positive relationships in the classroom (Dennie et al, 2019).

Overall, all teacher participants realized the importance as well as the benefits of building quality relationships with their Black students and they are intentional about ensuring that those quality relationships are sustained.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Needs of Black Students

During the individual interviews, teacher participants were asked if they felt that the needs of their Black students differed from those of their white students, and they all felt that to some extent there were differences. Teacher one stated, "I've learned that I need to show my Black students that I see them for who they are and acknowledge that we are different." Teacher one shared that it was her efforts towards seeing who the students truly were, that allowed them to be comfortable enough to share their needs whether they be academic or outside of school. She recognized that her students needed to have a relationship with her before they could trust her, she found that her Black students benefited from literature that represented them and their experiences as well as being represented in the literature and movies in a positive light.

Seeing Black students for who they are correlates to what Anderson, et al. (2019) says is an important factor in creating a "racially affirming climate". In such a climate, teachers can acknowledge that Black students often deal with racial stresses, trauma, financially contribute to the household finances, and other issues that impact Black students on a regular basis. In a school such as GHS, where there is a large population of white students from mid-to-upper middle class, that most likely do not deal with racial stresses, do not experience trauma at the same rates as their Black peers, who do not have to contribute financially to their households, there can be stark differences in the needs of the students. Teachers that want to help address some of the differing needs

of their Black students and build relationships where students trust them enough to open up about those needs, could incorporate more materials into their lessons and classrooms that depict some of the realities faced by Black students as well as materials that show Black people in a more positive light. This could lead to discussions with students that lead to strong relationships which could allow a teacher to see that their Black students may have needs that are far different from their white peers and work to address them.

Teacher two also shared that he has had to sometimes have deep discussions with his Black students to truly understand what his Black students need and how to support them as sometimes those needs are vastly different from anything he has encountered in his life. This teacher's efforts in working to understand relates to Lynch's (2018) work on whiteness where he discusses white teachers doing the hard work of dismantling whiteness to gain a better understanding of how to best support their Black students. Doing the hard work could look like working to earn the trust of Black students like teacher three did. Teacher three shared that compared to the other high schools she has worked at, she has really had to put effort into getting her students to trust her. She said this has proven challenging because most of her Black students do not want "seem needy and stick out". She found however that once the students trusted her, they were more open about sharing their needs with her.

Teacher four, shared that family dynamics sometimes led to a difference in the needs of her Black students. There has been a great deal of research on the importance of family support in students' academic and behavioral success in school. However, when it comes to the parental support and family dynamics, Black families

may land on the lower end of the support spectrum (Brown, 2022). Teacher four shared that, “Family dynamics tend to be a little different on average with my Black students versus my white students.” Brown (2022) reported that these problems are “likely grounded in the country’s patterns of residential and social segregation” (p.7). The family dynamics that teacher four noticed were that some Black families were trying to put their students at “the good school” and therefore were living in areas that were beyond their means and so several of her students had to work sometimes full-time jobs in order to contribute to the family’s finances by helping to pay some of the household bills. This makes the needs of those Black students a bit different.

Teacher four shared that she is aware that some of her students have families that are not as typically engaged in in the school but that is due to parents working more than one job just to make ends meet. In many instances, the students are contributing to the finances of the home so that may mean that they come in sometimes extremely tired and find it very hard to stay awake and fully participate because they have had to work long hours the night before to help pay the household bills. She shared that it can be easy for a teacher to think that the student was up late on the phone or hanging out the night before, but when you have a relationship with your students, they will be honest with you about why they are so tired and withdrawn.

