NO CONTAINER: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE INFLUENCE OF SELF, CONTEXT, AND SCHOOL ON THE SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THREE HIGHLY SELECTIVE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Noni Shamim Lopez

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Supervisor of Dissertation:

______________________________________________
Howard C. Stevenson, Constance Clayton Professor of Urban Education;
Professor of African Studies

Dean, Graduate School of Education

______________________________________________
Pamela L. Grossman, Dean and Professor

Dissertation Committee:

______________________________________________
Howard C. Stevenson, Constance Clayton Professor of Urban Education;
Professor of African Studies

Peter J. Kuriloff, Professor of Education

Kathleen Riley, Assistant Professor, West Chester University
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Nana and Pop-Pop, Leila Rabb Thomas and Ernest Thomas, who from heaven serve as the inspiration for all that I do. They instilled in me a belief in the importance of education, family, and faith. My Pop-Pop always wanted a doctor in the family; I am so proud to be able to fulfill his wish (even though I’m sure he meant an MD).

I also want to dedicate this to my beautiful son Novian for being the best son a mother could ask for, and thank you to my stepsons Rodney, Jr., and Roman. I appreciate you letting me work when you wanted me to watch movies with you and Daddy.

Finally, I want to dedicate this dissertation to my husband Rodney Eric Lopez. We met when I started this journey in 2011. I do not think I would have been able to make it to this point without you by my side. You are my partner, my love, and my best friend. Thank you.
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My beloved faith community, New Day Church, who covered me in prayer throughout this journey.

My husband and sons, as well as my Mom, Dad, and brothers, Jamal and Sharif, for your unconditional love, support, and belief in me.
ABSTRACT

NO CONTAINER: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE INFLUENCE OF SELF, CONTEXT, AND SCHOOL ON THE SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THREE HIGHLY SELECTIVE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Noni Shamim Lopez
Howard C. Stevenson

In my study, I examined teacher perceptions of the factors that contribute to or work against the success of African American (Black) students in predominately White independent schools. I asked three questions and two subquestions:

1. What do teachers observe across elementary, middle, and high school age groups that they perceive contributes to or works against the success of Black students?
   1a. How do teachers in a predominately White, independent school define success for their Black students?
   1b. Do teachers at different grade levels have different perceptions of Black student success?

2. Is it possible to develop valid, reliable measure of teacher perceptions of independent school racial climate and Black student coping?

3. Does a relationship exist between individual demographic factors of teachers and their perceptions of the success of Black students?
My study was conducted at three independent schools in New York City. Focus group interviews were conducted at each school with teachers and administrators who had 10 or more years of experience at their schools. Surveys with direct and open-ended questions were distributed to faculty, administrators, and staff of the three schools to explore perceptions of Black student success, racial climate, and Black student coping, and to determine whether a relationship existed among individual demographic factors and teacher perceptions of Black student success. I found four relationships:

1. Participants perceived that, regardless of their grade level, Black students in their schools experienced similar forms of implicit and explicit racial bias that negatively affected their success; however, patterns emerged in the participants’ responses that demonstrated a higher level of concern for their elementary-age Black students compared to the students who entered in middle or high school.

2. Participants identified strong sense of self and sense of connection as two core dimensions of success for all of their students, but identified knowing the “rules of the private school game” and having a strong support network early on as important success factors for Black students.

3. It is possible to develop valid and reliable measures of teacher perceptions of racial climate and Black student coping.

4. A significant relationship existed among teacher perceptions of Black student success and teachers’ race, years in current school, years in position, and school level taught.
# Table of Contents

Dedication ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... iii

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................ iv

List of Tables ......................................................................................................................................... xi

List of Illustrations .......................................................................................................................... xiii

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1

  Background and Context ............................................................................................................... 1

  Statement of the Problem, Rationale, and Research Questions ............................................. 5

  The Researcher’s Story and Context ......................................................................................... 7

  Pilot Study ...................................................................................................................................... 10

  Conceptual Framework .............................................................................................................. 14

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature ................................................................................................. 17

  Racial Socialization of Black Children .................................................................................... 17

    Racial Socialization Within the Context of White Supremacy .......................................... 17

    Emergent themes in research on racial socialization of Black children ............................ 18

    Racial socialization of Black children and Black identity development ............................ 19

  Racial Identity Development ...................................................................................................... 20

    Social Identity Theory and Racial Identity Models .............................................................. 20

    Overview of Black Racial Identity Research ...................................................................... 21

    Early research ......................................................................................................................... 21
Traditional or mainstream theoretical approaches .........................22
Intersectionality ..............................................................................25
Multidimensional approaches ........................................................28
African American Children and School Success ...................................................33
White Hegemony and the Schooling of Culturally Diverse Children ......33
Race, Racism, and Child Development .........................................................40
Young children, race, and racial prejudice ........................................40
Black children, racial identity development, and school
success: Early and middle childhood .........................................................42
Racial socialization: Early and middle childhood ...............45
Black children, racial identity, and school success: Early
adolescence and adolescence .........................................................46
Racial socialization: Adolescence ..................................................49
Black Students and Success in Independent Schools ..................50
Historical and theoretical context .....................................................50
Early and middle childhood .........................................................54
Adolescence ...............................................................................56
Definitions of success ..................................................................58
Role of Teacher Perceptions in the School Success of Black Students in
Independent Schools ........................................................................61
Effects of Teacher Perceptions on African American Student
Outcomes .......................................................................................61
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher–Student Cultural Differences and African American Student Success</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher–Student Perceptions and Black Student Success in Independent Schools</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology</td>
<td>Philosophical Assumptions</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Approach</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Sites and Participant Selection</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description of research sites</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant selection</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Design and Data Collection</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respondent bias</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reactivity</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Construct validity</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Qualitative Findings Teacher Perceptions of Black Student Success</td>
<td>Across the Lower, MIDDLE, and Upper Grades</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Racialized Experiences of Black Students in the Lower and Middle or Upper
Divisions ........................................................................................................................................86
Impact of Racialized Experiences Over Time .......................................................................90
Coping With Racialized Incidents ......................................................................................92
Affinity Groups as Healthy Coping Space .............................................................................92
Impact of Numbers of Black Students ..............................................................................93
Playing the Game: The Rules and the Costs ......................................................................96
Role of the Admissions Process and Placement Programs ..............................................103
Closing Thoughts ..................................................................................................................104

Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings: Teacher Perceptions of Success for African American Students in Independent Schools .................................................................106
Defining Success ......................................................................................................................106
Strong Sense of Self ..............................................................................................................108
Self-actualization .....................................................................................................................108
Vulnerability of Black students ..............................................................................................111
Strong Sense of Connection to the Core Values of the School ........................................113
Factors Underlying Success ......................................................................................................119
Importance of Seeing Others Like You ..............................................................................119
Involved and Networked Parents .........................................................................................125
Knowing the Rules and How to Play the Game of Private School ..................................129
Gender ......................................................................................................................................136

Chapter 6: Quantitative Findings ............................................................................................138
Introduction ..............................................................................................................................138
LIST OF TABLES

1. The Downtown School ........................................................................................................74
2. The Westside School ...........................................................................................................75
3. The Uptown School .............................................................................................................75
4. Emergent Themes from Focus Groups and Survey Category Rationale ...............78
5. Teacher Perceptions of Success Characteristics Ranked by Importance ..........141
6. Teacher Perceptions of Factors Impacting White Student Success .................142
7. Teacher Perceptions of Factors Impacting Black Student Success .................143
8. Item Statistics of the Black Student Interpersonal Support Scale .................145
10. Item Statistics of Context Determines Student Success Scale ......................146
11. Item Statistics of the Black Student Lower-School Success Beliefs Scale .......147
12. Item Statistics of the Black Student Placement Program Success Beliefs Scale ........................................................................................................147
13. Item Statistics of the Positive School Racial Climate Scale .........................148
15. Item Statistics of the White Racial Microaggression Scale–Shared .................150
16. Item Statistics of the Black Male Racial Microaggression Coping Scale– Avoidant ...............................................................................................................152
17. Item Statistics of the Black Male Racial Microaggression Coping Scale– Engaged ...............................................................................................................152
18. Item Statistics of the Black Female Racial Microaggression Coping Scale– Avoidant ...............................................................................................................153
Item Statistics of the Black Female Racial Microaggression Coping Scale–Engaged

Item Statistics of the Black Female Racial Microaggression Coping Scale–Fearful

Intercorrelations of Teacher Racial Perceptions (Self, Context, School, Student)

Correlations of Teacher Racial Perceptions to Black Student Racial Coping
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Illustration Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Conceptual Framework.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher Perceptions of Black Student Success (Multiple Factors) by Years of School Employment</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher Perceptions of Black Student Success and School Climate by Years in Position at School</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher Perceptions of School Climate and Success of Black Students by School Level</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Relationship of Teacher School Level to Teacher Perceptions of Black Student Success and School Politics</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Teacher Perceptions of Preparedness for Student Racism Issues</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teacher Perceptions of Black Student Success and School Climate Between White and Teachers of Color</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Teacher Perceptions of Black Student Racial Coping Between White Teachers and Teachers of Color</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

In its strategic plan, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS, 2005) expressed its support of schools’ “efforts to empower marginalized groups” and their goal to build “communities of inclusion and acceptance” (para.1), reflecting a belief that diverse and inclusive communities are essential to the success of independent schools. In a 2008 article on demographic sustainability, NAIS further noted:

In order for independent schools to thrive in the 21st century, NAIS believes that they must be sustainable along five dimensions: financial, demographic, programmatic, environmental, and global. Schools can work toward demographic sustainability by becoming more inclusive, providing greater accessibility financially and socially, developing a school climate in and out of the classroom that is supportive of a diverse student and faculty body, implementing a coordinated admission marketing strategy, and promoting a more flexible work environment. (para. 1)

In the 2001–2002 school year, NAIS member schools reported an average enrollment of 19% students of color. The average enrollment for the 2014–2015 school year was 29%. Average enrollment for African American students (non-Hispanic) rose from 5.4% in 2001–2002 to 6.3% in 2014–2015. Independent schools are prioritizing diversity in their admission and enrollment efforts, but to successfully recruit and retain Black students, independent schools must examine the ways in which they support the success of these students and families.

Arrington and Stevenson (2006) conducted a 5-year study examining the success of African American students (SAAS) in independent schools. The purpose of the study

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1 Retrieved from http://www.nais.org/Articles/Pages/Equity-in-Action-147336.aspx
2 Retrieved from http://www.nais.org/Articles/Pages/Demographic-Sustainability-150793.aspx
was to identify the factors that go into creating a positive independent school experience for Black students. In the context of their work on SAAS, Arrington and Stevenson (2006) came to define *success* as

>a positive sense of self by students across social contexts, a strong sense of community and membership in the school, and a racial identity that can be used as a resource during development—particularly when confronted with racism and race-related stereotypes.” (p. 3)

My study arose out of Arrington and Stevenson’s (2006) study and the expressed concern regarding the disproportionate number of African American students who had been identified as having academic and behavioral issues in school. In my own work in independent schools over the past 20 years, I have found the middle school years to be particularly difficult ones for African American students. My colleagues and I have observed the struggles of African American students manifest themselves in a variety of ways compared to their White peers: low grades, low academic motivation, behavioral issues and social withdrawal, to name a few. This is especially worrying given that a child’s adolescent years are critical regarding their academic, social, emotional, and physical development. Independent schools appear to be failing Black students when these children need them the most.

In their SAAS study, Arrington and Stevenson (2006) found that grade level was significantly related to several variables that determined school success for Black students. They found, generally, as students rose in grade level, the less comfortable they felt in the school. Moreover, their psychological sense of membership in the school decreased as these students moved up in grade. Arrington and Stevenson also observed that the middle and upper school years proved to be particularly difficult ones for Black
students. They posited that, as these students come to know themselves as racialized beings in their adolescent years, they become more conscious of the racism that persists in a predominately White school. Thus, these students become more aware of racial incidents and are likely to have a more negative view of their schools. Interestingly, Arrington and Stevenson found that the number of years that students had attended their school was not significantly related to any of the other variables of interest. This statistic was surprising to me given my own experience in independent schools.

On an anecdotal level, my colleagues and I have noticed that Black students who enter our schools at the middle and upper levels appear to be more successful—as defined by Arrington and Stevenson (2006)—than those students who entered in lower school. This is counterintuitive. It stands to reason that the longer that Black students are in a predominately White independent school, the more time they have to learn the culture and understand what it means to be successful in these environments. Teachers could be important in reconciling this disconnection. Independent schools are typically small, close-knit communities; therefore, teachers have the opportunity to observe their students closely and are expected to know them very well. In schools with lower, middle, and upper divisions, it is possible for a teacher to keep up with a student’s progress on a formal and informal basis for 13 years or more. Teachers on all grade levels represent an important resource in beginning to understand how Black students navigate their independent school experience.

My colleagues have shared their theories to explain their observations of the differences between Black students who enter private school during their elementary years and Black students who enter these schools during their middle and high school
years), and there are many. Some researchers attribute the success of students who enter private school during their adolescent years to the fact that most of them come from predominately Black school environments, ostensibly in or close to their home neighborhoods, where their racial identity was affirmed; thus, they enter private schools with a strong racial identity, one that allows them to cope more effectively with the racism that they might experience in school. Others believe that placement programs such as Prep for Prep, Albert G. Oliver, and A Better Chance (ABC), which place gifted public school students in private schools, typically in their middle and high school years, effectively prepare students for both the academic rigor and unique culture that a Black student will encounter when he or she enters private school. Another theory is that the low numbers of Black students and teachers in a predominately White school or the lack of conversations about race during Black students’ time in lower school do little to support and prepare them for the challenges they will face as they move into their middle and upper school years. Some teachers believe that adolescent children are at a more developmentally appropriate stage than lower-grade schoolchildren for their parents to explicitly prepare them for the challenges of navigating a predominately White private school.

In an extensive body of research, authors have examined the lived experience of African American students in independent schools. These researchers emphasized how important it is for private schools to provide opportunities for Black students to affirm their racial identities and how this affirmation supports student success in school. Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson (2003) reported that Black students in these schools reported feelings of both connectedness and disconnectedness, but their feelings of
disconnection and isolation were mitigated when they encountered support and affirmation of who they were. This increased sense of identity and belonging was shown to have a positive effect on academic performance.

Racial socialization is another factor that positively influences Black students’ ability to cope with the impact of the racism that they might encounter in private schools. According to Brown and Tylka (2011), “Racial socialization involves various explicit and implicit messages that provide African American youth with healthy methods for coping with the realities of racism and racial hostility” (p. 262). Brown and Tylka (2011) explained that messages come primarily from parents and caregivers; however, the research shows it is possible through approaches like Culturally Responsive Pedagogy\(^5\), and Racially Responsive Teaching Practices\(^6\) that students can—and should—receive racial socialization messages from their school environments as well.

**Statement of the Problem, Rationale, and Research Questions**

Racial identity development and racial socialization are closely related to the developmental stage of children. Tatum (1997) noted that racial identity development typically begins during a child’s adolescent years, and Brown (2008) noted that the positive effects of positive racial socialization could be mitigated by the kinds of messages children receive at particular developmental stages in their lives. However, few researchers have investigated how these different factors that impact the success of Black

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students in private schools intersect with the grade level at which these students enter school.

The researchers for SAAS interviewed and surveyed students who had been attending their respective schools for an average of 5–7 years with a range of tenure from 1–13 years at their schools. Furthermore, teachers observed and students reported having a more positive experience in lower school related to race and identity than in middle and upper school. The SAAS program takes into account the number of years the students have been enrolled in their schools, but it does not identify the grade or division in which individual students entered the school (grade-level entry point.) This could be an important variable to consider.

Lower schools in New York City are rapidly becoming more diverse. Twenty-nine percent of students at 31% of New York City private schools were students of color in the 2009–2010 school year (Anderson, 2011). This statistic represents a 20% increase from a decade earlier. The shift has been dramatic in some schools. For example, in New York City, the Dalton School’s 2011–2012 Kindergarten class was 47% students of color; and the prestigious Trinity School was at 45% (Anderson, 2011). As more Black children enroll in private schools in their elementary years, it will be important for schools to consider whether when these students enter has an impact on the success of these students down the road in their middle and upper school years. The purpose of my study was to gain empirical data from teachers in independent schools about their observations of the experiences of Black students across the lower, middle, and upper grade levels, their definitions of success, and their perceptions of the relationship between
grade-level entry point and the success of Black students in independent schools. In my study, I pose the following questions:

1. What do teachers observe within and across elementary, middle, and high school age groups that they perceive contributes to or works against the success of Black students?
   a. How do teachers in a predominately White independent school define success for their Black students?
   b. Do teachers at different grade levels have different perceptions of Black student success?

2. Is it possible to develop valid a reliable measure of teacher racial perceptions of independent school racial climate and Black student coping?

3. Does a relationship exist between individual demographic factors of teachers and their perceptions of the success of Black students?

**The Researcher’s Story and Context**

In my family, I constantly received the message that education would be the key to my success. My father’s brother, my Uncle Billy, was the first in our family to go to college. He received a football scholarship to Boston College, and his degree—all of his news clippings—held a place of honor on the wall of my grandparents’ home. My Nana and Pop-Pop were an incredible source of love, support, and encouragement to me over the course of my life. My grandfather only went as far as sixth grade in his schooling, and my grandmother graduated from a high school specializing in cosmetology, but they never wavered in their message that my educational journey would lead me and my two younger brothers to college and beyond. Before I left for college, my
Pop-Pop wrote me a letter of encouragement, but also of expectation. In his Grade 6 penmanship, he let me know that he would rather die than see me cleaning someone else’s house. The stakes were high.

My parents reinforced the message of the importance of education in very explicit ways. My mother taught me to read by Age 3, and I cannot remember a time in my life when I was not surrounded by books. My father worked at a power plant on the campus of North Carolina A&T University, a historically Black college, and I attended preschool and Kindergarten at the Child Development Lab on campus. I still remember my teachers Miss Jones, Miss Lofton, and Mrs. Arledge and how they encouraged me to read. Surrounded by teachers, students, and parents of color, I became clear about my identity, and I was proud to be a Black girl. My parents and teachers put books in my hands by Black authors with Black characters. They made me watch *Roots* and took me to plays and concerts with Black artists. Later, my mother, a very proud Puerto Rican, started working at A&T as a secretary. She introduced my brother and me to professors and college students in her department, and we often hung out on campus getting a sense of college life. My parents also made sure we spent time with their friends many of whom were involved in or had an interest in education, the arts, or local politics.

Our local public school was an unacceptable option for my parents. My parents did not make a lot of money, but they found a way to send me to a small private school in Grade 1 and then Catholic school for the remainder of my elementary years. Greensboro Day School (GDS) was the final step before college. During my years in private and parochial schools, I did not have one teacher of color, and there were many moments in which, as an adolescent Black girl from a working class family, I felt isolated and self-
conscious about who I was and where I came from. I experienced forms of explicit racism, like overhearing a classmate call Hispanics “spics,” and enduring microaggressions like jokes about my hair and suggestions that I date the one Black boy in my Grade 7 class. I remember when I ran for prom president my senior year and was told by someone whom I considered a friend that my classmates liked me a lot, but were afraid that I’d only have rap music played at the event.

Nevertheless, I did not stay silent. I stood up for injustice when I saw it, called the administration out when necessary, and I remained proud to be a young, smart, gifted Black woman. I believe it was my time at A&T Child Development Lab and my parents’ intentional efforts to build in me a positive sense of self that made it possible for me to navigate my private school years so effectively. I also had teachers who engaged with me on an intellectual level, implicitly letting me know that I belonged at the school. However, there were very few places for me to name, process, deconstruct, and reframe my experience as a Black girl at a predominately White independent school. As more Black students (all boys) joined my class in the upper school, I found a friendship group that affirmed my racial identity, but we rarely spoke deeply about our experience as Black students at GDS—our struggles, our insecurities. In short, there was no container in school to hold our experience up for reflection, no space to strategize with others on how to navigate a school where the our experience as Black students seemed to be light years away from that of our majority White peers.

I have often wondered about the role of my teachers during my time at GDS. Did they have a sense of my experience as a Black girl from, literally, the other side of the tracks? Did they have a sense of the culture and racial climate of the school? Did they
feel that they could make a difference? How did their own identity affect how they perceived my experience? My study is an attempt to answer those questions for my students today, specifically African American students at my school and so many others experiencing many of the challenges I did when I was at GDS and many other Black students in private school experienced before me. Students who need spaces in school where they can process their experience and feel affirmed for all of who they are. My study is also an invitation to schools to engage in the messy and hard work of taking on explicitly and intentionally the work of building racial (and socioeconomic) literacy in our communities, which will benefit all of the students, families, and faculty who come through the doors each day and move us closer to being the inclusive communities we strive to be.

**Pilot Study**

During the 2011–2012 school year, I conducted a pilot study at the Nightingale-Bamford School, a Kindergarten–Grade 12 (K–12) school for girls in New York City where I was the head of Middle School from 2009–2014, to investigate my research questions regarding teacher perceptions of the role of grade-point entry in the success of Black students. I explored this question by conducting a focus group with a sample of Nightingale-Bamford teachers.

I gathered seven teachers from the Nightingale-Bamford School for 1 hour to discuss their perceptions of the experience of African American students at Nightingale-Bamford. An invitation was emailed to the entire faculty and staff of Nightingale-Bamford describing the study and asking for their participation in the focus group. Participation was limited teachers who had been at Nightingale-Bamford for at least 10
years because I wanted faculty who were able to discuss their views of the phenomenon over a significant period of time. I also wanted faculty who were able to observe the experiences of the girls over their time in the lower, middle, and upper divisions. Of the ten responses I received to my email expressing interest in participating, I selected seven faculty members who I believed represented a suitably diverse range in terms of tenure, ethnicity, and age group taught. The purpose of my study was to examine an a priori theory; therefore, I wanted to make sure that I assembled a group that represented a diverse background within the school and could speak knowledgeably about the topic. Maxwell (2005) asserted that purposeful selection could be an effective sampling method in cases where a researcher begins the study with a theory in mind. By being selective in my sampling, the theory could be tested in ways that random sampling might not allow. When dealing with a small sample size, Miles and Huberman (1994) also noted that random sampling might not provide the kind of diversity that a qualitative researcher would desire.

The tenure of the teachers ranged from 11–42 years at the school. Six of the participants were female; one was male. Eight faculty members self-identified as White, one as Black or African American, and one as Latina. Prior to the focus group, I asked each participant to complete a questionnaire. In the first section, the teachers were given a list of all of the middle and upper school students whose families self-identified as Black or Caribbean American on their applications for admission to Nightingale-Bamford. The teachers were then asked to rate how well they knew the student (Very Well, Fairly Well, Not Well, Not at All). In the second section, the participants were asked to rate the students that they indicated they knew Very Well or Fairly Well as successful or
unsuccessful according to the SAAS criteria for success: a positive sense of self by students across social contexts, a strong sense of community and membership in the school, and a racial identity that can be used as a resource during development—particularly when confronted with racism and race-related stereotypes. In the last section, each participant was asked to select two girls from section two that stood out as the most successful and the least successful. They were also allowed to give the name of two students who were not on the list of Black or Caribbean American girls. I included this section because parents are not required to identify their daughter’s ethnicity on their application for admission, and I wanted teachers to have the opportunity to be able to include any girls that were not on this original list in their most and least successful designations. I reviewed the questionnaires before the focus group and made note of names of girls that came up more than twice so that we could use them as small case studies in our focus group discussion.

The focus group was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through multiple readings. During this analysis, broad themes emerged that I categorized into groups and used as a structure for organizing and subsequently coding the interview. I used these codes to interpret the results of the focus group discussion.

Although my original research design proposal included triangulating different data sources (focus group, survey, archival documents), this pilot study relied primarily on the data collected from the focus group. My original rationale for reviewing archival documents was to use the documents to select the students that would be the subjects of discussion for the focus group. I became increasingly uncomfortable with this approach because I feared it might bias the conversation with the teachers if I selected the student
subjects. The questionnaire allowed for the voices of the faculty emerge and for them to have more authentic involvement from the beginning in producing the data for the study. I do feel that a structured survey for the larger faculty and staff according to the emergent themes from the focus group would have been a rich data stream. The restraints of time did not allow for a survey in this pilot study, but the data collected from the focus group is substantive. As Miles and Huberman (1994) attested, small sample sizes are not outside of the norm in qualitative research where it is common practice to work with a small sample “nested in their context and studied in-depth” (p. 27).

The results of my study suggested that teachers perceive that it might be more difficult for Black students who enter independent schools in their early elementary years to develop the characteristics of success, as articulated in SAAS, than it would be for students who enter independent schools in their middle and high school years. Teachers interviewed for my study attributed these difficulties to the following factors:

1. “Invisible racial scarring” that occurs and goes largely unaddressed during the lower-school years.

2. A diminished sense of self that compromises students’ trust in the school and belief in themselves.

3. The nature of lower-school admissions, which makes it difficult to predict whether students will be successful as they matriculate through a pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 (pre-K–12) school.

Teachers observed that African American girls who were successful at Nightingale-Bamford were able to combine a strong sense of self with a high level of resilience. Teachers perceived that most of the Black students demonstrating these two
traits were more likely to come from environments where their social and racial identity was affirmed at both home and school; they had involved and positive parents who trusted the school; and they benefited from the preparation and support provided by independent school placement agencies.

In my study, I welcome the opportunity to expand this pilot study and to test further the generalizability of the findings. My intention was to expand the focus group interviews so that I could determine the variables that teachers perceive to be at play regarding the relationship between grade-level entry point and the success of Black students, as Robson (2002) suggested, to see “what mechanisms are operating in which contexts” (p. 235). To avoid any circularity in my argument for my dissertation, I decided to avoid introducing the SAAS definition for success as it relates to African American students in independent schools to the participants and, instead, asked them to share their observations and perceptions of the factors that contribute to or work against Black students in private schools. The introduction of a survey to my dissertation study provided the opportunity to design an instrument that could be used to measure teacher perceptions of school racial climate and Black student coping and suggest patterns of relationships between the survey variables that would serve to answer my revised research questions.

**Conceptual Framework**

The extant literature suggests that a positive racial identity, built through the processes of racial socialization, is important to the success of Black students in a school context. The relevant findings outlined in the literature review for my study overwhelmingly connect racial socialization and positive racial identity development to
improved academic achievement in Black students in any school situated in the context of societal and institutional racial oppression (see review of literature in Hanley & Noblit, 2009). The processes of racial socialization and racial identity development begin at a very young age. Although young children many have limited understandings on a cognitive level of their own racial identity and that of others, they do begin to form judgments and evaluations about themselves and others connected to race (Aboud, 2008; Hirschfeld, 2008; Katz, 2003; Patterson & Bigler, 2006; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

The model of the conceptual framework guiding this literature review (Figure 1.1.) represents the relationships between racial socialization, racial identity development, and school success for Black students. Racial socialization and racial identity development serve as a foundation to school success for Black students and generally occur along a developmental track cognitively; however, currently, few empirical studies exist that examine how Black students negotiate their identity development during the elementary years compared to their middle and high school years in the context of predominately White independent schools. In this research study, I contribute to the current literature by examining teacher perceptions of the experiences of Black students in their schools at different developmental stages, their definitions of success for their Black students, and how teachers perceive the experiences of their Black students affects their school success. I also examine whether a relationship exists between the individual demographic factors of the teachers who participated in my study and their perceptions of the success of Black students in their respective schools.
Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of my research study was to examine teacher perceptions of the factors that they believe contribute to or work against the success of Black students in predominately White independent schools with particular focus on their perceptions of the different experiences of students across the lower, middle, and upper school years. The results of my pilot study helped to form my conceptual framework and focus my literature review on the relationship between racial socialization, racial identity development, and school success for Black students in independent school during different stages of their cognitive development. In the first section, I review theories of racial socialization and racial identity development, as well as the relationship between the two, generally and then more specifically for African Americans. In the second section, I examine the intersection of Black racial identity (BRI) development in the context of school, including the relationship between BRI development and school success over early childhood through the adolescent years. This section ends with a review of the literature on Black identity development and the success of Black students in independent schools and includes an examination of the impact of racial stress on Black youth in environments that are predominately White. In the third section, I examine the literature on the relationship between teacher perceptions of Black students and the way that these perceptions affect the success of Black students in school.

Racial Socialization of Black Children

Racial Socialization Within the Context of White Supremacy

Racial socialization is the process by which a child learns from his or her family and community the ways in which he or she should “navigate a world marked by racial
oppression” (Hanley & Noblit, 2009, p. 33). Parents pass on these messages and practices to provide children with information about their race status as it relates to (a) personal and group identity, (b) intergroup and interindividual relationships, and (c) position in social hierarchy (Thorton et al., 1990, p. 401). For ethnic minorities in the United States the process of racial socialization is grounded in parents’ understanding of the fact that race matters. Socialization is the means by which parents teach their children the meaning of their race within a context of racial oppression and prejudice so that they can develop a sense of cultural pride and knowledge that will help them face the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination that will inevitably come with being a person of color (Hughes & Chen, 1997).

**Emergent themes in research on racial socialization of Black children.** A little over 20 years ago, researchers began to examine the idea that parents in families of color (i.e., ethnic minorities in the United States) view communicating with their children about race and racism as an important part of the socialization process (Hughes et al., 2006). The research on racial socialization began with studying African American families and the examination of the relatively unique, racial socialization practices in the African American community that continue to dominate the field. Ward (1991, as cited in Hughes et al., 2006) explained, “Preparation for bias among African American families may be part of an indigenous child-rearing strategies, transmitted intergenerationally, that emanate from shared knowledge regarding historical experiences of oppression” (p. 756).

Subsequent empirical studies demonstrate that the content and frequency of Black parents’ socialization of their children might vary (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Stevenson, 1994; Thorton et al., 1990); however, Hughes et al. (2006)
created four broad and widely accepted categories of racial socialization: (a) preparation for bias, (b) cultural socialization, (c) egalitarianism, and (d) promotion of mistrust. Preparation for bias describes parents’ attempts to build an understanding of the wider mainstream society and to foster an awareness of racial bias to prepare their children to deal with the challenges of prejudice and discrimination. Cultural socialization is parents’ efforts to promote cultural knowledge, traditions, and pride. Egalitarianism describes parents’ messages to their children about the importance of hard work and the ways in which they help their children to develop the skills they will need to navigate successfully a society that is predominately White. Promotion of mistrust describes the warning that parents give to their children that they must be cautious around, or even avoid, people of other races.

Stevenson et al. (2002, as cited in English-Clarke, 2012) noted that certain combinations of the above types of socialization could result in both positive and negative outcomes for children:

This suggests that there is an optimal balance of types of racial socialization, and not all racial socialization necessarily has a positive impact on children. As a result, the array of racial socialization that some children experience may serve as a protective factor or a support, while the array of racial socialization that other children experience may serve as a risk factor or challenge, doing the child more harm than good. (p. 63)

The literature supports the theory that racial socialization is an important factor in the positive racial identity development of Black children, but the relationship between the two is complex and multidimensional.

**Racial socialization of Black children and Black identity development.** The research shows that racial socialization, particularly cultural socialization practices (e.g.,
teaching cultural heritage, customs and traditions), play a significant role in building a positive racial identity in Black children (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Hanley & Noblit, 2009, Hughes & Chen, 1997; Stevenson, 1994; Thorton et al., 1990). Many of the practices of parents’ cultural socialization are aimed at exposing children to their collective ethnic history as well as and their ethnic customs and traditions to instill a sense of cultural pride.

