The School Experiences and Achievement of Black Males: The Voice of the Students

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ABSTRACT

THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENT OF BLACK

MALES: THE VOICE OF THE STUDENTS

by

Sarah Joan Barzee

Chair: James A. Tucker

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

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Title: THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENT OF BLACK MALES: THE VOICE OF THE STUDENTS

Name of researcher: Sarah Joan Barzee

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Problem

Black children are not achieving in public schools. What are the challenges of the schooling experience and contradictions of achievement for Black males, according to the students themselves? The answers to these questions are unclear, because they have not been given sufficient attention. Despite decades of research on achievement, few studies specifically address how students themselves define achievement, as well as what students do, feel, and think about in school.

Method

This qualitative study used focus groups and pre-existing data from 1:1 semi-structured interviews as a means to inquire about the schooling experiences of Black

males. Thirty-two Black males in Grades 9-12 from six high schools participated in the five focus groups and six 1:1 semi-structured interviews. Each focus group consisted of approximately six students. Participants were selected by school personnel and participation was voluntary.

Results

Results of this study indicate that Black males share similar schooling experiences regardless of the school setting. However, some experiences appear to differ based on the context of the school setting. Differences were noted in the perceptions of the students regarding their school experience based upon whether they attend an urban high school with greater racial diversity or whether they are one of fewer Black students in a suburban high school with less racial diversity.

The students' responses are categorized into four broad categories including (a) Black Student Identity, (b) The Importance of the Teacher-Student Relationship, (c) School Climate, and (d) The Importance of Involvement by Families and Other Positive Role Models.

Conclusions

Efforts to improve the academic performance of Black males must begin by understanding the attitudes that influence how they perceive schooling and academic pursuits. Because students "have been silenced all their lives," they have singular and invaluable views on education from which both adults and students themselves can benefit. As long as we exclude student perspectives from our conversations about schooling and how it needs to change, our efforts at reform will be based on an

incomplete picture of life in classrooms and schools and how that could be improved. When students are taken seriously and attended to as knowledgeable participants in important conversations, they feel empowered and motivated to participate constructively in their education.

Student-based inquiry seeks not only to add to the literature by providing reliable and valid information on achievement but also to present an alternative way of doing school research. Student-based inquiry research seeks to empower students in the research process. This qualitative approach attempts to generate data that capture students' perspectives regarding achievement, while addressing the meanings they attach to life, given their position in the social system.

Andrews University

School of Education

THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENT OF BLACK

MALES: THE VOICE OF THE STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Sarah Joan Barzee

July 2008

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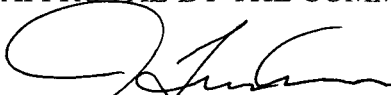
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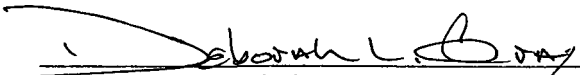
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_____7-03-08_____
Date approved

I dedicate this dissertation to the young Black males who so willingly chose
to participate in this research as an opportunity to not only have their
voices heard and their perspectives valued, but also to help those
young Black boys who will come behind them in our
public schools. I honor their openness and their
willingness to share deep insights regarding
their schooling experiences.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my mom and dad, for without the
foundation of unconditional love, strong moral and ethical
guidance, on-going support, and encouragement for all
of my personal and professional dreams and goals, I
would not have had the courage or the
perseverance to undertake
this endeavor.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Black children are not achieving in public schools (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Reglin,

1995). There is significant documentation reflecting that Black students lag behind their

White counterparts in academic achievement and have higher dropout rates (Avery &

Walker, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for

Education Statistics [U.S. DoE, NCES], 1994, 1995; United States Commission on Civil

Rights [USCCR], 1965). In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education reported that there

were racial differences in the national dropout rates (U.S. DoE, NCES, 1994). Two major

reasons cited for Black students dropping out of high school were that teaching

techniques did not match learning style and a lack of support for cultural identity.

These facts are particularly alarming because researchers have reported that the

achievement gap often widens as minority students progress through school (Pang &

Sablan, 1995). Race and ethnicity appear to be related to academic achievement because

differences in academic performance among ethnic groups have been consistently

observed (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Black and Hispanic students tend to have lower

standardized achievement test scores and a higher percentage of students performing in

the low math and reading achievement groups than their majority counterparts (Fischer,

2000). Data on suspensions, expulsions, retentions, and dropout rates indicate that a

disproportionately larger percentage of Black and Hispanic youth are being 'distanced' from mainstream America.

The problems noted above appear to be particularly alarming for Black males. To be Black and male in American schools places one at risk for a variety of negative consequences: school failure, special education assignment, suspensions, expulsions, and violence (Ferguson, 2000; Polite & Davis, 1999). Many Black boys are seen as both victims and participants in their own educational demise (Davis, 2003).

These negative school experiences and outcomes are viewed, to varying degrees, as products of structural factors, results of cultural adaptations to systemic pressures and maladaptive definitions of masculinity (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Hare & Hare, 1985; Majors & Mancini Billson, 1992). Contrary to the generally accepted objectives of schooling, the current thinking of many researchers and educators is that schools are not meeting the particular social and developmental needs of Black males (Brown & Davis, 2000).

Many researchers subscribe to a structuralist perspective, which would attribute negative school experiences and outcomes to structural factors such as class structure. On the other side of the debate are those who subscribe to a cultural perspective, which would attribute these same experiences and outcomes to factors such as the moral codes that govern families. While there are many who strongly support one viewpoint or the other, some researchers are dissatisfied with the determinism of the structuralists, which renders individuals as passive objects of larger forces and similarly dissatisfied with the "blame the victim" perspective of the culturalists, which views individuals as hopelessly trapped within a particular social/cultural milieu (Ryan, 1976).

