ADVISEMENT IN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS:

RELATIONAL TRUST IN ADVISING GRADUATE STUDENTS OF COLOR

Anne C. Ferrell

A DISSERTATION

in

Educational and Organizational Leadership

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Education

2018

Supervisor of Dissertation:

Susan A. Yoon, Professor of Education

Dean, Graduate School of Education:

Pamela L. Grossman, Dean and Professor

Dissertation Committee:

Susan A. Yoon, Professor of Education

Howard C. Stevenson, Constance Clayton Professor of Urban Education

Diane R. Waff, Professor of Practice of Education
Dedicated to Tyrice, Khalil, and Sef, who taught me the power of trust in teaching.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my Chair, Dr. Yoon, for her steadfast guidance and expertise in helping me complete this study. Thank you to my Committee members, Dr. Waff and Dr. Stevenson, for their interest in my research and providing their knowledge and feedback in the process.

Thank you to my father, who models an intellectual curiosity and deep appreciation for learning—you have always told me to get the most education I can, and to be the best I can be in whatever field or interest I pursue. I will continue to try to do that. Thank you to my mother, who offers kindness and care for others above all else—you have always shown me how to love and celebrate young children for their strengths. I will continue to try to do this with all learners. Thank you to my sisters who support all of my professional pursuits, even when it means seeing each other less. Thank you to Sun for your patience and love throughout this process— you are my sunshine. Thank you to my colleagues and professors at Penn for an incredible experience. Thank you to my Relay colleagues for your support of my graduate work and interest in how the learnings from my study can improve our work with graduate students. Thank you to John King for your belief in my potential as an educator, and to Mayme Hostetter for inspiring me to pursue this degree.

And most of all, thank you to all of my students, kindergartners through graduate students—you have shown me what matters most in learning, and each of you is why I love teaching so much.
ABSTRACT

ADVISEMENT IN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS:

RELATIONAL TRUST IN ADVISING GRADUATE STUDENTS OF COLOR

Anne C. Ferrell
Susan A. Yoon

There is ongoing debate in the current teacher preparation landscape about what type of training best prepares teachers for the classroom. As the larger field seeks to improve issues of recruitment and retention, many teacher preparation programs are trying to figure out the best ways to support new teachers, particularly those teaching in urban areas where both academic results and teacher attrition rates have struggled. Fewer scholars have examined how to support graduate students of color studying to become teachers most effectively. In addition to building human capital through teacher training programs, social capital could influence the experience of new teachers. Positive, trusting relationships with a faculty advisor could influence the experience and success of graduate students.

This qualitative methods study, at an alternative certification program in New York City, seeks to understand better the graduate student / new teacher experience in an advisement model designed to support teachers pursuing their master’s degree in education while teaching in a classroom full time. More specifically, through surveys and
interviews of recent program alumni, this study seeks to understand better the experience of graduate students of color in their relationships with their academic advisors, and how relational trust is built.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY ................................................................. 1
- Problem Statement .................................................................................................... 3
- Purpose Statement ..................................................................................................... 5
- Background of this Study ......................................................................................... 10
- Research Questions .................................................................................................. 12
- Significance and Rationale of the Study .................................................................... 13
- Conceptual Framework ............................................................................................. 15

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................ 18
- Supporting New Teachers ......................................................................................... 18
- Mentoring New Teachers .......................................................................................... 19
- Supporting New Teachers of Color in the Graduate Student Context ..................... 22
- Advisement as a Model .............................................................................................. 27
- Social Capital, Trust, and Racial Trust ...................................................................... 29

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................... 36
- The Research Site and Participants .......................................................................... 37
- Survey Participants ..................................................................................................... 38
- Interview Participants ............................................................................................... 39
- Data Sources ................................................................................................................ 41
- Data Analysis .............................................................................................................. 44
- Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity .......................................................................... 46
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS .........................................................................................50
Survey Participants..........................................................................................50
Survey Responses.............................................................................................53
Interview Participants.......................................................................................56
Interview Findings.............................................................................................61
Themes ..............................................................................................................65
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION ..................................................................................108
Connections to the Literature .........................................................................108
Recommendations for Practice .......................................................................113
Limitations .........................................................................................................121
Suggestions for Future Research .....................................................................124
Final Thoughts ..................................................................................................126
APPENDICES ....................................................................................................131
Appendix A: Permission Letter ........................................................................131
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter .......................................................................132
Appendix C: Graduate Student Alumni Survey .............................................133
Appendix D: Consent Statement ......................................................................135
Appendix E: Graduate Student Alumni Interview Questions .......................136
REFERENCES .....................................................................................................138
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Full Time Relay Teaching Faculty Members in 2016.................................14
Table 2: Class of 2017 Enrolled Students................................................................14
Table 3: Examples of Advisor Goals within Lechuga’s (2003) Advisor Framework......28
Table 4: Racial and Gender Demographic Data of Survey Participants....................52
Table 5: Responses to Quantitative Survey Questions Disaggregated by Students of
         Color .................................................................................................................55
Table 6: Interview Participant Demographic Data and Perception of Relationship and
         Trust with Year 1 and Year 2 Advisors ...............................................................58
Table 7: Code Set.......................................................................................................60
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Themes and Subthemes from Interviews..................................................63
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In the United States, there are two main paths by which teachers become teachers, traditional and alternative certification routes. In a traditional route program, teachers complete all of their coursework and requirements in a college or university program before they start teaching. Most teachers enter the classroom in this way, although the percentage has decreased from 97% of the teaching workforce before 1980 to closer to 60% in 2010 (Feistritzer, Griffin, & Linnajarvi, 2011). An alternative certification route allows individuals to teach in the classroom while simultaneously completing the necessary coursework and requirements for state licensure. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement (2004) explains that alternative routes developed as a way to mitigate the teacher shortage, especially in urban areas; to support career changers in joining the profession; and to move away from using teachers who were operating with emergency licensure.

Despite these benefits, there is considerable debate over the effectiveness of alternative route certification. While requirements vary greatly by state (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007), teachers in these programs generally enter the classroom without formal studies in education. Opponents argue that teachers with alternative certifications have less training and pedagogical knowledge which can affect student achievement (Noll, 2008). Studies have found, however, that this is not necessarily true and that teacher quality should not be linked to the amount of preparation received (Institute of Education Sciences, 2009). Furthermore, proponents argue that alternative certification routes help to provide a more racially diverse teaching force (Ludlow, 2011), which can be beneficial
for students of color (Bristol, 2017; Dee, 2004), which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Arguments aside, it is both unlikely and unrealistic that schools and districts will stop needing teachers from non-traditional pathways anytime soon. There is a shortage of teachers coming into the field from traditional certification routes, and alternative paths help fill that void (Feistritzer et al., 2011). In 2011, 16% of public school teachers reported coming to the field via alternative certification, and in 2005-2010, four of ten new hires came from non-traditional routes (Feistritzer et al., 2011). Given that alternative certification programs are likely to continue providing teachers to classrooms, it is important to figure out the best ways to support teachers as they join the field within this structure.

In the larger teacher preparation landscape, much attention focuses on mentoring as a way to support new teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Ingersoll & Strong’s (2011) review of 15 empirical studies found that overall, mentoring new teachers is beneficial in terms of teacher commitment and retention, classroom practices, and student achievement. Interestingly, exceptions to this pattern emerged in the context of large urban low-income schools, where student achievement improved, but positive effects on classroom practices or retention did not improve (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Because alternative route programs often serve low-income, urban schools, it is important to understand what types of inductive supports make an impact in these settings. This will improve teacher preparation to support these harder-to-staff schools.
Problem Statement

Improvements to support new teachers in alternative route programs are necessary, and teacher preparation programs should pay specific attention to supporting new teachers of color. In 1954 when the Supreme Court mandated that states comply with the stipulations of Brown v. Board, more than 30,000 Black teachers and administrators lost their jobs (Vilson, 2015). This led to a disproportionate number of White teachers in the field. At present, though there has been an increase in the diversity of the teaching force in terms of racial demographics, it is still primarily White (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Today, only 17% of the teaching force identify as people of color (Aud, Hussar, Planty, Snyder, Bianco, Fox, Frohlich, Kemp & Drake, 2010). This dearth of racial diversity results in many K-12 students of color not experiencing teacher role models who look like them or the opportunity to see themselves reflected in this professional realm (Madkins, 2011).

The diversity of student populations has increased, creating an even greater gap between the percentage of students of color and the percentage of teachers of color (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). This dissonance impacts the student experience. In a national study of 8th grade students, Dee (2004) found that racial/ethnic dynamics between teachers and students affected perceptions of student performance. Specifically, the findings noted that female and minority students are more likely to be seen as “inattentive” when being taught by a teacher of a different gender or race, respectively (Dee, 2004). Bristol (2017) contends the possibility that “for some Black students, it may be reasonable to conclude that having a same-race teacher could increase the likelihood
of academic success because their Black teachers may be more attuned to their socio-emotional needs and are able to create classrooms based on conditions that facilitate learning” (p. 4). A diverse teaching force that resembles the students of the classroom is essential in providing students of color with role models who are likely to have high expectations, contribute to a cultural sense of belonging, and positively influence the racial achievement gap (Dee, 2004; Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015).

Identifying this over-representation of White teachers in the field, many states and programs have instituted minority recruitment efforts and, in the past few decades, minorities have entered the teaching profession at higher rates than Whites (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Alternative routes have served as a way for more teachers of color to enter the profession than through traditional routes (Feistritzer et al., 2011), which can be attributed to several factors. The United Negro College Fund, an organization of private Historically Black Colleges and Universities, found that many high-quality college graduates of color lack interest in teaching because they see better opportunities in other fields or feel disheartened by negative experiences in their own schooling (Bireda & Chait, 2011). For others, the high cost of graduate schools after paying for college is a deterrent, especially considering that the return on investment is often lower in teaching given current teaching salaries (Bireda & Chait, 2011). In these cases, alternative certification routes provide a path into the profession that is less expensive. Alternative certification programs emerged to staff more difficult-to-staff schools and recruitment efforts to get teachers of color working in schools that serve minority or disadvantaged students have proven successful (Ingersoll, Merrill, &
Stuckey, 2014). A more recent problem is retaining teachers of color, who more often work in hard-to-staff, high poverty schools (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014), which are often staffed by teachers with alternative route certification.

**Purpose Statement**

A positive teacher preparation experience for new teachers of color who will work in high-need areas could influence the success of both the teachers and their K-12 students. Learning more about the specific perceptions of new teachers of color could lead to a more nuanced understanding of how to serve new teachers of color effectively and equitably. There has been scholarship about the lack of teachers of color (Bireda & Chait, 2011; Ingersoll, Merrill & Stuckey, 2014), and studies on the experiences of new teachers of color reveal their feelings of isolation (Bristol, 2018) and worse, their experience of hostile climates in schools (Kohli, 2016). Thus, there is a need to explore how new teachers of color are experiencing their preparation programs and how the related structures and interactions impact their experiences as new teachers.

The Relay Graduate School of Education (Relay) New York City campus is an accredited non-profit institution of higher education that offers an alternative certification route program. Relay’s New York campus confers a Master’s in the Art of Teaching (M.A.T.) for degree candidates who are simultaneously teaching in public New York City P-12 schools. At the New York campus, all graduate students are teaching in urban classrooms, mainly in disadvantaged areas of the city. Since receiving its charter by the New York State Board of Regents in 2011, Relay has made substantial growth in terms of
the number students served regionally in New York, from about 170 in the first graduating class in 2013 to 400 expected to graduate in the Class of 2017.

Relay’s program instructs novice teachers with a balance of theory and practice (Kronholz, 2012) and the program’s coursework is largely practical in application. For example, graduate students might submit a video or a lesson plan as the assignment to demonstrate their proficiency in effectively applying pedagogical knowledge, skills, or strategies. Accomplished and experienced K-12 teachers are selected to lead instruction once they have proven themselves as effective as K-12 teachers themselves. Notably, degree candidates must not only demonstrate proficiency in selected competencies, but they must also demonstrate sufficient impact on student achievement in their classrooms in order to graduate (Schorr, 2013).

In earlier years, Relay placed greater emphasis on their approach to faculty instruction than their approach to graduate student (i.e., new teacher) advisement. More recently, the role of the advisor has become a better-defined and more prominent aspect of Relay’s model. Advisors offer systematic and comprehensive support of new teachers in an alternative route program. During each of the two years of the M.A.T. program, Relay provides each graduate student with an assigned, dedicated faculty advisor. Faculty advisors are responsible for observing graduate students in their classrooms, grading course submissions, and providing support to improve effectiveness in teaching and promote success in students’ academic work at Relay. This support can come in many forms: helping graduate students build time and task management skills, navigating course requirements, providing moral support, or problem-solving classroom challenges.
These types of supports offer solutions to the challenges faced by new teachers, especially new teachers in alternative route programs.

To demonstrate the importance of graduate student success and the faculty’s role in achieving it, each faculty member, under the direction of the campus leadership team, must create a yearly goal designed to guide and measure their effectiveness in graduate student support. For example, an advisement goal might read, “90% of my advisees will end the summer term in good academic standing.” A faculty member’s manager creates these goals and documents the status of these goals in the faculty members’ middle of year and end-of-year performance reviews.

To help reach these goals, faculty members receive training in how to provide strong student support. Training sessions on relationship building with students, culture building with classes, and providing strong written feedback are all part of the on-boarding process. Training and attention to advisement continues beyond onboarding and is consistently a focus of faculty development. Over the past two years, New York faculty have received additional trainings on topics such as leading difficult conversations, responding to issues of academic honesty, analyzing student performance data, and providing differentiated support to different student profiles. Members of the leadership team design and lead these sessions, which all New York faculty attend. All new faculty attend “New Faculty Training”, an intensive national training held each summer for new faculty. To build self-awareness and consider implications of racial identity, the week opens with a session designed to help faculty reflect on their own racial identity and
experiences in education. In this session, new team members reflect upon and discuss identity and eventually compose their own educational autobiographies (Nieto, 2009).

Communication, in both oral and in written form, is a notable aspect of the advisor role at Relay. To this end, Relay prescribes some advisement communication structures as mandatory, and leaves others to the advisor’s discretion. For example, advisors are required be available to graduate students for weekly office hours (at a time that students can access). Written feedback on student assignments is also required within two weeks of assignment submission. Email communication is common, with a suggested response rate of 24 hours or less. Nearly all advisors provide weekly or bi-weekly email updates which communicate reminders about deadlines and coursework, providing resources and any necessary follow-up from class.

Faculty advisors at Relay closely monitor graduate student data. This includes module pass rates, midterm academic standing, formal observation scores, end of term academic standing, and overall group attrition rates. Advisors are required to keep up-to-date records of student progress in the program, and use these data to inform action steps with graduate students. By analyzing and responding to data, advisors can adjust their approaches to graduate student support. For example, some graduate students need more intensive feedback to improve their instructional practice, while others might need organizational support to balance graduate school and K-12 school responsibilities. Relay advisors have weekly meetings with their managers where they monitor graduate student data, discuss specific cases, and determine next steps.
Relay advisors have also participated in a number of experiences and conversations to support developing racial literacy. As an organization, Relay uses the following diversity statement to drive work in diversity and inclusion:

Relay GSE is committed to creating a diverse institution that honors and celebrates difference and is inclusive of the communities we serve. Relay GSE’s commitment to diversity stems from a belief that multiple, different perspectives are necessary components of a vibrant institution of higher education. Relay GSE values people of all backgrounds and strives to build a team that is diverse in ability, ethnicity, language, class, age, gender, religion, race, and sexuality. Given that Relay GSE’s ultimate constituency are underserved public school students, we place a critical emphasis on building an institution that is representative of these students both in terms of race and class. (Relay Diversity Statement, July 12, 2017).

Relay strives to support its staff in discussing and addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion as part of organizational culture. To this end, at least twice a year, the entire organization engages in structured, formal professional development sessions aimed at increasing awareness, promoting dialogue, and deepening understanding of issues related to diversity and inclusion. Once a month, the entire organization spends time reflecting on personal efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. On the New York teaching faculty, members participate in additional discussions centered on readings, research, as well as analysis and reflection on our own student data. Faculty members teach coursework on identity markers, culturally responsive teaching, relationship building, and developing one’s socio-cultural consciousness. In preparing for these sessions, faculty discuss the content and practice delivery of sessions together.
**Background of this Study**

In the summer of 2015, Relay launched teaching residency programs in New York, Chicago, and Houston. While alternative route programs are often criticized for skipping student teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2010), the residency model defies this criticism as its very purpose is to provide a more gradual on-ramp to the profession. Relay’s teaching residents (residents) spend their first year “in residency” at a school site while simultaneously completing master’s degree coursework at Relay. The residents therefore have the opportunity to study at Relay while located in a yearlong field placement, though not yet acting as a full-time teacher of a classroom. Rather, they support instruction for other lead teachers, and take on ownership of teaching more gradually. Similar to non-residents, residents also pursue a Master’s degree in two years of coursework at Relay. At the end of this first year, the schools have the option of hiring residents to become full-time teachers of record, and the teachers can continue to the second year of Relay’s M.A.T. coursework to complete their Master’s degree. The Class of 2016 was the first cohort to complete the residency program. Residents comprised about 20% of the M.A.T. candidates that year, with a student body more racially diverse than that of the general M.A.T. program. Of the 34 graduating residents in class of 2016, 50% of the class self-reported as either (a) Black/African American or (b) Hispanic/Latino, as reported in internal organizational data in July of 2017.

As a precursor to this study, in the spring of 2016 I conducted a pilot study designed to learn what our first cohort of residents perceived as strengths of the program as well as where they felt the program needed to develop. Specifically, I wanted to learn
about the residents’ transition from the first year of the program to the second year of the program, when they took on classrooms of their own as full-time teachers. I spoke with five residents in their second year of the M.A.T. at Relay, after they had taken on lead teaching roles in their schools. Through one-on-one interviews and a focus group, a clear trend emerged that the personal relationships with peers in their cohort and faculty advisors at Relay were an important and overwhelmingly positive part of their experience. Each participant spoke about their positive perceptions of these relationships in detail, and I found clear trends in the importance of trust in the relationships they deemed positive and impactful.

In this pilot study, I spoke with five participants, all females of color, who had worked with White female advisors during their time at Relay. The trends I found in their perspectives included believing that their faculty advisors had their best interests at heart such that they were able to be vulnerable in their practice and growth at Relay, indicating an existing level of trust. This spurred my interest in learning more about what led to these close relationships, knowing that females of color in graduate programs do not always experience high satisfaction with their graduate advisors (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Noy & Ray, 2012; Patton, 2009). I did not predict this trend going into the study, but upon coding and reflecting on the data, I came to see that Relay’s advisement model might be a noteworthy characteristic of the program worthy of further exploration. This study seeks to identify if the trends I observed with these five participants of color are unique or more widespread, and either way, to gain a deeper understanding of how our graduate students of color experience work with their advisors.
**Research Questions**

This study investigates the experience of teachers of color in hopes that the findings could improve teacher preparation for teachers of color, particularly within alternative certification programs. My hypothesis is that the strength of the relationship between a faculty advisor and a graduate student is important to the graduate student’s experience and satisfaction with program and in the K-12 classroom. To that end, I posit that trust is crucial to having an effective relationship in advisement, and that relationships complete with trust can lead to strong and satisfying advisement across lines of racial difference. I investigated these postulations by collecting data on the following research questions:

1. How do graduate students of color experience relationships with advisors at Relay?
   a. What advisor attributes are necessary to build trusting relationships with advisors, particularly across lines of racial difference?

2. How do students perceive that their advisors influenced their success in the program?

Overall, this study examines the relationships between graduate students of color and their advisors, surfacing input from students to identify the nuances of cross-racial advisement relationships and the impact of these interactions on their experience at Relay.
Significance and Rationale of the Study

Findings about relationships and trust-building can help determine best practices and inform development of advisors going forward, at Relay and in other models of advisement. Investigating these questions gives voice to the experiences of our graduate students. With a deeper understanding of their perspectives, we are in a position to more effectively meet the needs of our graduate students as they learn how to teach. If any trends suggest that students of color experience negative relationships in advisement at Relay, or indicate that there are nuanced considerations for supporting students of color, it is important to uncover and address these findings. Ultimately, this study can help illuminate the behaviors, mindsets, and approaches that create strong advisement between faculty and graduate students of color to improve the advisement approach at Relay, as well as other teacher preparation programs and institutions of higher education.

Cross-racial advisement is an area of Relay’s model that warrants special consideration and investigation. At Relay, employing a teaching faculty that represents the racial identities of our student body is an institutional priority. At the time of this study, less than 40% of the New York City full-time teaching faculty identify as “Historically Underrepresented Groups” (HUGS), with the current staff being more racially diverse than years’ past (as reported in internal organizational data in January of 2017). In the class of 2017, 52% of the approximately 400 enrolled graduate students self-reported as HUGS (as reported in internal organizational data in January of 2016). At Relay, “Historically Underrepresented Groups” (HUGS), as related to representation in higher education, includes people who self-identify as Black/African American,
Hispanic, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Native American. This disaggregation identifies specific groups who have the historical context of being underrepresented in institutions of higher education. Tables 1 and 2 outline the racial demographics of the teaching faculty in 2016, at the time of the most recent graduating class.

