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White privilege and teacher perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality

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Abstract

In this study, we investigated differences in teachers' perceptions of the teacher-child relationship from kindergarten through second grade as a function of child race and gender from the perspective of critical race theory and the cultural synchrony hypothesis. Given the extensive evidence of White privilege and anti-Black racism in the US education system, we expected that teachers, particularly White teachers, would perceive their relationships with White children more positively than with

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Black children. Controlling for family SES and child gender, results supported this hypothesis. Black boys had the highest risk of being perceived by teachers as having poor relationships with teachers in kindergarten (highest conflict and lowest closeness) and White girls had the lowest risk. In addition, teachers perceived relationships with Black boys as increasing in conflict across first and second grades at higher rates than with White and female children. These findings remained after examining teacher-child racial match as a moderator. Our results indicate that racism and sexism work together to explain the perceptions teachers have of children in the early elementary grades. Implications for training teachers and school psychologists on anti-racism and cultural competency are discussed.

Keywords: Teacher-child relationships, Racism, White supremacy, Critical race theory, Cultural synchrony hypothesis, Elementary school

1. Introduction

It has been well documented that, in the US education system, teachers' behavior and attitudes toward students in their classes favor White students over students of color, particularly Black, Latine, and Indigenous students. Teacher racial bias is evident in myriad ways, such as academic expectations (McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007), nominations for special education or gifted services (Blanchett, 2006; Callahan, 2001; Serpell et al., 2009), and rates and types of school discipline, ranging from office disciplinary referrals to corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Krezmien et al., 2006; Wallace Jr et al., 2008). In the US education system, as in the broader US society, racism is most prominent and clear when contrasting the experiences of White and Black students (Wilkerson, 2020) that often result from teachers' socialized perceptions of Black and White individuals. Frequently, teachers perceive White students as academically capable, respectful, and well behaved, whereas Black students are perceived as academically weak, disrespectful, and disruptive (Blake et al., 2016; Francis, 2012). Differential perceptions beget an inequitable and unequal system of education that perpetuates and exacerbates negative outcomes for Black students. In the present study, we examined one type of teacher perceptions: the quality of their relationships (i.e., conflict and closeness) with Black and White boys and girls from kindergarten through second grade. Teachers' perceptions of the quality of this early relationship have been linked to a host of academic and social outcomes

for children concurrently and longitudinally (e.g., Ansari et al., 2020; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Due to the predictive power of early teacher-child relationships, understanding racism's role in teacher perceptions is critical.

2. Racism in school settings

Racism is used to define a system of advantage based on race that is created and maintained by the interplay of biased thoughts, feelings, and actions, as well as sociopolitical factors such as policies, laws, and institutions (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). The US educational system is one of structural and systemic racism that has permeated the US since its founding (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Feagin & Barnett, 2004). Decades of first de jure and later de facto school segregation have produced a teacher workforce in which nearly 80% of teachers self-identify as White (Taie & Goldring, 2020), with many teachers having lived and learned in segregated environments (Orfield et al., 2016). Concurrently, teacher preparation programs tend to lack opportunities to build dispositions for cultural empathy through understanding the experiences of diverse (e.g., Black) students (Warren, 2018) in the US student population (McFarland et al., 2019). In addition, the US educational system's structural and institutional policies (i.e., zero-tolerance), practices (i.e., standardized testing), and perceptions (i.e., teacher bias) contribute to the sustainment of advantages for White students while simultaneously perpetuating anti-Black racism. Thus, within the educational system, policies and teacher perceptions come together to create contexts where students of color have very different school experiences than their White peers (Donnor, 2011; Milner, 2010), with White students afforded persistent and systemic advantages compared to their Black peers.

The present study was guided by critical race theory (CRT; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and the cultural synchrony hypothesis (CSH; Monroe & Obidah, 2004). Bell (1973) offered foundational arguments for CRT by providing a critical lens relating to the role of racism on structures and institutions within the US. CRT holds that race is physically, socially, legally, and historically constructed and is deeply embedded in US culture as reflected in its laws, institutions, and biases

(Milner, 2017). In addition to racism, “color-blind” and “race-neutral” practices serve as “camouflages for the self-interest of powerful entities of society” (Tate, 1997, p. 235). As such, most policies and structures are established on a color-blind basis, thus ignoring the critical role of racism.

Additionally, CRT has been used to conceptualize Whiteness as “property”. Understanding that Whiteness is a racialized social and historical construct, Whiteness does not represent a physical possession. However, CRT posits that Whiteness provides individuals with advantages and rights unavailable to non-White people (Harris, 1993). Thus, in education, Whiteness translates to having access to higher quality education and better educational opportunities and outcomes (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Indeed, Whiteness has, for centuries, been leveraged to prevent non-White (specifically Black) people from accessing high-quality (or any) educational opportunities. CRT in education highlights White students’ historical and current advantages across the US education system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Indeed, the US educational system confers systematic benefits to White students, as opposed to students of color, particularly Black, Latine, and indigenous students, such as holding higher academic expectations, assumptions of positive intent, and general goodwill from educators (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021).

CSH also informed the present study as it suggests that White teachers’ deficit views of Black students are a result of cultural incongruence between the structure of US education, which is based on European American cultural norms for behavior, and the cultural norms of African American and other minoritized students and families (Blake et al., 2016; Monroe & Obidah, 2004). The effect of CSH in school is the actualization of stereotypes and negative biases toward students from racial and ethnic minoritized groups within the US (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Experiences with such psychological dilemmas related to stereotyping, which often stem from implicit social biases, can lead to weakened relationships among teachers and students (Okonofua et al., 2016). As a result, teachers may view White students more positively than they view students of color; likewise, when there is racial match between teachers and students, this may allow teachers to capitalize on shared backgrounds, helping students and teachers avoid cultural misunderstandings that could lead

to negative reactions to and perceptions of students' behaviors (Blake et al., 2016; Irvine, 1988). As informed by CRT and CSH we expected teachers of any racial/ethnic background to have more positive perceptions of their relationships with White than Black students. However, we also expected teachers' perceptions of their relationships to be moderated by racial matching between teachers and children, such that Black teachers may have more positive views of relationships with Black students than White teachers and vice versa.