In his sociological analysis of the evolution of racism and "race talk" in the U.S., Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has critiqued what critical race theorists refer to as "the color-blind rationale." He pushed for a more comprehensive structural framework that explores the ways in which race operates in the contemporary post-civil rights era. This contemporary structuralist perspective calls for an examination of racism as an ideology that is part of a larger racialized social system that apportions "differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines: lines that are socially constructed" (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 474). He also describes the ideology of color-blind racism, which, he argues, utilizes hidden codes to mask racist ideas and practices. This provides further justification for how and why racist thoughts and actions can remain hidden and the deficiencies of racial minorities are explained in cultural rather than in racial terms (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

> Critical race scholars in education might use Bonilla Silva's work to strengthen existing arguments about the primacy and ever-changing nature of race and racism in America's classrooms where children of color are consistently viewed as lacking the necessary social and cultural capital to be successful in schools. (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 280)

Statement of the Problem

Black children are not achieving in public schools (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Reglin, 1995). What are the challenges of the schooling experience and contradictions of achievement for Black males, according to the students themselves? The answers to these questions are unclear because they have not been given sufficient attention (Wiggan, 2007). Despite decades of research on achievement, few studies specifically address how students themselves define achievement, as well as what students do, feel, and think about in school (LeCompte & Preissle, 1992).

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Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to invite the voice of adolescent Black males into the conversation about their school experiences and the impact of that experience on their achievement in order to inform educators attempting to achieve equity and excellence in the schooling of Black males. "Although most would say that schools exist *for* students, they are still treated almost entirely as objects of reform" (Levin, 2000, p. 155). Fullan (1991) writes, "We hardly know anything about what students think about educational change because no one ever asks them" (p. 182).

Research findings suggest that some young people, particularly middle-class girls, are more willing to speak than others, while those who are perhaps least served by schools are less willing to speak. There are complexities associated with the creation of meaningful dialogue across differences in power and identity and these complexities must be considered (Burbles & Rice, 1991; Fielding, 1998; Halpin, 1999). "It is tempting to allow the able, articulate, well-connected students to dominate the process. However, achieving greater equity in outcomes is not likely unless all sectors of the student community feel involved" (Levin, 2000, p. 168).

Rudduck, Chaplain, and Wallace (1996) have produced important results based on extensive work done with students at various levels. They argue that efforts in Britain to improve student achievement require educators to "start by inviting pupils to talk about what makes learning difficult for them, about what diminishes their motivation and engagement, and what makes some give up and settle for a 'minimum risk, minimum effort' position—even though they know doing well matters" (p. 3). They also make the point that students' work in schools cannot be separated from the changes happening in

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their lives outside the school; that changes in perceived work opportunities or family structures or gender roles have powerful impact on how students see and respond to what the school provides.

My hope is that this study will provide information from the students' perspective that will assist educators in school reform efforts, while at the same time empowering the student participants, some of whom have disengaged from schooling and achievement. Failure to listen to student voices, while dictating what we believe is best for them, encourages their dependence, rather than promoting their autonomy (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). My hope is that the students' perspectives will inform educators who acknowledge the persistence of racial achievement gaps but have been unable to determine which solutions will be most effective solutions in eliminating those gaps. A better understanding of the underlying causes of the achievement gap is critical. The appropriate public policy choice to address the achievement gap may depend critically on the underlying source (Fryer, 2006). It is imperative that we continue to examine the potential sources in order to ensure that our public policy efforts are not misguided or ineffective.

Research Question

How do adolescent Black males describe their schooling experience and the impact that experience has had on their achievement and success in school?

Rationale for the Study

While there is significant study of racial achievement gaps, little research has been done in terms of exploring these issues from the students' perspectives. "Improving

school outcomes is more likely to occur if students are accorded a significant role in all aspects of the process" (Levin, 2000, p. 165). "Education reform cannot succeed and should not proceed without much more direct involvement of students in all aspects" (Levin, 2000, p. 155). The unique viewpoints of students and their particular ways of understanding and responding to situations are as vital for a school interested in change as are achievement data. The key is to make it normal, even expected, that students would have a reasoned, informed, and respected voice in school decisions (Levin, 2000, p. 166).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Introduction

The most important and critical overarching flaw in research on Black youth, and boys particularly, is the absence of a systems-focused theoretical framework that can analyze, represent, and explain the mechanisms of experiences and outcomes. A comprehensive theory that takes into account both normative developmental processes and specific risks faced by African Americans, the effect of experiences on coping and identity processes, and the effect of these on life outcomes is needed.

In the absence of such a comprehensive theory, this study was developed on the basis of several theories. In the study of race, various scholars, notably educators, anthropologists, and sociologists, propose various viewpoints. Two viewpoints addressed in this study are the structuralist and the culturalist viewpoints. Beyond these viewpoints, I felt that it was necessary to foreground race so various aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) are discussed. Finally, because of the desire to invite students to share their

perspectives, a thorough understanding of the research regarding Student Voice was a

critical aspect. Each of these three theoretical frameworks is discussed below.

Critical Race Theory

Various aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) provide the theoretical foundation

for this study. According to CRT, race and racism are products of social thought and

relations.

> Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality;
> rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when
> convenient. People with common origins share certain physical traits such as skin
> color, physique, and hair texture. However, these constitute an extremely small
> portion of their genetic endowment, are dwarfed by that which we have in common,
> and have little or nothing to do with distinctly human, higher-order traits, such as
> personality, intelligence, and moral behavior. Society frequently chooses to ignore
> these scientific facts, creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent
> characteristics. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 7, 8)

"Race is a social construction, not a biological reality" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.

17).

Critical Race Theory regards race as a coded, signified, classificatory system that

operates as a governing code and, as such, an organizing principle of the status quo

(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Race Theory has been developed by activists

and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationships among race,

racism, and power. Although CRT began as a movement in the law, it has rapidly spread

beyond that discipline. Today, many in the field of education consider themselves

critical race theorists who use CRT ideas to understand issues of school discipline and

hierarchy, tracking, and controversies over curriculum and history, as well as IQ and

achievement testing (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Unlike some academic disciplines,

Critical Race Theory incorporates an activist dimension. It not only tries to understand

our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines, but also to transform it for the better.

Critical race studies in education are defined as a "critique of racism as a system of oppression and exploitation that explores the historic and contemporary constructions and manifestations of race in our society, with particular attention to how these issues are manifested in schools" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 282). Critical race studies in education use multiple methods to analyze race and racism as a social, political, and economic system of advantages and disadvantages. These advantages and disadvantages are accorded to social groups based on their skin color and status in a clearly defined racial hierarchy. Building on the theoretical traditions of Critical Legal Theory, Critical Race Theory is a multidisciplinary approach to examining the intersections and interconnectedness of race, class, gender, and sexuality oppression, particularly as they relate to the lives of people of color (Delgado, 1995; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1998).