Lastly, Teacher five saw the need for more encouragement as a difference in the needs of her Black students compared to her white students. She shared that she has observed that many of her Black students at one time were reluctant and hesitated to participate in class. The relationships that she has with her students allowed her to have fruitful private conversations with them, where she found that they felt they were

not as smart as their white peers, so she realized that she had to intentionally encourage her Black students and remind them that they had the knowledge to accurately answer questions like their white counterparts. This led to relationships thriving due to high levels of respect and as a result classroom attendance and participation increased. This idea of building relationships that allow Black students to be vulnerable enough to open up and be honest about their needs connects to Brown's (2021) thoughts that Black students need teachers that believe in them and affirm them and their abilities.

The Impact of Poor Relationships on Black Students

When asked what they thought were the impacts that poor relationships between Black students and their white teachers was having on the students. The responses that the teacher participants gave were both similar and different. Teacher participants one and three mentioned that per their observations, poor relationships were resulting in a high number of students skipping class. Teacher participant two shared that he observed a great deal of tension between Black students and their white teachers when there is a poor relationship. Teacher participants one, four, and five shared that when there is a poor relationship present, that students would often times shut down and refuse to do anything for the teacher. Teacher participant five shared that she has observed students becoming quite disruptive in the classroom and sometimes walking out of the classroom when issues arise between Black students and their white students.

The Importance of a Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Countering the negative effects of poor teacher-student relationships, teachers were asked to share their thoughts on the importance of a positive teacher-student relationship. Teacher one stated, “Students can’t learn without some sort of positive relationship... especially Black students.” If they aren’t learning in your room, you have to build that relationship and from that relationship you’ll get more out of that student. A lot more engagement, a lot more learning. She also shared that positive relationships serve teachers well in the instance that Black students become reluctant to participate or complete work, the teacher can talk with them to determine the reason behind the behavior instead of just assuming and moving straight to discipline. There has been a great deal of research on the impact a positive teacher-student relationship can have on students’ outcomes but not as much on teacher wellbeing. However, Spilt et al (2011) found through correlational research that positive teacher-student relationships rank highest on the things that are important to teachers and that as a result of positive relationships with their students, teachers receive intrinsic rewards from those relationships. When expressing her personal thoughts on the importance of positive teacher-student relationships, teacher three enthusiastically answered this question and stated that relationships with her students make her job worthwhile and fun. She said, “It’s a game changer! I would not want to do this job if I didn’t have relationships with kids. I mean it’s the reason I am here. The kids come before academics.” She further shared, “I love my job so much and I love these kids so much!” Teacher four shared a similar sentiment by sharing that positive relationships with her students “should be the reason that all of us are here. I don’t know if I could

teach effectively if I didn't have a relationship with my students." She continued to share that she knows what it feels like to not fit in and feel like she belongs, so she intentionally makes sure that her students of color feel like they belong in her class.

For teacher participant five, her response was quite personal. She took some not so pleasant experiences in her personal life and made it a point to intentionally make sure that her Black students and other student from marginalized groups felt that they belong in her classroom.

Interpreting the Initiative

The initiative that was implemented in this study involved interviewing only Black students and white teachers to determine what Black students need from their white teachers and what some white teachers are doing to build strong relationships with their Black students. The findings from this study will be used to develop an initiative that helps white teachers at GHS and throughout SSD understand and learn about what their Black students need from them to be more successful in school as well as how to build strong, lasting relationships with them.

A major takeaway from this initiative is that when reflecting on the information that resulted from the interviews of both students and teachers, the members of Team Go and I found several connections that lead us to believe that many white teachers have learned from their Black students how to best go about building positive relationships with them that have resulted in strong bonds, and high levels of engagement and academic success. This major takeaway aligns with the conceptual framework idea of whiteness as explained by Matias & Grosland (2016). The team and

I noticed that the teachers in the study repeatedly shared examples of them reflecting on themselves and according to Matias & Grosland (2016), that is one of the methods that white teachers can use to dismantle whiteness. Also, once the concept of whiteness was again explained to the team, we all concurred that there were clear examples that lead us to believe the teachers have all chosen not to participate in whiteness (Lynch, 2018) but showed a definite commitment to social justice (Picower, 2014).