3. Teacher perceptions of relationships with children

Teacher perceptions of their relationships with children in early elementary grades have significant implications for children's academic, social, and behavioral outcomes in the short and long term (e.g., Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Liew et al., 2010; Roorda et al., 2011; Rudasill et al., 2013). Extant literature indicates that positive teacher-child relationships are key for developing children's skills to traverse and circumvent social challenges. When teachers perceive the quality of their relationships with children as positive, children are more likely to have positive perceptions of school (Pianta, 1999; Roorda et al., 2011), which then promotes academic success. By contrast, when teachers perceive relationships with children as poor, children are more likely to avoid school, report loneliness, and display low levels of academic and social competence (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Pianta, 1997). These variations in child outcomes may be attributable, in part, to altered teacher expectations and practices because of a teacher's poor perception of the relationship with a child. Here, teachers may find it more challenging to work with children compared to their peers with whom they perceive better relationships. Children with whom teachers perceive negative relationships may also be perceived as more disruptive in the classroom and be seen as less socially competent, resulting in more instances of conflict with classmates and teachers (Lillvist et al., 2009). Moreover, children who are perceived as having poor relationships with their teachers may be less compliant with rules and procedures established by their teachers, thereby seeming to undermine their authority. It is likely that this lack of connection as perceived by the

teacher in early elementary grades (and in later grades, when students report on school climate; Thapa et al., 2013) stems from a sense of disconnection the teacher has from the child owing to lack of common experiences and low empathy; this would be amplified in situations where there is racial mismatch between a teacher and a child. Indeed, poorly perceived relationships are linked to fewer positive teacher-student interactions (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009) and teachers' negative interpretations of students' behavior and academic performance (Roorda et al., 2011).

Positive teacher-child relationships are marked by teachers' perceptions of high levels of closeness (i.e., mutual warmth and positive regard) and low levels of conflict (i.e., discord and disharmony), whereas negative teacher-child relationships are characterized in the opposite way with teachers' perceptions of low closeness and high conflict (Pianta, 2001). Seminal research by Hamre and Pianta (2001) indicated that kindergarten teacher-child relationship quality predicted children's behavioral outcomes as late as the eighth grade, and other studies have connected early teacher-child relationships to concurrent and later academic achievement (e. g., Liew et al., 2010; Palermo et al., 2007), classroom engagement (e.g., Hughes & Kwok, 2006), participation in class (e.g., Ladd et al., 1999), peer relationships (e.g., Rudasill et al., 2013), and externalizing behavior (e.g., Crockett et al., 2018; Doumen et al., 2008; Roorda et al., 2014). In a meta-analysis of teacher-child relationship research, Roorda et al. (2011) examined studies linking teacher and student perceptions of the teacher-child relationship with students' engagement and achievement from preschool through high school. Across 61 studies, Roorda et al. found medium to large effect sizes for the connections between relationship quality and students' engagement (i.e., correlations between 0.34 and 0.39 for positive relationship quality and engagement, and between -0.31 and -0.32 for negative relationship quality and engagement), and small to medium effect sizes in the connections between relationship quality and students' achievement (i.e., 0.16 correlation between positive relationship quality and achievement, and between -0.15 and -0.18 for negative relationship quality and achievement). Positive relationships are important across all grades, but in the early grades, when teachers perceive positive relationships, children seem to gain skills for behavior regulation

that promote successful academic and social trajectories (Decker et al., 2007; Howes et al., 1994; Pianta, 1997).

The teacher-child relationship literature is situated squarely within the notion that positively perceived relationships bode well for children's academic, behavioral, and social functioning because they point to security and belonging for the child or student in the school setting (Ansari et al., 2020; Pianta, 2001). The assumption here is that teacher perceptions are accurate indicators of child behavior, rather than being indicators of other factors such as teacher bias, structural racism, or culturally unresponsive learning environments. However, there is research that examines teachers' contributions to their perceptions of this relationship. Some work has examined the frequency of teacher-initiated interactions (Koles et al., 2009; Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). Other work has investigated teacher characteristics as predictors of perceptions (for educational levels, see Choi & Dobbs-Oates, 2016; for experience, stress, and exhaustion levels, see Nurmi & Kivuru, 2015), as well as teacher-child racial/ethnic match (e.g., Choi & Dobbs-Oates, 2016) which is discussed more below in "Teacher-Child Racial/Ethnic Match". Student reports of the quality of relationships with teachers, as well as of adjacent constructs like school climate, may provide a more direct measure of students' sense of security and belonging in the school environment (Thapa et al., 2013). However, teacher perceptions of relationship quality must be contextualized. Given the extensive evidence of concurrent and longitudinal connections between teacher perceived teacher-child relationship quality and children's school outcomes, it is essential to turn a critical eye toward the role of structural and systemic racism on these perceptions.

3.1. Teacher-child relationship quality and child race

There is a body of literature that includes examinations of the role of child race on teacher perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality (Hughes et al., 2005; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Jerome et al., 2009; Kesner, 2000; Liew et al., 2010; Murray & Murray, 2004; Saft & Pianta, 2001); however, there has been very little focus on systemic racism as a context for examining child race as a primary predictor of teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality. Previous studies have used regional samples (e.g., Hughes et al., 2005) or included child

race as a covariate (e.g., Liew et al., 2010), and collective results indicate that White students are perceived more positively by teachers in the early grades. That is, White students are more likely to be viewed by teachers as having higher closeness and lower conflict than their Black peers (Hughes et al., 2005; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Jerome et al., 2009; Kesner, 2000; Liew et al., 2010; Murray & Murray, 2004; Saft & Pianta, 2001). In the present study we were able to utilize a nationally representative sample of children in the US who were identified as White or Black and who were followed from kindergarten through second grade. Given the myriad advantages that White students have within the educational system, it is likely that teachers would perceive their relationships with White students as more positive than their relationships with Black students, conferring additional downstream advantages to White vs. Black students.

3.2. Teacher-child racial/ethnic match

Theoretical and empirical work points to the potential benefits of assigning students of color to teachers of color (Blake et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Redding, 2019). Studies have shown that racial/ethnic *mismatch* is related to poorer teacher perceptions of relationship quality among early elementary students (e.g., Meehan et al., 2003; Murray, Murray, & Waas, 2008; Saft & Pianta, 2001), whereas racial/ethnic *match* is associated with children's better social skills with teachers and peers in preschool (e.g., Graves Jr & Howes, 2011) and with teacher perceptions of less disruptive behavior (Wymer et al., 2022). CSH suggests that teachers of color may have shared racial/ethnic experiences or positionality with children of the same race/ethnicity (Wymer et al., 2022), thus providing an avenue for understanding and compassion that might not be forthcoming from a White teacher (i.e., a non-match). For this reason, we expected that teacher-child racial match would moderate teacher-child relationship trajectories for children from Kindergarten to Grade 2. Conversely, utilizing CRT, we also considered the panoply of advantages conferred on White children and their families (e.g., better housing and educational opportunities, more intergenerational wealth) and how these advantages may positively skew perceptions of White children by all teachers. That is, it may be that White children are more positively perceived than Black children by both White and Black teachers.

The issue of racial/ethnic match is especially timely as the US teacher workforce remains much less diverse than the students it serves. For example, in 2017–18, which is the most recent year for which data were available, 78% of K–12 teachers identified as White, 11% identified as Black or African American, 9% identified as Latine, and 3% identified as another race/ethnicity. Conversely, 48% of students identified as White, 15% identified as Black, 27% identified as Latine, and 9% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, Alaskan Native/American Indian, or two or more races (McFarland et al., 2019). These data indicate that there are nearly twice as many White teachers than White students, yet half the number of Black teachers than students, and one third the number of Latine teachers as students. Proportions for other racial/ethnic groups are so small it is difficult to parse out the proportions.