Knowledge of and pride in one’s ethnic or racial background is a foundational piece of building a positive racial identity. Helms (1990) defined racial identity as “a sense of group or collective identity according to one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 3). Thus, the specific messages that Black parents pass on to their children about who they are and where they come from have a significant impact on Black children’s concept of themselves and how they view themselves in relationship to the wider world.

**Racial Identity Development**

**Social Identity Theory and Racial Identity Models**

Racial identity development models emerged as an outgrowth of social identity theory. The proponents of social identity theory assert that membership in a social group serves as an important basis of one’s identity. Phinney (2008) noted, “Identity is a complex, dynamic construct that develops over time as individuals strive to make sense of who they are in terms of the groups they belong to within their immediate and larger social contexts” (p. 98). Social identity theorists focused on the relationship between group identity and self-esteem and argued that human beings need strong group membership ties to maintain a positive self-concept. Given the connection between self-
esteem and group membership, research on racial identity development has important implications such that, in our society, characteristics associated with membership in non-White racial or ethnic groups are often portrayed as inferior and unfavorable. Sue and Sue (2003) warned of the harmful psychological effects of prejudice and discrimination on people of color:

The resulting damage strikes at the self-esteem and self-group identity of many culturally different individuals in our society; many . . . may come to believe that their racial/cultural heritage or characteristics are burdens to be changed or overcome. (p. 207)

Racial identity theory provides a framework through which the identity development of a person of color can be understood on both the individual and group levels. These models account for the distinct cultural characteristics that can be assigned to different cultural groups, but they also account for “within-group or individual differences” (Sue & Sue, p. 208).

**Overview of Black Racial Identity Research**

**Early research.** Empirical studies of BRI can be traced from Horowitz and Horowitz (1939) with their line drawings, and Clark and Clark (1939) with their seminal doll tests. The authors of these studies, and others like them over the next 30 years, presented their findings (e.g., Black children demonstrating a preference for White dolls over Black ones) as evidence of a prevalent theory that African Americans internalized the negative views of them that are held by society at large (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009, Harper & Tuckman, 2006, Marks, Settles, Cooke, Morgan, & Sellers, 2004; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998), which resulted in self-hatred and low self-esteem. As applied in the doll tests, this concept of “reflective appraisal” (Marks et al., 2004), that
individuals develop their self-concept largely from the way they believe others view them, was found by later researchers to be problematic. Critics argued that these tests were not actually measuring self-esteem; rather, they were measuring various dimensions of the subjects’ racial identity. Another critique of this early research is that these studies did not take into account the role of racial socialization on racial identity development, ignoring the role of parents and the community in how Black children develop their sense of self-worth. Later studies would demonstrate that African American children actually reported higher levels of self-esteem than were reported by their White peers, illustrating that Black children—like all children—develop their sense of self from the messages of the adults around them, not from their understandings and how they are viewed by the society at large (Marks et al., 2004).

**Traditional or mainstream theoretical approaches.** In the wake of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s, Cross (1971) constructed a more empowering conceptual model of Black identity development, tracing the development of what the author termed *psychological Nigrescence*. DeCuir-Gunby (2009) explained, “The model was an attempt to describe the process of becoming Black by fully embracing a Black Identity and reaching self-actualization under oppressive conditions” (p. 105). In the conceptualization of BRI development, Cross (1971) conceived of a process by which a Black individual moves through developmental stages from a “non-Afrocentric [italics added] to an Afrocentric to a multicultural identity” (p. 41). Thus, according to Sue and Sue (2003) a distinctive and important feature of Black identity models during this period was the recognition of the sociopolitical factors (i.e., racism, oppression) on identity development.
In the model, Cross (1971, 1991) outlined five stages of BRI development that illustrate transformation from negative to positive self-identification:

1. Pre-encounter (valuing Whiteness and devaluing Blackness).

2. Encounter (questioning and reinterpreting of pro-White and anti-Black views; usually brought on by profound event).

3. Immersion–emersion (embracing Blackness and rejecting Whiteness and dominant culture).

4. Internalization (growing flexibility and cross-racial understanding).

5. Internalization–commitment (security in Black identity and commitment to social justice and change). (see also DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Sue & Sue, 2003)

Cross (1995) and Vandiver (2001) expanded this model later in response to criticisms that it was too simplistic and did not account for individual differences within stages. Another critique of Cross’s (1971, 1991) model was that it began with the proposition that, before the first stage of identity development, Black people were thought to be “unaware of their race or the race of others” (Chavez & Guido-Debrito, 1999, p. 41).

DeCuir-Gunby (2009) explained the changes in Cross’s (1971, 1991) new model, which attempted to acknowledge the complexity of Black racial development. DeCuir-Gunby (2009) stated:

The expanded model describes identity clusters within each stage that are influenced by socialization practices and result from conversion experiences. In addition, the expanded model addresses the possibility of recycling stages within one’s lifetime. The new theoretical additions include pre-encounter identity clusters (assimilation, self-hatred, and miseducation), an immersion–emersion cluster (anti-White), and internalization clusters (multiculturalist inclusive and Afrocentricity). The model expansion addresses the critique that the prior model was underidentified within the individual stages. This revision theoretically illustrates the complexity of BRI within each stage. (p. 105)
Despite the criticism, DeCuir-Gunby (2009) acknowledged that Cross’s (1971, 1991) model continues to dominate the discourse on BRI development, serving as the foundation of numerous research studies and survey instruments with which researchers have attempted to obtain empirical evidence of Cross’s theories.

Parham (1989) extended Cross’s (1995) work by developing a model for BRI development that describes a lifelong process of cycling through different identities. According to Parham (1989), these identities are constructed through encounters with White culture and negative treatment from White people. Parham’s model, like Cross’s (1995), described a process that is developmental and occurs over time, but Parham (1989) broke with Cross (1995) in that Parham (1989) rejected a purely linear notion of racial identity development. Instead, Parham argued that some individuals could progress from stage to stage, but others could stagnate, remaining in one particular stage throughout a lifetime, and still others could recycle through the stages, reaching one stage, but cycling back to an earlier stage, according to an experience that “forces the individual to re-think his or her identity” (Marks et al., 2004, p. 387).

Although Parham (1989) represented a more dynamic construction of BRI development than Cross’s (1995) earlier model, critics argued that it shares the same limitations of Cross and other traditional conceptualizations (e.g., Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 1996; Helms, 1984; Jackson, 1975; Thomas, 1971) of racial identity development. The primary critiques of these mainstream approaches were the following two critiques:

1. These theories generally represent Black identity development progressing linearly, in one direction, with a healthy or ideal psychological endpoint
(Constantine, Richardson, Benjamin, & Wilson, 1998; Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999; DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Marks et al., 2004).

2. These theories tend to generalize the developmental stages of Black identity development across individuals without taking into account how other aspects of identity (i.e., gender, class, age, etc.) intersect with and impact racial identity development (Constantine et al., 1998; Marks et al., 2004; Phinney, 2008).

**Intersectionality.** First coined by Crenshaw (1991) and expanded by Collins (2000) the term *intersectionality* described the way in which various dimensions of social identity categories—such as race, class, and gender—interact with one another to reinforce systems of oppression and multiple forms of discrimination. Grounded in critical feminist theory, Crenshaw (1991) put forth the notion that the impact of sexism on the lived experience of women could not be fully understood without also taking into account how race and class intersect to produce multiple and multilayered forms gender bias and discrimination. Crenshaw (1991) explained:

> Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and anti-racist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. (p. 1242)

Without acknowledging all the ways in which a woman’s social identity is constructed and construed (both within group and outside of group), Crenshaw argued, that one cannot accurately address the subjugation of women within a patriarchal, White supremacist, capitalist system.
Collins (2000) closely examined these systems of oppression in the context of the Black female experience and illustrated (a) the multiple ways these systems intersect; and (b) the multiple levels on which these intersections can occur through, what Collins terms, a *matrix of domination*. This new paradigm rejected additive models of oppression in which individuals belonging to subjugated groups are defined in relationship to a privileged other (e.g., White or Black; male or female). Collins argued that these “either–or” approaches, ignore the ways in which members of all groups in society can be both privileged and oppressed. Collins (2000) explained, “In this system, for example, White women are penalized by their gender but privileged by their race. Depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed” (p. 287). Looking at the Black female experience within a larger, overarching, historically created system of domination provides an opportunity to explore human identity, in general, in a much more powerful way, considering the impact of domination along multiple axes (i.e., race, class, gender, sexual identity, religion, ethnicity, age, etc.) and how they are dependent upon one another to maintain the larger structure of oppression.

In the matrix, Collins (2000) identified three levels at which domination is experienced and resisted: (a) the level of personal biography; (b) the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and (c) the systemic level of social institutions (p. 288). The level of personal biography represents the unique consciousness (i.e., experiences, values, motivations, emotions) individuals develop and use to interpret their world. Collins (2000) stated that these biographies—based in interpersonal relationships—could be “freeing and empowering” yet they could be at the
same time “confining and oppressive” (p. 288). For African American women, Collins discussed the ways in which the power of motherhood and community could provide a bulwark against the forces of oppression, while experiences of domestic violence and abuse might, in the same person, foster internalized oppression within Black women. The concept of personal biography as a site of oppression and resistance within the matrix of domination complicates traditional or mainstream approaches to Black identity development in that it recognizes the unique experience of the individual even within a group that has a strong, cultural identity.

In the model, Collins (2000) recognized the strength of these cultural bonds within the African American community, for the cultural context formed by the sharing of history, experiences, and values is what provides meaning for the personal biography. This group or community sphere of influence is the second level at which domination is experienced and resisted. Collins (2000) explained:

Each individual biography is rooted in several overlapping cultural contexts—for example, groups defined by race, social class, age, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. The cultural component contributes, among other things, the concepts used in thinking and acting, group validation of an individual’s interpretation of concepts, the “thought models” used in the acquisition of knowledge, and standards used to evaluate individual thought and behavior. The most cohesive cultural contexts are those with identifiable histories, geographic locations, and social institutions. (p. 287)

Although Collins recognized that dominate groups have attempted to subjugate Black people at the group level (e.g., the infiltration of Eurocentric standards of beauty), the author went on to note that, for African American women, the cultural context created through the nature of Black women’s relationships with one another, the Blues tradition, and the legacy of contemporary Black female writers has proven particularly resistant to
oppression by dominant groups (p. 288). Other authors supported the notion that the unique experience of African Americans and the emphasis of Black parents on cultural socialization practices play a significant role in building a positive racial identity in Black children (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Hanley & Noblit, 2009; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Stevenson, 1994; Thorton et al., 1990), thereby, forming a powerful barrier to the forces of domination.

The third level at which oppression is experienced and resisted is at the systemic level. According to Collins (2000), this level describes the social institutions—schools, churches, the media, etc.—controlled by the dominant group (p. 288). These institutions can also provide access to the privileges of the powerful, but this often comes with a cost, usually requiring members of subjugated groups “to replace individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant group’s specialized thought” (p. 287). Therefore, the oppressed can become the oppressor depending on the context. Resistance at this level occurs when individuals can acknowledge all of the dimensions of their identities and, thus, all of the ways that individual privileges and penalties operate together to maintain the overarching system of domination.

Intersectionality theory provides a multilayered reconceptualization of how of race and other social identifiers interact and affect identity development, and it underscores the importance of multidimensional approaches to understanding racial identity development.

**Multidimensional approaches.** As an outgrowth of the Black Nationalist movement, some researchers began to develop models of identity development that sought to describe and examine the meaning and significance of being Black
(Constantine et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 1998; Marks et al., 2004). These underground\(^7\) approaches to conceptualizing Black identity development (e.g., Baldwin, 1980, 1981, 1984, 1985; Myers, 1988, 1993) differ from mainstream approaches in that they examined the cultural, historical, and experiential forces that influence Black identity rather than viewing identity development as linear process moving through developmental stages (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 22). Although underground approaches take into account intragroup differences, Constantine et al. (1998) pointed out that underground approaches have been criticized for not sufficiently exploring the impact of racism on the racial identity development of Black individuals. Furthermore, underground models are founded on assumptions that cannot be tested (Sellers et al., 1998). More recently, researchers have taken elements of both the mainstream and underground approaches to reconceptualize a multidimensional model of BRI development.

Researchers taking a multidimensional approach to conceptualizing BRI explored the various components that make up a Black individual’s racial identity. Moreover, multidimensional approaches incorporate an exploration of the impact of socialization practices on racial identity development (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). Demo and Hughes (1990) proposed a three dimensional model divided into three components: *closeness*, *Black separatism*, and *Black group evaluation*. From the work of Jackson and Gurin (1979), who developed the National Survey of Black Americans to examine the lived

\(^7\) *Underground* is a term developed by Gaines and Reed (1994, 1995) that refers to Afro-centric approaches to Black identity development research, which stands in contrast to mainstream approaches that use models based on other racial-ethnic groups (Sellers et al., 1998).
experience of African Americans, Demo and Hughes (1990, as cited in Marks et al., 2004) defined in their model closeness as “the extent to which individuals’ feel that their ideas, feelings and thoughts are similar to other African Americans” (p. 394). Black separatism is the “commitment to African culture and the degree to which Blacks should confine their social relationships to other African Americans” (Hughes & Demo, 1989, p. 143). According to Marks et al. (2004), Black group evaluation is “the belief that most African Americans possess positive characteristics, but do not possess negative characteristics” (p. 394). Thus, Demo and Hughes’ (1990) model recognized the important role that parent messages and relationships with family, friends, and community members play in building a sense of group identity.

Sanders-Thompson (1991, 1995; see also Myers & Sanders-Thompson, 1994) proposed a multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI) development that was drawn from Clark and Clark (1939) and Baldwin (1984) and included all the important components of racial identity: physical, cultural, sociopolitical, and psychological (Marks et al., 2004). Like Sanders-Thompson (1991, 1995), Sellers et al. (1998) sought to combine or synthesize the strengths of different theoretical approaches (mainstream and underground) in their MMRI. With the MMRI as a four-dimensional model of BRI development Sellers (1998) sought to address the following questions: “How important is race in the individual’s perception of self?” and “What does it mean to be a member of this racial group?” (p. 23). Sellers et al. (1998) based the MMRI on the following four assumptions:

1. Racial identity in African Americans has properties that are stable, but can be influenced situationally and change over time.
2. Black individuals have a number of different identities, which are ordered by level of importance.

3. The most valid indicator of identity in Black individuals is their perception of what it means to be Black; thus, MMRI makes no value judgment as to what constitutes a healthy versus an unhealthy racial identity.

4. The focus of MMRI is on the significance and nature of an individual’s racial identity at a specific point in time rather than the individual’s racial identity over a period of time or developmental stages. (pp. 23–24)

With the four dimensions of MMRI (racial salience, racial centrality, racial ideology, and racial regard), Sellers et al. emphasized the important distinction between the significance that individuals attach to race when defining their identities (salience and centrality) and their perceptions of what it means to be African American (ideology and regard).

Salience is the extent to which race is a significant part of one’s self-concept at a particular moment or in a particular situation. Centrality measures the extent to which race is a core part of how an individual defines himself or herself over time. Ideology is an individual’s beliefs, opinions, and attitudes regarding the way she or he feels Black people should act in the world. Sellers et al. suggested four prevalent ideological philosophies:

1. Nationalist (emphasizes the uniqueness of being African American).

2. Oppressed Minority (emphasizes the commonalities between African Americans and other oppressed groups).

3. Assimilation (emphasizes the similarities between Blacks and the rest of American society).

4. Humanist (emphasizes the similarity among all humans).
Racial regard, the fourth dimension of MMRI, measures the extent to which one feels positively or negatively about one’s race. Private regard is the affective and evaluative judgments that African Americans make about themselves regarding race and the way that they feel about African Americans as a group. Public regard also measures the extent to which individuals feel that others view African Americans positively or negatively (Marks et al., 2004, pp. 397–398; Sellers et al., 1998, pp. 24–28).

MMRI, as well as other multidimensional measures of BRI [e.g., the Scale of Racial Socialization Development for African American Adolescents (Stevenson, 1994); the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers et al., 1997) do not consider the dimensions of their models as synonymous with racial identity. Rather, these models describe the ways in which racial identity manifests itself as Black individuals navigate and interact with American society (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Sellers et al., 1998). One of the strengths of multidimensional approaches is that they provide a complex and textured conceptualization of Black identity, which takes into consideration the meaning that African Americans attribute to being Black. Furthermore, multidimensional approaches allow BRI to be examined situationally, providing opportunities to understand intragroup differences in particular contexts (Sellers et al., 1998). This has implications for examining Black identity in the context of school. Salience, for example, might be helpful in explaining why two Black students experience the same event in the classroom differently. Thus, these phenomenological approaches to racial identity development differ from the developmental models in that their proponents focus on an individual’s experience of being Black and the meaning that he or she attaches to it rather than linear developmental stages. The use of both models constitutes a complementary approach to
understanding BRI, one that takes into account developmental factors as well as lived experience.

Much of the research on BRI has been used to examine the achievement or, more accurately, the underachievement of African American children in school (Oyserman & Harrison, 1999). Given the historical link between African Americans’ social identity, their pursuit of education (Perry, 2003), and the complex nature of Black identity development, it is important to examine the intersection of racial identity development and school success for African American children.

African American Children and School Success

White Hegemony and the Schooling of Culturally Diverse Children

Freire (1970, as cited in Bailey & Pransky, 2005) wrote, “The processes of learning cannot be divorced from the cultural contexts from which they occur” (p. 2). Many believe that the central purpose of schools is to transmit cultural values, and the literature on culture and learning recognizes the ways in which schools in our society are shaped by the cultural values and practices of the dominant communities (Bailey & Pransky, 2005; Delpit, 1995; Hollins, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2004). This orientation in schools towards the dominant cultural ideology has implications for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Bailey and Pransky (2005) identified six core premises from the literature to ground this assertion:

1. Different cultural groups organize processes of learning according to their own cultural beliefs, traditions and practices.
2. These processes impact learning from the earliest moments of our lives.
3. Educational best practices reflect a particular culture’s learning processes.
4. Diverse cultures have different views on the nature of knowledge and authority and different perspectives on culturally appropriate ways to interact with adults and others to learn.

5. Pedagogy in the United States flows out of middle class and affluent, mainly European-American cultural ideology.

6. Culturally and linguistically diverse students are disadvantaged by educational practices that do not build on the diverse orientations they bring to the process of schooling. (p. 3)

These claims recognize the important role of culture in the learning process and the important role that school can play in developing linkages between the socialization children receive at home and the socialization that they receive in school. The more connections that can be made between these two worlds, the more productive the learning experiences will be for the students, especially the culturally diverse (Hollins, 1996). The problem in many schools is that their practices have been more consistent with that of the dominant culture in our society and less connected to the cultural values and traditions of the poor and people of color (Bailey & Pransky, 2005; Delpit, 1995; Hollins, 1996; Nieto, 2004).

Delpit (1995) and Nieto (2004) noted the significance of power as it is implicated in culture and the classroom. Nieto (2004) wrote:

Members of the dominant group in a society traditionally think of dominant cultural values as “normal” while they view the values of subordinated groups as deviant or even wrong. The difference in perception is due more to the power of the each of these groups than to any inherent goodness or rightness in the values themselves. (p. 147)

This power dynamic has consequences for the culturally linguistically diverse child. Students whose languages and cultures differ from the dominant group will have difficulties in the classroom as their values, traditions, and beliefs are viewed as inferior
or deficient (Bailey & Pransky, 2005; Hollins, 1996). The role of power in the learning process is directly related to perceived cultural norms. Delpit (1995) wrote, “Success in institutions—schools, workplaces, and so on—is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power” (p. 25). If schools ignore the role that culture plays in the learning process, they are in effect validating the dominant cultural norms and invalidating the culture of subordinate groups in their classrooms. This devaluing negatively affects the self-concept and, thus, the learning experiences of culturally linguistically diverse students. Tatum (1997) noted the way in which the relationship between the dominant and oppressed is one of superiority and inferiority:

The dominant group assigns roles to the subordinates that reflect the latter’s devalued status, reserving the most highly valued roles in society for themselves. Subordinates are usually said to be incapable of being able to perform the roles. To the extent that the targeted group internalizes the images that the dominant group reflects back to them, they may find it difficult to believe in their own ability. (p. 23)

An understanding of how students from nondominant groups can construct a positive sense of self in the classroom must be accompanied by an interrogation of how the school context for culturally diverse children has been constructed “within an ethnic base of values, behaviors, beliefs, and ways of doing things that is different from their own” (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999, p. 44). In this way, the onus for success falls upon the school to develop comprehensive strategies to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of African American students at each developmental stage along their educational journey.
Holistic Approaches to Developing Successful Learning Environments for African American Students

Researchers in the field agree that, within the African American community, education is viewed as the primary means to success in American society despite the obstacles produced by racism and economic disadvantage (Perry, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2003). Unfortunately, the prevailing image of African Americans in our society as it relates to academic success is one of inferiority. Perry (2003) argued that this ideology of Black intellectual inferiority has only deepened over time, ironically, this has occurred because the notion of American society as more open and equitable has become the dominant sociocultural narrative. Therefore, Black underachievement in school cannot be attributed to external forces (social, historical, political); it must be attributed to intellectual deficits and cultural inferiority. Thus, Perry (2003) stated:

The dominant group tends to lead this conversation with African Americans participating at the margins or on the terms of the prevailing discourse. Thus it is no surprise that schools are not organized as intentional, counter-hegemonic communities and that there is an absence of spaces or programs in predominately White or multiracial institutions that are organized to forge the identities of African-American students as achievers, literate, and a people with a rich intellectual tradition. (p. 99)

Successful learning environments for Black students cannot merely be focused on academic achievement; schools must take into account and intentionally speak into the social, cultural, and political context within which Black students are forming their intellectual identities. Comas-Diaz (2006) called this “bearing witness” to injustice, arguing that the acknowledgement of racism and the impact of racism—both historically and currently—on the lives and learning of their Black students is an essential foundation for schools’ efforts to support the success of their African American students. Therefore,
educators of Black children are called upon to understand the inextricable link between culture and learning; to acknowledge and contextualize the unique experience of Black students; and to develop a culturally responsive curriculum, instructional approach, and school or classroom environment. Many education reformers have moved away from deficit-based explanations for the African American achievement gap; therefore, researchers have turned to studying the environments in which African American students are doing well to glean lessons that could be applied to other school environments. Researchers have found that schools that are effective education environments for African American children share the following characteristics:

1. A clear sense of purpose: African American students are more successful in school environments that intentionally and explicitly articulate and craft a culture of excellence and achievement (Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Perry, 2003).

2. High standards and a rigorous curriculum: High standards and a challenging curriculum send the explicit message to students that their success is determined by their effort and achievement of the standards, not their race (Hilliard, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999; Steele, 2003).

3. High expectations: A pervasive belief system in education promotes that African American students cannot achieve at high academic levels. Therefore, when they enter the classroom, they are faced with teachers who carry low expectations. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Black children and their families need to be respected to the extent that their teachers and schools will accept nothing less than excellent outcomes (Hilliard, 2003).
4. A belief that all children can achieve at high levels: Along with high standards and expectations, Black students must receive the explicit message that their teachers believe that they can meet those high standards and expectations. Affirming the ability of Black children is essential in overcoming the mistrust they have toward the school environment (Hilliard, 2003).

5. A safe, nurturing, and caring environment: Researchers have suggested that the achievement of Black students, more so than other students, is “influenced to a large degree by the social support and encouragement that they receive from teachers” (Noguera, 2003, p. 449). It is important to note that researchers find that this care from teachers occurs within a cultural context for Black students (Kuriloff, Soto, & Garver, 2012); thus, “students interpret what is caring from their culture, not from the culture of the person offering a caring relationship” (Hanley & Noblit, 2009, p. 8).

6. A strong partnership with families: Many families within the African American community are characterized by an extended family network that provides emotional and economic support. Schools must work to understand better the dynamics of African American families and communitarian traditions and work to create stronger ties between the family and the school (Noguera, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2003).

7. Supportive peer networks: Formal and informal peer networks of Black students within predominately White environments support African American students’ academic success and the affirmation of their racial identities.
(Arrington et al., 2003; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003, Perry, 2003).

8. A culturally relevant curriculum: Drawing on issues and ideas that African American students find meaningful and by using instructional methods that draw upon their strengths, teachers can more effectively meet needs of Black children and support their academic achievement (Hilliard, 2003; Kunjufu, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Thompson, 2004, Kuriloff et al., 2012).

At the core of all of these characteristics is the understanding of the important relationship between culture, identity, and school success. Hanley and Noblit (2009) noted:

Research now regards culture as a set of tools, perspectives, and capabilities that students can employ in the pursuit of learning. When these tools, perspectives, and capabilities are suppressed or denied, students are educationally disempowered… A student receives from his or her culture a racial identity, and for ALANA8 children and youth, their racial identity can connect them to a wider project of racial uplift. Researchers… now have generated a substantial body of research that demonstrates ALANA students learn best in culturally familiar settings and when they have strong positive racial identities. (p. 5)

The important role of identity affirmation and its positive relationship to the academic success of African American students is consistent throughout the literature, but the research also emphasizes that schools must adopt a holistic approach. Smith-Maddox (1998, as cited in Hanley & Noblit, 2009) argued that all elements of a program need to be thought through when considering the cultural factors that impact the success of African American students.

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8 Acronym for African American, Latina/o, Asian, Native American.
How and (perhaps more importantly) when many schools approach this work is an essential consideration. Schools develop curricula according to their best understandings of child development and how children learn along a developmental continuum. The authors of a growing body of research are calling upon educators to understand how children understand race and their racial identity from a developmental perspective.

**Race, Racism, and Child Development**

**Young children, race, and racial prejudice.** The research shows that young children (i.e., early childhood to elementary years) notice race and develop racial prejudices without explicitly being taught to do so (Aboud, 2008; Hirschfeld, 2008; Katz, 2003; Patterson & Bigler, 2006; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001), but parents and teachers persist in the belief that children this age are too young to engage in conversations about racial differences and prejudice (Katz & Kofkin, 1997). Thus, young children are noticing racial differences and making judgments about those differences with little substantive guidance from the adults in their lives to counter or explicate these narratives. If the academic success of Black children is closely related to their positive racial identity development, schools might be doing a disservice to these children by waiting until their early adolescent years to address issues of race head on in the classroom.

Children as young as preschool age notice differences between people and have a need to categorize them according to those differences. Ramsey (1991) asserted that young children use “concrete and observable cues when categorizing and identifying themselves and others” (p. 28). Physical traits such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features provide children with a way to conceive and talk about racial differences (Tatum, 1997). However, the authors of the research show that young children not only notice
differences, but they also make judgments according to difference at young age. Yee and Brown (1992) found that by Age 5, children showed a very strong bias for other children they considered to be more like them. These judgments make sense for where preschoolers are in their cognitive development. Bigler and Liben (1993) asserted that young children’s fledgling cognitive skills might explain their limited reasoning abilities regarding people and something like their skin color, and why they are prone to racial stereotyping at a very young age. Interestingly, the research does not support the popular contention that young children learn their racial beliefs primarily from their parents (Hirschfeld, 2008; Katz, 2003; Patterson & Bigler, 2006). Rather, internal (biological and cognitive) and external (environmental and social) factors are at play (Winkler, 2009).

First, although young children have the ability to organize people by categories, they do not have the ability to evaluate those categories along multiple dimensions (Aboud, 2008). Thus, children engage in transductive reasoning, presuming that people who are alike in one category (e.g., skin color) are alike in another category (e.g., intelligence, ability; Katz & Kofkin, 1997; Patterson & Bigler, 2006).

Second, children will pick up cues from their social environment that impact their assumptions about race, for example, noticing, that people who have a certain skin color or speak a certain language have certain jobs or live in certain neighborhoods (Patterson & Bigler, 2006). Taking these cognitive and social factors together, the research demonstrates that young children do not have the ability on their own to challenge the meanings that they attach to something like skin color. Therefore, unless a caring and thoughtful adult is working with them to challenge those assumptions and stereotypes, they go unchecked and those assumptions and stereotypes become normalized in their
minds (Winkler, 2009). Bigler and Wright (2012) added, “Without intervention, children receive very little information about race that might counteract their own developing biases as they as they observe racial inequalities in the world around them (p. 23).

Third, although young children’s narrow understandings of race are developmentally appropriate, it is important to consider the ways in which children of color, particularly African American children, might be affected at an early age by racial stereotyping.

**Black children, racial identity development, and school success: Early and middle childhood.** Tatum (1997) wrote extensively about the “smog” of racism and White privilege. This “smog,” Tatum argued, takes the form of the daily messages that young children receive in the form of “picture books, children’s movies, television, and children’s songs, which all include subtle messages that whiteness is preferable” (Tatum, 1997, as cited in Winkler, 2009, p. 3). Stevenson and Stewart (1958) found that Black children as young as three exhibited a higher rate of “own-race rejection” than their White peers. Black children were less likely to choose another Black child when selecting a playmate, a companion to go home with, or guests for a birthday party. Similarly, Katz and Kofkin (1997) found that Black and White children at 30 months expressed a preference for playmates in their racial group, but at 36 months, both the Black and White students preferred White playmates. Hirschfeld (2008) found evidence in children as young as Age 5 of being negatively affected by racial stereotyping. However, negative self-expressions might not necessarily represent internalized oppression in young children; rather, they could reflect their growing awareness and taking in of racialized messages from their social environments and the media (Aboud, 2008; Tatum, 1997).
As discussed earlier in this review, early research on Black identity development (e.g., Clark & Clark, 1939; Horowitz, 1939) attempted to draw a correlation between Black children’s out-group preferences (e.g., choosing a White doll over a Black doll) and their self-concept, positing that Black children derived their sense of self from the views of the larger society. Later research and subsequent critiques of these earlier studies problematized these claims. Researchers recognized the important role of racial socialization in racial identity development and moved towards centering their approaches on the individual’s perceptions of his or her experiences and identity, and the meaning that Black individuals attribute to their membership in their racial group (Marks et al., 2004; Sellers et al., 1998). This shift to incorporating phenomenological approaches to Black identity development with developmental approaches has important implications for understanding the intersection of racial identity development and child development.

In their review of the available research on the formation of racial stereotypes in Black and White children and adolescents, Bogan and Slaughter-Defoe (2012) concluded that the authors of the literature show that both Black and White children exhibit racial preferences or bias as early as Ages 4 or 5 with both groups expressing White preference and associating negative attributes to Black. However, as children mature, both groups develop increasingly positive evaluations of both Blacks and Whites. Although White children consistently demonstrated less prejudice over time, they yet maintained preferences for their in-group that were more positive than preferences for the out-group (i.e., preference for White or lighter skin color; preference for White children in hypothetical situations). In contrast, Black children’s White bias generally decreased, but
their in-group and out-group preferences fluctuated over time with racial awareness and stereotype consciousness being important variables affecting their preferences and attitudes (p. 17).

Briefly, Black children who demonstrated greater awareness of racial differences between Whites and Blacks demonstrated increased out-group (i.e., White) preferences. As Black children grew older—and, some researchers posit, more cognitively mature and, therefore, better able to process their social experience and the negative associations with race—these increased White preferences correlated with a decrease in self-concept (p. 15).