Table 1

*Full-Time Relay Teaching Faculty Members in 2016 Disaggregated by HUGS/Non-HUGS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Reported Racial Identity</th>
<th>Number of Faculty</th>
<th>Percentage of Full-Time Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-HUGS</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUGS</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

*Class of 2017 Enrolled Students Disaggregated by HUGS/Non-HUGS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Reported Racial Identity</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage of Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-HUGS</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUGS</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering these data, while Relay New York has made strides to increase the racial diversity of the teaching faculty, many of our students of color are likely to have a White advisor during one or both of their years at Relay. Considering the fact that racial
demographics can change the advising experience for graduate students of color (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Noy & Ray, 2012; Patton, 2009), this is an important nuance to explore within Relay’s advisement structure.

In summary, learning how graduate students of color perceive their relationships with their advisors, what they value in these relationships, and how to build a strong and trusting relationship across lines of racial difference could help Relay, and the larger community of higher education, to better serve our new teachers of color. This study aims to reveal some of the less concrete aspects of the graduate student experience, in other words, the relational pieces, to deduce how these aspects play out in higher education between Relay’s graduate students and their advisors. This study can help inform how to provide a better academic experience for students of color complete with trusting and strong relationships that can model the experience we want teachers to provide for their K-12 students. Relay faculty members, as well as the larger higher education community, can use these findings to understand better how to build strong relationships and trust across lines of racial difference.

**Conceptual Framework**

Through my pilot study research, I realized that the teachers with whom I spoke valued the relationships they had with their advisors and saw them as a component of their success in and satisfaction with the program. Since the target group of that study was not only graduate students, but also new teachers, my framework follows the assumption that new teachers of color value strong, supportive relationships, particularly when joining the field through an alternative certification route. In the alternative route
context, a form of mentoring or advising can help ease the stress associated with learning how to teach while also completing graduate studies, and that relationship, if strong, can propel development forward. I hypothesize that within cross-racial relationships, trust plays an important role in helping people connect.

To investigate the importance of trust in relationships further, I need a theory that explains how strong relationships contribute to success. Social capital puts name to the various entities that together make up the social structures and interactions that exist between people (Coleman, 1988). I have chosen social capital theory as an overarching concept to link the importance of relationship building and trust to successful advisement. Using social capital as a lens, one can consider advisement to be a networked resource that provides graduate students with access to a professional in the field enlisted in their development. To what degree a graduate student trusts that person can influence the nature of their relationship, and thus, the benefits of social capital associated with it.

When considering cross-racial advisement relationships, it is important to think beyond generalized trust to racial trust, as racial differences between teachers and students can complicate developing trust (Stevenson, 2013). In the graduate school context, students of color report feeling less respect in relationships with their advisors than their White peers (Noy & Ray, 2012). Thus, building social capital for students of color in advisement relationships will involve complex application of theory and investigation to identify what is necessary for racial trust to exist.

In summary, strong relationships with advisors could be a way to better support new teachers of color in teacher training programs. The literature review discusses the
need for support of new teachers, the roles mentors and advisors can play, how graduate
students of color have experienced advisors in higher education, and the connection
between trust and social capital. Because Relay advisors serve new teachers in an
alternative certification master’s degree program, the literature review includes research
on the two most similar roles: teacher mentors and advisors in higher education (doctoral
programs). Taken together, the literature review provides the necessary background of
the considerations that informed the development of this study.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

**Supporting New Teachers**

New teachers, particularly those in alternative certification programs already in the classroom, will benefit from additional support as they learn how to teach. For decades, teachers have consistently expressed that they do not feel prepared for the realities of the classroom. Simon Veenman’s (1984) report, which presents the results of 83 studies conducted since 1960, reported that classroom management stood out as the most serious problem, which new teachers continue to say today (American Federation of Teachers, 2012). Feeling unprepared is likely an amplified concern for new teachers joining teaching via alternative routes, where there is less pre-service preparation provided and they are learning how to teach while already in classroom contexts.

Without adjustment, new teachers will continue to experience struggle, and the challenges of retention and dissatisfaction in the field are likely to persist. While turnover in teaching is lower than in some professions (e.g., childcare workers, secretaries), it is also higher than others are (e.g., nursing, law, and engineering), which contributes to fewer career professionals in the field (Ingersoll & Perda, 2009). This notion that the American teaching force is unstable (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey 2014), is a powerful one, and yet, not surprising, given the decades of research showing the need to better prepare new teachers for their role in the classroom. The highest rates of teacher attrition occur in high need, lower performing schools (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014), compounding the challenges of struggling schools. The field needs teacher preparation models that can systematically lessen the stresses and challenges new teachers face as
they join the field. The next section discusses the findings of mentoring programs for new teachers, as this type of support from experienced teachers is a potential solution to better support new teachers.

**Mentoring New Teachers**

The number of studies done regarding the mentor’s role with and impact on new teachers is one indicator that this is a highly popular concept getting considerable attention in teacher preparation scholarship (Hoffman, Wetzel, Maloch, Greeter, Taylor, DeJulio, & Vlach, 2015). There is wide variation in how this study uses various terms: new teachers are often referred to as “preservice” or “student” teachers, and mentors are often called “cooperating teachers” or “mentor teachers” (Hoffman et. al, 2015). There is some nuance between these roles, and they likely differ in different contexts. In this literature review, the term “mentor” describes the role of a more experienced teacher working in a structured capacity with a new teacher in a K-12 school-based coaching capacity.

According to Grossman and Davis (2012), effective teaching mentoring includes three features: (1) highly trained mentors, (2) a focus on content, and (3) allocated time for mentoring. These criteria are important because a strong and positive mentor relationship essentially provides considerable support. However, that does not necessarily mean that it influences the teachers’ abilities. Grossman and Davis (2012) point out that many mentors are inclined to focus on greater emotional support, which might seem necessary to new teachers as they face the challenges that come with being new to teaching. Yet, for the mentoring to be effective in pushing a teacher’s development and
influencing positive outcomes, the mentoring support needs to be also instructional (Grossman & Davis, 2012). In addition, coaching that demonstrates a “more focused, honed approach,” including content-specific instruction, modeling, observation, and shared reflection proved to lead to improved teaching and higher student outcomes (Shidler, 2009, p. 459).

Of note, not all experienced teachers are in a position to be effective mentors. Wang’s (2000) study of mentors in three different national contexts, the United States, the United Kingdom, and China, found teaching experience did not necessarily translate into being a strong mentor, even if the mentor was a strong teacher. Aligned with the distinction made by Grossman and Davis (2012), mentors in this study were more inclined to act as “local guides” than to develop specific teaching practices (Wang, 2000, p. 70). There must be a common understanding of the role, or mentors will create their own conceptualization along with the practice that they see as relevant to their context (Wang, 2000). One way to mitigate these challenges could be for policy makers to steer effective program development regarding mentoring (Wang & O’Dell, 2002) and maintain a programmatic emphasis on effective coaching.

Hoffman et al. (2015) provide more detail about specific aspects of implementation in their review of forty-six studies specifically focused on interactions between the two actors in coaching relationships. Within the fourteen findings they report, several are relevant to this study. Primarily, the findings support my argument that building relationships appeared as a critical component of effective coaching. More specifically, when new teachers experienced a trusting relationship with good
communication, they were more likely to feel confident in taking risks and “jumping in,” which in turn, led to more learning and experiences (Stanulis & Russell, 2000).

Conversely, the review (Hoffman et. al, 2015) includes a study where tensions emerged between pairs because of communication issues (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008). In these case studies, the root of the communication problems seemed to trace back to different conceptions of mentoring in general, plus lack of clarity in shared expectations for communication and beliefs about teaching (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008). This study shows that without effective communication, it is difficult to forge a strong partnership.

The research also shows that mentors, i.e., “cooperating teachers”, are mostly unprepared for the coaching role and that the training received varies greatly; the majority did not receive training beyond an initial orientation (Hoffman et. al, 2015). Collectively, this review speaks to the benefits of strong and positive relationships for new teachers, and how closely linked communication and clarity of role expectations are to a high quality of relationship.

Finally, to further my argument on the power of strong relationships for new teachers, Izadinia’s (2015) study highlights that positive relationships between new teachers and their mentors resulted in positive changes in the new teacher’s self-identity. Teachers who had positive mentoring relationships felt more confident, while those with less positive relationships felt less confident, which affected their personal identities as teachers (Izadinia, 2015). While there is more to being a good teacher than being confident, having new teachers feel comfortable in their role is certainly important. Feelings of inadequacy can hamper teacher growth and development.
Supporting New Teachers of Color in the Graduate Student Context

While the stress of becoming a new teacher may exist for all new educators, racial stress (Stevenson, 2013) is an added component with which teachers of color must contend. For example, a qualitative study (Kohli, 2016) of 218 teachers of color who considered themselves “racial-justice oriented” found that these teachers regularly experienced hostile racial climates at the urban schools where they taught. The climates manifested in experiences of racism that included legitimized lenses of “color-blindness” that seek to ignore the realities of racial oppression, as well as repeated racial micro-aggressions that collectively serve to undermine and assault people of color (Kohli, 2016). In the absences of knowledge and awareness, people often believe being “colorblind,” or “not seeing color,” is a way to counteract racism, when it actually promotes racist ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). This approach ultimately serves as a denial of difference, contributing to ignorance and downplaying the experience of non-White groups and individuals. These ideologies can contribute to a devaluing of the intricacies of their experiences as people of color (Lewis, Chesler, Forman, 2000).

On the contrary, White Americans, often unknowingly, continue to enjoy benefits in life experiences and opportunities due to their skin color (McIntosh, 1989). Many White people conceptualize racism as specific acts of cruelty or hatred, failing to recognize that racism includes structures, misinformation, and societal beliefs that contribute to systematic advantages to being White (Tatum, 2003). Whether a person is aware that they possess these privileges or not, they nonetheless afford White people a level of comfort, assuredness, and inclusion that other groups cannot count on. Graduate
students are contending with different amounts of racial tension and stress related to their racial identity, which could influence their experience in their programs.

In the context of higher education, minority students who attend predominantly White institutions report feelings of isolation and aloneness, broken down into three forms of marginalization: physical, cultural, and intellectual (Gay, 2004). In addition feeling physically underrepresented, there are also cultural differences that make students feel as if they are a “guest” (Gay, 2004, p. 269). Ladson-Billings (2000) illuminates that teacher preparation programs often fail to teach all new teachers how to teach K-12 students of color, emphasizing that educational literature on the subject often encourages a deficit mindset regarding children of color. If schools of education are not effectively preparing teachers to teach K-12 students of color, then it is unlikely they are addressing the needs of their own graduate students of color. When a curriculum includes little content from non-dominant sources or perspectives, an added layer of difference can hinder a sense of belonging for non-dominant groups (Gay, 2004, p. 273). Positive relationships could be a crucial aspect of promoting a positive and inclusive experience for new teachers who are historically positioned to feel less like they belong.

There is limited research available on the topic of access to mentors and the associated benefits for women and underrepresented populations; what does exist shows mixed findings (Girves, Zipeda, & Gwathmey, 2005). The research does indicate that communication and trust between a new teacher and a mentor are important qualities when facing the challenges of being a new teacher (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Stanulis & Russell, 2000). Further, communication, specifically about education, can be difficult
across lines of racial difference (Delpit, 1988), and trust, while certainly possible, can be more complicated in cross-racial mentoring relationships (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). How graduate students experience their advisors can vary by race and gender.

When analyzing graduate student perspectives of their advisors, Noy and Ray (2012) identified six distinct advisor types: affective, intellectual, instrumental, available, respectful, and exploitative (p. 879). Using these categories as dependent variables, with a sample of over 3,000 doctoral students across 27 universities, they compared the rating differences between women of color, men of color, White women, and White men (Noy & Ray, 2012). Using an intersectionality framework (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991) to investigate both gendered and racialized lenses allows insight into the “interlocking effects of gender and race” (Turner & Myers, 2000, p. 6). This disaggregation revealed that while women of color were not disadvantaged along all dimensions, they did report that their advisors treated them with less respect than the other groups: men of color, White males, and White females (Noy & Ray, 2012). Overall, women of color were the most disadvantaged group in their work with their advisors, while White women were the most advantaged (Noy & Ray, 2012). One limitation of this study is that the race and gender of the advisors was not included in the analysis, and there is room for more research of the different experiences within racial groups so as not to ascribe generalizations to an entire group. This study speaks to the fact that students of color, specifically women of color, are likely to experience advisement differently than other groups. Thus, there might be inherent challenges to cross-racial advisement worthy of consideration in the development of faculty and in promoting equity in advisement.
To further this point, a study of African American female graduate students revealed a preference for an African American female mentor because of “the capacity to relate to them in unique ways” (Patton, 2009, p. 530). One graduate student described the “understanding” experienced with African American female mentors as a “shortcut” because she did not have to “spend 30 minutes explaining why I feel uncomfortable in a situation,” but rather, the mentor understood from her own experience (Patton, 2009, p. 523). Additionally, the graduate students in this study viewed their mentors as role models and found they could have honest discussions about the realities of their circumstances as African Americans with specialized advice that they might not get elsewhere (Patton, 2009, p. 524). The study found that African American female graduate students working with White mentors reported both positive and negative experiences, but notably, all participants brought up the issue of trust, even regarding positive relationships (Patton, 2009). Participants discussed concerns about being misunderstood or not having the same research interests as White mentors (Patton, 2009).

Thomas, Willis, and Davis (2007) highlight several barriers that can inhibit successful relationships between White mentors working with graduate students of color. For one, White faculty members might believe that only faculty of color can serve students of color effectively. While this assumption is not necessarily true, the notion can be very damaging to students of color experiencing a mentor who appears resistant to the student (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999). Additionally, White faculty members who have had little experience working with people who are different from them might lack multicultural competence, which inhibits such things as communication, the ability to
give effective feedback, and conflict management (Chrobot-Mason, Ruderman, and Nishii, 2013). Lastly, if they have not taken time to explore their own identities, and come to understand and accept the privilege they have received, working with a student with a more developed racially identity can be problematic (Chrobot-Mason, Ruderman, and Nishii, 2013).

In a study looking at the preferences of students of color in higher education, students of color indicated their preference for a mentor of their own racial identity, and those who did, felt they received more support than did the students who did not (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011). The authors of the study conjecture that working with someone who was more likely to have experienced similar challenges could promote more trust. Interestingly, matching mentorships did not affect academic outcomes; thus, it is possible that there are other reasons that make for strong mentoring relationships, such as mentors who are well matched to what a specific student needs (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011).

Fortunately, there are successful examples of cross-racial relationships that indicate there are strategies and approaches that support strong relationships. One example of a successful cross-racial relationship is outlined in “Mentoring in Black and White: The Intricacies of Cross-Cultural Mentoring” (2004). Juanita Johnson-Bailey, a Black female associate professor, and Ronald Cervero, a White male professor, met in the student/teacher context, and from there continued a thirteen year mentorship. They assert that the foundation of a successful mentorship is trust, and that building this trust becomes more complicated in cross-cultural mentoring, as there are historical, racial, and
societal tensions to contend with (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004, p. 11). One way in which they were able to build trust was by taking time to talk through Juanita’s experiences of racism. Her vulnerability and Ron’s listening to understand helped them to achieve a more realistic and honest sense of Juanita’s experience. They also spent time seeking to understand cultural differences in communication and interpersonal habits, which helped them to communicate more successfully (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). Trust and communication seem central to all successful advisement relationships, but there are certainly additional layers to consider when thinking about cross-cultural relationships based on transparency, awareness, and racial literacy (Stevenson, 2013).

Advisement as a Model

At Relay, graduate students, who are also mostly new teachers, work with “advisors” throughout their times in the program. The functionalities of the Relay advisement role overlap with the responsibilities of a mentor, since their role is to aid the development and support of their advisees—but not entirely, because they are not school-based roles as mentors often are. In addition to helping their advisees develop in the K-12 classroom space, advisors take on the role of supporting the teacher’s graduate studies. In that way, a Relay advisor performs tasks similar to that of advisors in an undergraduate program, where advisors help college students select coursework, accrue academic credits, and serve as faculty liaisons (Tuttle, 2000). Different from undergraduate contexts where faculty members often teach different students than they advise (Williamson, Goosen, & Gonzalez, 2014), Relay advisors often also teach their graduate students, so they are aware of the content they are learning and can support their
acquisition of knowledge. If Relay advisors are not the lead instructor, they are present for the instruction. The term “faculty advisor” at Relay encompasses all of these responsibilities.

Advisors who work in higher education have different conceptions of what successful advisement entails. In the context of terminal degrees, Legucha (2011) found in a qualitative study of 15 faculty members from one research institution that these faculty members perceived themselves as playing different roles with varying priorities and approaches to mentoring. Lechuga (2011) identifies three broad descriptors that define the nature of the relationships from the faculty perspective: allies, ambassadors, and master teachers, as outlined in Table 3. When acting as an “advisor,” faculty served the “ally” role, meaning the served a supportive function.

Table 3
Examples of Advisor Goals within Lechuga’s (2003) Advisor Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master Teacher</td>
<td>• Deliver content designed to develop new teachers’ skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Model strong instructional practices during graduate coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide feedback on instruction to support graduate student development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>• Provide encouragement and support to graduate student in development as a teacher, invested in the success of the graduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support graduate student in challenging situations such as academic jeopardy or difficulty in classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Act as a role model, and possibly a mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambassador</td>
<td>• Communicate with graduate student about status in program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work with shared services team (e.g., bursar or registrar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicate with graduate student’s school-based leaders to support their success in the program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graduate students also have different preferences as to what they believe is effective advisement. Rose (2003) created the “Ideal Mentor Scale” (IMS) used subscales to measure integrity, guidance, and relationship to explore preferences of over 700 doctoral students across three different institutions. This mixed-methods study, using both surveys and focus groups, found that students valued clear and effective communication and honest feedback from mentors above all, and beyond those commonalities there were variations in preferences (Rose, 2003). In a subsequent study that examined preferences by group found that socio-cultural factors, including age, gender, and citizenship, influenced preferences while academic fields of study and stage of progress toward degree did not. For example, women preferred a mentor that demonstrated integrity as a role model in professional ethics more than men and international students preferred a mentor with whom they connected interpersonally (Rose, 2003). This study did not disaggregate preferences by race, though it stands to reason that if there are differences in preferences by gender and citizenship, that there may be differences by racial groups as well.

Social Capital, Trust, and Racial Trust

Lastly, I summarize my argument by outlining how social capital can play an important role in improving teacher effectiveness by providing access to knowledge and resources, and that trust and racial trust play an important role in building conductive relationships. Social capital gives name to the interactions and relationships that allow people to acquire information, resources, or general access. In the context of teaching,
social capital could include access to veteran teachers, colleagues, or grade level teams—but social capital is more than these relationships alone. Rather, social capital represents the idea that through these networks, teachers can access and acquire the embedded resources (Lin, 2000). Human capital, conversely, includes what a teacher brings to the role, such as formal educational background or certification status (Leana, 2011). The two types of capital certainly relate, as social capital can contribute to the development of human capital and positive outcomes in active and productive ways. For example, high school students with more social capital in their home and community environments were less likely to drop out of school (Coleman, 1988).

Scholars have been advocating for the role social capital could play in education reform, with even a possible role in evaluating educational programs to determine how to target reforms around distribution of expertise and resources (Penuel, Sussex, Korbak, & Hoadley, 2006). Social capital is about the connections and networks to other people, and the literature reveals that these connections with other educators have proved impactful in K-12 schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Leana, 2011).

In Leana’s (2011) study of more than 1,000 New York City fourth and fifth grade teachers across 130 schools, the most significant predictor of student gains was not human capital such as teacher experience or level of education, but rather the amount of social capital they had in terms of interactions and a sense of trust with colleagues (Leana, 2011). That is not to say that human capital is not important; students of teachers who had high levels of both human and social capital showed the most gains (Leana, 2011). Yet, having social capital provides more options to access human capital that they
might not otherwise acquire through other channels. For example, one teacher in the study explained that collaborating with peers was safer, because asking administration for support could have negative implications on career aspirations (Leana, 2011). This indicates that trust is an important aspect to consider for the potential value of connections, affirming Coleman’s assertion that in a group where trust exists, so does more productivity and accomplishment (1988).

Bryk and Schneider’s longitudinal study of over 400 elementary schools (2003) demonstrated the power trust can have when it exists between teacher colleagues, particularly in relation to collective goals. The researchers conducted the study several years ago at this point, but the large number of schools studied over such a long period, nearly ten years, remains impressive. They used a variety of data collection methods including interviews and focus groups with both school faculty and community members and observations of classrooms, as well as surveys sent by the Consortium on Chicago School Research on relational dynamics in Chicago elementary schools.