3.3. Child gender, family SES, and teacher-child relationship quality

Evidence points to links between teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality and child gender and family SES, with teachers tending to perceive their relationships with boys as more conflictual and less close than with girls; this gender bias emerges as early as preschool (Ewing & Taylor, 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; McCormick & O'Connor, 2015; Nurmi, 2012). Teachers are also more likely to indicate problems with boys' compliance to teacher instructions and directives (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002). However, boys are also more likely to benefit from teachers' positive perceptions of relationship quality which is exemplified by the fact that boys whose teachers perceive their relationships positively tend to report more school liking, have lower school avoidance, and display higher achievement (Ly et al., 2012; Murray, Waas, & Murray, 2008). Because of the consistent and extensive evidence of gender differences in teacher-child relationships, we examined child race by child gender in the present study.

Although less abundant than research connecting child gender to teacher perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality, there is evidence that teachers tend to perceive children from lower SES families as having poorer quality relationships (O'Connor & McCartney, 2006; Rudasill et al., 2010; Wyrick & Rudasill, 2009). This appears

to be particularly important when there is a concentration of children from lower SES families in the classroom (O'Connor & McCartney, 2006). In addition, Pianta et al. (2005) suggested that teachers' positive appraisals of their relationships with children can safeguard against the risk of poor school outcomes due to unsupportive or high poverty home environments; this has been supported in research by Murray and Malmgren (2005), who evaluated the effect of a teacher-child relationship program among students in a high poverty urban school. Findings indicated that students in a program aimed at improving their relationships with at least one teacher had higher grade point averages compared to students in the control group.

Critically, racism in the US also shapes, and is shaped by, dynamics within and between groups and varies as a function of other social identities (e.g., racism oppresses women of color in ways that it does not oppress men of color; Crenshaw, 1991). That is, the classroom experiences of White and Black children are also likely to differ by other characteristics such as gender and family SES (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). Because of research suggesting that family SES has an association with teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality, and the fact that Black children are more likely to be from homes with lower income and wealth (Cornwell & Ye, 2022), we controlled for family SES and then examined family SES as a moderator of the association between child race, child gender, and teachers' perceptions of conflict and closeness. This allowed us to differentiate the effects of SES and race that are often confounded.

4. Purpose of the present study

In the present study we investigated the role of structural and systemic racism in teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality (i.e., closeness and conflict as measured with the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale [STRS]; Pianta, 2001) from kindergarten through second grade, with a specific focus on comparisons between teachers' perceptions of relationships with White and Black boys and girls. We also considered the effects of family SES on racial differences in teachers' perceptions. This study was guided by CRT and CSH. Based on CSH, we expected that teachers' perceptions of their

relationships with White and Black boys and girls would be moderated by racial match between teachers and children, such that Black teachers would have more positive views of relationships with Black children than White teachers would. We extended CRT by explicitly examining the role of White racial advantage on teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality, expecting that White children would be more favorably perceived by teachers than their Black peers.

Specifically, we expected that, when controlling for the effects of family SES, teachers would perceive relationships with White children as lower in conflict and higher in closeness than with Black children. Consistent with previous research, we also anticipated that teachers would perceive lower levels of conflict and higher levels of closeness with girls than boys. We also examined the trajectory of these relationships through second grade, hypothesizing that teachers' perceptions of relationships with White children would remain low in conflict and high in closeness, whereas their perceptions of relationships with Black children would deteriorate (*i.e.*, increase in conflict and decrease in closeness). Regarding the interaction of race and gender on teacher-child relationship quality in kindergarten through second grade, we hypothesized that there would be a unique effect such that teachers would perceive their relationships with White girls as having the least conflict and the most closeness in kindergarten and from kindergarten through second grade as compared to their perceptions of relationships with Black girls, White boys, and Black boys. Conversely, we hypothesized that teachers would perceive their relationships with Black boys as having the most conflict and the least closeness in kindergarten and from kindergarten through second grade. Finally, we examined the interaction of family SES and child race and gender on teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality. This was an exploratory goal of the study, so we did not put forth any hypotheses.

5. Method

5.1. Participants and procedures

The data for this analysis was from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–2011 (ECLS-K: 2011). Of the

18,170 children in the original ECLS-K sample, 9190 were included in the analyses. Participants were removed from the sample due to missing or zero sampling weights ($n = 8950$) or missing data for SES ($n = 30$).¹ Intermittent missing data (i.e., missing a wave of data on the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale; STRS, Pianta, 2001) were addressed using Full Information Maximum Likelihood (Enders, 2010). The analysis included 2540 White boys, 2350 White girls, 490 Black boys, 460 Black girls, and 3360 Other boys/girls.² Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers' unweighted demographic data are provided in **Table 1**. Data for the present study were collected in the spring of kindergarten, the spring of first grade, and the spring of second grade. Teacher-child relationship data were gathered at all three time points, whereas demographic data were used from the kindergarten time point.

The ECLS-K dataset includes sampling weights to account for missing data and selection bias and to produce final estimates that were representative of students attending kindergarten in the United States in the 2010–11 school year. More information on the sampling methodology used for the ECLS-K can be found in the user manual (Tourangeau et al., 2015). The final sample weight (W6CS6P_6TBo) was selected for this analysis based on the waves and surveys used (teacher and parent measures during the spring of each school year for kindergarten, first, and second grades) and to ensure the findings to be representative of the whole population. Replicate weights (W6CS6p_6TB1-W6CS6p_6TB8o) were selected to account for the complex design of the selection process. The Jackknife 2 replication procedure provides adjusted standard errors that account for dependency among observations (Tourangeau et al., 2015).

5.2. Measures

5.2.1. Demographic measures

Parent-reported children's race and gender demographic information was obtained from the parent's kindergarten survey. Categories for race included White (non-Hispanic), Black (non-Hispanic),

1 All sample sizes rounded to the nearest 10 per IES restricted use license agreement.

2 Child race was coded as (a) White (non-Hispanic), (b) Black (non-Hispanic), or (c) Other (Hispanic, any race; Other race/ethnicity).

Table 1 Unweighted teacher demographics.

	Race*			Median Age	% Female	Median Years Teaching	% Bachelor's Degree	% > Bachelor's Degree
	White	Black	Other					
Kindergarten	79.9%	4.8%	15.3%	41	97.3	12	52.5%	47.1%
1st grade	78.5%	6.4%	15.1%	42	95.7	12.5	49.7%	50.1%
2nd grade	78.9%	6.1%	15.0%	43	94.2	13	50.6%	49.2%

White and Black are non-Hispanic; Other are Hispanic (any race) and other non-Hispanic.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), "Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Teacher Level," Fall 2010, Spring 2012, 2013, "New Teacher Supplement," Spring 2011.

and all others (“Other”), including multiple races. Four demographic categories were of interest for this analysis: White boys, White girls, Black boys, and Black girls. Children who were in a different race category were grouped together as “Other”. SES was gathered at the household level from the parent’s kindergarten wave interview. The ECLS-K (2011) study captured SES using a continuous composite measure based on five components: (a) education level of parent 1, (b) education level of parent 2, (c) occupational prestige of parent 1, (d) occupational prestige of parent 2, and (e) household income (see Tourangeau et al., 2015, for more information about how each component was assessed). The composite scores ranged from -2.33 to 2.60 with a mean of -0.05 .

