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HOW BLACK STUDENTS EXPERIENCE SCHOOL IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY TO EXAMINE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY, SENSE OF BELONGINGNESS, AND PERCEIVED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Kristen R. Andriaccio
Saint John's University, Jamaica New York

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Kristen R. Andriaccio

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Kristen R. Andriaccio   Anthony Annunziato, Ed.D.

ABSTRACT

HOW BLACK STUDENTS EXPERIENCE SCHOOL IN A PREDOMINANTLY
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This study used critical race theory to examine the lived experiences of Black students attending a predominantly White, high-performing, suburban high school. The researcher used a phenomenological approach to examine student perceptions of self-efficacy, sense of belongingness, and perceived educational opportunity. Eight students participated in a focus study group, and seven students participated in semi-structured individual interviews. The data analysis showed the students did not experience a sense of belongingness in their schools, but they did exhibit high levels of self-efficacy and felt they were provided the same educational opportunities as other students. Six themes emerged from this study: (a) Social Isolation, (b) School Responsibilities, (c) Self-Efficacy, (d) Racism, (e) Relationships, and (f) Academic Opportunity. The participants expressed their struggles attending a predominately White school, including social isolation, conforming to the majority to fit in, difficulty forming relationships with their peers, racism, battling Black stereotypes, and the emotional harm it caused them. They demonstrated high self-efficacy and Black pride, and developed coping strategies and resiliency to be academically successful. The participants valued the academic

opportunity the school provided and felt prepared for college. Six areas of school improvement were identified by the participants to create equitable school experiences for all students: (a) evaluate curricula and instructional practices; (b) give students a voice; (c) combat racism in schools; (d) provide anti-bias and anti-racist education; (e) foster inclusivity and acceptance; and (f) increase diversity of faculty and staff. Recommendations for practice and research are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When Black students attend predominantly White schools (PWSs), they consistently report being treated differently than their White peers. They perceive being viewed differently in several areas, including disciplinary actions, academic expectations, postsecondary education expectations, educational opportunities, and other stereotypical behaviors that are deemed "Black" (Bottiani et al., 2016; Chapman, 2014; Slate et al., 2016). A myriad of research has shown there has been an achievement gap between Black and White students (Noguera, 2008; Ogbu, 2003) even when Black students attend high-performing PWSs (Diamond, 2006; Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

Black students have reported feeling weird and awkward when race and racism are discussed in classes and teachers and students defer to them for the answers (Carter Andrews & Gutwein, 2017). Furthermore, they feel pressured to be experts on historical events involving African Americans even though they are learning along with the rest of the class. Additionally, Black students have been struggling to find safe spaces. Racial microaggressions have been reported at the middle school, high school, and university levels (Carter Andrews, 2012; Henfeld, 2011; Ogbu, 2003; Solorzano, 2000). In his highly publicized research on Black boys, Noguera (2008) asserted,

> The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are assumed to be at risk because they are too aggressive, too loud, too violent, too dumb, too hard to control, too streetwise, and too focused on sports. Such assumptions and projections have the effect of fostering the very behaviors and attitudes we find problematic and objectionable. … The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are placed in schools where their needs for nurturing, support, and loving discipline are not met. Instead, they are labeled,

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shunned, and treated in ways that create and reinforce an inevitable cycle

of failure. (p. xxi)

Although Noguera's (2008) research specifically dealt with boys, it is important to note the students were labeled due to their skin color and perceived stereotypes, and a lack of equity perpetuated school failure. Current research has shown Black students continue to face similar experiences (Chapman, 2013; Diamond, 2006; Obgu, 2003; Tatum, 2017b).

Problem Statement

A well-documented problem has existed where Black students do not have the same experiences as White students, even when they attend the same high-performing schools (Carter Andrews, 2012; Horvat & Antonio, 1999). Feelings of discrimination, bias, or limited opportunities may preclude them from reaching their fullest potential academically, socially, and emotionally. They may experience racism, exclusion from the school community, or inequitable academic opportunities and outcomes. While attending a PWS, Black students may not experience the academic and social interactions in the same way that other students do. Therefore, Black students may not have the same educational experiences afforded to their White peers resulting from structures and systems that continue to marginalize Black students.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Black students who attended a predominantly White, high-performing suburban high school. This research focused on Black students' perceptions of self-efficacy, sense of belongingness, and perceived educational opportunity. The results of this study provide greater insight into students' personal experiences. Additionally, this research has implications for

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policies and practices that may need to be implemented or revised to ensure a safe and just learning environment where all students have positive experiences that do not hinder their social and emotional well-being or educational opportunities for success.

Research Questions

This research set out to examine the broad question, how do Black students experience school when they attend a predominantly White suburban high school? The goal was to gain a greater understanding of the perceptions and experiences of Black students who attend a PWS. The research addressed the following specific questions:

1. To what extent does attending a predominantly White school affect Black students' sense of belongingness?

2. To what extent does attending a predominantly White school affect Black students' self-efficacy?

3. What is the perceived educational opportunity when Black students attend a predominantly White school?

Overview of Methodology

This qualitative research was conducted using a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of Black students attending PWSs. The research took place in a predominantly White suburban high school. Black high school students participated in focus study groups and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy. Using Dedoose software, data were coded and analyzed to identify significant patterns and themes.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Race and racism have been found to affect Black students' school experiences, academic attainment, and social and emotional health (Diamond, 2006; Ogbu, 2003; Tatum, 2017a). It was necessary to examine these experiences in the school context to determine whether every child has an equitable school experience. While a significant body of research exists on Black and African American students attending predominantly White colleges and universities, more research is needed in public high schools. Additionally, many studies have focused on achievement gaps and disproportionate disciplinary practices (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Ogbu, 2003; Slate et al., 2016), but the social constructs have not been examined as closely. Chapman (2014) explained, "If we continue to press for racial integration, and the resources and social capital these spaces hold, we must contest every aspect of these learning communities until students of color experience all the privileges of education" (p. 323). Educators need to meet the academic, cultural, social, and emotional needs of a diverse student body. Therefore, it is imperative all students are recognized and supported in inclusive environments.

The results of this research can be used to inform research, policy, and practice in education. Educational leaders now have greater insight into Black students' experiences in a PWS and will be able to confront the potential unintended consequences of inequitable practices created through district policies. School administrators can provide professional development opportunities for staff members to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of all students. Conversations regarding race, racism, and equality must be part of an ongoing dialogue, and the development of strategic plans can ensure growth and success for all students, regardless of race and ethnicity.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) was used to provide an analysis of students'
perceptions about how they experienced school and served as a framework to guide this
research. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) proposed social inequity in education was
based on three central propositions:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United
   States.

2. U.S. society is based on property rights.

3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool through which
   we can understand social (and consequently, school) inequity. (p. 48)

There are five tenets of CRT relevant to education: (a) counter-storytelling, (b) the
permanence of racism, (c) Whiteness as property, (d) interest convergence, and (e) the
critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Counter-storytelling is a method of storytelling "that aims to cast doubt on the
validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado &
Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). These narratives provide understanding about what life is like
for others (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The permanence of racism suggests there are
hierarchical structures that govern political, economic, and social domains, which lead to
White privilege and othering of people of color in all areas, including education (DeCuir
& Dixson, 2004). Whiteness as property is a tenet embedded in property rights. Ladson-
Billings and Tate (1995) argued this tenet can be used to analyze the inequities in
education, including access to a high-quality, rigorous curriculum and advanced courses
often only afforded to White students. Interest convergence argues elite Whites benefit

more than the Black community when seemingly helpful actions are taken. Critique of Liberalism is a tenet in which CRT scholars are critical of three basic notions: (a) the notion of colorblindness, (b) the neutrality of the law, and (c) incremental change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Unfortunately, adopting colorblind ideology or the fact that the law is neutral does not consider the racism and racist policies that may already exist. Considering these tenets and the applicability to education, using CRT as a framework to analyze educational inequities was an appropriate theoretical framework for this study.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was an administrator in the school district where the study was conducted. Although she did not work in the students' high schools, she worked with the teachers in her role as an administrator. The researcher did not know any of the students who participated in the study or their parents.

Researcher Assumptions

The researcher was a member of the district's Equity Team for four years. Although racism did not appear to be a current problem in the school district, the researcher believed students would have experiences to share where racism has played a role. She was only aware of one incident of racism in the high school involving racial slurs and name-calling.

Definitions of Key Terminology

Black:

For the purposes of this study, the term *Black* was used to "refer to people of acknowledged African descent" (Tatum, 2017a, p. 95). Tatum (2017a) explained the term *Black* is more inclusive than African American because it also includes people who are

not African American but identify as Black and are targeted by racism due to their skin color, for example, Afro-Caribbean.

Perceived self-efficacy:

Bandura (1994) defined perceived self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, and motivate themselves and behave" (p. 2).

Self-efficacy:

Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 1).

Sense of belonging:

A sense of belonging is the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment (Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

Predominantly White school:

A predominantly White school is a school where more than 50% of its students are White.

Racial microaggressions:

Subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are "put downs" of Blacks by offenders. The offensive mechanisms against Blacks are often innocuous. The cumulative weight of their never-ending burden is the major ingredient in Black-White interactions (Pierce et al., 1978, p. 66).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a synthesis of the empirical literature, presents the gaps in the literature to identify the need for the study, and outlines the conceptual and theoretical frameworks for the research. The research methodology, design, and procedures are discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 also provides a rationale for conducting a phenomenological study and describes the research setting and sample, data collection, and data analysis methods. Findings are presented in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the implications of findings, the relationship to prior research, and limitations of the study. Recommendations for future practice and research are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review begins with a historical perspective of access to "White" schools for Black students. Historically, Black schools could not offer the same accommodations, resources, and curriculum as White students' schools. Black students' access to education was not equitable, and those inequities still exist today in many areas. The literature covers the extant research on poor educational outcomes for Black students, even when they have attended predominantly White schools. Several studies have demonstrated the mistreatment of Black students, the various forms of racism that have been experienced in schools, and the effects of racist structures inherent in educational institutions (Carter Andrews, 2012; Chapman, 2013; Diamond, 2006; Henfeld, 2011; Ogbu, 2003; Tatum, 2017b). In the face of adversity, the concept of resiliency and the protective factors that promote resiliency are discussed. The perception of self-efficacy is examined along with Maslow's hierarchy of needs as it relates to one's sense of belonging.

A framework for culturally responsive pedagogy is introduced as a possible intervention to support students in the classroom. An overview of culturally responsive leadership is also discussed. Critical race theory (CRT) is the theoretical framework for this study, and the tenets as they relate to education are examined. Finally, the conceptual framework is explained; whereby, all of these social constructs work together to create the adolescent school experience.

Historical Perspective

Brown v. the Board of Education (1954) was a landmark case that was meant to desegregate public schools. Earl Warren, chief justice of the United States Supreme Court at the time, wrote the decision for the court:

Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental

effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of

the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the

inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a

child to learn. … We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of

"separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently

unequal. (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, para 4)

The promise of educational equity and integrated schools did not transpire. Almost 70

years later, Black students are still struggling to find their place in schools—both public

and private—to receive an equitable education. The issues have been exacerbated when

students of color attend predominantly White schools (Horvat & Antonio, 1999;

Solorzano, 2000), and the academic achievement gap between Black students and their

White peers continues to be studied and examined (Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

Hypersegregated communities, those that are racially segregated across multiple

measures, continue to exist and confirm separate is not equal. Tatum (2017b) argued the

United States is still battling segregation when Black students live in hypersegregated

communities because they do not benefit from the same advantages afforded to White

students in affluent communities. Tatum (2017b) further contended "in those few places

where students of color and White students enter academic environments together, their

lived experiences are likely to be quite different, and racial stereotyping is likely to be an

inhibiting factor in their cross group interactions." (p. 48)

Black Students' School Experiences

School can be challenging for Black students, particularly when they attend a PWS. Pervasive racism exists in many academic settings, and when Black students attend a PWS, it becomes commonplace for them to feel culturally alienated, be physically isolated, and remain silenced (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). As a result, they begin to lose their sense of self and in many cases conform to the majority. Even more surprising, Black students' perception that racism is part of their culture has created an acceptance of racism. In a study by Horvat and Antonio (1999), the influence of race and class on African American female high school students attending a predominantly White, elite school found,

> race and class contributed to an organizational habitus of the school characterized by White and wealthy privilege. Interaction of that dominant habitus with the dissimilar individual habitus of the students results in a form of symbolic violence—symbolic violence the Black students knowingly endured in exchange for the social mobility afforded by attending the elite school. (p. 317)

Moreover, the students' parents were aware of their daughters' attempts to look and talk like the White girls, and acknowledged the psychological trauma involved in their daughters' process of "fitting in" while attending the PWS (Horvat & Antonio, 1999).

D. Carter (2007) conducted a year-long qualitative study of nine high performing Black students attending a PWS. The study showed that to shield them from their experiences with racism, the students created and used same-race peer networks, thereby allowing themselves to embrace and affirm their racial identity. The findings reinforce the importance of having safe spaces in predominantly White learning environments for

Black students to escape psychological, emotional, and physical stress due to their experiences with racism (D. Carter, 2007). Further studies have shown Black students in PWSs exhibited lower levels of self-esteem and cultural flexibility than Black students attending schools with a Black majority population (P. Carter, 2010).

In a study conducted by Chapman (2014), 100 students of color in four suburban schools were interviewed to examine how their relationships with school adults impacted their educational experiences and future choices. A team of researchers conducted 22 semi-structured focus group interviews with high school students of color attending White suburban schools in 4 districts. The majority of the students were African American. The interviews focused on three themes: general questions about their high school, adult relationships, and academics.

The study provided great insight into Black students' perceptions while attending a PWS. Students of color reported their White teachers' inability to relate to them, White teachers speaking to them disrespectfully in class, unfair disciplinary practices toward Black students, preferential treatment for White students, a lack of empathy from teachers, and overall poor relationships with teachers. Counselors were perceived as setting low student expectations, discouraging rigor in coursework and post-graduation paths, and having low levels of student connectedness (Chapman, 2014). These findings presented implications for schools to examine how their practices affect students' high school experiences and future choices.

Henfield (2011) sought to understand Black male students' perceptions of and experiences with racial microaggressions in a traditionally White middle school. A purposeful sample of five self-identified Black boys who attended a traditionally White

Midwestern state middle school participated. Semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted over a year. Specifically, the researchers were looking for the following themes regarding Black Americans: assumptions of intellectual inferiority, the assumption of deviance, the assumption of the superiority of White cultural values/communication styles, and the assumed universality of the Black American experience.

The findings of Henfield's (2011) study showed the most common reported theme was the assumption of deviance, and some students discussed experiences related to the themes of assumed universality of the Black American experience and assumed superiority of White cultural values/communication styles. The students did not report experiences related to the themes of assumption of intellectual inferiority. The students' perceptions of these microaggressions reflect a small sample of students' lived experiences. Although the findings of this study cannot be generalized due to the limited sample size, it contributes to the literature regarding racial microaggressions and how these actions impact Black students.

To examine how Black high achieving students responded to racial microaggressions, specifically racial spotlighting and racial ignoring while attending a PWS, Carter Andrews (2012) conducted a yearlong qualitative study comprised of nine Black students who attended a predominantly White suburban high school. The researcher conducted three semi-structured interviews, a focus study group, and observations. A grounded theory approach was used to analyze data and understand how the students responded to these racial microaggressions. The findings of this study showed students experienced microaggressions by racial spotlighting and racial ignoring

in several educational contexts and responded through various behaviors that demonstrated resiliency. As a result, the students were able to be successful in school because these strategies allowed them to embrace their racial identity despite attending a school with a perceived racist environment (Carter Andrews).

Black students at the university level have endured similar experiences. Racial microaggressions in the collegiate environment have been shown to exist in both academic and social spaces (Solorzano et al., 2000). Moreover, it was found racial microaggressions have a negative impact on the campus racial climate. Other students have found historically White universities' institutional cultures alienate and exclude Black students' identities, thereby altering their social identities (e.g., culture, heritage, language, traditions), self-esteem, and self-concept (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017).

Bottiani et al. (2016) set out to determine whether racial disparities in students' perceptions of school support (e.g., equity, caring, high expectations) are influenced by the racial and ethnic diversity and socioeconomic status of the school. Students from 58 Maryland high schools voluntarily participated. The MDS3 School Climate Survey was given to 19,726 students in Grades 9 – 12 to complete online during class. The survey included 12 items selected from the California Healthy Kids Survey and the School Development School Climate Survey, each assessed using a 4-point Likert scale. The findings of this study suggested students' overall perceptions of caring and equity were more negative for Black students, regardless of school socioeconomic status. However, both Black and White students' perceptions of equity and high expectations were more negative in diverse schools with low socioeconomic status and higher in primarily White schools with high socioeconomic status.

Disciplinary Actions

Black students continue to be overrepresented when examining students who are most likely to be suspended, expelled, or removed from class (Bottiani et al., 2017; Noguera, 2008). Slate et al. (2016) investigated the extent of disproportionality in disciplinary consequences for Black, White, and Hispanic girls in Grades 4–11 in Texas public schools. The disciplinary consequences examined were in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and disciplinary alternative education program placement.

The Texas Education Agency provided the researchers with disciplinary data by gender, race, and grade level for the 2013–2014 school year for all Texas public schools. Findings showed there was disproportionality in all three disciplinary consequences by ethnicity/race in every grade level. A higher percentage of Black girls were given out-of-school suspension in every grade compared to White and Hispanic girls (Slate et al., 2016). Black girls have not been afforded the same educational opportunities as other students since they are being disciplined at higher rates. When they are removed from school, they are no longer receiving the same education as their peers resulting in inequitable learning experiences and opportunities.

