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Ratings in Black and White: does racial symmetry or asymmetry influence teacher assessment of a pupil's work habits?

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Abstract Racial asymmetry, the circumstance of having a teacher's race differ from that of his or her student's race, is often considered important because most Black students are taught by White teachers. This paper analyzes data from a nationally representative sample of students and teachers to ascertain the extent to which Black and White teachers differ in their evaluations of the work habits of their Black pupils. Unlike most other investigations on this topic, we explored the likelihood that subject matter and school demographics influence teacher-student relationships beyond the more visible factors of racial symmetry or asymmetry. Our analyses of NELS: 88 data using this framework reveal an inconsistent racial effect on teachers' evaluations of Black students. The ratings of African American pupils by both Black and White teachers seem to be influenced by both the academic subject they teach and the demographic characteristic of the school. We discuss these findings and suggest avenues for further study.

Keywords School effects · Student race · Teacher race · Teacher perceptions of student behavior · NELS: 88

1 Introduction

Whether White teachers are racially biased against Black students has been debated among academics for many years. As the percentage of non-White students in American

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schools continues to increase (U.S. Department of Education 1995a,b; Hale 1997; McLoyd 1989), the debate has broadened to question whether White teachers are adequate teachers of non-White students in general. Such recent concern combines the issue of racial bias on the part of White teachers with issues involving cultural conflict or misunderstanding, a weak sense of affinity between teachers and non-White pupils, and the lack of positive role models for minority children, (Delpit 1988; Holmes Group 1995; Loehr 1988). Those advancing such views usually advocate changes in teacher training, including increased emphasis on multicultural education, as well as a vigorous campaign to recruit more minority teachers (e.g., Hale 1997; Holmes Group 1995; King 1993; Ladson-Billings 1999; Boykin 1992; Murrell 2001; Nieto 1992; Franklin 1994; Futrell 1999). Such changes, it is argued, can help reduce the risks posed to minority children by individual or institutional racial or cultural bias.

This paper examines the question of White teacher bias by comparing the "citizenship" ratings given by White and Black teachers to their White and Black students. We focus on the Black–White contrast for several reasons. First, despite outward indications of increasing acceptance of African Americans by Whites, the degree and impact of teacher bias towards Blacks remains a contentious key issue among social scientists, one linked to research on how African Americans continue to encounter discrimination in hiring, housing, and access to other public resources in the US. Second, White teacher bias has increasingly served as a possible explanation for the vexing "achievement gap," the tendency for African American students to score substantially lower than White students on standardized tests (Ferguson 1998; Perry 2003; Farkas 2004). More profoundly, some researchers believe that racial discrimination negatively affects Black pupils' school performance in general. Several studies, for instance, reveal a tendency for White teacher ratings of Black pupils' behaviors to be more unfavorable than those given by Black (Ehrenberg et al. 1995; Downey and Pribesh 2004). This raises the possibility that teacher–student racial mismatch may promote unfavorable labeling and stereotyping, and thereby negatively influence the academic careers of African American pupils as long as the majority of their teachers are White (Steele 2003; Rist 1977).

To investigate whether teacher–pupil racial mismatch affects teacher evaluations of student classroom behavior, we utilize the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS: 88), which contains data on student and teacher race. Our study uses the term "racial asymmetry" to indicate that teachers and students recorded different racial identities and "racial symmetry" to indicate that teachers and students share racial identities.

We examine the issue of racial asymmetry and symmetry in the classroom by merging two major research traditions in the study of African American education. We examine several cultural factors that affect the evaluation of African Americans at the individual level and the cultural and structural characteristics of schools that can affect teachers' evaluations of Black pupils. We perform this task by considering the social and organizational context in which teachers conduct their work, including some of the variations among teachers and the schools where they teach. By doing so, we illustrate that the effects of racial asymmetry or symmetry can be contradictory depending on certain demographic factors and are far more complex than indicated by previous writers.

2 Review of previous research

While the true extent of a teacher's influence on the academic performance of students is subject to debate, many personal accounts and narratives describe the influence that a particular teacher had on an individual's life (e.g., Paul and Smith 2000). These stories undoubtedly contribute to the public's belief in the importance of "good" teachers (Troen and Boles 2003). "Good" teachers are described as individuals with either special personal qualities such as the capacity to "care" for their pupils (Noddings 1992) or the ability to be "demanding but fair" to their pupils (Lortie 1975). Accordingly, a teacher who is racially biased violates the "caring" expectation as well as the widely accepted norms of fairness and universalism.

Some writers worry about the potential affective disconnect between a teacher's race and that of the pupil if a "good" teacher is someone who "cares." These writers suggest that this disconnect is a problem mainly caused by the demographic character of schools. An estimated 90% of American teachers are White (U.S. Department of Education 1995a,b), increasing the likelihood of classroom racial asymmetry and possibly making teacher–student relationships more problematic.[1] In other words, it is frequently assumed that White and Black teachers who teach children of their own race establish rapport more readily than with children of a different race (Delpit 1988; Foster 1993; Franklin 1994; Holmes Group 1995).