5.2.2. *Teacher-child relationship quality*

Closeness in the teacher-child relationship measures the degree to which a teacher experiences affection and warmth and effectively communicates with a particular child, whereas *conflict* measures the degree to which a teacher perceives their relationship with a particular child as negative or conflictual. Teachers completed the 15-item STRS (Pianta, 2001) that includes scales for closeness and conflict. The short form of the STRS has been widely used in teacher-child relationship research (e.g., Driscoll & Pianta, 2010; Graves Jr & Howes, 2011; NICHD ECCRN, 1993; Rudasill, 2011) and consists of two factors (i.e., conflict and closeness) that have good evidence for validity in the US (Pianta, 2001) as well as cultures across the world, such as Greece (Tsigilis & Gregoriadis, 2008), Ghana (Aboagye et al., 2019), and Italy (Settanni et al., 2015). For the ECLS-K: 2011, teachers responded by using a 5-point scale (1 = *definitely does not apply* to 5 = *definitely applies*). Sample items include “I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child” (i.e., closeness) and “Dealing with this child drains my energy” (i.e., conflict). Reliability estimates with the current dataset at kindergarten, first grade, and second grade range from 0.86 to 0.89 for the closeness factor and 0.88 to 0.90 for the conflict factor (Tourangeau et al., 2017). Item-level data were not available.

5.3. Data analyses

To examine the trajectories of teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality from kindergarten through second grade across racial and gender groups, we used multiple-group latent growth curve modeling. This method allowed us to model individual differences in perceptions of relationship quality at the intercept (kindergarten) as well as the longitudinal trajectories of the teacher-child relationship across time by race and gender. Latent growth curve models are particularly applicable when performing nested model comparisons to diagnose significant effects between proposed models (Singer & Willett, 2003). For this analysis, nested model comparisons were used to model interaction effects to determine if the teacher-child relationship and the effect of family SES on this relationship significantly varied based on race and gender and exactly where the differences existed. Data were analyzed using Mplus 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2019). To model the teacher-child relationship by racial/gender groups, multiple-group unconditional latent growth curve models were first constructed to assess the differences in the intercepts and linear growth of conflict and closeness from kindergarten to second grade by groups. Then, multiple-group latent growth curve models with the time-invariant covariate SES were built to predict differences in both the intercepts as well as the change processes for conflict and closeness by groups. This approach was chosen to address not only the main effects of child race and gender on closeness and conflict for each grade in school, but to also address the differences in their trajectories over the early elementary grades. An invariance approach using nested model comparisons was applied to test the equality of each effect between White boys, Black boys, White girls, and Black girls. Children of other races or multiple races were included in the model (as "Other"), but not examined in the analysis or results. Intercepts, slopes, and the effects of SES were all examined for equality among these groups.

As there were only three time points in this growth model, only a linear model could be considered (Singer & Willett, 2003). Consistent with Hu and Bentler (1999) recommendations, model incremental fit was assessed using the comparative fit index (CFI; ≥ 0.95), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI; ≥ 0.95), the root mean square error

of approximation (RMSEA; < 0.05), and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR; < 0.08). In the first step of the multiple-group unconditional latent growth curve model, we considered all groups to be inequivalent in the intercept and growth parameters. The equality was imposed on the intercept, growth, and both intercept and growth parameters across groups. In the first step of the multiple-group latent growth curve model with the time-invariant covariate SES, we considered all groups to be non-equivalent in the effects of SES on intercept and growth parameters. Equality then was imposed on the effect of SES on the intercept, growth, and both intercept and growth parameters across groups. Nested models were evaluated based on scaled chi-square difference tests (Satorra & Bentler, 2010). A more restrictive (i.e., invariance) model is preferred with a non-significant scaled chi-square difference test (Wang & Wang, 2012).

6. Results

6.1. Correlations

Inter-correlations across grade levels ranged from 0.464 to 0.531 ($p < .001$) for conflict, 0.297 to 0.321 ($p < .001$) for closeness, and -0.377 to -0.145 ($p < .001$) between conflict and closeness. SES during the kindergarten year was modestly correlated with conflict and closeness at each grade level (**Table 2**).

6.2. Conflict and closeness in kindergarten

Table 3 shows the mean conflict and closeness ratings for students in each grade by race and gender. Descriptively, teachers perceived increasing conflict with Black boys and girls, whereas teachers perceived a decrease in closeness over time with all groups of children. **Table 4** and **Table 5** present the results of invariance tests for unconditional latent growth curve models. Noninvariance of intercept and slope was observed for both conflict and closeness. **Table 6** shows the results of the configural invariance model. In terms of the intercept, teachers perceived closeness and conflict differently for all groups in the spring of their kindergarten year. Specifically, Black boys had the highest levels of conflict as rated by their teachers in kindergarten,

Table 2 Weighted bivariate correlations among continuous variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. SES	—						
2. Conflict K	-0.103	—					
3. Conflict 1	-0.111	0.513	—				
4. Conflict 2	-0.131	0.464	0.531	—			
5. Closeness K	0.123	-0.377	-0.166	-0.151	—		
6. Closeness 1	0.134	-0.183	-0.354	-0.176	0.297	—	
7. Closeness 2	0.150	-0.145	-0.174	-0.359	0.266	0.321	—

All the correlation coefficients are statistically significant at $p < .001$.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), "Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Child Level," Spring 2011, 2012, 2013.

Table 3 Weighted mean conflict and closeness ratings in each grade by groups.

Grade	Conflict						Closeness					
	K		1		2		K		1		2	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
White Boys	1.72	0.84	1.75	0.86	1.74	0.81	4.35	0.61	4.28	0.64	4.20	0.67
White Girls	1.42	0.65	1.42	0.63	1.42	0.64	4.57	0.52	4.52	0.56	4.48	0.57
Black Boys	1.97	0.92	2.12	0.99	2.14	1.05	4.28	0.64	4.20	0.67	4.10	0.75
Black Girls	1.69	0.81	1.70	0.80	1.73	0.89	4.40	0.60	4.59	0.64	4.30	0.64

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), "Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Child Level," Spring 2011, 2012, 2013, "Parent Interview," Fall 2010, Spring 2011.

Table 4 Model comparison for conflict: unconditional latent growth curve model.