Critical Race Theory developed initially from the work of legal scholars Derrick Bell, Allan Freeman, and Richard Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT focuses directly on the effects of race and racism. The goal of CRT is to illuminate racist practices and bring about social justice to oppressed people (Crenshaw, 1995).

Critical race scholars are committed to conducting both qualitative and quantitative research that exposes racist beliefs, practices, and structures in schools and the broader society. "They use their critiques as a basis to create more equitable practices and structures that will enable racially marginalized students to overcome and ultimately destroy existing obstacles to their freedom" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 282).

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Although CRT has been largely used in the area of legal research (Crenshaw, 1995), its influence has expanded into other disciplines, including education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT to education nearly 10 years ago. Subsequently, it has emerged as a powerful theoretical and analytical framework within educational research (Duncan, 2002; Lynn, Yosso, Solórzano, & Parker, 2002).

Student Voice

The concept of student voice represents a new frontier in the field of education. In recent years, the term 'student voice' has been discussed in the school reform literature as a potential avenue for improving student outcomes and facilitating school change (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2003; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Students are experts on their own perceptions and experiences as learners. They are the "only authentic chroniclers of their own experience" (Delpit, 1988, p. 297). Yet adults (both teachers and researchers), more often than not, leave students out of the dialogue about educational concerns and underestimate the potential that students have in contributing to our understandings (Erickson & Schultz, 1992).

Because students "have been silenced all their lives" (Giroux, 1992, p. 158), they have singular and invaluable views on education from which both adults and students themselves can benefit (Cook-Sather & Schultz, 2001a, 2001b; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Oldfather, 1995). Authorizing student perspectives introduces into critical conversations the missing perspectives of those who experience daily the effects of existing educational policies-in-practice (Cook-Sather, 2002).

Various researchers have invited student perspectives into the discourse about their schooling and education. Interested in "how adolescents view and define what is

significant in affecting their school experiences," Phelan, Davidson, and Yu (1998) used student perspectives to "illuminate those aspects of students' behavior that teachers had defined as important, curious, or problematic" (p. 5). Weis and Fine (1993) invited children and adolescents who had been expelled from the centers of their schools and the centers of our culture to speak about identity, difference, and racism from African-American perspectives. Other have also advocated for including the perspectives of students from racially and culturally diverse groups as part of their investigations into culturally responsive instruction and learning environments (Howard, 2002; Nieto, 1992).

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Acting White: To behave in the manner defined as falling within a White cultural frame of reference is to "act White" and is negatively sanctioned (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986); a set of social interactions in which minority adolescents who get good grades in school enjoy less social popularity than White students who do well academically (Fryer, 2006).

Agency: The condition by which the students recognize that they can exert influence and power. Agency instills a feeling of self-confidence and self-worth (Mitra, 2004).

Anti-racism: Conscious and deliberate, individual and collective action that challenges the impact and perpetuation of systemic/institutional White racial privilege, positioning, and power (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Colorblindness: "'Formal' conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7).

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Connectedness: A sense of being cared for, personally accepted, valued and supported by others, as well as enjoyment of and feeling attached to family, friends, school, and the wider community (Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993).

Cool pose: A ritualized form of masculinity that uses certain behavior, scripts, physical posturing, and carefully crafted performance to convey a strong impression of pride, strength, and control (Tatum, 2005, p. 29). The cool pose is a coping mechanism to hide self-doubt, insecurity, and inner turmoil, and can be observed in such things as dress (e.g., beltless pants hanging below the waist), manner of talk (e.g., rapping), and behavior (e.g., high fives, special handshakes, forms of greeting).

Courageous Conversations: Sustained and deep interracial dialogue about race for the purpose of examining schooling and improving student achievement (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Culture: A way of life shared by members of a population. It includes shared knowledge, customs, emotions, rituals, and traditions that are within a set of behaviors designed for survival within an environment (Ogbu, 1988, p. 22).

Cultural capital: The collected knowledge, techniques, and beliefs of a people (Bourdieu, 1986).

Cultural competence: A developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills along the cultural competence continuum (National Center for Cultural Competence, n.d.).

Cultural congruence: The ways in which teachers alter their speech patterns, communication styles, and participation structures to resemble more closely those of their students' own culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17).

Cultural racism: The belief in the inferiority of the culture of a group of people or even the belief that they have no real culture (Nieto, 1992).

Culturally responsive pedagogy: Teachers' responsiveness to their students by incorporating elements of students' culture into their teaching. Responsiveness means reacting appropriately in the instructional context (Irvine, 2003, p. 73).

Culturally responsive teacher: A teacher who is sensitive to the needs, interests, and abilities of students, their parents, and their communities (Irvine & Armento, 2001).

Cultural synchronization: When teachers and students understand one another's language, non-verbal clues, physical movements, learning styles, cognitive approaches, and worldviews (Irvine, 1990b).

Dialogue: The building of a shared narrative within groups that is more than conversation. Dialogue is about engagement with others through talk to arrive at a point one would not get to alone. Participants take time to explore, to promote ideas, and to use the group as a resource (Carnell & Lodge, 2001).

Dis-identification: Process in which a student dis-identifies with achievement; a change in self-conception, outlook, and values so that achievement is no longer important to one's self-esteem (Steele, 1992).

Epistemological empowerment: A sense of intellectual agency and the ability to "know" that emerges from a strong sense of the integrity of one's process of constructing meaning (Oldfather, 1995, p. 132).

Equity: "Raising the achievement of all students while narrowing the gaps between the highest and lowest performing students; eliminating the racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories" (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 46).

Hegemony: The complex process that allows dominant groups to establish and maintain control of subordinates by using specific ideologies and particular forms of authority that are reproduced via social and institutional practices (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996).

Identity diffusion: Lack of identity formation as a reaction to failure (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Taylor, 1989).

Individual racism: A personal belief that people of one group are inferior to people of another because of physical traits (Nieto, 1992).