Moreover, a strong case may be made for the negative effects of racial asymmetry on Black pupils. There are reports, for example, suggesting that White teachers tend to hold negative stereotypes of Black students. Some studies indicate that White teachers believe Black pupils present more behavioral problems than White pupils (Farkas et al. 1990; Shouse et al. 1992). This difference in teacher evaluation of pupils by race was found to exist even as early as kindergarten (Downey and Pribesh 2004). In one study, White teachers were found to be more pessimistic than Black teachers about the likelihood of their Black pupils' success in college (Beady and Hansell 1981). Another study documented White student teachers giving more positive evaluations to White students than to their Black peers. These student teachers also praised Black pupils less frequently and spent less classroom time with them (Aaron and Powell 1982). An earlier study even revealed a perverse tendency among some White teachers to treat gifted Black adolescents more negatively than their less able Black peers (Rubovits and Maehr 1973).

While these studies report the existence of racial bias among White teachers, other studies, especially quantitative analyses of teacher attitudes and behavior conducted in large surveys, suggest that racism among White teachers either is not as prevalent as suggested by qualitative studies with smaller samples, or is not easily measured by quantitative methods (Entwisle and Hayduk 1982; Leiter and Brown 1985; Natriello and Dornbusch 1983).[2] Further illustrating the contradictory findings in this area of research, assessments of previous studies on this topic drew inconsistent conclusions. Hallinan (2001) claimed that research suggests that White teachers are racially biased

[1] While most Black pupils were taught by Black teachers until the 1960s, fewer and fewer Black children have been taught by Black teachers since then.

[2] We should not forget that one incident of racial discrimination is likely to be unforgettable to the victim.

while Ferguson (1998) was far less certain about the direction of the evidence. A more recent review of research on this topic, proposed that the available evidence was inconclusive at best (Tyson 2003).

Obviously if a Black pupil was being taught by a racially biased White teacher, the pupil could suffer academically due to the racially asymmetrical relationship. But what if the relationship were symmetrical? Racial symmetry between a person in authority and his/her clients or subordinates is typically believed to yield positive consequences for the latter. Black police officers, for example, were found to express greater empathy for Black citizens than did their White counterparts (Weitzer 2005). Racially symmetrical situations in school logically should confer on Black teachers an advantage in establishing positive relationships with their pupils and some writers do claim such is the case (Foster 1993, 1997; Ladson-Billings 1994; Ladson-Billings and Henry 1990; Delpit 1988). Many of these descriptions, however, are anecdotal accounts of particularly successful Black teachers or schools, which make generalizations about the typical Black teacher and his or her relationship to pupils somewhat tenuous. In fact, quantitative studies that report Black teachers to be more favorably disposed towards Black than White pupils are difficult to locate. One study, which did not control for contextual factors, reported that students were more positively evaluated by teachers of their own race/ethnicity when academic achievement was held constant (Ehrenberg et al. 1995).[3] This finding contradicts another study that concluded that Black teachers rated Black pupils' class performance more negatively than White teachers (Farkas et al. 1990).

Farkas and his colleagues suggested that Black teachers' negative evaluation of Black pupils could be due to administrators assigning more "difficult" Black pupils to their classes. If true, it suggests that administrative decisions can affect teacher–pupil relations. Other writers, however, attribute this result to a dilemma that some Black teachers face when they teach African American students. Those teachers consider the socioeconomic advancement of Black children and youths a part of their special mission as African American teachers and subsequently pressure their pupils to do well in school. If their students do not meet the teachers' expectations, the teachers may be harsher on their pupils than if they were not African American (e.g. Fordham 1996; Delpit 1996; Ladson-Billings 1994). Many African American teachers are aware that White society often stereotypes Blacks as loud and unruly. Black teachers, therefore, may be more likely than White teachers to warn their Black students about this stereotype, thus racial symmetry could reinforce the Black pupils' awareness of how they could be stereotyped (Tyson 2003).

3 Theoretical issues

Fundamentally, the issue of whether racial asymmetry affects teacher evaluation of students involves analyzing interactions between teachers and students using different theoretical frameworks. The most commonly utilized approach over the past

[3] Their study used the same data set as analyzed in this paper, but they did not look at the subjects taught by the teachers nor the demographic characteristics of the schools.

half-century has relied upon some variant of the cultural conflict or cultural difference model.[4] The remaining literature review will focus on the various ways cultural explanations are utilized to analyze the effects of racial asymmetry in the classroom. These overlapping theories will be grouped loosely as racially, socially, and organizationally-based explanations.