	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	Model Comparison
A1 Configural Invariance Model	5	1.000	0.999	0.008	0.007	
A2 Equal Intercept	243.144*	0.903	0.838	0.088	0.089	A2 – A1 251.099*
A3 Equal Slope	17.472*	0.996	0.994	0.017	0.014	A3 – A1 11.389*
A4 Equal Intercept and Slope	401.620*	0.838	0.814	0.094	0.140	A4 – A1 414.026*

* $p < .05$

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), "Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Child Level," Spring 2011, 2012, 2013, "Parent Interview," Fall 2010, Spring 2011.

Table 5 Model comparison for closeness: unconditional latent growth curve model.

	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	Model Comparison
A1 Configural Invariance Model	5	1.000	1.000	0.000	0.006	
A2 Equal Intercept	232.466*	0.786	0.643	0.086	0.135	A2 – A1 220.313*
A3 Equal Slope	16.560	0.993	0.988	0.016	0.016	A3 – A1 13.205*
A4 Equal Intercept and Slope	445.281*	0.586	0.522	0.099	0.238	A4 – A1 420.318*

* $p < .05$

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), "Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Child Level," Spring 2011, 2012, 2013, "Parent Interview," Fall 2010, Spring 2011.

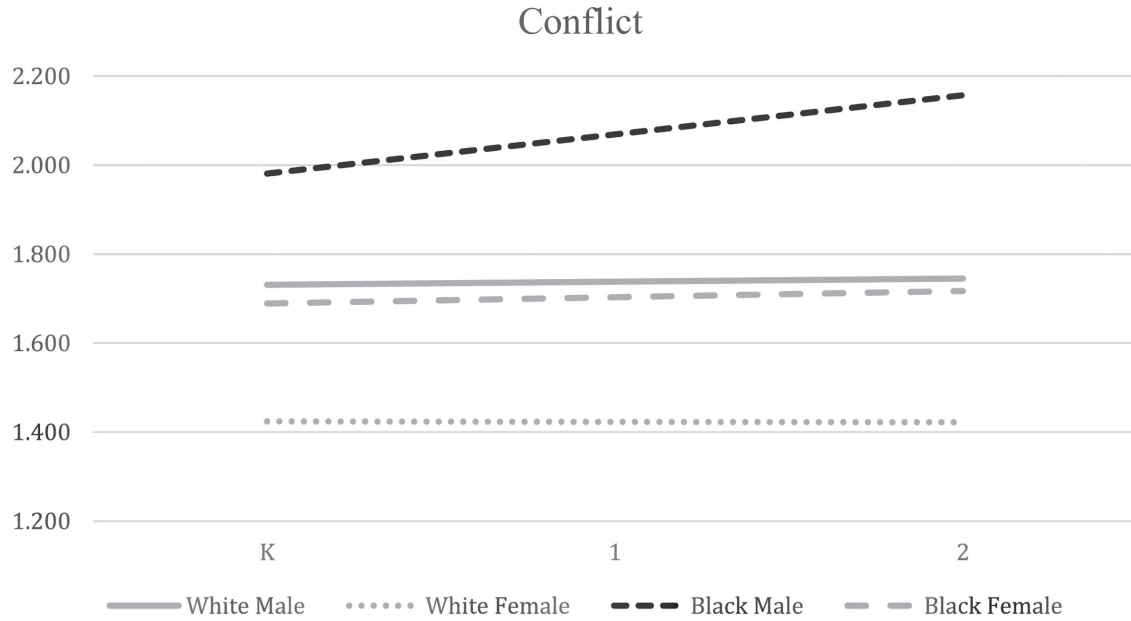


Fig. 1. Conflict trajectory from kindergarten through 2nd grade. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), “Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Child Level,” Spring 2011, 2012, 2013, “Parent Interview,” Fall 2010, Spring 2011.

followed by White boys, then Black girls, and finally White girls. For closeness, the reverse was true in that White girls had the highest beginning levels of closeness as rated by their teachers, followed by Black girls, then White boys, with Black boys having the lowest levels of closeness. **Fig. 1** and **Fig. 2** present the trajectories of teacher-rated conflict and closeness from kindergarten through Grade 2 for each group.

6.3. Growth in conflict and closeness from kindergarten through Grade 2

Apart from differences in kindergarten levels of teacher-perceived closeness and conflict, teachers also perceived growth in closeness and conflict differently for Black and White children (**Table 6**). Black boys were the only group for whom teachers’ perceptions of conflict significantly increased from kindergarten to second grade. Over time,

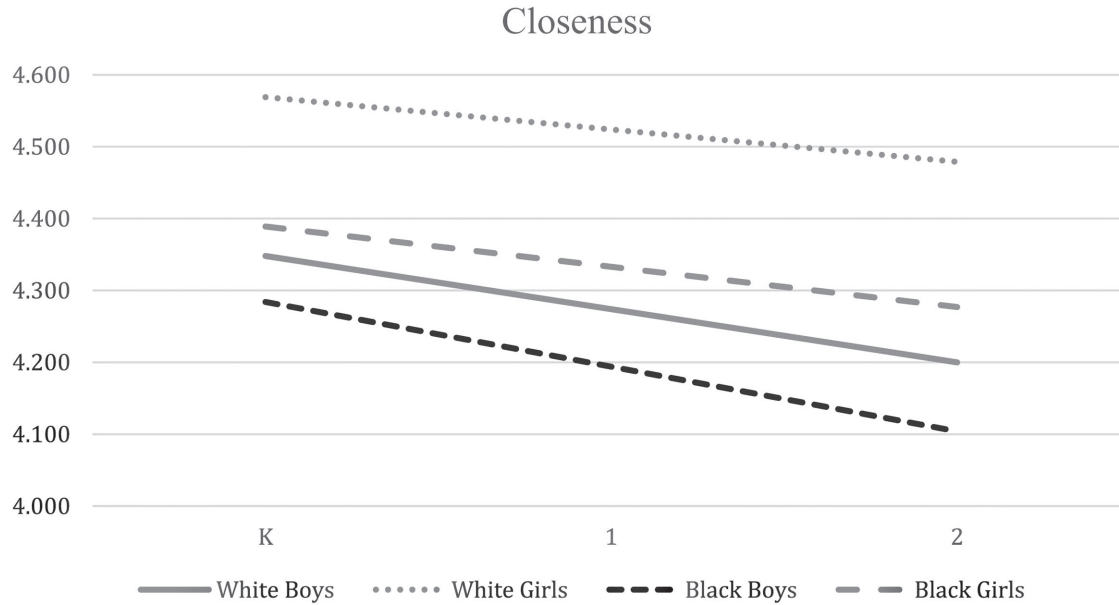


Fig. 2. Closeness trajectory from kindergarten through 2nd grade. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), “Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Child Level,” Spring 2011, 2012, 2013, “Parent Interview,” Fall 2010, Spring 2011.

teacher-perceived conflict intensified. There was no significant change in the slope of conflict for the other groups. All groups had a significant slope of closeness such that, over time, teachers’ perceptions of closeness decreased. From kindergarten through Grade 2, teachers’ perceptions of closeness with Black boys decreased the most, followed by White boys, then Black girls, and finally White girls.