The conceptual framework of white gaze (Yancy, 2013) was noticeable in the teacher interviews by all members of Team Go. What the team and I noticed was that the teachers were realizing the importance of being aware that they are not just teaching to an audience of white students. Teachers' responses proved that teachers had determined that they needed to intentionally talk to and listen to their Black students to gain a better understanding of their thoughts, experiences, and needs in order to best meet their needs and gain their trust.

The standout takeaway, according to the team and I, was a true commitment on behalf of the teachers to build authentic relationships with their Black students (Picower, 2014) and radical care (Rivera-McCutchen, 2021). We discussed that teachers through their responses to the interview questions, teachers showed that they were committed to building relationships with their Black students by going above and beyond to learn their students and their needs to build relationships that would allow them to effectively help and support their students. As a team, we also discussed how deeply the teachers care about their Black students both in and out of the classroom. We concluded that

teachers have consistently spent time working to gain the trust of their Black students and have worked to create equitable environments for them.

In reference to the student participants, one major takeaway is that students were very eager and appreciative to have a voice and to have an opportunity to share their lived experiences while at GHS although some of them were painful experiences. I was pleasantly surprised that although the student participants had negative experiences with many of their white teachers, not one of them spoke negatively about the teacher, they just simply shared the facts and the stories but never spoke disrespectfully about those teachers which I thought was intriguing.

Regarding the teacher participants, although they became more and more comfortable throughout the course of the interviews, they appeared nervous at times, especially at the beginning when they had no idea what types of questions would be asked surrounding the topic of what Black students need from their white teachers. One teacher participant mentioned that some of the interview questions were initially difficult to answer because he did not want to feel like he was throwing his peers under the bus, but that he understood the need to be honest if change is to occur. I got the feeling that the teacher participants really have genuine care for and appreciation for their Black students and how the relationships with them have helped them to grow as educators and keep focused on what matters and ensuring that all their students feel wanted, safe, and cared for. The findings were sometimes surprising, but other portions of the findings were what we as a team had hypothesized.

Reflecting on the process, I feel that everything went very well. There was eagerness to participate from both students and teachers and they all thanked me for

allowing them to participate at the conclusion of each interview. Some even shared that they were honored to participate in something that had the potential to make things better for our Black students. Another positive was that everyone that was asked to participate agreed to participate. After turning in their assent forms, students were sometimes chasing me down asking me when it was going to be their turn to be interviewed.

I think the greatest takeaway for me is a personal one. Each day that I have gone to work in my 27 years in the district, I never think about what I am going to do to, I just walk in the building and do what I feel is right when it comes to supporting and caring for students and working with staff to do the same. Because the majority of the students asked if they could talk about their relationship with me or talk about the ways that I have helped and supported them, it gave me a glimpse into the fact that I really am making a difference in the work that I am doing to build relationships with students and to my best to ensure that they are getting a quality and equitable educational experience and enjoying themselves along the way while feeling like that belong and are wanted. The teachers' reactions after the interviews ended pleasantly surprised me as well. Like I am about my work with students, I approach my work the same way with staff. I do all that I can to support and encourage them and they made it known that they truly appreciated all that I have done not only for them but the students and the school as a whole.

What the team and I are curious to know is if the findings would be similar for other marginalized groups in the school such as members of the LGBTQIA2S+ community and female students. We also want to know if the results if presented

effectively would have positive impacts on those teachers that do not currently have positive relationships with Black students and if the two parties worked together would it yield positive results and lasting positive change.

Feedback Loop

The theories of action that this initiative focused on were whiteness, colorblindness, white gaze, and committing to building authentic relationships. I feel that the interviews that were conducted for this initiative lent themselves to the majority of the theories of action. The only theory of action that I did not find a connection for was colorblindness. It does not mean that colorblindness was not at some point a theory that related to the behavior and thoughts of the teacher participants at some point in their careers, but it did not surface throughout the course of the initiative.