Resiliency

Resiliency can be defined as the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social and academic competence despite exposure to severe stress, or simply the stress of today's world (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Extensive research on resiliency has identified environmental protective factors that promote resiliency in children despite having stressors in their lives and being faced with adversity. These protective factors include caring and support, high expectations for

success, opportunities for meaningful participation, pro-social bonding, clear and consistent boundaries, and life skills training (Henderson, 2007). These environmental protective factors became the basis of an effective school reform model (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Henderson (2007) identified three hidden predictors of academic success that have been documented in the research: (a) school climate, (b) social and emotional learning, and (c) arts education—noting a positive school climate had a significant impact. Key components of a positive school climate can be summarized as:

(a) feelings of safety among staff and students; (b) supportive relationships within school; (c) engagement and empowerment of students as valued members and resources in the school community; (c) clear rules and boundaries that are understood and by all students and staff; (d) high expectations for academic achievement and appropriate behavior (Elfstrom et al., 2006); and (e) "trust, respect, and ethos of caring (Perkins, 2006)." (as cited in Henderson, 2007, p. 39)

These components are closely related to the environmental protective factors and help to foster resilience in children. Schwarzer and Warner (2013) posited when someone shows resiliency, they demonstrate the ability to return to their baseline functioning after overcoming a stressor. Therefore, resiliency could likely lead to high levels of perceived self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy has been best defined by Bandura (2020):

Among the mechanisms of human agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs in their efficacy to influence events that affect their lives. This core belief is the foundation of human inspiration, motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being. Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to undertake activities or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to affect changes by one's actions. This core belief operates through its impact on cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes. (para. 1)

Bandura (1994) asserted sources of self-efficacy are developed from four principle sources. The most effective way to create self-efficacy is through mastery experiences (i.e., experiencing success, overcoming obstacles, or through perseverance). Vicarious experiences provided by social models also create self-efficacy by watching others succeed. The more similar the model to oneself, the greater the belief in one's success. Likewise, seeing a similar social model fail could decrease one's self-efficacy. The third source of self-efficacy is social persuasion. Verbal persuasion and providing opportunities for success that one possesses the ability to produce a desired effect will yield greater success and self-efficacy than one being persuaded they lack such capabilities. Finally, the fourth source of self-efficacy is emotional and physiological states (Bandura, 1994).

Research has shown self-efficacy is positively correlated to academic performance (Bandura, 1994). A 2021 meta-analysis examined 50 antecedents of academic performance and showed self-efficacy had the strongest correlation

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(Richardson et al., 2012). Schneider & Prackel (2017) examined 105 correlates of academic performance in higher education and found self-efficacy was the second strongest predictor of academic achievement. Consistent with Bandura's research, Tyler and Boelter (2008) found teacher support to be a significant predictor of self-efficacy related to academic achievement and engagement.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology that delineates a model of human hierarchal needs. The five stages are (a) biological and physiological needs, (b) safety needs, (c) belongingness and love needs, (d) esteem needs, and (e) self-actualization. This model was later expanded to include two more stages: cognitive and aesthetic needs (Maslow, 1970). The resulting hierarchal model is (a) biological and physiological needs, (b) safety needs, (c) belongingness and love needs, (d) esteem needs, (e) cognitive needs, (f) aesthetic needs, and (g) self-actualization needs. These stages originally proposed one must first fulfill their most basic needs before moving on to the next stage, but Maslow (1987) later revised his theory and explained that a need does not have to be fully satisfied before the next need emerges.

Maslow's (1954) motivational model asserted the first four levels of this model are deficiency needs which will continue to grow until they are met, and the higher levels are growth needs which motivate people to grow to reach self-actualization, one's desire to reach their full potential and self-fulfillment. Belongingness is a deficit motivator in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Although one's needs may not necessarily progress through the stages in a linear manner, if the basic need of belongingness cannot be met, this may present a barrier to reaching self-actualization.

Feelings of Belongingness

Goodenow and Grady (1993) described school belonging as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 61). Student belonging has been found to be a predictor for a broad range of academic, psychological, and physical benefits; boost student engagement and motivation; enhance resilience, gratitude, and self-esteem; and decrease stress, bullying, misbehavior, and truancy (Roffey et al., 2019). Student belongingness in educational settings continues to be examined as researchers seek to determine its influences and outcomes.

Allen et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis to examine individual and social level factors that influenced school belonging. Fifty-one qualitative studies were analyzed to examine if 10 identified themes were related to school belonging. The studies were comprised of 67,000 participants between the ages of 12 and 18. The strongest predictor of school belonging was teacher support and positive personal characteristics, such as conscientiousness, optimism, and self-esteem. Emotional stability, parent and peer support, academic self-regulation, self-academic rating, education goals, motivation, and valuing academics were related to greater school belonging. Academic motivation had a weaker correlation in urban settings, and gender was also weakly associated.

Goodenow and Grady (1993) examined the relationship among early adolescent students' sense of school belonging. Perceptions of their friends' academic values and academic motivation were investigated. Through the use of surveys, data on student measures of school belonging and motivation were collected. Survey results revealed school belonging was significantly associated with several motivation-related measures—

the expectancy of success, valuing schoolwork, general school motivation, and self-reported effort. Students' beliefs about their friends' academic values were weakly correlated to these outcomes. Of greater significance was the data that showed many urban adolescents may have a poor sense of school belonging and low school motivation. Students with a high sense of belonging in school are also more likely to be motivated and academically engaged than those with a low sense of belonging (Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The term culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is a theoretical model proposed by Ladson-Billings (1995) "that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (p. 469). She identified three broad propositions to distinguish culturally relevant teaching: (a) the perceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers, (b) the manner in which social relations are structured by culturally relevant teachers, and (c) the perceptions of knowledge held by culturally relevant teachers.

CRP is made up of three tenets: academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2002, 2006). Academic achievement consists of having high expectations and providing the necessary support to students to be successful. Cultural competence involves making cultural connections in the context of education and larger communities with a commitment to learning about and valuing other cultures and how they influences students' educational experiences. Sociopolitical consciousness "helps students develop critical thinking skills that

challenge inequities while cultivating self-dignity in an unjust society" (Warren-Grice, 2017, p. 5). The success with CRP and its theoretical underpinnings could serve as a responsive framework to address the gross inequities that have precluded Black students from receiving the same educational experiences and opportunities as their peers.

Ford (2013) defined multicultural education as:

a progressive approach for transforming education that critiques and corrects color-blind and discriminatory curriculum, practices, and policies in education. It is grounded in ideas of social justice and equity, critical pedagogy, and a dedication to providing educational experiences in which all student reach their full potential as socially and culturally aware and responsive citizens. (p. 62)

She argued multicultural education must include an analysis of the curriculum for accuracy, presenting curricular content from multiple and various perspectives, and preparing teachers to foster a culturally responsive classroom.

As CRT continues to be evaluated in the context of education, critical race pedagogical practices and curriculum are also being developed. Yosso (2002) defined critical race curriculum as "the approach to understanding curricular structures, processes, and discourse, informed by critical race theory" (p. 98). Using the tenets of CRT, Yosso proposed a critical race curriculum would:

(1) acknowledge the central and intersecting roles of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination in maintaining inequality in curricular structures, processes, and discourses; (2) challenge dominant social and cultural assumptions regarding culture and intelligence, language and capability, objectivity and meritocracy; (3) direct the formal curriculum

toward goals of social justice and the hidden curriculum toward Freirean

goals of critical consciousness; (4) develop counter discourses through

storytelling, narratives, chronicles, family histories, scenarios, biographies,

and parables that draw on the lived experiences students of color bring to the

classroom; and (5) utilize interdisciplinary methods of historical and

contemporary analysis to articulate the linkages between educational and

societal inequality. (p. 98)

These pedagogical frameworks use a social justice lens to challenge and transform

educational practices, systems, and structures with the goal of eliminating racial

injustices.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

With the increased diversity among students due to shifting demographics, there

has been a fundamental and urgent need to develop school leaders to be "culturally

relevant, responsive, and competent" (Horsfeld et al., 2011, p. 586) and implement anti-

racist pedagogy and approaches. Khalifa et al. (2016) asserted culturally responsive

leaders influence the school context while addressing the students', parents', and

teachers' cultural needs. They "develop and support the school staff and promote a

climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized

students. … Culturally responsive leadership is needed in all settings including those not

dominated by minoritized students" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1275).

A comprehensive literature review of culturally responsive school leadership

identified four culturally responsive leadership behaviors: (a) critically self-reflects on

leadership behaviors; (b) develops culturally responsive teachers; (c) promotes culturally

responsive/inclusive school environments; and (d) engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). Each strand outlines specific culturally responsive school leadership behaviors to center inclusion, equity, advocacy, and social justice within the school context.

Khalifa et al. (2016) argued school leaders are obligated to employ culturally responsive school leadership,

> Because minoritized students have been disadvantaged by historically oppressive structures, and because educators and schools have been—intentionally or unintentionally—complicit in reproducing this oppression, culturally responsive school leaders have a principled, moral responsibility to counter this oppression. (p. 1275)

Research on school leader preparation programs has shown many leaders are not well-equipped to adequately address the diverse cultural needs of today's schools (B. L. Young, Madsen, and Young, 2010). Thus, to challenge the current structures that exist within educational systems, developing culturally responsive leaders is necessary.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory is the study and transformation of the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgano & Stefancic, 2017). CRT is being theorized in education to analyze the systemic racism in our schools and the exploitation and oppression of marginalized groups. Chapman et al. (2013) introduced CRT:

> Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a relative newcomer as a discrete approach to understanding the opposing inequalities in education, but the approach has its roots in the centuries old diasporic experiences and struggles of people of color,

especially, but not exclusively enslaved Africans and their descendants in the United States. The perspective builds on this tradition in numerous ways, including the central role it devotes to political struggle, its concern for storytelling, and the significant position accorded to key black intellectual figures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as Frederick Douglas and W.E.B. Du Bois (Baszile, 2008, Mills, 2003). (The Origins of CRT section, para. 1)

Crenshaw et al. (1995) asserted,

although Critical Race Scholarship differs in object, argument, accent, and emphasis, it is nevertheless unified by two common interests. The first is to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained. … The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it. (p. xiii)

The term "white supremacy" when used in CRT refers to the "operation of forces that saturate the everyday mundane actions and policies that shape the world in the interests of White people" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, White Supremacy section, para. 1).

Although CRT originates from critical legal studies, it is beginning to find its place in educational settings to examine racism and educational inequities. Lynn and Parker (2006) explained,

Critical Race studies in education … is ultimately concerned with employing multiple methods and borrowing from diverse traditions in the law, sociology, ethnic studies, and other fields to formulate a robust analysis of race and racism as a social, political and economic system of advantages and disadvantages accorded

to social groups based on their skin color and status in a clearly defined racial

hierarchy. (p. 282)

The tenets of CRT often used in education are counter-storytelling, the permanence of

racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and critique of liberalism (DeCuir &

Dixson, 2004).

Counter-storytelling gives a voice to the oppressed and allows others to

experience their stories firsthand (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Counter-storytelling

"aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by

the majority" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011, p. 144). Chapman et al. (2013) posited, "CRT

exposes the contradictions inherent in the dominant storyline that, among other things,

blames people of color for their own condition of inequality" (Racism section, para. 7).

Additionally, these stories allow the discrimination to be named and confronted and

could serve as a cure for silencing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The permanence of racism is a tenet that highlights the normalcy of racism in

society and is often viewed as an everyday experience. DeCuir and Dixson (2004)

contended, "The permanence of racism suggests that racist hierarchal structures govern

all political, economic and social domains. Such structures allocate the privileging of

Whites and the subsequent Othering of people of color in all areas, including education"

(p. 27).

To explore the tenet of Whiteness as property, we must first recognize property as

a right. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued property can be related to education;

hence, children who live in better areas—own better "property"—will by default attend

better schools. They further contend curriculum is "intellectual property" (Ladson-

Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 54) along with educational opportunity, which therefore, correlates to property values. Property comes with certain rights: rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, and the absolute right to exclude (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The right to exclude began with denying Black students access to schools, later creating separate schools, segregation, school choice, and student tracking (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Interest convergence is the belief policymakers are motivated by their own self-interests rather than the racial justice they appear to be supporting (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). In essence, actions that support racial equity are believed to be grounded in personal gain.

Critique of liberalism refers to the three basic notions that CRT scholars are critical of: (a) the notion of colorblindness, (b) the neutrality of the law, and (c) incremental change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). When racism is not acknowledged or confronted, colorblind attitudes by the dominant group are realized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Therefore, when structural racism is ignored, people are not afforded equitable opportunities.

CRT scholars have developed the following five tenets to guide research and inquiry on educational equity and racial justice:

1. Centrality of race and racism—All CRT research within education must centralize race and racism, including intersections with other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and citizenship.

2. Challenging the dominant perspective—CRT research works to challenge dominant narratives and re-center marginalized perspectives.

3. Commitment to social justice—CRT research must always be motivated by a social justice agenda.

4. Valuing experiential knowledge—CRT builds on the oral traditions of many indigenous communities of color around the world. CRT research centers the narratives of people of color when attempting to understand social inequality.

5. Being interdisciplinary—CRT scholars believe that the world is multidimensional, and similarly, research about the world should reflect multiple perspectives. (Howard & Novarro, 2016, pp. 6–7)

CRT is being used as a theoretical framework in many research studies as a way to analyze the racial inequities that exist. Howard and Novarro (2016) posited, "As scholars continue to make a compelling case as to why race matters in education, gaps in experiences and outcomes remain persistent" (p. 7). To address these gaps, schools must confront the practices that have not been challenged and begin to create policies and practices to cultivate supportive school climates. Moreover, CRT provides the tools to examine the racial constructs that are inherent in today's schools.

Conceptual Framework

A student's success in school is influenced by several factors. The three determinants of the school experience (i.e., sense of belongingness, self-efficacy, and perceived educational opportunity) examined in this study are critically important social constructs that work together to create one's personal experience. PWSs have been hostile environments for Black students since the time of integration. The relationship between sense of belongingness, self-efficacy, and perceived educational opportunity

overlap and contribute to one's school experience as a unique product. These interconnected relationships made up the conceptual framework for this research.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework
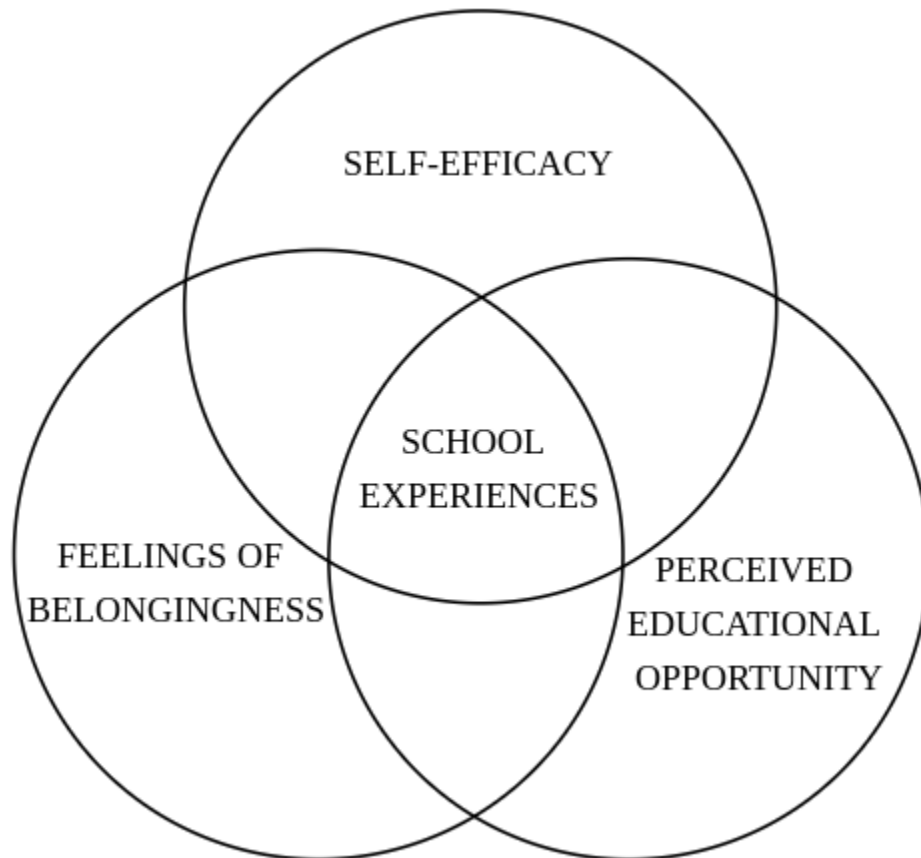
Conclusion

Ongoing research has found race and class have consistently been identified as playing significant roles in shaping Black students' school experiences and outcomes. In 2017 Tatum dubbed U.S. culture a "color-silent society" (p. 51) where people have learned to avoid talking about racial differences, despite evidence that people still notice

race and act accordingly based on their explicit and implicit biases. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) posited, "Given the insidious and often subtle way in which race and racism operate, it is imperative that education researchers explore the role of race when examining the educational experiences of African American students" (p. 26).

There has been extensive literature that highlights the achievement gap for African American students (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Ogbu, 2003). Additionally, disproportionate student disciplinary actions have been widely studied. A growing body of literature has been emerging about students' experiences in PWSs, often centered on microaggressions (Carter Andrews, 2012; Horvat & Antonio, 1999); however, to truly capture Black students' experiences and the essence of this phenomenon, social constructs and how they affect their experiences must be looked at more closely.

The findings of this study have great relevance and the potential to raise awareness surrounding issues of educational equity. How do self-efficacy, sense of belongingness, and perceived educational opportunity contribute to a student's overall school experience? Archaic policy and practice must be reviewed, and all educators must revisit and reflect on their practices. The idea of separate but equal was eliminated over 70 years ago (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954), but now we must continue to examine integrated environments to ensure equity, even when students are under the same roof.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine Black students' lived experiences while attending a predominantly White suburban high school. Specifically, the research examined students' perceptions of self-efficacy, sense of belongingness, and perceived educational opportunity. This chapter discusses the methodology used for this study and the rationale for using a phenomenological approach. The researcher then describes the research setting and context, the research sample, and the data collection and analysis methods. Issues of trustworthiness are discussed along with limitations and delimitations of the study.

Rationale for Research Approach

This study focused on how Black students attending a predominantly White school (PWS) experience school. Qualitative research was "best suited to address a research problem in which [the researcher did] not know the variables and need[ed] to explore" (Creswell, 2005, p. 16). Qualitative research should be used when the goal is to "empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 84). The stages of the qualitative research process include,

exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon; having the literature review play a minor role but justify the problem stating the purpose and research questions in a general and broad way so as to include the participants' experiences; collecting data based on words or images from a small number of individuals so that the participants' views are obtained; analyzing the data for description and themes using text analysis and interpreting the larger meaning of the findings; writing the report using flexible,

emerging structures and evaluative criteria; and including the researchers'

subjective reflexivity and bias. (Creswell, 2015, p. 26)

This study used a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is best suited for

problems that seek to "understand several individual's common or shared experiences of

a phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 124), and the development of descriptions of

the essences of these experiences, not explanations or analyses (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology is both a description and an interpretation of the meaning of the lived

experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, phenomenological methods were used,

including focus study groups and individual interviews to explore and examine the lived

experiences of Black students attending a predominantly White suburban high school.