Institutional racism: Racial inequalities in society manifested through established laws, customs, and practices (Nieto, 1992).

Minority: For the purposes of this study, this term will refer to Black, Native American, and Hispanic youth and will not refer to Asian students, as this group generally does well academically in school.

Micro-aggression: The minor things teachers do or say on a day-to-day basis that can anger their Black male students (Tatum, 2005).

Oppositional culture hypothesis: The notion that disparity between Blacks and Whites stems from the following factors: (a) White people provide them with inferior schooling and treat them differently in school; (b) White people fail to reward them adequately for their academic achievement in adult life and impose a job ceiling, and (c)

Black Americans develop coping devices which, in turn, further limit their striving for academic success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Pygmalion effect: The practice in which teacher expectations, even when based on erroneous information, can influence the academic performance of children (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

Race: A grouping of individuals who display the same phenotypic skin color by which people in the United States identify themselves and are identified by others (Coleman et al., 1966). "Race is a social construction, not a biological reality" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 17).

Racelessness: The notion that Black students consciously and unconsciously sense that they have to give up aspects of their identities and of their indigenous cultural system in order to achieve success as defined in dominant group terms (Fordham, 1988).

Racism: Any attitude, action, or institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of their color (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1970). A system of privilege and penalty based upon one's race (Nieto, 1992). Those institutional policies and practices that are fair in form but have a disproportionately negative impact on racial minority groups (Lawrence, 1987).

Self-efficacy: One's self-perceived ability to perform a task (Bandura, 1977).

Stereotype threat: The threat or "risk of confirming, as self characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group" (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797).

Social construction: "The process of endowing a group or concept with a delineation, name, or reality" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 155).

Teacher efficacy: A form of self-efficacy, defined as an individual teacher's expectation that he or she will be able to bring about student learning (Ross, Cousins, & Gadalla, 1995).

Teaching efficacy: The teacher's belief that he or she can reach Black students and help learn (Woolfolk, 1995).

Voice: Signals having a legitimate perspective and opinion, being present and taking part, and/or having an active role "in decisions about the implementation of educational policies and practice" (Holdsworth, 2000, p. 355).

White privilege: "The myriad array of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come along with being a member of the dominant race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 78).

General Methodology

Since the primary purpose of this study is to gain perspective about the school experiences of Black adolescent males, a qualitative research design is the most appropriate methodology as it allows student voice to emerge within the natural context of stories. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, "If we understand the world narratively, then it makes sense to study the world narratively" (p. 17). For social scientists, experience is a key term. As education is a form of experience for students, narrative is the best way of representing it as "both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18).

Qualitative research methodology is also congruent with Critical Race Theory, the tenets of which are central to this research study. Ladson-Billings (2000) outlined how CRT might be viewed as both theory and method that guides how we view the research

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context and shapes how we conduct research. "Application of Critical Race Theory in educational research can provide the necessary impetus for significant changes in the way that communities of color are studied and written about" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 272). Critical Race Theory (CRT) uses literary narrative and storytelling so a qualitative research methodology is appropriate to the purposes of this study.

Delimitations

This study focuses only on adolescent Black males. The purposive sample is relatively small and included only those who were willing to participate. The voluntary participation criterion, while essential to this study, may limit the perceptions and perspectives represented in this analysis. The results of this study may provide the basis for further research about the schooling experience of Black males and the potential benefits of providing students *voice* in order to improve their educational experiences through an increased sense of belonging in their schools, development of agency, and a feeling of empowerment.

Limitations

The voice of the students in describing their schooling experiences provides the data to inform this study. A potential limitation that should be considered is the fact that the secondary data were obtained from 1:1 interviews conducted by a White female. It is possible that the inter-racial dynamic of the interview process had some impact upon the students' willingness to share openly and honestly. Additionally, talking explicitly about the topic of race may have been uncomfortable for the participants.

In addition, "narrative inquiry is aimed at understanding and *making meaning* of experience, and therefore *experiencing the experience*" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 80). They further write, "The narrative researcher's experience is always a dual one, always the inquirer experiencing the experience and also being a part of the experience itself" (p. 81). This aspect of narrative inquiry may have been compromised because I could not truly experience the schooling of a Black male, nor was I present firsthand in the focus group sessions because of concern about the inter-racial dynamic, but rather relied on the videotaped sessions.

Finally, a potential caution should be noted with respect to the data analysis. Because a White female analyzed the data, it is possible that the analysis was influenced by the racial lens through which the data were analyzed and interpreted. In addition, my participation in *Courageous Conversations About Race* (Singleton & Linton, 2006) training for the past 5 years may have affected the objectivity with which I designed and conducted the research and analyzed and interpreted the data. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) warn,

> The way we enter the inquiry field influences what we attend to. We deliberately select some aspects that turn up in field texts. It is important to be aware not only that selectivity takes place but also that foregrounding one or another aspect may make other aspects less visible or even invisible. (p. 93)

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study was based upon three theoretical frameworks: Structuralist and Culturalist viewpoints about race, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Student Voice. A review of the literature in each of these three areas is presented. In addition to the research related to each of these theories, there is an extensive body of research related to the schooling and achievement of Black males. The review of the literature addresses various issues that affect the schooling of Black males, such as racial identity, teacher-student relationships, negative stereotypes, identification with school, teacher expectations, and culturally relevant curriculum and instruction.

Black children are not achieving in public schools (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Reglin, 1995). Negative school experiences and outcomes are viewed, to varying degrees, as products of structural factors, results of cultural adaptations to systemic pressures and maladaptive definitions of masculinity (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Hare & Hare, 1985; Majors & Mancini Billson, 1992). Contrary to the generally accepted objectives of schooling, the current thinking of many researchers and educators is that schools are not meeting the particular social and developmental needs of African American males (Brown & Davis, 2000). Broader sociological and economic forces have been noted to undermine both the development and the appropriate expressions of masculinity among Black boys, particularly among inner-city poor. Some of the most commonly studied

causes of the achievement gap include poverty, race, lack of resources, teacher quality, and student-teacher relationships (Lynch, 2006).