Connections to whiteness were seen throughout the teacher participants' interviews as they spoke about situations in which race had an impact in white teachers' classrooms, when students' behavioral expectations are measured by those of white teachers and deemed unacceptable if Black students' behaviors differed. Whiteness was also seen when teacher participants spoke of some white teachers embracing the old ideologies and Black students are governed by teachers with antiquated epistemologies.

The white gaze theory of action was evident in this process when Black students were made to feel invisible and being made to feel that because they did not think like some of their white teachers that their thoughts, ideas, and opinions were wrong and without merit.

The theory of committing to building authentic relationships was very evident throughout the teacher participant interviews. Most questions asked related to building relationships with Black students and each teacher participant spoke eloquently about their understanding of and the commitment to building relationships with their Black students.

CHAPTER VIII: NEXT STEPS

Implications

The current study suggests that what Black students need from white teachers is:

1. Check in on them regularly
2. Talk to them to determine if there are any unmet needs and help meet those needs as they are able
3. Use kind, caring tones when speaking to them and try to see things from their perspective
4. Respect them in tone and treatment

The implications of my findings could be beneficial to students, teachers, and school districts as they work to understand how to support and understand the needs of their Black high school students' success. The design of this study allows for Black students to share their lived experiences related to what they need from white teachers in order to increase attendance and engagement in some classrooms. The initiative also allowed teachers an opportunity to share what they have observed in regard to relationships with Black students, how they go about building relationships with Black students, the negative impacts of not having good relationships with your Black students, as well as the importance of having good relationships with your Black students.

This study outlined evidence that white teachers can benefit from not only having relationships with their Black students, but also the benefits that come from listening to and learning from and about their Black students. The study also outlined the benefits that Black students can gain from trusting and opening up to their white teachers and

being honest about their needs. Lastly the study outlines the negative implications of white teachers that do not work to separate themselves from critical whiteness and white gaze. Additional study involving other marginalized groups is warranted.

This current study adds to the research base investigating the importance of white teachers building authentic relationships with their Black students as well as what Black students need from their white teachers that leads to increased attendance in class and higher levels of engagement in those classes. By targeting the relationships between Black students and their white teachers as a possible factor in increasing Black student attendance and engagement, there is a potential to inform school practice and professional development for teachers and staff to improve their ability to intercede when Black high school students do not regularly attend some classes and do not engage when they do attend.

Future Plans to Embed These Findings into Practice

This research topic study was very important to me because of the many situations that I experienced and witnessed first as a student in Sandalwood School District (SSD) and then as a 27-year employee of SSD. My years as a school principal allowed me to get to know my students on a surface level, but my current position as a high school assistant principal affords me the opportunity to get to know my students on a deeper level. This study gave me an opportunity to have discussions with students that gave insight to their lived experiences throughout their three to four years at GHS. Listening to them reflect on their past experiences was startling as I learned of their reasons for not attending class and disengaging if and when they decided to attend, the trauma that has resulted from some of their experiences at GHS, as well as the positive

interactions and experiences they have had with some of their white teachers. Both teacher and student participants' reflections and experiences were applicable to and supported my research.

This study and research conducted by researchers such as Matias and Yancy as well as the student participants demonstrates that the hurdles faced by Black students, including myself, many years ago have not changed much. The need for strong and positive relationships between Black students and their white teachers, creating equitable environments, caring for students, and understanding the differing needs of Black students and addressing them are imperative in schools as demographics continue to become more diverse.

I have learned a great deal about the continued struggles of marginalized high school student populations as well as my very own biases because of this study. As a school administrator, I have the responsibility of advocating for students and their needs and ensuring that all students, especially Black students, have a voice and are heard.