Regarding stereotype consciousness, Bogan and Slaughter-Defoe (2012), citing the one empirical study of stereotype consciousness in young children (McKown & Weinstein, 2003), found agreement that both Black and White children could determine an individual’s stereotype (i.e., stereotypes that they perceive the other to hold) by Age 10. McKown and Weinstein (2003) posited that once children were able to infer an individual’s stereotype, they would quickly develop an awareness of broadly held stereotypes. McKown and Weinstein (2003) found that children from “academically stigmatized ethnic groups” (i.e., Black children) developed their awareness of broadly held stereotypes much earlier than their White peers (p. 15–16). Although they found no evidence that stereotype consciousness had a negative impact on the academic performance of White students, McKown and Weinstein (2003) did find that “stereotype
threat\(^9\) conditions led Black children[,] who were aware of broadly held stereotypes, to experience a decrease in performance on cognitive tasks and to report higher levels of effort withdrawals” (p. 18). McKown and Weinstein demonstrated that stereotype threat could have negative impact on the academic performance of Black children before they even reach the Grade 3 (p. 16).

**Racial socialization: Early and middle childhood.** Racial socialization has been shown be a protective factor for African Americans against the impact of racism and prejudice (Spencer, 1983). In addition to preparing children for the social realities of living in a racialized society, socialization might bolster Black children’s self-esteem and foster positive racial identity development, which are positively associated with young people’s academic beliefs and performance outcomes (Chavous et al., 2003). Few researchers have examined the protective and coping benefits of racial socialization among children in their early and middle childhood years. It stands to reason that these studies are challenging because young children are or perceived to be less able than older children and adolescents to recognize and cognitively process racial discrimination when it occurs. If this assumption is true, it might leave young Black students in a precarious position in the school context, particularly if it is predominately White. Tatum (1997) asserted that students as young as Age 3 are breathing in the “smog” of prejudice and bias, but White parents and even parents of color might be avoiding conversations about racial discrimination, believing their preschool and elementary aged children are too young to understand. Katz and Kofkin (1997) found that Black parents were equally as

\(^9\) Stereotype threat refers to being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group (Steele & Aronson, 1995).
hesitant as White parents were when it came to pointing out racial bias that they observed or experienced in daily life. Although Black parents were comfortable instilling racial and cultural pride in their young children, they were less likely to employ the kind of socialization (i.e., preparation for bias) that would likely provide the protection factors and coping mechanisms necessary to navigate effectively the predominately White spaces (Hughes & Chen, 1997).

The authors of the extant literature support introducing interventions that challenge stereotyping during the preschool years before these negative attitudes become internalized and harder to change during the early adolescent years (Ramsey, 1991; Tatum, 1997, Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

**Black children, racial identity, and school success: Early adolescence and adolescence.** As children—both Black and White—move into the early adolescent years, they begin a process of exploring, questioning, evaluating, and re-evaluating their various identities (Erikson, 1968). For Black youths, this experience is particularly fraught as the understanding of self is developing alongside a growing realization that they are viewed not as individuals but as members of an often derogated group (Tatum, 1997). As Black students come to identify themselves as part of a cultural group and to understand the ways in which their culture and cultural practices are marginalized in society, they will develop beliefs that can affect various areas of their lives, including educational achievement (Chavous et al., 2003). The literature reveals two schools of thought regarding the role of BRI and academic success. The first school posits that African
American students develop paranorms\textsuperscript{10} to negotiate and cope with perceived structural and cultural barriers to educational success.

One of the most common phenomena cited in the literature is that of the detached stance or “cool pose” adopted by many African Americans in school. The structural barriers to success in American society cause some Black students to infer that, to succeed in the culture of school, they must reject the culture of home (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). According to Ferguson (2000), for many Black adolescents, this choice is untenable and they make the conscious decision to disidentify with the culture of school to counter the school’s devaluing of who they are, where they come from, and how they communicate. According to Tatum (1997), this “oppositional stance both protects one’s identity from the psychological assault of racism and keeps the dominant group at a distance” (p. 60). It is important to note that the authors of several conceptual critiques and empirical studies have challenged Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) theory—that Blacks associate school success with “acting White” (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Cook & Ludwig, 1998).

Perry (2003) noted the long historical tradition in the African American community of placing a high value on education and viewing it as a vehicle for transcending the structural barriers to success. This school of thought emphasizes the theory that group and cultural affiliation facilitates the development of positive academic

\textsuperscript{10} The majority of research and clinical literature that defines psychological normality has been developed primarily from Euro-American traditions with little emphasis on ethnic, cultural, or class distinctions. Deviations from these standards are considered abnormal. Paranorms are psychological mechanisms developed by minorities which, by Euro-American standards, might appear abnormal, but are actually adaptive and healthy minority coping mechanisms for use against oppression and racism (Sue & Sue, 2003).
achievement beliefs. Ward (1990) found that high-achieving Black adolescents demonstrated a sense of connectedness and belonging to a collective struggle and triumph, and were able to reject negative messages about their racial group. Arrington et al. (2003) asserted that same-race or same-ethnicity affinity groups in schools are a way that African American students “can come together and be emotionally reinforced” (p. 2), contributing to an increased sense of identity and belonging and, thus, positively affecting their academic performance.

In a study of boys of color in an elite independent school, Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) corroborated the importance to the schooling of African American boys of a sense of belonging. They found that the African American boys who were members of the Black Student Association (BSA) were able to strategize explicitly on how to navigate the race and class dynamics of the schools. In their study of 147 African American girls, Constantine et al. (2012) found that girls who exhibited greater adherence to Afro-centric cultural values (i.e., collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, and self-determination) were more likely to have higher levels of both self-esteem and perceived social support satisfaction.

Oyserman and Harrison (1999) argued for adding a third model to the two models above when considering the relationship between Black adolescents, racial identity development, and academic achievement. Oyserman and Harrison (1999) posited:

The missing component involves conceptualization of academic achievement as part of being African American. Youths able to conceptualize themselves in terms of a sense of connectedness with the Black community and heritage, an awareness of racism and likely structural barriers, and a view of achievement as connected to and an integral part of being African American are likely to both perform better at school and be at reduced risk of depression. (p. 4)
Oyserman and Harrison argued that the identity components were likely to have interaction effects, thereby, bolstering the positive impact on school success for Black adolescents.

**Racial socialization: Adolescence.** Similar to the research on early and middle childhood children, whose authors examined the link between racial socialization and academic achievement, the studies of adolescents were also inconclusive. In a review of the research on parents’ ethnical–racial socialization practices, Hughes et al. (2006) were not able to identify any emergent themes and, in the cases of the three studies cited, the findings were contradictory. Most of the available research on racial socialization has been focused on the nature of socialization practices; however, determining the impact on different aspects of child development (i.e., self-esteem, academic achievement) is challenging given all of the variables one must consider when examining the success of Black students in school.

Nevertheless, the research is clear that Black students learn best in culturally responsive environments where their racial identities are strongly affirmed. According to the University of Pittsburgh PRIDE (2016), positive racial identity development has been linked to “higher resilience, self-efficacy, self-esteem, grades, GPA, higher standardized test scores, ability to solve more problems on SAT exams, and reduced risky behaviors” (p. 4).

As Black families look for the school environments where their children have the best chance at being successful, an increasing number are looking to independent schools to provide their children with the tools to obtain success in the academic, social, economic, and interpersonal arenas (Johnson & Anderson, 1992). As elite independent
schools continue to be predominately White and in predominately affluent spaces, it will be important to examine the cultural and developmental landscape that Black students and parents are required to navigate and the stressors they will experience on positive racial identity development, which is an essential foundational factor in school success for Black children.

**Black Students and Success in Independent Schools**

**Historical and theoretical context.** Independent schooling in the African American community has a long history in this country. According to Johnson and Anderson (1992), the effort by Black parents to “exert more control over their children’s educational destinies” (p. 121) reflects a belief by the African American community in the power of education to transcend the obstacles of racism. This has been a long struggle, but an important one, pursued in spite of the inability to predict whether the results of their learning would be valued or even seen by the larger society (Perry, 2003). Thus, Perry (2003) wrote:

> For African Americans, from slavery to the modern Civil Rights movement, the [reasons] were these: You pursued learning because this is how you asserted yourself as a free person, how you claimed your humanity. You pursued learning so you could work for racial uplift, for the liberation of your people. You pursued education so you could prepare yourself to lead your people. (p. 11)

In enrolling their children in independent schools, African American parents are continuing a long tradition of using education as a means for their children to achieve success in American society.

Since the 1960s, African Americans have been attending in growing numbers predominately White elite schools (Johnson & Anderson, 1992; Datnow & Cooper, 1998; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988), believing that these bastions of privilege would provide
their Black children with not only a rich and rigorous academic experience, but also with the cultural capital and training in the habits of success that would prepare them for positions of power and leadership in a White world (Datnow & Cooper, 1998; Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003). Programs like A Better Chance (ABC) and Prep for Prep created a pipeline intended to move talented students of color from public schools to elite independent schools, many of whom were looking to create student bodies more reflective of the cultural diversity found in their communities and the changing world (Schneider & Shouse, 1992).

According to Schneider and Shouse (1992), despite the efforts of independent schools to recruit minority students, the research shows that African American students and families “often feel like outsiders, alienated from the culture of these schools” (p. 223). Despite their deep resources and selective admissions processes, independent schools are not immune from the Black–White achievement gap found in American public schools (Kuriloff et al., 2012). The gap between the culture of Black students and families and the culture of independent schools appears to be the most salient factor affecting the success of African American children in these schools.

Delpit (1995) referred to the culture of the dominant group in a society as the “culture of power” (p. 24) and described how these power dynamics play out in the classroom:

1. Issues of power are enacted in the classroom. Schooling is intimately related to power.

2. There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a “culture of power.”
3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those that have power.

4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.

5. Those with power are frequently less aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (p. 24)

The role of power in the learning process is directly related to perceived cultural norms. Delpit (1995) wrote, “Success in institutions—schools, workplaces, and so on—is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power” (p. 25). If schools ignore the role that culture plays in the learning process, they are in effect validating the dominant cultural norms and invalidating the culture of subordinate groups in their classrooms. This devaluing negatively affects the learning experiences of culturally diverse students. The very nature of independent schools—historically exclusive institutions where students and families are expected to buy into a mission and a set of norms and values—makes for a culturally hostile environment for many Black students from the moment they walk in the door. Cookson and Persell (1985, as cited in Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991) noted, “The schools encourage not only the development of a collective identity[,] but also the adoption of values that serve to legitimize privilege” (p. 29).

Programs like ABC and Prep for Prep understood the important role of cultural capital to school success and worked to not only prepare students of color for the academic rigors of independent school, but also to provide those students with what Bourdieu (1990) called the “habitus” of the elite class, the dispositions and habits of mind that affluent White students are steeped in from early childhood and are pass on
generation to generation, thereby, cementing and perpetuating their place in the ruling class. Thus, the ability of African American students to succeed in independent schools seems to be closely related to their ability to take on an upper-class identity. In a study of the Black–White academic achievement gap, Kuriloff et al. (2012) found that many of the variables on the student level that affected academic achievement could be connected to the student “not having (yet) acquired elements of an upper-class habitus or what we have come to call ‘knowing how to do prep-school’—habits of mind and heart that these schools require for success” (p. 92).

The challenge for many African American students in predominately White, elite independent schools is managing the marginalization and psycho-social stress that can come with adopting an upper-class habitus (Kuriloff et al., 2012). Given the conclusive evidence demonstrating the positive relationship between positive racial identity development and school success for Black children, it seems that Black students and families might face a challenging journey as they attempt to assimilate to the culture of independent schools, while maintaining a positive sense of self. Arrington et al. (2003) note:

As members of groups that are not advantaged in the same way Whites are socially and economically, Black students and other students of color in independent schools benefit from acquiring the academic and social knowledge that will position them for success in college and future careers. Connecting with possible future leaders in society, and, more importantly, potentially becoming one of these future leaders are other advantages of attending independent schools. However, by attending independent schools, Black students must also grapple with implicit and explicit messages that the community they represent is not as valued in school as is the majority community. (para. 13)

These implicit and explicit messages, which serve to diminish the self-concept of Black students come in many forms, from the low enrollment numbers of Black students to the
pictures of White men hanging on the walls (Horvat & Antonio, 1999), but few
researchers have examined the impact of these messages—or the impact of cultural
milieu in which they exist—on the school experience of young Black children (i.e., early
to middle childhood) in predominately White independent schools. Given the agreement
in the literature (a) that children see race and can exhibit stereotyping and bias at an early
age (Aboud, 2008; Hirschfeld, 2008; Katz, 2003; Patterson & Bigler, 2006), (b) that
young children pick up on messages about race from media and their social environments
(Aboud, 2008; Bigler & Liben, 2007), and (c) that these message interactions can affect
the self-concept of Black children (Tatum, 1997), this area is important for future
research. In a small body of research, some authors have examined the lived experience
of younger Black children in contexts other than elite independent schools, which might
be helpful to review.

**Early and middle childhood.** Benner and Crosnoe (2011) pointed to the transition
to elementary school as an important developmental milestone as young children are
moving from a segregated and homogeneous environment (i.e., home) to a new and more
diverse one (i.e., school). Alexander and Entwisle (1988, as cited in Benner and Crosnoe,
2011) noted the positive relationship between a child’s socioemotional development in
the early years and their educational trajectory; thus, it is important to examine the social
and cultural ecology to which young children are exposed. In a study of Black students’
early school engagement and attitudes towards achievement and learning, Tyson (2002)
found that elementary-age students at an all-Black independent school and an all-Black
public school begin school with very positive and achievement-oriented attitudes.
Students enjoyed showing off their knowledge and were explicit about how important it
was to them to be smart. Experiences of academic failure negatively affected school attitudes and their ability to envision a successful academic future for themselves. This might have implications for Black students in elite, predominately White private schools. What is the impact on Black children’s attitudes towards school when they encounter failure within the social and cultural ecology of these spaces?

Benner and Crosnoe (2011) examined the relationship between the racial or ethnic composition of elementary schools and the students’ academic and socioemotional functioning. A finding in Benner and Crosnoe’s (2011) study, which could have implications for independent schools, was related to the importance of same-race or ethnicity to the social–emotional health of children:

[H]aving more same-race/ethnicity peers in school was associated with fewer externalizing behaviors and more positive interpersonal skills among children. Social adaptations are a critical mechanism by which young children successfully navigate the transition to school . . . Children who have more same-race/ethnicity peers may find it easier to forge relationships with other children, which in turn may facilitate better adaptation to the new social context of formal schooling. (p. 641)

Although the positive socioemotional impact of having same-race peers was evident in the study, higher diversity in the classroom was not shown to result in academic benefits for students of color (White students did demonstrate academic benefits from being in a diverse classroom). Benner and Crosnoe (2011) suggested taking a nuanced view of classroom composition by observing students across their school careers and developmental stages and examining “whether and when diversity and belonging might exert their most potent influence on children and adolescents academic and socioemotional development” (p. 642).
Adolescence. The authors of a richer body of research have addressed the experience of Black adolescents in predominately White independent schools. One of the themes that emerged from their literature is the importance of peer relationships in school success. Datnow and Cooper (1997) studied African American students in a predominately White, elite, independent school, and revealed that formal and informal peer networks “support[ed] these students’ academic success, creat[ed] opportunities for them to reaffirm their racial identities, and facilitate[ed] their adjustment to settings that are otherwise difficult for Blacks to fit into” (p. 56).

Arrington et al. (2003) found that Black students in private schools report feelings of both connectedness and disconnectedness, which stem from encountering support and affirmation of who they are while simultaneously confronting “challenges to their sense of self and community” (para. 10). Confirming Datnow and Cooper (1997), Arrington et al. (2003) believed that same-race or ethnicity affinity groups in schools are a way that African American students “can come together and be emotionally reinforced” (para. 29), contributing to an increased sense of identity and belonging and, thus, positively affecting their academic performance.

In a study of boys of color in an elite independent school, Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) corroborated the importance of a sense of belonging to the schooling of Black adolescents. They found that the African American boys who were members of the BSA were able to strategize on how to navigate the race and class dynamics of the schools. In their study, Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) observed that African American boys in the BSA were able to “compare notes” according to the variety of their experiences both inside and outside of the school, allowing them to develop sophisticated critiques of the
school through the lenses of race and class. This discourse provided the boys an opportunity to understand more deeply the “rules of the game” and “the value of mastering it” (p. 764). This knowledge and strategizing built confidence in African American boys and helped them to feel as if they had more control over their school experiences. Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) explained, “In an explicit way, they worked to acquire both the cultural capital and the habits that more privileged boys took for granted” (p. 765).

According to the literature, explicitness is an important factor in the success of adolescent students of color in independent schools. Explicitness provides access to the privileges of belonging to what Delpit (1995) called the “culture of power.” Cookson and Persell (1991) noted the importance of Black students and their teachers having a common understanding of academic expectations. In their study of Black high school students, Kuriloff et al. (2012) pointed to misunderstandings around the meaning of teacher feedback and the negative impact this might have on Black students’ academic outcomes. They found Black students were more likely than their White peers to internalize negative feedback and believe that they deserved it, while their White peers could more easily “shake off” critical comments.

Earlier attitudes, reflected in the approach of programs like ABC, placed the onus on the student for his or her success and his or her ability to understand how to “do” independent school. More recently, advocates and researchers place this responsibility on the schools, arguing that it is the school’s job to promote and support the psychological and emotional health of Black students in independent schools and to teach explicitly the habits of success (Arrington et al., 2003; Kuriloff et al., 2012).
However, what does success look like for a Black student in an elite, predominately White independent school? Examining approaches that effectively support African American students along the different stages of their developmental journey in independent schools might provide important directions for schools as they seek to develop more effective interventions.

**Definitions of success.** Arrington and Stevenson (2006) defined success for Black students in private schools as

A positive sense of self by students across social contexts, a strong sense of community and membership in the school, and a racial identity that can be used as resource during development—particularly when confronted with racism and race-related stereotypes. (p. 3)

Interestingly, this definition of success did not include academic achievement. This lack might be a recognition of the importance of a positive racial identity and sense of connection or belonging to the success of Black students in independent schools. Moreover, this lack might also be an acknowledgment of the psychological and emotional toll of racism on these students and the ways in which these daily stressors can affect all aspects of the school experience, including academics. Arrington and Stevenson (2006) called on schools to view the positive development and mental health of its Black students as equally important to their academic progress. The implication was that even students who perform at a high academic level might not actually be “succeeding.” As an example, Zweigenhaft and Domhoff (1991) quoted an ABC graduate who recalled Black peers from the program who went on to selective colleges, but “with a lot of scars” (p. 77).
Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) seemed to support aspects of this definition, but explicitly identified class as an important factor that affects the success of Black boys in elite independent schools. Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) found that the most successful Black boys were able to learn “the drill” (p. 751; i.e., the skills and habits of mind) required to perform well academically; to recognize, name, and interrogate issues of race and class; and to take on the school’s “‘hegemonic habitus’ without ‘selling out’” (p. 751). Cookson and Persell (1991) equated selling out with “acting upper class” (p. 220) and argued that class divisions exacerbate racial divisions. Thus, successful Black students are those who are able to recognize and reconcile these tensions, which occur on the level of identity. Zweigenhaft and Domhoff (1991) reinforced the idea of considering the important intersection of race and class. Although ABC (in its early incarnation) did an incredibly successful job of preparing its students to navigate the culture of power, many of the graduates found that they were not full members. Zweigenhaft and Domhoff (1991) wrote:

But a proper upper-class style and good personal chemistry are not sufficient to make it to the top levels of the corporate power structure. Unfortunately, the ABC graduates have come up against the barriers of personal, cultural, and institutional racism just as they are reaching a key point in their careers. They have come near the top, but they are blocked from the top itself, and the usual White excuses, lack of education or the popular cultural style do not hold. (p. 166)

In other words, although it provided cultural power, earning a preparatory school diploma did not always provide Black graduates with the social and economic power of their White, upper-class peers.

Knowing the “rules of the game” seem to extend beyond the school and into the world, requiring Black students to understand the ways in which race and class play out
within the school context are reflective of a larger historical, social, and political context. Oyserman et al. (1999) argued that Black students who could connect this understanding (i.e., awareness of racism) to their sense of connectedness with the Black community and heritage, and to their view of achievement as being an integral part of being an African American, would more likely be academically successful.

However, when considering definitions of success, it is important to understand the criteria being measured. Independent schools can be difficult “nailing down” in this respect, given the emphasis on culture and fit. Schoeffel, Steenwyk, and Kuriloff (2011) examined at the Shipley School faculty and student beliefs about success, and found that both groups viewed success as a process, not an outcome. According to Schoeffel et al. (2011), the faculty viewed students as successful when they were “curious, confident, self-aware, hard-working, and respectful risk-takers who care about others and can ask essential questions as they think independently, critically, creatively, and collaboratively” (p. 1). Without the pressure of standardized testing, independent schools have the ability to measure success in a holistic way that goes beyond test scores. Nevertheless, the authors in the literature beg the questions: Does the focus on these affective aspects of success reinforce the sometimes-inscrutable culture of independent schools for Black students? Does a more subjective definition of success take into account the ways in which characteristics such as “confidence” are mediated through culture? For example, confidence from a Black student’s perspective could be interpreted as arrogance from a teacher’s perspective. Therefore, any examination of the success of African American students must also examine the role of the teacher and the impact of teacher perceptions on student success.
Role of Teacher Perceptions in the School Success of Black Students in Independent Schools

For the 2015–2016 school year, NAIS reported that 84.5% of teachers in New York State independent schools identify as White\(^\text{11}\). This has important implications for Black students in these schools because it is very likely that they will be taught primarily by White teachers over their time in private school. My review of the literature has established the positive impact that a culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning can have on the success of Black students in school. Fraser (2002) explained what a culturally responsive pedagogy would encompass:

Culturally responsive pedagogy . . . as its name implies, focuses . . . on the issue of pedagogy. Instead of the curriculum, this movement looks at teachers and teaching. Culturally responsive pedagogy is concerned with issues of sensibility and style; on how one teaches and moves beyond teacher knowledge to focus on teacher practice. Ultimately, it focuses on the teacher’s soul, the health and hard won integrated wholeness that is essential if one is to understand oneself and one’s relation to students, some of whom will be similar and some of whom will be quite different from any individual teacher. (p. xii)

This approach of focusing on the “teacher’s soul” calls upon educational reformers and those interested in closing the Black–White academic achievement gap in the United States to examine teacher beliefs, perceptions, and expectations and the influence they might have on the success of Black students.

Effects of Teacher Perceptions on African American Student Outcomes

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) conducted what would become their seminal study at Oak School on the relationship between teacher expectations and student performance. They found that teachers’ expectations were powerful self-fulfilling

prophecies for young children (Grades 1 and 2). Students whom teachers expected to
grow and improve, grew and improved. Students who did not receive that label failed to
make the same gains as those who did. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) termed this a
Pygmalion Effect,\textsuperscript{12} theorizing that teachers who believe in their students’ abilities will
likely engage in behaviors that will make that behavior more likely to occur. Subsequent
studies supported Rosenthal and Jacobson’s findings, but they found the effects of self-
fulfilling prophecy to be relatively small (Jussim 1989; Jussim & Eccles, 1992),
concluding that teacher perceptions often predict student outcomes because they are
accurate not because they are self-fulfilling prophecies. In other words, teachers who
know that a student has done well in the past and observe that student performing well in
his or her class will develop an expectation that the student will do well in the future.
When the student performs well, it reflects an accurate expectation, not a self-fulfilling
prophecy. However, Jussim, Eccles, and Madon (1996) did find that certain groups were
more susceptible to self-fulfilling prophecy: stigmatized groups (African American
students and students with low socioeconomic backgrounds) and students with low self-
concepts and previous records of poor achievement. Nevertheless, their study did not find
that teacher bias or stereotyping explained the more powerful effects of self-fulfilling
prophecy. Instead, they theorized that students from stigmatized groups might have fewer
social and psychological resources to protect them from the negative influence of teacher
expectations.

\textsuperscript{12} Pygmalion was a sculptor in Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} who fell in love with a statue of his own creation.
George Bernard Shaw’s play \textit{Pygmalion} is the story of Professor Henry Higgins and his grandiose sense of
his talents as a teacher.
Responding to Jussim et al. (1996), Ferguson (2003) posited that the results suggested “either that Black students respond differently than Whites to similar treatment from teachers or that teachers treat Black and White students differently, or both” (p. 473). Steele (1992), as cited in Ferguson, 2003) spoke on stereotype threat as one of the most compelling examples of the ways in which Black students respond to perceived bias in the classroom. Ferguson (2003) found the empirical evidence of biased treatment of Black and White students by White teachers quite thin; however, like Jussim et al. (1996), Ferguson (2003) found that Black students were more likely than White students to be affected by teacher beliefs. Ferguson argued that the findings had implications for both Black and White teachers of Black students, calling on schools to consider nuanced professional development for teachers to help them understand how their perceptions of their Black students develop and how their perceptions might affect student performance.

Ferguson (2003) rejected the notion that Black teachers are more effective than White teachers are in their ability to affect positively the academic success of Black students. However, the authors of a growing body of research challenging this view. For example, Gershenson, Holt, and Papageorge (2016) examined systemic bias in teachers of Black students. Rather than look at the gap in a teacher’s expectations between his or her Black students and White students, Gershenson et al. (2016) looked at the expectations of two teachers of the same student (i.e., within-student differences), arguing that unless these students were intentionally placed in these teachers’ classes according to race or other demographic factors (which they were not), and if within-student differences are systematically related to the demographic match between student and teacher, then the results suggest that “on average, teachers have systematically biased
beliefs about student potential that are at least partly explained by student demographics” (p. 2). Indeed, they found that non-Black teachers had significantly lower expectations for their Black students than did Black teachers.

Wright (2015) studied the relationship between teacher perceptions and students’ disruptive behavior and found that Black teachers had significantly more positive views of Black student behavior than did White teachers. Wright used within-student identification to examine teacher evaluations of African American students’ externalizing behaviors (i.e., disruptive, acting out behaviors) and found that evaluations of these behaviors significantly improved when these students moved to classrooms with African American teachers. When Wright compared race-matched student assessments to the average in their assessment in their classroom, African American students’ externalizing behavior improved by about 0.24 standard deviations when rated by a Black teacher. Wright also found that African American students in classrooms with African American teachers were suspended less often. Interestingly, Wright found that perceptions of White or Hispanic students’ disruptiveness were not affected by having a same-race teacher.

Egalite, Kisida, and Winters (2015) studied the academic achievement of Florida students in Grades 3–10 over 9 years and found small but significant, positive effects when Black and White teachers were same-race teachers in reading and math. They also found that struggling Black and White students appeared to benefit from being placed with a teacher of the same race. All three of the authors—Egalite et al. (2015), Gershenson et al. (2016), and Wright (2015)—concluded that their findings demonstrated the importance of recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers of color, particularly for African American students. It is important to note that these researchers did not explore
the specific ways in which Black teachers might positively influence Black students, either passively (e.g., role model effect) or actively (e.g., advocates, cultural translators).

**Teacher–Student Cultural Differences and African American Student Success**

Research on cultural difference in the classroom might provide more insight on the beliefs and pedagogy of teachers who have proven to be effective with African American students. Cooper (2002) discussed the characteristics of effective teachers of Black students. Irvine (1990, as cited in Cooper, 2002) examined teacher effectiveness through the lens of “cultural synchronization” (p. 48), which “refers to the quality of fit between the teachers’ and students’ primary cultures” (p. 48). Perry (2003) noted that the desegregation of schools following *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954 ushered in an assimilation model in which White identity became the standard, essentially breaking the historical link between African Americans social identity and their pursuit of learning. Where once schools for Black students affirmed the connections between Black identity, Black culture, and achievement, integrated schools placed White identity as the standard and defined anything outside of that norm as inferior (Hanley & Noblit, 2009). Cooper (2002) explained the implications for cultural synchronization in this context:

> The importance of this concept can be felt at the school level when the combination of Black children’s African ancestry and the influence of prevailing community norms becomes manifested in a certain learning style. This learning style can leave children at odds with White teachers and schools since both traditional practice and institutions most often reflect Eurocentric worldviews, customs, teaching styles, and expectations for student behavior. (p. 48)

Cooper also noted that, although culturally synchronistic teaching strives to connect the school culture with the home culture of students, this approach does not mean rejecting the standard curriculum. Thus, according to Cooper (2002) the work of the culturally
synchronistic teacher is to honor the norms of Black culture while teaching students how to navigate and succeed in the dominant culture (p. 49).

Through a review of the relevant research, Cooper (2002) identified the specific characteristics of effective teachers of Black children. Cooper (2002) found that effective Black teachers have the following characteristics:

1. Committed to the Black community and provide a sense of family.
2. Promote positive racial identity.
3. Help students to succeed in school endeavors, despite the racist nature of both the institution and society in general by using alternative instructional methods when necessary.
4. Take personal responsibility for their students learning.
5. Know their subject matter.
6. Are demanding of students in all areas, including curriculum and discipline.

(p. 52)

Through interviews with “community-nominated” (p. 54) White teachers, Cooper (2002) identified the following characteristics in effective White teachers of Black students:

1. A deep respect for the Black community.
2. An active resistance of the status quo for their Black students and families.
3. A sense of responsibility to teach children well.
4. A belief that White teachers could make a difference in the lives of Black children.
5. Uniform high expectations of Black children.
6. A personal and subjective teaching style.

7. An oppositional view of the standard curriculum.

8. A racial and political consciousness that resulted in outrage over systemic inequities in the educational system.

9. A belief that an educated citizenry is good for democracy. (pp. 57–58)

Cooper’s (2002) review of the literature points to the importance of identifying Black cultural norms within the school context and the importance of high expectations in the success of African American students. This finding has implications for teachers in predominately White independent schools, which were founded upon and perpetuate systems of exclusion founded on race, class, and gender (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009). In these schools, achievement and excellence are intertwined with a White, upper-class “habitus” that leaves many Black students in these environments feeling that, to succeed, they need to give up a part of their identity as a Black person (Cookson & Persell, 1991; Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003). The research shows that the dynamics of teacher–student perceptions and expectations are an important factor in the success of African American students in predominately White, private schools.

Teacher–Student Perceptions and Black Student Success in Independent Schools

In a study of the Black–White achievement gap in highly selective independent high schools, Kuriloff et al. (2012) identified variables at the student level and at the school level, which could explain the achievement gap. Of the student variables, most were related to the culture gap between the student and the school. Of the school variables, all of them could be connected to mismatches between teacher–student perceptions and expectations.
Kuriloff et al. (2012) found that White teachers comments to their Black students were more negative than those written to their White students. They found that teachers might experience Black students in their class as not as academically successful as their White students, and then generalize that belief to the larger group, creating a bias that might, in fact, influence student performance (i.e., self-fulfilling prophesy). They noted that Black students interpreted feedback from their teacher as indicative of the teacher’s feelings about the student and their relationship and found that high expectations played a positive role Black students’ success. In addition, they found that, despite teacher’s praise and fair treatment, Black students did not believe that their teachers truly cared about them as people.

Teachers can play an important role in helping to understand better the school experience of African American students in independent schools. Teachers have an insider’s view of school culture and practice, and they come with important understandings of child development from multiple dimensions. Their observations and analysis of children from their youngest years to their matriculation through high school can provide an important picture of the Black student and family experience. However, their perceptions of these students can shape the student and family experience as well. Thus, a study of teacher perceptions of Black student success must also include an examination of the relationship between those perceptions and individual demographic factors like the race/ethnicity of the teacher. In the next section, I will discuss my research design and methodology for this study.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Philosophical Assumptions

Although I entered my study with a hypothesis in mind and an intention to reform practices in independent schools, my philosophical approach to my study was pragmatic. According to Creswell (2009), pragmatists “look to the what and how to research, based on the intended consequences—where they want to go with it” (p. 11). I was interested in (a) examining what the teacher perceptions are regarding my two research questions and (b) how widely shared these perceptions are. My first aim sought to illustrate the picture, show what is, if you will, from the perspective of teachers. In addition, it was a complex picture to paint that required contextualized responses grounded in the participants’ observations and lived experiences. My second aim was to distribute this picture to a larger sample to determine whether the findings could be generalized to a larger population.