3.1 African American culture

Almost half a century ago, the most commonly utilized theory to explain the lower academic achievement of African American pupils was the inadequate socialization they received from their family. Such terms as "culturally disadvantaged" and "culturally deprived" were used to explain the relatively weak academic performance by Black children (e.g., Passow 1963, passim). Low levels of motivation could not adequately explain this gap between the academic performance of Blacks and Whites because earlier studies beginning with the Coleman Report of 1966 revealed the educational and occupational aspirations among African American students to be as high as those of White students. It thus seemed logical to argue that while Black students aspired to be successful, they lacked the cultural tools needed to be evaluated positively by teachers (e.g., Heath 1983). When this theory became criticized as another way of "blaming the victim," scholars began to use the less pejorative term "culturally different" (Allison and Takei 1993). Regardless of the change in terminology, it is important to note that this theory assumes that the standards teachers use to evaluate student performance are fair and universalistic and that Black pupils' work tended to be inferior to that of Whites. Those accepting this theory seldom considered teacher bias to be a significant factor in affecting Black academic performance.

The second cultural theory related to race also absolved White teachers of responsibility for Black under-performance. Popularized by John Ogbu (1982, 1990), it proposed that limited opportunities for employment led African American, Native American, and Mexican American youths to reject some of the norms of success espoused by the White middle class. It is thus argued that Black pupils may often discourage their peers from studying and earning high marks by accusing them of "acting White." Although Ogbu's theory of African American oppositional culture towards school has become an important part of the debate on Black pupils' academic performance (e.g., Mickelson 1990), it has also been sharply critiqued, as will be discussed in a subsequent section covering the limitations of cultural theory.

3.2 Class culture

Cultural theories of achievement differences focusing on race were challenged by theories that accorded primacy to family social class or socioeconomic status (SES) as a source of cultural knowledge important to school success. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) is

[4] The concept of culture used in this paper was defined by Ann Swidler (1986) as a "tool kit" of symbols, rituals,, and perspectives which people use to construct "strategies of actions that are repeated over time, and which serves to explain why different groups behave differently in the same structural situation" (p. 277). The strategies of action are based on peoples' definition of the situation.

credited by many as the writer who offered the theory of "cultural capital" to explain how the culture of schools mirrors the culture of the middle class, thereby offering their children an advantage in schools as compared to low SES families.

It seems clear that one of the reasons for the lack of consensus over the effects of racial symmetry in the classroom is the tendency of many writers not to delineate cultural theories related to race and social class. Analysis of the situation of African Americans frequently depicts them as financially disadvantaged and living in crime-ridden neighborhoods (e.g., Gans 2005; Smith and Moore 2000). Most of these writers are critical of the existing situation and favor reforms to improve the lives of those they write about (e.g., Fine 1991; Kozol 1967; Metz 1978 and Rosenfeld 1971). Their work, however, tends to perpetuate the stereotype of African Americans as alienated members of a racially oppressed group and neglects to take into account that White working class youths also tend to display oppositional culture in school (Willis 1979; MacLeod 1995).

The tendency to conflate race and social class identities in studies of Black Americans has serious implications for analyzing the issue of race in the classroom. Rist (1970), for example, conducted a classic study of an African American teacher and her all-Black kindergarten class in a low-income neighborhood. The differential treatment of the students based on visible indicators of their families' socioeconomic status reflected the teacher's expectation of differences in academic performance related to family SES. This is a clear example of a teacher's attitudes toward social class affecting her perception of pupils' academic performance in a racially symmetric situation.

3.3 School culture

The conflation in scholarly literature of racial and class cultures as contributing to negative stereotyping of African Americans also is reflected in the analysis of teacher culture. Since teachers' work largely consists of using authority to make their charges learn skills and material most youngsters are not interested in learning, more compliant pupils tend to be favored by their teachers (Waller 1965). Becker (1952a) proposed many years ago that an important component of teacher culture is the idealized student image teachers utilize to evaluate their students. Teacher culture idealizes pupils who learn quickly the skills and knowledge the teacher presents, who are easily controlled, and who behave in a morally acceptable manner (honest, dependable, etc.). Other writers concur with this analysis of teacher culture (e.g., Parsons 1959; Lortie 1975).

It is important to note that a teacher culture that values certain student traits may conflict with some of the African American and social class cultural elements discussed above. Many assume that it is White children from middle class families who are likely to fit the teachers' image of an ideal student. Teachers may thus tend to seek transfer from low achieving, predominantly Black, and/or low SES schools to higher achieving, "whiter," and/or more affluent settings (Becker 1952b; Lortie 1975; Hanushek et al. 2004; Freeman et al. 2005). On one hand, this pattern may promote a tendency for schools serving Black students to be disproportionately staffed by younger, less experienced teachers who may experience difficulty with some of the unfamiliar cultural aspects of their students from low income neighborhoods. On the other hand,

those White teachers who decide to stay in predominantly Black schools may be more flexible and open to gain greater insight into how to best serve their students.

3.4 Limitations of popular theories

Some limitations of the cultural theories summarized in the preceding section include the tendency to generalize African American, social class, and school cultures in a manner that can lead researchers to expect evidence of unequal treatment of Black pupils by their teachers. Reality, however, is more complex.