The results indicate clear lines between trust and strength of adult culture and student performance. Bryk and Schneider (2003) use the term “relational trust” to emphasize that trust needs to exist across roles and in relation to one another. They outline four components to consider in building this trust: respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity. Their research found many positive attributes in the schools that demonstrated greater relational trust, including increased teacher buy-in, vulnerable exchanges about personal areas of improvement, and increased commitment to making change. Interestingly, schools
without this relational trust had a harder time resolving challenges, even ones much smaller in nature (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). In addition, the presence of relational trust showed a positive relationship with the likelihood that a school would show academic improvement, whereas without it, improvement was less likely (p. 44).

Alder and Kwon’s (2002) framework for social capital uses the following definition: “Social capital is the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor’s social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor.” Adler and Kwon synthesize the research of social capital in various domains, exposing that while many studies demonstrate the benefits of social capital, the shared conceptualization of social capital is more elusive. Those in the field know less about the risks of social capital, and research would do well to spend more time figuring out how to create the social structures that “encourage the emergence of social relations that provide the requisite opportunity, motivation, and ability” (p. 35, 2002). I agree that learning how to create these structures is important, which is closely linked to the goals of this study: how to create social capital in a specific context (Relay) between two actors (graduate students and faculty advisors). For this study, social capital is defined by access to knowledge and amount of trust built between graduate students and faculty advisors over time.

Sankar (2003) asserts that character is what builds trust. Considering trust more specifically in the advisement realm, McClennan (2014) offers three key tenets of trust as necessary qualities to build trust in academic advisement: integrity, authenticity, and competency. There is lot of overlap between these criteria and Bryk and Schneider’s
(2003) criteria for trust (respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity). In short, building trust requires demonstrating behaviors of trustworthiness in what advisors know and are able to do, as well as their demonstrated commitment and follow through in interactions. “Authenticity” stands out as an additional measure to consider. Authenticity speaks to the affect and persona of the advisor, and as McClennan indicates, is able to exhibit their expressed core beliefs in real life, which effectively demonstrates that they are of their word and can be trusted (McClennan, 2014). It also requires an apparent sincerity and realness in the care for the students in the relationship.

Creating trust across lines of racial difference can be more complicated, as there are histories and societal contexts to consider. Terrell & Terrell (1981) outline four areas in which African Americans feel the mistrust of White people: educational and framing settings, political and legal systems, work and business interactions, and interpersonal social contexts. The advisor role encompasses at least three of these four contexts: the setting is educational, programs often relate to organizations of student employment, and there is interpersonal communication between advisors and graduate students. Thus, considering the nuances of racial trust is important in investigating how students are experiencing advisors from different racial backgrounds.

As discussed earlier, effective communication is a critical component to successful mentoring relationships for preservice teachers (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008). To expand on the communication aspect of racial mistrust we can consider Lisa Delpit’s seminal essay, “The Silenced Dialogue”, which was originally part of a speech given at
University of Pennsylvania’s 1987 Ethnography Conference. In this response to the controversy spurred by her earlier publication, “Skills and Other Dilemmas of a Progressive Black Educator”, Delpit (1988) discusses her findings on communication across cultures of White and Black school teachers, specifically on the topic of the best way to educate children of color. Delpit (1988) reports that teachers of color often feel unheard and frustrated when they share their thoughts with White colleagues (p. 22). She theorizes through anecdotes and teacher perspectives that the stifling of discussion across racial lines results in “alienation and miscommunication” for teachers of color, and it leads to what she has defined as a “silenced dialogue” (Delpit, 1988, p. 24). She also outlines five aspects of the culture of power, regarding how they show themselves in the classroom, in language and codes and in acquisition and awareness of power. She surmises that the real issue is not in the disagreements over instructional practices, but rather, in the implications of the power dynamic and the voices it drowns out. She concludes hopefully, acknowledging that while difficult, dialogue is both possible and necessary (Delpit, 1988, p. 47).

Making progress requires a “special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds” (Delpit, 1988, p. 46). This work outlines many of the challenges that arise in communication across racial difference, especially in the discussion of educational practices, which is exactly the subject matter for new teachers and their mentors. Delpit (1988) provides clarity regarding the complex implications of power, citing specific challenges that arise, as well as a call to action to improve these interactions through relational interactions. These considerations about
communication are important to building relationships. If communication is a hang up, then the relationship will neither be as effective as it could be, nor produce as much social capital as it could.

Bordieu (1986) asserts that social capital embodies the reciprocal relationships or group membership that allow for access to the resources of others in the network. Indeed, as with other forms of capital, social capital is “productive” in that it allows for access to resources that would not exist without the social structure (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). These structures, however, are not a given, and they take time to build and investment to maintain (Bordieu, 1986; Putnam, 1993). Without a cohesive bond, both actors cannot achieve the full potential of the connection. Therefore, in this scenario, if trust and effective communication are not present between advisors and graduate students across lines of racial difference, the resulting relationship inhibits access to resources, information, and successes, which ultimately disadvantages graduate students.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences and perspectives of graduate students of color at Relay regarding their work with faculty advisors in an effort to improve the experience of future graduate students. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do graduate students of color experience relationships with advisors at Relay?
   a. What advisor attributes are necessary to build trusting relationships with advisors, particularly across lines of racial difference?

2. How do students perceive their advisors influenced their success in the program?

A qualitative methodological approach serves the goal of attending to the personal stories and experiences of participants within their specific, “real-world” context (Yin, 2016, p.9). The theoretical framework of this study gave it direction, as scholarship indicates that mentorship-types of support can make a positive impact on new teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), and that social capital can be an effective way promote teacher learning (Leana, 2011). Therefore, this methodological plan aimed to hear the voices of the graduate students at Relay (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), specifically regarding their relationships with their advisors, and whether their advisors influenced their success in the program. The following sections outline each aspect of my methodology in detail, including a description of the research site, the participant selection process, the approach to data collection and analysis, and the limitations of the methods.
The Research Site and Participants

This study took place at the Relay Graduate School of Education’s New York City campus. At the time of this study began in 2016, there were approximately 900 students enrolled in the Master’s of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T) program at the New York City campus, with over 1,000 graduated alumni. Graduate students at Relay are largely new or novice teachers seeking their master’s degree and New York State certification. While completing the program, teachers are employed by public schools of New York City.

The ultimate goal of advisement at Relay was to provide necessary support such that graduate students could successfully complete the program and become effective classroom teachers. Graduate student advisement, also known as “student support,” was a major job responsibility for full-time faculty members. Relay provided faculty advisors with clear guidelines and expectations for advisement, including professional development and managerial support designed to promote effective advisement.

The participants of this study were all graduates from the three most recent Relay classes—2015, 2016, and 2017. I selected this group in effort to balance having a pool of participants large enough to secure an adequate sample size while also ensuring participants had experienced Relay recently enough that their experiences would be relevant to current Relay practices as well as recently enough to remember them with detail.
Survey Participants

To invite alumni to participate, I sent the initial email request to 997 alumni with an invitation to complete a survey. The body of the email explained the nature of the study and invited them to complete a survey about their experiences in advisement (Appendix B). My goal was to be transparent about the goals of the study, such participants would be clear that the purpose of the study was not to evaluate them or their advisors, but rather to gain a better understanding of the current context to make improvements in the future. I discuss how I addressed my positionality within this practitioner research in detail in a subsequent section. While the research questions aimed to illuminate the experiences of students of color, I sent the request to all alumni because my database of contact information showed 11% of students had not reported their racial identity as students. By doing this, I could avoid ruling out participation from students who had not disclosed their identity as a graduate student, and allowed everyone to participate and indicate their racial identity, if they wished, in this new context.

After the initial email, I sent one follow-up request to students who had not responded, and then closed the survey. In all, 227 students responded, which is about a 23% response rate. Eighty-five of the respondents, or about 37%, self-reported belonging to a historically underrepresented group in higher education (HUGs). The study focuses on this group of students’ responses to answer the research questions. I realize that “of color” is vague terminology, and leaves sufficient room for both interpretation as well as difference within a subgroup. My hope was not to over-generalize students, but rather, to hear voices of underrepresented groups, knowing that context, culture, and other
considerations vary. Essentially, I wanted this study to focus on how people outside of the non-dominant (i.e., non-White) group felt and experienced our institution. I knew this was a trade off in keeping my participants broad, but since the context includes a relatively small group of students, I opted for more voices over greater specificity in my data set. I was aware of this limitation when making my decision. This study should serve as a starting place, with room to be more specific and targeted in participant selection to learn about the experiences of specific subsets of people.

**Interview Participants**

Using the survey responses to select participants for interviews, I first determined which survey respondents of color would be willing to continue in the research. Forty-eight of the 87, or about 55%, of the respondents of color said they would be willing to participate further in an interview. Because I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of students’ perspectives by following up with several types of respondents (Light, Singer, & Willet, 1990), I wanted to speak to students who felt both negatively and positively about their experiences in advisement at Relay. This categorization can facilitate purposeful selection of participants by choosing them intentionally to achieve the goals of the study better (Maxwell, 2013). I organized respondents who were willing to participate further into two groups, based on their responses to survey questions 7 and 8, which asked if they had experienced positive relationships and trust with their advisors. Participants responded to these questions on a 1-5 Likert scale, with a rating of “5” indicating strong agreement and a rating of “1” indicating strong disagreement. The responses to these two questions showed narrow range of responses, suggesting that
perhaps alumni who felt positively about their relationships with their advisors were more willing to participate. Because of this, in categorizing students for purposeful selection I considered a Likert scale rating of a ‘3’ to be a negative sentiment, as opposed to a neutral one. Therefore, the “happy” group included 44 willing participants who answered positively (agree or strongly agree) to questions one and two on the survey for both advisors. The second group, the “unhappy” group, included the 14 students who had responded less than positively (neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree) on one of these questions for at least one advisor. Using this categorization method allowed me to seek a “maximum variation sample,” that could garner varying perspectives and alternative viewpoints to other participants, as well as mine as the researcher (Yin, 2018).

With these categories determined, I invited willing participants to interview. I reached out to all students in the “unhappy” group, and was able to interview eight individuals based on who responded. For the “happy” group, I prioritized asking students who had opted to share qualitative comments on the survey, and interviewed a total of ten, in order to speak to a similar number from each group. The location of the interviews was a pragmatic decision (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), aimed toward increasing convenience for participants’ busy schedules. It was most important that participants felt as comfortable as possible and that I was as adaptive as possible to their busy schedules. All participants had the option to meet in person or via video conference, and the interviews lasted from 40 to 60 minutes. The three students (across both categories) who had experienced me as an advisor were interviewed by a different faculty member in an effort
to decrease positionality bias and to create a comfortable space for them to share their perspectives.

It is important to note that a major limitation of this study is that participants were self-selected. Whether or not participants chose to respond to the survey, or chose to participate interviews, was voluntary. This creates bias in the findings as the study did not have data from non-respondents to consider (Creswell, 2013), or data from students who did not complete the program. This limitation is essential to hold front of mind in the analysis and drawing conclusions.

**Data Sources**

I collected data using a survey and individual interviews. One way to increase validity of findings is methodological triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data collection plan included two methods and yielded data from multiple sources to ensure that I had enough data and the right kind of data to answer my questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This format was designed to allow me to see “the same thing from different angles” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p.166), as hearing many student voices was essential to drawing legitimate conclusions. My data collection and analysis plan was structured and purposeful, and left room for adjustments I might need to make during execution, as advocated by Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007).

**Survey.** Data collection began with a survey positioned to collect general information from a wide range of participants in both an organized and cost-effective way (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Beginning with the survey allowed me to ask participants to expand on the feelings, observations, or opinions they shared in the survey in the follow-
up interviews. To have variable data for the analyses, I used a five-point Likert scale for respondents to indicate to what degree they agreed with a statement in addition to open response items. The survey protocol (Appendix C) includes questions constructed to respond to research question 1, which asks how graduate students of color experience advisement relationships and investigates the strength of their relationships and trust with their advisors. Participants assessed their experiences with both of the advisors they had at Relay, in the first and second years of the program. Sample questions included an evaluation of the strength of their relationship with each of their advisors, whether they trusted each of their advisors, and whether they believed their advisor contributed to their success as a teacher. From there, questions asked more specifically about their experience including questions that asked to what degree they trusted their advisors’ knowledge to support their development as a teacher, whether they felt comfortable openly sharing their ideas and feelings about teaching with their advisor, and whether they were comfortable bringing up topics of race and diversity with their advisors.

**Individual interviews.** Following the survey, I conducted 18 in-person interviews designed to understand “how others interpret their reality” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 169) to add depth to my understanding of the graduate perspective by talking one-on-one with willing participants. Sequencing interviews after the survey provided the opportunity to probe on responses and findings from the surveys. Using a semi-structured interview format allowed me to focus on a specific topic and at the same time be open to directions that participants take the discussion (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I prepared a sequence of questions in advance for interviews with graduate students (Appendix E) in
which participants could introduce their own language and conceptualizations to describe their relationships (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also asked follow-up questions to probe for more insight and asked for specific examples to strengthen my understanding of their responses.

The planned interview questions mapped to all of the research questions. For the first research question, I wanted to understand their general experience with advisors better. I asked students to explain their survey ratings and then I probed with specific questions about their experience with their advisor, such as, “What was your first impression of your advisor?” To answer question 1a, which addresses their relational trust, I asked them directly about why they either did or did not experience a relationship and trust, and probed with questions derived from the study’s conceptual framework regarding how they had experienced authenticity, communication, and racial stress, for example. To answer question two about the impact of the advisor, I asked participants to describe how their advisor had been helpful to them and if there were supports they wished they had been given that they were not. The complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix E.

All interviews occurred one-on-one. With participants’ permission, all of the interviews were audio-recorded, and I had all of the recordings transcribed by an outside service (Rev.com) to provide a record to visit for deeper analysis. A colleague at Relay conducted three of the 18 interviews because I had advised these participants. These participants understood that I would read the data to analyze it, but I thought that speaking to someone else could contribute to a more honest and less-biased interview.
My colleague who conducted the interviews knew the students, but did not serve as their advisor.

**Data Analysis**

To make sense of the data I collected, I completed a number of analytical exercises. In qualitative data analysis there is no one way to analyze the findings—rather, as Maxwell (2013) explains:

Reading and thinking about your interview transcripts and observation notes, writing memos, developing coding categories and applying these to your data, analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships, and creating matrices and other displays are all important forms of data analysis (p. 105).

To this end, I analyzed my data in a variety of ways to find trends, uncover differences, and build a fuller understanding of my results. This section outlines my plan for data analysis.

**Survey Responses.** First, I analyzed the responses to the survey for the purpose of gaining a general sense of student perspective on their advisors, identifying participants to interview, and informing my questions for interviews. I disaggregated the responses by racial identity to only include participants who self-identified as Black/African American, Latinx, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (thus, excluding students who had self-identified as White or Asian). I then calculated the descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation for each question. I determined the questions with higher and lower response averages and used these findings in my questioning to better understand these responses.
**Memos.** After completing my interviews, I listened to all of the interview recordings a second time. Then, I used writing and reflection as a way to process and make sense of the data by writing reflective memos for each interview. I used writing as an on-going tool to both capture thinking and promote thinking (Maxwell, 2013). Doing this after each interview helped me summarize some of the main ideas that surfaced, and also helped me to make note of highlights and vignettes that I did not want to lose as the data got bigger. I also wrote memos at benchmark moments in the process, such as after my initial round of coding, to help me make sense of the information and start to identify themes. I did this again after my second round of coding to help capture my new observations and plan for the organization of my findings.

**Reflective journaling.** As the study progressed, I kept a research journal as a place to collect my ideas, questions, and next steps to help me develop my thinking and organize my observations (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). I used this heavily during the coding process as I sought to make sense of my findings and sift through the data to determine themes. I often wrote in this journal before, during, and after coding.

**Coding.** Before coding my data, I compiled all of my data in one local place, using the Dedoose.com platform as a tool. I began by coding in big, broad themes that spoke directly to the research questions by identifying excerpts that spoke to positive and negative relational trust with advisors, as well as how advisors had positively or negatively influenced their success in the program. From there, I used a deductive coding approach to identify how theoretical aspects from the conceptual framework showed themselves in the data (Yin, 2018). For example, I identified comments that discussed
communication, demonstrations of respect, or instances of trust using \textit{a priori} code set. While in this process, inductive codes emerged from the data as the emic language and ideas shared by participants revealed how participants conceptualized and experienced these themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This process of \textit{in vivo} coding expanded my code set notably as new narratives emerged (Yin, 2018). Thus, I sought to collapse my codes into thematic primary and sub-themes that both organized the breadth of the content, and sufficiently represented the diversity of thought shared in the interviews. Using an iterative process of rethinking and reorganizing the codes, over time the code set evolved as I reviewed the data through multiple rounds of reading and coding. Lastly, I determined the amount of representation of each code to determine the weight the themes and sub-themes for stronger interpretation.

\textbf{Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity}

In addition to a comprehensive plan for data collection and analysis, it is also essential to consider my positionality and my role as the researcher in planning and executing this study. I am currently an Associate Dean at Relay, a position of leadership, and have taught and advised many of our alumni. In some ways, this proximity could be of benefit to the study, as I was familiar with many students through class night instruction, office hours, and being around campus. As a manager of our faculty, I regularly spend time talking and thinking about advisement with my colleagues. Maxwell references Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) who conjecture that “relationships that are complex, fluid, symmetric, and reciprocal—that are shaped by
both researchers and actors—reflect a more responsible and ethical stance and are likely to yield deeper data and better social science” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 137-138).

That said, I am a White woman, and served in a position of leadership at the institution of higher education at the time the participants attended as graduate students. In a study that seeks to explore issues connected with race, my own race could be a factor in the collection of data. By selecting alumni who no longer attend the school, I am hopeful that through describing the goals and purpose of the study I can convey a genuine interest in each participant’s story that compels them to share openly.

It is imperative that “participants voluntarily consent to being part of that study, that there be no sense of coercion involved” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 140). Many of my students, present and former, knew about my studies at Penn and expressed interest in participating in my research. I wanted to ensure that no one felt that he or she had to participate. To this end, I employed a selection process that widely asked if people would be interested in participating, and I did not encourage anyone to participate beyond the initial requests. I explained when writing the initial ask, and again in person before the interview, that the purpose of the research was to gain a better sense of student perspective, not to evaluate or pass any judgement on our students or our faculty. It is difficult to eliminate issues of positionality, but I hoped that making the intent of the research very clear would help. I also hoped that alumni felt that they contributed to the research with a chance to tell their stories to improve their alma mater, rather than being studied themselves.
My personal goal in this study was to understand the impact and experience of advisement on Relay students, so I needed to disconnect from my personal assertions and experiences to hear their voices. To do this, I needed to be aware of “the purposes and assumptions” that I might have brought to the study (Maxwell, 2013, p. 93). This study was personal to me, as I have been lucky to have meaningful relationships with many of the new teachers I have worked with, and remain in touch with many of them today. I feel that our relationships have energized both of us at times, and personal connections are some of the most impactful and rewarding part of teaching for me. I am aware that I bring these experiences and biases to the study, and that I need to be continuously conscious and reflective of how they might shape my planning, interactions, data collection, and data analysis.

This study also served to fulfill my intellectual goal of better understanding the nature of advisement relationships at Relay. I have been an advisor for nearly six years and have supported faculty advisors for five, so this self-study at Relay provided me with the opportunity to increase my knowledge and awareness of the topic. Understanding the student experience is a goal not only of mine, but also that of Relay as an institution. My findings are important for the practical goal of making informed programmatic decisions in the future that consider the experiences of our graduate students. I think there is a real possibility to understand how the role functions and how to use it to support our graduate students most effectively.

Lastly, I entered the study committed to finding ways to collaborate with my peers throughout the process. This quote from Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen (2007)
resonated: “Because doing action research in [your] own sites is such a complex undertaking and because it can become quite political, we have suggested that, if possible, it’s best undertaken collaboratively” (p. 126). To inform the goals of my research I was in communication with Relay’s Director of Research and the Dean of New York to discuss what we wanted to learn from this study. While building my own knowledge of the area of study, I read and discussed relevant literature with faculty members. I was lucky to have colleagues who are eager to participate in collaborative inquiry at our institution, and this was a topic of interest.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the study’s research questions:

1. How do graduate students of color experience relationships with advisors at Relay?
   a. What advisor attributes are necessary to build trusting relationships with advisors, particularly across lines of racial difference?