Research Approach

My conceptual framework and the findings from my pilot study suggested that teachers perceive that the success of Black students in independent schools is related to an interplay between where Black students are developmentally, their racial socialization, and their racial identity development, among other factors. Questions also emerged about the teachers’ positionality. Where did they sit in all of this? What were their perceptions of racial climate in their schools? How did they define success for their students? How did their identities affect their perceptions? Could any of this be measured? I determined that my research goals of identifying and articulating the relationship between these
various dimensions and determining the prevalence of these perceptions was most effectively achieved using a mixed methods research design.

I was interested in examining a phenomenon (Black student success in independent schools) from a new perspective (teacher perceptions across different grade levels); therefore, it was important to collect qualitative data on the subject to identify the relevant variables to consider for study (Creswell, 2009). However, I was also interested in testing a theory and investigating whether particular variables could predict a particular outcome, which was best achieved through a quantitative approach. For my study, using both quantitative and qualitative methods provided the best path to addressing the research questions.

**Research Sites and Participant Selection**

The population of interest for this research was faculty, administrators, and staff from three pre-K–12 independent schools in New York City: The Downtown School (TDS), The Westside School (TWS), and The Uptown School (TUS). I selected these three schools for three reasons. First, I have personal and professional relationships at each school. I care deeply about these school communities, and I view my research as a contribution to their ongoing diversity and equity work. Second, I am a member of the Diversity Committee at the New York State Association of Independent Schools; the committee works to provide member schools with resources and professional development to support their diversity and equity goals. The three schools in my study have demonstrated a historical and ongoing commitment to social justice and creating

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13 All names of institutions and people in my study are pseudonyms.
inclusive school communities. Given the well-documented challenges that students of color experience in predominately White independent schools, I wanted to study schools that were considered culturally atypical when one thinks of an elite, New York City, private school. You will find no portraits of old White men on the walls of these schools or buildings named after big donors. You will find histories of activism, a liberal faculty and parent body, and a multicultural and progressive curriculum, which brings me to the third reason for choosing these schools for my study: all three identify themselves as progressive schools.

According to Perrone (1991), education, when seen through the eyes of a progressive, begins with the child and his or her “intentions and needs, always rooted in powerful purposes—an endeavor concerned with the forest rather than the trees” (p. 10). The central role of the learner in his or her learning and the construction of learning around primary concepts is not a social or political stance. Constructivist theory draws upon research in the fields of cognitive psychology, philosophy, and anthropology and has become one of the most influential theories guiding work in the field of education today (Bailey, 2005). The literature review for my study documents the unique academic, psychological, and social–emotional needs of African American students in independent schools. I wanted to explore teacher perceptions of the experiences of Black students in schools whose mission, curricula, and instructional approach reflect a commitment to serving the holistic needs of their students and families.

**Description of research sites.** TDS is a pre-K–12 coeducational day school that was founded in 1921 and is located in Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. The founder of TDS was a contemporary and colleague of progressive luminaries
John Dewey, Caroline Pratt, and Lucy Sprague Mitchell, who all articulated and advocated a policy of educating “the whole child” as well as a commitment to social justice and inclusion. The mission of TDS is realized through an interdisciplinary curriculum and instructional approaches, which stress student-centeredness and active learning. There are 650 students enrolled at TDS and 35% percent are students of color. TDS has 100 teachers and 52 faculty and staff.

TWS is a coeducational day school that serves students from Age 3 through the Grade 12. The school was founded in 1896 and is located on campuses on the Upper West Side of New York City. TWS prides itself on its progressive instructional approach, which begins “with the strengths, needs questions and diverse life experiences of the individual students.” The academic program is designed to encourage students to experiment, take risks, and discover and pursue their passions. TWS enrolls approximately 750 students and employs 197 faculty and staff.

TUS is a pre-K–12 coeducational day school serving students in pre-K–12. The school was founded in 1878 and is located on two campuses, one on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and the other in the Riverdale neighborhood of the Bronx. The mission of TUS is founded on the tenets of the ethical culture movement, which promotes that living a life according to ethical principles is central to living a meaningful and purposeful life and to making the world a better place. The curriculum of TUS is “cooperative, student-centered, and discussion based.” They encourage freedom through question asking and

14 From school materials
15 From school materials
mistake making. TUS enrolls about 1,700 students, 34% of whom are students of color. TUS employs about 350 faculty and staff.

**Participant selection.** Participants for the first phase of my study (i.e., focus groups) were faculty and administrators from TDS, TWS, and TUS who had at least 10 years of experience working in their respective schools. I was asking participants to respond to a hypothesized trend; therefore, it was important to have respondents who had been able to observe students in these schools for a significant period; therefore, it was necessary to require that respondents have at least 10 years of experience working in their school. I also asked the diversity directors of each school (or the person in an analogous role) to participate in the focus groups, given their knowledge of the school culture, the faculty, and the experiences of students and families of color in the community. All three of the diversity directors were currently teaching or had taught at some point in their tenure at the school.

Through my personal relationships at TDS and TWS, I was able to receive permission from the three heads of the schools to conduct my research at their schools and to have an administrator send an email with a Google form, inviting faculty and administrators to participate in my research study. Interested volunteers from each site completed the Google form, which asked for their demographic information (name, title, grade level taught, race or ethnicity, and years at the school). I received responses to my Google Drive through the Google Form response spreadsheet. I wanted to ensure that the individuals in the focus groups would represent the lower, middle, and upper school divisions, and a range in gender and race or ethnicity.
I did not receive any responses from TWS to the email invitation, so I asked whether I could attend divisional faculty meetings and invite people to participate in person. This was a very successful endeavor; I left with about 19 names of faculty and administrators who were interested in participating in the study. I emailed all of the interested faculty and administrators from TWS with a Doodle, and seven were able to meet on the specified date. One respondent was not able to attend because of a scheduling conflict.

The initial responses to the Google form from TDS did not include any members of the upper school faculty or administration. I asked the head of school and assistant head of school to recruit upper school participants, and the upper school principal who was also a former teacher and dean in the upper school at TDS agreed to participate.

At TUS, the diversity officer emailed the faculty and staff inviting them to participate in my study. Interested respondents were instructed to email me directly. I received eight emails of interest, and I followed up with a Doodle. Six respondents were able to attend the focus group on the specified date. Tables 3.1–3.3 provide the number of participants in each focus group along with their demographic information.

Table 3.1

The Downtown School

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Role in school</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race or ethnicity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alyssa</td>
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<td>Mariana</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Latina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexa</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Grade level</td>
<td>Role in school</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Race or ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suzanne</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>Lower, Middle, Upper</td>
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*Note. N = 6.*

Table 3.2

*The Westside School*

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<th>Race or ethnicity</th>
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<td>Philip</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mariam</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Learning specialist</td>
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<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Lower, middle, upper</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Biracial (Black/White)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 6.*

Table 3.3

*The Uptown School*

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<td>Carla</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
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75
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<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>Middle/upper</td>
<td>Teacher and department chair</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julissa</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Teacher and department chair</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>Lower, middle, upper</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 7.

In addition to conducting focus group interviews, a semistructured survey was distributed to the faculty, staff, and administrators at each research site via email with a link to Survey Monkey. My administrative contacts at each site sent the email invitation with the survey link to their full faculty and staff, approximately 350–400 people. However, these numbers do not accurately reflect the desired sample population. Not all administrators and staff in a school have the opportunity to interact with students, but the focus group interviews revealed the importance of staff to some Black students, so I did not want to miss an opportunity to include certain members of these school communities by narrowing the distribution list to faculty and principals. Moreover, I was looking to generalize responses to the larger population of the school for which Creswell (2009) recommended a random sampling process.

**Research Design and Data Collection**

**Data collection.** My design followed what I call a “quasi-sequential” mixed-methods approach. I first conducted focus group interviews to explore in a deep and detailed way how teachers perceive the relationship between the developmental stages of
Black students’ and their school success as well as teachers’ perceptions (e.g., observations, beliefs, and experiences) of the factors that contribute to or work against the success of Black students in independent schools. I then used the data from the interviews to construct a semistructured survey that was distributed widely to faculty, staff, and administrators at the three schools participating in the study. This collection approach allowed me to achieve, as Creswell (2009) noted, my two research aims: “to both generalize the findings to a population as well as develop a detailed view of the meaning of a phenomenon or concept for individuals” (p. 18). I called my design a “quasi-sequential” approach because the qualitative data collected from the focus group interviews was not only used to help form the questions for the survey, but was also integrated with the survey results to inform the findings.

**Focus groups.** As part of my study, sought to understand teacher perceptions of a theorized phenomenon, the focus group methodology was an appropriate data-gathering approach in that it allowed for in-depth discussion with a group of people who have deep knowledge about a particular subject or issue. Liamputtong (2011) noted that the focus group is an effective instrument to employ when a researcher is seeking “to describe and understand meanings and interpretations of a select group of people to gain an understanding of a specific issue from the perspective of the participants of the group” (p. 3). Rabiee (2004) added that focus groups are also a helpful way to explore and clarify issues related to feelings, emotions, and perceptions. Given that I was interested in quantitatively measuring complex beliefs and perceptions related to racial socialization, racial identity, and school success, it was important that I spend some time identifying, exploring, and untangling the intricate web of mechanisms at play within particular
contexts. The identification of these mechanisms formed the foundation of the semistructured survey.

The three focus group interviews lasted about 90 minutes each and were audio-recorded. Immediately following the interviews, I wrote a memo to summarize my impressions, surprises, new questions, and emergent themes. After the recordings were transcribed, I read the interview transcript multiple times and created preliminary thematic codes, using the summary memos and my research questions, to create and organize the categories and questions for the survey. Table 3.4 illustrates the preliminary thematic codes and how they were used to design the survey. Research Question 2 is not included because reliability of the instrument was determined through analysis of the responses.

Table 3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Preliminary themes</th>
<th>Survey categories and rationale</th>
<th>Sample survey questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What do teachers observe within and across elementary, middle, and high school age groups that they perceive contributes to or works against the success of Black students?</td>
<td>The preliminary themes focused on school variables and student or individual variables that affected the relationship between grade-level entry point and success of Black students.</td>
<td>Assessment of climate and culture (school): It is important to understand respondents’ assessment and interpretation of their daily lives in their current school. This section asks questions about their personal assessment of school climate and culture and their perceptions of the stresses that</td>
<td>“I am proud to be a member of this community.” “Racism is a problem in our school.” “Our Black students regularly see themselves reflected in the curriculum.” “Our school does an effective job of meeting the needs of our Black students and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research questions</td>
<td>Preliminary themes</td>
<td>Survey categories and rationale</td>
<td>Sample survey questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>1a. How do teachers in a predominately White independent school define success for their Black students?</td>
<td>In the focus groups, respondents spent some time coming to consensus on what they believed defined success at their respective schools and discussing the factors they believed contributed to or worked against the success of Black students. The preliminary coding allowed me to identify</td>
<td>Definitions of success:</td>
<td>“What are the qualities that you believe are important when considering whether or not a student is successful in your school? Please rank by importance:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b. Do teachers at different grade levels have different perceptions of Black student success?</td>
<td></td>
<td>It is important to understand how participants define success for their students and if they define success differently for their Black and White students. The survey asks participants’ questions about their personal definitions of what it means for</td>
<td>Has the ability to think critically and consider multiple perspectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations of student experiences:

- It is important to understand what teachers from different grade levels observe in terms of the experiences of their Black students in the lower school middle and upper divisions and the factors that they perceive contribute to or work against their success.

- A White person touching a Black person’s hair
- A White student refusing to play with a Black student because that student is Black
- “I have observed this scenario/this scenario has been shared with me (Quite often; Often; A Few Times; Not at all):

- “White students generally perform better academically than Black students at our school.”
- “Black students seem to be more successful when there is a critical mass of other Black students in the class.”
- “What are the qualities that you believe are important when considering whether or not a student is successful in your school? Please rank by importance: Has the ability to think critically and consider multiple perspectives
- Knows him/herself; is comfortable with who
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Preliminary themes</th>
<th>Survey categories and rationale</th>
<th>Sample survey questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Does a relationship exist between individual demographic factors of teachers and their perceptions of the success of Black students?</td>
<td>a list of variables for survey respondents to consider when defining success and when identifying the factors that underlie success.</td>
<td>students to be successful in their schools.</td>
<td>s/he is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Performs well academically; gets good grades”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the focus group interviews, I noticed differences in the quality and content of the responses of the teachers of color compared to the White teachers.</td>
<td>Demographics background and information:</td>
<td>“How long have you been employed in your current position?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>It is important to understand how the personal and professional background of participants might shape and factor into their perceptions. This survey section captures the information by asking a serious of direct questions about their race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and time at the school.</td>
<td>“How long have you been employed by your current school?”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comfort with racial discussions:</td>
<td>“For which age group are you primarily responsible?”</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In this survey section, I ask questions about the level of confidence that the participants have in their individual ability and their perception of their colleagues’ ability to address racial matters in the classroom.</td>
<td>“Which of the following best represents your racial/ethnic identity?”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I feel prepared to respond when issues of racism arise among students.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I worry that I am not effectively meeting the needs of my Black students and families.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“My classroom curriculum allows for regular discussions about equity and justice.”</td>
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</table>
**Survey.** Participants took the survey online via Survey Monkey and responses were collected anonymously. The questions were organized by the categories articulated in Table 2. Questions were both close-ended, in a Likert-scale style, and open-ended. Robson (2002) noted that one of the advantages of the survey as a data collection tool is that it is “a simple and straightforward approach to the study of attitudes, values, beliefs, and motives” (p. 233–234), and it allows for the collection of generalizable data.

However, Robson warned that, when moving from the descriptive to the interpretive, the survey has its limitations. Survey analysis typically comes in the form of correlations, but correlation does not translate into causation. Therefore, Robson argued that a sophisticated approach to data analysis would be required.

**Data Analysis**

As Creswell (2009) recommended, I employed a sequential exploratory model for my study to facilitate an efficient but nuanced analysis of the data, using preliminary results from the qualitative stage of the study “to test elements of an emergent theory” (p. 211) and generalize the findings to a larger sample. Using an embedded model of design, I prioritized the focus group interviews as the primary form of data collection and used the survey results to support the qualitative data. The focus group data was analyzed in two stages. Stage 1 was described in the Focus Groups section: the three interview recordings were transcribed, analyzed for preliminary codes, and emergent themes were identified and used to design the survey. The survey data analysis focused on building on the preliminary focus group data and determining the generalizability of the findings from the interviews to the three school populations as a whole. After distributing the survey, I returned to the focus group data set for Stage 2 of the analysis. The interviews
were read multiple times and coded for emergent, recurrent, or discrepant themes. I also looked for relationships between themes.

The quantitative analysis of the survey data was multilayered to examine the research questions from multiple angles. The survey data was entered into SPSS by the primary investigator, and descriptive statistical analysis of the survey responses was conducted to organize and describe the data set. In Stage 1 of the quantitative analysis, we were particularly interested in the frequency of responses from all teachers regarding their (a) assessment of their school climate and comfort with racial discussions, (b) their observations of the experiences of Black students, (c) their definitions of student success, and (d) the factors that they perceived had affected the success of their African American students and their families. I was also interested in describing and comparing variables; therefore, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted and followed with a reliability analysis for any factors identified.

Stage 2 of statistical analysis consisted of a set of one-way ANOVAs to examine all of my variables and to determine whether any significant differences existed between the responses of groups of teachers by race, gender, and years of experience in one’s role and in one’s school. A correlation analysis followed to determine any relationship between the variables, which yielded an overall correlation table. I was particularly interested in differences between the responses of lower-, middle-, and upper-school teachers. It was important for me to keep in mind that, although this test would show whether a relationship existed between variables, the analysis would not necessarily prove a causal relationship (Salkind, 2011); nevertheless, I was interested in identifying
any significant associations that could be made and might point to important directions for further investigation.

Finally, in Stage 3 of the analysis, I coded the open-ended survey responses and identified emergent themes. I used the survey data to illustrate the frequency of responses in the larger populations of the three schools to determine generalizability and assist in bolstering or affirming the qualitative data results.

**Limitations**

**Respondent bias.** One of my primary concerns regarding validity in the focus groups and the survey was social desirability response bias. Given the sensitive issue of race and the high social value that the schools place on tolerance and inclusion, I was concerned about whether the participants would be honest and forthcoming in their responses. In the focus group interviews, I attempted to mitigate this threat by designing questions that asked respondents to talk about their observations—trends, patterns, anecdotes—rather than the behavior of individuals or the response from the school. In this way, I engaged them to assist me as experts in understanding a possible phenomenon, rather than to put them or their school on the spot. I had more concerns about the survey because in it I did ask questions about school climate and about how comfortable respondents were in responding to racial issues. To address this concern, I made sure to inform respondents that their responses were anonymous. I also let them know that I was surveying three schools and that I would be analyzing the data in aggregate. I limited the number of questions focused on individual behavior (e.g., “I am comfortable addressing issues of race when they arise in the classroom) and focused more on questions about their observations (e.g., “Black students regularly report experiencing microaggressions
at our school”). I also left questions about personal demographic information (e.g., race, gender, etc.) for the end of the survey so that respondents were not primed to think about how their personal background affects their responses, thereby, setting them up to answer questions in ways they believe are socially acceptable.

**Reactivity.** I work as a senior administrator at one of the sites in the study; therefore, I was concerned that my power and position might affect the responses of the participants. I believe this threat was minimized by the fact that I am new to the community and that the community regularly engages in conversations about sensitive issues like race with members of senior administration. Additionally, I planned to exclude my direct reports from participation in the focus groups, but none volunteered. I also made sure to begin each focus group session by reassuring the participants that the purpose of the study was to glean perceptions, beliefs, and observations, so there were no right or wrong answers.

**Construct validity.** I was not able to pilot test my survey, but I did have it reviewed by my dissertation chair who is well-versed in creating survey instruments. Moreover, the analysis of the survey data shows that the reliability (α) for each measure is at an acceptable level. A sequential exploratory model is hospitable to new instruments given that that the quantitative data set is meant to expand upon the more highly weighted qualitative set (Creswell, 2009).
CHAPTER 4: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF BLACK STUDENT SUCCESS ACROSS THE LOWER, MIDDLE, AND UPPER GRADES

Introduction

The first aim of my study was to describe teacher\textsuperscript{16} observations of the experiences of Black students across the lower, middle, and upper grade levels and to examine their perceptions of the factors that affect Black student success in predominately White, independent schools. The qualitative data showed that teachers perceive that younger and older Black students experience similar forms of implicit and explicit racial bias over their time in school that affect their sense of self (i.e., identity) and their success in school, but patterns emerged in the participants’ responses that demonstrated a higher level of concern for their elementary-age Black students. Participants’ perceived a developmental vulnerability in their younger Black students, which they believed made these students particularly susceptible to internalizing racialized messages that negatively affect their school success. Teachers also expressed a concern about the impact of these messages over time, which has implications for lower-school Black students who are exposed to these messages for a longer period than Black students who enter their schools in the middle and upper grades.

The teachers also observed that Black students who are successful in their schools employ a sophisticated set of “survival” strategies and have a deep and wide network of support (parents, teachers, and friends—usually Black) helping them understand how to

\textsuperscript{16} “Teachers” includes administrators who participated in the focus groups.
play and win the game of doing private school. Teachers expressed that knowing the “rules of the game” at their school and having a strong support network early in a Black student’s career in independent school are important factors in his or her success.

Finally, teachers perceived that the nature of lower-school admissions in a pre-K–12 school makes it difficult to predict which students will be successful in the school over time. They theorized that students who are admitted in middle and high school are more likely to be successful than those who enter in lower school because the school has more information about the students and is in a better position to predict their success in the middle and upper grades.

**Racialized Experiences of Black Students in the Lower and Middle or Upper Divisions**

Teachers reported that even at an early age, they believe Black students begin to pick up the message that judgments associated with the differences between them and their White classmates. In a predominately White environment in which Black students might be regularly singled out for cultural differences such as their hair type or skin shade, teachers interviewed believed that Black students receive and internalize a message that they are outside of the norm. Alyssa, a Black Grade 2 teacher at TDS recalled the experience of one of her students during an author visit. The topic of the book was slavery:

I remember the author coming in and reading this story, and I remember Evan feeling so like the only one in the class. Feeling very . . . embarrassed. I remember him taking his hood and putting it up over his head while the book was being read and looking around the classroom and kids were looking at him. All of the White kids looking at him. It was heartbreaking.
Alyssa recalled the experience of another Black boy who struggled in her classroom. Jared was the only African American boy in her classroom, and Alyssa described watching Jared’s frustration grow over the course of the year because of assumptions made by students and parents about things like how Jared got to school, his interests, and his temperament. Alyssa also noticed the negative impact that these stressors had on Jared’s school experience:

From his past experiences at school there was this feeling that “He is the one who is hyperactive” or “He is the one that doesn’t listen.” I think he just kind of internalized that over time, and he ended up not staying. I think he really struggled because, one, he was the only one, and, two, those assumptions were being made, and he felt like he had to keep explaining himself. Explaining . . . “No, not everyone has a car. No, not everyone goes away to a country house on the weekend.”

Lower-school teachers identified Grades 2–4 as the years when younger Black students seemed to become more aware of the racial and socioeconomic differences between them and their affluent White classmates. Carla, a Black lower-school physical education teacher at TUS noted that around Grades 2–3 is when she, like Alyssa, sees the ways in which her Black students begin to notice differences between them and their White classmates along race and class lines:

They are aware of the economic aspect of their environment and the fact that they are different based on race. In pre-K and K, it’s just like “We’re just students here.” But they know . . . at some point they realize it’s not their environment.

Teachers who work with this age group described these grades as “intense” transition points, where the academic expectations ramp up, and many of the teachers expressed concern that both Black and White students might be making negative connections between race, class status, and academic abilities. Philip, a White assistant principal at the lower school at TWS, shared what he was seeing from his vantage point:
As I think about 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and next year, 5th graders, a lot of these families of color, not all of them, but a lot of them are coming from far away. I think of one Black child in particular who travels almost two hours to be here. He’s the first one in the door. He’s here for breakfast. He’s also here until 6:00pm for afterschool. And that brings up a whole conversation about a child who doesn’t have the same access to things like playdates and things such as that. He’s at the school all day long.

Stephen, a White Grade 4 teacher at TUS, shared that, when students in the grade are having trouble with reading, they are pulled out to work with a learning specialist. This year, all of the students being pulled out are African American boys. Joseph did not view this as a trend in the lower school, but he wondered about the impact of the optics:

I’m not sure how much they’re [the students] aware of it, but I certainly know that the parents are aware of it. And one of the dads came in . . . and he said that he was very upset that all of the boys of color were being taken out and what message we were giving to them. He was hoping this would be changed or alleviated, which it is not.

Carla had a similar concern when she thought about the make-up of the afterschool academic support program in her lower school, “I would say it’s 99% kids of color.” Carla observed that young Black students notice the differences, and she argued that they have an impact. She recalled younger Black students coming to her to complain about not being called on in class and not being placed in the more advanced math groups because they were Black. She shared what a Black, Grade 3 girl told her, “No matter how hard we work, we can’t move up.” Carla acknowledged that this could just be a perception rather than a reality, but she argued that these perceptions matter if they negatively affect young Black children’s sense of themselves or their sense of trust or belonging in the school.

Teachers from all three schools could recall implicit racialized messages, like the ones described above, that they believed Black, lower-school students were receiving from the school, but more explicit incidents occurred as well from White classmates refusing to
play with Black students because of their skin color to Black students being called “nigger,” but teachers made a point to note that though these incidents are unfortunate, they are not surprising given where the students are developmentally.

Philip from TWS, noted that the “N word” is a word that young children actually hear a lot out in the world whether it be in families, in music, or on television, and they understand that that word has power in that it gets a reaction from adults and peers, and students, both Black and White, are drawn to experiencing the power that word can create. Nevertheless, Philip added that, although incidents like these are unfortunate, younger students might not have the ability to understand the impact of some of their comments on their Black classmates:

I look at them from a . . . developmental perspective. I think once we open up those comments with kids, that can spill over into conversations between the kids that will impact the kids of color . . . we are purposely acknowledging the fact that we’re all different . . . and that’s a good thing. [But] once we highlight those things—such as difference in hair—kids [start] touching each other’s hair without permission. I think it’s a microaggression that pops up from time to time.

Lisa, the biracial the director of Diversity at TWS added, “[In lower-school], noticing of physical difference comes up and a lot of experimentation around language. Like, ‘this is a word I just heard about, let’s see what it feels like to use it.’” Interestingly, the teachers’ descriptions of racialized experiences at all three schools suggested that lower-school students might be experiencing more explicit forms of racial bias (i.e., racial slurs, microaggressions) than their middle and upper school peers.

In three schools that have strong missions around inclusivity and diversity, a demonstrated commitment to multicultural curriculum, and support structures in place such as affinity groups, it was surprising to hear that teachers are concerned that their
Black students are just surviving. The focus group participants from all three schools noticed this disconnect between the positive messages the school believes it is sending to Black students and families and what these students and families are actually feeling and experiencing. The results of my study demonstrate that teachers perceived that their Black students across the lower, middle, and upper schools were noticing implicit and explicit messages that Black bodies were not welcome in these spaces. However, many respondents expressed a concern about the impact of these messages over time, which has implications for the experiences of lower-school Black students, who are exposed to these messages for a longer time than Black students who enter in the middle and upper grades.

**Impact of Racialized Experiences Over Time**

Teachers in my study who work with lower-school students consistently expressed a concern not only that Black students were receiving and internalizing racialized messages, but also that these students were receiving and internalizing these messages early in their development.

Julissa, a Latina department chair at TUS who has experience working with both middle and upper school students, shared examples that demonstrate the impact of these racialized messages on the trust that Black students have in the school, particularly in their friendships with White students. Julissa referred to what she called a “mental file cabinet,” in which she believed that many Black students were keeping track of the racialized interactions and microaggressions that they had experienced over the years. She shared when some Black students experienced a particularly egregious or disappointing racialized incident with a White friend, she noticed that the student’s
reaction was not in response to merely that incident. Rather, the student’s reaction—which was usually intense—was in response to all of the incidents of racialized incidents filed away over the years. In one story, she described two Grade 6 students, one Black and one White, who ended up coming to blows over a racial exchange. When Julissa spoke to the Black student about the fight, the student related the long history of exchanges between him and the White student that went back to their time in lower school. Another story that Julissa shared had to do with a group of Black students in the Grade 8 who had organized an in-school demonstration after the nonindictments following the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Gardner. The students papered the lockers of the middle school with signs reading “I Can’t Breathe” and “Black Lives Matter.” In response, a group of White students crossed out the words on some of the signs and replaced it with “All Lives Matter.” Julissa described what followed:

The Black boys and, in particular, the Black girls were . . . enraged. And it turned into this very ugly moment where for many Black kids, where they were like, “No, you don’t know what this is.” And then, that’s when that history, that file cabinet, all of a sudden went to “In 3rd grade, you blah, blah, blah! And in 5th grade, you…! It was incredible to watch.

Lisa at TWS shared a theory that seems to explain the incidents above. She posited, “The longer they’re there [Black children in a predominately White independent school], the longer time they’re being exposed to an environment where they’re internalizing all kinds of stuff around oppression and racial oppression.” These “last straw” incidents are interesting to examine giving the ways in which lower-school teachers describe how they observe student’s responding—or more often, not responding—to racialized incidents when they occur.
Coping With Racialized Incidents

When asked to share the ways in which they observe younger Black students responding to racialized incidents, many of the lower school teachers indicated that, more often than not, they observed their students withdrawing or exhibiting externalizing behaviors. Alyssa at TDS shared, “Some of the younger kids don’t always articulate when something racialized happens, and so it manifests itself into ‘I have a stomach ache’ … or there is some outburst.” Mariam, a learning specialist at TWS, talked about a Black boy in the younger grades who would run out of the building. Lisa at TWS shared a similar observation, describing how a Black girl who began at TWS in lower school waited an entire year before sharing with a teacher that she had been called “nigger.” Carla at TUS noted, “It would be a secret to tell what they had experienced if they felt it was racial.” Naomi, the Black Director of Diversity of TUS, shared her observations:

I can think of a few students in our lower school who have had really racially charged experiences, and it either goes in one of two directions: they get more vocal where it’s like, “I’m going to name this!” And then we have some students who’ve become more quiet and to themselves, and have often, I think, maneuvered their sense of the world based off of others more than actually thinking about their needs.

These responses demonstrate a concern on the part of teachers about the ways in which their younger students cope with racial stress.

Affinity Groups as Healthy Coping Space

Most of the teachers interviewed noted that younger students were more likely to talk about racialized incidents when the school has structures in place like affinity groups. TUS’s affinity group program requires that all students in Grades 3–5 participate in discussion groups about race, and all students can choose to have these conversations in
race-based affinity groups or in a mixed-raced discussion group. TUS teachers noticed that their Black students were much more forthcoming about their experiences with race and racism after these groups were established.

TWS has made affinity groups available for students of color in Grades 2–12, and, like TUS, the teachers have also noticed that their Black students who participate in these groups seem to have an easier time verbalizing and processing their experiences with race within the school environment. The establishment of race-based affinity group spaces for young students at all three schools seems to be an acknowledgment that young children recognize and internalize racialized messages and that this process of internalization can have a negative impact on the success of Black students. Furthermore, development of these affinity groups seems to be evidence of the recognition by the school of the importance of creating spaces where young Black children can see and spend time with other children and adults who look like them and, ostensibly, share their experience.

**Impact of Numbers of Black Students**

The results of the focus group data, regarding teacher perceptions of the impact of the admissions and enrollment on the success of Black students, is shared in a subsequent chapter; however, teachers in the focus group interviews were in almost unanimous agreement in their belief that being the only one (or one of a few) made it difficult to be a Black student in their lower school. They hypothesized that the longer these students were in classrooms as the only one or one of a few, the harder their experience was more likely to be. Moreover, study participants posited that the lack of numbers of Black students could be one of the primary reasons for the discrepancy between the positive
messages teachers believe Black children hear from the school and what these children internalize regarding their value and worth.

Teachers who provided examples of Black students who were struggling in lower school often accompanied their description of the child with how many other Black students were in the class. Evan, the TDS student that hid under his sweatshirt during a story about slavery was the only one in his class. Mariana, a Black Latina and principal of the lower school at TDS described another Black boy—“a dark-skinned Black boy”—who came into TDS in Kindergarten as the only Black child, not only the only one in his class, but the only one in the entire grade of 40 students. He struggled throughout his time at TDS and left after Grade 3. “His family just couldn’t take it anymore,” Mariana said. The Kindergartener that Mariam described running out of the building was the only Black boy in his grade in lower school. Anne at TUS expressed her concern for one of the only dark-skinned girls in one of her lower-school classrooms, who she perceived was struggling with aspects of her identity.