Research Questions

The following research questions helped the researcher to explore the lived

experiences of Black students who attend a predominantly White suburban high school:

1. To what extent does attending a predominantly White school affect Black

   students' sense of belongingness?

2. To what extent does attending a predominantly White school affect Black

   students' self-efficacy?

3. What is the perceived educational opportunity when Black students attend a

   predominantly White school?

Research Setting and Context

The students in this research study attended a high-performing suburban high

school in New York. The school district is located 40 miles from New York City and

covers 35 square miles. It is the fourth largest school district in its region, consisting of 125 school districts.

The school district is located in a geographic region considered one of the most segregated parts of the nation. Local newspapers, news channels, politicians, and educators have publicized the resultant problems and inequities with hopes of finding a viable solution. The Center for Understanding Race and Equity published a paper that examined the five "separate and unequal" school districts in this region (Wells et al., 2009). The report highlights the deleterious effects of segregation created by district boundaries and

> documents the multiple ways in which place and race/ethnicity matter in terms of students' educational opportunities, and how the two combined and intertwined as they are today in districts, schools and classrooms, define students' and educators' sense of possibility and self-worth in a manner unlikely to ever be done. … In a vicious cycle, the resulting inequality becomes, for those on the more affluent and privileged side of the divide, the ammunition for their resistance to change the boundaries or even to allow students to cross them. (Wells et al., 2009, p. 2)

This defacto segregation has perpetuated an unjust system of haves and have-nots, positioning children for their place in life and their options for college and careers as early as kindergarten when they are assigned to a school.

The study collected qualitative data from five schools in different districts and 75 people from all stakeholder groups were interviewed. Wells et al. (2009) lamented the findings that uncovered a complex educational system laden with competition, inequity, politics, and a very strong resistance to dismantle the current system, which benefits the

more affluent communities. In a region deep rooted in this ideology, will it benefit or harm minority students who reside in predominantly White neighborhoods to cross the invisible lines of structural racism with the expectation of receiving a better education at their local schools?

The school district used for this research provided student demographic data. The total student enrollment for the 2019–2020 school year was 8,084. The total number of Black or African American students in the district was 118, or 1.46%. The district was comprised of seven Grades K-5 elementary schools, three Grades 6–8 middle schools, and two Grades 9–12 high schools. Only one high school was initially selected for this study, but due to a limited number of participants, the research was expanded to include both high schools. The total population of High School A was 1,524, and the total population of High School B was 1,494. The number of Black or African American students attending High School A was 21, or 1.38%; and 23, or 1.54% at High School B. The student demographics by grade level and gender are listed in Table 3.1 for High School A and Table 3.2 for High School B.

Table 3.1

High School A Student Demographics for the 2019-2020 School Year

Grade	Enrollment	AS	Bl	His	AI	MR	NH	WH
9	370	21	7	23	1	2	1	315
	194/176	6/15	4/3	17/6	1/0	1/1	1/0	164/151
10	395	22	5	30	0	6	0	332
	192/203	13/9	4/1	13/17	0/0	2/4	0/0	160/172
11	373	17	6	22	2	2	0	324
	184/189	6/11	3/3	9/13	2/0	0/2	0/0	164/160
12	386	18	3	25	1	4	0	335
	204/182	12/6	1/2	12/13	0/1	3/1	0/0	176/159
Total	1524	78	21	100	4	14	1	1306
	774/750	37/41	12/9	51/49	3/1	6/8	1/0	664/642

Note. Race/Ethnicity Key: Asian American= AS, Black or African American = BL, Hispanic or Latino = HIS; American Indian or Alaskan Native = AI; Multiracial = MR; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White = WH. The first number in the column represents male students, and the second number represents female students.

Table 3.2

High School B Student Demographics for the 2019-2020 School Year

Grade	Enrollment	AS	Bl	His	AI	MR	NH	WH
9	326	18	3	43	0	7	1	254
	132/194	10/8	2/1	18/25	0/0	1/6	0/1	101/153
10	356	16	9	30	1	3	0	297
	194/162	11/5	5/4	13/17	0/1	1/2	0/0	164/133
11	379	18	5	36	1	4	0	315
	188/191	9/9	1/4	20/16	1/0	2/2	0/0	155/160
12	433	32	6	51	0	2	2	340
	222/211	17/15	4/2	25/26	0/0	0/2	1/1	175/165
Total	1494	84	23	160	2	16	3	1206
	736/758	47/37	12/11	76/84	1/1	4/12	1/2	595/611

Note. Race/Ethnicity Key: Asian American = AS, Black or African American = BL, Hispanic or Latino = HIS; American Indian or Alaskan Native = AI; Multiracial = MR; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White = WH. The first number in the column represents male students and the second number represents female students.

The following data were collected from the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection (2020) is to obtain information about students in public schools, including enrollment and education programs and services, disaggrgated by race/ethnicity, sex, limited English proficiency, and disability. Individual student data were not collected.

Civil rights data are public data that is posted online. The most recent available data represents the 2017–2018 school year. During the 2017–2018 school year, the overall Black/African American student population was 1.1%. In relation to the overall

student population, Black students made up 6.6% of in-school suspensions, 4.7% of out-of-school suspensions, and 12.5% of expulsions as presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Student Disciplinary Actions by Race/Ethnicity Compared to Overall Enrollment

2017-2018 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity		Percentage of students by disciplinary action		
	%	In-school suspension	Out-of-school suspension	Expulsions
Indian or Alaska Native	0.002	0.007	0.000	0.000
Asian	0.052	0.044	0.019	0.000
Black or African American	0.011	0.066	0.047	0.125
Hispanic or Latino of any race	0.085	0.073	0.104	0.125
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.001	0.007	0.000	0.000
Two or more races	0.015	0.007	0.009	0.000
White	0.833	0.796	0.821	0.750

One indicator of students' college and career readiness has been participation in high-level science courses in high school. Table 3.4 shows 1.1% of the total students enrolled in the school district were Black/African American. In comparison to the overall population, the percentage of Black and African American student enrollment in challenging science and math courses during the 2017–2018 school year was calculus, 0.6%; chemistry, 0.7%; and physics, 0.8%.

Table 3.4

Student Race/Ethnicity for Enrollment in Calculus, Chemistry, and Physics in Relation to

Overall Enrollment

2017-2018 student enrollment by race/ethnicity	Percentage of student enrollment		
	%	Calculus	Chemistry	Physics
Indian or Alaska Native	0.002	0.2	0.7	0.3
Asian	0.052	6.4	5.0	7.8
Black or African American	0.011	0.6	0.7	0.8
Hispanic or Latino of any race	0.085	3.8	4.4	3.2
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.001	0.0	0.0	0.0
Two or more races	0.015	0.9	0.7	0.8
White	0.833	88.1	88.4	87.0

Research Sample and Data Source

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants. Purposeful samples are used in qualitative studies to "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 222). The target population was Black students attending a high-performing, suburban high school in New York with a predominantly White population. All Black students in Grades 9–12 as indicated on the school's student management system who attended either of the district's high schools were invited to participate. The students' race was self-selected by their parents or legal guardian(s) during their initial registration in the school district.

Enrollment in High School A for the 2019–2020 school year was 1,524 students. Twenty-one students self-identified as Black or African American. There were seven 9th-grade students, five 10th-grade students, six 11th-grade students, and three 12th-grade students. Enrollment in this High School B for the 2019–2020 school year was 1,494

students. Twenty-three students self-identified as Black or African American in the student management system. There were three 9th-grade students, nine 10th-grade students, five 11th-grade students, and six 12th-grade students. Only students who have taken classes in this school for at least two full semesters were included in the study. Therefore, new entrants from either school were not invited to participate.

An application to St. John's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was submitted. Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Superintendent of Schools after IRB approval was granted. All students who met the criteria for the study were invited to participate via letter and email. Students who volunteered to participate signed consent forms; parents of minors were required to sign consent forms as well. Once consent was received, students were asked to participate in a focus study group and a personal interview. Eight students volunteered to participate in the research and participated in a focus study group. Seven students participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

The primary ethical concern in focus study groups is "the dynamics of power and influence that may play out" in the group (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 155). To counter this concern, this researcher was prepared to be sensitive to the dynamics of the group and facilitate a discussion where all voices could be heard. Marshall and Rossman (2016) also emphasized the potential of privacy issues when focus study groups are recorded and recommended participants are provided with a complex statement regarding the data collection process and their privacy. The researcher provided written and oral assurances to the students and their parents that they would be protected from physical or

psychological harm with the understanding that participation was voluntary and must be supported by the parents or guardians, even after informed consent was received.

Data Collection

This study used phenomenological research methods. A phenomenological study "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 120) and focuses on what they all have in common as they live an experience; in this instance, a Black student attending a PWS. Participants who have experienced this phenomenon, those who selected Black or African American as their ethnicity upon school registration, were invited to participate in the study.

Students who chose to participate were invited to take part in a student focus study group. Focus study groups are used to encourage the expression of differing opinions and points of view through the use of questioning in a supportive environment (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Krueger and Casey (2015) recommended carefully recruited participants be interviewed in groups of five to eight people per group. Therefore, one focus study group was held with eight students. A list of interview questions (see Appendix B) was developed for the focus study group. The focus group introduction (see Appendix A) was modeled after Kruger and Casey's (2015) *Outline of a Focus Group Introduction Template*.

In addition to the focus study group, students were invited to participate in semi-structured one-on-one interviews. In semi-structured interviews, open-ended interview questions are used to capture participants' voices as they share their stories, perceptions, and realities (Cohen et al, 2007). These interviews were scheduled for approximately 40

minutes. The interview protocol (see Appendix C) provided a script to guide the

researcher through the questions. Individual interviews provided additional data beyond

the focus study group.

Interview questions were developed to address the specific research questions.

These questions are mapped to the corresponding research question in Table 3.5. It was

predicted that several questions could possibly elicit responses that address more than one

research question, so they were mapped to all relevant questions.

Table 3.5

Interview Questions Mapped to the Research Questions

Interview questions	Q1	Q2	Q3
Focus study group questions			
Tell me what it's like to be a student in your school?	X	X	X
Tell me about your circle of friends at school?	X		
Think back to a time when you may have felt like you had to act differently at school to fit in with your peers or feel accepted	X		
In what ways are you part of the school community?	X	X	
Can you think of a time when Black students may have been treated differently than White students?	X	X	X
Has a teacher or classmate ever asked your opinion about a topic because of your race? If so, how did it make you feel?	X	X	
Has attending this school prepared you to be successful after graduation?		X	X
Would you say you experience more or less stress than the average student in your school? Tell me why?	X	X	X
Some people say that they are colorblind and don't notice race. Do you think that's true in school?	X		X
What is one thing you would change about your school if you could?	X	X	X
Semi-structured interview questions			
Have you been encouraged to take challenging courses by your teachers or counselor?		X	X
Can you remember a time when adults or students have made assumptions about you based on your skin color? Tell me about it.	X	X	X
Tell me about some of your strengths. How has attending this school contributed to your success in these areas?		X	X
Now think about some areas in school where you feel like you could grow. Is your school giving you what you need to be successful in those areas?		X	X
Think back to a time where you may have felt uncomfortable in school or a time when you were picked on or bullied in a school setting. Tell me about it.	X		
Discuss any challenges or difficulties you may have faced by attending a predominantly White school.	X	X	X
Of all the things we talked about today, what do you think is the most important?	X	X	X

Note. The research questions are: (Q1) To what extent does attending a PWS affect Black students' sense of belongingness? (Q2) To what extent does attending a PWS affect Black students' self-efficacy? (Q3) What is the perceived educational opportunity when Black students attend a PWS?

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Focus study groups and interviews were held remotely via Google Meet because schools in New York State were ordered closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools closed on March 16, 2020, and remained closed for the remainder of the school year through June 17, 2020. New York state residents were issued a stay-at-home order and were expected to practice social distancing, so in-person interviews would not have been acceptable to maintain the safety of the students and their families.

The focus study group and individual interviews were recorded via Google Meet. In addition, the interviews were recorded using the Rev Voice Recorder app on an iPhone as a backup method. If students became disconnected or froze during the focus study group, the researcher paused until they rejoined the meeting. A phone number was provided so students who may have had internet connectivity issues could call in. In addition to recording the interviews, the researcher took notes.

Interview responses were transcribed by the researcher. Member checking validates the accuracy of the findings by allowing the students the opportunity to review their responses after they are transcribed. The process of member checking involves asking the participants to review the transcripts for accuracy and determining if the themes are accurate and whether or not the interpretations are fair and representative of the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Students' names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Triangulation is sometimes used in qualitative research as another method to validate results and interpretations. However, there are a growing number of researchers who do not agree with the necessity or validity of triangulation in qualitative studies. Yin (2011) asserted,

The "field" in qualitative research need not always be the subject of a researcher's

observations or personal interactions. Many qualitative studies can be based

solely on a set of open-ended interviews. What makes the studies qualitative is

that they are interested in the interviewees' words and ideas, not in arraying the

responses numerically. (p. 32)

Yin (2011) also called into question the need to triangulate data that does not need to be

corroborated because it was recorded (i.e., recorded interviews). Erzberger and Kelle, as

cited in Hammerlsey (2008), argued,

the transfer of the notion of triangulation from trigonometry to the realm of mixed

methods of research [seems] to have transformed it into a somewhat fuzzy idea

with a variety of possible meanings. Whereas the term represents a

straightforward concept in its initial frame of reference, it carries a systematic

ambiguity when transferred to the domain of social research methods. (p. 24)

Hammerlsey (2008) argued some forms of triangulation "are investigative

strategies that offer evidence to inform judgments, not techniques that provide guaranteed

truth or completeness" (p. 33). Mathison (1988) also debated the flawed system in trying

to triangulate qualitative data. Mathison (1988) said,

Practicing researchers and evaluators know that the image of data converging

upon a single proposition about a social phenomenon is a phantom image. More

realistically, we end up with data that occasionally converge, but frequently are

inconsistent and even contradictory. And we do not throw our hands up in despair

because we cannot say anything about the phenomenon we have been studying.

Rather, we attempt to make sense of what we find and that often requires

embedding the empirical data at hand with a holistic understanding of the specific

situation and general background knowledge about this class of social phenomena

being studied. (p. 17)

Data Analysis Methods

These data were analyzed "in order to develop a description of the experiences

about the phenomenon that all individuals have in common—the essence of the lived

experience" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 179). Creswell (2005) identified six steps to

analyze and interpret qualitative data. The steps include:

preparing and organizing the data for analysis, engaging in an initial exploration

of the data through the process of coding it, using the codes to develop a more

general picture of the data (descriptions and themes), representing the findings

through narratives and visuals, making an interpretation of the meaning of the

results by reflecting personally on the impact of the findings and on the literature

that might inform the findings, and, finally, conducting strategies to validate the

accuracy of the findings. (Creswell, 2005, p. 236).

Data were analyzed using Dedoose qualitative analysis software. Saldańa (2016)

defined a code as a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient,

essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of a language-based or visual

data. He asserted coding is deep reflection and interpretation of that data's meanings, so

coding is analysis. Saldańa proposed two cycles of coding. In vivo coding uses words or

short phrases that the participant records as codes; therefore, it is suggested to use in

research that is meant to capture and honor the participants' voices. In vivo coding,

values coding, and emotion coding were used in the first-cycle coding of this research as

an appropriate coding approach for phenomenology. The second cycle of coding, pattern coding, grouped the first-cycle codes into smaller, more meaningful analytical units.

Miles et al. (2020) referred to their coding method as the "Miles and Huberman" way of analyzing data (Chapter 1, An Approach to Qualitative Data Analysis section, para. 2). Miles et al. (2020) have identified a 6-step sequence of data analysis:

1. Assigning codes or themes to a set of field notes, interview transcripts, documents, or visual data.

2. Sorting and sifting through these coded materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, categories, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences.

3. Isolating these patterns and processes, and commonalities and differences, and taking them out to the field in the next wave of data collection.

4. Noting reflections or other remarks in jottings, analytic memos, and/or journals.

5. Gradually elaborating a refined set of assertions, propositions, categories, themes, concepts, and generations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database.

6. Comparing those generalizations with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of concepts or theories. (Chapter 1, Analytic Method section, para. 1).

After careful data analysis and the development of concepts and theories, the final written report "includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44).

Trustworthiness of the Design

Student interviews were recorded via Google Meet and transcribed verbatim. In addition, students had the opportunity to review their responses through member checking to enhance trustworthiness. After the interviews were transcribed, participants were provided with a copy of the written interviews to review and edit their response or expand on their responses once they have had time to reflect on the interview questions.

Limitations and Delimitations

There were limitations to this study. There were 44 Black students in total who were enrolled in both high schools, and recruitment was difficult. Participants varied by gender, grade level, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, due to the personal nature of the interviews, it was considered that some students could have dropped out of the study. This research only provided data based on a small sample in one suburban school district. The student data collected in this study may not be representative of all Black students who attended the school district.

It is important to note the school district closed in March 2020 and had to conduct classes via remote learning until the end of the school year in June 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It should also be noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, student perceptions and feelings about their enrollment in a PWS may be different than if they were interviewed while school was in session. Student interviews were conducted remotely, and students were out of their school buildings for several months at the time of the study. Delimitations were imposed to exclude new entrants from participating.

Summary

This phenomenological study set out to examine the lived experiences of Black students who attend a PWS. Black students participated in a focus study group and semi-structured interviews via Google Meet. Questions were created to help the researcher understand to what extent attending a PSW affected students' perceptions of self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perceived educational opportunity. Data were transcribed and analyzed using Dedoose software, resulting in several themes which are discussed in Chapter 4. Conclusions and implications for future research and practice will be presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Black students who attended a predominantly White high-performing suburban high school. The study answered the following research questions:

1. To what extent does attending a predominantly White school affect Black students' sense of belongingness?

2. To what extent does attending a predominantly White school affect Black students' self-efficacy?

3. What is the perceived educational opportunity when Black students attend a predominantly White school?

The participants in this study were high school students in Grades 10, 11, and 12. Three girls and five boys participated. Three students attended High School A and five students attended High School B. Table 4.1 provides demographic information for the students who volunteered to participate in this research.