6.4. Effect of SES

Results of invariance tests for latent growth curve models with SES as a covariate for conflict are shown in **Table 7**. The effect of SES on the intercept and slope of conflict was noninvariant across groups. That is, the effect of SES on the intercept and slope of conflict differed by groups (see **Table 9** for results of the configural invariance model for conflict). In terms of the effect of SES on the intercept, all groups’ initial teacher-perceived conflict was significantly and negatively related

Table 6 Conflict and closeness intercepts and mean slopes: configural invariance model.

	Conflict			Closeness			
	Intercept		Slope	Intercept		Slope	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
White Boys	1.731*	0.022	0.007	4.348*	0.014	-0.074*	0.013
White Girls	1.424*	0.017	-0.001	4.569*	0.010	-0.045*	0.011
Black Boys	1.981*	0.041	0.088*	4.284*	0.033	-0.090*	0.024
Black Girls	1.689*	0.046	0.014	4.389*	0.030	-0.056*	0.024

* *p* < .05

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), "Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Child Level," Spring 2011, 2012, 2013, "Parent Interview," Fall 2010, Spring 2011.

Table 7 Model comparison for conflict: latent growth curve model with covariate SES.

	<i>df</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>Model Comparison</i>
A1 Configural Invariance Model	8,404	1.000	1.000	0.000	0.007	
A2 Equal Coefficients on Intercept	24,326*	0.997	0.993	0.016	0.019	A2 – A1 17.996*
A3 Equal Coefficients on Slope	18,660	0.999	0.997	0.011	0.011	A3 – A1 10.725*
A4 Equal Coefficients on Intercept and Slope	59,080*	0.988	0.979	0.028	0.033	A4 – A1 55.054*

* *p* < .05

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), "Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Child Level," Spring 2011, 2012, 2013, "Parent Interview," Fall 2010, Spring 2011.

Table 8 Model comparison for closeness: latent growth model with covariate SES.

	<i>df</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>Model Comparison</i>
A1 Configural Invariance Model	11,079	0.999	0.998	0.006	0.010	
A2 Equal Coefficients on Intercept	18,426	0.997	0.993	0.010	0.016	A2 – A1 7.436
A3 Equal Coefficients on Slope	18,413	0.997	0.993	0.010	0.013	A3 – A1 7.471
A4 Equal Coefficients on Intercept and Slope	25,852	0.994	0.990	0.012	0.019	A4 – A1 14.943

* *p* < .05

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), "Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Child Level," Spring 2011, 2012, 2013, "Parent Interview," Fall 2010, Spring 2011.

Table 9 SES predicting intercept and slope of conflict by groups: configural invariance model.

<i>Dependent Variables</i>	<i>Intercept</i>		<i>Slope</i>	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
White Boys	-0.169*	0.028	-0.027	0.019
White Girls	-0.104*	0.023	-0.024	0.015
Black Boys	-0.071	0.043	-0.090*	0.025
Black Girls	-0.098*	0.047	0.018	0.032

* *p* < .05

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011), "Classroom Teacher Questionnaire – Child Level," Spring 2011, 2012, 2013, "Parent Interview," Fall 2010, Spring 2011.

to SES, except for Black boys. SES was not significantly associated with teachers' perceptions of the initial level of conflict with Black boys. In terms of the effect of SES on growth in conflict, only teacher perceptions of conflict with Black boys over time was associated with SES, with higher SES predicting a decreased perception of conflict with Black boys over time. SES was not associated with the change in conflict for the other groups.

The effect of SES on the intercept and slope of closeness was invariant across groups (see **Table 8**). That is, the effects of SES on teachers' perceptions of closeness with children at kindergarten and growth in perceptions of closeness from kindergarten through Grade 2 did not differ by groups. For all groups, SES had a significant, positive effect on teachers' perceptions of closeness with children at kindergarten ($b = 0.076, p < .001$) and a non-significant, positive effect on growth ($b = 0.071, p = .051$).

6.5. Racial match between teachers and children

A follow-up analysis was performed using the restricted ECLS-K 2011 dataset to examine the possible moderation of teacher race. Including teacher race did not improve model fit, indicating that the race of the teacher had no significant impact on the findings. Thus, racial match between children and teachers was unrelated to the trajectories of teachers' perceptions of their relationships with children.

7. Discussion

In the present study, we examined teachers' perceptions of their relationships with children from kindergarten through second grade in a nationally representative sample in the US. Our goal was to investigate the weight of anti-black structural and systemic racism in teachers' perceptions of this early and important relationship; consequently, we specifically focused on teachers' perceptions of Black and White children. Given the extensive evidence of differences in teachers' perceptions of boys vs. girls (e.g., Ewing & Taylor, 2009), we considered teachers' perceptions of Black boys and girls separately. In addition, all analyses accounted for children's family SES so that the unique effects

of race could be examined. We found evidence of systematic bias in teachers' perceptions of relationships with Black and White children. Four major findings emerged. First, kindergarten teachers perceived the lowest levels of conflict and the highest levels of closeness in relationships with White girls, whereas they perceived their relationships with Black boys as having the highest levels of conflict and the lowest levels of closeness. In addition, only Black boys were perceived by teachers as increasing in conflict from kindergarten to second grade, and, although teachers perceived relationships with all four groups of children (i.e., Black boys, Black girls, White boys, and White girls) as having significant decreases in closeness across time, they perceived their relationships with White girls as decreasing the least, followed by Black girls, then White boys, and, finally, Black boys. Second, our results point to teacher bias advantaging girls in that teachers perceived their relationships with both Black and White girls consistently more positively than with Black and White boys (with White children perceived more positively than Black children within each gender group).

Third, our findings regarding the moderating role of family SES supported the Matthew effect (i.e., the rich get richer; Stanovich, 1986) such that teachers of children from higher SES families reported less conflict and more closeness with children in kindergarten through second grade. The only exceptions were teachers' perceptions of relationships with Black boys for whom family SES was unrelated to kindergarten teachers' perceptions of conflict but related to teachers' change in perceptions of conflict over time; teachers perceived their relationships with Black boys from higher SES families as having less conflict over time. Finally, we did not find evidence that teacher-child relationship trajectories differed based on teacher-child racial match.

What is *noteworthy* in this study? We found evidence that teacher perceptions of their relationships with Black and White children in early elementary US classrooms systematically advantaged White children and demonstrated an anti-Black racial bias representative of the structural and systemic racism endemic to the US. What is *novel* in this study? Unlike most other studies of teacher-child relationship quality (e.g., Ansari et al., 2020; Choi & Dobbs-Oates, 2016; Liew et al., 2010), we situated this study within the context of the structural

and systemic racism in the US educational system and the US at large. As such, teacher-child relationships were centered on teacher perceptions of child characteristics rather than child behavior.