2. How do students perceive that their advisors influenced their success in the program?

The findings address in detail how participants experienced relationships with their advisors, what advisor attributes contributed to those relationships, and whether students felt their advisors influenced their success in the program. As outlined in detail in Chapter 3, to answer these research questions, the study included a survey sent to the Relay alumni classes of 2015, 2016, and 2017, followed by 18 individual interviews. The data revealed four major themes of what contributes or detracts from a positive, influential advisor-graduate student relationship: the authenticity of the advisor, the communication and interpersonal skills of the advisor, the individual investment an advisor shows their students, and how the advisor demonstrates respect of their students. These themes and their sub-themes are discussed in detail after presenting a summary of the findings from the initial survey.

Survey Participants

Of the approximately 1,000 alumni who were sent the survey, 226 participants chose to respond, 85 of which self-identified as people of color. Table 4 outlines the self-
reported race and gender of the survey participants. About 37% of the survey respondents identified as Black, Latinx, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, which are historically underrepresented groups in higher education (HUGS). As is consistent with the language of this study, this group is referred to as “students of color.” Reported racial identity was very important because adequate representation of students of color at Relay was essential to answer the research questions seeking to learn more about these specific perspectives. About half of the participants were White, with Black/African American students being the next largest group with just over 25%. This is somewhat comparable to the demographics of the Relay student body. In the past three graduating classes included in the survey request, approximately 49% self-identified as belonging to a historically underrepresented group, with 24% reporting to be Black or African American. Gender representation was also representative; the past three classes have averaged 70% female and survey respondents were 68% female.
Table 4

Racial and Gender Demographic Data of Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Reported Race</th>
<th>Self-Reported Gender</th>
<th>Prefer Not to Say</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gender Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat.Hawaiian/ Pac. Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Not to Say</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Responses

Participants responded to questions about their advisors on a 1-5 Likert scale, with a rating of “5” indicating strong agreement and a rating of “1” indicating strong disagreement. The survey began by asking students to rate their overall experience in the program. As discussed in Chapter 3, in order to answer my research questions I disaggregated the survey responses to only consider responses from participants who self-identified as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. As outlined in Table 4 and discussed above, this group comprises about 37% of the survey respondents. Going forward, the findings discussed will reference the responses of this group.

The majority of survey respondents either agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (26%) that they had a positive experience at Relay on question number 1, indicating that the majority of survey-takers felt positively about their overall experience at Relay. Relatively few participants disagreed (4%) or strongly disagreed (2%) that they had had a positive experience at Relay (with “neutral” chosen by 28%). The next questions asked participants to rate the strength of the relationship and level of trust experience they experienced with both their Year 1 and Year 2 advisors. To explore the conceptual framework’s emphasis on the importance of trust, I investigated whether there was a correlation between the participants’ ratings of their experience at Relay and the trust they had experienced with their advisors. The survey results revealed a strong relationship between the trust participants felt with their advisors and their overall experience in the program with a correlation >0.4.
The majority of survey-takers felt they had positive relationship with their advisor. Averaging the responses for both Year 1 and Year 2 advisors, 50% of people of color strongly agreed that they had experienced a positive relationship their advisors, and 33% agreed. Only 2% strongly disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed, with 21% selecting a neutral response. The following question asking specifically about experiencing trust with advisors yielded similar results. About 48% of people of color strongly agreed and 33% agreed that they had experienced trust with their advisor. On the negative side, 2% strongly disagreed and about 5% disagreed. It is worth noting that while these data are a strong reflection of Relay’s program and the work of its faculty, the overwhelming positivity of responses means that there is a lack of variation in the responses. This was discussed in Chapter 3 regarding the analysis plan, and will be discussed again in Chapter 5 as a limitation of the study.

To better understand specific perspectives and experiences related to trust, the survey then included a series of more targeted questions drawing on concepts from the literature review: communication, competency, accessibility, and the level of comfort in specific scenarios (to assess the level of trust). Table 5 outlines the average and standard deviation for each survey question for both advisors, disaggregated by respondents of color. These data show that on average students rated their relational experiences with each of their advisors higher than they rated their overall experience at Relay. Graduate students of color rated their advisors highest on believing in the graduate student’s ability to succeed and showing commitment to the growth and success of the student. Among the lowest-rated questions were the graduate students’ level of comfort bringing up topics
of race and diversity with their advisor, and their comfort sharing an experience of racial discomfort with their advisor. These trends hold true for both years of the program, indicating consistency in the experience of graduate students working with advisors across the two years. The survey data provided direction for areas to probe in the interviews to understand what contributed to these feelings.

Table 5

*Responses to Quantitative Survey Questions Disaggregated by Students of Color*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. I had a positive experience as a graduate student at Relay.</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I had a positive relationship with my advisor.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I trusted my advisor.</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My relationship with my advisor contributed positively to my experience at Relay.</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My advisor had the necessary knowledge to support my development as a teacher.</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My advisor was competent in discussing the racial politics of becoming a teacher.</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My advisor followed through on commitments and deadlines.</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. My advisor actively demonstrated belief in my ability to succeed. & 4.75 & 0.51 & 4.56 & 0.86 \\
9. My advisor demonstrated a commitment to my growth and success. & 4.58 & 0.76 & 4.54 & 0.75 \\
10. I felt comfortable talking freely with my advisor if I was having academic challenges as a graduate student. & 4.52 & 0.84 & 4.50 & 0.75 \\
11. I felt comfortable talking freely with my advisor if I was having challenges as a K-12 teacher. & 4.07 & 1.24 & 4.27 & 1.07 \\
12. My advisor was comfortable with disagreement and challenges regarding class content. & 4.01 & 1.22 & 4.10 & 1.21 \\
13. My advisor was comfortable if the topic of race or diversity arose in our conversations. & 4.08 & 1.11 & 3.92 & 1.30 \\
14. My advisor encouraged questions and discussion regarding diversity and learning to become a teacher. & 3.93 & 1.20 & 3.86 & 1.24 \\
15. I felt comfortable bringing up topics regarding race or diversity with my advisor. & 3.83 & 1.14 & 4.10 & 1.03 \\
16. If I was to experience racial discomfort at Relay, I would feel comfortable bringing it up with my advisor. & 3.70 & 1.39 & 3.71 & 1.29 \\

**Interview Participants**

Of the 85 Black and Latinx survey respondents, 48 indicated that they would be willing to participate further in the study. Using the methodological process detailed in
Chapter 3, I purposefully selected participants to represent a range of experiences with their advisors. All interview participants’ names are referenced in this study by pseudonyms. Quotes with any potentially revealing information about any advisor or student were edited to use pronouns or labels in place of names.

Table 6 presents information about the interview participants, including race and gender, as well as whether the participants believed that they were of the same racial background as their Year 1 and Year 2 advisors. It also includes their ratings of the strength of the relationship and trust they experienced with each advisor. I interviewed male and female alumni who identified as Latinx or Black/African American. In terms of racial congruence with their advisors, the large majority of participants did not match with either advisor, though two participants matched with one advisor, and two participants matched with both advisors. Whether a graduate student had an advisor of the same race or not was not included as participant selection criteria, but Table 6 outlines this information for reference. As outlined in Chapter 3, in effort to have a range of relational experiences represented, the primary criterion for selecting from willing participants was how they responded to the survey questions about the strength of relationship and trust they reported with each of their advisors. As Table 6 outlines, ten participants strongly agreed or agreed that they had experienced a positive relationship and trust with both of their advisors. Eight participants indicated that they strongly disagreed, disagreed, or were neutral about having a positive relationship or trust with at
least one of their advisors. During the interviews, participants shared their experiences with both of their advisors.
## Table 6

*Interview Participant Demographic Data and Perception of Relationship and Trust with Year 1 and Year 2 Advisors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Y1 Racial Match</th>
<th>Y1 Rel.</th>
<th>Y1 Trust</th>
<th>Y2 Racial Match</th>
<th>Y2 Rel.</th>
<th>Y2 Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nailah</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alana</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leticia</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martina</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwina</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayima</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tess</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimena</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andre</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Findings

The interviews were crucial in understanding what mattered for students in building a strong relationship with an advisor, including what matters to students when working across lines of racial difference, and the specific ways that students felt advisors had supported their success in the program. It was clear through the interviews that a strong, trusting relationship was something nearly all of my participants valued in working with advisors, and for those who wanted it, all but one participant felt they had experienced such a relationship with at least one of their advisors while at Relay.

Table 7 outlines the primary codes and sub-codes that were used to analyze the interview data and how many times they appeared in the data. Chapter 3 described the process for determining these codes. Notably, 87 excerpts were coded as describing positive aspects of a relationship or trust experienced with an advisor, compared to 51 excerpts that described a neutral or negative experience in the relationship or trust a student experienced with an advisor. Forty-five excerpts detailed the positive impact of an advisor, while 25 excerpts described a lack of impact, or negative impact. When I asked about the relationship with and influence of their advisors, students spoke most about their advisor’s authenticity, communication and interpersonal skills, investment in students, and respect for students. Table 7 outlines the frequency of themes found through coding, including the percent of comments within a primary code that reference a sub-code. Some excerpts received more than one primary or sub-code. The following section describes in detail the themes revealed in this analysis.
Table 7

**Code Set**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Code</th>
<th>Uses</th>
<th>% of excerpts coded to subtheme within the theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships and Trust with Advisors</strong></td>
<td>138</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>Positive descriptions of the relationship and trust between an advisor and a graduate student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative or Neutral</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>Negative to neutral descriptions of a relationship and trust between an advisor and a graduate student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact of Advisor on Graduate Student</strong></td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s positive impact on a graduate student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s lack of impact or negative impact on a graduate student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advisor Authenticity</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s ability to demonstrate authenticity with graduate students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s consistency as it relates to being authentic, including first impressions and subsequent observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s vulnerability with graduate students, including sharing personal stories or experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortability</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s comfortability, including with their own racial identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s honesty and openness with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advisor Communication and Interpersonal Skills</strong></td>
<td><strong>66</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s approach to communication, including interpersonal skills, accessibility, demeanor, and racial literacy skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor Accessibility</td>
<td>37*</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s availability to students (office hours, after class) and responsiveness via email, phone, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Nature of Advisor</td>
<td>35*</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s ability to be personable in interactions with graduate students, including demonstrations of warmth, positivity, humor, and encouragement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Literacy of Advisor</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s ability to converse about topics pertaining to race, culture, diversity—including topics of identity related to teaching children of color—with graduate students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advisor Investment in Individual Students</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s investment in supporting, knowing, and developing graduate students as individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor Belief in Student Success</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s belief in the graduate student’s ability to succeed, including implicit and explicating messaging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor Awareness of Students</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Descriptions of an advisor’s awareness of students as individuals and their ability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feedback to Graduate Student | 18 | 20% | Descriptions an advisor’s feedback, both written and verbal, to promote a graduate student’s development, including holding high expectations.

Advisor Respect for Graduate Students | 29 | 70% | Descriptions of an advisor’s demonstrated respect for a graduate student, including showing interest in their ideas, openness to their feedback, and treating them as an intellectual colleague.

Advisor Respect of Graduate Student Ideas | 24 | 70% | Descriptions of an advisor’s interest in student’s perspective and ideas (even if counter to advisor’s), as well as student feedback to the advisor.

Advisor Flexibility and Understanding | 10 | 30% | Descriptions of an advisor providing flexibility and understanding when students need it.

Advisor Competency | 20 | 20% | Descriptions of an advisor’s competency in the role, including knowledge of content, delivery instruction, and ability to advise students effectively.

Graduate Student Vulnerability | 17 | 20% | Descriptions of when graduate students felt vulnerable working with an advisor.

Graduate Student Racial Stress | 30 | 70% | Descriptions of graduate student experiences with racial stress at Relay, including in relationships with advisors and classes.

Notes. The total uses of the primary code within the data set are in bold. In some subthemes, excerpts were coded for more than one sub-theme. These are marked with an asterisk (*). The percentages calculated for these sub-themes represent the percentage of excerpts that referenced that sub-code within all of the coded excerpts in that theme.
Themes

Figure 1 displays the four themes and related subthemes that emerged through qualitative data analysis. Four major themes surfaced to describe what contributes to or detracts from a strong and influential relationship: the authenticity of the advisor, the advisor’s communication and interpersonal skills, the investment an advisor shows in students as individuals, and how advisors demonstrate respect of their students. Students spoke about the importance of these entities and demonstrated how they appeared in relationships that were both strong and weak. Each primary theme includes sub-themes to provide a deeper understanding of what the larger themes encompassed.

Figure 1. Themes and Subthemes from Interviews.
Theme 1: Authenticity. The first theme, authenticity, emerged as a major determinant in how students perceived their advisors and whether or not trusting relationships could exist. All 18 interview participants felt authenticity was important in building a positive and trusting relationship with an advisor. They detailed how they had observed authenticity in their specific advisement relationships and what it meant to them. This first section seeks to explore this central theme of authenticity, providing depth to how students experienced it, and specifically, what they valued about it in working with advisors.

Consistency. About 30% of responses about authenticity fell into the sub-theme of “consistency,” meaning that for students to perceive a faculty member as authentic, they wanted to see them being “themselves” at Relay. When talking about authenticity, they emphasized the importance of the first impression. Of the eight students who referenced consistency, seven of them spoke about how they perceived their advisor’s authenticity the first time they met, and the impact that impression had on the relationship that ensued.

When talking about meeting advisors for the first time, five students referred to what they experienced before trust builds when working across lines of racial difference. Andre described the impact of identity during the phase of getting to know someone, such as an advisor:

I feel like when someone does share an ethnic background, or they identify as a person of color who's not traditionally represented, or sometimes an Asian person, you can skip through a lot of the glazing of, ‘Can I trust you? Are you going to say something that's a micro-aggression? Are you going to use your position of power differently towards me than you would someone else?’ You can kind of
skip over that and just assume you might be safe, whereas there's like a long period of testing the water when someone is not your same race. Especially in academia, where you don't necessarily ever feel like you belong, you know?

Andre described this awareness as “having his antennae up” and that this heightened awareness is necessary for him, as a man of color, before trust builds. “Can I trust you?” is a specific question he is seeking to determine as he meets new people, and his last sentence underscores the need for this type of assessment within the context of higher education.

Before determining whether they could trust someone new, these five students explained that they took extra care in how they presented themselves across lines of racial difference. They said they did this to avoid being “judged” or seen as a racial stereotype. Oscar shared that he had this feeling upon first meeting his advisor:

The only thing that I felt a little pressure, on not meeting the expectations. Me, being Hispanic, let's get real. I have to perform twice as hard to be seen as successful. That pressure because of that, because she's a White woman, I felt the pressure of I have to perform, do my best. I couldn't fail.

This excerpt demonstrates that, before Oscar interacted with his advisor, just knowing her identity as a White female caused him to think about how he needed to prove himself because of his racial identity. Barry shared a similar sentiment. When he is operating in a cross-racial scenario his “guard is up a little bit more,” and he tries to be on his “Ps and Qs.” When I asked what was on his mind in these moments, Barry shared his worry that “maybe folks won't always appreciate all of me.” Javier said that he approached meeting his Relay advisor the same way he had approached other experiences in academic settings: “You don't want to give anyone any reason to discredit you or your
experiences. So, you must provide your ‘A’ game at all times.” Javier explained that such approaches are “internalized” in him as a Latino male to avoid being seen as a stereotype.

Renee shared that, as a female of color, she considers whether she can trust someone when first meeting them: “It's the first impression for me, right? It's your reaction. It’s how you speak about certain content and certain topics for me that I'm like, ‘Are you trustworthy or are you not?’” For Renee, how faculty members present themselves the first time she interacts with them is a determinant in whether or not she trusts them. Renee explained that she trusted one of her favorite faculty members because Renee believed she was her “real” self from their first encounter, and valued that she did not pretend to be something she was not.

Whether or not an advisor was authentic was something the graduate students felt confident in assessing, largely based on whether they felt the advisor was being who they really were, not putting on an act at Relay. For example, Martina shared in describing her advisor, “I'm pretty discerning, and I can tell…that's who she is: in Relay and outside of Relay.” Students shared that they determined authenticity by how faculty presented themselves to the larger class during instructional delivery. Oscar said he valued the authentic consistency of his advisor: “Every time she got up there and taught us, you know that she was being herself. Every time she talked, she would be herself. I felt it since day one.” Olivia also referenced her advisor’s consistent authentic demeanor: “I don't think it was a skit, it wasn't a play, [and] it wasn't an act. It felt like that was [her] 24/7…I don't know how to explain her. She's just so real.” For Olivia, realness directly related to the strength of the relationship and impact an advisor could have: “I think
[teaching] is really difficult, and I think that the best instructors, the best advisors, the best relationships, you need that honesty.”

_Vulnerability_. The second sub-category that emerged under the theme of authenticity was an advisor’s vulnerability. This sub-theme describes how an advisor’s willingness to be vulnerable can influence their relationship and have an impact on the graduate student. Of the excerpts coded for authenticity, about 30% referenced advisors’ demonstrated vulnerability with students. Participants recalled moments when their advisors demonstrated vulnerability in front of the whole class and in one-on-one conversations outside of class. Hearing stories about advisor struggles emerged as something that both forged relationships and influenced students. Leticia described one of these instances:

> It was during those office hours that I really got to know her. She would tell me her experiences in the classroom, and one time this happened to her…it made me feel like it was okay to struggle and fail. She's successful, she's a professor. She's failed and had these mishaps, okay. So her being vulnerable and letting me know that there are going to be times when you struggle, that really made me feel better. Okay, I'm not a total failure.

In this case, the advisor’s willingness to be vulnerable served to build rapport with the student, and supported the student in accepting some of the challenges and failures she was experiencing. Martina also referenced the impact her advisor’s vulnerability made:

> I think her honesty and vulnerability that she displayed in our classes, and just with me…it kind of opened up another side to let me see that she is my professor, however, she's a human being. She does have feelings, emotions, and she does go through things, and I can remember her talking to me, and basically pushing me, helping understand that this is hard, but you can get through it. But her also telling me that she's struggling in school, too. So this is my professor telling me, "Listen,
I'm a human being. I am struggling with things right now, and I'm behind also."…that was helpful for me, and impactful on me.

Martina’s description makes the connection between vulnerability and humanity, and similar to Leticia’s comments, highlights that knowing someone in a position of authority who is upfront about struggling can help the student feel better about the struggles they are facing.

About 20% of all of the participants detailed that advisors built rapport with them by telling their own stories. They recalled their advisors talking about such vulnerable topics as family members, illnesses, death, and as discussed above, their personal growth as an educator, including failures. Edwina shared why her advisor’s personal stories made a difference in their relationship: “I feel like when people are able to be vulnerable, that kind of gives you a sense of how much they're willing to see other people as equal human beings, no matter what they've been through.”

That said, it is important to note that if an advisor came across as disingenuous in relating stories, it could adversely affect the relationship. Javier talked about this being the barrier for building a relationship with one of his advisors:

A lot of the different professors I had at Relay, they’d bring in their personal experience and try to relate it to yours. And yes, I would say that this advisor did that, but for some reason, I don’t know if it came off as genuine as it did from other professors I had. So, it made it harder to connect and open myself up… My overall take from it was that this person was just inserting a personal anecdote where it said to do so in the script.

This is an important point, as it suggests that a seemingly scripted approach came across as insincere. If students perceive that an instructor is inserting an anecdote because that is what the “script” says, the story loses its impact. In this case, Javier perceived that
the story was not genuine or from an organic place, and thus, he actually felt less connected to this advisor as a result.

**Comfortability.** The third sub-theme revealed as important to authenticity was how advisors demonstrated comfortability, meaning that they presented as comfortable with who they were as a person. About a third of the excerpts coded under authenticity discussed whether an advisor demonstrated a level of self-awareness and ease when interacting with graduate students.

Andre, who spoke about the need to have “antennae up” upon meeting someone from a different racial background explained, “[When] someone is more comfortable talking to me, [they’re] probably used to being around people of color…not weird interacting with people who are different from [them].” In conjunction with being comfortable with difference, students highlighted that self-awareness of identity was important. Keisha stated her preference for advisors to be honest about their backgrounds, including whether they came from privilege. She stated:

Being aware that not everybody had the same experiences as you and openly stating it…I think that when you are vulnerable and you let those things out and you own it, it's so much better instead of acting like you don't know or you don't see it.

Renee also named identity awareness was why she trusted her favorite faculty members: “I think they were just White people who know that they’re White and know what that means when working with people of color.” This quote appeared to ascribe importance to both identifying one’s own race, as well as having an awareness of your race in context. Renee explained that as a Black woman in the program, she was very
aware of the intentions of the faculty and students who were talking about and teaching students of color. For her, there were certain behaviors related to racial awareness that a White advisor needed to demonstrate to contribute to her feeling comfortable working with them and trusting them. When talking about an advisor that had done this, she described:

She owned her privilege as a white woman in this work (both as a classroom teacher in the hood and a professor of students doing the same work)… I never got the feeling that she felt like a “savior” to the children she taught…a perspective I got from many other white professors in the field.