Many researchers subscribe to a structuralist perspective, which would attribute negative school experiences and outcomes to structural factors such as class structure. On the other side of the debate are those who subscribe to a culturalist perspective, which would attribute these same experiences and outcomes to factors such as the moral codes that govern families. While there are many who strongly support one viewpoint or the other, some researchers are dissatisfied with the determinism of the structuralists, which renders individuals as passive objects of larger forces, and similarly dissatisfied with the "blame the victim" perspective of the culturalists, which views individuals as hopelessly trapped within a particular social/cultural milieu (Ryan, 1976).

As a result, a growing number of researchers are trying to find ways to bridge the two sides of the debate and have sought to synthesize important elements from both the structural and cultural perspectives, while simultaneously paying greater attention to the importance of individual choice and agency (MacLeod, 1995). "Both structural and cultural forces influence choices and actions, but neither has the power to act as the sole determinant of behavior because human beings have the ability to produce cultural forms that can counter these pressures" (Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996, pp. 21-26). While structural and cultural explanations of human behavior have traditionally been seen as irreconcilable, Luker (1996) has demonstrated the possibility of synthesizing the two perspectives. From this combined perspective, "the importance of both structure and culture is acknowledged, but so too is the understanding that individuals have the capacity to act and make choices that cannot be explained through the reductionism

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inherent in either framework" (Morrow & Torres, 1995, pp. 112-134). This combined perspective encapsulates the basic framework for this study.

The Cultural and Structural Viewpoints

The Structural Viewpoint

In contrast to the culturalists' perspective, structuralists generally focus on issues such as the availability of jobs and economic opportunities, class structure, and social geography (Massey & Denton, 1993; Tabb, 1970; Wilson, 1978, 1987). Within this viewpoint, individuals are perceived as products of their environment, and changes in individual behavior are made possible by changes in the structure of opportunity. From this theoretical perspective, to hold individuals responsible for their behavior makes little sense because behavior is shaped by forces beyond their control. For example, drug abuse, crime, and dropping out of school are largely seen as social consequences of inequality. Structuralists propose that the most effective way to reduce objectionable behavior in students is to reduce the degree and extent of inequality in society (Noguera, 2001).

In schools, structures such as curriculum, teaching strategies, school climate, and behavioral expectations have been shown to influence student achievement (Epstein & MacIver, 1992; Lee & Bryk, 1988). Unequal access to academic experiences and achievement through the curriculum, teachers, and other school activities impacts students' opportunities to learn. Unequal access to such experiences and opportunities are of particular importance for Black males who may be already marginalized at school. Equitable access to educational opportunities is critical for Black males to achieve in school.

The structures of schooling have been designed for White students. As such, educating White children has been more successful than educating Black children. Black students have been expected to function in schools that were not designed with their learning needs in mind (Hale-Benson, 1986). Similarly, Don Locke (1992) advises that persons from the dominant culture should not use their own cultural background as a reference for how Black children should behave. Given existing structures, it is not surprising that the racial achievement gap persists.

The Cultural Viewpoint

Scholars and researchers commonly understand that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence on human behavior, including academic performance (Brookover & Erickson, 1969; Morrow & Torres, 1995). The ways in which environmental and cultural forces influence the way Black males come to perceive schooling and how those perceptions influence their behavior and performance in school are less well understood.

Culturalists downplay the significance of environmental factors and treat human behavior as a product of beliefs, values, norms, and socialization. Cultural explanations of behavior focus on moral codes that operate within particular families, communities, or groups (Anderson, 1990). For the culturalists, change in behavior can only be brought about through cultural change. Hence, providing more money to inner-city schools will do little to improve the academic performance of Black students because their attitudes toward school are shaped by the culture they brought from home and the neighborhood in which they live (Murray, 1984). According to this view, culture provides the rationale

and motivation for behavior, and cultural change cannot be brought about through changes in governmental policy or by expanding opportunities (Noguera, 2001).

Critical Race Theory

An explanation of America's achievement gaps must include a theoretical perspective relevant to a discussion of race. Critical Race Theory provides this backdrop. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework initially developed from the work of legal scholars Derrick Bell, Allan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, who were interested in studying and transforming the inter-relationships among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT focuses directly on the effects of race and racism, foregrounds race in its understanding of the social world, and recognizes racism as part of America's social fabric and an inevitable condition for those who occupy society's margins (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Taylor, 1998). The goal of CRT is to illuminate racist practices and bring about social justice to oppressed people (Crenshaw, 1995).

Although CRT began as a movement in the law, it has rapidly spread beyond that discipline. Today, many professionals in the field of education consider themselves critical race theorists who use CRT ideas to understand issues of school discipline, tracking, and controversies over curriculum, IQ testing, and achievement testing (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Unlike some academic disciplines, Critical Race Theory contains an activist dimension. It not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but also to transform it for the better.

An Historical Perspective of Critical Race Theory

CRT emerged from the National Critical Legal Studies conferences that took place at Harvard and the University of California, Berkeley, law schools in the early to mid-1980s (Lawrence, 2002). This group of law professors and students began to question the objective rationalist nature of the law and the process of adjudication in U.S. courts. They criticized the ways in which the real effects of the law served to privilege the wealthy and powerful in the U.S., while ignoring the rights of the poor to use the courts as a means of redress. Out of this critique of the role of law in society, a second strand of scholarship emerged through the writings of Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Richard Delgado, Angela Harris, and Kimberly Crenshaw. These scholars argued that the Critical Legal Studies movement did not go far enough in challenging the racialized nature of the law and its impact on persons of color (Lynn & Parker, 2006). CRT scholars began to formulate a discourse focused on issues of race and racism in the law in the same way that education scholars began to formulate a critique of race and racism in education (Tate, 1997). These scholars, as synthesized in Lynn and Parker (2006) proposed the following:

1. For centuries, racism has been a normal daily fact of life in U.S. society, and the ideology and assumptions of racism are so ingrained in the political and legal structures as to be almost unrecognizable.

2. CRT challenges the experience of White European Americans as the normative standard; CRT grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive contextual experiences of people of color and develops through the use of literary narrative knowledge and storytelling to challenge the existing social construction of race.

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3. CRT attacks liberalism and the inherent belief in the law to create an equitable just society. CRT advocates have pointed out the frustrating legal pace of meaningful reform that has addressed blatant hateful expressions of racism, while keeping intact exclusionary relations of power (Bell, 1988; Delgado, 1987; Matsuda, 1987).