Like TDS, teachers at TWS and TUS theorized about the negative relationship between the success of their Black lower-school students and the low numbers of other Black children in the grade, class, or division. Lisa, the Director of Diversity at TWS, shared her thoughts:

If you’re trying to figure out who you are in the world, and that’s part of your developmental arc as a young person moving through school, and you don’t have a lot of models and figures in your daily environment that can help you answer that question, it very quickly leads to alienation, isolation, and acting out, which is why I think so many of the issues come out around behavior…and obviously that’s going to have a huge impact on academics and just the ability to focus on learning because you’re just trying to get through the day.
Josh, the White principal of the upper school at TDS, saw a strong connection between the numbers of Black students in a class and their success in school:

When there is a community of students that can look around and say, “You look like me. You have an experience like me; even if it isn’t the same, like, we can understand each other, right? That kind of same experience grounds them, and it helps them have that confidence and trust because they are a large enough group.

The teachers at TDS know firsthand about the importance of having a critical mass of Black students in the class. Like the other two schools in my study, TDS, has a relatively low number of Black students enrolled in their lower school compared to their middle and upper divisions. However, they remembered a unique cohort of students, the Class of 2015, which had an unusually high number of Black students in the class. In addition, this class also had a principal of color during their time in lower school, and contact with a relatively high number of teachers of color in the lower grades. A highly engaged and involved group of Black parents characterized this class. Although all of these students struggled in different ways during their time at TDS, whether they arrived in lower school or later, every TDS teacher in the focus group was in agreement that every Black student in that class was successful, and they all attributed this success to the fact that this group of Black students had a special community of support (peers, parents, and teachers). During the interview, we came to refer to this group of students as the “Golden Group.” In Chapter 5, I will discuss in more detail how teachers in my study defined success for their Black students, but when considering the relationship between the success of Black students in private school and the grade level at which they enter these schools, it’s important to note that the TDS teachers believed that this group of
Black children was so successful because they had a support system of other Black folks at the beginning of their journey at TDS. Mariana explained:

There were four Black kids, Caribbean kids who came in at the Kindergarten and first grade level. Their parents had questions about the institution and sought out the help of another Black family that was a year or two older. Together, they formed our Parents of Children of Color Committee that is still active and thriving. But they started it in the lower school while they struggled through. But at that time, they had a Latina first grade teacher as an option and a Latina assistant principal; they had a Black Latina teacher as a second grade option. They had a Black teacher and then myself as a Latina teacher as a third grade option. Their experience through lower school was unique because we kept them together and because of the community of adults around them: “We got you. We are going to take care of you. We are going to help you understand this system.” By the time the others entered, by the time they entered middle school, they were stronger in voice. They had the anchor. They had adults in the community to fall back on.

From Mariana’s description and the comments from the other TDS teachers, it became apparent that this network of support was essential to the Golden Group’s success, and this network was successful because it was activated early in the educational and developmental journey of the student and it focused on helping this group of Black students learn, understand and master the “rules” of the private school game.

**Playing the Game: The Rules and the Costs**

In my study, teachers of older students described observing or hearing of fewer incidents of explicit bias and spoke more about the difficulties that older Black students faced on a daily basis navigating the myriad stresses that come with being a student in an elite, predominately White, independent school, specifically the expectation that students negotiate all of the demands of highly selective private schools (e.g., getting good grades, establishing social relationships, participating in extracurricular activities, and getting into a good college) alongside the normal challenges of adolescent identity development.
Teachers in my study observed that Black students who struggled were the students who could not master the “rules of the game” or what Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) call upper-class habitus (i.e., “knowing how to do prep school”). How teachers in my study perceived the relationship between these rules and the success of Black students will be discussed in Chapter 5; however, for the purposes of answering Research Question 1, it’s important to note that teachers from all three schools shared that, although upper-class habitus is a key factor in the success of both lower-school and middle- or upper-school Black students, they expressed worry about their younger Black students who do not have the internal (cognitive, psycho-social) skills or external (school) support structures to develop or leverage the “habits of heart and mind that these schools require for success” (Kuriloff et al., 2012). Julissa, a Latina teacher and department chair at TUS described her concerns for Black students coming up through their lower school to the upper grades:

I wonder about the expectations that continuing schools have of entering students with very little information [about the students and families] early on and expecting them to go through from pre-K or Kindergarten . . . until whatever the endpoint is and whether or not that really makes sense. The school creates the rules and the culture, and we’re accepting you into that. We’ll make some modifications, but we really also expect you to make some adjustments to who you are to be a part of this experience. I have to wonder what price our younger children are paying when they don’t have the ability or experience of figuring out the rules.

Joseph, a White, lower-school math teacher at TWS who also has experience working with middle- and upper-school students in theater hypothesized the following:

When you are older and you come in, one assumes—this, again, is an assumption, a speculation—that you’re more self-aware, more secure, more comfortable . . . you come more ready to grapple with the things that you have to confront coming into a White environment, where the culture is still a White environment, and it hasn’t changed to meet the needs that you bring as opposed to expecting you to
meet the needs you discover when you get here. Whereas when you are little and you go through this process [maybe it is harder for students who start here earlier] because they are building their sense of self, and as they get older, they see how different they are from what’s around them, and they feel less secure and less comfortable in the environment.

These responses reflect the belief shared by many of the participants that being successful in an independent school requires a sophisticated ability to read and analyze the cultural landscape and strategize appropriately. On the one hand, many of the teachers described the strategy for success, as observed in older, primarily upper-school students, as simply the students doing what they understood needed to be done for them to get the rewards of an independent school education. On the other hand, teachers perceived that many Black students who began matriculating in lower school were negotiating a more complex relationship with the school, and the survival strategies employed by students who came in later did not quite seem to fit. The complexity of Black lower schoolers’ relationship with their school was illustrated in an anecdote shared by a TDS faculty member.

Alexa, a White middle school teacher at TDS told the story of a group of young Black alumni from the Golden Group who returned to the school for an assembly where they shared their experience of being Black students at TDS. In this group, was one of the Black boys who started at TDS in lower school (Bryce) as well as students who joined the class in middle school (Nina and Nicholas). Alexa noted that both groups of students expressed how challenging their experience was at TDS from their enrollment through their senior year, but Alexa did hear a difference in the nature of their experiences:
Now, Bryce was a lifer, and he spoke with a distinct experience from Nina and Nicholas who described, in my opinion, culture shock, fear, overwhelm, disconnect, upset, hatred for this school and the people here. A sense that they had no one—that they couldn’t trust anyone in the building. Bryce found when [Nina and Nicholas] came, their experience was shocking to him because he felt that he was having some of the same experiences with microaggressions, but these were his friends. He had known them since he was four. They came up together; he actually said they grew up together. Whereas Nicholas and Nina would come here every day and say, “Okay, I am gonna do what I gotta do and I’m gonna get the good grades that my family expects me to get and I am leaving.

Alexa’s story points to an interesting difference between the experience of “lifers” and students who entered later. Black students who entered in lower school seem to struggle to reconcile their relationship with a school—friendships, traditions, classroom experiences, and relationships with teachers they hold dear—with a growing understanding of how the school operates and their place in it as Black students. An exchange between Lisa and Mariam, a lower-school learning specialist at TWS illustrates this tension:

Mariam: I just feel that we make the kids feel comfortable amongst us in Kindergarten. They feel they belong; this is their school; they are not outsiders. Whereas if they came in at middle or high school, they are strangers. This is a new environment. This is a new culture. I’m going to adjust to it. But when they come to us when they are 5 or 6 years old, although there is racism all the time, do they really not feel they belong?

Lisa: Yeah, I think what you’re talking about is this idea of belonging, right? If you polled these kids individually and asked them, “How do you feel about TWS?” I bet a lot of them would say, “I love coming here. I feel so comfortable.” What I am commenting on is normative culture. Who is setting the norms for how we operate? . . . I guess I’m just suggesting that that’s a key piece—that kids are [becoming] aware of that in terms of who is setting the standards and norms for this environment, authority figures, teachers, all of those things. It’s a predominately White institution.

17 “Lifer” is a term that is commonly used in independent schools to describe a student who graduates from the school after having entered the school at the earliest grade at which the school enrolls students (i.e., pre-K or K).
These comments seem to corroborate Joseph’s hypothesis that Black students who come up through the lower school not only have to deal with the normal transitions of moving from lower to middle school, but they are also dealing with learning the “rules of the game” while navigating their changing understanding of what it means to be a Black student at their school.

Mariana had the opportunity to interview the Golden Group during their Senior year and found that the experience of Bryce and his fellow Black lifers, wasn’t easy as they moved up through the middle and high school, but Mariana credited their support network, established in lower school, for making the journey easier than what other Black lifers might have experienced at TDS. Their parents and teachers, and their relationships with each other, provided an “anchor” that helped ground them in trust in and connection with the school. They, in turn, were able to pass on their knowledge of how to “play the game” with Black students who entered in middle school. Alexa shared that in their remarks for the assembly at TDS, Nina and Nicholas said, “We don’t know how we would have made it without Bryce and Malachai.”

Distinct from these examples, and as illustrated through the experience of Nina and Nicholas, the focus group responses showed that many of the teachers perceive that older Black students come into private school with an understanding that they will face racial bias—or they learn very quickly that they will—and have to learn how to “play the game” if they want to be successful. Carla at TUS used this language of “the game” to describe her conversation with an alumnus after she asked him about his experience as a Black student at the school:
He said, “You know it was the probably the worst experience I could ever have.” But he had to play the game in order to get out. It’s a game that some of them learn very early, and if they don’t play it well, they don’t feel like they can get out.

This concept of “playing the game” was repeated in all three focus groups. For the high school students in particular, “playing the game” meant keeping in mind the real reason they were at the school. Ida, a White upper school math teacher at TWS, and Lisa talked about two Grade 9 Black girls who arrived in middle school. Lisa described them as solid academically, but perceived them as being shut down. She and Ida wondered whether they had made a conscious decision to be strategic about the ways they involved themselves in the life of the school:

Lisa: They have been here a little while, so they’re familiar with the lay of the land, but I sometimes wonder about that.

Ida: They compartmentalize. “This is why I come here. I’m supposed to get a degree; I’m going to college, and I turn off [when I come here]. I have a completely different experience in the real world, and here is where I put on my mask. I just go through the motions.” It’s survival time.

Lisa: Exactly. It is survival. It’s coping as opposed to thriving.

What this example illustrates is while teachers in my study observed that older Black students might be in a better position developmentally to take on the difficult task of learning and playing the rules of the private school game, this did not necessarily mean that these older students were having an easier experience than Black students who entered these schools in their elementary years. Playing the game is apparently a way to survive, not thrive.

What is interesting about Alexa’s story is that fact the TDS teachers I interviewed considered the Golden Group successful. They received good grades; they were involved
in student government and the Students of Color group. They were athletes, artists, and all around good people. However, there were also deep and ongoing feelings of mistrust, disconnection, isolation, anxiety, and questions about belonging. Mariana, as well other teachers in my study, believed the complicated experience of the Golden Group calls on schools to consider the emotional and psychological costs of playing the private school game:

All of those kids we are talking about are successes in different ways, but what I think I hear my colleagues saying is that it comes at their psychological expense. Every day they are coming to school like, “Oh, what is the next crappy thing someone is going to say to me? What am I doing here? I’m just here for the grades. I am just here for the school name.” There is a piece of themselves that they are sacrificing.

The concern about the cost for Black students of playing the game was a consistent theme in the focus group interviews. Carla at TUS ran off a list of Black alumni who by any standard definition would be considered successful, but Carla wondered about the toll. She spoke about an African American girl she remembered:

There were those struggles. I remember one kid told me, she said she felt like she was trying to live in two different worlds. She said she sat on the stoop at home, and she didn’t feel a part of that community because of how she spoke when she was at school. You know, she just didn’t feel like she fit in. And this was a girl with good grades, who was doing well on the basketball team, graduated here, went to good college, but she paid a price.

Julissa at TUS had several examples of students who were successful and paid a similar cost. One example she gave demonstrated why the cost of playing the game was particularly taxing for Black students:

It was a senior. I think most people would say he was very successful here: academically very thoughtful, got into all of the colleges he wanted to, was really involved, self-aware, and little bit of the straight-arrow type, but a great kid. And in his senior year, we were putting together an event because of some racial incidents that had happened in the upper school. So, it was a day that was set
aside, but the seniors could get away with not being there, and they just didn’t come. And it was devastating for him. He said to me, “Now in my senior year, in my last two months at this school, I’ve just realized that when it comes to the things that matter most to me, my best friends in this place won’t actually show up.

This Senior’s experience illustrates that even when Black students “successfully” play the game, they are still faced with the reality that they don’t belong, and they don’t belong not because they don’t have the right grades, or the right friends, or the right achievements; they don’t belong because of who they are, because of the Black bodies they inhabit in these White spaces.

**Role of the Admissions Process and Placement Programs**

When asked to explain the factors at play when considering the differences between the success of students who entered the three schools in lower school compared to those who entered in middle and upper school, the first responses from most of interviews related to the nature of the lower-school admissions process. Lower-school admissions at these three independent schools are decided on according to the parent application and interviews, observations of the child in play with other children, and preschool reports. There is not a long social or academic history to draw upon to predict how a child—of any color—may fare at the school. Rob at TDS theorized:

A 3-year old comes to the school; they participate in a playgroup. Our ability to look at a kid of 3 or 4 in the admissions process and say, we are taking a bet on you to sort of be able to make it—that this is the right place for you—is different than when you have a lot more data when you are looking at a kid who is entering in middle school. You can sort of say, how do you demonstrate a sense of school success skills? And that gets ramped up even more in the upper school admissions process where we can say we have history of figuring out the kind of kid who will be successful here. So there is a sense of a state of gate-keeping processes when you look at a kid of 3 and wondering “is this a good fit” when you don’t necessarily know what that looks like, whereas with a 9th grader you have a clearer sense of “can you do school?”
Teachers at TDS and TWS also noted that, although their schools are increasing their efforts to attract more full-paying Black families, most Black families who apply are also in need of financial aid. These funds are limited, so this might affect the number of Black families that are able to apply to and enroll in their lower schools. All three schools reserve financial aid funds for students of color from placement agencies like Prep for Prep and the Oliver Scholars program, but these students are admitted in the middle and upper divisions. Additionally, students who come from these programs have gone through a rigorous preparation process, which sets them up well to be successful in the independent schools in which they are placed. Although a program, Early Steps, places young children of color in the lower grades of New York City private schools, the program is designed to support parents through the admissions process and understand the culture of predominately White, independent schools, it is not designed to provide young children with direct services to prepare them for what it means to be a Black students in these schools.

**Closing Thoughts**

Kuriloff et al. (2012) argued that the school is a dynamic institution, which is a “product of the interaction and accumulation of individual actions and institutional decisions and traditions” (p. 92). If this is true, then independent schools like TUS have the ability to affect positively the lived experience of students like the TUS senior above by examining the ways in which the school’s institutionalized structures negatively affect the success of their Black students. Kuriloff et al. also recognize that interpersonal factors that affect the experience of Black Students occur on the individual level, and suggested opportunities for “individual agency” as Black students strive to be successful in
independent schools. In Chapter 5, I will examine how teachers in my study define success for their African American students and the factors that teachers perceive contribute to or work against the success of African American students in independent schools.
CHAPTER 5: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Defining Success

Schoeffel et al. (2011) published the results of their study on student definitions of success. They conducted their research at the Shipley School, a coeducational pre-K–12 independent school in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. To design their study, Schoeffel et al. interviewed Shipley faculty with the goal of coming to a consensus on determining what it meant to be successful at the school. Schoeffel et al. (2011) found the following:

While expected common ingredients appeared (e.g., “curious, confident, self-aware, hard-working, and respectful risk-takers who care about others and can ask essential questions as they think independently, critically, creatively, and collaboratively”), the faculty agreed that Shipley is committed to supporting many different paths to success over time. Experienced teachers argued passionately that our definition of success should reach beyond mere academic achievement given that our mission is to help all students discover and build on their strengths while learning from their mistakes. (para. 11)

This holistic and inclusive approach to considering student success aligns with the way that teachers in my study defined success. Similar to Schoeffel et al.’s (2011) study, one of the themes that emerged most consistently was that success in all three of these schools was not synonymous with academic achievement. In the progressive tradition, teachers agreed that many ways were available to be successful in their schools; however, when respondents were asked what success looks like at their schools, two core principles emerged: a strong sense of self and a strong sense of connection.

Teachers were in agreement that these principles applied to all of their students, regardless of race, but they also agreed that the normative culture of predominately
White, independent schools is a complicating factor. The extant literature and the results of my study demonstrate an important relationship between positive racial identity development and school success for Black students; however, the research and my study also show that an important element of success in private school is acquiring White, upper-class “habits of heart and mind” (p. 92). Thus, Black students in independent schools face a very difficult path to success, and the teachers in my study noted that Black students face this difficulty from almost their first day in school. Arrington and Stevenson (2006) noted that success for Black students came to be defined as

A positive sense of self by students across social contexts, a strong sense of community and membership in the school, and a racial identity that can be used as a resource during development—particularly when confronted with racism and race-related stereotypes.

The results of this research study strongly support Arrington and Stevenson’s definition. Although respondents identified core principles for success that they said applied to all of their students, distinct subthemes emerged when teachers considered Black students they perceived to be successful and unsuccessful, and these subthemes intersect in important ways. For teachers in my study, a strong sense of self for Black students was closely related to students’ ability to develop and maintain a positive racial identity in the school environment. The results also show that teachers perceived that a strong sense of connection for Black students was closely related to their ability to connect to the ethos of the school while remaining closely connected to their identity as a Black person. In other words, Black students who were successful were able to “buy-in” without “selling out.”
Strong Sense of Self

In the focus group interviews, the respondents at all three schools were interested in creating a working definition for what it meant to be successful in their schools. In all three groups, this response was an iterative process: teachers would propose a definition, discussion would ensue and specific students were referenced as examples, and the group would come back and reshape the definition. In all three focus groups, the responses that emerged through this consensus-building process coalesced around the importance of building a strong sense of self. This is a broad concept, but teachers recognized that developing a sense of self is part of the developmental journey from early childhood through adolescence. As Joseph from TWS said, “You’re trying to figure out who you are in the world.” Josh, the upper school principal at TDS observed, “Their level of success doesn’t necessarily mean they got into the top college, it means they are working towards being their best selves.”

Self-actualization. The responses from the focus groups indicate that teachers believed a strong sense of self is important because it serves as an emotional and psychological foundation that supports students and serves as a buffer as they navigate a pressurized environment. Don, a White department chair at TUS, spoke about Erika, one of his African American students, who is a standout in her music class. He recalled, “The thing that I observe being her most successful thing is her confidence, her assertiveness, and her guts.” Don was impressed by the way that this student was able to draw upon her internal resources to navigate powerfully a terrain where she was in the minority on a variety of fronts. However, he and other TUS teachers noted that Erika was successful
because her confidence and assertiveness was a match for the culture of TUS where confidence is required to succeed:

Don: She sits in a classroom that is mostly White, and mostly boy, and she sits in the hot seat, the drum seat, and kills it. And she basically runs the class. And the thing that is going on there is her, sort of, natural assertiveness. And I have kids of color that aren’t that way and who are more laid back and chill about things. And that can be a problem because the school runs on . . .

Anne: The big noise.

Don: Yeah, on that Type A, alpha dog type thing.

When Don thought about how Erika was able to develop her strong sense of self, he shared that he knew she had a strong connection to her family and that she had religious beliefs that were important to her, so she came into the school in Grade 6 with a “strong base” for success.

The teachers at TWS came to a similar understanding as Don about what success looks like, and they used the term “self-actualized” to define what it meant to be successful at the school. They came to their definition by considering two groups of Black, upper-school girls, one group about whom there were concerns, and the other, that was considered to be successful. The following excerpt is a long exchange, but it is worth sharing in full because it demonstrates the teachers’ perceptions of the ways in which successful Black students are able to use their racial identities to drive them towards success:

Lisa: They are strong students, but they’re pretty shut down. I feel as though I can’t access them. And they’re teenagers, so it could just be a developmental thing, but for me there’s always that added layer. [I wonder] are they as actualized as some of their peers because of some of the stuff with which they dealt? I know for a fact they’ve dealt with some racialized incidents over the years . . . For me it’s weird, though, because I don’t want to put them in a category of not
successful. The way I think about it is more about actualizing their full selves. Do we see all of this beautiful person at TWS?

Philip: That’s how you’d define success?

Lisa: Well, I guess what I’m realizing is that’s what I am looking at in terms of kids where I’m like, “Yeah, that kid’s in a really good place” versus kids where I’m like, “Hmm . . . something’s going on here. We have Black students who thrive here. I’m thinking of Vivian, right? Kids who come at you and you feel like you are getting all of that child.

Philip: Yeah. I put Nya in that category. As I think about Nya as a lower schooler, success was just her ability to do anything she wanted. She was navigating myriad social circles. She was excelling academically, socially, and was cheerful.

Lisa: And she landed here as rock star. It wasn’t anything we did, I don’t think. Would you consider Kayla [successful]? She’s deeply engaged. She’s got a really strong social network. She’s involved; she plays sports. She’s participating really actively in the life of the school.

Philip: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Joseph: That’s what I would say would be success. And that would be Black, White, whatever.

Ida: Then we have arrived at the definition of success, being truly yourself, without defenses. Somebody who can engage with the community openly and feel at home, truly at home, for whom TWS is truly a home, and who, as a result, can thrive in all of the other areas. We agree that would mean true success.

Don’s observations and those of TWS teachers demonstrate an interesting tension between how these schools define success and how they view the school’s role in developing successful students. Although self-actualization appears to be an important part of how the three schools define success, it is not a quality that they observed the school developing or socializing in the students whom they deemed successful.

Lisa at TWS shared her belief that Black students whom she considered successful usually came from homes where the parents were taking on this socializing role, having explicit conversations with their children about race and what it meant for
their children to be Black and be students in a predominately White school. She observed:

There are a couple of other kids who snuck into my head where I feel as though they can do home and really talk about what it’s like to be at Westside with as a kid of color in a predominately White institution. I feel as though there are parents who are aware of this and are actively trying to say, “Talk to me about your day as a boy of color or a girl of color.” And there’s another piece that’s interesting in the lower school—I just know this based on a Parents of Color meeting—there are some families of younger students who, I think, are doing that really intentionally, and there are others who are not, who are in a sense, more on the colorblind side, where they don’t want to necessarily have that explicit conversation. I think some of those kids have a harder time because there’s no container. If I can have, like, a really hard day, but go home, and my parents are like, “No, no, no. We totally get it. We see you. We see your experience. We know what you’re managing.”

In the examples above, the teachers perceived that students either came in with a strong sense of self (i.e., “a base”) or that there were things happening in school or were endemic to the school culture or environment (i.e., racialized incidents) that served to undermine students’ sense of self. There were few examples in any of the responses from the three schools of institutional structures, programs, or interventions that teachers believed were serving to actively and intentionally cultivate a positive sense of self in African American students in a substantive way.

**Vulnerability of Black students.** The tension described above might explain how teachers in my study talk about the importance of developing a strong sense of self in the success of Black students. They see their Black students as talented and capable human beings who can be successful in their schools and who, generally, come into their school with a strong sense of self. Then, the teachers watch the way that the culture of the school negatively affects the Black students on the level of their racial identity, which teachers perceive to be important to Black children’s success. Teachers perceive that all of the
children in their schools are subjected to overwhelming pressure to succeed in lots of different—and perhaps unrealistic—ways; therefore, the teachers believe that even the normal struggles of private school can have higher stakes for Black students in a predominately White space. An exchange between the TUS teachers illustrates this point:

Julissa: Well, isn’t that the model for the success in the high school? The kid that can juggle all of those balls? Maybe the actual model we have for a successful student is—well of course it’s unrealistic. That’s what we fight all the time. I do think there is something in the water, in the sauce, in the chairs, in the air at this institution [where students are expected to do it all].

Anne: But is that differentiated? That stress, is it different for Black students versus White students?

Julissa: I think it is when you have fewer students. I think the absence of having a large number of students to see yourself reflected in—and you don’t have the faculty. And so I do think that is a stressor for Black kids because on top of all of that pressure, you also have to figure out the cultural and social implications.

In the focus group interviews, teachers consistently expressed their concern about the negative impact of the low numbers of Black students and teachers in their schools and the message that sends to Black students and their families. The example above reflects the way in which teachers perceive Black students reading the school landscape through a racial lens. Anne shared her perceptions of a Black girl in the lower school who ended up leaving to attend another school:

What does it mean to feel successful and feel successful at a school like ours and as a parent of a Black girl who is solidly average student but feels deeply that she is failing because she is amongst people—mostly White—who are stellar exceptional students. Like she’s a fabulous kid and works really hard, but she’s not a stellar student; she’s a solid student. She works hard. I can tell her all I want, and she will or will not hear it.

Anne’s rhetorical comments reflect her belief in the importance of a strong sense of self for Black students and the reality of the impact of the implicit messages that students
might receive from the school about their ability or worth. However, it also reflects her concern that she or the school might not have much ability to move the self-concept needle in a positive direction.

**Strong Sense of Connection to the Core Values of the School**

In addition to a strong sense of self, teachers in my study shared that another core principle of success is a sense of connection. A subtheme of these responses was authenticity. As illustrated in Ida’s articulation of TWS’s definition of success and her repetition of the word “truly,” the teachers distinguished what students believed it took to be successful in their schools from what teachers believed it meant to be successful in their schools.

In a majority of the responses, the teachers used the mission or ethos of the school as one of their criteria to measure the degree to which they perceived students to be successful at their schools. In the interviews at all three schools, at least one teacher referred to a student who embodied the ethos of the school a “Downtown Kid,” a “Westside Kid,” or an “Uptown Kid.” To be clear, this term was not used to describe Black students who had acquired or exhibited upper-class habitus. These were students whom the teachers perceived to be authentically connected to the school’s core values.

The following exchange between TDS teachers illustrates this distinction:

Interviewer: So in terms of success, are you identifying this group not necessarily as being the top academic students, but you would define them as successful because…?

Alexa: I think it’s mixed, but I do think, interestingly, that if we had to say, “Oh, that’s such a Downtown Kid.” Their values are like: interested in justice, interested in empathy, interested in their fellow humans, I would say that, yes, they all are.
Josh: I think some of them are really, really struggling.

Alexa: Really??

Josh: Yeah, academically. Just keeping their head above water.

Rob (White assistant head of school): So even in the cases of those kids that are academically struggling, there is a sense of those kids—I don’t see any of those kids alienated from the school’s ethos. There is a sense in them of the underlying value we hope will one day help to make them into successful adults. Some of those kids have struggled since day one, but they don’t strike me as kids who feel at arms-length from the school.

The members of the Golden Group at TDS (not the group referenced in the above exchange) were examples of students who might have struggled during their time at the school, but had internalized the school’s core values. The students not only returned to the school to share their stories, but they came back to serve the school. They provided recommendations to the school on how to support better the students of color, and they took the initiative to spend some time with a Black student whom they noticed was in need of support. Alexa shared what she witnessed:

Bryce, Lydia, and Nicholas came up to me right after the assembly and said, “Who’s that kid with the fro?” I’m like, he’s new. They’re like, “We know he’s new; what’s his situation? We really want to know how he’s doing.” I’m like, it has really been a rough ride. He comes from another world. He has barely spoken to anyone. They came to my classroom later and asked me if they could pull him out. Since that meeting, and it could probably be a million things, but since that meeting, David has been so different in class.

Alexa defined TDS values as “interested in justice, interested in empathy, interested in their fellow humans”; the alums who returned demonstrated those values despite feelings of “hatred for the school” when they were students. Moreover, they exhibited these values when they were students in the school, reaching out to support Black students in other classes by encouraging them, as Mariana shared, “To show up. Speak out. Be a
voice.” These students were role-modeling TDS values, but also as Mariana observed, they were “literally giving lessons for how to be a Black kid in this community.”

However, these lessons were not lessons on strategic detachment, “playing the game,” or (as TWS teachers described) compartmentalizing, surviving, or “putting on the mask.” Although individuals in the Golden Group surely had moments like this, what seemed to have made them “golden” was that they were able connect their identity as Black students to the core values of the school and act upon them.

The responses from the TUS teachers suggest that the affinity group program at in their lower school is providing an opportunity for Black students to tie their racial identity to the school’s values. Carla and Anne, who facilitate two race-based affinity groups, observed that the groups have provided a space where Black students can process their experiences during the school day and within the normal curriculum. They shared that in the past, many Black students kept racialized incidents they had experienced to themselves or chose to share only with their parents or a trusted teacher or staff member. “It would be a secret to tell you what they had experienced and that they felt it was racial,” said Carla. With the establishment of the affinity groups, the teachers noticed that students felt more empowered to make race part of the normal conversations of the school day. Anne shared her experience teaching her Grade 3 class:

We were talking about “What are the things people need?” and the “What are the things people want?” So, they were just making a list, and I asked, “What are some things that can be done?” And one kid, she’s like, “I need to say a need. We need to talk about race.” A little Black girl. And that’s never come up before, before we had these explicit conversations [in affinity groups]. I think that’s kind of a transformation, of bringing that conversation into spaces where they wouldn’t have taken place before.
In a school that values activism and speaking out, a Black girl who feels empowered to talk about race is considered successful, but what this example also demonstrates is that the school played an important role in facilitating the connection between the student’s racial identity and the values of the school. The school gave over time in the daily schedule, dedicated resources to compensate facilitators to receive training outside of school, and required every Grade 3–5 student to participate, not merely the students of color.

The importance of authentic alignment between the racial identity of Black students and the ethos of the school might be demonstrated in the race-based affinity group program at TWS, which is voluntary and takes place outside of normal class time. Although Lisa observed that the affinity groups in the lower school provide a safe and comfortable space for younger students to talk about their experiences, she also observed that the older Black students who she believed could most use an affinity space usually choose not to attend. She said, “The kids who are really struggling and grappling with that aspect of their identity [race] are not going to be the ones to show up.” Lisa explained further:

Lisa: Honestly, I think there are plenty of kids who actually shut that part of themselves off. I don’t mean that they’re not experiencing it. They’re like “I’m not going to acknowledge it.” I think affinity groups actually become something that are threatening to them because fitting in and social capital is so important.

Stephen: All the energy it takes.

Lisa: Yeah, to actually put it out there like “I’m a person of color, and that’s a really big part of who I am” can be alienating to their classmates that they don’t want to touch it with a ten-foot pole. That’s where the compartmentalizing, I think, really, really kicks in. Kids who were really active in some of these conversations in middle school, all of a sudden don’t want to be anywhere near anything diversity or race related. They struggle in those spaces.
Interviewer: You implied earlier this idea of fatigue.

Stephen: Yeah, like “just let me get through the day.”

Ida: Yeah, like “I don’t want to deal with this.” They have other priorities. “I have to get into college. I have to get good grades.”

The observations of the TWS teachers reflect an interesting irony. The Black students, who might be doing well academically, were not necessarily considered successful by these teachers because a perception existed that the students are struggling with their identity. However, the students seem to believe that to be successful, they need to deprioritize their racial identity and turn their attention to the things that are truly important: grades and peer relationships. Several examples of this tension showed throughout the interviews, where teachers recalled students who had “played the game” (i.e., earned good grades, gotten their diplomas, and got into a good college), but about whom teachers expressed regret because they perceived that the students did not have—or could not have—an authentic connection with the school as Black students. Thus, the Black students whom teachers considered successful were students who had bought into the values of the school, but who were able to find ways to connect those values to their racial identity.