Table 4.1

Summary of Participants

Student	Gender	School	Grade level 2019-2020	Grade level Enrolled	GPA
Participant 1	M	B	10	7	3.68
Participant 2	M	A	11	3	1.68
Participant 3	F	B	12	9	3.72
Participant 4	M	B	10	9	3.39
Participant 5	M	B	12	2	3.75
Participant 6	M	B	10	K	4.18
Participant 7	F	A	11	7	4.07
Participant 8	F	A	10	9	4.03

Note: A student's grade point average, or GPA, is based on a 0.0 – 4.4 scale. Weighted averages can surpass 4.4. Grades in advanced placement courses are multiplied by 1 quality point due to the rigor of the courses. GPA reflects the total weighted cumulative high-school average at the conclusion of the 2019-2020 school year.

Eight students participated in the focus study group, and seven students participated in semi-structured one-on-one interviews for a total of 15 interviews. Participant 2 did not participate in a one-on-one interview; therefore, his voice was not included in the data collected during the personal interviews. The school district is a K-12 district with seven elementary schools (kindergarten–Grade 5), three middle schools (Grades 6–8), and two high schools (Grades 9–12). Only one student had attended district schools since kindergarten. Two students enrolled in the school district in elementary school, two students enrolled in middle school, and three students enrolled in high school.

A detailed analysis of the code and theme data is presented in this chapter. Quotes from student interviews are highlighted to capture the students' voices, along with tables and figures to highlight the use of codes and the subsequent themes that emerged.

Findings

Using Dedoose software, the interview transcripts were manually coded. The first cycle coding used in vivo, emotion and values coding to capture the students' lived experiences. Pattern coding was used for second cycle coding. This resulted in the development of six major themes: (a) Social Isolation, (b) School Responsibilities, (c) Self-Efficacy, (d) Racism, (e) Relationships, and (f) Academic Opportunity. Table 4.2 shows the child codes (subcodes) associated with each major theme and their frequency.

Table 4.2

Frequency of Codes by Theme

Major theme	Subcode	Frequency
Social Isolation	Alienation/Estrangement	50
	Emotional Effects	56
	Not Fitting In	39
	Conforming to the Majority	24
Racism	Emotional Reactions	33
	Acts of Racism	36
	Student Views on Racism	31
	Stereotypes and Microaggressions	74
	Confronting Racism	19
	Ignorance	47
Self-Efficacy	Resiliency	13
	Belief in Self	24
	Black Pride	9
Relationships	Peer Relationships	49
	Teacher Relationships	22
School Responsibilities	Evaluate Curricula and Instructional Practices	17
	Give Students a Voice	9
	Combat Racism in Schools	32
	Provide Anti-Bias and Anti-Racist Education	32
	Foster Inclusivity and Acceptance	31
	Increase Diversity of Faculty and Staff	4
Academic Opportunity	High-Quality Education	21
	Prepared for College	10
	Teacher/Counselor Support	19

A word cloud analysis, illustrated in Figure 4.3, shows the expansive codes that were generated from the interviews. Codes in quotation marks are students' own words provided through in vivo coding.

Figure 2

Word Cloud Analysis of All Codes

After thorough analysis, the researcher determined several of the themes that emerged could not be directly linked to one research question. Rather, the themes

provided an overall essence of the students' experiences, which were intricately related to one or more research question. Therefore, this chapter provides a broad summary of the salient findings related to each research question and then discusses the in-depth analysis of the data relevant to each theme that emerged.

Research Question 1

The first research question in this study asked: To what extent does attending a predominantly White school affect Black students' sense of belongingness? Analysis of the data showed 100% of the students suffered from social isolation and not fitting in. They struggled to make friends and establish meaningful relationships. The participants were often victim to or witnesses of ongoing acts of racism and/or microaggressions toward Black students. Even when participants were actively involved in the school and were included, they never truly felt like they belonged. As a result, Black students did not have a sense of belongingness while attending a predominately White school.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked: To what extent does attending a predominantly White school affect Black students' self-efficacy? The seven participants who participated in individual interviews demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy. Moreover, attending a predominantly White school did not decrease the students' self-efficacy. Students proudly shared their strengths and accomplishments. They had positive attitudes and boasted about the ability of Black students and people. Some students exuded Black pride and argued their skin color did not make them any less capable than their peers. The participants took challenging coursework and were willing to work hard

to be successful. Many students felt the need to work even harder to prove themselves and dispel stereotypes, likely increasing their self-efficacy.

Research Question 3

The third research question asked: What is the perceived educational opportunity when Black students attend a predominantly White school? Data analysis showed students were provided the same academic opportunities as their peers. They were able to self-select their courses and challenge themselves. While some students felt the school lacked the emotional support they needed due to feelings of isolation and as a victim of persistent racism, they felt supported academically by both their teachers and counselors when selecting and taking challenging coursework. The participants were grateful for the opportunity to attend a high-performing school that they believed would fully prepare them to be successful in college. Additionally, they valued the academic program the school district offered and were proud and happy to attend a school with high standards and prestige.

Theme 1: Social Isolation

Social Isolation was a prevalent theme that was assigned 169 total codes. The subthemes related to Social Isolation were Alienation/Estrangement, Not Fitting In, Conforming to the Majority, and Emotional Effects. All eight participants discussed feelings of social isolation.

Alienation/Estrangement

Fifty codes were assigned to the category of Alienation/Estrangement, and 100% of participants shared stories that discussed their feelings of isolation, exclusion, loneliness, and being ostracized as a Black student attending a predominantly White high

school. Students reported not being accepted, not belonging, being viewed differently, and keeping to themselves. They lacked connections to peers or anyone they could "relate to" and felt "disconnected from the school." Five out of the eight participants said "nobody looked like me," or "I was the only minority." Participant 2 explained, "You kind of feel like the odd one out in a way. Like you're in a room full of people that, you know, don't even look like you and just look at you differently."

Participant 5's sentiments were reflective of the group:

At times I just feel like an exhibit on display, like everybody is just passing by and they're like (*sic*), "Oh look. This is cool. Can I touch it?" Truth is … we just get a different vibe.

Participant 6 continued, "It's almost as if you're stranded on an island and … you're a different person in their world; you're in your own world."

Some students initially reacted to their first school experiences by wanting to attend a different school. Participant 7 asked her mother to move, and Participant 5 struggled with telling his father, "I don't want to be here." He wanted to attend a school "where [he] could actually talk to people." As noted by Participant 1, "There may be like (*sic*) two or three people in the school that you could really relate to, because those are the only people who actually look like you."

The students lamented, "I don't belong here," "people stared," I was by myself," "they don't like us," and reported the students were "not welcoming" and "cliquey." In turn, the students generally remained estranged from the majority population. The following codes were used 14 times: "distanced myself," "kept to myself," "stayed to myself," "had to separate myself," "I was by myself," and "I had to sit by myself." A

current freshman in college, Participant 5 stated, "I realized after I left high school and came to college that I was never actually comfortable where I was; there was never a time where I could take a deep breath and kind of enjoy my space."

One student's realization that by senior year, despite the fact that she had social interactions and was involved in school activities, she still did not feel like she belonged, led to the development of self-isolation as a coping strategy. Participant 3 stated,

By my senior year … I was at a point where I'm growing up and I need to be confident in myself and I need to have pride in who I am because stuff like that [racism] is not going to change. I can't change where I came from. I can't change the values that I've learned and the traditions that I've grown to love and embrace, so at that point [I decided] it's either me or these people, so I stayed to myself. I don't know if it's like that for everybody else, but I did stay myself and I stayed isolated.

Five students conveyed they did not feel a sense of belonging. Participant 6 captured the essence of how the group felt: "I feel like I could say this confidently, that a majority of the Black students in [school name] don't really feel like they belong … no matter what the school does, we still feel outcasted." Participant 5, now a first-year college student, shared positive school experiences and memories and said he "felt very included in that school." The researcher probed, "So you felt like you belonged?" He quickly retorted, "Belonged? No. Included? Yes. But I felt like, not left out, but like a spot, like a little Sharpie marker in the middle of a white piece of paper." Participant 8, a girl who was beginning her second year as a student in the school district asserted:

I still don't feel like I truly belong in the school. Not yet at least. I still feel a little

outcasted when I walk around the hallways. … I'm like (*sic*) hunched over and I

don't really exude that confidence that a lot of people have at that school.

As a result of lack of connections, the participants sought relationships with other

minority students because "Black students need to stick together." Furthermore, Black

students felt like it was their responsibility to welcome new Black students into the

school so they would not experience the same sense of isolation. Participant 3 said:

When new people would come into the school, it just felt like we had to take it

upon ourselves to welcome people … because it was very hard. It was very

difficult. I mean, we all know what it's like to be a student there, how

uncomfortable it could feel and how lonely you can feel and how hard it is to

make friends, especially when [the school] is so cliquey and they make their

friends very quickly. … There are people that will move into the school at

different times … and it's like you can feel the energy without even knowing their

story. It's like you see them when they're new and you feel compelled to go over

there and talk to them and be like (*sic*), "Hey, I can show you around?" or "We

can talk this out because you feel by yourself," but at the same time, you're still

able to make a community [of Black students] through the struggles that you deal

with even if it's unspoken.

Participant 1 added on:

I feel as though like (*sic*) when a new Black student comes into the school …

we're the ones who have to really bring them in and try to make them feel as

comfortable as possible because a lot of people in the school don't understand

what it's like being Black in that school, honestly, and … when they [majority population] do try to help them and introduce them, they're usually still getting discriminated against. … They're still getting a bunch of hate towards them (*sic*). That's what happened to me, honestly … it was very difficult.

Not Fitting In

All of the participants experienced feelings of not fitting in with the majority population. Overall, 39 codes were recorded for Not Fitting In. The code "Culture Shock" was used five times by the students who previously attended other schools and quickly realized school was "not what we expected." One student proclaimed she was "sheltered in private school," and Participant 5 concurred by stating, "I received a lot of attention due to my skin color." All eight students reflected on the difficulties and surprise of being Black in a PWS as noted in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Frequency of Quotes Regarding the School's Lack of Diversity

Participant quotes	Frequency
"Culture Shock"	5
"Only Black Person in Class"	1
"Lacks Diversity"	11
"No One Looks Like Me"	3
"Black Students are Outnumbered"	1
"Didn't Know Anyone Black"	1
"Odd One Out"	1
"Didn't Fit In"	3
"People Don't Look Like You"	2
"Only Minority"	1
"I Don't Look Like Them"	1

In addition to physical appearance, all eight of the participants noted how they did not fit in due to their taste in music, clothing, style, speech, or even the way they acted.

Conforming to the Majority

Participants struggled with embracing their style and culture or conforming to the majority to be accepted. Six of the eight participants discussed their experiences conforming to the majority, and the code was applied 23 times. When the researcher asked the students if they have changed the way they do things, two participants quickly responded, "Every single day," while all nodded in agreement. Participant 1 shared, "The biggest struggle is just not being able to completely be yourself." Similar sentiments were shared by Participant 5 who stated, " I felt like I needed to be another person to fit in, but I couldn't be true to myself like the person I was at home … so that was a big thing for me."

Participant 5 explained:

When you first go in there, the Black kids are outnumbered. I was outnumbered. I didn't have anyone to relate to … and from a young age, I didn't really have anyone … so I tried my best to fit in or I was cast aside … So I changed how I held myself, the way I spoke, stuff like that. In general, just like (*sic*) my whole character was different. That's why it was such a problem for me, and I felt like I needed to stick to who I am.

The same student spoke about his struggle again during his interview:

It was constantly just people that didn't look like me surrounding me, and it got to a point where I was almost expected to act like them just because I was around them. And that's not really what I wanted to do. I wanted to act like somebody who looked like me.

Students spoke about the difficulty of wanting to remain true to their identities, but they conformed because they did not want to be judged. Participant 3 stated:

You have to force yourself to be a different person because you feel as though they're not going to accept who you are. … You have to be careful to speak a certain way because you don't want to be judged or you don't want to say something that you believe … [if] they don't believe the same. So it's just difficult.

Participant 3 expressed her frustration, "The fact that we have to kind of just change the way we are in order to kind of assimilate and fit, you know, that's just one of the worst things about going to school." Overall, the students agreed they

would feel like they could be themselves if they were in a more diverse environment.

Interestingly, even though many students took on White dress, music, and speech to be accepted and because they "didn't want to be labeled," there was still resentment and confusion when other Black students became "whitewashed." According to the participants, the term "whitewashed" indicates Black students adopted White practices such as straightening their hair or shopping in the same popular stores where the majority population shopped and wearing similar clothing. Participant 3, who felt like the kids stared at her clothing, said,

I remember my mom telling me, "Let's go shopping." Or she'll be like (*sic*),

"What clothes do they wear there? Let's go buy the clothes that they have so that

you can fit in." But it's just, it's difficult because why should I change myself in

the environment that I am [in] when I'm trying to be comfortable?

Participant 8 who exuded Black pride, shared her frustration when her White

friends said she was whitewashed:

[The] problem is when they [White friends] try to group me into their race, like

they call me whitewashed and that really offends me because … although I go to

school with predominantly White people, I'm not [their] race … I know who I

am, and I will never let [them] try to call me whitewashed and say that I act like

[them] just because I'm in an environment where I'm surrounded by people like

[them]. I hate when people say that to me, but I don't know what to say. I think I

just kind of … my mind goes blank because I don't know what to say when

someone says that to me.

Emotional Effects

Not surprisingly, the students struggled with the emotional effects of feeling estranged, alienated, and even invisible at times. All eight participants shared this sentiment. The combination of not fitting in and feeling pressured to conform to the majority negatively impacted the students. Participant 7 was an active participant in school in both sports and clubs. She shared her disappointment and sadness in not having the same experience as the other students and the emotional toll it took on her. She said,

The sad thing about going to [school name] for me was that I never felt comfortable there, even though I had been brought into the multicultural club and the social justice club. It still never felt like a home, as many other people may have felt it were [*sic*]. People would have their friends; they would go to school. And it just seemed like they were so much happier than how I felt when I went to school.

Participant 5 was an active member in school and several sports. He tried to mentally prepare himself for school every day, sometimes to no avail:

I feel like having to deal with the struggles of being a minority definitely heightens stress, because it just felt weird, like walking into school became like a cloud. I would be fine in the morning. I would be like, "Okay, we're getting ready. Today is going to be a good day," and then I would walk into the school and just feel a cloud of darkness, like an energy that did not belong there. And it was stressful. It really did feel like there was a weight on me that I could not shake off … you have to balance all that emotional stress.

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Participant 1 concurred:

You're surrounded by people who don't understand the problems that you're going through, don't understand what you're going through mentally, don't understand what you're going through emotionally and stuff in terms of issues that you [a Black student] go through in the school. And it's kind of, it's kind of just difficult.

Theme 2: Racism

Racism was the most common theme with 240 code applications. The sub codes associated with racism were: Acts of Racism, Stereotypes and Microaggressions, Confronting Racism, Emotional Effects, Student Views on Racism, and Ignorance. All eight participants spoke about racism.

Acts of Racism

One hundred percent of the students shared stories of racism they personally experienced or witnessed. The acts ranged from name-calling to racial profiling. Students reported being called names such as "monkey," "ape," and "purple," along with other racial slurs. Students were subjected to racial jokes, "discriminated against," and oftentimes put in "awkward" and "weird" positions by persistent student actions, sometimes even by friends. Participant 6 explained,

Every single day in every single class, the person that sat behind me or people walking down the hall would try to stick pencils in my hair. And I would always know when they were doing it, because, I mean, they would stab me in the head and stuff. … I don't know, just the amount of disrespect that that showed me that

they had for me. … I tried to explain to them why that wasn't cool. And it never really got through to them.

In fact, four of the eight students mentioned inappropriate comments and touching of their hair and the unwillingness of their peers to stop touching it after being asked not to. Participant 3, stating that her hair is her "crown," felt students needed to be educated on the maintenance involved to care for black hair and other hair concerns, such as alopecia, so they could understand how disrespectful it is to inappropriately touch someone's hair or hair accessories. Furthermore, so much attention toward one's hair further magnifies the differences between Black and White students and contributes to feelings of discomfort and being viewed differently.

The n-word emerged in all of the interviews. At times it was used as part of an overt racist act, as Participant 1 described,

I was sitting at my lunch table, minding my own business and then someone wrote in ketchup the n-word with the hard R and everything and brought it to me on a tray. And they were like (*sic*), "Oh, this is a message for you. …" I didn't even know what to do. I wanted to fight both those kids so bad, but I decided I'm not going to get myself in trouble. I'm not going to get suspended, because, of course, if I ended up fighting that person, I would be the person who was in trouble because I'm Black.

The participants were collectively angry and perplexed when their friends asked for the "n-word pass," as Participant 8 explained,

The problem with my school is that the other black kids in my school, since they grew up with these people, they gave them the n-word pass. So they feel like it's

okay to say that to me. … First of all, that's not even a thing. So I know what they're [other students] telling you, but you shouldn't feel like that's right to come up to me and say it, because I never said that you can say it, and I would never say that you can say it because you don't have the right to.

Participant 1 was frustrated when a friend regularly asked for the n-word pass, despite the fact that he told him he does not "do that" and does not "condone it."

Two participants shared stories of teachers engaging in acts that had racial overtones. Participant 1 explained, "Sometimes when teachers ask you about a topic [such as slavery], you can tell if they have good intentions behind it or not. … and then sometimes you feel like they're trying to isolate you [Black students] and trying to make you answer something that you wouldn't feel really comfortable answering." Participant 3 was stunned when she learned about one teacher's social studies project:

Some teachers will treat minorities less than their White students. I remember there was one teacher who had a project and the teacher had their students dress up as slaves and slave owners, and it just felt, it was so uncomfortable because I would go through the hall and on this day you would see kids dressed up in rags and these ropes around their necks with derogatory terms written on a sheet of paper and or on a card. So it really does depend on the person that is in authority. I remember telling my mother and she had told me, "Listen, it's not your class, so I don't want you to get involved."

Racial profiling was mentioned five times. As one student recalled, "Security guards look to us first. If anything happens, they stare [us] down more than anyone else." It was difficult for students to articulate exactly how they felt at times, but one student

shared his experience with racial profiling, which he felt was a continuous problem. Participant 2 shared,

> Security guards would follow me, and then they would make sure that I would walk through the door and they'd [talk into their walkie talkie and say] "[student's name] just walked through the door, make sure you got 'em. He's wearing a blue shirt today." … They would make sure that they got me on the radar about everything that I do (*sic*) … I don't know. It just got to a point where I was just like, I don't even really like being myself … I don't even like the color of my skin because of that … it just makes you think about the people around you and the people that you can really trust.