A primary conclusion from this study is that, above and beyond children's family SES and teacher-child racial match, teachers appraised their relationships with White girls most positively, followed by appraisals of relationships with Black girls, then White boys, and finally Black boys. This may be understood from both the CRT and CSH frameworks. Systemic and structural racism in the US educational system appears in many forms, such as under-representation of Black students in gifted education, over-representation of Black students in special education, and disproportionality in disciplinary actions (Callahan, 2001; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Serpell et al., 2009; Wallace Jr et al., 2008). Findings from the present study align with CRT by providing additional evidence of access to educational opportunities that come from being White, with White students, and specifically White girls, the children most well positioned in terms of how teachers perceived their relationships. Teachers appear to appraise their relationships with White children in the early elementary grades more positively than their relationships with Black children, and these positive perceptions have downstream academic, social, and behavioral benefits (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Rudasill et al., 2013; Spilt et al., 2012). Likewise, CRT suggests that teachers' poorer perceptions of their relationships with Black children stem from White supremacist policies, practices, beliefs, and values that permeate the US (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021; Salter et al., 2018). Indeed, US society's culture of Whiteness as normal and "belonging" is so pervasive that negative messaging about non-Whiteness is simply ingrained in individuals' responses, perceptions, and beliefs (DiAngelo, 2018). CSH asserts that Black children are perceived more negatively than their White peers because of teacher bias regarding norms for behavior, dress, and language (Monroe & Obidah, 2004). In addition, stereotypes of Black individuals, particularly Black males, are perpetuated in the media as angry, aggressive, violent, and criminal (Blake et al., 2016). Without cultural understanding and empathy to combat these stereotypes, teachers are likely to succumb to negative perceptions of their Black students (Warren, 2018).

The fact that Black boys are uniquely at risk for being perceived by teachers as being high in conflict and low in closeness may be best understood in the context of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), which is rooted in the US Black feminist movement. Although our finding is not centered on feminism, we see intersectionality's applicability here (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). The concept of intersectionality is that some individuals have a combination of identities that intersect with various systems of oppression and marginalization. In the early elementary school setting, it may be that being a Black boy fits this description. As noted earlier, being a Black student confers consistent disadvantages in the US educational system, as borne out by lower teacher expectations, over-representation in special education, and higher likelihood of being disciplined than White peers (e.g., McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Serpell et al., 2009; Sullivan & Bal, 2013). In addition, being a boy in the early elementary environment may be another aspect of marginalization given that a large majority of early elementary teachers is female and White (Taie & Goldring, 2020), and the classroom environment privileges the self-regulated behavior that girls are more likely to display (e.g., sitting still, waiting in line, taking turns, following directions; Matthews et al., 2009; VanSchyndel et al., 2017).

Thus, we propose that teachers are particularly likely to perceive their relationships as poor with children who are both Black and male. Conversely, teachers are particularly likely to perceive their relationships as high quality with children who are both White and female. There is an extensive body of literature pointing to negative teacher-child relationships for boys; not only are boys more likely to be perceived by teachers as having more teacher-child conflict, they also are less likely to be perceived as having close teacher-child relationships (e.g., McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Nurmi, 2012). This gender difference appears in preschool (e.g., Rudasill et al., 2016) and continues throughout elementary (O'Connor, 2010) and middle school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). In addition, these early negative perceptions of relationships between boys and teachers may set the stage for students' perceptions as they reach adolescence; studies of students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers and school climate in middle school have shown the same pattern (La Salle et al., 2016; Niehaus et al., 2012; Zee et al., 2017). The intersection of gender and race in

predicting teachers' perceptions of relationship quality both in kindergarten and across the early elementary years, while controlling for family SES, is striking and bears further examination.

These findings are also consistent with research in the school climate literature. When upper elementary students report their perceptions of teachers' support, racial/ethnic and gender disparities in perceptions emerge. For example, La Salle et al. (2016) found that students of color and boys reported less positive school climate than their White and female peers. With a statewide sample of older students in middle and high school, racial disparities were even more pronounced; Black students were three times more likely to perceive the climate of their school as negative than White students (De Pedro et al., 2016). However, no gender differences in student perceptions of school climate emerged.

It is important to note that our findings remained even with the additional considerations of two potential moderators of the effects of child race, consisting of family SES and teacher race. Family SES is often confounded with child race and ethnicity given the disproportionate number of children of color who are from lower income families (Blanchett et al., 2009). However, findings from our models *controlling* for family SES compared to our models examining the *moderating* effects of SES revealed similar race and gender effects on teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality. In both sets of models, teachers perceived worse relationships with Black boys than White boys, Black girls, and White girls in terms of both closeness and conflict in kindergarten. In fact, the closeness models with SES as a control variable and SES as a moderator variable did not meaningfully differ. The primary difference in the conflict models emerged for change over time. This is the only place where teacher perceptions of relationships with children favored Black boys such that teacher perceptions of conflict decreased with Black boys from higher SES families. Teacher perceptions of relationships with White girls also demonstrated a decrease in conflict over time if the girls were from higher SES families.

We draw two conclusions from these results regarding family SES as a moderator. First, when we consider teachers' perceptions of children's relationships in early elementary grades, we should separate race and family SES rather than consider racial differences as solely

byproducts of SES. The findings reported here are clear: there were racial differences in teacher-perceived teacher-child relationship quality above and beyond SES, and there was little change in these trends when SES was considered instead as a moderator. Second, the children who were already advantaged in terms of how teachers appraised their relationships as having low conflict (i.e., White girls) were further advantaged when they were from higher SES homes, a case of the Matthew effect (Stanovich, 1986). The reverse was true for Black boys in that teachers' perceptions of teacher-child conflict with the higher SES members of this group decreased over time, suggesting a protective effect of SES. This makes sense given the affordances of higher SES that predict better academic adjustment, such as access to more educational enrichment (Duncan & Murnane, 2016), better health care (and thus better school attendance; Jackson et al., 2011), less punitive parenting (Evans, 2004), and exposure to more language in the home (e.g., Hart & Risley, 1995). However, we did not see any change in teacher perceptions of conflict with White boys, White girls, or Black girls, although this may have been because perceptions of conflict with these groups of children were already rather low in kindergarten, thus presenting a floor effect. The fact that teacher perceptions of relationships with Black boys from economically advantaged homes showed improvements over the early elementary years was encouraging, but also points to the magnified or cumulative risk for Black boys from disadvantaged homes (Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010).