It can be argued that like White Americans, African Americans are culturally diverse and that oppositional culture represents only a minority of African Americans (Horvat and Lewis 2003; Akom 2003). Many Blacks see themselves not just as African Americans, but as racially diverse (Smith and Moore 2000; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002). The people categorized as Black also mirror the cultural differences between social classes in the larger society (e.g., Anderson 1990; Guerra and Jagers 1998; Lareau 2002; Wilson 1980). It can also be argued that Whites are similarly diverse and can also be influenced by oppositional culture. Tyson et al.'s (2005) mixed method study, for instance, found that regardless of race, high achieving students tended to be stigmatized by their peers as "nerds" or elitists.

If it is true that African American culture can vary considerably by social class and oppositional culture is observed among many White youths from low SES families, then there should not be much Black–White difference in school-related attitudes and behavior. Some studies report that this is indeed the case.

For example, MacLeod's (1995) ethnographic study of White and Black adolescent boys living in a public housing project reported that compared to White teenagers, Black teens were much more cooperative and respectful towards authority figures in school and less likely to drop out because their parents believed that Black Americans' opportunity for employment had improved. Consistent with this view, a quantitative study found Black and White pupils to be equally attached to school and Blacks to be even more academically engaged when SES was controlled (Johnson et al. 2001). Another study, controlling for SES, reported that Black adolescents in a nationally representative sample were more likely than Whites to say that education is important to future employment, to feel good about their school, to express positive attitudes about their student role, to esteem peers who are good students, and most important to our study, to report good treatment by their teachers (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998; See also Cook and Ludwig 1998 for similar results). This evidence suggests the distinct possibility that teachers may be far less likely to react to the student's race or identity than the student's observed behavior in class.

Another serious limitation of previous studies on this topic is the tendency to focus on teachers, students, and their relationships while ignoring the rest of the school environment. Ethnographic analyses of schools, in contrast, describe organizations that vary considerably from each other in teacher–pupil relationships, teacher morale, and student sub-cultures. (e.g., Metz 1978; Anyon 1997; MacLeod 1995; Patchen 1982; Peshkin 1978; Burkett 2001; Bidwell 2000). The racial and social class composition of the student body has been identified as a major factor in creating these variations by shaping students' attitudes and behavior as well as teachers' collective definition of

their school's situation (e.g., Coleman et al. 1966; Fordham 1996; Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Wilson 1959; Rosenfeld 1971; Becker 1952; Passow 1963).

This line of analysis leads to the conclusion that the demographic characteristics of schools should be considered in further attempts to study teacher–pupil relationships. In addition to the SES composition of the student body, the racial composition of the school also should be included in an analysis of the effects of racial symmetry. It is important to be aware of the possibility that the effects may not be linear. For example, a large study reported that heavily Black classes (higher than 40%) led to students self-reporting lower effort (doing less homework, etc.) but receiving higher grades. Paradoxically, the students who attended predominantly Black schools (more than 75% Black) self-reported higher effort but lower grades (Patchen 1982). These counter-intuitive results indicate the importance of including school demographic characteristics in analyzing teacher–pupil relationships.

4 Conceptual framework

Our study relies primarily on organizational theory to examine whether racial asymmetry or symmetry influences the way teachers evaluate Black pupils' work habits. Work by Waller (1965), Becker (1952), Lortie (1975), and other sociologists, identify the core elements of teaching as maintaining order in the classroom, teaching cognitive knowledge, and evaluating student performance. Most teachers would agree that specific expectations constitute the core components of their image of an "ideal student" and be willing to concede that they utilize this image to evaluate student performance.

Role expectations and actual performances do not always align, however. Previous studies suggested that various characteristics of the participants such as race, gender, SES indicators, physical attractiveness, height, and skin tone can influence student–teacher relationships and subsequent evaluations. Some White teachers may be biased against African American pupils because they accept the stereotype of Blacks as either academically inferior, disruptive in class, or resistant to teacher authority. Though Black teachers are less likely to stereotype Black students negatively, they may experience disappointment when the role performance from some of their African American students' does not meet their expectations. These teachers may view their students as either unmotivated or influenced by the "wrong" crowd, and thus may evaluate those students' role performance more negatively than they deserve.

We thus look beyond the dyadic relationship of teacher and student to examine how it is influenced by racial identities, mindful that interactions do not occur in a vacuum. Of the many structural conditions that affect these interactions, school racial and social class composition seem most salient. Furthermore, we consider it likely that teachers in a particular school develop a consensual view of their mission based largely on the school's historic position in a given community (Bidwell 2000). We decided to extend these insights by examining whether racial asymmetry or symmetry interacts with the demographic composition of a school and the particular class subject to influence how teachers evaluate their African American pupils. We focus on systematic discrepancies between students' self-reports of their performance in the student role and the teachers' evaluations of student performance after controlling for race, social class, and selected structural factors.