One of the main arguments of critical race theorists has been that while classic forms of overtly racist behavior in the United States, such as lynchings, have subsided, everyday racism has increased. This type of racism can be characterized as those mundane practices and events that are infused with some degree of unconscious racial mal-intent. It can also be described as those institutional policies and practices that are fair in form, such as school discipline policies, but have a disproportionately negative impact on racial minority groups (Lawrence, 1987). Furthermore, everyday racism, in the form of microaggressions, defined as actions or statements that unconsciously project negative or stereotypical images, is incessant and cumulative as practiced in the everyday actions of individuals and groups, as well as in various institutional policies and administrative procedures. Critical race theorists called attention to the existence of these structures in the broader society that were created and maintained by a tradition of inherently racist practices (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995).

The Basic Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory is based on the following tenets: (a) counter-storytelling; (b) the permanence of racism; (c) Whiteness as property; (d) interest convergence; and (e) the critique of liberalism. The five tenets of Critical Race Theory are readily observable within education and schooling and they have a profound effect on how Black students are taught, who teaches them, and what outcomes they achieve.

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Counterstorytelling

An essential tenet of CRT is counterstorytelling (Matsuda, 1995). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define counterstorytelling as a method of telling a story that "aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (p. 144). It is a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes. The use of counterstories challenges the privileged discourses of the majority, therefore providing a means for giving voice to marginalized groups. In other words, counterstorytelling "help(s) us understand what life is like for others, and invite(s) the reader into a new and unfamiliar world" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41).

In education, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) suggest that counterstories can be found in various forms, including personal stories and narratives, other people's stories and narratives, and composite stories and narratives. Counterstorytelling has been an essential feature of educational research focused on telling a story that shines the spotlight on racism in order to counter accepted notions or myths held by members of the majority culture.

The Permanence of Racism

One of the basic premises of CRT is the notion that, as Bell (1992) states, "racism is a permanent component of American life" (p. 13). The acceptance of the idea of the permanence of racism involves adopting a "realist view" of the American societal structure. According to Bell (1995), within a CRT framework, a "realist view" requires recognizing the dominant role that racism has played and continues to play in American society. This tenet suggests that institutional racism is embedded in the nation's culture

and evident in the hierarchy of its governmental, financial, and educational institutions. Furthermore, it implies that racist hierarchical structures govern all political, economic, and social domains. These structures allow for the privileging of Whites and the subsequent "*Othering*" of people of color in all arenas, including education.

Whiteness as Property

Whiteness as property suggests that functions and attributes of property have historically been used in establishing whiteness as a form of property (Harris, 1995). Whites have dominated the capitalist system since its inception. In America, Blacks were brought here as slaves and were considered property. The White power structure designed and operated an effective, oppressive economic system that kept Blacks powerless. When school segregation was defeated in 1954, White heads of the public schools used tracking and special education placement in order to maintain the status quo.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggest the existence of educational inequity in that Whites exclusively have access to high quality and rigorous curriculum. Tracking, honors, and/or gifted programs and advanced placement courses are some of the myriad ways that schools have essentially been re-segregated. The formal ways that selection and admission into these programs are conducted guarantee that students of color have virtually no access to a high-quality curriculum or certainly one that will prepare them for college attendance (Oakes, 1995; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002). Thus, through the array of school policies and practices that restrict the access of students of color to high-quality curricula, and to safe and well-equipped schools, school districts have served to maintain this notion of Whiteness as property whereby the rights to possession, use and enjoyment, and disposition, have been enjoyed almost exclusively by Whites. Many

schools have further reinforced "Whiteness as property" through policies and practices that have regulated the manner in which students expressed themselves either verbally or through their dress (Brady, Eitman, & Parker, 2000).

Interest Convergence

An additional tenet of CRT is interest convergence. Bell (1980) suggests that civil rights gains within communities of color, specifically those for African Americans, should be interpreted with measured enthusiasm. He argues that the majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits their interest to do so. Early civil rights legislation provided only basic rights to Black Americans, while these rights had been enjoyed by Whites for centuries. These civil rights gains were, in effect, only superficial "opportunities" because they were basic tenets of U.S. democracy. Bell (1980) contends that these very basic rights came only inasmuch as they converged with the self-interests of Whites. Bell further discusses the notion of interest convergence in speaking about the limited and uncertain gains of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. He articulated the loss of human capital by way of the dismissal of scores of African-American teachers and administrators, school closings in Black neighborhoods, and the limited access to high-quality curricula in the form of tracking and inflated admissions criteria. These and other factors made the so-called "gains" from *Brown* questionable. Bell's shocking proposal stated that *Brown v. Board of Education,* the triumph of civil rights litigation, might have resulted more from the self-interest of elite Whites than a desire to help Blacks.

Critique of Liberalism

The last tenet of CRT, the critique of liberalism (Williams, 1997) encompasses three areas: (a) the notion of color blindness, (b) neutrality of the law, and (c) incremental change. Critical race scholars are discontent with liberalism as a framework for addressing America's racial problems. Many liberals believe in color blindness and neutral principles of Constitutional law. While equal opportunity for all, without favoritism, is a desirable goal, given the history of racism in the U.S., rights and opportunities have been awarded and withheld based almost exclusively on race. Generally, rights are cut back when they conflict with the interests of the powerful.

The notion of color blindness fails to take into consideration the persistence and permanence of racism and the construction of people of color as *Other*. In the color-blind discourse, "difference" usually refers to people of color because being White is considered "normal." Color blindness, as Williams (1997) suggests, has made it nearly impossible to interrogate both the ways that White privilege is deployed and the normalizing effects of whiteness. CRT scholars argue that color blindness has been adopted as a way to justify ignoring and dismantling race-based policies that were designed to address societal inequity (Gotanda, 1991). In other words, arguing that society should be color blind ignores the fact that inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are historical artifacts that will not be easily remedied by ignoring race in the contemporary society. Adopting a color-blind ideology does not eliminate the possibility that racism and racist acts will persist.