Students' emotional experiences were interwoven within each story. As noted by Participant 2, some acts had long-lasting impact:

> I'm not really good with, you know, expressing this type of stuff, but I feel like I haven't really had the best high school experience in a way. I remember sophomore year, I was like just going off the bus … and I found in my bag a little index card that somebody drew on. It was a black guy, basically, a black guy being hanged on a noose and it said 1856 and had a cross being burned and on the back of it said, "For you." I didn't really show anybody or anything like that. My mom found it and brought it to school.

This student's story is particularly representative of the long-lasting effects of such egregious acts. Although the incident had occurred over 2 years prior to the interview, the student was able to quickly pull up the image on his cell phone to show the group.

Microaggressions and Stereotypes

Students' experiences with microaggressions and stereotypes overlapped as codes since many of the microaggressions were based on stereotypes. The students called these actions "annoying," "offensive," "hurtful," and "uncomfortable." Some students thought "it felt intentional" when students engaged in microaggressions, even when they assured them it was not intentional. Table 4.5 shows the range of student and staff perceptions in the students' own words, which were pulled from the interview transcripts.

Table 4.4

Student and Staff Perceptions of Black Students

Students' quotes about perceived stereotypes	
"ghetto"	"not smart"
"we're criminals"	"we're hood"
"good at basketball"	"must like rap music"
"dumb Black kid"	"guilty until proven innocent"
"I'm dangerous"	"more trouble because I'm Black"
"sexual predator"	"underestimate me"
"all look alike"	"all act the same"
"we can freestyle"	"not as smart"
"perceived as a thief"	"all Black people are bad"
"smokes weed"	"does drugs"

Students experienced microaggressions in various forms, from students acting surprised that Black students are smart, mixing up Black students because they "all look the same," whispering, staring, or even running away as Participant 6 shared:

I was walking to the buses after school and there were these two girls talking to each other. … It was a big crowd because everybody was going to the buses after school and they turned around and they got really scared when they looked at me.

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And then they started speeding up and running away. It kind of hurts when that happens because it makes me feel like even though I haven't actually done anything, I'm already being seen like a bad person, you know.

Students were told their music was "weird," their clothes were different, and had their hair touched often. One participant was often told he "talks like a White person." The persistent behaviors were a "rude awakening" to one student who said, "Some students would say something kind of passive aggressively or somebody would say something outright racist to me and … I was never really exposed to that in [former school]." Participant 7 felt like students "dismissed" her ideas in class but welcomed the same ideas when a different [White] student would say them. In one instance, a student had to sit at her table to do group work, and his friends whispered, "You're at the minority table."

Students also shared stories of being viewed as troublemakers, as one student explained, "People in our school district … when they addressed racial issues or any problems that came up or any fights that happened, they have (*sic*) a tendency to like look at the Black kids for some reason." Participant 8 facetiously added, "We don't deserve respect." Overall, all of the participants felt like they were judged for being Black.

Even when students were happy in school and everything was seemingly going well, there was always an underlying uneasiness or concern that something could happen or they would be put in awkward or uncomfortable situations. As expressed by Participant 5 after discussing ongoing, persistent microaggressions, "It was just too much. It was overwhelming."

All eight participants felt like they had to prove their worth to be accepted. The code "Had to Prove Worth" was used 23 times. The participants used various terms to express dispelling stereotypes, including, "appear happy and nice," "present myself well," "avoid drama," "make others happy," "maintain a positive reputation," and "stay on the good side of your teachers." Participant 3 summarized it well:

As a minority, you feel like you [have to] hold such a high standard. You have to be put together because you can't afford to slip up, you can't afford somebody thinking you have attitude, you can't afford having grades slip up.

Students' stories of proving themselves were common, as illustrated by these students who had excellent academic records. Participant 6 said,

Since elementary and middle school, people labeled me as just a dumb Black kid and … I didn't even have bad grades. It's just that nobody really cared to take the time to actually see if I got good grades or not … no matter what I did, I had to try and prove myself.

Participant 8 shared the pressure she faced to dispel stereotypes:

I always feel like I have to be the smartest one in the group to prove myself, so people don't put a stereotype towards me that I'm not smart and that we [Black students] can't do anything and we can't have really amazing jobs when we're older. … I try to keep my grades up. I try to look presentable in school. … I don't want people looking at me for the color of my skin. … I always try my hardest. I feel like I shouldn't always have to prove myself (*sic*) that I can do stuff, but that's something that I feel like I constantly have to do in order to be respected.

Proving one's worth out of fear of receiving disciplinary action was also common as noted by Participant 4:

One thing that I feel that I have to do is whenever I walk into school, I always like, I feel like I have to present myself as a person who can hold himself very well, not somebody who gets in trouble a lot, because then if something ever does happen and somebody calls me out to the principal or something, I could always have people or teachers who know me [say] that I'm not that type of kid.

Participant 3 limited her social circle out of similar beliefs:

I didn't want to get into any trouble because I knew if something were to happen, I feared that I would get into worse trouble or there would be more disciplinary action towards me than anybody else. So I just tried to stay away from getting in trouble … so I stayed a lot to myself.

Upon reflection, Participant 4 offered the following advice:

Don't try and put yourself in a place where you're going to be in bad situations… just try and do well in school … don't do anything that's going to make you look bad, and always, always try and be on the good side of your teachers and try to make yourself look like the happiest kid in school or the most endearing and nice (*sic*).

Confronting Racism

The participants struggled with how to respond to and confront racist acts. Although angry and frustrated by some of the incidents that had occurred in school, they did not want to react in a negative way, which would perpetuate some of the students'

and staff's perceptions. One student noted, "I had to cool myself down," in response to an event that occurred. Participant 4 explained how he tries not to let things bother him:

I'm too nice of a guy and I want to stop them, but it's just who I am. I don't really like backlashing at people when they say something that's wrong to me or do something that's wrong to me. I just kind of shrug it off and go on with my day because I don't like to let it bother me.

Additionally, if students did not respond when faced with racism, they struggled with the internal conflict and disappointment of not sticking up for themselves. One student mourned, "It makes me want to disappear and act like I'm not even there because I don't know what to say to them." Participant 3 said,

It's kind of like you feel like you have to survive throughout the day or throughout the week because something might happen. Somebody might say something and you have to figure out the best way to respond because you don't want to get in trouble.

Participant 7 stated, "I have to learn how to speak up for myself more, because when I hear stuff, I kind of just shy away from it and act like I don't hear it because I'm not a confrontational person."

Emotional Effects

As students shared stories during the focus study group, they showed empathy and compassion toward one another. While they were aware of some of the racism that students had endured, they were not fully aware of the extent of students' experiences, including their own friends. Although students were never specifically asked how they felt by the researcher, each story naturally led students to discuss how the negative effects

of attending a PWS affected them personally, such as Participant 6 who said, "It's so bad that it's just, it's unimaginable." Participant 5 captured the overall essence of ongoing, repeated acts of racism:

I think it's crazy just how much of an influence mentally that something like this can have. You go into a place like this … kind of just taking it at face value because you don't know what to expect from the school and then, all of it [combined experiences with racism and isolation], as time goes on, you doubt the person that you are because of the people around you, and that can cause trauma, serious mental troubles.

Participant 1 added on:

Some of the experiences that I had in my first year moving here, they really, I don't know, they really shocked me in a negative way. They weren't, they were not good at all because … people didn't understand … Some of the things that were said to me really kind of hurt and stuck with me. And it's been like that every year that I've been here. Something new has happened every year … it kind of messes with you in terms of your self-esteem.

Student Views on Racism

It became apparent that participants grappled with making sense of their peers' beliefs and actions. Participants felt students in the school oftentimes "downplayed" racism, making statements such as, "It's not a big deal," It's not broken," Black students are "overreacting," and "Racism doesn't exist." Three participants stated students in their school "live in a bubble," and are not truly aware of the struggles and challenges that

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others may face. Participant 5 argued that because the students in his town were sheltered, they were unaware of their actions:

I'm not going to say that it's necessarily their fault because [our town] is like a bubble, and it's really just like being separated from the outside world. … Most people that live in the area have luxury houses, and you can stay in the house and not worry about anything else that's going on … from a White person's point of view, nothing's broken.

The overall consensus of the group was that racism is learned. The majority of the participants said racism is learned at home, but they spoke of outside influences as well, including the media and friends. As stated by one student, "If their parents are racist, then that's all they know, and it goes way back … they do the things that they do … and they think it's okay." One female said students "take what they hear on the news and they bring that to school, and they take what they hear from their parents and they bring that to school, and they had (*sic*) that judgment before they even get to know you." Another student added, "It's very difficult in [town name] because they don't take the time to learn about us."

Participant 1 shared his views:

Racism is a learned trait. They probably learned it from home. They probably learned it from people surrounding them. They probably learned it from other students. And some of the experiences that people may have had with certain Black people may have made them racist.

This research took place during the 2020 presidential election. Additionally, the school is located in conservative leaning town where regular rallies and marches in

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support of Donald Trump and the conservative party were held. It created a "tough political climate," in the schools. One student expressed relief the schools were operating on a hybrid model due to the COVID-19 pandemic because he feared if all students were in school, the political climate would have created a more negative school environment. The town has several social media groups, including anti-racist groups that highlight the perceived rampant racism that exists within the town and school district. Students in this town are very active on several social media channels and have been exposed to personal student, parent, and community member views regarding racism and the ongoing debate regarding various political issues, such as support or lack thereof of Black Lives Matter, which directly affects minority students who are associated with political parties and views by default, even if they remain silent or do not hold such views.

Ignorance

Despite the racist environment, participants seemed to be somewhat forgiving to the students who engaged in racist acts, even saying "it's not their fault." One participant said that students are "naïve" and probably are not even aware of what's happening in the school. Students oftentimes were frustrated with peers, but it was more frustrating when their "friends" would engage in behaviors that isolated them or drew attention to their color. The codes lack of understanding and lack of awareness were applied nine times. Students said their classmates "had no filter," "don't think before they say things," "can't tell right from wrong," "don't understand," and "say what they want." Participant 6 stated due to the lack of diversity in the schools and town, the students just have not had enough practice in handling certain situation and have not developed the skills they need to be inclusive. Participant 3 explained his rationale:

Because [town name] is a predominantly White populated area, there are not

many incidents where people have to learn [what they should and should not do]

because I genuinely think that some people don't even recognize that what they're

doing is harmful because they grew up in a household or in their family or the

community where stuff like this is just socially acceptable, especially if nobody

has said anything about it or said anything against it or said, "Hey, that's not

something you should say" or "That's not something you should do."

One girl was called "the n-word; hard r" by a boy who randomly came up to her.

She looked at him with confusion, and he explained that it was okay for him to call her

that because he was "a redneck." All eight students were stunned with the amount of

ignorance that was shown by many students; yet, they also felt that it could not be

possible that they did not know better about saying or doing certain things, and they must

be joking or pretending to be ignorant.

The participants tried to teach their peers repeatedly about what they can or

cannot say, what they should or should not say, and what is and is not appropriate.

However, the students continued to engage in the same behaviors because many truly

believed what they were doing did not need to be corrected. As one student argued who

could not understand why a Black student was upset in response to an uncomfortable

event, "It wasn't a big deal." Participant 3 shared her frustration with students' ignorance:

When there were negative incidents having to do with racial discrimination or

even any social injustice, whether it was because of someone's sexual orientation

or gender, I felt like I had to challenge myself to just not burst out or do

something unreasonable or raise my voice or bash anybody, but really take the

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time to hear them out and be like (*sic*), "Why would somebody reasonable say something like this?" or "Why would somebody who claims to be a good person think the way they think?" A lot of the times it's because it's not even their own fault, even though … they have the personal responsibility to educate themselves. We're at an age, especially in high school, we're at an age where we have the access to educate ourselves and not be ignorant.

The code teacher ignorance was used 14 times. Students mostly agreed teachers had good intentions. However, they sometimes engaged in behaviors that could be deemed offensive. One participant spoke about a teacher who assumed he like Snoop Dog when he asked him to play different music in class. Another student spoke about a well-liked teacher using certain nicknames that could have biased connotations but followed up with, "But he doesn't know any better."

All eight participants concurred that students and teachers would benefit from anti-racist and anti-bias education and wished the school district would implement programs to support these goals. The related interview sections will be discussed in the school responsibilities section.

Theme 3: Relationships

Relationships with peers and adults was coded to 71 interview excerpts. Participants discussed peer and teacher relationships as they shared their experiences.

Peer Relationships

All of the participants shared their struggles in finding true friends. Students reported not really having a friend group, "making friends is difficult," forcing themselves "to connect" with others, and making friends "was a struggle." Participant 4's

parents pleaded with him to make friends, and although he tried, he stated, "You don't always find people right away, and socially, it's challenging to make friends." While all of the participants spoke about their friendship groups, some were able to clearly delineate who were true friends versus mere acquaintances as noted by Participant 5 who declared, "I had a whole lot of acquaintances." He did not call them friends; instead he referred to them as "the people I hung around with in high school." Another student proclaimed he "found good people within the trash." A girl who was the captain of her team explained the lack of a true bond with her friends from her team: "There was always such a disconnect, even though there was a lot of love within the group."

As the participants got older or spent more time in the school district, they became more critical of their "friends," and made conscious decisions about choosing the right friends—those they could rely on, trust, and feel comfortable around. Some began to question their friend group, as noted by Participant 6:

Obviously, going to [school name] my friends are predominantly White and up until probably either ninth grade or beginning in tenth grade, I didn't really have friends that I thought would stick up for me if somebody [said] something that was way past the line. … That kind of affected me mentally. … I was trying to figure out whether that's where my line should be or whether I should move my line because I wasn't sure if I was overreacting or if it was just that they didn't realize how hurtful other people's words could be or … how much that could affect me.

Participant 1 had a friend who was friends with others who called him racist names. He grappled with his friend's choices and questioned how anyone could

"associate themselves with a bunch of people who are racist and claim they're not [racist]." Participant 3 stated just because her friends say they have Black friends does not make them "genuine." Three participants sought friends who would "stick up for" them. Participant 6 explained Black students "try to make themselves feel accepted and integrated into the actual friend groups, but at the same time … it still feels like there's a wall there … that you just can't get through." He added on by saying peers acted like they enjoyed his company and said what a great person he was and they should hang out, but when he tried to make plans with them, they "ignored" him or "ghosted" him.

The social challenges caused students to react in different ways. One student made a conscious decision to make friends who shared her experiences despite the inner conflict she endured from knowing that she was limiting her options and opportunities. Participant 3 explained,

> I'm going to stick to the people that I'm comfortable with. I'm going to stick to the people that have the same struggles as me, that go through the same pain, who fear the same things that I do. I feel like that stunts me as a person, because … I still need to be with various groups of people and there's (*sic*) still people that I haven't met yet.

Participant 8 ended friendships when needed:

> Some of my friends, their true colors really showed when all of this political stuff happened, so they're not really my friends anymore, which is sad, but I can't surround myself with people who judge me and don't think I deserve the same rights as them.

In time, each student forged friendships with a small, tight circle. Participant 3 said things will be easier if you "find people who respect you and who appreciate your existence because of who you are, because of what you wear, because of what you believe, your values, your beliefs." All of the participants said they were happy with their small, tight friend circle, albeit it took great effort and self-reflection for them to form those circles. One student confidently said, "I have a small circle, but it's a good circle." Another student who was grateful for her friends said, "I have a small circle, but I don't feel like an outcast anymore." Even when making friends, the participants were careful when giving advice, as evidenced by this student who was mindful of the typical stereotypes that exist in his school. Participant 4 stated,

> Find that one person who is doing well in school and can help you do well in school and stick with them. If they have good friends, you stick with those friends and have a very tight circle where you know you won't get in trouble for something.

Although it was not explicitly stated, the researcher believed students were envious of the majority population who appeared to make friends more easily and had larger friend groups.

Teacher Relationships

The participants openly discussed the relationships they had with their teachers. They spoke about positive teacher relationships and reported liking their teachers, being able to trust them, and being accepted, welcomed, and encouraged. The overwhelming majority of comments regarding teachers was positive, and students felt nurtured and supported. Students stated their teachers were "there for me," and "will push you to do

what they think is best for you." One student even boasted he had his English teacher's cell phone number so he could buy her breakfast when he was running late and was not going to be in first period on time. Others joked about teachers bumping into their parents in a local store and making jokes and banter about them.

Participants were eager to share stories about their favorite teachers. Participant 4 was a new student and appreciated his teacher's welcoming nature. Dubbed his "favorite" teacher, he said he "really took the time to get to know me," and asked about his family, his adjustment to the school, and tapped into his interests. Participant 6 shared his sentiments about liking his teachers:

> I know that I learn a lot better when I have a teacher that I can actually like, that I feel like I can trust, that I feel like is my friend first and then a teacher. … I've had a decent amount of math teachers that I thought, "Wow, like (*sic*) this person actually wants to get to know me, like (sic) they actually care about me."

Participant 3, who struggled with peer relationships, felt similarly about her teachers and said,

> When it came to the teachers, it was very different because for me. I was afraid that the teachers wouldn't take the time to listen to me, especially because there wasn't a lot of diversity in the faculty. However, they actually took the time to listen. And I remember in a lot of my classes, especially English and history, they would actually look at me when they when they asked a question. … When I when I would speak in the classroom, they would make sure that everybody was silent and I could tell through their eye contact that they were truly paying attention to what I was saying, or they would take the time to develop on a

question that I asked. … I honestly did appreciate [it], because it was far from what I expected to happen when it came to the teachers.

The consensus of the group was that the teachers were inclusive and did not focus on their students' race or ethnicity. Participant 5 stated,

Socially, it was hard … you are outcast … [but] in the classroom, you kind of receive the same attention. It was never—for me at least—it was never the staff that were prejudiced against me. They were always welcoming, warm. They were just being teachers there, wasn't (*sic*) thinking about color, race, anything … It was really them genuinely just teaching, like (*sic*) not focusing on the color [of our skin].

Forging personal connections was a common theme as noted by this student, who was proud to share her reflection of a teacher. Participant 3 said,

I know teachers who love the minority students. I know teachers who try to connect in any way that they can … just getting to know the minority students personally and having a connection with them and letting them know, "Listen, if you need anything, you can come talk to me, even if our struggles are not the same." And then there are some teachers who acknowledge that a student is a minority, but don't really let it negatively affect the way that they teach.