Over the course of the focus group interviews, the teachers consistently observed that African and Black Caribbean students and families appeared to be more successful than African American students and families in being able to develop an authentic connection between the values of the school and their racial identity. Ida at TWS called it “first-generation phenomenon,” which she believed reflected a “no excuses” orientation towards academic achievement. As the TWS teachers recalled Black students they
defined as successful, they noticed that student after student came from an African or Caribbean family. Ida and Lisa theorized on the connection between these students’ ethnic backgrounds and their success at TWS:

Lisa: I would never venture to say that their race is not a part of their identity that is important to them. I think it absolutely is, but it’s not a subject they are actively engaging at school.

Ida: We talked about first generation immigrants. “I am going to succeed. I am going to make my parents proud.” It’s a whole different mindset. I would say this group is a category to itself.

Lisa: Well, it’s also within this cultural context, which is not one that their families have grown up in.

Ida: Right, race isn’t something I need to spend a lot of time on. My time is for getting A’s.

During a conversation about the impact of poverty Judith, a White lower schoolteacher at TUS shared her memory of an African family whom she believed transcended their circumstances:

This was a family that the school kind of saved. They were from Eritrea near Ethiopia. And this family came, and they were basically helpless. They had three children, and they were highly motivated kids. They had nothing, but they worked hard and did athletics and art and all that. The oldest daughter’s now in medical school in Boston. They really succeeded even though the family was struggling to make ends meet.

Carla, who in addition to teaching at TUS teaches at Prep for Prep, shared that the majority of Black students she sees in this prestigious program, which places gifted students of color in private day and boarding schools, are first or second generation African and Caribbean immigrants. She observed:

It’s very seldom you find students who say, “I’m African American.” It’s more Caribbean. And those are the kids who are, you know, because their families are coming here and saying, “You are going to be a great student and you are going to do what it takes to be successful academically.” I think that is the difference in
how they perceive getting a good education, and, you know, what it means to their families.

The teachers at TDS also identified their most successful students as having a Caribbean background, including a majority of the Golden Group. A common factor that teachers in my study identified between these first- and second-generation, Black immigrant families was a mindset of achievement that was closely tied to their ethnic or immigrant identity, but did not carry the weight of the African American historical experience (e.g., legacy of slavery in the United States, Jim Crow laws, etc.).

**Factors Underlying Success**

The teachers at TDS were in unanimous agreement that the Golden Group at TDS exhibited the two core principles of success as the teachers defined them in my study (sense of self and sense of connection). The factors that the TDS teachers identified as potentially contributing to their students’ success consistently also showed up in the interviews at TWS and TUS. In the presentation of many of the results, I used the Golden Group as an exemplar and confirm those results by sharing feedback from the other interviews.

**Importance of Seeing Others Like You**

When the focus group interview began at TDS, the teachers initially had trouble thinking about whether Black students entered in lower school were more or less successful than Black students who entered in middle or upper school because of the low numbers of Black students enrolled—currently and historically—in the lower grades. As discussed in the previous chapter, many of the Black students about whom teachers had concerns were the only one—or one of a very few—in their class. The Golden Group, on
the other hand, not only had a relatively high number of Black students in their lower grade class, but they also had a relatively high number of teachers and administrators of color throughout their time in the lower school. The teachers believed that this experience of having a critical mass of Black students, parents and teachers provided a strong foundation—an “anchor”—that empowered the students and parents as they moved through the school. Mariana noted:

So they entered middle school even stronger in voice, even more involved, starting initiatives, pushing back, while the families coming into the lower school were never quite as diverse. They weren’t those same numbers. [Because of the Golden Group’s numbers], there is a sustainability for them in a different way than if they are one of a few in the Fours, Kindergarten, and 1st Grade.

The teachers at TWS saw this same sense of empowerment in a golden group forming in their current Grade 2, which they described as being far more diverse than any current class in the lower school. Teachers of this class noticed the resilience of students in the class in the face of racialized incidents as well as their sense of ownership and belonging. Mariam observed, “They totally own the place.” At TUS, Julissa made it a point to mention that the Grade 8 students who felt empowered to organize the “Black Lives Matter” protest were in a class with a “substantial core group of Black students in it.” Mariana, whose daughter is a student in the upper school at TDS spoke about the inspiring influence the Golden Group had on her daughter and other Black students in her daughter’s class:

Over the years, they keep hearing about the success of that particular class. I would imagine that all of those kids would like to see themselves as part of the other large group of Black kids. And that impacts in the coming years their ability to see themselves running for student government, taking on more active roles, to start more committees. My daughter is in the Students of Color group because she knows it’s important to do that. Not because of what I do but because the other kids said, “You have to be here.”
In addition to a self-actualization effect, when speaking about the impact of critical mass, the teachers’ comments were coalesced into the themes of trust and support. At TDS, teachers shared that members of the Golden Group expressed that they would not have made it at the school without the support of their fellow classmates. They also mentioned the importance of teachers of color and urged the school to increase their efforts to hire more faculty of color.

Two figures emerged in the conversation at TDS as essential supports to students and families of color at the school. One was Vicky, an African American member of the administrative staff, who has been at the school for more than 25 years. The other was Barbara, a Black, middle school math teacher (she had also taught in the lower school) who had been at TDS for nearly 20 years. These were two women whom Black students and parents regularly sought out for support. When I asked Mariana why she believed Vicky and Barbara had so much trust and influence with Black students and families, she answered, “Barbara and Vicky are two people who can be direct with Black students and families in a way that many White colleagues cannot around issues of behavior, academics, fitting in, racialized experiences, or just being a familiar, friendly face.” The observations shared by other TDS teachers echoed Mariana’s observation. Alexa shared that Vicky is the only person in the school with whom her troubled student, David, would confide. She added that Vicky also works with David’s parents, helping them understand the importance of getting to know and being involved in the TDS community.

The White TDS teachers in the focus group who saw the assembly with the Golden Group felt it was eye-opening in that it not only made them more deeply aware of the experiences of Black students at TDS, but it also made them aware of how, despite all
of the teachers’ best intentions, their Black students carried a deep mistrust that their White teachers could really take care of them. Rob and Alexa’s exchange illustrates this point:

Rob: There is work for us to do. Even when there is this awareness that in this community there are White adults who care…

Alexa: And they did say that, they said a thousand times, “We love so-and-so…”

Rob: Yeah, so that trust thing is really huge. They’re saying, the fact that we’re surrounded by a bunch of White people that care is necessary, but it’s not special.

Teachers at TUS also shared examples of Black students who chose to confide in Black teachers or other teachers of color when they were in need of support. Julissa shared that when the “Black Lives Matter” protest occurred, a number of the Black teachers and administrators were off campus at a conference, so many of the Black students sought out Julissa to share their frustrations. Julissa observed that many of her White colleagues were surprised or disappointed by the fact that students didn’t come to them either before or after the protest occurred. Julissa provided this explanation, “The Black kids did not see them as resources, as advocates, as people who would’ve been able to help them be their best selves in this protest moment.” She adds, “It’s a struggle for everybody in a racialized space to understand their place in the conversation.” For Suzanne from TDS, three Black boys came to mind, and she expressed a worry that as a White teacher, she might not be able to support her Black students in all the ways they need:

I would say they were successful on paper, but if you were to really pay attention to their experience—socially, emotionally—you know, they were having a tough time. And as much as I can say that we’re this incredibly welcoming, generous, loving place, I have no idea what that’s like and how to help them navigate that.
Despite the difficulty, TDS student Nicholas called on teachers to continue to consider how they would close the trust gap. Alexa shared that, during the assembly, Nicholas went around the room and named the teachers he felt he could trust. However, he said that he came to that understanding at the end of his Grade 8 year. She said, “He said by that time it was too late. He had been here almost 2 years. He was basically calling on us, asking, ‘How are you going to narrow the distance? That was a long ass time to wait.’”

The teachers in my study overwhelmingly agreed that Black teachers played an important role in helping Black students and families navigate the school environment, but also shared that not all Black teachers were effective in supporting Black students. The teachers’ responses might reflect a belief that Black students need to not only see their skin color reflected in the faculty, but also see their values and experiences reflected in that teacher, whether it be their home experience or their experience at school. David, for example, had only connected with Vicky at TDS. He had not sought out Barbara. Josh reported that the Golden Group was particularly disappointed with a Black male teacher they encountered in the upper school because he “didn’t get it.” Carla at TUS spoke about a time when she directed a Black basketball player who was having trouble talking to one of the Black coaches. The student responded, “He doesn’t help. He never helps.” So although all of the teachers in my study agreed that having a larger number Black teachers would be an important way to support the success of Black students, their responses suggest that schools should not assume that all Black teachers can support all Black students or that White teachers cannot support Black students.

Teachers at TWS and TUS shared examples of White teachers who were able to build trust with their Black students. Lisa at TWS shared that the student who was called
“nigger” in lower school decided to speak with her White middle school teacher the next year because of a lesson he did on the Civil Rights Movement. From how he conducted the lesson, Lisa said the student believed he was someone she might be able to trust. At TUS, Anne, the White teacher and diversity coordinator, shared that she was often the person Black students sought out to discuss racialized incidents. She thought this was because, before affinity groups, she was one of the few people whom Black students saw talking about subjects that were important to them. These responses suggest that trust was built between Black students and their teachers from not only what these teachers looked like, but also from the racially affirming things Black students saw these teachers doing.

The importance of identification of experience when considering the importance of critical mass has implications for student relationships as well. Lisa at TWS shared her observations of the dynamic of a particular class when new Black students entered a class with Black students who had come up through the lower school:

There were some really gross dynamics two years ago, particularly between Black girls, the new ones versus the ones who had been here. You wanna talk about entitlement! It was like, “The new girls are more ‘street’; they’re rougher around the edges, and I don’t know how I feel about that.” They were kind of getting behind what they were hearing from their White classmates and, like, trying to ostracize these kids.

Mariana at TDS shared Nicholas’ view of his Black classmates when he arrived at TDS:

One of the first things that Nicholas said was, “When I first came, and I saw all of these Black kids, I was like, oh my gosh! Saving grace! Then I saw their relationships with the White kids, and I was like, sellout. They’re not going to be my friends.” And it took him a while to hold on—to build a relationship with Bryce, Malachai, Sarai, and Lydia and to feel like it was always going to be there.
The teachers at TDS and TWS wondered whether the examples above could mean that Black students who had been in the schools since lower school would need a different kind of support from those who might enter in middle and upper school. Josh at TDS noted that students who come in new in Grade 9 are expected to need some support in getting to know the culture and expectations of the school, but students who come in the lower or middle school are expected to already have it. Mariana advocated for paying special attention to the students, particularly the Black and Latino students, coming through the lower divisions transitioning to the upper school. She added, “Because there is something that they are losing because of this expectation of ‘they know the community; they’ve been around; they’re going to be okay,’ but if we don’t pay attention, we’re going to lose them along the way.” Mariana’s warning seemed to already be applicable at TDS and TWS where both groups of teachers—teachers who had been in their respective schools for a decade or more—had difficulty finding examples of Black students (other than the Golden Group) who entered their lower schools and made it all the way through to graduation.

**Involved and Networked Parents**

In addition to the importance of seeing others like you, the teachers in my study agreed that one of the most important factors underlying the success of Black students was the involvement of their parents and their ability to connect with one another to support each other and their children. For any child entering an independent school, the parents pay an important role in the admissions process, especially in the case of families applying for admission to the lower school. The TDS teachers believed that one of the
reasons that the Golden Group was so successful was that their parents had “bought in” to the mission and philosophy of the school. Alyssa observed:

I feel like there is a direct connection between the parents [and the success of the child]. If there isn’t buy-in from the parents with the school’s philosophy and a commitment to this type of education, particularly with the Black families, then that is directly connected to whether or not they stay.

The teachers at TWS agreed that parents not only understanding, but also authentically buying in to the philosophy and approach was essential to Black students’ success. Lisa posited:

I think families that have really bought into TWS are more well-situated. I think a big part of that is the partnership with the school and really leaning into that, so that when things come up—as sometimes they do, particularly with Black families—the families are already poised to think about this as a partnership, and so there isn’t an us-versus-them dynamic that you’re then adding to the mix when something comes up.

Again, the issue of trust emerged as an element of the factors underlying the success of Black students. Mariana explained, “And trust looks like tell me my kid is going to be okay academically and socially emotionally. Tell me specifically how this progressive approach is going to help my kid be okay.” Teachers in my study shared that the most successful Black students had parents who were fierce advocates, who in some ways took on the same sense of entitlement as some of their affluent White parents. Rob shared his experience with Lydia’s mother when he was principal of the middle school at TDS:

It really seems that a hugely important factor is an engaged parent. And that parent can be engaged positively or negatively. So they don’t have to, like, have drunk the Kool-Aid, but if the parent is an advocate for their kid—even if they are challenging us—then the kid is not alone. Lydia’s mom had a regular meeting with me, which was to challenge and complain and advocate, and then it slowly began to shift. Frankly, if she had stayed critical of the school all the way through, I think it still would have been okay because being here as a kid of color, engaged in your own struggle, just strikes me as immeasurably hard.
Josh agreed with Rob, drawing a relationship between entitlement and the confidence that comes from feeling you belong at the school. When asked whether he saw any connection between the affluence of his Black parents and the success of his Black students, Josh responded, “Absolutely.” Rob disagreed, citing a prestigious award given annually to five Grade 8 students who are determined to best embody the values of TDS. Rob noted that the list usually included a significant number of students who were on financial aid. Mariana supported Rob’s observation and argued that parents of successful Black students are not necessarily the more affluent parents; rather, they are skilled at building social capital and engaging in “concerted cultivation.” She explained:

I don’t mean social capital outside of TDS, I mean within. Are you connected with the Parents of Children of Color group? Do you know the power that Barbara has in the school? Do you know who the White allies are? Do you know who to talk to? Annette Lareau wrote this powerful book about the social life of children. She said that one of the things that families with wealth and opportunity had that they transferred to their children was this sense of advocating for yourself. It was a social way to fight for themselves. So, you got a bad grade? You have every right to write a letter to that teacher to say you deserved a better grade. You were kicked off of that sports team, you go right back to that coach and tell them that you can be there and why. So concerted cultivation is this idea that these children where consciously being taught how to navigate a world of power. I think about the role that and social capital has for those families who are connected to the places of power within our White independent school, and those are the families—regardless of income or whatever financial aid they have—that are doing fairly well.

The TDS teachers agreed with Rob and Mariana; however, when they and teachers from the other two schools were asked to think about their struggling Black students, more often than not, socioeconomic factors were mentioned as well, particularly how they believed a lack of resources could prevent parents from building the social

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capital and doing the concerted cultivation that teachers believed was important to
student success. Teachers shared examples of parents who could not make soccer games
and music performances because of work schedules. They expressed concern about
families that lived in the outer boroughs and had to endure long commutes. They all
talked about exhausted single mothers who just did not have the energy to help with
homework at night. They spoke about the culture of tutoring at their respective schools
and the unspoken understanding among White and affluent families that outside tutoring
(which could go as high at $200 per hour) is a normal and necessary requirement for
academic success. Some teachers shared that they knew that some Black parents did not
advocate or push the school too hard for fear of losing their financial aid. The parents of
some of the members of the Golden Group had to deal with these challenges, but the TDS
teachers noted that the breadth and depth of the parent network in that class served as an
important support. The parents in this class actively connected with Black parents in their
class and in other classes. They planned events and created committees. They connected
Black parents to folks like Barbara, Vicky, and Mariana. They actively worked to create a
base of support that worked to overcome the lack of resources that kept some other Black
families disconnected from the school.

The teachers at TUS also observed that the Black students whom they considered
successful had parents who were actively creating a network of support. Julissa spoke
about two Black boys in the upper school and their mothers:

There’s some parallels between these two Black boys. They both came up through
our lower school divisions. Their mothers. They were both single parents. The
role of their mothers was important in figuring out the system, figuring out the
rules of the game, working, connecting with all the people they needed to be
successful here like, “You’re watching my kid, right?” Like that ongoing work

128
was very successful because if the boys slipped a little, those moms were in there like you wouldn’t believe. Landon’s mom developed very strong relationships with people. She was like, “Watch my kid. Support my kid. Help me with my kid. We are co-parenting my kid.”

From the majority of teacher’s responses, they perceived one of the primary purposes of these important parent networks was for Black parents to create a community—of students, of parents, and of teachers—who would look out for and care for their children in the predominately White space of school. Another important purpose was to share important information with each other about how to navigate successfully the culture and expectations of independent school.

**Knowing the Rules and How to Play the Game of Private School**

Teachers from all three schools agreed that an important factor underlying the success of Black students was the extent to which the students and their parents were able to understand and acquire the “habits of mind and heart” (Kuriloff et al., p. 92) that these schools require to be successful. As someone who worked in these three self-described progressive schools, I know that TDS, TUS, and TWS do not feel at home with being described as “elite.” Though these schools have annual tuitions which range from $40,000–$47,000 a year and parent body that is primarily comprised of some of the most affluent people in New York City (if not the country), these schools would rather be known for their current and historical commitment to social justice, for their interest in admitting a wide range of learners (they like “quirky” and “artsy” kids), and for their belief in educating the “whole child.” It is important to note that TUS stands apart from TDS and TWS in some important ways. TUS is almost three times the size of the other two schools in terms of the number of students it serves, and its operating budget is more
than double those of TDS and TWS. TUD boasts a significant endowment, and it regularly appears on lists of the top independent schools in the country. Lastly, TUS’s campus in Riverdale is an actual campus with large sports fields, turn-of-the century architecture, and a quad in the middle of campus. It bears more similarity to elite New England boarding schools than the private schools down in Manhattan just a few minutes away.

The differences between TUS and the other two schools in my study are reflected in how teachers at TUS discuss the messages that students receive from the school about what it means to be successful. Teachers at TUS agreed that the message that the school sends to students is that they have to do it all: get good grades, play on a sports team, be involved in the school play or the jazz band, do community service, run for student government, and, ultimately, get into a good college. In addition to that, students need to have good relationships with their teachers and peers, and they should speak out in and out of class and make their opinions known. Although the TUS teachers interviewed for my study recognized and were able to articulate clearly this culture of “unrealistic” expectations, they also expressed that it was not healthy for students and that TUS needed to work to change how they defined success. When it came to considering the factors underlying the success of Black students at TUS, the majority of teachers interviewed perceived that many of the Black students whom they would consider successful had made strategic decisions about how to “do school” at TUS, and often these decisions reflected a rejection of the school’s definition for success. Julissa explained what she saw happening in the upper school with one particular student:
Julissa: Aaron learned the rules. Aaron’s mother learned the rules. Aaron figured out early on that he couldn’t mess up, like not to cause too much attention to himself. So Aaron’s rules for success were different from everybody else’s rules for success. And his mother bought into his definition—“This is what it means for my son to be successful. He doesn’t need to be the alpha dog. One, he needs to stay out of trouble, stay off of people’s radar screens. Number two, he needs to do what he needs to do within the context of our family.” And then when Aaron figured out that he had this powerful story, that he could choose who he shared it with, and that he could play a sport and [define what that meant], and when he owned that part of his identity, he was like, “I’m not going to be the dumb jock.” Then everything clicked.

Carla: He’s at Brown, right?

Julissa: Yeah, and so he figured out, “Who’s going to help me use this skill I have and also allow me to use these brains I have, and who am I going to connect to and who is my mom going to trust that is going to get me to the next level?” And it became the football coach who created that. Very much so.

Aaron’s story suggests that teachers perceive successful Black students at TUS work to create a counter-narrative to the stories they believe the school has created about them as Black students, particularly the narrative that Black students were only at the school because of athletics. Julissa noted that, although many Black students found a home in athletics—a place where they could feel confident and successful—they were quick to notice whether they were being perceived as mere jocks, particularly by teachers. Although Aaron was able to use that view to motivate him, Julissa and other TUS teachers observed some Black students responding negatively to lowered expectations. Julissa explained, “The second they were relegated to ‘you’re only worth it because of your athletic skill,’ it was like self-fulfilling prophecy. They thought, ‘What’s the point?’ because you as the teacher are never going to see me as anything other than, I’m here because…”
Naomi shared the story of an upper school student who made a decision not to move up into an advanced level course because he knew that he would be the only Black student in that class:

I think sometimes our levels of success need to be marked by what students are making a decision not to engage with. Like, this is the place where I can be my full self. I can engage at this level, and I’ll still be successful in the class. And then we look at ourselves and go, “Why do the top level courses look this way? What are the demographics?” Those are important questions, but I think we’ve only looked at them from one perspective, which is what do students lose when we actually push them to those classes? Do they end up hearing things? Witnessing moments that only confirm the nastiness they only thought was in the shadows at our institution?

This story has similarities to the one that Lisa from TWS about the girls who chose to engage with the school at the level at which they felt they could be most successful and choosing to stay away from spaces where they might be confronting negative messages about their Black identity. At TWS, this space was affinity groups. At TUS, the space was advanced level courses. In both examples, teachers perceived that Black students were looking to avoid spaces where they believed their racial identity was foregrounded and either separated from their academic identity (i.e., the jock) or brought too much attention to it. The latter concern was demonstrated through teachers’ examples in all three schools of Black students deciding to just “keep their heads down” or “stay off the radar.” Naomi shared one example that reflected both:

I’ve heard students talk specifically about arguing to bring a particular text into the highest level English course, a text that is Black-focused, and then hearing some [negative] comments about the book, about the skill of the author, about the importance of the story—and, you know, it’s one thing that it’s the ONE book you get in that year, and you become the owner and speaker for that story and that text, even when it might not mirror your own experience. And then, to have that go poorly, they would rather not be in the class.
Here, Naomi perceived that Black students were receiving a message in the classroom: (a) that the “Black-focused” text was unique and not-up-to-par in terms of the academic standards of TUS, and (b) that Black students feared that the teacher and other students might be associating them with the text. Therefore, the Black students believed that they were being seen as unique and not-up-to-par academically.

The responses of the TUS teachers reflected a perception that Black students at TUS who are able to engage in this kind of strategic thinking and decision making (i.e., “play the game”) are usually successful at obtaining the reward of attending an elite independent school: a diploma and acceptance to a selective college. However, the teachers also expressed regret that many of these “successful” students had to play a game that required them to place their racial identity as secondary to their academic identity. Aaron was an example of a student who was able to connect his story—his racial identity—to his academic identity and use this understanding to challenge the status quo. However, more often than not, examples of “successful” Black TUS students were students whom teachers saw reading the landscape and deciding that they had to give up a piece of themselves to survive. As Carla said, “Success is getting out of this place.”

Although the responses from the teachers at TDS and TWS shared some similarities to those that the teachers expressed at TUS, the TDS and TWS teachers’ responses reflected a feeling that their schools’ definition of success was in alignment with the messages that students and families received. Both schools took pride in their low-pressure conceptualization of academic achievement and felt that their schools were fairly successful at relating the message to students and parents that there were many paths to success. Teachers from both schools agreed that an important factor underlying
success for Black students and families was, first, understanding and “buying into” the school’s progressive philosophy and approach. Teachers shared their observation that this requirement can be challenging for many of their Black students because the progressive philosophy is oftentimes at odds with the home culture and values of their African American families. Philip and Lisa from TWS shared what they had observed:

Philip: I always kind of question the connection between [our] culture and the stuff we are putting out there as a school and how that’s married with what’s going on at home and how their parents are raising them. Whereas the school teaches kids to question authority and to do a lot of things like that, I don’t think that’s necessarily the landscape for children of color as they’re being raised in New York City or any urban context for that matter.

Lisa: First names alone for some families of color is uncomfortable terrain. Like you don’t call adults by their first name, so they’re already in a place where “I don’t know what the rules are, nor what the boundaries are.

TWS teachers admitted that they sometimes mediate their interactions with Black families in recognition of the differences between home and school cultures. Mariam and Philip shared that they could recall two Black families who told their lower schoolchildren that, if they did not behave, the school was going to throw them out. Mariam and Philip said that these incidents made them think twice about what they shared with these families about their children’s progress. Lisa recognized that Mariam and Philip’s decision was in line with the school’s values of individualizing their approach to their students and the school’s desire to be sensitive to the cultural values that each student brings to the classroom. However, she wondered whether, in their efforts to be a school for all students and families, TWS was being honest with itself about its ability to serve Black families:

Lisa: We are so individualized, and we really try to meet all kinds of kids where they are, and understanding that not all kids are moving on the same track at the
same speed at the same time. Something, with which I think we struggle with, if I can say this, institutionally is at what point do we stop being the best environment for a child particularly around these issues of culture and behavior and social–emotional well-being? I feel like we will probably more so than other schools, more traditional settings for sure, we will really work hard to help move a kid through a difficult time.

Mariam: A lot of latitude.

Lisa: A lot of latitude. For me, what becomes tricky about that is that, at the end of the day, we’re still a predominately White institution, so it’s like we’ve gone as far as we can with the family, and that still doesn’t mean that the kid is in a place where they’re thriving.

Lisa’s observation highlights what other teachers recognized in terms of “playing the game:” the importance of making the rules of the game explicit to Black families and being explicit when they or their children are not being successful. Mariana from TDS shared that she believes that an important part of her role as an educator at TDS is to make the “rules” clear to Black students and families. She shared the story of a lower-school student she had to suspend:

The day I suspended him, he and his family came, and I said, “You are a Black boy, and you can’t do that. You cannot ever do that again because the radars are all over you.” I just remember this idea of really naming that the stakes were high because he was a Black kid, and Black boy, and in a way that is just sort of different. If I were in an all-Black school or a predominately Black school, I don’t know if I would say that. Part of it is helping this kid figure out how to be successful not only in this environment, but in a predominately White environment and society they live in.

Many of the teachers at the three schools who identified as Black or Latina shared that they felt a responsibility to help Black students and families not only to understand and navigate the private school landscape by being explicit about the rules of the game, but also by speaking some hard truths to these students and families about what they needed to do or stop doing to be successful at the school. Julissa shared that she viewed
part of her role as a teacher at TUS as being someone who translates the “language” of private schools to Black families:

I mean, there is a translation that needs to happen. For instance, as an upper school dean, there was a period of time where I sat with some kids and said, “When a teacher says to you, ‘I think it would be a really good idea, Kevin, for you to come and see me,’ that is not an observational statement! That’s a ‘you need to come and see me!’” And I think that there’s a translation that needs to happen for some kids and some parents—well, and teachers should actually know, too, that, say, when you pose it this way, it’s not going to land…

Anne: As an option, yeah…

Julissa: Yeah, that it’s a requirement. It’s going to land as something that’s optional. Instead of, “Let’s make an appointment.”

Naomi: Yeah, cut to the chase: “I need to see you.”

The importance of being explicit in language when teaching the rules of the game was reinforced by Mariana at TDS who spoke about helping a Black boy in Grade 3 to learn the right way to hug girls in his class when he was perceived as doing it wrong. She said, “I had to help him understand how the other kids were hugging, so he could learn their language.”

Gender

Teachers at TDS and TWS shared a concern for success of their Black boys. They noticed anecdotally that Black girls seemed to fare better than Black boys in their schools. Teachers at TUS did not explicitly comment on the differences between boys and girls, but when teachers provided examples of Black students who were struggling at TUS, the majority of their examples described the experiences of Black boys. Only Lisa provided a theory as to the discrepancy, saying that she thought that Black boys and girls were socialized differently—in school, at home, in the world. The differences between
the experiences of Black boys and girls fell outside the scope of my study, but the observations of the teachers point to an important area of study for future research.
CHAPTER 6: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings from the qualitative analysis show teachers perceive that Black students in their schools experience similar forms of implicit and explicit racial bias across the lower, middle, and upper divisions that negatively affect their school success; however, patterns emerged in the participants’ responses that demonstrate a higher level of concern for their elementary-age Black students compared to the students who entered in middle or high school. Participants also identified *strong sense of self* and *sense of connection* as two core dimensions of success for all of their students, but identified knowing the “rules of the private school game” and having a strong support network early on as important success factors for Black students.

These findings provided an important foundation from which to gather quantitative data that not only allowed me to test the generalizability of the qualitative findings, but also supported the construction of instruments that served as valid measures of teacher perceptions of the Black student experience. Moreover, the quantitative study expanded the examination of teacher perceptions beyond their observations of their students and families and into an examination of their perceptions of their school climate, their efficacy dealing racial politics, and the relationship between their perceptions and demographic factors like race/ethnicity, the grade levels they teach, and their time in their position in their current school.

Participants

One hundred and two respondents completed the survey across the three research sites. Of the respondents, 50% \( (n = 48) \) were employed at TUS, 34.4% \( (n = 33) \) were
employed by TDS, and 15.6% \((n = 15)\) were employed by TWS. In terms of their role in
the school, 74.5% \((n = 73)\) were teachers, 19.4% \((n = 19)\) were administrators, and 6.1%
\((n = 6)\) were staff.

Respondents were distributed fairly evenly regarding the age groups they for
which they were responsible with lower-school teachers making up 32% \((n = 32)\) of
participants, upper school teachers making up 28% \((n = 28)\), and middle school teachers
making up 25% \((n = 25)\). The respondents who had pre-K–12 or responsibilities across
more than one division made of 15% \((n = 15)\) of the sample set. Of the respondents,
33.3% \((n = 33)\) had been employed by their school for 0–4 years, while 30.3% \((n = 30)\)
had been at their school for 15+ years. 19.2% \((n = 19)\) had been at their school for 5–10
years, and 17.2% \((n = 17)\) had been at their school for 11–15 years. Regarding the
number of years in their current role, respondents who had been in their roles for 0–4
years made up 37.8% \((n = 37)\) of the sample. Of the respondents, 31.6% \((n = 31)\) had
been in their roles for 15+ years, 16.3% \((n = 16)\) for 11–15 years, and 14.3% \((n = 14)\) for
5–10 years.

The racial make-up of the sample was not diverse, but was reflective of the make-
up of faculty and administration of most highly selective, independent schools: White
(63.6%; \(n = 63\)), Black African or African American or Caribbean (17.2%; \(n = 17\)),
Multiracial or Biracial (11.1%; \(n = 11\)), Asian or Asian American or Pacific Islander
(10.1%; \(n = 10\)), Hispanic or Latina/o (7.1%; \(n = 7\)), and Native American (1%; \(n = 1\)).
Of the respondents, 68% identified as female \((n = 68)\), and 32% identified as male
\((n = 32)\).
Defining Success and Factors Underlying Success

**Descriptive results.** In my examination of the research subquestions 1a and 1b involving teacher perceptions of Black student success, survey respondents were asked to rank the qualities that they believe are most important when considering whether a student is successful in their school. The top responses from the 102 participants (from the ranking score calculated by Survey Monkey) were “Has the ability to think critically and consider multiple perspectives” (7.32), “Has a moral and ethical compass that guides behavior” (6.59), “Is resilient; knows how to navigate and press through failure and disappointment” (6.51), “Knows him or herself; is comfortable with who s or he is” (6.41), and “Is kind, compassionate, empathetic” (5.92). Full descriptive results are provided in Table 6.1.

Respondents were then asked whether they would change their rankings when considering success for their Black students. 76.8% of the respondents indicated that they would not change their rankings; however, 47.1% of the Black respondents replied that they would change their rankings when defining success for their Black students compared to just 16.7% of the White respondents.

Survey respondents were also asked to rank the factors that they believed contributed to White students success and the factors they believed contributed to Black student success (Tables 6.2 and 6.3). For White students, the items that received the highest rankings scores were “How involved and engaged the parents are” (8.57), “Socioeconomic status of the family” (7.61), “How connected the student feels to adults in the community” (7.52), and “How connected student feels to his or her peers” (7.38). For Black students, the top responses were “How involved or engaged parents are”
“How connected student feels to adults in the community” (7.86), “How connected student feels to his or her peers” (7.43), and “Socioeconomic status of the family” (7.34).