5 Methods

Our data analysis examines White and Black teachers' assessments of their White and Black students' classroom work habits. These assessments consist of items from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS: 88) Base Year (8th grade) Survey.[5] The NELS data set provides an unusual opportunity to look at the potential effect of racial symmetry or asymmetry since it specifies the racial identity of both the teachers and the students they evaluated. Using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), we examine variation in the effect of racial asymmetry or symmetry and the extent to which ratings differ by teacher subject area (English/social studies as compared to math/science) and with respect to school socio-economic characteristics (school mean SES, percent of Black students, and percent of Black teachers).[6]

5.1 Sample

The NELS Base Year Survey conducted in 1988 contains a nationally representative sample of 24,599 8th grade students attending 1,052 public and private high schools (see National Center for Education Statistics 1995). The principal of each school randomly selected 24 pupils to participate in the survey and the response rate was 93%. For the purposes of our analyses, the larger sample was screened to include (1) only those public schools having at least 5 NELS: 88-sampled students; (2) only those schools having at least 2% of both White and Black students; and (3) only White and Black students and teachers. The first of these three criteria is necessary in order to conduct reliable multi-level analysis using HLM. The second ensures that we are looking at schools where racial asymmetry is possible. The third allows us to concentrate on schools with a stronger contrast between White and Black students and helps clarify the interpretation of our HLM coefficients. Using these criteria produced a sub-sample of 6,355 students across 410 schools.[7]

6 Dependent variable: teacher ratings of student academic behavior

The NELS Base Year Survey asked teachers to evaluate individual students in several school-related characteristics, including classroom behavior and academic performance. The dependent variable used to represent an overall rating in our study is a factor composite of three dichotomous (yes/no) teacher ratings: (1) Does the student work below ability? (2) Does the student rarely complete homework? (3) Is the student

[5] Included here are data from the NELS: 88 Restricted Use File and the Hopkins Enhancement Survey of Middle School Practices.

[6] The NELS: 88 survey established the participants' SES by utilizing the parents' education, occupation, and income. Racial identity of teachers and students were those provided by the participants (see National Center for Education Statistics 1995).

[7] The 410 school in our sample is constant across the tables. The original student sample size is 6,355. The exact number of students for each table is not provided, but it varies between 6,060 and 6,125 depending on whether there was missing date for a given item.

inattentive in class? This factor composite was coded in such a way so that lower values represent a more negative teacher rating (see Appendix for further details).

7 Unit of analysis

The NELS: 88 sampling design, which links each student with two of his teachers (one from either English or social studies, the other from either math or science), enabled the use of student–teacher pairs as our unit of analysis. Our analysis examined how teacher ratings varied across four different student–teacher pair categories; White teacher–White student, White teacher–Black student, Black teacher–Black student, and Black teacher–White student.

Dummy variables were created to represent the last three of these pair categories (the first, White teacher–White student, served as the omitted comparison group). The tabulated HLM coefficients associated with each of these three dummy variables thus represents the difference between the estimated rating for a particular pair category and the estimated rating of a White student by a White teacher. Based on these coefficients, the average difference in rating between other pairings can also be calculated.

8 Independent variables

In addition to the dummy variables described above, our analysis includes controls for student and school characteristics that may influence or relate to a teacher's rating. At the student level, these include students' perceptions of whether other students view them as a "good student" or "troublemaker." Also included are students' self-reported grade averages and the amount of homework they completed per week. Finally, composite variables were created to reflect students' self-reported attendance and tardiness record and classroom work habits (see Appendix for details concerning composite variables).

At the school level, controls include school mean socio-economic level, percent of non-Hispanic Black 8th graders, and number of non-Hispanic Black teachers. Descriptive statistics for all variables used in this study are presented in Table 1.

9 The logic of hierarchical linear modeling

Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) is a form of multiple regression useful in examining multi-level or "nested" effects such as those associated with students and schools. Through HLM, the total variation in student achievement is separated into a within-school and between-school component. Separate equations are then estimated to explain the variance at each level. This process is illustrated by describing the steps involved in this analysis. First, a "level-one" regression equation was specified to show how student characteristics explain within-school variation in teachers' ratings. The intercept of this equation represents the estimated mean rating across the sample of schools. It is based on the mean ratings for each school adjusted for the student-level variables contained in the equation. The adjusted school mean ratings then serve as

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

Variable name	Description	English/Hist.		Math/Science	
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Dependent variable					
ACADRATE	Student rating composite (see Appendix)	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
School-level variables					
SSOCENVS	School socio-economic status composite (see Appendix)	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
BYSC20D[a]	School number of black, non-Hispanic teachers	6.32	8.30	6.34	8.29
BYSC13D[a]	School percent black, non-Hispanic 8th grade students	22.18	22.45	22.24	22.43
Student-level variables[b]					
WTBS	Equals 1 for White teacher rating Black student, else equals 0	0.16	0.36	0.25	0.36
BTWS	Equals 1 for Black teacher rating White student, else equals 0	0.06	0.24	0.06	0.24
BTBS	Equals 1 for Black teacher rating Black student, else equals 0	0.05	0.22	0.06	0.23
BYSES	Student socio-economic status	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
BYS56C	"Others see me as a good student" (1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, 3 = very much)	1.71	0.60	2.29	0.60
BYS56E	"Others see me as a troublemaker" (1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, 3 = very much)	2.71	0.54	1.29	0.54
BYGRADS	Student-reported GPA, grades 6–8	2.89	0.76	2.88	0.76
WKHAB	Student work habits (Standardized composite, see Appendix)	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
HOMEWORK	Student-reported hours of homework completed per week (Standardized)	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
ATTEND	Student attendance (Standardized composite, see Appendix)	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00