Renee further explained this White female advisor did not “try to act Black.” She said that she can detect when people put on an “‘urban’ mask,” which she described something non-Black people do to try to connect:

Speaking to a black person, particularly a black woman…trying to be an expert on our issues or culture (i.e., only mentioning Beyoncé’s new album to me, looking to me when they make a point about race relations, or overlyexcitingly noticing a change in my hair or style), and just trying to relate with me in ways that are racially motivated. When I say she didn’t try to “act Black” I mean she was genuinely herself in class and in our many one-on-one meetings.

This description pushes on the fact that advisors not only needed to be aware of their own racial identity, but also cognizant about how they authentically interact with people across lines of difference. Students were sensitive to whether advisors were attempting to forge connections that were true to the advisor or whether they seemed contrived, and even racially loaded.

Relatedly, to build trust advisors needed to be aware of their blind spots, and own them—particularly when they spoke about difference or issues related to
race and culture. For example, Jimena described what being straightforward about blind spots could accomplish in cross-racial relationships:

I think it's to be incredibly transparent. As a person of color, I appreciate when non-people of color ask me very direct questions and not beat around the bullshit nonsense questions. “I noticed you said ‘blank’ in your execution of a lesson plan, what does that mean?” Or, “You made a joke with your kids that I didn’t necessarily understand, can you explain it?” Just be straightforward about it. I think beating around the bush when it comes to race, it creates dissonance between people…. That's the difference [between] creating a comfortable relationship with someone outside of your race and having a very uncomfortable relationship with someone outside of your race.

This quote suggests that in spaces of difference, an awareness of gaps in knowledge and willingness to name them can help create cross-racial relationships that are more comfortable.

Keisha described that her advisor’s authenticity, specifically her comfortability with who she was, contributed to their relationship and the impact her advisor had on her:

I think that relationship comes from one, being yourself, being your authentic self and not being someone you are not. That's one reason why I really appreciated [my advisor] because I felt like she was herself. She wasn’t afraid to be herself--the conversations we had, the way she welcomed me in her classroom, the way she pushed me as a student, as a thinker, as a young woman, as a Black woman, really made me feel confident and speaking to her and coming to her.

Alternately, the absence of comfortability can come across as inauthentic. Andre explained that he perceived a formal professionalism from one of his advisors, which he described as “cold”, and he believed was linked to his advisor’s “self-consciousness”.

When I asked him to explain this more, he elaborated that what he wanted was a more authentic demeanor:
Grad students are a tough crowd, but I think a certain part of it might be self-consciousness or robotic-ness…it does kind of seem like the instructors who I appreciated during my time in Relay, even if I didn't necessarily feel like I'd personally be their friends, the ones who I appreciated had a level of authenticity to them. When they didn't have that level of authenticity, I felt instead kind of like a cold professionalism, almost similar to what I would imagine would be in banking, in finance jobs or something.

Andre described this advisor as “phony” and “superficial” at times. He viewed the formality as inauthentic and wondered if his advisor’s disposition was because of him: “If I felt someone was being overly formal, I would be worried. Was it something about me? Was it something about me that was making them put up this wall of professionalism?” Andre interpreted his advisor’s “professional” nature as inauthentic, and possibly a function of racial tension due to his identity. One way to interpret this sentiment could be that when a student perceives advisor discomfort, it can create a barrier and stifle the relationship or connection because they think the distance could be related to them and discomfort with their racial identity.

While all participants saw being authentic as a positive attribute, being authentic was not necessarily enough to forge a connection. Jimena and Alana both felt that the advisors they did not have strong relationships with were being themselves, but they did not feel close to them for different reasons. Jimena did not appreciate the lax personality of one of her advisors, even though she believed it was genuinely who she was. Alana rated both of her advisor relationships as a four on her survey, but in speaking with her it became clear that while she felt satisfied by her advisors efforts, she did not feel close relationships with either of her advisors. Alana felt her advisors were authentic, but she was not convinced her advisors had the same interests or purpose in teaching students of
color: “I think that is who they are and what they believe in. I think that that's fine. It's just not who I am.”

In summary, participants voiced that authenticity was very important to having relational trust. If authenticity is present, the door can open for students to trust their advisor. If advisors were perceived as inauthentic, strong relationships and trust were unlikely, if possible. Students assessed authenticity by whether advisors were consistently their “real” selves, the vulnerability they were willing to show, and their comfortability. Jimena explained that graduate students could tell if Relay faculty are authentic, the same way K-12 students can tell if their teachers are authentic: “They know authentic, they know love. If you're really transparent with your kids, they receive you very well. I think the same thing can be said for our advisors. If they're very transparent with us, the connection is much easier to make.”

Theme 2: Communication and interpersonal skills. The second theme to surface was advisors’ communication and interpersonal skills. Within this theme, students spoke about their advisor’s accessibility, demeanor, and racial literacy. Overall, participants were impressed with the amount of communication and responsiveness of their advisors, but just as with authenticity, when they found their advisor lacking in these areas, it hurt their relationship and ability to trust their advisor.

Accessibility. When asked about communication with advisors, 37% of the excerpts coded for communication referenced an advisor’s accessibility, meaning whether advisors made themselves available to students and how quickly they responded. Whether an advisor was available seemed to translate to whether or not a student felt
their advisor cared for them. Leticia explained that her advisor’s availability contributed to her interpretation of her advisor’s intentions in their work together: “Her availing herself and me just trusting that she really wanted to help me…it wasn't about her looking good as an instructor. She genuinely cared.”

On the contrary, inaccessibility sent a message that an advisor did not care. Jimena was very frustrated by one of her advisor’s lack of availability, and she shared that it permeated all types of communication: “I think one of the biggest things was lack of communication…It was really hard to communicate with her, email-wise, phone-wise.” This lack of access had an impact on how Jimena perceived this advisor and their relationship: “There was no consistency as far as my relationship with her, as far as communication, grading. She just didn't care. I felt that.” In this case, the student has connected perceived unavailability with a lack of care for her as an individual. When Jimena could not get what she needed from this advisor, she relied on her relationship with her former advisor, who she felt did care about her. Jimena recalled that her first advisor had told her, “If you ever need me, call. If you ever need me, email me.” She took her up on this, and reached out to her when she found her other advisor fell short. Jimena shared that this availability and care for her success made a big difference: “It just felt like she really cared about me graduating.” This relationship, forged in explicit availability with follow through, made a big difference for this student in completing the program.

Nayima experienced quick responses from both of her advisors, and this translated to her feeling that her needs were important to them:
I actually felt like they kind of taught me how to respond a little faster. I would send an email and get a response in probably like one to two minutes, or a text. It was always really, really quick. And really concerned and really helpful…I always felt like, ‘Your communication with me matters and I'm always going to respond.’

This quote re-iterates the connection Jimena’s made between access and care.

The rate in which an advisor responded appeared as an important trend in the data. When describing the difference she experienced between her two advisors, Tess referenced their response rate. She explained that she always got a quick response from this advisor, joking that: “[If] you text her and if you don't get a response within five minutes, call 911. Something is terribly wrong.” She did not experience this with her other advisor. Getting a response quickly seemed to be very valuable to other participants as well. Oscar, who had initially felt pressure of having to prove himself to his advisor as a Latino male, had come to trust his advisor and found the support “invaluable.” He explained how accessibility contributed to his experience:

Advisement for me was vital. I needed it. I have kids, I had so much going on outside of Relay and the classroom, that without [my advisor], I wouldn’t have known what to do. She guided me whenever I had a big assignment coming in. Every time I needed something, I'd email her. Boom. Less than 24 hours, I had a response. She was like, ‘If anything, you could give me a call.’ It was great. I loved it.

Responsiveness and the explicit availability for “anything” he might need, was part of what made Oscar feel taken care of with his advisor.

Olivia said she knew her advisors wanted her to succeed because both of her advisors exceeded her expectations by reaching out to her: “This is graduate school. You don't have to check in with people. That's something extra. I felt like they went out of
their way to make sure I was okay and I was good.” When I asked her who initiated the interactions, she felt effort was balanced between herself and her advisors. However, touch points were consistent, and if she did not reach out, her advisor would check on her: “I don't think I could ever leave the class without her trying to reach out to me if I'm not reaching out to her.”

Renee valued when her advisors were explicit about availability and she would have liked more of it. She noted:

I'm not saying that my advisors wouldn't have been there if I'd reached out to them, but I just didn't know I could. There was so many of us, so many students, I didn't want to be one more person on your roster of people that you need to speak to when you have 65 people's [videos] to score and things like that.

Although she felt she could reach out, she did not want to be an imposition.

Keisha remembered that when she first met her advisor she explicitly told the whole class to “reach out,” and eventually she met with this advisor near weekly, including weekend study sessions.

Spending time together in-person surfaced as positive aspect of building relationships. Evening office hours were one way in which students spent time with advisors outside of class time, and those who participated in this support opportunity strongly believed that these face-to-face touch points supported their success in the program. When asked about how to navigate building relationships without inherent commonalities, Leticia talked about how she built trust with her advisor through the time her advisor spent with her at office hours:

It didn't matter what I emailed [her] about, it was never a ‘figure it out on your own’ type thing. It was always, ‘Come in. Let's sit down. Let's talk about it.’ I
guess having that face-to-face contact made me realize she genuinely cared. For me that's big…you’re giving up your time…that really shows me that you care.

[My advisor] really worked with me in how to get it done and feel like I was being successful. I went to office hours I believe every other week, I was always in office hours. And even if I didn't show up, she would be like, ‘Hey! Are you still coming?’ So it was like she was really invested in me and she wanted me to do well.

This excerpt shows the direct relationship between having an advisor’s availability to support a student and a student feeling successful. It also speaks to the impact of the advisor being proactive in initiating communication that both holds the student accountable and exhibits care for her success.

After class was also a communication structure where students and advisors could connect. Nayima appreciated that her advisor was available after class for questions and conversation. She compared it to her experience of “growing up in the church, [where] you're supposed to have communion and stay and talk, there was something about that that felt familiar to me. I liked that. I liked that I wasn't forced to stay, but I could if I wanted to.” The connection she made to after class feeling like after church speaks to the comfort of familiar cultural norms and experiences. Advisor availability in a space akin to a structure from a student’s culture, such as church, could promote a sense of belonging and comfortability for students that could increase communication. Andre also appreciated that his advisor stayed after class to speak with him and his colleague about challenges they were facing at their school:

They would stay with us like half an hour after class and talk to [us] about how our school was falling apart. It was valuable just because a lot of times it feels like people just don't even hear you…It does feel nice to have someone who has actually been an educator, who now educates educators saying, ‘These are real problems. I've heard of this type of stuff happening before.’ It felt validating.
This is another example of how making time for students can show that advisors care about them. The time advisors spent with students and their willingness to listen can make students feel both “seen and heard,” as Nayima described the feeling she had with her advisors.

**Affective nature.** The second sub-theme of communication and interpersonal skills is the affective nature of an advisor. This sub-theme describes advisors’ demeanor in communication and interpersonal skills. When talking about their advisor’s communication, about 38% of the comments referred to how an advisor’s affect influenced their relationship and the impact of the advisor. Barry described the difference between the communication experiences he had with his two advisors as “transactional” versus “real.” The ability to forge a connection through conversation made the difference between Barry’s two advisors:

> I would only see her in class, and communicate with her through email. I think with [my other advisor], in addition to communicating via email and during class sessions, we also had time to talk, so even if I was there early, he would come check in on me before class started. We would sometimes speak outside of class, where he would just have real conversations with me, and it was a little bit less formal. Real conversations around what was going on.

This quote illustrates the link between authenticity and communication. Other students who had varying relationships with each of their advisors also said that being “personable,” having a certain affect, made a difference. The difference for Javier was that his advisor’s “personality, and I think her persona, made things easier and I didn't hesitate ... I was more likely to reach out for help and go for office hours because I felt
just more comfortable.” Renee had not felt a strong connection to her advisor the first year, and described the difference she experienced with her second advisor:

Going to class got easier and it was just so much better than the year before. I think it was just because of how [my professors] communicated and maybe we had the same love language which is affirmations and touch…and maybe those little pats on the back really were the little momentum that I needed to keep going, or know that I had an ally in the room, right? Knowing that somebody who had to judge me and teach me still knew that I could do it, even though I was coming with whatever baggage I was coming with and whatever feelings I was feeling…it was just different.

Renee felt that this connection and trust was important to her success because without this feeling, she was less inclined to get the help she needed. These interactions, both verbal and non-verbal, provided her a space where she felt comfortable getting the support she needed without being judged or dismissed. She referenced the fact that she was often a student who was having a tough time and was not fully bought into Relay’s program, and that instructors she trusted never let that bother them. She spoke about one advisor that made this clear to her: “Even when I was the most frustrated one of [her] classes, I never felt like I couldn't come to [her], or that [she] didn't believe in me, or like it was going to be a big deal if I didn't get it. The help was there.” She appreciated that certain faculty members could respond to her frustrations with care and empathy, and did not make her feel “a dummy” when she did not understand or had questions.

Students explained that advisors with whom they had a relationship they could talk about parts of their lives that were unrelated to teaching or Relay, but were affecting their lives: divorce, moving, break ups, sick family members. The way advisors responded when people needed additional support could both build relationships and
serve as a barrier to one. Maya experienced a relationship with her advisor where she felt comfortable showing when she was really struggling. Her advisor’s support in those times made a big difference for her:

I think personally, I've had so many meltdowns because I didn't feel like I could do it and [my advisor] was very supportive in that area, and she was always like, ‘It's gonna be okay, it's gonna be okay.’ You know, we feel like it is life or death. I think that was very effective and very comforting for me to know I can still cry and get my work done and it still be fun.

The advisor’s awareness of the stress Maya was feeling, and having the right words and approach to help her stay positive and confident, made a difference for her experience.

Javier noted his comfort asking for help was a difference he experienced between his two advisors: “With my first advisor, yes, I could ask for help, but... there was always something keeping me from doing it. And I can't really say why... I didn't feel like I was treated any less, but there was definitely a barrier.” Javier felt that one advisor came across as “rooting for him,” while the communicated “indifference.” He felt that tone was important. He explained that his advisor who came across as “enthusiastic” created more of a connection and bridge to support: “I didn’t hesitate... I was more likely to reach out for help and go for office hours because I felt just more comfortable.” Affect mattered to Renee also, especially when she was struggling:

[My advisor] was so compassionate. If I was at the back table, freaking out, like “I don't get what y'all mean.” He put it in a different way. It was like, I don't understand where you're coming from because I'm not going through it, but I'm not going to make you feel like a dummy. I'm not going to be like, “Just look here. See what they're doing.” I'm going to meet you where you're at and going to bring it forward.’
This excerpt speaks again to the comfort an advisor can provide through their approach. When a student is struggling or feeling vulnerable, it is important that an advisor create a space where the student feels valued, heard, and supported.

For three students in the study, having a relationship with their advisor was not a priority. In these cases, they felt that they could reach out if they needed something, but usually did not use their advisor for the support. This was true for Nailah:

Honestly, I don't really think about advisor relationships at Relay. Not that I had anything against my advisors. I thought they were strong. I mainly just thought of them as delivering the content. I didn't feel that I couldn't necessarily reach out. I just didn't feel like I needed to or really had that strong relationship with them.

This excerpt is interesting, because Nailah felt she could reach out, and then listed not needing them or having a relationship as the reasons why she did not. One way to interpret this might be that perhaps if she had felt a relationship, she would have been more inclined to be in touch despite not needing the support an advisor can provide. This seems to indicate that, perhaps, advisors can be primary sources of support when a student is struggling, are less likely to be when a student is able to be successful without help. David described a similar sentiment—he did not feel like he needed help nor did he have strong relationships, but he did feel that his advisor was “prompt” in responding. David was glad his advisor did not reach out to him more. These narratives indicate that for some students, a relationship is neither needed nor wanted.

**Racial literacy.** Nearly all of the participants said they had discussed issues of race, culture, and identity with their professors, citing the “Self and Other People” (SOP) strand of modules in Relay’s curricula. Opinions varied on whether they wanted more
coursework in this area or not; the majority felt very strongly that this was an important part of the curriculum and there needed to be more, while about 20% of participants did not like the idea of more “PD Sessions” on race, as Nayima put it. Nailah gave “props” to relay for including these topics in the coursework. Alana appreciated the effort to include this coursework, but felt that rather than more isolated coursework, race and identity should be a “consistent frame” by which all coursework could be considered.

All participants recounted whole class experiences when their advisor (or another instructor) facilitated class conversations about racial identity and education. In these instances, the majority of participants felt that their advisors had the racial literacy necessary to lead a productive conversation. Olivia described her Relay advisors as “No Excuses” when it came to mindsets about inclusivity and social justice, and trusted that they would call out anything that was “off.” She felt her advisors set up a culture where this type of interruption or push was expected, so people generally did not make off-putting comments. Olivia also said that she felt there was “intentionality of what was presented” and an approach to leading the conversations that she valued: “It was like this needs to happen because I care about it and you should, too. That's the attitude that was given. It wasn't like, ugh, here we go again. It was never like that.”

Most students felt that their advisors had the racial literacy to facilitate these conversations effectively. Barry explained why this was the case for him:

I trusted my advisors to be fair moderators in those conversations, and to not to necessarily be the person jumping in and doing the teaching-- I think that was on us as graduate students who were having these conversations. But, I do think that in my first year, my instructor was a boss, so she comes in and she's very
interested, she's very hands on, and I do think of how she would put herself in the conversation and try to rectify certain things.

Olivia had also felt positively about talking with her advisors about race, and detailed why:

I felt like my advisors were really open. We talked a lot about race, which was great. It wasn't like something that we tiptoed about. It was something we could have open discussions about. I never really felt a racial tension with my advisors at the time.

In addition to discussions on the topic of race, the frequency with which those discussions took place also appeared to matter. How the discussion felt—rushed versus important—made a big difference for how graduate students perceived the value of them. Javier voiced wanting more time on topics of diversity, saying these discussions often felt rushed:

It was covered in class, you learned about it, but you sort of kept moving. Like, there was more to cover...I just don't think it was something that was really stressed or made more important than other [topics]. It would've been nice to have a dialogue where it was expected that maybe your professor could learn just as much from you about these topics as you were learning from them about whatever module you were on, you know? I think it would've been important to understand my teaching style or why did I do things in a classroom a certain way.

This excerpt shows an important connection between having conversations about race and culture that could lead to understanding the student and their teachers. Not only did Javier want this type of discussion in class, but also for his advisor to understand him in this regard.

Tess voiced that she did not appreciate feeling as if she knew more than her professor did regarding topics of race and culture. During these classes, she felt frustrated
by the small amount of text presented and described and instance where her advisor did
the very thing the text warned not to do:

[One instructor said], ‘I just want to learn from my students.’ And I was like, we
literally just read a paragraph [from] Audrey Lord saying, ‘It's not the job of the
oppressed to teach the oppressor.’ And so, if you're a White lady, and you're
saying, ‘I just want to learn from my students,’ what does that mean then when it's
not your students' job to teach you about racism? When are you going to learn
this? How do you reconcile these thoughts? And like, that is a really frustrating
thing that basically that idea, that contradiction was allowed to live in that
classroom. It was like, ‘Isn't it nice to learn from our students?’

This sentiment speaks to the fact that advisors, particularly White advisors, need to have
racial literacy, and be able to communicate that they are learning, but that this is not their
students’ responsibility.

Some students felt that they should have had more one-on-one conversations
about race and identity with their advisor. For some, it came up in getting to know their
advisors and, for others, they felt like they did not know much about their advisor in this
regard. Renee valued that her professors “did a good job speaking their truths” about
race, and said this was necessary for productive communication about race and identity
across lines of difference. She did feel frustrated by the absence of voice from White
students in her class, and felt she often detected a “White saviors” mindset. A few
students described feeling that these conversations could feel like “surface”
conversations, and that they were geared toward supporting White students process and
learning about identity, as opposed to being for “real” conversation that might make
people uncomfortable, raising difficult issues about identity and teaching.
Martina talked about the conversation she had with one of her advisors after one of her observations. Martina was a reading teacher who worked with students who struggled in reading. During her observation debrief, Martina and her advisor discussed issues with assessments and over-identification of students of color in special education. Her advisor gave her feedback on how to adapt her reading intervention curriculum to be more culturally responsive, pointing out shortcomings in the materials. Martina appreciated this awareness in her White female advisor:

It felt good because I'm like, ‘Okay, she's woke!’ Because, she gets it! She gets it. She knows. It's like, who knows this? I don't even know this, and you're thinking about it, coming from a certain background, and it made me feel good. Because, it's like, I'm not the only one out here, trying to fight the same fight, and who actually understands, that there is a problem.