One way that I plan to use my research is to work towards and encourage my principal and the district to intentionally diversify the teaching staff of GHS. The school's staff should be more reflective of the student population. Once diversified staff members are hired and placed, it will be very important to ensure that these staff members have an opportunity to create a community that would work with school and district administrators to support and retain them. This community would serve as the nucleus for diversified staff members to communicate their successes and challenges with other members of the same community and with school and district administration. The community would also be able to work together to support one another and work

with administration to create opportunities for collaboration with other school staff, develop leadership capacity, assist in designing quality and relevant professional development trainings, and receive mentoring from highly qualified and trained staff.

I will advocate to facilitate and assist in planning for meaningful and relevant professional development opportunities for students and staff. This study has shown that there is a need for students to better understand the perspectives and actions of teachers and shows that teachers could learn a great deal about building relationships with Black students and the importance of getting to know them and their needs. This study also showed the need for training on critical whiteness and white gaze and how it may be a factor that is contributing to the lack of relationships many white teachers and their Black students. I will seek out effective PD opportunities that incorporate knowledge, reflection, and understanding and celebrating the differences in students of color. Professional development for students would look like training that helps them to better understand their role and the teacher's role in the classroom and how to effectively navigate challenging classroom situations. Those PD opportunities for staff would look like training on how to create and promote equity in the classroom, how to build relationships with students of color, and training on how to create inclusive and respectful classroom environments. It is paramount that GHS staff members learn how to ensure equity, a sense of belonging, and respect are at the core of everything we do with students. The treatment or goal of professional development for staff is to build leadership capacity in the five staff members that participated in the study as well as to build leadership capacity in other teachers that are interested in building effective relationships with Black students. Building leadership in effective teachers can allow

administrators to coach or support teachers that are struggling to build effective relationships with Black students. These teacher leaders can also be utilized to work with new teachers that may be added to the staff in the future to assist them in building effective relationships with Black students from day one.

I will continue to work with Team Go to have regular meetings with Black students and other marginalized groups of students to keep a pulse on their perspectives and needs regarding the current culture of GHS and any curriculum and schoolwide changes that may occur. We must continue to give students a voice and a positive avenue in which to give feedback to the GHS staff and inform necessary change.

Additionally, I will advocate for there to be regular discussions with GHS teachers that are struggling to build relationships with Black students. These discussions would include administrators and teachers that have and continue to build positive relationships with Black students as a means to provide another perspective, to give ideas and strategies, and to support those teachers.

Recommendations for a New Cycle of Inquiry

In order to broaden our present and future understanding of what Black students need from white teachers, further research is warranted to examine the lived experiences and the needs of Black male students compared to Black female students to see if there are differences in their needs. Although the collective voices of Black students and what they need from white teachers is powerful, drilling down and looking at the needs from the Black male and Black female perspective is also deserving of consideration.

Future research should also examine the needs of incoming freshman groups as well as other marginalized groups of students. This study focused on the lived experiences of Black students that had attended GHS for three or more consecutive years, but I believe that there is more to be revealed by creating new cycles of inquiry around a variety of groups attending mostly white high schools to see what they might need from their white teachers and to find possible commonalities with the group of students that were selected for this qualitative study.

Furthermore, future research should examine the needs of Black families whose children attend predominately white high schools. There is a great deal of research (Buchanan & Clark, 2017; Burke, 2010, & Grice, 2020) that has been done on the Black families and their levels of engagement in school future research should look at the needs of Black families as their children enter into a predominately white high school. There may be needs that are unknown that might negatively impact their ability or their interest in participating in and supporting their children in that particular high school.

Current preliminary plans for the next cycle of inquiry in conjunction with Team Go are to work with groups of female students to determine what their needs might be and interview teachers that they mention as being teachers that create positive relationships with them. This will help inform teachers understand the possibly unique needs of their female students so that positive and effective relationships between the two groups can be developed and sustained and so that females feel seen, hear, and respected.