Table 6.1

Teacher Perceptions of Success Characteristics Ranked by Importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has the ability to think critically and consider multiple perspectives</td>
<td>32.93%</td>
<td>15.81%</td>
<td>9.78%</td>
<td>9.68%</td>
<td>10.36%</td>
<td>8.54%</td>
<td>4.84%</td>
<td>6.10%</td>
<td>2.44%</td>
<td>4.88%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>7.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a moral/ethical compass that guides behavior/actions</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>9.95%</td>
<td>13.13%</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
<td>8.38%</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>6.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is resilient; knows how to navigate through failure/disappointment</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>16.41%</td>
<td>10.99%</td>
<td>27.06%</td>
<td>12.94%</td>
<td>7.65%</td>
<td>4.71%</td>
<td>9.41%</td>
<td>3.53%</td>
<td>2.55%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows him/herself; is comfortable with who he/she is</td>
<td>20.73%</td>
<td>7.32%</td>
<td>10.98%</td>
<td>12.29%</td>
<td>10.86%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>6.54%</td>
<td>7.32%</td>
<td>7.32%</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>6.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is kind, compassionate, empathetic</td>
<td>4.65%</td>
<td>20.33%</td>
<td>10.47%</td>
<td>10.47%</td>
<td>11.63%</td>
<td>8.14%</td>
<td>8.14%</td>
<td>12.70%</td>
<td>5.81%</td>
<td>6.04%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>5.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is hardworking</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
<td>18.00%</td>
<td>13.58%</td>
<td>19.50%</td>
<td>6.87%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>15.56%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>5.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has close and connected peer relationships</td>
<td>3.75%</td>
<td>3.75%</td>
<td>11.25%</td>
<td>13.75%</td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>11.25%</td>
<td>16.25%</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
<td>13.75%</td>
<td>3.75%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>5.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performs well academically; gets good grades</td>
<td>5.85%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>13.10%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>11.80%</td>
<td>10.71%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>10.71%</td>
<td>19.71%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>5.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the ability to manage multiple commitments and responsibilities</td>
<td>2.27%</td>
<td>16.33%</td>
<td>5.68%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>5.68%</td>
<td>10.23%</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
<td>19.32%</td>
<td>19.32%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>4.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has diverse interests; participates in multiple activities</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
<td>2.33%</td>
<td>2.33%</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
<td>11.63%</td>
<td>13.95%</td>
<td>19.77%</td>
<td>20.07%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>3.44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.2  
Teacher Perceptions of Factors Impacting White Student Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>RIA</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The co-educational status of the family and their access to resources</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>6.14%</td>
<td>9.59%</td>
<td>2.33%</td>
<td>1.61%</td>
<td>6.05%</td>
<td>1.16%</td>
<td>2.33%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How connected student feels to and adults in the community (i.e., being known)</td>
<td>18.67%</td>
<td>12.33%</td>
<td>18.44%</td>
<td>18.44%</td>
<td>12.59%</td>
<td>5.61%</td>
<td>8.44%</td>
<td>7.21%</td>
<td>6.02%</td>
<td>9.81%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td>4.32%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of our academic program (i.e., small classes, range of offerings)</td>
<td>8.47%</td>
<td>15.06%</td>
<td>13.23%</td>
<td>11.69%</td>
<td>15.36%</td>
<td>7.23%</td>
<td>8.43%</td>
<td>8.41%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td>9.81%</td>
<td>1.29%</td>
<td>2.41%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well the student and family understand and &quot;buy into&quot; the expectation of the school</td>
<td>15.29%</td>
<td>8.41%</td>
<td>14.32%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>6.24%</td>
<td>12.96%</td>
<td>4.71%</td>
<td>4.71%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>1.59%</td>
<td>1.59%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The previous school or program attended (i.e., academics preparation)</td>
<td>11.82%</td>
<td>10.89%</td>
<td>16.13%</td>
<td>16.73%</td>
<td>12.64%</td>
<td>6.48%</td>
<td>8.68%</td>
<td>7.81%</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
<td>7.53%</td>
<td>2.19%</td>
<td>3.22%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The socioeconomic background of the family</td>
<td>19.88%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>18.26%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The willingness of the school to support and monitor the student (i.e., intrusive support, monitoring)</td>
<td>3.26%</td>
<td>4.05%</td>
<td>2.31%</td>
<td>7.06%</td>
<td>4.21%</td>
<td>7.66%</td>
<td>14.13%</td>
<td>7.01%</td>
<td>14.13%</td>
<td>8.34%</td>
<td>10.60%</td>
<td>8.34%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student's gender</td>
<td>1.44%</td>
<td>6.88%</td>
<td>8.95%</td>
<td>8.98%</td>
<td>7.95%</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
<td>7.95%</td>
<td>11.31%</td>
<td>17.05%</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
<td>11.58%</td>
<td>5.68%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The behavior of the student (i.e., discipline, attendance, etc.)</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
<td>3.45%</td>
<td>3.45%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>13.79%</td>
<td>14.04%</td>
<td>14.04%</td>
<td>12.58%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>6.99%</td>
<td>5.75%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The age of the student when he enters the school</td>
<td>4.27%</td>
<td>5.39%</td>
<td>7.37%</td>
<td>5.95%</td>
<td>9.87%</td>
<td>6.32%</td>
<td>8.22%</td>
<td>10.51%</td>
<td>7.33%</td>
<td>15.54%</td>
<td>17.89%</td>
<td>5.36%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The gender of the student</td>
<td>1.12%</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
<td>6.78%</td>
<td>7.87%</td>
<td>3.37%</td>
<td>7.92%</td>
<td>14.51%</td>
<td>19.11%</td>
<td>19.11%</td>
<td>6.99%</td>
<td>10.51%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6.3

**Teacher Perceptions of Factors Impacting Black Student Success**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reinvolved/engaged the parents are at home and at school</td>
<td>25.32%</td>
<td>24.05%</td>
<td>11.33%</td>
<td>7.58%</td>
<td>7.58%</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
<td>6.33%</td>
<td>7.58%</td>
<td>6.33%</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How connected student feels to and adults in the community (e.g., being known)</td>
<td>29.88%</td>
<td>17.65%</td>
<td>7.10%</td>
<td>7.58%</td>
<td>7.10%</td>
<td>7.58%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>7.10%</td>
<td>7.10%</td>
<td>7.58%</td>
<td>3.53%</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race-connected student back to another year</td>
<td>8.66%</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>10.58%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>8.06%</td>
<td>8.66%</td>
<td>8.06%</td>
<td>8.66%</td>
<td>0.22%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The socio-economic status of the family and their access to resources</td>
<td>15.75%</td>
<td>18.00%</td>
<td>13.75%</td>
<td>8.76%</td>
<td>12.69%</td>
<td>7.61%</td>
<td>8.76%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>3.75%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>7.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The health of the student (e.g., academic disease; range of referrals)</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>12.56%</td>
<td>12.56%</td>
<td>7.99%</td>
<td>9.05%</td>
<td>10.05%</td>
<td>7.99%</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>7.99%</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>6.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The availability of in-school support monitoring programs (e.g., “small” programs, after-school, clubs, sports)</td>
<td>8.06%</td>
<td>8.43%</td>
<td>14.41%</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>12.69%</td>
<td>13.21%</td>
<td>8.02%</td>
<td>9.64%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>9.64%</td>
<td>2.61%</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>6.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The previous school or program attended (i.e., academic preparation)</td>
<td>8.72%</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
<td>6.75%</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
<td>11.25%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>12.00%</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>9.25%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well the student was family, social, and “buy into” the instructional focus of the school</td>
<td>7.67%</td>
<td>3.37%</td>
<td>4.48%</td>
<td>16.18%</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
<td>16.18%</td>
<td>4.48%</td>
<td>8.99%</td>
<td>7.67%</td>
<td>9.41%</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
<td>2.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The racial/ethnic background of the family</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>9.12%</td>
<td>5.96%</td>
<td>15.90%</td>
<td>8.05%</td>
<td>13.10%</td>
<td>8.05%</td>
<td>16.11%</td>
<td>16.11%</td>
<td>0.56%</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The gender of the student</td>
<td>3.45%</td>
<td>9.05%</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
<td>5.76%</td>
<td>9.05%</td>
<td>5.76%</td>
<td>4.65%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>13.71%</td>
<td>9.05%</td>
<td>17.24%</td>
<td>5.76%</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The age of the student who transfers to the school</td>
<td>1.96%</td>
<td>6.33%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Factor Analysis and Measurement Development**

In examining the second and third subquestions by which explored teacher perceptions of the factors that affect teacher support self-efficacy, context for Black student success, school climate, and Black student racial coping, seven scales (some with dual measures) were identified among this sample of participants.

**Teacher perceptions of self.** The first scale, the Black Student Support Self-Efficacy Scale, measures the degree to which independent school teachers believe they are able to support Black student academic and social success ($\alpha = .71$). After conducting a factor analytic procedure, a two-factor model identified interpersonal support ($\alpha = .80$) and facilitation support ($\alpha = .79$) as factors that explain 60.0% of the total scale variance.

Tables 6.4 and 6.5 show the two factors and items on the Black Student Support Self-Efficacy Scale. Black student interpersonal support includes items that reflect confidence in personally resolving racial conflicts for Black students (“I feel prepared to respond when issues of racism arise among the students”) and being sought by Black students as a source of support (“Black students or parents feel comfortable speaking with me about their experience being in a predominantly White school”). Black student facilitation support includes items that reflect proactive behaviors in which teachers engage to support their Black students (“I facilitate student reflection on the impact of prejudice and discrimination”) and training they receive, which might make them more effective at supporting Black students (“I regularly participate in antibias training and professional development”). A moderate and expected significant relationship existed between the two factors ($r = .55 \ p < .001$).
Table 6.4

*Item Statistics of the Black Student Interpersonal Support Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel prepared to meet the needs of students from any racial, ethnic, or cultural background.</td>
<td>2.8182</td>
<td>.77412</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Black students and/or families feel comfortable speaking with me about their experience being in a predominately White school.</td>
<td>2.5051</td>
<td>1.13725</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel prepared to respond when issues of racism arise among students.</td>
<td>2.8889</td>
<td>.80672</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Black students and/or parents seek me out to discuss their experience being in a predominately White school.</td>
<td>2.3232</td>
<td>.90157</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I worry that I am not effectively meeting the needs of my Black students and families.</td>
<td>2.2424</td>
<td>.84625</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.5

*Item Statistics of the Black Student Facilitation Support Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. I feel comfortable proactively creating opportunities to have discussions about race with students.</td>
<td>2.8119</td>
<td>.99712</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I facilitate student reflection on the impact of prejudice and discrimination.</td>
<td>2.6436</td>
<td>1.18814</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My classroom curriculum allows for regular discussions about equity and justice.</td>
<td>2.4554</td>
<td>1.43892</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I regularly participate in antibias training and professional development.</td>
<td>2.6337</td>
<td>.96667</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher perceptions of context factors in student success.** The second scale, the Context Determines Black Student Success Scale, is very reliable measure (α = .81).
Select items from this scale include “Black students seem more successful when there is a critical mass of Black students,” “Most successful Black students come from two-parent families” and “Black girls are generally more successful than Black boys.” Descriptive statistics for this scale are displayed in Table 6.6.

The third scale (Table 6.7), the Lower School Entry Success Scale, measures the degree to which independent school teachers agree that student academic and social success is greater with lower-school entry (α = .71).

The fourth scale, the Placement Program Entry Success Scale displayed in Table 6.8 measures the degree to which independent school teachers agree that student academic and social success is greater with placement program support and preparation (α = .85).

Table 6.6

*Item Statistics of Context Determines Student Success Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Alpha = .81</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Black students seem more successful when there is a critical mass of Black students.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7234</td>
<td>1.23048</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Parent involvement more important for Black than White students.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5426</td>
<td>.96904</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Most of students counseled out are Black.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4681</td>
<td>1.23308</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Most successful Black students are from affluent families.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.8723</td>
<td>1.29709</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Most successful Black students come from two parent families.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6702</td>
<td>1.29006</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Black immigrant students are more successful than American Black students.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.7340</td>
<td>1.19295</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Black girls have been more successful than Black boys.  
15. Black alumni have positive memories to share about their experience in our school.  
16. Black students pay a high emotional or psychological cost.

Table 6.7

*Item Statistics of the Black Student Lower-School Success Beliefs Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Black students who enter in lower school are more successful than Black students who enter in middle or upper school.</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.195</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Black students who enter in lower school are more socially comfortable.</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.296</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.8

*Item Statistics of the Black Student Placement Program Success Beliefs Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Most successful Black students have come from placement program.</td>
<td>1.5876</td>
<td>1.37502</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Placement programs do a better job of prepping Black students.</td>
<td>1.9794</td>
<td>1.46472</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher perceptions of school climate.** The fifth and sixth scales were used to investigate school racial climate and White racial microaggressions. The fifth scale, the School Racial Climate Scale (α = .77), displayed in Table 6.9 involved 8 items by which I
asked teachers of their perceptions of the positive experiences in the school setting for Black students and families. Examples of items from this scale include “Black families feel comfortable in our school,” “Our school does an effective job of meeting needs of Black students,” “Our Black students see themselves in our curriculum,” and “Our school does a good job of hiring Black teachers and administrators.”

Table 6.9

*Item Statistics of the Positive School Racial Climate Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alpha = .77</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Black families feel comfortable in our school.</td>
<td>2.4737</td>
<td>.52849</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Our Black students see themselves in our curriculum.</td>
<td>2.2763</td>
<td>.72293</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Our school does an effective job of meeting needs of Black students.</td>
<td>2.3684</td>
<td>.68977</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Our Black students feel that this is their school.</td>
<td>2.5263</td>
<td>.68262</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Our Black families trust we can meet the needs of their children.</td>
<td>2.5263</td>
<td>.62126</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Black students &amp; families have a harder time.</td>
<td>2.6711</td>
<td>.64059</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Our school does a good job of hiring Black teachers and administrators.</td>
<td>1.9474</td>
<td>.89286</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Most of my colleagues know how to work with Black students.</td>
<td>2.3947</td>
<td>.73174</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sixth scale addressed the racial microaggressions that faculty and staff observed White students or teachers enacting on or toward Black students at school, and included two measures. Factor analysis of the data resulted in two very reliable measures of the racial microaggressions that respondents observed or were shared with them by a
student, colleague, or parent. The first measure (see Table 6.10), is an 11-item measure; the second measure, White Racial Microaggressions Scale–Heard ($\alpha = .86$; see Table 6.11) is an 11-item measure.

Table 6.10

*Item Statistics of the White Racial Microaggression Scale–Observed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A White person touching a Black person’s hair – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A White student refusing to play with a Black student because that student is Black – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A White student refusing to touch a Black student or teacher or staff member because that person is Black – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A White student speaking in Ebonics or in a way that would be considered stereotypically “Black.” – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A White student using the N– word or justifying the use of the N– word (e.g., “It’s from a song,” or “My Black friend uses it.”) – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A White student or teacher making a racially insensitive remark in the classroom – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. A White person mistaking a Black parent for caregivers or school maintenance or kitchen staff – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8A White person confusing the names of Black students or faculty or staff – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9A White person making a racist joke or comment</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha = .83</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. deviation</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or using a racist slur – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10A White person making a comment about the color or shade of a Black person’s skin – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11A White teacher asking a Black student to comment in class on his or her personal experience when discussing a topic perceived to be relevant to the African American or Black experience (e.g., slavery). – Yes, I have OBSERVED this scenario.</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.11

*Item Statistics of the White Racial Microaggression Scale–Shared*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alpha = .86</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A White person touching a Black person’s hair – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>2.2105</td>
<td>.97044</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A White student refusing to play with a Black student because that student is Black – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>1.2632</td>
<td>.49982</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A White student refusing to touch a Black student or teacher or staff member because that person is Black – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>1.0263</td>
<td>.16114</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A White student speaking in Ebonics or in a way that would be considered stereotypically “Black.” – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>1.8947</td>
<td>.98764</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A White student using the N– word or justifying the use of the N– word (e.g., “It’s from a song,” or “My Black friend uses it.”) – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>1.5526</td>
<td>.66121</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A White student or teacher making a racially insensitive remark in the classroom – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>2.1053</td>
<td>.77595</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The seventh set of scales (see Tables 6.12–16) reflects the observations that teachers in the lower, middle, and upper schools reported regarding the ways Black male and female students cope with the racial microaggressions that White students or teachers enact on them at school, and included two measures. The first measure the Black Male Coping with Racial Microaggression Scale. After a factor analysis, a two-factor model was identified with avoidant coping ($\alpha = .66$) and engaged coping ($\alpha = .69$) subscales.

The second measure is the Black Female Coping with Racial Microaggression Scale. After conducting factor analysis, a three-factor model emerged. The three factors identified were the avoidant coping ($\alpha = .66$), fearful coping ($\alpha = .76$) and engaged coping ($\alpha = .73$) subscales.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. A White person mistaking a Black parent for caregivers or school maintenance or kitchen staff – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>1.8684</td>
<td>.85389</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. A White person confusing the names of Black students or faculty or staff – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>2.2368</td>
<td>.96427</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. A White person making a racist joke or comment or using a racist slur – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>1.5526</td>
<td>.64072</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A White person making a comment about the color or shade of a Black person’s skin – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>1.5263</td>
<td>.70188</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. A White teacher asking a Black student to comment in class on his or her personal experience when discussing a topic perceived to be relevant to the African American or Black experience (e.g., slavery). – Yes, this scenario has been SHARED with me.</td>
<td>1.8816</td>
<td>.97935</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.12

*Item Statistics of the Black Male Racial Microaggression Coping Scale–Avoidant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. The Black student ignores the incident or “brushes it off.” – Black male students</td>
<td>2.5467</td>
<td>.91966</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Black student becomes withdrawn. – Black male students</td>
<td>2.2667</td>
<td>.81096</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Black student expresses fear or anxiety. – Black male students</td>
<td>1.6000</td>
<td>.73521</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The Black student complains of physical ailment (e.g., headache, stomach ache). – Black male students</td>
<td>1.5600</td>
<td>.73961</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Black student expresses sadness or hurt. – Black male students</td>
<td>1.8133</td>
<td>.69152</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.13

*Item Statistics of the Black Male Racial Microaggression Coping Scale–Engaged*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. The Black student expresses anger. – Black male students</td>
<td>2.0519</td>
<td>.74155</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The Black student asks to speak with you or with some other adult about the incident. – Black male students</td>
<td>1.9610</td>
<td>.89504</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.14

*Item Statistics of the Black Female Racial Microaggression Coping Scale–Avoidant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. The Black student ignores the incident or “brushes it off.” – Black female students</td>
<td>2.6974</td>
<td>.96636</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Black student becomes withdrawn. – Black female students</td>
<td>2.6053</td>
<td>.93920</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The Black student defends the other person (“they didn’t mean it”) or says incident wasn’t a big deal. – Black female students</td>
<td>2.0000</td>
<td>.99331</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.15

*Item Statistics of the Black Female Racial Microaggression Coping Scale–Engaged*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. The Black student expresses anger. – Black female students</td>
<td>2.2078</td>
<td>.83252</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The Black student addresses the incident in the moment with the person involved. – Black female students</td>
<td>2.0000</td>
<td>.85840</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The Black student asks to speak with you or with some other adult about the incident. – Black female students</td>
<td>2.2468</td>
<td>.94807</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Black student expresses sadness or hurt. – Black female students</td>
<td>2.4026</td>
<td>.93555</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.16

*Item Statistics of the Black Female Racial Microaggression Coping Scale–Fearful*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. The Black student expresses fear or anxiety. – Black female students.</td>
<td>1.8919</td>
<td>.94460</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The Black student complains of physical ailment (e.g., headache, stomach ache). – Black female students.</td>
<td>1.8919</td>
<td>1.00093</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation Analyses**

To answer the third question regarding the relationship between individual demographic factors and teacher perceptions of Black student success, correlation analyses were conducted. Means differences were calculated between the teacher racial perceptions variables and no differences were found by gender. Correlational analysis is displayed in Tables 6.17 and 6.18.

Table 6.17

*Intercorrelations of Teacher Racial Perceptions (Self, Context, School, Student)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black student support self-efficacy</th>
<th>Context determines Black student success</th>
<th>Positive school racial climate</th>
<th>Seeing White racial microaggressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black student support self-efficacy</td>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.881</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context determines Black student success</td>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.288*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Black student support self-efficacy & Context determines Black student success & Positive school racial climate & Seeing White racial microaggressions \\
N & 93 & 94 & 73 & 84 \\
Positive school racial climate & Correlation & .017 & .288* & 1 & −.364** \\
 & Sig. (2-tailed) & .881 & .013 & .003 & \\
N & 76 & 73 & 76 & 66 \\
Seeing White racial microaggressions & Correlation & .272* & .160 & −.364** & 1 \\
 & Sig. (2-tailed) & .012 & .145 & .003 & \\
N & 85 & 84 & 66 & 86 \\

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) 

Table 6.18  
Correlations of Teacher Racial Perceptions to Black Student Racial Coping 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black student support self-efficacy</th>
<th>Black female racial coping with microaggressions</th>
<th>Black male racial coping with microaggressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td>.285*</td>
<td>.352**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context determines Black student success</td>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td>−.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.557</td>
<td>.380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive school racial climate</td>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td>−.308*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing White racial microaggressions</td>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td>.419**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Anova Analyses and Figures

Several one-way ANOVAS were conducted to determine whether any demographic variables influenced the teachers’ racial perceptions. The following variables were found to be significant.

Years in current school. One of the most interesting findings for this demographic variable was that the longer the teachers are in their school, the more efficacious they feel in their ability to facilitation support of Black students. However, teachers who have been in their school for 15 or more years are significantly less likely than teachers with fewer years of experience to report feeling efficacious in facilitation support. A possible explanation for this result could be that the most veteran teachers in a school might not feel the need for ongoing or proactive antibias training once they have reached a certain level of experience.

Teachers with 0–4 years of experience at their school are significantly less likely than teachers with 5 or more years to perceive that Black student success is greater with lower-school entry than entering the school in middle school or high school. Given that this result does not trend up or down with the years of experience, more research would need to be done to explain why the results for new teachers are significantly lower than teachers with 5 or more years of experience at their schools.
A similar correlation occurred for placement program entry success. Teachers with 11–15 years of experience at the school are significantly more likely than the other experience groups to perceive that Black student success is greater with preparation and support in an independent school placement program. No trends were found in the results that could help to explain this difference; therefore, more research is necessary.

Finally, new teachers (0–4 years of years at school) were significantly less likely than teachers with 5 or more years at their schools to perceive that context determines Black student success. One could assume that the longer a teacher is in his or her school, the longer he or she has to understand the culture of his or her school and to get to know the students and families, and his or her colleagues; therefore, such a teacher would be more likely to perceive how contextual factors affect the success of his or her different students (see all results in Figure 5.1).
Years in position (stability). Teachers who have been employed in their current position less than 4 years are significantly less likely to perceive their school climate as positive and to believe that contextual factors explain Black student success compared to the other three experience groups (see Table 5.2).
Teacher perceptions of Black student success and school climate by years in position at school.

**Teacher school level.** The ANOVA analysis shows that lower-school teachers are significantly more likely than middle- and upper-school teachers to perceive that their schools have a positive racial climate. Interestingly, middle-school teachers emerged as an important group in the sample population. Middle-school teachers are significantly less likely than lower- and upper-school teachers to be proud of their school community, to believe that Black families feel comfortable in their school, and to believe that their colleagues know how to work with Black students and families in their school (see all results in Figure 5.3). This result makes sense given that middle-school teachers are significantly more likely than lower-school and upper school teachers to (a) report observing White students and teachers committing racial microaggressions towards Black students and (b) to observe Black girls using avoidant coping when experiencing racial
microaggressions (Figure 5.4). Interestingly, middle-school teachers report feeling significantly more prepared than lower- and upper-school teachers to respond when issues of race arise among their students (Figure 5.5).

As a former middle-school teacher and administrator with 18 years of experience working with directly with middle-school students and faculty, these results are not surprising. Educators who work effectively with early adolescents understand the multiple dimensions of students’ development and their need for support: academic, psychological, social–emotional, and physical. Effective middle-school teachers are also aware of the ways in which multiple aspects of their students’ identity development (e.g., gender, race, ability, and sexual orientation) affect learning, self-concept, and school experience. It makes sense that middle-school teachers see more of what is happening with their students on the level of racial identity, have deeper understanding of the impact on students and families, and are less proud of their school in the context of how they feel that the school serves (or does not serve) their Black students.
Figure 5.3. Teacher perceptions of school climate and success of Black students by school level.

Figure 5.4. Relationship of teacher school level to teacher perceptions of Black student success and school politics.
Another significant result related to teachers’ role and age group taught is that middle and upper school teachers are significantly more likely to believe that placement programs are a factor in Black student success. This is not a surprising result given the fact that most independent school placement programs for students of color are targeted to middle- and upper-school students.

**Race.** Affirming the qualitative results of my study, the quantitative analysis shows that teachers of color are significantly more likely than White teachers to observe or hear about White racial microaggressions enacted on Black students and to feel efficacious in their interpersonal and facilitation support of Black students (Figure 5.6). Teachers of color in my study were less likely than White teachers to feel that their school has a positive racial climate. Teachers of color are also significantly more likely
than their White peers to perceive racial coping behaviors (Figure 5.7). Specifically, teachers of color to perceive that male engaged coping and female avoidant coping are at significantly higher levels than the White teachers perceived. This difference between the kinds of coping observed according to student gender could have two explanations: (a) differences between male and female coping behaviors or (b) teacher assumptions about male and female responses to stress. Males are typically associated with interactions and communications that are more direct, while females are associated with responses that are more indirect. These differences could be actual (biological or socialized) or teachers might report seeing these differences because they expect to see them, according to their assumptions about gender.

Figure 5.6. Teacher perceptions of Black student success and school climate between White and teachers of color.
Figure 5.7. Teacher perceptions of Black student racial coping between White teachers and teachers of color.
CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

One of the most surprising, and I will admit disheartening findings of my study is the discovery that the lived experience of African American students and families in predominately White, independent schools has not appeared to have changed considerably in the 20 years that I have been in education. In fact it doesn’t seem to have changed much from the time that I was a student in an independent school in the 1980s or even from the time when African Americans began matriculating in private schools in greater numbers in the 1960s.

The impact of racism and prejudice on African American children goes deeper than a lack of access to opportunity. The psycho-emotional stress of being a student of color in a predominately White school is concerning. Thompson and Schultz (2003) identified six psychological burdens that students of color in independent schools tend to experience as minorities in a predominately White setting: (a) social loneliness, (b) racial visibility and social invisibility, (c) class and cultural discomfort among White parents and administrators, (d) the burden of explaining oneself to White people, (e) completing studies at a demanding school with minimal parent participation, and (f) the burden of having to feel grateful all of the time. These same stressors can be found in the experiences of ABC students attending private schools the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. They can also be found in Cookson and Persell’s (1991) study of almost 2,500 Black students in elite boarding schools and in Horvat and Antonio’s (1999) research on the experiences of six, Black, private school girls. In addition, they can be found in the 21st century experiences of African American students attending predominately White
independent schools (e.g., Arrington & Stevenson, 2006; Kuriloff et al., 2012). The results of my study were no different and, in my estimation, reveal the ways in which racism is endemic in American life in the United States, and in the ways in which elite independent schools are yet institutions that perpetuate hegemonic culture and preserve the status quo. What is heartening is a trend in the research, which calls on independent schools to examine and interrogate their culture and practices (e.g., Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009) and to enact changes that would make these school more inclusive communities. In their study of the Black–White achievement gap in highly selective high schools, Kuriloff et al. (2012) noted:

At the school level, certain variables are institutionalized (e.g., grading systems, the minority status of Black students), while others are interpersonal and suggest greater individual agency. In this sense, the school context is not a static structure, but rather a product of the interaction and accumulation of individual actions and institutional decisions and traditions, giving promise to the potential for school level reform (p. 92)

My hope is that my study holds promise for school reform as well. Teachers in my study shared their perspective on the individual actions of their Black students and families as well as their perceptions of their respective schools’ culture and decisions. They were asked to compare the experiences of their lower-school students to those of their middle and high school students. They were also asked to consider what it meant to be successful in their schools, and about their perception of the factors that contribute to or work against the success of their Black students.

Patterns emerged in the data that demonstrated a higher level of concern on the part of teachers for their elementary-age Black students compared to those who entered in middle- and upper-school. The teachers’ responses reflected a perception that younger
students are particularly vulnerable to the negative psychosocial effects of racialized messages. Themes from the data suggest that teachers believe that a strong sense of self and a sense of connection are two core dimensions of success. Their responses point to community-wide support networks and in-school “containers” for racial stress as important factors in the success of their Black students.

**The Vulnerability of Younger Black Students**

Teachers in my study perceived that a positive sense of self was a core element of success for all of their students, regardless of race. However, for their Black students, they saw racial identity as being closely tied to their students’ sense of self and, thereby, to their success in school. This belief is strongly supported by the extant literature, which links a positive racial identity to various markers of school success (e.g., resiliency, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and academic performance; Brown, 2008; Chavous et al., 2003; Hanley & Noblit, 2009; Shin, 2011; Smith, Levine, Smith, Dumas, & Prinz, 2009). The majority of teachers in my study expressed a concern that Black students regularly receive and internalize implicit and explicit racialized messages, which they believe undermine their students’ positive racial identity development, thus, negatively affecting their emotional, psychological, and academic well-being. The participants in my study generally agreed that Black students in the lower, middle, and upper grades, as well as those they considered successful, have a difficult road to travel in navigating their respective school terrains, but they perceived that younger students might be particularly vulnerable.

The participants’ responses reflected a belief that the transmission of racialized messages are endemic to the *racially dissonant* (Arrington et al., 2003) make-up and
privileged culture of independent schools, where Black students and families are in the numerical minority and are usually unfamiliar with the “upper-class habitus” that these schools require for success (Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003). Arrington et al. (2003) explained the significance of this context for Black students, which was affirmed by the responses of the participants in my study:

Racial dissonance becomes even more meaningful when we focus on the broader context of whiteness that exists in predominantly White schools and how it relates to socialization. In school, youth learn what is expected of them in their roles as students and as citizens in the larger world. In independent schools, the majority of students are White and a great deal of economic resources are available to prepare students to enter into places and positions of power and prestige. Consequently, whiteness and privilege will shape the rules concerning what is appropriate behavior, which attributes are valued more than others, and how people are supposed to interact with one another in and out of the school community. (para. 12)

The teachers’ responses for my study aligned with the relevant research, whose authors asserted that predominately White, independent schools act as racially socializing environments that can place African American students’ positive racial identity development at risk (Stevenson, 2014). The findings of my study revealed a general belief by teachers that Black students and families who were successful at mitigating that risk were the ones that were able to take a proactive and sophisticated approach to racial coping, which (it makes sense to assume) lies outside of the cognitive capacity of a Kindergartener or third grader to enact on his or her own. This points to the importance of parents and schools in the racial socialization process, but the literature shows and my study affirms that in their efforts to be sensitive to children’s cognitive capacities and developmental competencies, parents and schools might not be engaging in the racial
Comas-Diaz and Jacobsen (2001) noted that the process of racial socialization includes “cognitive skills in the accurate identification of racism, modeling of appropriate responses, and emotionally supporting the management of feelings, difference, rejection, and confusion generated by the racial experience” (p. 250). For African American children in particular, parents play an important role in the racial socialization process (Spencer, 1983; Tatum, 1997). However, in a review of the literature on parents’ racial socialization practices, Hughes et al. (2006) noted that (a) parents of younger children “who lack the cognitive maturity to understand race as a social category” might be less likely than parents of older children to discuss racial issues, and (b) parents of younger children are more likely to transmit messages of cultural pride while a “discussion of more complex social processes, such as discrimination . . . may not emerge until children reach middle childhood or adolescence” (p. 758). The University of Pittsburgh (2016) found and reported in *The PRIDE Report* a similar dynamic in early childhood classrooms, wherein teachers acknowledged the value of understanding race and racism at an early age, but expressed a need for support in learning how to execute this work in a developmentally appropriate way. However, in *The PRIDE Report*, the University of Pittsburgh focused on African American students in the Pittsburgh Public School System, in which young Black children are more likely to be in classrooms in their home neighborhoods and in which they are not in the minority of the student population. Therefore, what are the implications for young Black children and their positive racial
identity development in the more racially stressful environment of the elite, predominately White independent school?