There were very few mentions of less than positive teacher relationships. For example, one student said interaction with teachers can be "awkward" and another one felt "singled out." Despite a few isolated incidents, the students collectively agreed teachers genuinely cared about them and supported them. Participant 8 shared a disappointing memory but concluded, "But other than that, the teachers have been really

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great." As summarized by Participant 3, "There's an obvious divide between the way that the students treat the minorities and the way that some of the teachers treat the minorities."

Theme 4: Academic Opportunity

Despite the social challenges the students faced, seven of the eight participants valued the school's academic program and the opportunity it provided them to be successful in college. The code Academic Opportunity was used 50 times and resulted in 3 child codes: High Quality Education (21 applications), Prepared for College (10 applications), and Teacher/Counselor Support (19 applications).

High-Quality Education

Receiving a high-quality education was a prevalent theme. Students valued the district's "strong" academic program, took challenging courses, praised the academic rigor and challenging courses that were available to them, and were appreciative of the opportunities they were afforded by attending a high-performing school. Participant 7, who previously moved out of the district due to the social challenges and lack of diversity, moved back prior to starting high school because "there's (*sic*) better opportunities," and she knew she would not be in as many advanced placement courses or clubs had she not attended her school. She discussed her co-curricular activities: "I'm in the National Honor Society, I'm in English Honor Society, I'm in Spanish Honor Society, and I'm in DECA for college." Participant 3 said, "It's difficult because I feel like even though I didn't feel comfortable being within the school, the school has honestly provided me so much." Participant 1 concurred by saying, "[School name] is great for academics. [School name] is absolutely amazing for academics. … Going here

has given me the opportunity to see a school that's more than advanced in terms of academics."

Prepared for College

The students were pleased and excited about having a strong academic background to be successful in college and life. Seven out of the eight participants took advanced courses, many offering college credit. The students worked hard, took rigorous coursework, and faced challenges in preparation for their future. As Participant 5 noted, "Academically I think that [school name] was a very good school and supplied me with the tools … to move forward and start my life." He continued, "[School name] prepared me for college. I know a lot of kids who came from city schools, and they are very overwhelmed. I never felt like that." Participant 3 said, "I wouldn't be as successful if I went to my dream high school because I feel like they [the teachers in my school] prepared me." She continued, "Even though I felt a disconnect toward the school, it did provide me a lot of tools to be successful and actually had its own way to pave me into what I'm passionate about." Participant 1 added, "I'm becoming more and more confident that I can do well in school and attend the college I want to attend. … [School name] definitely prepared me for my post-high school life."

All of the students evaluated the worth of their school based on academic opportunity. Participant 5 summarized this belief:

Academics wise, [school name] is a very, very good school, like (*sic*) [a] really good school. … The classes I took my senior year pretty much helped me for my whole college experience. So, yeah, I mean, we've been talking a lot of the bad (*sic*) about [our school district], but it's a very, very good school.

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Teacher/Counselor Support

The participants openly spoke about the high expectations their teachers had for them. Although the school district did not preclude students from taking rigorous courses and students may select any course they want, the teachers still made recommendations to guide their decisions. All of the students agreed they received support from their teachers and counselors when pursuing rigorous coursework and advanced classes.

Participant 5 appreciated the support he received from the staff and said, "I definitely had the opportunity to achieve the things I wanted because, like I said, the faculty and staff were very, very welcoming, very open arms (*sic*), and very supportive, actually." He continued by saying his guidance counselors "supported me in my actions to take the courses I wanted to take." Participant 3 agreed:

> My teachers would recommend me for honors and AP classes. I feel like in the
> school, especially if you're a minority, if they see that you are willing to work
> hard and you have it in you to do the work and they can see that you're smart,
> they will do what they can to provide you with the best courses.

"My teachers are more than willing to give me any type of help that I need"
Participant 1 concurred.

Students discussed how teachers and counselors encouraged and motivated them to take advanced classes and kept them on track by offering help and guidance if needed. Teachers supporting and believing in their students helped the students to believe in themselves.

Theme 5: Self-Efficacy

The theme of Self-Efficacy resulted in three child codes: Belief in Self, Black

Pride, and Resiliency. The seven students who participated in individual interviews

discussed self-efficacy.

Belief in Self

Seven participants were able to identify personal strengths, and they all agreed the

school contributed to their success, although many also attributed their strengths to

parental support and an innate willingness to put forth effort to be successful. The

participants all took high-level courses including honors classes and advanced placement

courses. The participants spoke about working hard to achieve good grades, being a

leader, and having positive character traits, such as being caring, thoughtful, empathetic,

supportive, and encouraging. Some shyly highlighted their creativity, confidence, and

helping others. The participants also shared how they always put forth effort and strived

for greatness, as discussed by Participant 3:

> I'm a pretty determined person … I feel like when I have my heart or my soul set
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> on something, I continuously go at it, and even if I fail, I continue going until I get
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> to where I want to be. And even if I reach where I want to be, I try to push for
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> something further than that.

Students also discussed other roles they had in the school. Participant 8 asserted,

"Even if they don't give me a leadership role, I always end up trying to lead if I

can." Participant 3 shared her leadership role as the captain of a sports team:

> I did like being on the [sports] team. It gave me a little sense of, "You know
>
> what? I'm supposed to be here. They appreciate my existence." I did the best that

I could, especially when I became captain … I said, "This is my team. It's not just me being a member of the team. It's *my* team." And so I have to do what I can to best support, encourage, motivate and help my team succeed.

As students shared their stories about their strengths and what they had achieved in school, Participant 8 proclaimed, "I deserve to be here. I deserve all these opportunities." She discussed proving her worth and continued, "I have to work a lot harder, which is stressful, but I don't have a choice. It needs to get done." Many students discussed perseverance and how their effort and hard work would no doubt lead them to be successful in life--something they truly valued.

Black Pride

The participants discussed embracing their culture and the need to teach other students about the meaning and significance of Black dress, music, speech, and other cultural norms or trends. One girl acknowledged she wanted her teachers to recognize her color and celebrate it. Many students expressed the desire to celebrate Black History month and cultural norms. Participant 8 pleaded, "Let us show our potential and bring things to the school that other students can learn from."

In addition to celebrating Black pride and promoting awareness in the schools, students asserted they are just as capable as their White peers. Participant 8 stated with conviction, "Don't doubt us because we are just as smart as everyone else in that school, and they need to recognize that."

Resiliency

Students naturally spoke about their resilience in the context of their interviews. Six of eight participants expressed resiliency when sharing their experiences. Students

used phrases such as "made me tougher," "brushed it off," and that they "learned" about people and what the world could be like in the context of racism. In general, students were forced to come to terms with being a minority in a PWS and town, as expressed by Participant 6: "There's (*sic*) always going to be some racist people in the world. You can't just eradicate all of them. And you need to learn how to deal with situations like that."

The students discussed how their experiences attending their high school prepared them for the real world, as expressed by Participant 7:

> I feel like if I learn how to handle living in [town name] and living in this predominantly White area, then it'll probably make it slightly easier [in college] because I'm already pretty used to it right now. So … it wouldn't be that big of a transition.

Participant 6 added, "It hurts a little, but it makes you tougher in the end." Participant 4, a self-described introvert who focused on always being happy and embracing the positive things in life, described his experiences by saying, "If something bad happens, I try to fix it right away and then just get it over with."

Students taught themselves how to confront racism, ignore it, or just learn to live with it. They each developed unique, individual coping skills based on their personalities, but they all demonstrated resiliency in some form. Participant 5, a current college student, explained his thinking:

> Would I choose [school name] again? (long pause) I don't know. I don't know. I don't know if I can answer that question. … Going through what I went through (long pause). … Because of where I was, I was forced to learn. I was forced to

grow. It was something that I needed to do and I, um, I don't know if I would

have been in the same place as I am now. So would I have switched [schools]? I

don't know … I'm honestly past that point. … I just kind of take what I need from

it, get rid of the bad stuff, and keep on going as a person.

The students placed great value and emphasis on the quality of education. As a

result, they were grateful to have attended a school that prepared them for success in

college. While every participant spoke about the social challenges associated with

attending a PWS, seven of eight participants said they would likely attend the school

again if given the choice; the eighth participant did not participate in an individual

interview and was not asked that question. There was a direct correlation between

academic opportunity and success in college in choosing a school; whereas, the social

aspect, as devastating as it was for many, was not considered as important a factor. One

student who shared many negative experiences expressed his happiness from being able

to attend his high school.

Defining happiness was difficult for the students because they had mixed

emotions. When the researcher asked a senior if she was happy, she quipped, "I

am now that I have one foot out the door." In broad terms, however, several of the

participants said they were happy they attended their high school. Although the

students had several recommendations and suggestions for the school district to

improve the culture and climate of the high schools, none of them said they would

choose another school if given the opportunity. Participant 5 even said, "It didn't

stop me from living my best life."

Theme 6: School Responsibilities

School Responsibilities was a prevalent theme with 125 code applications. The child codes associated with school improvement were Evaluate Curricula and Instructional Practices, Give Students a Voice, Combat Racism in Schools, Provide Anti-Bias and Anti-Racist Education, Foster Inclusivity and Acceptance, and Increase Diversity of Faculty and Staff. Improvements to the school culture and climate were recommended in each interview. All eight participants argued the school district needs to take action and expressed dismay at the district's evident failings in addressing these issues.

Several tenets of school responsibility were often combined into single responses as participants carefully thought about how the school could be better and do better to support its students. Participant 1 said,

One thing I feel like I would definitely change is … letting the higher ups provide more awareness as to how we feel. … If there was more awareness surrounding some of the events that happened in the school in terms discrimination … I feel like we [Black students] would be a lot better off in terms of how these situations are handled. I feel like they'll bring some type of reform by punishing the kids who are being racist towards students … Nothing happens … If there was some type of awareness … [about] what is happening in the school it would be greatly appreciated because they'll deal with something and then kind of let it die down … They won't talk about it ever again, ever. And that means a lot of people won't be able to hear about anybody's experiences and won't be able to hear about how they feel … A bunch of the experiences that I've heard today I haven't even heard

about … and that kind of makes me feel sad because I want to hear about some of these things so something can be done so it won't happen again.

Evaluate Curricula and Instructional Practices

Throughout the interviews, students often spoke about "uncomfortable" topics taught in class using the terms "really uncomfortable," "tension," "awkward," "everyone stares," and "they all looked at me." Of particular concern was the book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as Participant 6 noted:

When we read *To Kill a Mockingbird* I remember that there were certain kids in my class that I knew they (*sic*) were going to, like, try to say it [the n-word], and I knew that was going to happen. … My teacher, for some reason, let kids read over those parts even though I approached her after class one time and told her that I wasn't really comfortable with it. And she still continued to do it. I didn't want to say anything in front of the whole class because I didn't want to seem like I was overreacting because there are a lot of kids who see it as, "Oh, it's just a word or nobody is directing it at you." But every time it was said or every time it came up in the book I would like feel eyes on me … there would be at least four or five people staring at me … I don't know how to explain the feeling, but it just feels like, it outcasts you to the point where you just feel like you shouldn't be yourself anymore. Like, you should just give up on your whole person and just become somebody else.

Participant 1 shared a similar story of his teacher saying the n-word while reading the book:

She [the teacher] felt as though it was necessary. Then one of the kids—I'm guessing he did this as like a joke or something—he acted like he didn't know what the n-word was and then he kept saying it repeatedly … He looked back at me and then gave me like a little smirk … Nobody was saying anything. Nobody cared … When the teacher was reading it … every single time it was said I had three people look at me, next time it was four people looking at me, there would be different people throughout the class looking at me.

Participant 8 chimed in that her teacher would not allow the students to read the n-word while reading, but she played audio recordings of the book which made her very uncomfortable because her classmates would stare at her. She said students were eagerly raising their hands "because they wanted to say it … That was a really scary thing for me." Another student shared that he and other Black students have talked about how they feel whenever social studies teachers discuss slavery or anything related to the treatment of Blacks. Participant 6 said, "You can just feel eyes on you … you can see people staring at you." Moreover, the issue is escalated when other students do not understand his discomfort. He explained,

[Students] get mad when people are sensitive about it [slavery] because [they feel] it doesn't actually apply to us, which is what a lot of people have told me recently. They've been like (*sic*), "Well, you were never a slave. So why does it matter to you? … Slavery doesn't exist today. So why is it still an issue?"

In contrast, a different experience was shared by a student who said her teachers asked her if she would be comfortable if they used the n-word when it appeared in literature. Participant 3 added, "They're very careful." When the slave trade was being

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discussed in social studies class, Participant 4 said the teacher was going to show a graphic video and asked if any students needed to leave the room.

Students said, "Teachers are cautious," "They don't want to address racism in school," and "They tiptoe around us." One student said, "Just teach us." The students concluded teachers need guidance and direction when teaching content that involves race, racial slurs, or even the history of disenfranchised groups.

The participants pleaded for the school to teach students about all cultures and celebrate diversity to increase students' awareness, acceptance, and understanding. Additionally, students strongly felt Black history and culture must be taught. Participant 8 addressed her Blackness:

I feel like it [color] should be seen and it should be recognized because especially in a classroom, especially for English or social studies, where history has a big impact on the topic or the subject in general, I feel like stuff like that needs to be embraced in order to make sure that the classroom is comfortable because when a teacher says that they don't see color, I feel like you're (*sic*) not recognizing me as a person because my skin color is a part of who I am. And there's history behind this … to me it's important to recognize that.

Participant 1 said Black history and culture have never been taught. He corrected himself by saying, "I think one year we talked about Black history for a day." Several students concurred that Black culture is not part of the school's curriculum, but it should be. Participant 4 expressed a desire to take a class about Black history and culture and learn about the achievements of Black Americans. He added that it should be taught by "an expert in the field," and someone who can teach it through a social justice lens and

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discuss current issues affecting minorities. Not only would he enjoy such a class, but he felt it was necessary for his White peers to be offered a class that would teach them to be more understanding and less biased. As Participant 1 noted, "There's really nothing happening in the school where Black people are represented."

Give Students a Voice

The participants felt very strongly about giving students a voice. They discussed the importance of listening to students, "highlighting student voices," lack of student voice, and in general, they felt like they were not heard or their opinions did not matter. Participant 6 expressed his opinion about the school soliciting student feedback:

> In certain areas, the school tries really hard to get the students to feel engaged and feel like they're like their opinion matters. But at the same time … it feels like we're just going to be ignored and whatever they wanted to hear, that's what they're going to say that we said.

In general, students believed they could help the school to select better speakers, assemblies, programs, clubs, classes, and leadership opportunities because they know what the students want and need. They had a desire to be involved in some of the decision-making processes that have been mostly made by adults on behalf of the students. Participant 5 explained the value of why their voices should be heard by saying:

> We're a small group and we're so different from everybody else, we should stand out more compared to other students … I feel like the school should use that as a vehicle to allow us to have some type of opportunity to improve upon the school and take on leadership roles so we could put these plans that we have [in place], because I feel as though every student in the group has a plan that we could all

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agree upon to make the school a better place for us and for every other diverse student in the school. … The school should see us as people who are more than able to help with anything going [on] around the school … we should have an equal opportunity to fulfill these leadership roles.

At the conclusion of the focus study group, after students candidly shared their experiences, including the difficulties and challenges they have had to endure as a Black student, the participants showed sincere appreciation for the interview and the opportunity to be heard. They were excited to participate and learn they were not alone in their struggles. One student declared, "I needed this," while another thanked the researcher "for creating this safe space for us." Participant 5 said it was "a needed conversation" about "an unspoken thing," and he realized at the conclusion of the interview how necessary and important it is to have these conversations to listen to students. The group concurred they had never been brought together to discuss the challenges of attending a PWS, and by not acknowledging the issues or even attempting to discover if a problem exists made them feel like they did not matter. The overall consensus of the group was the school district does not want to raise awareness of the racism that exists within the schools, and it is easier to ignore the problem. The students collectively agreed speaking to students regularly about things going on in the schools would be appreciated, but is also necessary to meet the needs of the students.

Combat Racism in Schools

All eight participants said the school needed to take steps to combat racism. The students said, "We fight our own battles," and the school "doesn't care." There was also a

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fear that by not addressing racism at its core, the district was "normalizing" racism.

Participant 1 explained:

> They [school leaders] don't care that anything like that has happened before or they don't care that it's been happening to students for whatever amount of time that Black students have been in [school name]. … I feel as though every Black student has had [a racist] experience in the past, unfortunately. But it's just the reality of things.

The researcher asked students what they would do if they could change one thing about the school. Participant 1 responded:

> One thing that I would change about the school system as a whole? I don't know. I would just have more [effort] being put into trying to stop this [racism], you know, trying to stop the issue of racism within the school, because as of right now, nothing is being done at all.

Several of the participants discussed raising awareness regarding the [racist] events that have occurred so appropriate action can be taken to stop these behaviors. Overall, the students felt school leaders were being reactive instead of proactive. Their wish was for the school to address racism before it happens. The perception from the participants was students get a slap on the wrist, and the same acts happen again and again without getting to the root of the problem.

Students expressed concern over their perceptions of inequitable disciplinary measures toward Black students or lack of appropriate discipline for students who engage in racist acts. One participant was told he was "colored like [derogatory term]," and the student was benched for a few basketball games. Another student reported an incident

when a high school student posted racist comments using the n-word on social media, and she was "kicked off" the cheerleading squad for the rest of the year, but the participant felt it was meaningless because they were in quarantine and sports were canceled anyway. Participant 1 shared his views on the school's action against racism:

I feel like there could be a little bit more rigorous (*sic*) punishments for racism in school, because there have been a couple of instances where people have been openly racist towards me and said racist things. And I told the principal, and they (*sic*) really just didn't do anything. They just sit them down and say, "Don't do that again." I feel like the school should have learned at this point that kids aren't just not going to ever do that again. … I feel like the majority of the students need to be taught that this is wrong and if you do this, you're going to get this punishment rather than [being told not to do it]. I just feel like we don't have enough enforcement or punishments.

Students agreed "benching" students for a few games does not change anything. In general, participants felt that acts of racism are not "dealt with in a serious matter," as expressed by Participant 5.

Provide Anti-Bias and Anti-Racist Education

Another school responsibility identified by the participants was to provide anti-bias and anti-racist education to the students and staff. There were 32 excerpts coded to this subcode. It was apparent throughout the interviews students vehemently believed all members of the school community needed anti-racist and anti-bias education. Participants were stunned by students' lack of awareness and ignorance, as well as some teachers' actions. While the students discussed many intentional acts, there was also a lot of

unconscious bias that affected them. Racial profiling and reacting to perceived

stereotypes has greatly affected students and could be mitigated through staff training.