Conclusion

This study that I conducted cast light on a dire need for teachers of Black students to evaluate the role that race has and continues to play in Black students' school success. Researchers have spent countless years and decades interviewing and working with teachers inspecting the role race plays in the classroom, when this study suggests that it is time to put the spotlight on the voices of the Black students that have quietly endured the residual effects of critical whiteness, white gaze, implicit bias, and racism. The impact of these effects has resulted in Black students dropping out of school at alarming rates, becoming physically and verbally disruptive in schools, and sadly choosing to end their life. These effects are a result of being continuously made to feel invisible and rejected by the institutions that were built to serve ALL students, yet sadly continue to focus on those that society has deemed worthy. Researchers should concern themselves with the deep and ever-changing needs of Black students and listen to their desires to be educated, to feel that they belong, to be seen as bright and intelligent and worthy of the same high-quality education that is given to their white peers.

My research showed that when teachers intentionally work to dismantle whiteness by turning the mirror on themselves and evaluating their role in the poor state of their relationships with their Black students, positive relationships were created through listening and understanding the needs of their Black students. My research further showed that students experienced high attendance and engagement levels in classrooms where teachers made them feel seen, heard, respected, and valued.

Although dismantling whiteness to support the needs of Black high school students is a huge undertaking, white teachers, such as the participants in this study, that want to do the hard work of intentionally building positive relationships with Black students and meeting their needs, is worth the effort. Investigating and applying the findings of this study and new studies will go a long way in ensuring that future Black students do not have to continue to live the damaging effects of racism.

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APPENDIX A: STUDENT'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Student Interview Questions

1. Tell me about you: how old are you, what grade level are you currently in, and how many years have you attended Green high school?
2. During a typical school day how many times do you believe you receive positive acknowledgement by staff from the time you arrive until dismissal?
3. Think of a teacher that you have a positive relationship with or that you like and tell me what you like about them.
4. Can you describe your relationship with that teacher?
5. What do you think are good characteristics of a positive student-teacher relationship?
6. Think of a teacher that you do not or did not have a very good relationship with. Tell me about them and your relationship with them.
7. Explain why you feel that relationship was poor.
 - a. If prompt is needed: Can you share some specific examples of negative interactions or events that happened?
8. In your opinion, can you share some of the reasons you feel led to those poor relationships?
9. In your opinion, what are some of the reasons for the poor relationships between Black students and their White teachers?
10. Do you feel that Black students have better relationships with their Black teachers? Why or why not?
11. How do you typically handle poor relationships with teachers?
12. To what extent do you feel poor relationships with White teachers has impacted you academically? With your attendance in their classes.
13. How important is it that White teachers care about their Black students? How do Black students know whether a White teacher cares?
14. Do you feel that bad relationships between Black students and White teachers is a common problem in schools such as this one?
15. How could this problem be fixed? What suggestions might you have for White teachers of Black students?
16. Are there white teachers in this school that you feel you have a positive relationship with? If so, what does that/those teachers do differently to build relationships with Black students in particular?
17. Would you like to share any other information about teacher relationships that you have experienced?

APPENDIX B: TEACHER'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Tell me about you: What subject do you teach and how many years have you worked in Sandalwood School District and how long have you been a teacher.
2. Is this the only high school that you have worked at in this district?
 - a. If the answer is no, ask teacher to describe the students that he/she has taught at the other schools.
3. What type of relationships do you feel you have with your Black students?
4. What do you do to build positive relationships with your Black students?
5. Do you feel that in this school that there are issues with the relationships between Black students and some of their White teachers?
 - a. If the answer is yes, ask teacher to describe what they have observed.
 - b. If the answer is yes, why do you think there are issues?
 - c. What impact do you feel these issues are having on Black students' academic success, attendance, discipline, and engagement levels in class?
6. Do you feel that there is a difference in the needs of Black students compared to their White peers?
 - a. If the answer is yes, ask teacher to share some of those differences.
7. What do you feel White teachers could do differently/better to improve their relationships with their Black students?
8. Would you like to share any other information about the student-teacher relationships in the building?