Under the notion of incremental change, gains for marginalized groups must come at a slow pace that is palatable for those in power. Equality rather than equity is sought

and in so doing, the processes, structures, and ideologies that justify inequity are not addressed and dismantled. Remedies based on equality assume that citizens have the *same* opportunities and experiences. Race, and experiences based on race, are not equal, thus, the experiences that people of color have with respect to race and racism create an unequal situation. On the other hand, *equity* recognizes that the playing field is *unequal* and attempts to address the inequality. Incremental change appears to benefit those who are not directly adversely affected by social, economic, and educational inequity because of racism and racist practices.

Critical Race Theory in Education

Critical Race Theory has also emerged as a powerful theoretical and analytical framework within educational research (Duncan, 2002; Lynn et al., 2002). Ladson-Billings (1999) argued that CRT has the capacity to challenge and change the terms of the debates in educational scholarship on race and gave further validity to CRT as a valid construct through which others could explore the perennial problems in education.

As CRT rose to prominence in the early 1990s, education scholars began to use it as a tool for explaining existing inequalities in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). Before scholars in education began to actively use CRT as a tool for analyzing racial inequality in education, much of the literature that addressed issues of inequality and schooling addressed either social class (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) or gender (Weiler, 1988). For some time, a corpus of research in multicultural education had used culture as a vehicle for analyzing and theorizing about schooling conditions of diverse students (Banks, 1971). However, there were serious debates about whether or not the multiculturalism or other culture-centered frameworks paid enough attention to issues of

inequality and the centrality of race (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Lynn and Adams (2002) explored CRT's origins and then discussed the history of critical educational research. As Tate (1997) had shown, they also showed how race continued to be under-theorized in education. In essence, they put forth a call for CRT to move beyond analysis to action. This "call to action" would later be explained more fully in the work of Parker and Stovall (2004), who explored how CRT can move from theoretical explication to action that affects the lives of disenfranchised people of color.

Not only have CRT and education researchers explored CRT's connections to education, they have used CRT to explore specific issues in education such as qualitative research methods, pedagogy and practice, the schooling experiences of marginalized students of color, and the efficacy of race-conscious education policy. Critical race scholars in education "critically interrogate the role of race and racism in all aspects of their work and stress the need for further research" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 270). Critical Race Theory has the potential to "unify existing critical explications of educational phenomena in education and to provide grounding that is more theoretical and direction for educators who are concerned with issues of racial, ethnic, and gender inequality in the U.S. educational system" (Lynn, 1999, p. 622).

Given CRT's relatively recent entrée into the field of education, critical race scholars have worked to explore its theoretical and methodological significance and its role and links to education theory and practice. For example, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) illustrated how racism was a persistent historical and ideological construct that could account for inequalities such as dropout rates and school suspension rates for

Blacks. They also made important links between property values in the U.S. and the quality of schools. They illustrated how poverty and low social status is racialized, with Blacks and other people of color routinely having access to "property" with low value. This, in turn, affects the inherent "value" of the schools attended by those students. They argued that CRT, with its insistence on exploring both the ideological and material manifestations of racism, could be used to explain the important connections between race and class in American schooling. These studies have played an important role in helping new scholars understand not only the nature of CRT but the specific ways in which the theory can be used to help illuminate as well as solve educational problems.

Critical Race Theory in Qualitative Research

Ladson-Billings (2000) outlined the benefits of a CRT approach within qualitative research. She discussed how CRT might be viewed as both a theory and a method that guides how we view the research context, but also shapes how we conduct research. Parker and Lynn (2002) also discussed how qualitative studies have examined race in educational research and have encouraged the use of CRT to transform research practices. They assert that a "critical race methodology in educational research can provide the necessary impetus for significant changes in the way that communities of color are studied and written about" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 272).

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define a critical race methodology as

a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology,

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history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color. (p. 24)

Marx (2003) explores how whiteness can be used as a pedagogical construct to examine the role of racial identity for White scholars conducting qualitative research. Scholars asked questions such as, (a) Can CRT be used as a tool by White researchers to deconstruct traditional inherent racist forms of qualitative research in order to reconstruct newer, more socially just methods? and (b) What is the role of White educational researchers and practitioners in creating research that helps move us toward a more just society? These researchers have begun to articulate how "social science research on race, along with the personal narratives or *testimonios* of communities of color, can be used to construct a critical race method that provides specific guidance about how to conduct research that is sensitive to the needs of these communities" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 272).

Critical race studies in education scholars, whose work focuses on the lives of marginalized students, demonstrate how CRT can be used to privilege the voice of students who would otherwise remain nameless and voiceless. Not only are the experiences of these students illuminated and brought to life, but CRT helps to connect these experiences to the experiences of others sharing similar plights. It also illuminates the ways in which these students' experiences with oppression symbolize important social, cultural, and political struggles in the larger society. "This is important given our society's tendency to blame children of color and their families for their failure in school when schools are woefully inadequate and lacking in the necessary resources to help the majority of children become successful in a larger society" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 277).

Student Voice

The importance of Critical Race Theory as applied to education converged with the historical perspective on student voice, which also began in the 1980s. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child highlighted children's right to participate with Article 12, which states that children should be free to express their views and to be heard. Similarly, Article 13 asserted that children have the right of freedom of expression and freedom to seek and impart information through the media of the child's choice (Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2003).

Because students "have been silenced all their lives" (Giroux, 1992, p. 158), they have singular and invaluable views on education from which both adults and students themselves can benefit (Cook-Sather & Schultz, 2001a, 2001b; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Oldfather, 1995; Oldfather et al., 1999). Authorizing student perspectives introduces into critical conversations the missing perspectives of those who experience daily the effects of existing educational policies-in-practice.

Various researchers have invited student perspectives into the discourse about their schooling and education. Interested in "how adolescents view and define what is significant in affecting their school experiences," Phelan et al. (1998) used student perspectives to "illuminate those aspects of students' behavior that teachers had defined as important, curious, or problematic" (p. 5).

A Definition of "Student Voice"

Advocates generally agree that "student voice" is "an increasingly important element in understanding teaching and schooling more generally, but how that understanding is achieved and what is done in response or with it vary considerably"

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(McCallum, Hargreaves, & Gipps, 2000, p. 276). "Voice" signals having a legitimate perspective and opinion, being present and taking part, and/or having an active role "in decisions about the implementation of educational policies and practice" (Holdsworth, 2000, p. 355).