For Martina, this conversation revealed specific knowledge and awareness that her advisor had about how to serve students of color. It allowed them to connect about a shared goal, and gave insight to an interest of her advisor’s that she did not know was there. When this connection was not there, it influenced how students felt as well. A lack of connection was one of the biggest hindrances Alana felt in building trust with her advisor:

If I talk to you about how I feel about the anxiety that I feel around the fact that my kids are not reading at grade level, and how I have a kid even right now who makes sudden movements with his body, and I'm afraid that if he would one day get in the wrong situation. …If that's not front of mind for you, then I don't really know how we're going to build a close relationship as educators. Because to me, that's the whole reason I'm doing this. I feel like the Black women who teach that I've built relationships with, these are issues that we talk about all the time amongst ourselves. Talking about the larger issues that affect our kids’ lives and their access, these are the concerns that push us as teachers. I feel like if I don't know that's where you're coming from, then for me, I'm not necessarily going to build a close relationship with you in talking about that stuff.
This quote illustrates the importance of having a similar outlook and motivation for the work, but also the importance of having conversations about what drives you, or as Alana put it, “what keeps you up at night” about educating students of color. Alana needed to have a better sense of why her advisor was in the work, and what her perspectives were to connect and build a trusting relationship. Even without an explicit incident, this lack of communication and understanding can cause for distance.

When I asked participants whether they had experienced racial stress in their relationships at Relay, nearly everyone said they had not. A few recalled racially tense moments from class, but did not qualify them as racial stress. Interestingly, as discussed in the introduction, students who recounted feeling worried about how advisors (of a different background) would “judge” or stereotype them based on race did not name this feeling as racial stress. Rather, they spoke about those moments when I asked about their first impressions of their advisor. As Javier explained, he was less aware of how he might have used racial coping strategies while at Relay because for him they are so “internalized,” which could be true for feeling racial stress as well.

Students described specific comments or events they experienced as racially stressful. The four participants who had felt racial stress recounted specific moments in class. Two students referenced the same event when their advisor had shown a slide with an image of people of color and then talking about going to prison versus college. They said that they had not personally felt bothered by it, but that it resulted in tears and anguish for many of their colleagues. They were satisfied that their advisor had
retroactively addressed it with the whole class, apologizing for her misstep. When I asked Maya why she was more comfortable talking about issues relating to race with one advisor over another, she cited this incident as a barrier that lasted.

Three students brought up moments where they felt that the instructor did not sufficiently address racially stressful comments made by classmates. In Renee’s example, she had her hand up to address a classmate’s comment about kindergarten being her students’ “first time with language” but the teacher moved on without addressing the comment or giving Renee the chance to speak. At that point, she said she shut down and walked out because she did not want to learn from a professor who let such a comment go unaddressed. Andre also recalled a time when his advisor failed to address an insulting comment a classmate made about poverty and his hometown. Therefore, he addressed himself, and when he did, felt that his advisor dismissed his concern and moved class along:

> Basically, I got told to calm down. It was like, I am calm, first of all. I'm not actually angry, but I don't think that micro-aggression, or really just aggression should be allowed to be said in this classroom, in this space.

This interaction influenced his trust with this advisor. When it was time to submit a paper that asked for personal reflections on experiences in schooling, he wondered if he needed to “sanitize” for his advisor. He was not sure he wanted to be vulnerable in that space.

> In summary, communication and interpersonal skills offer a way for advisors to demonstrate they care about their students’ success. Being accessible, responding with urgency, and making time for students to talk about things outside of the coursework
opens the door for stronger relationships and closer bonds. Students benefited from explicitness in this regard, and authenticity is highly related to effective communication. For deeper, more trusting relationships with students of color, the data indicate that advisors need proficient racial literacy to discuss identity and the issues that face educators that pertain to race beyond a surface level.

**Theme 3: Investment in the individual.** The third theme that emerged was how students felt invested in by their advisors. This theme includes how students experienced their advisor’s belief in them, and felt known as an individual, as well as the impact of their advisor’s feedback. Collectively, whether a graduate student felt their advisor’s confidence and investment in their growth and success contributed to the strength of their relationship and their success at Relay.

**Belief in student success.** The first sub-theme of the larger theme of investment is the advisor’s belief in the student. This sub-theme includes how advisors communicated both implicitly and explicitly that they believed in the capabilities and potential of the student. Forty-five percent of the excerpts included in this larger theme pertained to how an advisor demonstrated their belief in the student.

Javier described the difference he felt between his two advisors in how they showed investment in his success. One of his advisors was able to demonstrate her investment through her responses to his successes, which were in contradiction to his first advisor:

I mean, she was just so excited all the time. And little accomplishments also were accomplishments for her. So, I felt like, ‘Oh my God. She's invested in this.’…Not just like, ‘Oh my God, at least I don't have to talk with you anymore.’
And it was just those little things I think that made me more appreciative and helped me to open up more.

He linked the way his advisor responded to his successes to his ability to open up more.

Nayima, who described herself as being initially less-invested in Relay, recalled how she felt working with her advisor: “I felt like someone was in my corner like cheering me on. It felt very natural.” Ultimately, Nayima said it was the connection to her professor that pushed her to (a) have personal goals in the program and (b) want to do more than just get through it. Olivia, who also expressed that she initially did not want to attend Relay, said her experience with her advisors changed her mind.

Building confidence, as Martina mentioned, came up for others as well. The advisor’s confidence in the student helped students to build their own confidence. Andre shared the positive feeling he got from his advisor’s confidence and awareness of his abilities:

[My advisor] was confident in me, but also flexible. He understood what I couldn't do, but also understood what I could do. That definitely felt really good, and I definitely remember being like, ‘Wow, that was great.’

Jimena appreciated the explicit messages of her advisor’s belief in her: “She would tell me all the time, ‘You can and you will.’ Sometimes you need to hear that.” When I asked her how this advisor helped her most, she said with her self-confidence. Jimena recalled that her other advisor, with whom she did not have a strong relationship, had also communicated explicitly that she believed in her students, but it did not have the same effect:
I think execution is where they differ... while she would always say to all of us, ‘I want to see you guys succeed, I'm on your side,’ [it] didn't feel that way. There was no way it could feel that way because she never followed through.

This point speaks to the integration of trusting the advisor’s message based on their investment in you, which also relates to authenticity. Without the follow through, the message did not appear to be sincere, thereby hampering the relationship and its potential influence. The way this message in communicated, it sounded like it was a general vote of confidence to the whole class, as opposed to an individual, which affirms the importance of investing in the individual to build trust and rapport.

When asked if she felt her advisors believed in her, Alana shared that she felt they believed she would be successful, but not specifically because of her capabilities or potential as an individual.

To be completely honest, I feel like it is in Relay's interest that we succeed. It is not in Relay's interest to have a bunch of teachers that can't get certified and can't graduate. But I feel like your question is speaking to them believing in me personally, and I don't have enough of a personal connection with to say that they do. I didn't see it as my professor thinks I'm an awesome teacher and that is the reason why they think I am going to be successful in the classroom. I don't think I ever felt that way about either of my advisors.

This quote speaks to the issue of intention and trust—it seems as though something is missing for Alana to feel that her advisors feel invested in her as an individual, as opposed to a more general sense of believing that all of the students can make it.

**Awareness of students.** The second sub-theme that emerged in within student investment was an advisor’s awareness of students as individuals. This included knowing them both as learners and as people. Within the theme of investment, about 33% of the coded comments indicated the importance of feeling known as an individual by their
advisor. This section describes how students experienced their advisors’ awareness of them, both interpersonally and as learners, and the impact it had on their relationship and success.

Javier felt comfort in his advisor knowing where he was in his development, and that she could “help me get to somewhere better. …that always made me feel like I can do this, like this is possible. I can accomplish this.” Martina felt that her advisor was aware of her areas of strength and areas for growth, and knew her preferences in terms of class participation: “Sometimes she pushed me to step out of my comfort zone in class. That was also helpful, so she wasn't enabling me, but she pushed me in the right settings, at the right time, and that helped build my confidence.” Similar to Javier, Martina felt that her advisor was able to promote her growth and success as an individual because her advisor knew her individually. Keisha described how her advisor demonstrated awareness of her during class nights:

I think that she did a really good job of sensing the room. She’d check in on me, ‘Hey, how are you feeling. How is this going?’ If she wasn’t available, ‘Give me a second, I'm helping this person.’ I didn't always have to initiate with her, she would come to me. She would check in on me.

This awareness and initiation of support emerged in other student’s responses as well. Martina felt that her advisor was able to adjust interpersonally to meet her needs as a student that was older than many of her colleagues in the program:

I think it's the way you deliver, and you have to know who you're delivering to. You’ve got to know your student. So, if you have a mid-thirties woman versus someone who's just graduated from college ... if you've been in the workforce before, and you're coming back into education, there needs to be something there, that you take that into consideration.
Awareness and differentiated approach stood out to her as a reason she came to trust her advisor. She felt like advisor understood her unique experiences and context.

Renee spoke about the difference it made when her instructor showed interest in her as an individual, and why this was important when working with White female advisor:

You want to come and ask me about my life? It just was a certain level of interest in me, and that is something that I get from people of color and [my advisor] just had that quality within her. Maybe that's how [she was] brought up. I don't know, but it did feel different.

For Renee, receiving this attention from a White woman felt different and it made an impact on their relationship. Alternatively, David reported that he did not have a particularly strong relationship with his advisor, but he appreciated that his advisor seemed to know that he did not need one. When he summarized what mattered to him, this ability to read people and give them what they want and need surfaced as what he valued most:

I think it just comes down to what makes a good teacher is what makes a good Relay advisor. It's an ability to read a group of people and be like, ‘These people are fine with minimal intervention. This person I can't read right now and maybe I need to tap into that a little bit. And these are people that need help to make this work.’ That's the hardest thing about teaching, and by extension anything related to teaching other teachers, is the interpersonal skills where you need to read those situations. So they can't really be taught and they can't really be prescribed. The best teachers, I think, are really, really good at that.

To him, this awareness is not a skill that one can learn, but it makes the difference for the student experience. He said that he would not have responded if his advisors had reached out more and tried to forge a relationship because he was so busy at school. He appreciated that his advisor put energy into other students and left him alone. Nailah had
a similar sentiment of not needing support or a relationship with her advisor. She felt that she had the support and relationships she wanted at her school. She did say that in the absence of that support she would have yearned for a closer relationship with her advisor.

A couple of participants recalled the personal details their advisor noticed or knew about them. Olivia described the kinds of things her advisor would notice about her in class: “She noticed a lot of things, like ‘Oh, I like that lip color,’...‘How is that student so and so and so...’ [She was] observant in noticing who I was outside of just her student.” Maya had similar recollections about her advisor knowing her little details about her. She said the personal touches made the difference for her. Her advisor had given a survey about student preferences that asked what snacks she liked: “And then she brought them in. You know it was like, "Oh, they actually read the survey, and now I personally have M&Ms." Jimena shared a similar sentiment about one of her advisors: “She was attentive, and we had a lot in common. She remembered very little details about me, which obviously, I know as a teacher, definitely makes students feel more loved and cared about.” There appears to be a connection between remembering these individual details and feeling known by your advisor.

Alternatively, the absence of feeling known also impacted students. Jimena shared that this was not the case with both of her advisors, and she felt the difference:

She would ask me the same questions every time we spoke: what grades do you teach, what are you thinking about doing your thesis on...It felt like she wasn't really seeing me... I was just one in a bunch. We lacked an interpersonal relationship, which for me, definitely made [that] year a little bit more difficult.
When I asked to hear more about feeling unseen, Jimena recounted a story from when they first met: “This is a personal thing. She said my name wrong and I actually corrected her because it's very frustrating for me when people say my name wrong. She continued to say it wrong after that. From the jump, I felt like I was never really heard by her.” Whether or not students felt “seen” came up a number of times. Javier explained the difference between his two advisors being that he felt “unseen” by one of them:

I don't think there is anything about me that would stand out. And again, it's those things where aside from the structure and the required meeting time, there wasn't an outreach. It doesn't mean that you have to email me asking how I am after every week, but little things in class or remembering little anecdotes or things like that I think are important.

Javier did not feel that the advisor needed to reach out all the time, but would have appreciated some more initiation of communication and awareness of him as a student.

Alana also felt the absence of this interest, particularly because she saw it existing between other students and the professors:

During class discussions, it felt like a lot of the same teachers were getting called on by name a lot. And it felt like ‘My professor knows these people.’ And that may or may not have been the case, and it may have been those people took extra time to make sure that they were interacting with their professors a lot more than I was. …I also remember the passing of the baton and how it seemed that there was knowledge that my professors had of either what people were doing in their classroom or what people had been doing in Relay that made them choose those people. And I seemed to kind of know it was not going to be me.

This quote shows how aware students are of what professors are noticing about other people, and how it can feel if you are receiving different treatment. Alana noted that the student approach might have contributed to these connections, but that does not change how it felt to know she was on the outside. She wondered when these connections
developed and why she did not know the faculty members the way she observed other students did.

Effective feedback. Feedback that was personal and individual to students was one of the ways students felt their advisor was able to support their growth. Within the theme of investment in the individual, about 22% of the comments were about the feedback their advisor provided them. Nayima felt that her advisor was able to give her strong guidance because her advisor had an awareness of where she was and helped her to see it. This awareness led to her feeling that they “clicked.” Andre also valued the personal specificity in the feedback he received:

It wasn't generic. It was tied to things that I was actually proud of in my classroom, and a lot of the things I wanted to work on. [It was] also tied to things that we had discussed I was struggling with. It was attentive feedback that was focused on actually me.

There was some overlap between an advisor’s belief in a student’s ability and the feedback they gave. When asked how her advisor most influenced her success in the program, Olivia cited the impact of her advisor “pushing and knowing that I could do well.” That does not mean it was easy for her to see lower grades, but she felt that she grew because of it:

First of all, she was a very hard grader. Seeing my grade—and I'm an overachiever—seeing my grade not where I wanted it to be…could be so harsh. But, overall I think she just had high expectations, just as I would have for my students, and really just wanted me to succeed.

Leticia also discussed how her advisor’s feedback had pushed her because her advisor made her do the work. Her advisor supported her, but she did not do the work
“for her.” Through her advisor’s approach, she got an important message about her advisor’s belief in her capabilities:

You can do it on your own, you don’t need me to hold your hand. You can do this. You can do this. [She put] the heavy lifting back on to me. That's what we say about the kids, right? We trust that they can do it. Put the thinking on to them. So her putting the thinking on to me, that's what made me believe I could do it.

Both Leticia and Olivia likened their advisors’ feedback approach to what Relay teaches teachers to do with their students: keep high expectations of what your students are capable of doing, and make sure not to do the work for them. When students talked about an advisor’s high expectations, they indicated that it meant their advisor believed in them and trusted them, and that it ultimately helped build their self-confidence.

Similar to how students sized up an advisor’s authenticity, they also assessed whether or not they felt an advisor had the skills and knowledge to push their development adequately. Interestingly, an advisor’s knowledge and competency mostly came up in interviews if it was a problem. Two students who had different experiences with their advisors cited a “knowledge/experience” gap that made the difference. Tess described her frustration when the feedback she received was, “That was really good!” She wanted to feel more challenged by her advisor. Working with one advisor, Tess sensed a lack of experience and a resulting lack of crispness in the feedback: “I feel like a lot of the feedback he [gave] me was like ‘try this’ or ‘yeah, that'll work.’” She felt as if she had to figure out how to move forward with that advice, and it was not always enough for her to be successful. She did not think this was of mal-intent, but did feel a difference in the level of investment in her success:
Of course, I want to assume the best that both of my advisors expected me to succeed. However, one took her personal time, like times on the weekend to help address my areas in which I was struggling. That meant a lot to me. It wasn't like, “Just try this, or go on this module, or reread or fix this.” It was, “How can I help?”

She compared this experience to the one she had with her other advisor, whose competency helped her feel taken care of when she needed guidance or feedback: “There was never like a sign of doubt or uncertainty-- she knew what she was doing. She knew what was going on.”

Renee spoke about the importance of her advisor’s approach to supporting her when she need help, guidance, or feedback:

Anybody who can talk me off the ledge is somebody who believes in me, right? Because if you didn't believe then you would be like ‘Okay, girl, you think this is really hard? It is, bye.’ Or ‘Figure it out.’ That's never what I was left with. It was like, ‘Okay, this is really stressful for you…Let’s get you to understand this.’ I know that because my grades got better, and it wasn't because [my advisor] was like, ‘Okay let's give her a three.’ I know that wasn't the case, but my grades got better.

Renee explained that with this advisor she was able to receive feedback and help because her advisor knew her needs and was responsive to them. This excerpt directly connects the importance of knowing a student, showing you believe in them, and being able to provide feedback and guidance in such a way that they can work through challenges in learning and ultimately improve their performance. In the absence of an approach that works for the student, the opportunity to provide more clarity and impact learning is missed. Different advisors are likely going to have different approaches to feedback, but it seems that being aware of whether or not the student is able to receive and making use of the feedback is something an advisor needs to consider. Renee felt a great deal of
stress her first year because she felt like her advisor’s feedback was not helpful so she “gutted it out on her own.”

In addition to the potential stress related to feedback, having a visitor in the classroom during the first year of teaching can come with emotion. Javier, who said he really struggled during his first year in the classroom, and he felt this stress when his advisor came to see him teaching:

   So, I felt ... it was sort of like, embarrassing ... And I didn't know what she was seeing in other classrooms, so I was always trying to like, ‘Oh my God. She's going to come in here and see something awful and I'm going to look so bad.’ And it was sort of like, this intimidation like, ‘Oh my God, if she sees something so bad, what's gonna happen?’ I think that was a really big block for me in order to connect with [her].

Javier’s anxiety of feeling judged by his advisor was a barrier, which Javier said kept him from feeling as if he could connect with her. This disconnect then affected the observation experience for him. That said, Alana felt that she could get useful information from her advisor, even in the absence of a strong relationship:

   They were always nice to me, and they were helpful to me when I had a question, but I don't feel like I really knew them. I didn't know much about their teaching experience and things like that. The best interactions I had with my advisors were when they came to observe me, because that was the only time that I had a one-on-one conversation with them about my future practice, and I got a lot of feedback on it that I felt like I could implement.

This quote surfaces that an advisor could provide necessary supportive functions without a relationship. Alana still felt she benefited from the feedback her advisors provided.

In summary, with a few exceptions, students described the value of feeling that their advisors were invested in them as individuals. Advisors demonstrated this through a
communicated belief in the student, an awareness of the student as an individual, and the feedback they gave to support growth and development of the student.

**Theme 4: Advisor respect for students.** The final theme that emerged from the data was how advisors demonstrated that they respected graduate students. This includes whether advisors were interested in graduate students’ ideas and perspectives, as well as whether advisors treated students as intellectual peers. Almost 80% of the participants talked about concepts of respect when they described what helped to bolster or deplete a relational trust with their advisors.

**Interest in student ideas and perspectives.** How advisors demonstrated interest in student ideas and perspectives accounted for about 70% of the comments students made regarding feeling respected by their advisors. This category included how advisors responded to ideas that students surfaced—the intellectual interests of students, and student feedback to advisors themselves.

Renee said she felt respected because she and her advisor were able had “real” conversations and that this advisor wanted to hear her perspective in its true form:

I could critique the work. I got to say how I was really feeling without feeling like it was going to be backlash or even like, you know, judgment of my progress in the program... She listened to me without trying to finish my statements or claim to know how I felt being in that class and questioning my peer’s motivation or the program’s intention. I didn’t see myself opening up to anyone in the program, because I felt like I had an even heavier burden being a black woman teaching in a black community, and no one would or could understand. I was wrong. My advisor never claimed to understand, refute my points, or even boast about her own successes in the classroom. She just listened.

This description illuminates how an advisor can demonstrate respect by responding to student concerns by listening to understand, as opposed to listening to then try to prove a
point or shift the student’s thinking. There might be times for that, but generally, making space for critique and critical thinking without consequence is an important aspect of creating a respectful relationship. Conversely, Renee shared an experience with another faculty member where when she voiced concerns or alternative perspectives, it seemed to be perceived as a “threat” or a “personal attack.” This caused her to disengage in that class. She “shut down” and was not able to engage with students or the faculty in that space once she felt unheard and dismissed by raising her concerns.

David, who did not particularly value having a strong relationship, did share that he valued the climate of respect his advisors created:

[The] advisors that I worked with made an effort to welcome different perspectives. I don't think there was ever a moment that I can remember where people of a certain background were marginalized whether by explicitly or by telling the story from a very one sided perspective.

Without this climate, a student could feel less respected when they voiced their opinion, as Andre did. He shared, “It was kind of a refusal to engage with some of the ideas that I would sometimes bring up during class that made it feel like my voice, or like my alternative point of view wasn't appreciated as much, or at least not worth going into.” He noted that these interactions created a distance between him and his advisor. He had a much more positive experience his second year, where he felt “everyone's experience and opinion mattered, even though everyone's experience and opinions were different. I don't think anyone in the class ever felt invalidated by the time they spent in the class.”