Moreover, students argued "racism is very complex" and should be addressed in a

formal, intentional way to have the best outcome. Participant 5 shared his thoughts about

his peers' views on racism:

> Sometimes I get the [feeling] White people [think] "Oh, slavery was so long ago
>
> … the civil rights movement abolished that … there's no racism." There's (*sic*)
>
> some people that have that belief. …There's (*sic*) laws in place for the Black man
>
> to be down and it's bigger than us (*sic*). … White people think justice was served
>
> … but at the end of the day we don't see the results because we're still being
>
> discriminated against.

Participant 5 continued:

> It [racism] almost became subjective. … One group says, "We're not racist." The
>
> other group says, "You're racist." And there's a constant clash because the lines
>
> are so blurred, whereas, you can't tell right from wrong. And that's chaos …
>
> because nobody really knows what's actually going on.

Participant 3 stated, "It's not always about race," but it is hard to identify, as

discussed by Participant 1:

> People claim that racism has gone away. … I feel like it's taken on a different
>
> form where sometimes it's harder to draw the line between what is racist and what
>
> is not racist … it is subjective to each person. And it's getting harder and harder
>
> to understand what can be seen as racist. And that makes it harder for these school
>
> (*sic*), for these higher ups (*sic*), to actually understand what offends people. …

That's also why I feel like there's this level of disconnect between the higher ups and the students. And there are people who feel as though it's not as important because of the fact that it might seem minor to a specific person, but to the person who's the victim of it, if it feels completely different.

Foster Inclusivity and Acceptance

Students spoke about feeling isolated and out of place in a PWS. There is a need to create and nurture an inclusive school environment that accepts all students. In addition, students yearned for small, intimate safe spaces where underrepresented populations can come together and feel welcome. It is important to note that when the participants spoke about safe spaces and inclusivity, they often referenced various underrepresented populations as well, e.g. English language learners, Hispanic students, student with disabilities, etc.

Creating safe spaces for students to come together and share their experiences was noted on several occasions, especially because these safe spaces create a culture of acceptance. Participant 5 shared the need for safe spaces by saying, "I feel like there should be systems in place where we can come together as a community and just talk to each other and just express how we feel. … I feel like that really strengthens the ethnic group in general." Participant 7 added on:

I would try and have more safe spaces for Black kids, maybe just people of color because I know there's not a lot of Black kids, but there's (*sic*) some Asian kids and Hispanic kids … just a safe place to talk about how your day was. Maybe you encountered something throughout the day you want to talk about or you want advice.

Several students talked about their lack of awareness about the diversity and inclusion club and social justice club. While many school clubs are well advertised, most were not aware of the existence of these clubs and thought they "may be a safe space for Black students."

Participants recommended formal education for students to develop empathy and acceptance. One student said the high school principal should speak to the whole student body to educate them about racism because students may value his opinion and find it more meaningful than an assembly led by someone they do not know. Many students even said they would be willing to share their stories and bring awareness to the challenges they face. Participant 1 explained,

To make the school better, I'm pretty sure that just understanding a person and what they go through, understanding the struggles, understanding their story … that would make the school a better place … it would make for less people making these comments that hurt people or it would allow for students to become less racist.

The participants also spoke about exposure to different cultures to develop and promote acceptance for other underrepresented racial, religious, or ethnic groups. Participant 3 stated,

I think a lack of exposure to people who are different affects [students' understanding] … students who haven't been exposed to people of other races or people who speak different languages or people with disabilities or people of different ethnicities … they don't really understand them, which is why they might say things that shouldn't be said. … I think it's just a matter of

understanding the other person and their point of view and everything that's happened to them. I think that would make a big difference.

In reference to assemblies and speakers, Participant 8 added, "When they bring speakers into the school, bring a more diverse group of speakers into the school so they can show their experiences instead of just having one race come in because then you can't really learn from that."

Increase Diversity of Faculty and Staff

The participants expressed several times during their interviews that the school lacked diversity in its student population and faculty and staff. While many students expressed the desire for greater diversity in the school, four of the participants specifically expressed a desire to have greater diversity among the faculty and staff in their schools. Participant 7 shared her thoughts:

I would like teachers that look like me … because there's (*sic*) no Black teachers. I don't even think there's (*sic*) any Hispanic teachers. None of the Spanish teachers are even Hispanic. So just having more, doesn't even have to be Black, just more teachers of color. I think that would make me feel more welcomed and feel like I belong there more.

The students shared their dismay at the lack of disciplinary measures related to racially motivated acts, further arguing staff members of color could potentially help to mitigate the problem. Participant 5 said,

I don't think it [racist action] was really dealt with in a serious nature because they [school leaders] can't really relate, and there's nobody on staff (*sic*) that can understand what we go through on a regular basis. So it's very complicated.

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Conclusions

The analysis of this research resulted in several emergent themes. Many of the themes overlapped and provided data to address more than one research question. Although the students were able to provide detailed experiences that addressed their sense of belongingness, self-efficacy, and perceived academic opportunity, their stories were laden with heartache and a yearning to have the same experiences as the majority White population. Interwoven in their personal accounts were pleas to be acknowledged, accepted, and understood.

Participants implored school and district leaders to take action and create more inclusive schools, starting with student and staff training, reviewing the curricula and instructional practices, confronting and mitigating racism in their schools, increasing the diversity of its staff, and giving Black students a prominent voice so they can join in the efforts to effect change. Each student demonstrated self-efficacy and developed coping strategies and the resiliency to achieve academic success despite frequent encounters with racism and its insidious harm. However, students lacked a sense of belongingness and did not experience school in the same way the majority population did.

The researcher analyzed specific aspects of students' experiences when attending a PWS. Each story addressed various social constructs as the students tried to make sense of their conflicting feelings and their hopes for a more positive school experience. Thus, it is difficult to separate the individual factors that contribute to one's overall educational experience. Diamond (2006) posited, "One cannot separate the educational experiences, attitudes, and achievement of students from the broader patterns of racial inequality that exist in the communities, schools, and classroom" (p. 501). The findings validate the

importance for educational institutions to develop policies that challenge racist systems

and actively seek to dismantle them.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of Black students attending a predominantly White suburban high school. Specifically, the researcher examined students' perceived self-efficacy, sense of belongingness, and perceived academic opportunity. Eight high-school students participated in a focus study group and seven participated in personal interviews. The research resulted in the following six themes: (a) Social Isolation, (b) School Responsibilities, (c) Self-Efficacy, (d) Racism, (e) Relationships, and (f) Academic Opportunity

Critical race theory (CRT) was the theoretical framework for this research. CRT provided the tools to contextualize the experiences of Black students attending a predominantly White school (PWS). Specifically, the five tenets of CRT often used in education are counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism. Using a CRT lens, this chapter presents the implications of findings, the relationship to prior research, limitations, and recommendations for future practice and research.

Implications of Findings

Research Question 1

To what extent does attending a predominantly White school affect Black students' feelings of belongingness?

One way to use a CRT framework in education is to engage in counter-storytelling. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) defined counter-storytelling as "a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes" (p. 27). They posited using counter-stories "allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourse of the majority, therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to

marginalized groups" (p. 27). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) asserted that to cure the silencing that often occurs with victims of race discrimination, these stories "can give them a voice and reveal people have similar experiences. Stories can name a type of discrimination (e.g., microaggressions, unconscious discrimination, or structural racism); once named, it can be combated" (p. 51). Thus, counter-storytelling can help dismantle the ingrained beliefs the majority population holds by offering a different narrative. The participants in this research study shared rich stories of their school experiences that challenge the majority population's narrative. Their stories dispelled the stereotypes that exist within the schools and highlighted deleterious discrimination and racist acts that contradict many White students' views that racism no longer exists or does not impact the students in their school.

Students sharing their stories in isolation will not manifest in the desired outcome to mitigate the racial structures that permeate the school. However, students were able to share experiences and, more importantly, their experiences were validated by others who shared similar experiences. As a result, they began to bond socially and discussed ways to bring their stories to the larger school population. The students suggested the school district honor, listen to, and welcome their voices. Moreover, they suggested sharing their plight with the student body in an effort to develop understanding and acceptance because they truly believed sharing their personal stories will deter students from engaging in racial acts and other forms of discrimination and begin to develop awareness, understanding, and empathy.

The permanence of racism, another tenet of CRT, suggests "racism is a permanent component of American life" (Bell, 1992, p. 13) and Whites are allocated the privilege of

racist hierarchical structures governing political, economic, and social domains while othering people of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The participants in this research attended high schools with fixed hierarchical structures governing social domains. The high schools' social hierarchy provided White students the advantage of positive social interactions, acceptance, inclusion, and comfort. They also attended school in a more socially safe environment absent of chronic fear, and, as the majority population, had a sense of belongingness that Black students were not able to actualize. Moreover, the hierarchical structures in the school perpetuated a negative school culture and led to the othering of Black students who were socially isolated. Racially motivated incidences were ignored or addressed in a lax or dismissive manner, racial profiling quietly existed, and Black students were stereotyped, mistreated, and not valued to the same degree as their peers; thus, contributing to their lack of sense of belongingness.

The participants in this research claimed they were "lumped together" or "grouped" as one being by the White students and adults in their schools. For example, one participant was with a Black friend who is called by his initials, so their peers began to call him by initials too, an unfamiliar name he has never used. The participants were assumed to like the same music, be equally skilled in recreational activities and sports, and have the same degree of intelligence. They were also perceived to possess negative character traits, such as engaging in criminal activity, drug use, violence, dishonesty, and theft. These espoused perceptions were difficult for the participants to escape. As a result, many avoided social situations.

In essence, the Black students were not seen an individuals, but rather part of a group where fixed stereotypes predetermined one's actions, where one cannot thrive on

his or her own without a comparative analysis to other Blacks, and where one's achievements or lack thereof are attributed to the larger Black group with causation and explanations that allow for a misfit of success or a determinant of failure. While White students viewed themselves as individuals, they did not see their Black classmates an individuals. Tatum (2017a) contended the ability of Whites to view themselves as individuals is "a legacy of White privilege" (p. 196).

The permanence of racism that exists within the schools did not allow the participants to experience a sense of belongingness. Instead, they shared stories of social isolation, including feelings of alienation and estrangement, not fitting in, pressure to conform to the majority, and the detrimental emotional effects that resulted. The hierarchical structures created a form of racial segregation present in the social aspects of the schools and contributed to a school climate and culture that separated Black students and prevented them from fully accessing positive social experiences and inclusion that other students were able to experience.

Research Question 2

To what extent does attending a predominantly White school affect Black students' self-efficacy?

The participants in this study exhibited high levels of self-efficacy. Participants shared their social and academic strengths and the ability to achieve and reach their goals. Bandura (1997) defined perceived self-efficacy as the self-belief that one can perform novel or difficult tasks and attain desired outcomes. The students exhibited belief in themselves and their ability to achieve and be successful despite their environment. Moreover, they believed if they were given a voice and the opportunity to be heard, they

could make substantial positive changes to the school. Using a social justice lens, an important component of CRT, they were prepared to challenge the dominant ideology present in their schools and were committed to effecting change. This commitment aligned with Bandura's (1998) claim that "an efficacious outlook fosters intrinsic interest and deep engrossment in activities. They set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them" (p. 1).

The students were proud of their race and cultural norms, highlighting Black students can be just as successful as the other students. A few spoke openly about their innate Black pride. Critical race theorists refute the notion of adopting colorblind ideology, which views everyone as individuals and ignores one's race. Thus, holding colorblind ideology strips Black students of their blackness and Black pride and cannot nurture or promote a color conscious school culture. When speaking about a teacher who proclaimed to be "colorblind," a participant asserted she wanted her color to be acknowledged and honored. The students discussed the lack of Black history, voices, and perspectives in the curriculum. Hence, demonstrating Black Pride, boasting about the abilities of Blacks, and internalizing those abilities to oneself, is a form of self-efficacy.

The results of study suggest students' perceptions of self-efficacy may have contributed to their resiliency when faced with adversity. Additionally, they demonstrated self-efficacy in the beliefs that they could challenge the social constructs and racial inequities embedded within their schools.

Research Question 3

What is the perceived educational opportunity when Black students attend a predominantly White school?

Students' perceptions of educational opportunity included receiving a high-quality education, access to rigorous courses, and being prepared for college. Using a CRT lens, Whiteness as property assumes Whiteness comes with certain property rights that grant access to better schools and a high-quality education and curriculum (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However, when Black students reside in predominantly White neighborhoods and attend high-performing majority White schools, they do have access to the same courses and curriculum as their White peers. The participants in this study took rigorous coursework, including honors and advanced placement classes. Although teachers and counselors provide their students with course recommendations, all students have the ability to choose the courses they want and challenge themselves. Seven of the eight students demonstrated academic success and maintained high grades. They also received encouragement and support from their teachers and counselors to take rigorous courses.

Unfortunately, although the students had access to a high-performing school, including its curricula and other educational opportunities, such accessibility did not come without self-sacrifice and the negative emotional toll that conflated to form their experiences as a Black student in a PWS.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research illustrates the interconnected relationship between self-efficacy, sense of belongingness, and perceived educational opportunity to form unique student experiences. The results of this study showed a causal relationship does not exist. High self-efficacy or perceptions of educational opportunity did not result in feelings of belongingness. Conversely, a lack of sense of belonging did

not decrease students' self-efficacy or perceived academic opportunity. Instead, a child's school experience is an amalgam of various factors that contribute independently to one's overall school experience.

Relationship to Prior Research

This study examined Black students' experiences while attending a predominantly White suburban high school. The Black student population in the district was less than 1.5%. This research took place in a highly segregated area—a suburb often cited as one of the most segregated areas in the nation. Inequitable school funding policies in the state have contributed to very wealthy and very poor school districts just miles apart. Efforts to desegregate the public schools have been met with harsh criticism by the wealthier school districts' stakeholders—those who benefit most from these systems. Students of color make up the majority population in the poorest districts, and these practices continue to disenfranchise them (Wells, et al. 2009).

The results of this study supports Tatum's (2017b) research on hypersegregated communities where she asserted Black and White students will have very different experiences, and their interactions will be inhibited by racial stereotyping. The participants in this study did not have the same school experiences as their White peers. Black students reported being stereotyped and were victims of continuous racism. Moreover, the participants struggled to form relationships with their White peers, oftentimes feeling outcasted, ostracized, and socially isolated. The participants reported having diversity within their friend groups, and although cross-group interactions did occur, the participants lacked meaningful connections and found it difficult to relate to other students. Their White peers did not fully understand the dynamics of being a

minority and how it affected them. Everyday incidents that a White student may not even notice were difficult for a Black student to bear. As a result, they tried to form relationships with other Black students and form same-race relationships.

One hundred percent of the participants in this research reported they did not feel a sense of belongingness in school. These results align with the existing literature that showed it has been common for Black students who attend PWSs to feel culturally alienated and be physically isolated (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Another study showed Black students who attend PWSs attempted to fit in by conforming to the majority and talking or dressing like the White majority even when it resulted in trauma (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). Consistent with the literature, the social isolation experienced by the participants in this study included alienation and estrangement, not fitting in, and conforming to the majority, even when it caused them distress or they didn't feel like themselves.

In Tatum's (2017) book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race,* she explained Black students often find each other in mixed-race settings as part of their identify development:

> Joining with one's peers for support in the face of stress is a positive coping strategy. What is problematic is that the young people are operating with a very limited definition of what it means to be Black, based largely on cultural stereotypes. (p. 144)

This research confirmed her point. The participants in this study sought Black friends, said it was difficult to find people "to relate to," and were "disconnected" from their White friends because they did not share similar struggles. The Black students bonded

more naturally with each other and stated, "Blacks need to stick together." The participants had very similar experiences and the ability to share those experiences and know they were not alone was comforting.

Chapman's (2014) study, which examined students of color in suburban schools and their relationships with adults, found student of color did not have positive relationships with White teachers, they could not relate to the teachers, they were spoken to disrespectfully, and there was a lack of empathy. These findings were in sharp contrast to this study which found students had positive, supportive relationships with their teachers. Chapman's study also found students did not feel connected to or supported by their counselors who had low academic expectations for them and did not recommend rigorous coursework, which also refutes the findings of this study where students reported positive relationships with supportive counselors who encouraged them to take rigorous coursework.

In alignment with Henderson and Milstein's (2003) assertion that one can develop "social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply the stress that is inherent in today's world" (p. 7), the participants in this study developed various coping strategies and demonstrated resiliency in response to the racist environment in which they were subjected. They exhibited self-efficacy and took pride in their Blackness. Despite the school climate, they demonstrated academic success. This supported earlier findings in a PWS where Black students who were subject to microaggressions embraced their racial identify and demonstrated resiliency, resulting in successful academic outcomes in school (Carter Andrews, 2012).

Goodenow and Grady (1993) defined school belonging as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environments" (p. 61). Interestingly, the students did feel accepted, respected, included, and supported by some members of the school, but they also felt rejected, disrespected, excluded, and unsupported by other members of the school. As such, they did not experience a sense of belongingness. Additional research to determine the relationship of these determinants would provide greater insight into this phenomenon.

St-Amand et al. (2017) identified three concepts to define school belonging: (a) belonging contributes positively to an individual's psychological development; (b) a sense of belonging is a basic need that leads people to build social bonds and to affiliate with members of a group; and (c) the four defining attributes of belonging are positive emotions, positive social relations, involvement, and harmonization. The students discussed the emotional effects of being a minority in a PWS including lowered self-esteem, decreased confidence, and an overall sense of social isolation. One can likely conclude these school experiences did not contribute positively to their psychological development. However, their perseverance, resiliency, and academic achievement did lead them to have positive attitudes about their abilities and fostered a sense of self-efficacy, which may contribute to their psychological development.

The second concept of school belonging discusses the need of people to build social bonds and affiliate with members of a group. The participants had great difficulty bonding with their White peers. Even when they formed friendships with White students, they were still alienated from the majority population as a whole. The students

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experienced some of the four defining attributes of belonging to varying degrees. More research is needed in this area to identify the specific attributes students possessed or lacked to support students with appropriate interventions and increase their sense of school belongingness.