[a] In subsequent HLM analyses this variable has been standardized to a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1

[b] In subsequent HLM analyses student variables are centered to a mean of 0

the outcome variable for a "level-two" equation linking school-level characteristics to between-school variation in teachers' ratings. This procedure produces a pair of nested equations with more reliable coefficients than can be obtained through ordinary least squares regression (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992).

Using HLM also allowed us to examine how student-level effects vary across different school settings. Using this "slopes as outcomes" technique, we examine the extent to which the links between racial symmetry/asymmetry and the ratings students receive vary across demographically different types of schools (e.g., percent of Black students and school mean SES).

10 Results

Table 2 presents the results of our first analytic model. In accordance with the standard practice, school-level effects are presented in the table's top panel and student-level effects in the bottom panel. Each coefficient represents the estimated difference in a teacher's rating associated with a "one unit" difference in the predictor variable. For standardized predictors, such as school socio-economic level (SSOCENVS), "one unit" equals one standard deviation. The same is true for the variable representing the school percentage of Black students (BYSC13D) and the dependent variable representing teacher ratings. The "Intercept" coefficient represents the sample grand mean rating, adjusted for the school and student factors contained in the model.

The top panel reveals that the average adjusted ratings are equivalent across subject areas (.03). We also note that the effect of school SES on teacher rating differs across subjects. School SES appears to have no significant influence on the ratings given by English and social studies teachers. For math and science teachers, however, a significant negative link exists between school SES and teacher rating, with a one standard deviation difference in school SES associated with about a 9% (−0.09) of a standard deviation difference in teacher rating. Overall, students in more affluent schools received ratings from their math and science teachers that are more negative than those received by students in less affluent schools suggesting that the performance standards may rise in relation to school SES.

Although school SES had no significant influence on English and social studies teachers' ratings, school racial composition apparently did. Table 2 reveals a significant negative association between a school's percent of Black students and the ratings Black students received from their English and social studies teachers (−0.04 for the variable BYSC13D). Thus, based on descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 (showing both the mean and standard deviation for BYSC13D to be about 22), Table 2 indicates that for each 22% increase in school Black composition, a 4% drop occurs in the average ratings assigned by English and social studies teachers.

The school-level panel of Table 2 suggests that English and social studies ratings are influenced by school racial composition, but not SES level; that is, teachers assigned lower ratings in schools with higher percentages of Black students, but not necessarily in schools with lower socio-economic environments. Math and science teachers, on the other hand, were not influenced by school racial composition, but tended to be more negative in their rating of students' work habits in higher SES schools.

Table 2 Factors influencing teachers' student ratings

Variable	Description	Coefficient English/ History	Coefficient Math/Science
School-level effects			
Intercept	Adjusted grand mean rating	0.03	0.03
SSOCENVS	School socio-economic composite	−0.03	−0.09[a]
BYSC20D	Sch. # non-Hispanic black teachers	0.00	0.00
BYSC13D	Sch. % non-Hispanic black 8th-graders	−0.04[a]	−0.02
Student-level effects			
SES	Student socio-economic status	0.06[a]	0.01
WTBS	White teacher, Black student	−0.09[a]	−0.07
BTWS	Black teacher, White student	−0.02	0.00
BTBS	Black teacher, Black student	0.07	−0.14[a]
BYS56C	Others see me as a good student	0.15[a]	0.17[a]
BYS56E	Others see me as a trouble-maker	−0.10[a]	−0.07[a]
BYGRADS	Student-reported grades, 6th–8th grade	0.42[a]	0.47[a]
WKHAB	Student work habit composite	0.08[a]	0.08[a]
HOMEWORK	Student reported hrs. homework/ week	0.01	0.00
ATTEND	Student attendance composite	−0.09[a]	−0.06[a]

[a] Coefficient is at least twice its standard error

The student-level panel of Table 2 reveals that unlike their math and science counterparts, the ratings of English and social studies teachers are significantly and positively associated with student affluence (SES effect = 0.06). Equally notable is the disparate effect of White English/social studies teachers' ratings of students by race. On average, White English and social studies teachers rate their Black students about 9% of a standard deviation lower than their White students. Among math and science teachers, the smaller disparity in the ratings given by White teachers to Black and White students (−0.07) is not statistically significant. Therefore, we cannot be confident that any disparity actually exists in the way math and science teachers rate their White and Black students.