Tess described an interaction that took place during a class when she told her advisor that she did not want to participate in the learning exercise they were doing. Her
advisor responded by saying, “Okay, I respect that, and two, I kind of want to know why.” From there, they engaged in a deeper conversation about Tess’s concerns with the activity, and Tess sent her advisor some additional readings on her perspective, which her advisor read. She said that this felt different from earlier experiences where other people have been “scared or backed away” from her when she “pushed back.” She valued that when she pushed back, her advisor “[rose] to the occasion…that means a lot to me.” Olivia explained that she felt comfortable giving her advisors survey feedback and never worried that she would be “shunned” or seen differently as a result of her opinions.

When Edwina had a question about a score she received, her advisor told her “‘You're allowed to advocate for yourself. You should. Send me an email.” She said that her advisor’s openness to her concerns made her feel valued and respected as his student. On the contrary, when Barry had questions about scores, he chose not to address it for fear it “could be taken negatively…I didn't want to rub people the wrong way…I wanted my reputation to be safe.”

_Treating students as colleagues._ The second sub-theme to emerge within the theme of respect was how advisors managed their power dynamic while in a position of authority working with adult students. Whether students felt that advisors treated them as colleagues (versus K-12 students) appeared 30% of the excerpts coded under respect. Showing respect for students as colleagues included how advisors responded to student lateness and absences and off-task students, as well as the flexibility and understanding about their other life responsibilities.
There was inconsistency in how students felt about their advisor’s monitoring of attendance. Nayima appreciated that her advisor took attendance and was aware of who was and was not at class. She felt that at class she was made to feel that she was “not just a number in here” and that even if she was not always as invested in her graduate work, her advisor was invested in her. She appreciated that her attendance was noticed, since it held her accountable and communicated that it mattered to her professor whether or not she was there.

It appeared that how advisors handled attendance, especially if it was a problem, could make a big impact on their rapport with the students. Students shared being frustrated when advisors reached out to them about attendance because they did not feel respected as adults. Crystal remembered “passive aggressive” comments made about people not in attendance that annoyed her. Jimena felt that she was treated unfairly by one of her advisors because of attendance. She said that she sensed this advisor did not like her because she had missed class, and thus, she was even less inclined to come to class.

Crystal, who had made a decision not to attend classes but keep up on her work on her own, was impressed when despite her absences her advisor reached out to her specifically to let her know about an elective in which he thought she would be interested. She felt that this demonstrated a respect for her decision, and that her advisor was interested in helping her find topics that interested her.

Oscar, who had initially worried about having to prove himself as a Latino male to his White female advisor, said the shift in their relationship occurred in the “first five
minutes.” When I asked him how this happened, he said things changed for him when he was late to the first class. He was nervous about being late and the impression it would make:

‘Oh my God, it's the first time I'm going to meet her, so what is she going to think of me?’ First impressions are huge, they're really important. I sat down, we greet. When I saw her, she gave me a nice beautiful smile. She told me, ‘I got you, relax. It's okay, I understand.’ She had me. She made me feel heard, first of all, because she heard me. The train was late, and she was like, ‘I got you, it’s okay, let's get to work.’ I can't begin to describe the feeling. I felt heard and supported.

Edwina had a similar experience where she was concerned about what her advisor thought about her being late because she had to drop her kids off at the baby sitter between her school day and class:

I felt like she was probably kind of looking at me like [she does not] ‘care about people's time, doesn't respect people's time.’ But as soon as I explained my situation, she was like, ‘Oh my God. Thanks for telling me.’… So if there's a way that professors can communicate that, because you never know what people are going through.

These stories about how advisors approached students regarding attendance and tardiness were some of the most vivid memories students shared, and appeared to be central in how they felt about their advisors.

In addition to responding to timeliness, there were ways in which professors conducted themselves during class that could either communicate trust or make students feel like children. Nayima likened this experience to a “high school study hall.” On class days where students were asked to come in and do work on their assessments, she said it “felt like someone was looking over your shoulder. If you wanted to take a break to grade a couple papers, I felt like I wasn't supposed to.” This speaks to students feeling that they
were being watched, but not from a place of trust or support. Renee talked about her advisor was able to hold her accountable in a way that did feel adult appropriate:

I get frustrated, [and] I shut down. I don't talk to nobody. I just want to get done with things and be out. She didn't care. She didn't care about that. She still kept coming over, and prepared me for certain things in small ways. Even if that was just proximity… a check-in in a way that wasn't judgmental. It wasn't patronizing. Even if we were doing group work and my group got off a little subject, she might join us for five seconds and get us back together but it wasn't like, “Oh, I need to stand over here and be the authority figure.

The difference in how advisors approached what one might think of as “adult accountability” made a difference for students. It appeared that if a student experienced frustration at how an advisor treated them on a topic, such as attendance or class engagement, it was difficult for the student to respond as productively as possible to their instruction, guidance, or feedback.

Students shared that they felt respected and valued when advisors provided them with flexibility and understanding. Oscar recalled how this understanding influenced the level of support he felt:

‘Oscar, if you need an extra week or two to hand in that assignment, I got you, I understand. I support you.’ I thanked her with open arms. There were days that my kids were sick and I needed to take care of home. That support…there's no price for that. She understood that I had a family, and let's face it, family is first. I love my education, but my children are my children and she saw that, also. She valued that. For me, that means everything to me.

Martina appreciated that she felt her advisor saw her not just as an advisee, but also a “friend and a co-worker.” She felt like they saw each other as mutual “resources” to each other.
In summary, there are commonalities in what graduate students at Relay felt contributed to a strong relationship with their advisors: the degree of authenticity they perceived, their advisor’s communication and interpersonal skills, feeling as though their advisor was invested in them as an individual, and how their advisor conveyed respect for them as adults. The majority of students felt that their advisor(s) influenced their success at Relay. Specific ways that their advisors impacted students included their own self-confidence, developing in response to feedback, and navigating the programmatic coursework and requirements successfully.

The findings of this qualitative study show that there are trends in what students believe contributes to having trusting relationships with their advisors. Students cited their advisor’s authenticity, communication and interpersonal skills, investment in students as individuals, and their respect for students as major considerations. The next chapter discusses the implications of these findings.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

There is a need to diversify the teacher workforce in the context of K-12 education. There are many benefits to having a diverse teaching population (Casey, Di Carlo, Bond, & Quintero, 2015), not the least being that having teachers of color can influence the academic achievement of students of color (Dee, 2004; Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015). At present, the diversity of the K-12 student population has outpaced its teacher workforce, which remains predominantly White (Ingersoll, Merrill, Stuckey, 2014). There are a number of things to consider in rectifying this inequity, including improving the experience of teachers of color in their teacher preparation programs. Knowing that in higher education more broadly, graduate students of color report feeling disadvantaged in their experiences with advisors (Noy & Ray, 2012), it is important for Relay, as a degree granting institution of higher education, to pay close attention to how students of color experience advisement within the program. The purpose of this study was to learn about the experience of graduate students of color at Relay in advisement and better understand how advisors can build strong and trusting relationships with their graduate students of color as a way to support building a more racially diverse K-12 teaching force.

Connections to the Literature

Considering the conceptual framework of this study, strong relationships can increase a graduate student’s social capital by providing access to more knowledge and resources (Coleman, 1988; Bordieu, 1986). The findings of this study suggest that strong, trusting relationships with Relay advisors can positively influence their success in the
program as students navigate becoming a teacher, and that there are specific attributes that contribute to building those relationships.

In my study, the components that surfaced as necessary for trust were consistent with many of the findings of the literature reviewed. Bryk and Schneider (2003) defined the components of trust as respect, personal regard, competency in core responsibilities, and personal integrity. My study affirms these aspects of trust, as students who trusted their advisors spoke about these same themes. For example, students spoke about the importance of feeling respected by their advisor, observing their advisor go “above and beyond” to reach out to them, the competency of their advisor, and their follow through and reliability (e.g., integrity). My study also surfaced “authenticity” as essential to building a trusting relationship, which is consistent with McLennan’s (2014) definition of trust, which includes authenticity, competency, and integrity. In my study, students felt trust could not develop without authenticity, and issues with competency fractured trust and rapport.

In terms of the impact of trust, Bryk and Schneider (2003) found that increased relational trust allowed for better problem solving and functionality in the schools they studied. In this study, students who trusted their advisors felt more satisfied in their ability to problem-solve together, which they felt supported their academic performance. Additionally, Leana (2011) found that teachers were more likely to ask questions of colleagues that they trusted where they felt “safer,” noting the increased vulnerability and risk in asking someone in a position of authority, such as a principal. These findings on the importance of trust are consistent with the findings of my study While the educational
context is different (K-12 versus higher education), the graduate students, who are most often new teachers just as the participants of Leana’s study, shared similar worries about feeling vulnerable with advisors before trust was built. Once they had established trust, they shared multiple examples of feeling they could talk to their advisors about “anything,” as Olivia said in my study. Students who had strong relationships with their advisors were also more likely to communicate with their advisors outside of class, thus increasing their access to information, resources, and support. When students did not feel trust with their advisors, as in the case of Keisha and Jimena, they resisted working with these advisors, indicating that the absence of a relationship can hinder social capital, while strong relational bonds can serve as a path to necessary information, materials, support, even after the formal structure of the connection is removed.

Lechuga (2011) surfaced three main descriptors for faculty-graduate student relationships: allies, ambassadors, and master-teachers. These roles are consistent with the findings of this study, where students cited the impact of the academic guidance and moral support from their advisors (“advisor” role), as well as the feedback and instruction of their advisors (“master-teacher” role). The “ambassador” role, which encompasses “socialization” of students into the activities of the field (Lechuga, 2011, p. 768) was not present in my study, likely because this role is more relevant in graduate schools that focus on research and publication.

Noy and Ray’s (2012) study revealed a “mentoring glass ceiling” where women of color “get material support but not interpersonal” support. There was evidence in my study that women of color at Relay often did experience interpersonal support from their
advisors. More specifically, 71 out of the 85 (83.5%) survey respondents of color (both male and female) indicated they had experienced a positive relationship with at least one of their advisors. Each of the 18 interview participants in my study had experienced a positive relationship with at least one of their advisors. When describing why they felt positively about their advisors, participants consistently referenced the interpersonal nature of their advisors. In Noy and Ray’s (2012) study, African American women rated their advisors the lowest for demonstrating respect (as compared to White men, White women, and African American men). My study did not measure the degree to which attributes were experienced, but feeling respected did emerge as an important aspect of relationship building and trust with my participants through interview discussions. In alignment with Noy and Ray (2012), my interview participants felt respected by their advisors when their ideas and perspectives were valued. Many participants, including African American women, shared that they did experience respectful relationships with their advisors. My study adds context for how the feeling of respect can be diminished as well: when graduate students felt they were being treated like a K-12 student as opposed to adult learners, they felt disrespected as learners, which hindered trust and rapport.

The literature highlights communication as a major component to effective relationships, particularly along lines of racial difference. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero’s (2007) case study highlighted the importance of communication to build trust in a successful mentoring relationship across lines of racial difference. Their research surfaced the importance of having explicit conversations about experiences related to race, and acknowledgement of racism. This is consistent with the findings of my study,
where students voiced the importance of their advisor being self-aware of their racial identity, and able to explicitly and comfortably name racial differences between them and their students. To do this requires a level of racial literacy, which was not prevalent in much of the literature on successful mentoring and advisement. Stevenson (2013) outlines how important racial literacy is to successful relationships in schools. My findings support this notion. Students experienced racially charged moments in class at Relay, including text discussions, micro-aggressions between students, and stressful racial incidents, and they were very aware of their advisor’s ability to navigate these interactions. In classes where students trusted their advisor’s ability to guide the class effectively in discussion of race or moments of racial tension, students felt that productive and important conversations could take place. In other instances, students spoke about instructors who did not have the necessary awareness or skill to navigate these moments, and that this deficit negatively influenced their relationships and trust with these faculty members.

Overall, many of the aspects of trust and building rapport with their advisors was consistent with previous findings about what contributes to trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; McLennan, 2014). In my study, students of color at Relay discussed similar attributes and considerations that have been historically linked to trust. However, much like Johnson-Bailey and Cervero’s (2007) case study, specific considerations arose for creating trust with graduate students of color. For example, racial literacy and feeling respected were not included as aspects of trust in all of the literature reviewed but were present in studies that included graduate students of color (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero,
2007; Noy & Ray, 2012). Paying attention to these nuances in building trust will be essential to creating strong and trusting relationships for graduate students of color.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Next, I discuss how this research can contribute to the field. The following section outlines how to translate the findings of the study into action for advisors or mentors of new teachers of color. The study revealed clear conditions and criteria for positive, trusting, impactful relationships for graduate students of color at Relay, and this section provides guidance to act on these findings.

**Proposition 1.** Initial interactions are important in cross-racial relationships. The first encounter provides an opportunity for an advisor to defuse racial stress by authentically demonstrating who they are and what they believe in as educators. The findings of this study indicate that graduate students of color are likely to feel race-related stress before they build rapport with their advisors. Students spoke of the impression they felt they needed to make as a person of color, and how they kept their guard up before they trusted somebody, especially across lines of racial difference. If advisors are to be effective for students of color, they need to be aware that these feelings can exist, particularly given that advisors might not have ever experienced these feelings themselves (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2007).

While most participants did not feel that they had experienced “racial stress” at Relay, they all spoke about scenarios where they felt vulnerable or stressed out that appeared linked to racial identity. There were trends in when these feelings occurred: being late to class or missing a class, not submitting an assignment on time, or needing to
ask for help with an assignment. If an advisor is the go-to person for students when these situations occur, then this potential barrier of trust is increasingly important to mitigate if the advisor is to effectively support the success of the student. How advisors react in these moments can make a difference for students—specifically, how advisors respond to lateness or absences stood out as a way to either build trust and rapport by showing understanding, or to distance graduate students by communicating disappointment or a lack of compassion.

While relationships and trust develop over time, first impressions proved to be very important as students are “testing the water,” as Renee described it. Many students referenced moments from their first encounter with their advisor when they explained what contributed to their feelings about their advisor. When advisors introduce themselves, graduate students are assessing their authenticity, comfortability, and competence. Graduate students said they want to hear why their advisor is in the field of urban education, and why teaching children of color matters to their advisor personally. These components can easily be included in an instructor’s introduction to students, thus opening access and creating connections from the start.

Demonstrating self-awareness and an authentic commitment to improving education for students of color was noted positively when students believed it was genuine. They appreciated when their advisor’s purpose in education aligned with their interests in becoming a teacher. In cross-racial contexts, specifically when an advisor was White, how advisors talk about their former experiences working with children of color was an indication to graduate students of color how that advisor might feel about working
with them. Off-putting comments about working with children of color can add another layer of racial stress or distance. Thus, advisors should reflect on how they speak about their experiences in the classroom, and why they are teachers. Sharing this part of their story with humility and awareness can help graduate students better understand their advisors’ view of their role as teachers as it relates to identity.

**Proposition 2.** Advisors working with teachers of color can build stronger relationships if they have strong racial literacy skills. This study’s survey revealed that students were less comfortable engaging with advisors about issues of race and diversity or telling advisors about racial stress they had experienced. Some students shared in their interviews that they rated these questions as neutral (a “3”) on the Likert scale, not because they were uncomfortable, but because they had not experienced such discussions with their advisors. But the absence of these conversations is important, especially given that many students described conditions that did create racial stress (even though graduate students did not necessarily name it as such). Overall, the interviews suggested that the strongest cross-racial relationships were those where these conversations could and did happen comfortably. Graduate students specifically noted advisors who appeared comfortable with their own identity and had the language and awareness talk about issues of racial equity and identity in education. In the absence of an advisor of the same racial background where trust and comfortability might occur more naturally (Patton, 2004), advisors need to be not only comfortable and skilled, but also invite the conversation. Students might not want to initiate these conversations, or they might assume that the advisor does not have interest or knowledge in these areas. In addition, what advisors
choose to talk about and spend time on in class communicates what they value. Students with advisors who prioritized these discussions in class understood that topics of race and identity were important to their advisors, and that helped them feel as though they were on the same page as educators.

Approach and facilitation matters more than just having the conversations. While it might be tempting to try to relate or bond over “sameness,” graduate students appreciated when advisors were willing to name their personal experiences related to identity makers, and not assume that they understood what students had experienced or that there was a shared experience. In cross-racial relationships, explicitly naming differences and listening to the stories and truths of others to understand them as an individuals, as opposed to trying to relate to one’s own experience, can help bridge difference and build trust (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). There is inherently a power dynamic in the advisor/student relationship, and there are likely potential power dynamics related to identity markers as well. There is a risk of feeling “unheard” in communication within a power dynamic (Deplit, 1988), so creating space to hear other people’s stories is an important way to exhibit interest in and better understand an individual. Taking time to have these discussions, whether with the whole class or in one-on-one interactions is important.

**Proposition 3.** Advisors can treat students with respect as individuals by showing interest in their perspectives, their individual stories, and their growth. Students valued working with an advisor who demonstrated respect for them as a colleague. They appreciated having their perspectives and ideas considered without judgement, and
knowing that their advisor was there for them, as an individual. Students wanted to work with advisors who communicated a belief in their potential through moral support and constructive feedback that would push them to be better.

Grossman and Davis (2012) discuss that strong mentoring needs to include more than just moral support, though I think some of these examples were more than moral support—more like guidance or feedback on more personal matters. That said, this study also found that graduate students considered their advisor’s feedback on their practice in how they assessment the impact of having a relationship. The best feedback from advisors felt personal and specific, that advisors considered the individual, as opposed to providing “cookie-cutter” responses. Students were open to high expectations and being pushed; they wanted their advisor to hold them to a high standard because it communicated that the advisor believed they could achieve it. They also said that knowing their advisor believed in them personally mattered—this sentiment could be communicated both explicitly and implicitly, through a variety of behaviors. When they felt like their advisor believed in them and reveled in student successes as their own, it changed the feedback dynamic. With a trusting relationship, advisors can give tough feedback and push their students to higher levels. Without trust and rapport, tough feedback can come across as “nit-picky” or unreasonable.

Students appreciated when advisors took time to listen to the challenges they were facing—students referenced talking about school related challenges such as leadership conflicts, as well as personal life issues such as moving or a family emergency. Feeling that their advisor was there to be a problem-solver or a sounding board was another way
relationships grew stronger. In some cases, these discussions included professional advice; in others, it was more personal. Students referenced trusting their advisor’s perspective, and that the guidance provided really made a difference for them. However, it takes trust for a student to open up to an advisor this way.

**Proposition 4.** Being available and accessible matters, as it communicates whether an advisor cares about the student and their success. Advisors need to be explicit about the support they can provide and then follow through on it. Students who felt their advisors had supported their successes were impressed by the amount of communication and availability they had with their advisors. Access by email, texts, office hours, before and after class exchanges were all frequently referenced as ways they felt supported. It seems logical that being able to reach your advisor easily and hear back from them in a timely manner would contribute to getting the information needed and being able to move forward. What I had not realized before this study was how much responses, or lack thereof, contributed to whether or not a graduate student felt cared for by their advisor. Quick responses sent the message that the graduate student was a priority, that their advisor understood their busy schedules and wanted to get them an answer back quickly. The amount of time advisors spent with students communicated to students that their advisor was invested in them.

Students mentioned office hours, extra classroom observations, and even meeting over the weekends as ways their advisors had gone “above and beyond” for them. These supports seemed to merge the idea of an advisor being “available” with an advisor demonstrating a vested interest in and care for the student’s success. Multiple
access points can serve as a way for students to get information and knowledge, but also to build trust with their advisor. Many students referenced that it was in these spaces that they had time to talk and get to know their advisor. They valued when their advisor was vulnerable about challenges she had faced, such as the first year of teaching. Hearing that their advisor had gone through these times and was able to succeed helped them feel more at ease with their current challenges.

Noy and Ray (2012) include “available” as one of the traits they measured and specifically point out that an advisor’s perceived availability does not necessarily mean they are “respectful.” The responses I received from Relay graduate students indicate that there might be a relationship between availability and the graduate student feeling respected. One graduate student who had trouble with an advisor’s availability felt that this was an indication that the advisor did not care, as opposed to something unrelated to the relationship (e.g., being busy, or having different communication preferences). If advisors can be more transparent about their availability, there is more of a chance that students will access it. Many students shared that when advisors reached out to them, they were more likely to come to office hours or get the help they needed. If advisors adopted a mindset that their role is to help students access the supports they can provide, it could help more students feel important and seen by their advisors.

Adherence to these propositions will make Relay advisors more likely to build strong and trusting relationships with their students. These criteria make strong and trusting relationships more likely, which will allow for better support and development of graduate students toward their goal to complete the program and be effective teachers.
themselves. It is important for advisors to remember that they are always in a position of modeling the same behaviors and mindsets that they would want their graduate students exhibiting with their K-12 students.