There is a body of work pointing to the role of teacher-child racial/ethnic match on child outcomes (e.g., Jerome & Pianta, 2008), but when teacher race was considered as a moderator in the present study, that is, when we sought to examine the role of teacher-child racial match, we found no differences in our results. This was somewhat unexpected when considering CSH, as well as existing research, to suggest that racial mismatch would contribute to teacher perceptions of teacher child relationship quality (e.g., Blake et al., 2016; Laddson-Billings, 1994; Redding, 2019). In the present study we were able to control for child family SES, which may have eliminated some of the variance that was explained by racial match in previous work. In addition, this sample had far more White teacher participants than Black teachers. Specifically, Black teachers made up a mere 4.8%, 6.4%, and 6.1% of the teacher sample in kindergarten, first grade, and second

grade, respectively. It is likely that our lack of findings based on racial match resulted from the small representation of Black teachers in our sample. We also recognize that because a child and a teacher identify with the same racial or ethnic group, they may not share beliefs or values. Perez and Hirschman (2009) argued that broad racial labels (such as African American) undermine the extensive individual variability in culture, experience, and history.

7.1. Implications for practice

Structural and systemic racism pervade US society and the academic setting is no exception (e.g., Skiba et al., 2011). The results of this study suggest that young White children, especially girls, benefit in terms of teachers' perceptions of the teacher-child relationship quality, and these benefits can have long-term consequences for academic performance, school liking, behavior, future employment, and income (Skiba et al., 2011). Findings reported here and other evidence of racial disparities emphasize the need for training in antiracism, with attention to the current and historical forces that situate institutions, policies, practices, and, ultimately, beliefs toward a White supremacist gaze. This type of training has been absent from K-12, post-secondary, and educator training (e.g., Ohito, 2016); as a result, the US teacher workforce, which is predominantly White, is placed in schools without this key knowledge. School psychologists can be the catalysts for change by leading training in schools with teachers and other educators, providing this anti-racism education with the skills afforded from their training in therapeutic techniques.

In addition, teachers would benefit from cultural competence training. Ball et al. (2010) defined cultural competence as one's ability to work effectively with individuals of differing backgrounds and cultures. Cultural competence is the ability to place emphasis on diversity, tolerance and respect for others, knowledge of cultural perceptions, examination of personal suppositions and biases, and the development of strategies for removing racial barriers and implicit models within education. Such skills are critical for educators in today's increasingly diverse classrooms. Thus, instituting practices in schools to foster cultural competence should begin to move the needle in racial disparities in educational settings.

As schools and districts expand their work to dismantle White supremacy, foster cultural competence, and implement broader diversity and inclusion initiatives at the school level, school psychologists should be core in these discussions and processes (Jenkins et al., 2018). Smith et al. (2020) noted that when applying social justice principles to practice, school psychologists should think of themselves as preventionists who work with administrators and teachers to reduce disparities. Given the historic and systemic racism and oppression in the US, we suggest that school psychologists directly address White supremacy, which means identifying their own positionality and any attendant privilege they may have and working within their school systems to achieve equity and excellence for Black students and families by providing a voice of advocacy at a level equal to that of a middle-class White student (Lott & Rogers, 2008). This advocacy can help address cultural factors and biases that may be at play when seeing disparities in academic expectations (McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007), placement of students in special education for emotional and behavioral disorders (Blanchett, 2006; Callahan, 2001; Serpell et al., 2009), school discipline (Krezmien et al., 2006; Wallace Jr et al., 2008), and in ratings of conflict and closeness as seen in the present study.

Like teaching, the field of school psychology is heavily populated by White, female practitioners; approximately 86% of school psychologists identify as White and 87.3% identify as female (Goforth et al., 2021). As professionals in a predominantly White profession, members of US society (Salter et al., 2018), and, if White, also likely raised and educated in segregated environments (Orfield et al., 2016), school psychologists should examine their own vulnerability to White supremacy. In addition, the school psychology profession should examine the role of White supremacy on the training and preparation of school psychologists and, importantly, be intentional about recruiting and retaining more individuals of color to the profession.

At the same time, school psychologists can also work with teachers on understanding their own biases and becoming culturally responsive teachers. There are several interventions with evidence for effectiveness in supporting teachers' development of culturally responsive practices (Bottiani et al., 2018) that are critical to teachers' movement from implicit bias to empathy and culturally responsive

teaching (Warren, 2018). For example, the Double-Check Self-Assessment (Bradshaw et al., 2018) is an intervention designed to support teachers as they develop culturally responsive practices through professional development and coaching. Results from a randomized controlled trial of the Double-Check Self-Assessment indicated that teachers used improved behavior management strategies that were associated with Black students having fewer office referrals. Another promising intervention is GREET-STOPPROMPT (GSP; Cook et al., 2018) that is designed to reduce the impact of teachers' implicit bias in behavior management interactions with children. Based on results from Cook et al.'s single-case experimental design with elementary students, GSP showed promise in reducing teachers' implicit biases, particularly toward Black male students. Specifically, teachers made fewer disciplinary referrals for Black boys and Black boys also reported more school belonging. In addition, simply providing teachers with information about the value of positive teacher-child relationships in early grades for children's long-term academic lives could help teachers prioritize the quality of their relationships with young children. A combination of anti-racist training, cultural competence training, and targeted skills for cultivating positive teacher-child relationships could give teachers considerable agency in providing equitable and inclusive classroom environments.

7.2. Limitations and future directions

Although the present study makes meaningful contributions to our understanding of trajectories of teacher-child relationships across the early elementary years by race, it is not without limitations. First, this study only examined trajectories through the first 3 years of a child's schooling. Future work should explore the trajectories and White racial advantages as a child moves beyond early elementary grades and into the adolescent years. Second, this work centered on teacher perceptions of relationship quality. Future work should also account for students' reports of relationship quality, especially as the school climate reform literature increasingly identifies the importance of teacher-child relationships. Third, we did not account for other child characteristics, such as child behavior and temperament, that are often shown to contribute to teacher perceptions of relationship

quality. This work could be extended by including additional child characteristics that have been linked to teachers' perceptions of relationship quality. Fourth, the sample, although nationally representative, was limited by fact that there are far fewer Black teachers than White teachers in US classrooms. As such, the role of teacher-child racial match in teachers' perceptions of relationship quality could not be thoroughly explored. There is a national effort to diversify the teacher workforce (Carver-Thomas, 2018), but inroads here will likely be slow until there is a full recognition of the structural and systemic racism that pervades education.

8. Conclusions

This study, with a nationally representative sample of children followed from kindergarten through second grade, reveals an uncomfortable set of findings. White children, especially White girls, enter kindergarten with a much greater likelihood that their teachers will perceive relationships with them to be positive (i.e., low in conflict and high in closeness). Conversely, Black boys are likely to be perceived as having poorer quality relationships with their kindergarten teachers and are the children for whom this relationship is perceived by teachers to deteriorate across the first three grades of elementary school. This is problematic as early teacher-child relationships set the stage for children's educational trajectories. These early relationships, when positive, help children feel safe and secure at school, which result in positive attitudes toward learning, better attendance, more engagement, and higher achievement. Conversely, negative relationships are detrimental to children's educational outcomes, and are linked to behavior problems, poor academic performance, and social difficulties. It is critical that all teachers, particularly teachers in the early grades, are aware of the power of their perceptions and interactions with children and are afforded opportunities to learn culturally responsive practices.

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