On the other hand, a significant cross-subject disparity exists in the ratings that Black teachers assigned to Black students. While the ratings assigned by Black English and social studies teachers to Black students are comparable to those given by White teachers to White students, Black math and science teachers rate their Black students substantially lower (−0.14).

The student-level effects reported in the bottom panel of Table 2 appear markedly consistent across subject areas. Earning higher grades and believing that others perceive oneself as a good student are positively linked to teacher ratings for both subjects.

In contrast, poor attendance, poor work habits, and believing that others perceive oneself as a troublemaker are negatively linked to ratings in both subject areas.

11 Modeling the racial disparity in English and social studies teacher ratings

As indicated earlier, the use of HLM allows us to determine whether the effects revealed in Table 2 vary in any systematic fashion across different school demographic or socio-economic contexts. Table 3 models teachers' ratings of students across schools, but it also includes a middle panel which models cross-school disparity between White teachers' ratings of White and Black students. Specifically, this new panel examines how a school's socio-economic level (SSOCENVS) and its Black teacher (BYSC20D) and student (BYSC13D) composition influence the tendency for White teachers to assign more negative ratings to their Black students. The "Intercept" coefficient here represents the difference in ratings given by White teachers to Black students from those they give their White students (in other words, it represents the same thing as did the coefficient associated with the variable WTBS in Table 2). This difference appears statistically non-significant in Table 3 because it is largely accounted for by the school characteristics presented in the middle panel.

The middle panel in Table 3 reveals two main findings. First, there is a significant positive relationship between school SES and the ratings assigned by White teachers to Black students across both subject areas (0.10 for English/social studies, 0.11 for math/science). Beyond the student-level controls included in this model, the higher a school's SES, the higher the rating a Black student was likely to receive from a White teacher. Second, there is a significant negative relationship between the ratings given to Black students by White English and social studies teachers and a school's Black student composition. In other words, the greater the percentage of Black students attending a school, the lower the rating a Black student is likely to receive from a White English or social studies teacher.

Tables 2 and 3 lead to four main conclusions. First, student race notwithstanding, English and social studies teachers tend to give more negative ratings in schools with higher percentages of Black students. Math and science teachers are not influenced by school racial composition, but tend to give more negative ratings in schools at higher socio-economic levels.

Second, a striking contrast exists across subject areas in the ratings given to Black students by Black teachers. On average, Black math/science teachers rate their Black students just under one-eighth of a standard deviation lower than their English/social studies counterparts (−.14 in Table 2; −.13 in Table 3).

Third, White English and social studies teachers tend to assign lower ratings to their Black students, even after controlling for an array of student academic behaviors. This tendency increases directly as school Black composition rises.

Finally, the ratings assigned to Black students by White teachers in both subject areas are related to school affluence. Specifically, White teachers working in schools at higher SES levels give ratings to their Black students that are significantly higher than those given in lower SES schools, and equal to or higher than the ratings they give their White students.

Table 3 Factors affecting teachers' student ratings and school factors affecting White teachers' ratings of Black Students

Variable	Description	Coefficient English/ History	Coefficient Math/Science
School-level effects, school means			
Intercept	Adjusted grand mean rating	0.03	0.03
SSOCENVS	School socio-economic composite	−0.03	−0.08[a]
BYSC20D	Sch. # non-Hispanic black teachers	0.00	0.00
BYSC13D	Percent non-Hispanic black 8th-graders	−0.05[a]	−0.02
School-level effects, White teachers' ratings of Black students (WTBS)			
Intercept	Adjusted WTBS effect	−0.05	−0.05
SSOCENVS	School socio-economic composite	0.10[a]	0.11[a]
BYSC20D	Number of non-Hispanic black teachers	0.01	0.00
BYSC13D	Percent of non-Hispanic black 8th-graders	−0.08[a]	−0.05
Student-level effects			
BTWS	Black teacher/White student	−0.03	0.00
BTBS	Black teacher/Black student	0.06	−0.13[a]
SES	Student socio-economic status	0.06[a]	0.01
BYS56C	Others see me as a good student	0.15[a]	0.17[a]
BYS56E	Others see me as a trouble-maker	−0.10[a]	−0.07[a]
BYGRADS	Student-reported GPA, 6th–8th grade	0.42[a]	0.47[a]
WKHAB	Student work habit composite	0.08[a]	0.08[a]
HOMEWORK	Student reported hours homework/week	0.01	0.00
ATTEND	Student attendance composite	−0.09[a]	−0.06[a]

[a] Coefficient is at least twice its standard error

12 Conclusion

We embarked on this project seeking an answer to a deceptively simple question: do White teachers evaluate Black pupils more negatively than White pupils? The question is important because most Black students are being taught by White teachers and the situation is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

Those who are convinced that racial asymmetry has a detrimental effect on Black pupils call on teacher preparation programs to take steps to remedy this situation. Most writers who address this topic, however, realize that there is no simple way to reduce the shortage of Black teachers or to teach White teachers how to do a better job of teaching Black pupils (e.g., King 1993; Holmes Group 1995). In order to

find out whether racial symmetry affects how teachers evaluate Black pupils, we also included an analysis of how Black teachers rated their students by race using data from a national sample of American secondary schools.