As described in the opening of this chapter, Thompson and Schultz (2003) examined the myriad psychological burdens of being a student of color in an independent school and the pain, depression, and isolation that can occur as a result. The participants in my study affirmed several of these findings; they also confirmed Thompson and Schultz’s (2003) assertion that older students are better equipped to cope with these stressors:

When students talk to us, they don’t experience these stresses as something cultural or societal. In the moment, what a child experiences always feels unique and personal. It is only with experience and detachment that a student can come to see that what is happening to him or her is a result of being a “student of color.” As they grow older, they may come to recognize and label behaviors as “racist.” The label that may help take the sting out of those behaviors, and enable a student to maintain some emotional distance. However, that emotional distance, to the extent that it can ever be achieved, is an achievement of maturity that only begins developing in middle school and high school. (para. 6)

The teachers in my study perceived a defenselessness of sorts in their young Black students that made them particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of racialized experiences. These youngest learners are virtually at the beginning of their developmental and educational journeys; they are just beginning to figure out who they are and how to do school. Therefore, what does it mean when a second grader such as Evan at TDS feels he must justify the neighborhood in which he lives or the way that he comes to school each day? W.E.B. Dubois (1903, as cited in Stevenson, 2014) asked more pointedly, “What does it mean to be a problem?” (p. 82). Many of the teachers in my study worried about this question. Moreover, they expressed a concern for the youngest of their students and what it possibly meant to feel like a problem for year after year in their schools,
usually as the only student or one of only a few students. The current research affirms this concern, warning of the psychological harm that can be inflicted by exposure to racial stress and microaggressions over time (Sue et al., 2007; Thompson & Schultz, 2003).

The responses of teachers in my study show that they do not perceive that Black students who enter in middle and upper school necessarily have an easier experience in their schools compared to those students who enter in the lower grades. In fact, their responses suggest that the general perception is that Black students in their schools regularly face challenges that have the potential to affect negatively their racial identity development and psychosocial well-being. The results of my study suggest that the concern for the psychological and social wellness of Black students is related to how the participants in my study define success. As mentioned earlier, teachers identified “sense of self” as one important dimension of student success, and that they perceived a relationship between positive racial identity development and school success for their African American students. The other important dimension of success was a “sense of connection.” Black students who respondents identified as successful were not necessarily the academic all-stars or even students who were perceived to have a positive racial identity. The data suggest that the teachers perceived that the truly successful Black students in their schools—those who were thriving, not merely surviving—were those who were connected to the community. For teachers, this connection looked like trusting relationships among the students, their teachers, and their peers. This connection also looked like an authentic relationship between the core aspects of the student’s identity (i.e., racial, cultural, or “home”) and the core values of the school. Given the historical
character and dominant cultural capital (i.e., White, affluent) of elite independent schools, this criterion for success seems to be a high bar for African American students and their families to reach.

The teachers’ responses showed that any hope for realizing success lies in Black students and families developing not only a keen understanding the “upper-class habitus” of these schools, but also the ability to engage in a meta-analysis of the culture and hidden curriculum. This meta-analysis would involve a critique of the race and class dynamics at play so that, rather than internalizing racialized messages, students would see them as a product of the “smog” surrounding them. The teachers in my study believed that the Black students that they perceived as most successful were able to use this understanding to confront proactively the challenges of navigating a private school as a Black student. This pinnacle of success was less about “playing the game,” which teachers perceived as exhausting and overwhelming for Black students, and more about “flipping the script,” where Black students weren’t resigning themselves to a surviving a system, but were using their identities as Black students to challenge and shift the system all together.

This language of “playing the game” and “flipping the script” implies active strategizing and intentional action, which teachers in the study perceived are more effectively enacted by older students, although teachers believed those students needed support, too. This need for support points to another significant finding of my study, the importance of support networks to the success of Black students in independent schools, especially to the success of the youngest ones.
The Importance of Community-Wide Networks of Support

Teachers in my study perceived an important relationship between parental involvement and the success of their Black students, regardless of their grade level or entry point. It makes sense that teachers believe that parents play an especially important role in mediating racialized messages for elementary-age students who are dependent on adults to help them understand and cope with racialized experiences. Therefore, if the Golden Group at TDS is an exemplar in my study for Black student success, the involvement of parents is essential, but perhaps it is not enough. The Black students whom teachers considered the most successful benefitted from a network of support made up of parents, peers, and teachers or staff—more often than not people of color—working together proactively and intentionally to play and win the private school “game.”

The term “network” is appropriate for a number of reasons. First, a network implies numbers. Teachers in my study were in almost unanimous agreement that Black students would benefit from having more Black students, families, faculty, and administrators in their schools. The description of the number of Black students, parents, and faculty to which the Golden Group had access during its lower-school years was a powerful example of the difference that teachers believe numbers can make. A network is also a system. Early in their school career, the parents in the Golden Group began to connect with one another to share knowledge and advice about to how to “play the game”; they started making connections with the school—creating committees, building relationships with teachers and advocating for their children—and they connected their children with each other to form bonds that would serve as an essential support mechanism. As new Black students and families entered the class, the network grew;
however, as the respondents from TDS shared, this network was an anchor that not only supported the students and families in that class and other grades, but it also effected institutional change, pushing the culture of TDS to conform, in some ways, to the needs of its Black students and families.

One of the findings of my study was that teachers of color seemed to have a more comprehensive awareness of the experiences of their Black students. Black students and families sought them out more often than they sought White teachers to talk about their experiences and to seek support. It was clear in my study that teachers of color play an important role in explicating the experiences of Black students and families in their respective school communities, often providing a meta-analysis of the school culture and revealing the impact of that culture on the academic and psycho-social well-being of African American students. My study supports the recommendations found across the literature calling on predominately White schools to hire and retain more faculty and administrators of color. However, what my study also showed is that increasing the numbers—of students or faculty of color—is not sufficient to create the kind of support that teachers perceive that Black students and families need. Yes, Black students and families are scanning the room and counting the numbers of Black and brown faces in their school, but teachers believe that they are also interested in the care and nurturing that the school is able to provide, which most teachers of color in my study believed looked like seeing their Black children, naming and acknowledging their experience, and helping them to strategize to navigate the school terrain, in essence, partnering with the students and families in the racial socialization process. Teachers perceived this was a foundation of trust for Black students and families, but a number of teachers in my study
wondered whether their schools were equipped to meet this need and to engage authentically in this partnership. Even in these schools, with progressive pedagogies and stated commitments to multicultural curriculum and antibias ideology, a sense of helplessness lingered around how to best support Black students and families. It’s an understandable question: Can elite private schools, which were created for and are currently populated by affluent White students, ever truly be spaces where Black students can develop a strong sense of self and sense of connection and belonging? Can curricular programs, pedagogical approaches, and learning spaces be created in these schools that are proactively building and developing these two important dimensions of success rather than leaving that work to parents and peers? One program in my study, the affinity group program at TUS, provided a possible answer to that question, and pointed to the important role that schools can play in the racial socializing process.

**In-School “Containers” and Creating Environments of Success for Black Students**

An interesting finding in my study was that, despite the attempt of the school administrators and teachers to send the message that Black students and families are valued, the majority of the students and families were not buying into it. The teachers perceived that their schools’ intended messages were undermined by what Black students saw and experienced each day. Whether it was the implicit messages (e.g., the low numbers of Black students and faculty or the perception that White teachers do not call on Black students) or the explicit messages (e.g., being called “nigger”), the teachers perceived that these experiences affected their Black students’ sense of self and connection more than did their schools’ diversity statements and multicultural events.
The benefits of racial socialization and its protective effects against the psychological impacts of racism and discrimination have been established in the literature review and affirmed in the findings for my study. Moreover, my study affirms that the extant research identifies schools as racially socializing environments for children. Therefore, schools can racially socialize students in positive and negative ways, sending intended and unintended messages about race, ethnicity, and culture. In schools, and particularly in predominately White, independent schools, Black students are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of this socializing process, for a double stratification and marginalization can occur at the intersection of race and class (Cookson & Persell, 1991). This marginalization points to the importance of building awareness in schools of this negative socialization process and to the need to create spaces within school for positive racial socialization to occur. Stevenson (2014) referred to this positive racial socialization as second aim equal to building racial literacy: “the ability to read, recast, and resolve racially stressful encounters through the competent demonstration of intellectual, behavioral, and emotional skills of decoding and reducing racial stress during racial conflicts” (p. 115). Along with the authors of the relevant research on the subject, I recommend in my study that this process should be begun as early as possible in the students’ educational journeys.

TUS took on the goal of cultivating racial literacy through its affinity group program. However, different from the laudable programs at TDS and TWS (and other schools around the country), TUS requires every student in Grades 3–5 to participate in regular conversations about race as part of the lower-school curriculum. Students can choose to have these conversations in race-based affinity groups or in a mixed-race
discussion group. This program was founded at the beginning of the 2014 school year, but teachers in my study are already seeing positive results. They noticed that their Black students have safe space where they can discuss issues that are important to them and where they can receive the message that their issues are important to the school. No longer are these conversations relegated to whispered interchanges between a Black student and a trusted faculty member. When Anne’s Black female student confidently stated in front of the class, “We need to talk about race,” Anne perceived this as a reflection of how conversations about race had become normalized because of the affinity group program. Young students now see that these conversations happen during the school day alongside math and social studies. They see that White students are having these conversations, too. They see that conversations about race are healthy and essential, and they are being taught the skills to have them in a productive way.

Lisa at TWS described the importance of spaces like affinity groups and the purpose they serve. Lisa stated:

There are some families of younger students who, I think, are doing that really intentionally, and there are others who are not, who are in a sense, more on the colorblind side, where they don’t want to necessarily have that explicit conversation. I think some of those kids have a harder time because there’s no container. If I can have, like, a really hard day, but go home, and my parents are like, “No, no, no. We totally get it. We see you. We see your experience. We know what you’re managing.”

Lisa’s observation suggested that “containers” are the relationships or spaces within a Black child’s community (a) where that child’s racial identity is seen as an essential part of who they are; (b) where that child’s experience as a racialized being in an independent school is acknowledged; and (c) where the stresses and burdens of that experience can be “held” and “carried” by others.
In my study, teachers identified parents, Black peers, and teachers and staff of color (particularly Black teachers and staff) as important containers for Black students in their schools. However, given the relative low numbers of Black students, families, and faculty or staff in these schools, it makes sense that teachers, particularly White teachers, were somewhat at a loss regarding how their schools could provide what they perceived their Black students needed to be successful. The affinity group program provides a possible model for addressing this concern. In addition to the message that is transmitted throughout the community about the importance of race and racial literacy when a program like this is mandated, students, teachers, and families are provided with the skills and competencies that will support them in being effective containers for their students as they navigate the racially dissonant landscape of school.

In-school containers (e.g., the affinity group program at TUS) have the potential to serve as powerful and positive racial socializing mechanisms for all students. However, schools are more comfortable leaving the work of racial socialization to parents, avoiding intentional approaches to supporting the positive racial identity development that would provide all community members with the knowledge and skills to navigate effectively racially diverse environments (Michael & Bartoli, 2014).

Ironically, Bartoli et al (2014, as cited by Michael & Bartoli, 2014) noted that White parents who choose to send their children to racially diverse schools do so hoping they will become racially literate through osmosis, through just being in a classroom with students of color. Thus, neither schools nor parents seem to be consciously taking on the essential work of fostering a culturally competent community, particularly with the White students, faculty, and parents. Michael and Bartoli (2014) explained:
Independent schools tend to have mission statements and/or diversity statements that indicate that they want their school communities to be diverse. But such statements tend to reflect the racial socialization goals of most White parents: wanting to have racially diverse communities in which race does not matter. They rarely reflect an awareness of the need to teach racial skills and competencies in order to foster healthy racially diverse communities. Nor do they reflect an awareness that White children need to learn specific competencies in order to be full members of those racially diverse environments.

Some may argue that school is not an appropriate place for racial socialization. This view assumes that it is possible to maintain racial neutrality in schools. In fact, the neutral/color-blind approach that most schools currently use does racially socialize youth — it simply does so in a particular direction. As stated earlier, silence is a racial message and a “tool of whiteness.” In order to support the goals of their diversity mission statements and work toward a “racially just America,” schools need to take a more proactive approach to teaching White students about race and racial identity (para. 9–10).

As more children go through the affinity group program at TUS, it will be interesting to examine the program’s impact on White racial socialization. What the program does demonstrate already is the importance of making diversity/inclusion/equity work a part of the classroom curriculum for every student, and not just viewed by the school community as “support” for Black students and families. In this way, every member of the community is aware of the “rules of the game,” their place in it, and how they can work together to transform to create a more inclusive and racially just community.

Arguably, the experience of many African Americans in predominately White, independent schools is no more than a reflection of the larger experience of Black people in this country, an experience rooted in America’s foundational history of systemic racial
oppression and crystallized in present-day protest movements like Black Lives Matter\textsuperscript{19}. Wallis (2016) termed racism America’s “original sin” in recognition of the ways in which racial prejudice and White privilege is embedded in this country’s identity and how it continues to impact negatively the lived experience of Black and White people alike. As Hodges (2015) noted, “In the context of anti-racism work, the historical centrality of White supremacy to American social structure makes us all inheritors of the original sin of slavery and racism” (para. 7).

This should serve as a call to action to all Americans, but to educators in particular. For far too long the burden has been placed on Black students and their families to develop the strategies to navigate the racially stressful environments of predominately White independent schools. Schools must take on this responsibility, but their response must go beyond diversity mission statements into demonstrated action. Coleman and Stevenson (2013) explained the positive outcomes that can occur when schools courageously decide to make space for and actively engage in the work of “racial questioning” (p. 562):

> The power of racial questioning in contributing to one's sense of belonging may not be that these questions are always answered but that as a learning environment, support for these questions reflects a safer atmosphere of intellectual inquiry and openness to change. Faculty, students, and parents of color may be particularly sensitive to the difficulty in raising these questions, as openness to them is related to other aspects of the school climate and may reflect a flexible and practical application of diversity, rather than one that is symbolic, rhetorical, and hollow. (p. 562)

\textsuperscript{19} Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an activist movement founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometti in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Black teenager Trayvon Martin and grew into national prominence after the deaths of two Black men, Michael Brown and Eric Garner, at the hands of White police officers. Today, BLM defines itself as “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise.”
This work requires a paradigmatic shift in the conversations in our schools around race and must include an honest examination of the history of racism in the United States, the current impact of that legacy on the lives of Black students and families, and the role of independent schools in perpetuating systemic injustice and inequity. Building from this foundation, schools must work to develop curriculum and policies that establish racial literacy and institutional equity as a moral imperative, which will ground and guide all aspects of community life.

My study demonstrates the important relationship between racial socialization, positive racial identity formation, and the success of Black students in independent schools. Predominately White, independent schools must continue work towards understanding and bringing awareness to the ways in which administrators, teachers, and students act in the schools as racially socializing environments to place undue racial stress and psychological burden on African American students, particularly elementary-age students who often do not have the cognitive ability to defend themselves from the negative psycho-social effects of racial discrimination and prejudice. Schools need to see themselves in partnership with parents in the racial socializing process, and need to work to create intentional and proactive policies and programs that will engage all community members in understanding and analyzing the “upper class habitus” of their schools and how this culture affects the sense of identity and connection that are core dimensions of student success and that have particular implications for African American students.

An important aspect of the racial socialization process that should not be ignored is that of the teachers. In my study, I have demonstrated a relationship between teachers’ race and ethnicity, and how they perceived Black racial climate and student coping. The
data showed that teachers of color are significantly more likely than White teachers to observe or hear about White racial microaggressions enacted on Black students and to feel efficacious in their interpersonal support and facilitation support of Black students. Teachers of color were also less likely than White teachers to feel that their school has a positive racial climate, and were significantly more likely than their White peers to perceive racial coping behaviors. Although this affirms recommendations across the literature for predominately White schools to work to create a critical mass of Black students, faculty, staff, and administration, this finding also points to the importance of racially socializing White teachers.

Michael and Bartoli (2014) noted that school administrators and teachers can play an important role in racially socializing White children; school administrators can do the same for White faculty by providing them with the time and training to build their racial literacy toolkits. Yes, predominately White, independent schools need more teachers of color, but they also need more White teachers and administrators who are comfortable talking about race (including and especially their own) and racism, and they need more White teachers who are armed with the knowledge and skills to resist and deconstruct racist systems.

**Closing Thoughts**

When I made the decision 20 years ago to teach in an independent school, I did so because I was guided by a deep commitment to supporting students of color, particularly Black students, in whom I saw my own experience reflected each day. As I matured as an educator, I came to see myself as a role model and support for all of my students, knowing that I had an opportunity to guide White students and families through
conversations about race and equity that they might not encounter outside of my classroom. As a school leader, I worked to create spaces where this essential work could take place on the personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels, recognizing that our schools must be places where every child can bring his or her full self through the door each day, leaving nothing behind. This work has always felt personal and, although I enact it in community each day, my research study has forced me to reflect upon how courageous I have been (or not been) in naming and foregrounding the essential conversations about the history of racial injustice in this country and how the legacy of that injustice manifests itself in our day-to-day interactions and relationships within and without the schoolhouse walls.

Our country is in a precarious moment of time around issues of race and racial justice. The stakes are high, and it will not be possible to remain on the sidelines. Those of us who are committed to building racially just and inclusive communities must, as President Theodore Roosevelt said, be men and women “in the arena.” These times call for nothing less.

*It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errrs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat. (p. __)*
APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Introduction/Informed Consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey measuring perceptions of faculty, administration, and staff of the experiences of African American/Black students in predominately White, independent schools.

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about how members of your school community perceive the role of grade-level entry point in the success of African American/Black students. In other words, does the success of your Black students depend upon when these students enter your school?

This survey will ask questions about

1. Your assessment of your school's racial climate,
2. Your assessment of your classroom climate and your comfort with racial discussions,
3. Your perceptions of student success, and
4. Your observations of the experiences of Black students in your school.

You will also be asked for some personal and professional background information. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete.

This survey measures your beliefs, perceptions, and observations, so there are no right or wrong answers. Your responses will be completely anonymous. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible.

I do not anticipate that taking this survey will contain any risk or inconvenience to you. Furthermore, your participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time.

All of the information collected will be used only for my research and will be kept confidential. There will be no connection to you specifically in the results or in future publication of the results. Once the study is completed, I would be happy to share the results with you if you desire. In the meantime, if you have any questions please ask or contact:

Noni Thomas Lopez
noni.penn@gmail.com
973-997-0373
Assessment of School Culture/Climate

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Note: In this survey, you will be asked about your perceptions of the experiences of Black students and families. Unless otherwise indicated, Black refers to people who identify as African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean.

* 1. I am proud to be a member of this school community.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N/A

* 2. Our school values diversity.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N/A

* 3. Our school is a welcoming place for people of all races.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N/A

* 4. Racism is a problem in our school.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
* 5. Black families feel comfortable in our school.

  Strongly Agree
  Agree
  Disagree
  Strongly Disagree
  N/A

* 6. Our Black students regularly see themselves reflected in our curriculum.

  Strongly Agree
  Agree
  Disagree
  Strongly Disagree
  N/A

* 7. Our school does an effective job of meeting the needs of Black students and their families.

  Strongly Agree
  Agree
  Disagree
  Strongly Disagree
  N/A

* 8. Our Black students feel like this is their school.

  Strongly Agree
  Agree
  Disagree
  Strongly Disagree
  N/A

* 9. Our Black parents and families trust that our school can meet the needs of their children.

  Strongly Agree
  Agree
  Disagree
  Strongly Disagree
  N/A

186
* 10. Black students and families have a harder time at our school than other students and families of color.

   Strongly Agree  
   Agree  
   Disagree  
   Strongly Disagree  
   N/A

* 11. Our school does a good job of hiring and retaining Black teachers and administrators.

   Strongly Agree  
   Agree  
   Disagree  
   Strongly Disagree  
   N/A

* 12. Most of my colleagues know how to work effectively with Black students and families.

   Strongly Agree  
   Agree  
   Disagree  
   Strongly Disagree  
   N/A

13. Please feel free to elaborate on any of your responses to the questions in this section.

   **Assessment of Classroom Climate/Comfort with Racial Discussions**

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Note: If you do not work as a teacher or administrator, “your” students and families should be considered students and families in your school with whom you have relationships or encounter on a regular basis in your role.

* 14. I feel prepared to meet the needs of students from any racial, ethnic, or cultural background.

   Strongly Agree  
   Agree  
   Disagree  
   Strongly Disagree  
   N/A
* 15. Black students and families feel comfortable speaking with me about their experience being in a predominately White school.

   Strongly Agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly Disagree
   N/A

* 16. I feel prepared to respond when issues of racism arise among students.

   Strongly Agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly Disagree
   N/A

* 17. Black students and parents seek me out to discuss their experience being in a predominately White school.

   Strongly Agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly Disagree
   N/A
   If you are not a teacher or administrator, please indicate your role here.

* 18. I worry that I am not effectively meeting the needs of my Black students and families.

   Strongly Agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly Disagree
   N/A

* 19. I feel comfortable proactively creating opportunities to have discussions about race with students.

   Strongly Agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly Disagree
   N/A
* 20. I facilitate student reflection on the impact of prejudice and discrimination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

* 21. My classroom curriculum allows for regular discussions about equity and justice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

* 22. I regularly participate in antibias training and professional development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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</table>

**Definitions of Success**

* 23. What are the qualities that you believe are important when considering whether or not a student is successful in your school? Please rank by importance (1 = most important; 10 = least important).

- Has the ability to think critically and consider multiple perspectives.
- Has close and connected peer relationships.
- Knows him/herself; is comfortable with who he or she is.
- Has diverse interests; participates in multiple activities.
- Performs well academically; gets good grades.
- Has the ability to manage multiple commitments and responsibilities.
- Is kind, compassionate, empathetic.
- Is resilient; knows how to navigate/press through failure/disappointment.
• Is hardworking.
• Has a moral/ethical compass that guides behavior/actions.

24. I would change or rethink my rankings about when considering how I would define success for a Black student at our school. Or, the criteria above mean something different to me when I think about Black students in our school (Y/N).

25. Please explain your answer to Question 24.

26. Please rank, according to importance, the factors that you believe impact WHITE student success in your school (1 = most important; 10 = least important; NA = Not applicable).

• How involved or engaged the parents are (at home and at school).
• The socioeconomic status of the family and their access to resources.
• The previous school or program attended (i.e., academic preparation).
• How connected student feels to and adults in the community (i.e., being known).
• The availability of in-school support and mentoring program (e.g., “buddy” programs; affinity groups; advisory).
• How connected student feels to his or her peers.
• The racial and ethnic background of the family.
• The quality of our academic program (i.e. small classes; range of offerings).
• The gender of the student.
• How well the student and family understand and “buy into” the mission and ethos of the school.
• The age of the student when s/he enters the school.

27. Please rank, according to importance, the factors that you believe impact Black student success in your school (1 = most important; 10 = least important).

• How involved or engaged the parents are (at home and at school).
• The socioeconomic status of the family and their access to resources.
• The previous school or program attended (i.e., academic preparation).
• How connected student feels to and adults in the community (i.e., being known).
• The availability of in-school support and mentoring program (e.g., “buddy” programs; affinity groups; advisory).
• How connected student feels to his or her peers.
• The racial and ethnic background of the family.
• The quality of our academic program (i.e., small classes or range of offerings).
• The gender of the student.
• How well the student and family understand and “buy into” the mission/ethos of the school.
• The age of the student when he or she enters the school.

28. Please feel free to elaborate on your responses to the questions above.

Perceptions of Student Success

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Note: In this survey, you will be asked about your perceptions of the experiences of Black students and families. Unless otherwise indicated, Black refers to people who identify as African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean.

* 29. White students generally perform better academically than Black students at our school.

    Strongly Agree
    Agree
    Disagree
    Strongly Disagree
    N/A

* 30. White students seem to be more socially comfortable at our school than the Black students.

    Strongly Agree
    Agree
    Disagree
* 31. White students who enter our school in lower school are generally more successful than White students who enter in middle and high school.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 32. Black students who enter our school in lower school are generally less successful than Black students who enter in middle and high school.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 33. Black students who enter our school in lower school seem to be more socially comfortable than Black students who enter in middle and high school.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 34. Black students seem to be more successful when there is a critical mass of other Black students in the class.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 35. Parental involvement/engagement is a more important factor in the success of Black students than it is for White students in our school.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
* 36. The majority of students who have been counseled out of our school have been Black.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 37. The most successful Black students in our school have come from a placement program like Prep for Prep.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 38. Programs like Prep for Prep do an effective job of preparing Black students for independent schools.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 39. Generally, the most successful Black students in our school come from more affluent families.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 40. Generally, the most successful Black students in our school come from two-parent households.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 41. Generally, Black students from immigrant families (e.g., African, Afro-Caribbean) are more successful than our African American students.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 42. Generally, Black girls have been more successful than Black boys in our school.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 43. Black alumni generally have positive memories to share about their experience at our school.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

* 44. Black students pay a high emotional and/or psychological cost for their education at our school.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

45. Please feel free to elaborate on any of your responses to the questions in this section.

Observations of Student Experiences

Please indicate whether you have observed or whether you have had a student, parent, or school employee share about a Black student experiencing the following scenarios in
your school. In the dropdown list, please indicate how often these scenarios have occurred (Quite often; Often; A Few Times; Not at All).

* 46. I have observed the following or a student, parent, or school employee has shared about observing or experiencing the following scenarios.

- A White person touching a Black person's hair
- A White student refusing to play with a Black student because that student is Black
- A White student refusing to touch a Black student/teacher/staff member because that person is Black
- A White student speaking in Ebonics or speaking in Ebonics or in a way that would be considered stereotypically “Black.”
- A White student using the N word or justifying the use of the N word (e.g., “It’s from a song,” or “My Black friend uses it.”)
- A White student or teacher making a racially insensitive remark in the classroom.
- A White person mistaking a Black parent for caregivers or school maintenance or kitchen staff.
- A White person confusing the names of Black students, faculty, or staff.
- A White person making a racist joke or comment or using a racist slur.
- A White person making a comment about the color or shade of a Black person's skin.
- A White teacher asking a Black student to comment in class on his or her personal experience when discussing a topic perceived to be relevant to the African American or Black experience (e.g., slavery).
- Other scenarios not listed above?

* 47. When you have OBSERVED the different scenarios above for Black male students and Black female students, please indicate your perception of the kinds of reactions you have seen from Black student(s) (Quite often; Often; A Few Times; Not at All).

- The Black student becomes withdrawn.
- The Black student expresses sadness or hurt.
• The Black student expresses anger.
• The Black student expresses fear or anxiety.
• The Black student ignores the incident or “brushes it off.”
• The Black student defends the other person (“they didn’t mean it”) or says incident wasn’t a big deal.
• The Black student addresses the incident in the moment with the person involved.
• The Black student asks to speak with you or with some other adult about the incident.
• The Black student complains of physical ailment (e.g., headache, stomach ache).
• Other reactions you observe not listed above?

48. Please feel free to elaborate on any of your responses to the questions in this section.

Professional Information/Personal Background

Please answer the following questions about your professional and personal background.

* 49. What is your current school?

* 50. What is your current role in your school?

  • Administration
  • Faculty
  • Staff

* 51. What is your current title?

* 52. For which age group are you primarily responsible?

  • Lower School
  • Middle School
  • Upper School
• PreK–12
• Other (please specify)

* 53. How long have you been employed in your current position?
  • 0–4 years
  • 5–10 years
  • 11–15 years
  • 15+ years

* 54. How long have you been employed by your current school?
  • 0–4 years
  • 5–10 years
  • 11–15 years
  • 15+ years

* 55. Which of the following best represents your racial/ethnic identity?
  • AAPI (Asian, Asian American, Pacific Islander)
  • Black (African, African American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latina/o)
  • Hispanic or Latina/o
  • Middle Eastern or Arab
  • Multiracial or Biracial
  • Native American or First Nation
  • White
  • My race or ethnicity is not listed here; I identify my race or ethnicity as...

* 56. Which of the following best represents your gender?
  • Female
• Genderqueer
• Male
• Trans-female
• Trans-male
• My gender is not listed; I identify my gender as...

* 57. What is your sexual orientation?

• Bisexual
• Gay
• Heterosexual
• Lesbian
• Queer
• My sexual orientation is not listed; I identify my sexual orientation as...
APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. After having heard the explanation of the research study and the guiding hypothesis, I first would just like to hear your opinions on the thesis. Do you think there is anything to it?

2. If so, do you have any hypotheses to explain why you believe this “phenomenon” may be occurring? Can you share specific examples that support your explanation?

3. One might argue that it is easier in a child’s later years to determine (through the admissions process) whether he or she will be successful in an independent school. In your experience, what have you observed regarding the success of Black and White “lifers” at this school?

4. Do you consider independent schools to be a stressful environment for Black students? Why or why not? Do you consider this school to be a stressful environment for Black students? Why or why not?

5. During your time at this school, think of some of the Black students that come to mind that you would describe as successful?

6. Of those students, do you notice any common factors?

7. Are these factors different than those you would attribute to successful White students?

8. During your time at this school, think of some of the Black students that come to mind that you would describe as unsuccessful?

9. Of those students, do you notice any common factors?

10. Are these factors different than those you would attribute to unsuccessful White students?

11. What developmental factors do you see at play when you consider the Black students who are successful? Unsuccessful? In other words, do things happen that you believe might be connected to the fact that these students were in the lower, middle, or upper divisions that you perceive affected the success of those students you identified as successful or unsuccessful.

12. What role do you see race or racial identity playing in the success (or lack thereof) of these students?
13. During your time at this school, can you describe any incidents you observed with your Black students that you would describe as racialized? What did you perceive as the impact of the incident on the child, if any?

14. What connection did you perceive, if any, between the impact of the incident and their grade/developmental level?

15. What role do you perceive class playing in the success (or lack thereof) of these students? Is it different than your White students?

16. What role do you believe parents play in the success (or lack thereof) of Black students? Is it different than your White students?

17. What role does the school play? How do you see the school supporting, not supporting these students?

18. What difference do you see between Black students from Prep (or similar organizations like A Better Chance) and non-Prep students in regards to their successful navigation of school?

19. Is there anything else you believe I should know?
REFERENCES


207