Bandura (1994) identified four sources of self-efficacy. Although this study was too broad to identify the students' sources of self-efficacy; there are some findings worth noting. Bandura (1994) has identified mastery experiences as the most effective way to create self-efficacy noting adversity leads to a greater sense of self-efficacy as people learn how to persevere in difficult times. Through perseverance, they are able to bounce back, which makes them stronger and resilient. The participants in this research were faced with adversity as a minority student in a PWS. Their high sense of perceived self-efficacy could be a result of these experiences. Another source of self-efficacy is social persuasion, which is verbally telling someone they have the competence to achieve (Bandura, 1994). This notion is supported by this study in which students reported encouragement and support by teachers and counselors. Some of the participants also discussed parental influence and encouragement to do well in school. The school held high expectations for the students, and they in turn, met those expectations.

Bandura (1994) identified a strong correlation between self-efficacy and academic achievement. Tyler and Boelter (2008) used Bandura's findings to examine teacher support as a determinant of academic efficacy and found a strong correlation. The results of this study aligned with this premise. The students maintained high academic grades and expressed high levels of self-efficacy. They also reported ongoing teacher support and encouragement, which could have contributed to their development of academic self-

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efficacy. Self-efficacy has been identified as a strong predictor of resiliency (Schwarzer & Warner, 2013). This study confirms that relationship as the students demonstrated resiliency despite the negative school environment and the stress it caused.

Critique of Liberalism, a tenet of CRT, challenges the neutral law. The students voiced great frustration about the schools' policies and practices in response to racial slurs and acts. They demanded a greater degree of disciplinary actions for racially motivated incidents and felt oppressed by the school system when no greater emphasis was placed on such acts. Delgado (1982) argued racial insults are not mere insults, but rather "racial insults are different qualitatively because they conjure up the entire history of racial discrimination in this country" (p. 157). He further contended that "racial slurs may cause long-term emotional pain because they draw upon and intensify the effects of the stigmatization, labeling, and disrespectful treatment that the victim has previously undergone" (Delgado, 1982, p. 146). The neutrality of the law, therefore, would not be equitable when applied in school settings with a one-size-fits-all discipline policy. This study confirmed that because the school's discipline policy does not confront racist acts with a more stringent lens and appropriate consequences, Black students are being harmed.

The participants also argued that lax punishments in response to racially motivated acts did not deter students from engaging in the same act again. The participants claimed the school did not want to be perceived as a racist school district, so they kept any racially motivated acts quiet in an attempt to hide what was truly happening in the schools. One student argued the school was "normalizing" racism, which aligns with the tenet of the permanence of racism. When disciplinary actions were enacted upon

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a student for engaging in racist behaviors, the school leaders handled the incident just as they would any other without exception. When investigating a racist act using a CRT lens, the incident would be investigated to explore the meaning and intent of the action, the school culture that enabled a student to be comfortable enough to engage in such an act, and whether the incident encouraged further acts toward students of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Research has shown school leaders may not be equipped to address the demands of changing demographics in schools and developing culturally responsive leaders is necessary (Young et al. 2010).

The students identified specific actions they believed the school should take to support the small population of Black students. Interestingly, their suggestions were embedded within the frameworks of culturally responsive leadership, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching. Using a social justice lens to dismantle the systems that perpetuate racism and inequality, the intent of these frameworks is to create inclusive environments where marginalized students can thrive and be afforded the same academic and social opportunities and experiences as their White peers.

Limitations of the Study

This study had limitations. The researcher had difficulty recruiting student participants. Several factors could have contributed to this. A letter was mailed home to the students' parents/guardians inviting them to participate, followed up by an email and phone call. Interviewing minors about their experiences as a minority in a conservative leaning town is a sensitive subject. Additionally, the interviews were being held during a particularly tumultuous political time; political debates were commonplace among students in the high schools, and many parents declined participation due to the potential

risk of harm. Some parents elected to have their children participate for other various reasons. One parent was hopeful her son would make friends; another was frustrated with the racism her son had continuously endured and wanted him to be heard; yet another parent was willing to contribute for the benefit of research. While the initial intent of the study was to recruit students from one high school, due to limited interest, the research had to be expanded to both high schools. After several months of recruitment efforts, eight students were enrolled in the study.

This research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the schools were closed from March 2020 through August 2020. When the schools reopened in September 2020, the students were on a hybrid model, attending school 2–3 days a week and learning remotely from home 2–3 days a week. The students had not attended school with the entire study body in about 6 months by the time the interviews were held. Two were attending college. Although the students were asked to respond to questions about their high school experiences, it is possible that some of the feelings they endured while attending full time were abated since they had been out of school for so long.

The students had varied experiences attending the two high schools within the school district. Although the high schools are just a few miles apart, the participants did have different classmates, teachers, and school building administrators. There has been a mild rivalry among the students, particularly in sports, but sports had been suspended for several months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the schools follow the same district curriculum, assessments, and policies.

While the participants' unique perspectives contributed to this body of research and provided them an opportunity to share their voices, this research cannot be generalized to the broader population.

Recommendations for Future Practice

This research had several implication for practice. The participants identified several ways the school could make notable changes. Recruiting diverse staff members to increase the diversity in the school can help to increase the students' sense of belongingness and also offer different perspectives, a key element of counter-storytelling. Another way to increase students' sense of belongingness is to give them a voice, hear their stories, and include them in decision-making processes. The students' experiences in this study provided personal accounts that confute the majority populations' views. The participants asked to have their voices heard and share their stories as a way to counter the preexisting narrative. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) contended giving voice and meaning to marginalized populations can "reduce alienation for members of excluded groups, while offering opportunities for members of the majority group to meet them halfway" (p. 52). The school district has an obligation to acknowledge the experiences of the minority populations in their schools and give voice and agency to those who have historically been marginalized.

The participants in this study suggested creating safe spaces for students of color to shield them from the racism in the school, and also to give them the opportunity to form relationships with other Black students with whom they can more closely relate. All of the participants, regardless of the size and makeup of their social circle, hoped the

school would provide them with safe spaces to come together. It is recommended the school create opportunities for same race peer networks.

The harshest reality of this research was the students' ongoing encounters with racism. The participants struggled to understand how racism was perpetuated in the schools and how students could engage in such acts, yet, appear so seemingly ignorant about the effects of their actions. Although the participants in this study agreed racism is learned, most often from the home environment, they also concluded it was not the students' fault they engaged in racist behaviors. Tatum (2017a) defined prejudice as "a preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information" (p. 85). She contended the development of prejudice is based not only on stereotypes but also on the distortion of information that people hear and the omission of information that could bring new meaning. Tatum (2017a) acknowledged these prejudices are not one's fault, but maintains "it does not relieve us of our responsibility to interrupt this cycle" (p. 87). Therefore, the school must educate its students and expose them to different cultures and narratives. Ongoing professional development in anti-bias and anti-racist education is strongly recommended as a starting point. Furthermore, there is an obvious need to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy and evaluate the curricula.

Tatum (2017a) posited part of White privilege includes having "greater access to the societal institutions in need of transformation" (p. 91) and shifting White people to "active anti-racism" (p. 91) is necessary to confront racism. Thus, if we are committed to truly combating racism in schools, school leaders must adopt and support culturally relevant leadership practices. As school leaders reflect on the structures that exist within their schools, they must do so with a critical lens. School leaders must make concerted

efforts to evaluate the existing policies, practices, and social and racial constructs in their schools and take the necessary steps to confront and dismantle racism. To remain remiss exacerbates their complicity while undermining public education and every child's right to a free and appropriate public education. Lopez (2003) reminded us:

> Racism is alive and well in this country and functions at a level that is often invisible to most individuals. It reminds us that the only way we will make advances in dealing with the problem of racism is if we take the time to see and understand how it operates, recognize it within ourselves, highlight it within our field, and take brave steps to do something about it. (p. 86)

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this research provide opportunities for future investigation. The participants longed for meaningful relationships with their peers and acceptance in the school community. If school leaders adopted culturally relevant leadership practices to combat racism and develop a culture of tolerance and acceptance for all students, would the participants still feel socially isolated because of their color? Were their perceptions and feelings a result of being a minority in a majority White school or did the school climate and social isolation lead them to feel different and decrease their sense of belonging? Identifying the attributes that contribute to students' sense of belongingness would provide greater insight. Further research is warranted to examine how institutions can cultivate inclusive environments to increase students' sense of belongingness.

Many of the participants acknowledged although they were the subject of racial discrimination, they demonstrated resiliency and accepted the school culture as the status quo, convincing themselves that it prepared them for their future lives in what they

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perceived to be the "real world." Faced with the knowledge that racism is pervasive in their hometown and the nation, the participants accepted their experiences as typical and accepted the notion that it made them stronger as they progressed through their life stages, ready to eventually face similar circumstances in college, careers, and adulthood. Longitudinal studies to examine students' lives in post-secondary institutions and the workforce would contribute to this body of research and allow researchers to examine whether or not the students: (a) had realistic views of the racial discrimination they would be faced with post high school and (b) had developed the necessary coping strategies to manage racial discrimination beyond high school.

Several factors contribute to the development of self-efficacy. This research showed despite a negative school climate toward Black students, their self-efficacy was strong and led them to believe in themselves and strive to be academically successful. The participants were committed to dispelling the stereotypes that existed in their schools and community about Blacks. What caused the students' to develop high levels of self-efficacy? Was it the competitive nature of attending a high-performing school, their parents' support and encouragement to excel academically despite the social challenges, their teachers' motivation and encouragement, or the Black pride that was inherent in each of them as they navigated a predominantly White school? Students expressed the need to prove their worth as a minority to the majority population. Examining self-efficacy in the context of racial and cultural pride is worth further investigation.

Conclusion

With the passage of *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954), there was hope and future promise for Black students to attend better schools—the same public schools as

White students—and be afforded the same educational opportunities. Almost 70 years later, Black students continue to face racism in schools governed by racist ideologies, systems, and structures that perpetuate inequity (Bottiani et al., 2016, 2017; Carter Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Diamond, 2006; Chapman 2013, 2014; Tatum, 2017a). Likewise, the participants in this research saw the promise of attending a high-performing suburban school district with a reputation for academic achievement and the opportunity to attend prestigious colleges. Instead, they attended a school where racism was the norm, and as such, it was not noticed or given the attention it deserved. Students accepted it as the status quo, and school administrators saw it as inconsequential.

One can conclude from this study that there is a cost involved when Black students attend a PWS. The participants valued the quality of their education and the academic opportunities they were provided. However, to reap the benefits of a high-quality education and college and career opportunities, the students had to endure years of racial discrimination and social isolation. For some, their struggles resulted in trauma and resentment. The salient racism embedded in the school's culture and climate did not appear to hinder the students' academic success, but it did take an emotional toll; the long-term effects of racism are deeply ingrained within them. Of great interest was the revelation that the participants said they would choose to attend the same high school again. The opportunity to attend a high-performing school with a robust academic program was more important to them than their overall well-being. The students accepted their schools as typical representations of society and convinced themselves that it was preparing them for the real world.

The participants in this study represent just one example of the experiences of Black students attending a PWS. Their stories, however, remind us that there is work to be done. This study has deep implications for research, policy, and practice. To shift the narrative and challenge our educational system is a far-reaching, overwhelming, yet necessary task.

We have yet to realize the promise of integrated schools where all students can thrive and enjoy the same educational experiences and benefits. There is tremendous promise in a future where systemic racism does not exist; where all cultures are embraced and welcomed in our schools; where teachers and school leaders have the knowledge, skills, and tools to educate students of diverse backgrounds; and where policies and practices provide equitable opportunities to every student. Until we amplify the voices of oppressed populations and challenge the dominant ideology and racist structures manifest in our schools, that promise cannot be realized.

EPILOGUE

As an educator and child advocate, this study was of great interest to me. I set out to conduct this research in the hopes of possibly uncovering some student concerns that I optimistically thought would be easily remedied. I could not have been more wrong. The high-performing, mostly White suburban school district where this study took place offers a highly sought after academic program and has a positive reputation for student success. I expected to uncover a handful of isolated racial incidents; instead I uncovered a system rooted in racism that was not being acknowledged. Surprisingly, the students themselves did not realize the magnitude of the pervasive racism until they shared their experiences during the focus study group. That interview ignited a fire within them, and I have no doubt many will pursue advocacy work in their futures. The seemingly isolated acts reported in school only captured the overt racism; the structures and systems that perpetuated a school climate and culture exclusive of students of color was almost invisible. The students described their daily experiences using words such as "trauma," "overwhelming," and "hurtful," and they had to prepare themselves to "survive" throughout the day, at times resorting to self-isolation to avoid conflict. As difficult as it was to hear about the students' experiences, it was even more disheartening to learn that their futures are already clouded with the firm belief that racism will always exist in the world and they have to accept it as the norm because that is what they learned in school.

As I neared the end of my research, the 2020 presidential election was taking place. This exacerbated the tensions in the community for months to come as media coverage and social media disputes erupted over the perceived racism believed to be inherent in the community. Students, parents, and community members engaged in protests, social media debates, and discourse regarding political views, racist ideology,

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and social structures embedded within the community. In addition, the district's Equity Team was under fire as community members demanded the Board of Education halt the "leftist radicalization" of district leaders. The community was clearly divided, and as former and current students argued on social media, I worried about their digital footprints and the potential future implications of their written words, even those who argued in the name of social justice.

Although the study was designed to answer the research questions, several themes emerged that indicated the students' overall experiences could not be separated into discrete parts. The students' discussions about racism were profound and rich with explanations. They discussed the complexities of racism and the associated challenges to implement change. Nevertheless, they were able to recommend actions that the school district should take to mitigate the racism in their schools. That was their priority.

The findings of this study have far-reaching implications beyond the school district, and this work will not be easy. It became increasingly clear as the research continued there was an immediate need for interventions in the school district, and those who could speak about it best did not have a voice. It is my hope this research provided the participants with the courage and motivation to advocate for themselves and one day all students will be able to enjoy the benefits of a high-quality education without having to sacrifice their overall wellbeing or hold the belief that their school's social hierarchy positions them to deserve or expect less.

APPENDIX A

Focus Group Introduction

Good morning and welcome. Thank you for taking the time to join me to talk about what it's like to be a student in your school. My name is Kristen Andriaccio, and I am a doctoral student at St. John's University. I am conducting my dissertation research on Black students who attend predominantly white schools. Specifically, I would like to capture what it's like for you to be a student in your school and how your experiences affect your perceptions and ideas about certain topics.

I am conducting this study to help inform policies and practices in public education and create more inclusive environments for all students. Your responses will help me learn about things are going really well and areas that may need improvement.

You were invited because you identify yourself as a Black student. It does not matter if you are African American, African Caribbean, biracial, or any other race or ethnicity. All students who identify as Black have been invited to participate, and your participation is voluntary.

There are no wrong answers, only differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others say. Keep in mind that we are just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are most helpful.

Since we are unable to meet in person, we are meeting via Google Meet. I want to be sure that you can see each other so it feels like we are having a conversation. I am going to record this session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. People

say some really helpful things in these discussions and I can't write fast enough to get them all down. We will be on a first-name basis today, but I won't use any names in my reports. I will keep what you say confidential. My reports go back to St. John's University, but no names will be attached. You responses are anonymous and no one will ever view the recorded session except me.

I have a number of questions I want to ask, but my job is really to listen. If someone says something, feel free to follow up on it or share a different point of view. You don't need to address all your comments to me. It will help if only one person speaks at a time or it will be difficult for us to hear one another. You don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as other share their views. Does everyone understand?

If you have a cell phone, please put it on silent mode. If you need to take a call, please step out and return as quickly as possible. Please be sure your device is fully charged or plug it in if you think the battery may not last. If you become disconnected from the meeting, we will pause and wait for you to rejoin the session. If you cannot rejoin the session using your device, please call the phone number that was provided to you.

My role is to guide the discussion, so please talk to each other. Let's begin. Your names should appear on the screen on the bottom of your picture. Let's find out more about each other by introducing ourselves. When I call on you, please tell us what you like to be called and tell us something about yourself.

APPENDIX B

Focus Study Group Questions

1. What is it like to be a student in your school?

2. Tell me about your circle of friends at school.

3. Think back to a time when you may have felt like you had to act differently at school to fit in with your peers or feel accepted. Tell me about it.
   a. [If no response] Have you ever changed the way you say or do things to fit in?

4. In what ways are you part of the school community? If you don't feel like you are part of the school community, tell me what challenges exist.

5. Can you think of a time when Black students may have been treated differently than White students?

6. Has a teacher or classmate ever asked your opinion about a topic because of your race? If so, how did it make you feel?

7. Has attending this school prepared you to be successful after graduation?

8. Would you say you experience more or less stress than the average student in your school? Tell me why? Can you think back to particularly stressful event?

9. Some people say that they are colorblind and don't notice race. Do you think that's true in school? Can you think of an example?

10. What is one thing you would change about your school if you could?

Review the purpose of the study and ask, "Have we missed anything?"

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Hello. Thank you for volunteering to be interviewed today. I'm so excited to continue this conversation and learn more about your school experiences. As a Black student in a predominantly White school, you may have different experiences than other students. That's what I'm trying to find out.

Please remember that everything we talk about is strictly confidential. When I write my paper, no names will be used and no one will have access to view these interviews.

1. After our focus study group, was there anything you thought about that you wanted to add?

2. Tell me what it's like to be a student in your school?

3. Have you been encouraged to take challenging courses by your teachers or counselor?
   a. [If the child selected his/her own courses] Do you wish you had more help or guidance?
   b. [If no] Do you believe you could have been successful in more rigorous courses with appropriate support?

4. Can you remember a time when adults or students have made assumptions about you based on your skin color? Tell me about it.

5. Tell me about some of your strengths. How has attending this school contributed to your success in these areas?

6. Now think about some areas in school where you feel like you could grow. Is your school giving you what you need to be successful in those areas?

7. Think back to a time where you may have felt uncomfortable in school or a time when you were picked on or bullied in a school setting. Tell me about it.
   a. [If not discussed] Why do you think this happened?

8. Discuss any challenges or difficulties you may have faced by attending a predominantly White school.

9. Of all the things we talked about today, what do you think is the most important?

Review purpose of study and ask, "Did we miss anything?"

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Vita

Name	*Kristen R. Andriaccio*
Baccalaureate Degree	*Bachelor of Arts, Dowling College,*
	Oakdale, Major: Elementary Education
Date Graduated	*January, 1999*
Other Degrees and Certificates	*Master of Science, Long Island University,*
	Brentwood, Major: Literacy
Date Graduated:	*September, 2002*
	Advanced Graduate Certificate in
	Educational Leadership, Stony Brook
	University, Stony Brook
Date Graduated:	*May, 2014*