Based on these findings, Relay, and other teacher training programs, can strengthen the experience of new teachers of color by paying careful attention to the relationships and trust students experience while in the program. Teacher training programs should be aware of the racial demographics of their student body and their faculty. Institutions can strengthen the student and faculty experience by having a racially diverse faculty and student body such that students and faculty can interact across racial lines of sameness and difference. Relay, which has sought to have both a diverse faculty and student body, needs to support all advisors to be effective with their students of color. Considering the propositions determined by this study, Relay advisors would benefit from being aware of specific knowledge and approaches valued by study participants.

Of course, not all students of any group will want the same thing from their advisors. And yet, there were themes in what participants said they valued from and advisor, and what they felt hindered their work with their advisors. First, adopting a framework that encourages advisors to ensure that students feel “seen and heard” at Relay could strengthen relationships and improve the student experience. To do so, advisors must embrace mindsets and behaviors that actively demonstrate their belief and investment in all of their students. This might mean rejecting some of the traditional approaches of graduate schools, where students might be expected to be able to figure things out on their own. Relay advisors can maintain very high expectations of their
students while simultaneously communicating their belief in the graduate student’s ability to be academically successful and grow and develop into a strong and effective teacher. Advisors should communicate openly and frequently with students demonstrating awareness, care, and belief in them. Being available to students makes a big difference in feeling supported, confident in solving problems, and trusting their advisors’ interest in their success.

In addition to being accessible, advisors should build their knowledge and skills to strengthen their communication skills, specifically building competencies of racial literacy. In order to responsibly instruct new teachers, faculty must be prepared to facilitate discussions about race and identity, and effectively address moments of racial stress. To do this, being self-aware in terms of racial identity is necessary for an advisor to engage with students on these matters with a depth of reflection and insight. Advisors should spend time building their own self-awareness of racial identity, and be informed about the current contexts and experiences of new teachers of color in K-12 spaces and graduate school.

**Limitations**

This study investigates the experience of graduate students of color with their advisors in the context of Relay’s M.A.T. alternative route certification program. One limitation of this study is that it is specific to the Relay context, and thus, the findings are not generalizable for other contexts. Advisement at Relay operates according to a specific model, outlined in Chapter 1, and other teacher preparation programs or institutions of
higher education operate differently, meaning that what students need, value, or want from someone in an advisement role could differ.

In Chapter 3, I discuss concerns of positionality given that at the time of the study I served as Associate Dean of the New York campus, and these concerns apply to my interpretation of the findings as well. I have served as an advisor for many years; I have my own biases about what matters in a strong relationship with advisees at Relay based on my experiences with students and from coaching professors who serve as advisors. My role and positionality also could affect the participants who decided to participate. For one, many of the alumni I reached out to for participation knew me either as a professor, a dean, or an advisor. While I executed my methodology to limit the impact of these connections, it is important to note that there could be noise there. If alumni knew me, depending on how they felt about me, they might be more or less willing to participate.

Second, is also important to note that participants of color were being asked to share their experience with a White female in a position of authority, which could influence their comfort in sharing their true feelings and experiences, affecting the data. My identity as a White female will inherently limit my ability to analyze and comprehend the experiences of my participants, as I am not a person of color. I can only listen to the experiences shared and do my best to interpret them, realizing my depth of understanding will be limited.

On the topic of participation, when asking for opt-in participation, it is likely that people who decide to participate are doing so because of how they feel about the topic at
hand, either negatively or positively. Thus, in addition to a small sample size, it is difficult to know whether this sample of graduate students represents how the larger student body feels about their experiences with their advisors. Additionally, it is possible that people who felt positively about Relay and their advisors would be more likely respond to an emailed survey. As discussed in Chapter 4, survey responses were largely positive in rating the strength of their relationship with their advisors, and this could be because more satisfied alumni were more inclined to respond. Additionally, 18 interviews is a small sample size such that generalizing findings for other populations is problematic.

In an effort to increase sample size, this study grouped participants in a broad, non-specific category of historically underrepresented racial groups. This grouping provides some insight to what non-dominant groups might experience, but it limits understanding of the nuances related to more specific groups, including racial identities, as well as the intersectionality of other identity markers: gender, sexual orientation, first generation college students, and class. Relatedly, participants experienced advisors who were of different racial and gender identities (and all other markers). As a result, this study speaks in broad strokes about the student experience and cross-racial advisement experiences, but it does not provide a comprehensive look at what different groups experience in specific relational contexts.

There are several limitations given that the participants were all program alumni. For one, by reaching out to program alumni, graduate students who did not complete the program are not included. Knowing how students who were not successful in the program
experienced their advisors is important to understand the impact of advisement. It is likely that this group would have different perspectives on what they valued and what they wanted from advisors. Second, reaching out to the past three classes of alumni helped increase the number of participants, but it also meant collecting data from people who are distanced from the program. Not only can perspectives shift and memories fade, but also Relay as a program has changed and evolved in the past three years. Talking to current students would provide perspectives based on the program as it is now executed, and participants might be those who do not make it through the program.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

In conjunction with the limitations outlined above, I can recommend subsequent studies that could deepen our understanding of the graduate student experience with advisement relationships and their advisors influence their programmatic success. First, I recommend a larger scale study that speaks with current students about their experiences at present as program participants. This would build knowledge of the program in its current state, and could reveal different outcomes. In planning this study, I also recommend determining a more specific group of teachers to focus on, depending on institutional data and current areas of growth. This group could be defined by tighter demographic groupings (i.e., Black females), to more fully understand the experience of a specific subgroup. To understand cross-racial relationships, a larger study could look for trends between different matches (e.g., Black males being advised by White females), which would help identify considerations in specific contexts.
Additionally, it is important to talk with students who have had less positive experiences at Relay. Including students who have been less successful by programmatic measures (e.g., students who have been in academic probation based on grade point average) would provide a more varied sense of the student experience. A larger study could also include faculty perspectives, as this group might have different perspectives on faculty behaviors that lead to strong relationships, as well as insight on student behaviors that lead to strong relationships, which this study did not investigate.

To better understand some of my own findings, I recommend future studies that are designed to measure impact more precisely. For example, studies of treatment and control groups could help to measure the impact of interventions. Is there a difference in relational trust across lines of racial difference in faculty who have received professional development to increase racial literacy? Alternatively, does a specific advisement approach (e.g., 30-minute introductory meetings where students and faculty share their specific interests, motivations, and expectations for their working relationship) change how students feel about their advisor? It would be interesting to test whether increased knowledge or specific approaches make a difference for students.

Furthermore, when asked about the general environment at Relay, many participants referenced feeling that Relay’s environment was inclusive, not only because of their advisor’s actions, but also because of the diversity of the student body. Several remarked that they saw people that “looked like them,” or that Relay showed them, “Wow, these things can happen,” as they had not experienced this level of racial diversity in other educational settings. Experiencing a more racially diverse cohort could
contribute to a greater sense of belonging such that the race of the advisor matters less, as there is a greater sense of belonging generally at the institution. How students of color experience their classmates and how diversity of a student body impacts their experience could inform recruitment and admissions strategies in support of new teachers of color.

**Final Thoughts**

Institutions can measure the strength of their programs by graduation rates, attrition rates, or demographic quotas. But none of such metrics consider the experience of the people during the program. When academia thinks about goals for historically underrepresented groups of graduate students, making it into the institution and out of the institution cannot be enough. How individuals experience the institution is also crucial. If institutions of higher education maintain that they are committed to providing equitable experiences for racially diverse students, then they need to consider whether their faculties are committed to examining their approach to student relationships and the role of trust, specifically racial trust. Without this commitment, including making necessary shifts and pursuing required learning, an institution’s ability to provide an equitable experience and education is compromised. This study offers guidance for how to improve the experience between acceptance and graduation for students of color. The propositions presented in this chapter support efforts to provide a more equitable experience in advisement. Without this commitment to self-examination and change in approach, students of color are at risk of experiencing less trust in their relationships with faculty, and as a result, less access to knowledge, resources, and connections.
There were clear trends about the importance of authenticity and effective communication, as well as the desire to feel known and respected as a student. For the majority of interview participants, the strong and trusting relationships they experienced were meaningful to their experience and their success at Relay. Making strong advising relationships accessible to all of our students needs to be a priority for advisement at Relay going forward. The findings offer specific ways that Relay as an organization, as well as advisors in higher education as individuals, can strive to provide more positive experiences in advisement for students of color.

In probing specifically about relationships and trust from the perspective of our students of color, it became clear to me that there are criteria for what I would think of as “general” trust, and additional criteria for what could be considered “racial trust;” or the factors that contribute to building trust across lines of difference. Too often, we fail to acknowledge how identity markers contribute or influence conditions or phenomena. This study underscored for me the importance of acknowledging the racial considerations that can factor into our work as advisors. My next steps include building advisors’ awareness of the criteria that this study revealed for building racial trust. Advisors, specifically White advisors, would benefit from exploring the specifics of what can contribute to strong relationships that they might not be aware of from their own experiences as students.

As a leader at Relay who supports faculty development, I can use the learnings from this study to drive faculty development and aid advisors in strengthening their work as advisors for students of color. I can share the findings of my study with faculty and
facilitate discussion to better understand how racial identity markers can influence a student’s relationship and trust with their advisor. Faculty members can analyze student quotes and reflect on the implications for their work as advisors in the coming year. To foster growth and improvement, faculty members can identify specific goals for improvement, with aligned action steps designed to improve their advisement by building stronger trust with their advisees of color (e.g., communication response rate, specificity of feedback, or building racial literacy). To nurture collaboration and maintain focus on these goals, faculty members with related goals can support each other’s learning and development across the year. Faculty managers can provide accountability measures by evaluating progress at designated benchmarks throughout the year. At scheduled intervals across the year, faculty members at the New York campus participate in small group discussion protocols designed to share perspectives and deepen understanding of our work with advisees. These meetings can serve as a space for faculty to reflect on their progress and identify next steps with input from colleagues. At the conclusion of the year, faculty members can reflect on their progress toward goals, evaluate the impact, and select a new area of focus for the following year. This cycle of reflection, goal setting, action steps, and progress monitoring can continue yearly, and be built upon as new data is collected on student experience in the future.

Additionally, Relay has a research series called “Aperio,” where faculty members share the findings of their research projects with the larger institution. I can use this platform to share the findings of this study with Relay staff members beyond the teaching faculty who work directly with students: office of enrollment, registrar, financial
aid, etc. In this presentation I can include the major themes as well as relevant student quotes to increase perspective-taking and deepen awareness of our students’ narratives. This can contribute to a stronger sense of the student experience in interactions to create a shared understanding and approach to guide interactions and reflections at the organization level.

Experiencing the practice of collecting data and learning from the results of this study pushed my thinking in terms of how I spend my time as a leader at Relay. My personal commitment at the conclusion of this study is to prioritize hearing about the student experience. Talking to alumni and hearing their graduate student stories was certainly the most beneficial aspect of this research for me. I reflected that I tend to spend most of my time as a leader in the region speaking with faculty members and other institutional members about our programming, plans for the future, and approaches to problem-solving. Going forward, I want to ensure that student voice is included in my work in a purposeful and intentional way so that I may use this feedback to improve our institution. One way I will do that with my own advisees is to collect regular data about their experience in my class. In addition to the institutional student survey that is administered twice per year, I will administer surveys at the end of each class night. I will include questions designed not only to gauge student learning of the content, but also to understand their experience and their advisement needs. Two questions that can help me better understand the student experience on a nightly interval are “What moments in this session did you feel meaningfully included?” and “What opportunities were there when your instructor could have been more inclusive?” These questions can help surface
whether or not a student feels included, a term which I think incorporates feeling respected, valued, and seen as an individual in the class. By asking specifically if there are ways I can be more inclusive can surface next steps for improvement. I will also always ask if students have advisement questions or needs, so that this feedback can be shared regularly and they get the sense that I seek their perspective on advisement. I will encourage my faculty team to also ask these questions and reflect on the student responses together as a part of development in teaching and advisement.

Lastly, I want to find ways to continue to collect data and observe how students are experiencing Relay. This study made clear to me how important larger scale investigations designed to answer specific questions that will inform the institution. Studies such as this one can and need to be conducted regularly, with the goal of hearing about the experiences and perspectives of students that might not otherwise have the opportunity to share, or whose unique experience might be lost within larger, less nuanced data sets. Without such dedicated research, we are limiting our understanding of our work and missing opportunities to improve. To make real change for historically underrepresented groups of students, this study needs to serve only as a beginning to learning about the experiences of our students.
Appendix A: Permission Letter

Anne-Marie Hoxie  
Chief Research Officer  
40 West 20th St, 7th Floor  
New York, NY 10011  

The Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania  
Mid-Career Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership  

March 2, 2017  

Dear Members of the Mid-Career Doctoral Program,  

I write to grant my consent to Annie Ferrell, a doctoral student in the Mid-Career Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of Pennsylvania, to use de-identified academic, demographic, and interview data from Relay’s alumni and student body in her Graduate School of Education dissertation. This consent is, of course, contingent on Ms. Ferrell’s successful completion of the University of Pennsylvania’s IRB process.  

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at ahoxie@relay.edu.  

Sincerely,  

Anne-Marie Hoxie  
Chief Research Officer
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear [Name],

If we haven’t met, my name is Annie Ferrell, and I serve as Associate Dean of Relay New York. I had the pleasure of working with your cohort when you were at Relay, and I appreciate you taking a moment to read this email. This request is from me personally, not on behalf of Relay as an institution.

I am currently working on my doctorate in educational leadership at UPenn. My dissertation research seeks to learn more about how Relay graduate students experience trust and communication with their advisors, looking at same-racial identity pairings and cross-racial pairings.

I am reaching out because I hope to hear as many voices as possible—participation is completely optional, and greatly appreciated.

Please know that the purpose of this study is to learn more about the student experience at Relay and hopefully contribute to the literature on advisement, support of new teachers, and trust and communication across lines of racial difference. The purpose is not to evaluate instructors or students in any way, and the survey can be taken anonymously, if you prefer.

The survey shouldn’t take more than 5-7 minutes-- I’ll leave it open for the next week should you choose to participate:

<survey link>

Thank you so much—I hope our paths cross soon.

Yours,

Annie Ferrell
Appendix C: Graduate Student Alumni Survey
Survey for Graduate Student Alumni (sent to all graduates of 2017, 2016, 2015)

Demographics
1. Name:
2. With which racial group do you identify:
   • Black/African American
   • White
   • Hispanic/Latino
   • Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   • Native American
   • I prefer not to respond
3. With which gender do you most identify:
   • Male
   • Female
   • Trans-Gender
   • Gender-Neutral
   • I prefer not to respond
4. My Year 1 advisor and I belonged to the same racial identity group: yes/no/unsure
5. My Year 2 advisor and I belonged to the same racial identity group: yes/no/unsure
6. Overall, I had a positive experience as a graduate student at Relay.
   (5 pt Likert Scale: 1-Strongly Disagree; 2-Disagree; 3-Neutral; 4-Agree; 5- Strongly Agree)

YEAR ONE/YEAR 2 ADVISOR (participants were asked to complete these questions for each of the advisors they worked with in Years 1 and 2 of the program, respectively)

Please answer the following questions about your experiences with your Year 1 advisor:
(5 pt Likert Scale: 1-never; 2-rarely; 3-sometimes; 4-often; 5- all the time)

7. I had a positive relationship with my advisor.
8. I trusted my advisor.
9. My relationship with my advisor contributed positively to my experience at Relay.
10. My advisor contributed to my success as a K-12 teacher in the classroom.
11. My advisor had the necessary knowledge to support my development as a teacher.
12. My advisor was competent in communicating knowledge about the racial or diversity politics of becoming a teacher.
13. My advisor followed through on commitments and deadlines.
14. My advisor demonstrated belief in my ability to succeed.
15. My advisor demonstrated a commitment to my growth and success.
16. I felt comfortable talking freely about the academic difficulties I was having as a graduate student with my advisor.

17. I felt comfortable talking freely about the difficulties I was having as a K-12 teacher with my advisor.

18. My advisor was comfortable with disagreement or challenges in class discussions.

19. My advisor was comfortable if the topic of race or diversity arose in our conversations.

20. My advisor encouraged questions and discussion regarding diversity matters in learning to become a teacher.

21. I felt comfortable bringing up topics regarding race or diversity with my advisor.

22. If I was to experience racial discomfort at Relay, I would feel comfortable bringing it up with my Year 1 advisor.

23. Is there anything you'd like to share about trust, communication, or your general experience with your Year 2 advisor? (Open-ended)


Further Participation:

Are you willing to share more information on your experience by participating further in this study? (yes/no)

If yes, Preferred email:
Appendix D: Consent Statement

Dissertation Study: Graduate Student Experience with Relay Advisement

1. Invitation to Participate and Description of the Project. My name is Annie Ferrell and I am an Ed.D. candidate at The University of Pennsylvania. I would like to understand strengths and areas of growth in Relay New York’s advisement. Thus, my study will focus on learning more about the perceptions of our graduate students. You are being asked to participate in this study.

Your participation in the research study is voluntary. Before agreeing to be part of this study, please read the following information carefully. Feel free to ask questions if you do not understand something.

1. Description of Procedure. If you participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview-style conversation or a focus group in the fall of 2017. With permission, these conversations will be audio-recorded.

2. Risks and Inconveniences. If you ever feel uncomfortable responding to a question, please know that you can choose not to answer certain questions, take a break and continue later, or choose to stop the interview.

3. Benefits. This study was designed to foster a better understanding of the strengths and areas of growth of our advisement, which will allow leaders and instructors at Relay to work toward improving the model. It will also provide graduate students with a chance to voice their opinions in a way that protects their identities.

4. Confidentiality. Your name will not be shared with anyone at any point. You will not be identified individually in any way as a result of your participation in this research. The data collected, including recordings and transcripts of the interviews, may be used as part of publications and presentations related to discipline and education.

5. Voluntary Participation. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this research. Such refusal will not have any negative consequences for you. If you begin to participate in the research, you may at any time, for any reason, discontinue your participation without any negative consequences.

6. Other considerations and questions. Feel free to call or email me, Annie Ferrell, if you have any questions. I can be reached at 347-834-7583. You can also email me at aferrell@relay.edu

__________________________________________  ____________________________________________  __________
Name of Participant                         Signature of Participant                     Date
Appendix E: Graduate Student Alumni Interview Questions

General:

1. Tell me a little about yourself—why did you decide to become a teacher? Are you teaching now?
2. Do you feel that you’re an effective teacher?
3. How did you feel about your experience at Relay overall?
4. How would you describe your experience with your advisors at Relay?

Advisement/Relationships:

1. When you think about strong advisement, what do you think are the qualities of a strong faculty advisor? Why?
2. Do you feel that your advisors helped your progress or not? How so?
3. Did you feel like your advisor expected you to succeed? Why did you feel that way? Can you give me a specific example of a time you felt that way?
4. What structures of support did you use (e.g., office hours, email, meetings after class)? Who initiated those interactions?
5. Tell me about your relationships with your Year 1 and Year 2 advisors…how did these experiences vary?
6. How did your advisors contribute or not contribute to building a relationship with you? What was your role?
7. Was your relationship with your Relay advisor similar or different to other faculty relationships you’ve have experienced at other institutions? How so/how not?
8. Were there any advisor actions that you found helpful to you as a teacher of color?
9. How do you think Relay advisors could improve advisement for students of color?

Trust

10. On the survey you said X… (pull from questions on trust). Tell me about that…how did that come to pass? Were there specific behaviors or approaches your advisor took or didn’t take?
11. How did your advisor build trust with you?
12. What could you or your advisor have done to increase the amount of trust between you?
13. Were there any specific actions that decreased trust between you and your advisor?
14. Describe communicating with your advisor—what were those interactions like? Why?
15. On the survey you said X… (pull from questions on communication). Tell me about that…how did that come to pass? Were there specific behaviors or approaches your advisor took or didn’t take?
16. Did you feel comfortable talking with your advisor and sharing information about yourself? Can you describe a time where you decided to or not to share?
17. Did you get the sense that your advisor would have been comfortable if you approached them about a topic of race?
18. Did you ever talk about race, diversity, or racism? In what context? Why do you think that is?
19. Do you think talking about issues of race, diversity, or racism is relevant to building trust in this context? Why?
20. If something did happen in class that felt stressful racially, would you have felt comfortable initiating conversation about it with your advisors? If not your advisor, who might you talk to? Did you ever do that while at Relay?
21. Did you ever experience anything during class or at Relay that was racially stressful, so to speak?
   a. If so, did you tell your advisor? Why or why not?
22. Are their ways you know that you cope with racial stress? Did you employ any of those strategies at Relay? With your advisor?
23. Did you find Relay’s environment to be inclusive of you as a teacher of color? How so? Can you give me an example?
24. Did your advisor contribute to that feeling, positively or negatively?
25. Were either of your advisors the same racial identity as you (from survey)? Tell me about that…did it have an impact on your relationship? What about trust?
26. Do you think the race of an advisor makes a difference for the student experience at Relay? Why or why not?
27. Any additional comments you want to share?
REFERENCES