Our data analysis revealed no consistent patterns in teacher evaluations related to racial asymmetry alone. The race of the teacher, in conjunction with socioeconomic and racial composition of the student body, and the subject taught by the teacher, however, do appear to affect teacher evaluations of Black students.

White English and social studies teachers in predominantly Black schools, for example, rated their Black pupils more negatively than White teachers working in schools with proportionately fewer Black students. Several factors could contribute to this pattern, including the possibility that pupils in predominantly Black schools may tend to behave in a manner which White teachers could interpret as an oppositional stance towards the manifest objectives of the school, especially in English and social studies classes.

The finding that Black science and math teachers were more likely than White teachers to rate their Black students' work behavior less favorably was somewhat unanticipated despite the claims by some that Black teachers often expect more from Black pupils than White teachers and therefore are more likely to assign negative ratings to their performance (e.g., Delpit 1996; Ladson-Billings 1994). A less benign interpretation of this pattern is that Black teachers who teach science and math tend to have the more behaviorally "difficult" Black students assigned to their classes by the administration, and therefore, are more likely to complain about Black pupils (Farkas et al. 1990). If there is some truth to this speculation, it suggests that White teachers may tend to have the more conforming Black students assigned to their classes, and this might result in White teachers rating their Black students' role performance more positively than White pupils' performance. Why this pattern is not evident among Black teachers of English and social studies is unclear, but there is the distinct possibility that they are more accepting of their students' cultural patterns (e.g., Black English).

The pattern for Black students to be rated more positively by White teachers in higher SES schools is noteworthy and could indicate that Black students at high SES schools tend to be highly motivated to do well in school. We must admit, however, that we are speculating and do not have empirically based explanations for the patterns revealed in our data analysis. The explanations for these patterns will have to be pursued in future studies.

Most important, our results do not support the conclusions by those who earlier analyzed this same data set and found a consistent pattern of negative evaluation of Black students' work habits by White teachers. Equally important is our finding that the social context of the school as reflected by demographic factors and departmental affiliation of a teacher influence teacher evaluations of Black students. The inclusion of these contextual variables in our model probably produced results that differ from those reported in previous studies.

Several directions for future study are suggested by our findings because it is important to determine whether departmental affiliation and teachers' racial identity interact to affect their expectations for and evaluation of student role performance. If the effects of racial symmetry or asymmetry between teachers and pupils vary depend-

ing on demographic characteristic of schools, then administrative policies intended to ameliorate potential teacher–pupil problems may benefit from systematic analysis and identification of local contingencies. In summary the results of our data analysis suggest that racial asymmetry is a far more complex educational issue than previously portrayed, and may be a partial result of school structure, demographic characteristics, administrative decisions regarding teacher and student assignment to classes, and not entirely due to racial bias on the part of White teachers. Finally, we propose that the use of a less deterministic theory of race relations can frame the problem of racial asymmetry and symmetry more broadly than is commonly done in research and in a manner that may more closely reflect the reality in many of our schools.

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Appendix

Description of composite variables

Student rating composite (ACADRATE)

ACADRATE is a standardized factor composite of three teacher–student-level variables: BYT1_2 (student performs below ability); BYT1_3 (student rarely completes homework); and BYT1_6 (student is frequently inattentive in class). With an eigenvalue of 2.20, this composite accounts for just over 70% of the variation in these three variables. ACADRATE has been recoded so that higher values indicate a more positive rating.

Student work habit composite (WKHAB)

WKHAB is a standardized factor composite of three student-level variables: BYS78A (how often come to class without pencil/paper); BYS78B (how often come to class without books); and BYS78C (how often come to class without homework). With an eigenvalue of 1.88, this composite accounts for just over 60% of the variation in these three variables. WKHAB has been recoded so that higher values indicate a lower reported frequency of coming to class without these items.

School socio-economic status composite (SCSOCENV)

SCSOCENV is a standardized factor composite of three school-level variables: HES33F (school percent of students from welfare or unemployed families, from the NELS88 Hopkins Enhancement Restricted Use File), G8LUNCH (school percent of students receiving free lunch), and MBYSES (school mean of BYSES). With an eigenvalue of 2.08, this composite accounts for just under 70% of the variation in these three variables. SCSOCENV is coded positively, so that higher values indicate higher SES.

Student attendance composite (ATTEND)

ATTEND is a factor composite of three student-level variables: BYS75 (number of days missed from school in last four weeks); BYS76 (how often do you cut or skip class); and BYS77 (number of times late for school in last four weeks). With an eigenvalue of 1.44, this composite accounts for just under 50% of the variation in these three variables. Higher values of ATTEND indicate greater frequency of absence, skipping, and tardiness.

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