How voice is defined depends in part on the relationship that exists in a particular context between "voice" and "agency" or "action" (Holdsworth, 2000, p. 357). "Student voice" efforts ask us to connect the sound of students speaking not only to those students experiencing meaningful acknowledged presence, but also with their having the power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices in schools.

Other researchers (Fielding, 2001; Holdsworth, 2005) also point to the importance of linking student voice with action, arguing that "authentic" student voice is not simply to provide data for others to make decisions, but that it should encourage young people's active participation in shared decision making and consequent actions. Meaningful involvement of students means validating and authorizing them to represent their own ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experiences throughout education in order to improve our schools (Fletcher, 2005).

The Empirical and Conceptual Basis for Student Involvement

Student voice requires consideration of the empirical and conceptual basis for thinking about student participation, which is quite limited. Few studies have examined the construct of student voice as a strategy in school reform efforts, either theoretically or empirically. Though the literature on school reform is extensive, very little of it actually includes a perspective that acknowledges issues related to the role of students. According to Levin (2000), the literature is so sparse that we have only a few indicators of what

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might be possible. He presents the following overview of the pragmatic arguments for greater student participation in school reform:

1. Effective implementation of change requires participation and buy-in from all those involved, students no less than teachers.

2. Students have unique knowledge and perspectives that can make reform efforts more successful and improve their implementation.

3. Students' views can help mobilize staff and parent opinion in favor of meaningful reform.

4. Constructivist learning, which is increasingly important to high standards reforms, requires a more active student role in schooling.

5. Students are the producers of school outcomes, so their involvement is fundamental to all improvement (p. 165).

As more work is completed with students, we will accumulate more salient evidence to guide our efforts. Until a compilation of empirical data is forthcoming, Levin's conceptual framework will need to guide methodology concerning student involvement.

<div align="center">The Emergence of the Term "Student Voice" in
Educational Research and Reform</div>

Despite the paucity of research within the school improvement field, there has been a persistent theme that it is important to listen to the views of young people (Fielding, 2001; Pickering, 1997; Rudduck et al., 1996). Over the last 15 years, a way of thinking has reemerged that strives to reposition students in educational research and reform (Cook-Sather, 2006). In this view, the young people are viewed as the "expert

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witnesses" with something to tell us about their experiences of schooling. Student voice has reemerged on the educational landscape in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom in the past decade. Student voice is no longer geared to rights and empowerment as it was in the past, but instead focuses on the notion that "student outcomes will improve and school reform will be more successful if students actively participate in shaping it" (Mitra, 2004, p. 652).

It is becoming increasingly more prevalent to find researchers, policy-makers, and teachers making claims for the value of student involvement and for listening to the students' voice (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder, & Reay, 2004; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). Rudduck and colleagues point out that the increasing involvement of students in school improvement is a recent trend observable in the social policy of more developed countries (Prout & Hallett, 2003). Best documented in Australia, Canada, England, and the United States, this way of thinking is based on the following convictions: that young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling; that their insights warrant not only the attention, but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Some school reform efforts in the United States "strive to enact an honoring of the voices of the young, not only by attending to students' words, but also by putting students in the position of 'translating other students' explanations of why they struggle in school into language that adults would understand" (Mitra, in press). Kozol (1991) wrote of "the voices of children . . . that have been missing from the whole discussion" of education and educational reform (p. 5), while Weis and Fine (1993) invited "the voices

of children and adolescents who have been expelled from the centers of their schools and the centers of our culture to speak" (p. 2).

In Canada, Pekrul and Levin (2005) contend that the voices of students may provide the tipping point to shift the culture and practices of high schools. Also in Canada, Fullan (1991) asked, "What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?" (p. 170). Levin (1994) argued that the most promising reform strategies involved treating students as capable persons, capitalizing on their knowledge and interests, and involving them in determining goals and learning methods.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, early champions of student voice work, such as Rudduck et al. (1996), who followed in the spirit of Stenhouse (1983), argued for the inclusion of students' perspectives in conversations about school improvement (Cook-Sather, 2006). Hargreaves (2004) asserts that if we are to ensure that every aspect of teaching and support is designed around a student's needs, then potentially the most powerful gateway for this to occur is through facilitating student voice.

Fundamental Premises That Underlie Including Student Voice

Two fundamental premises underlie student voice: rights and respect. Both are about honoring the dignity and the distinctiveness of young people. "The manner in which the principles and dynamics of rights and respect play out in practice varies greatly across contexts and circumstances" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 376).

Rights

There is a long history of claims to rights in the United States. The right of all students to free public education was among Thomas Jefferson's founding ideals. The

most enduring pursuit of this ideal was the advent of the school in the early to mid-1800s. As the population of the country increased, control over educational policymaking and practice shifted from local to national forums. The 20th century saw the passage of federal legislation framed in terms of students' rights, particularly regarding equal access to education regardless of race (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954), gender (Title IX), class (Elementary and Secondary Schools Act in 1965, including Title I), and ability (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975). The most recent legislation, No Child Left Behind, a bipartisan law passed in 2002, is designed to change the culture of America's schools, in order to close achievement gaps, by implementing research-based methodologies and teaching students based on evidence-based practices that have been proven to work.

While the spirit of these ideals and laws was intended to offer all children the right to equal education, the results are questionable. "All students," referred to by Jefferson, did not include the children of slaves. Fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, gross inequities remain in schools across racial lines (Fine, Roberts, & Torre, 2004).

The point that is striking in reference to the evolution of educational law and rights in the U.S. is that student voice, the students' own words, presence, and power have been missing. This is consistent with the tendency for educational research to be conducted *on* not *with* students (Cook-Sather, in press). It is also consistent with the tendency of the educational system and the reforms within this system in the United States to focus exclusively on adults' notions of how education should be conceptualized and practiced (Cook-Sather, 2002). Even strong and important arguments about students'

right to learn focus on teachers' or other adults' perspectives rather than on what students express as needs (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

There is research in progress in the United States that asserts that students have the right to have their voices heard and counted (Cook-Sather, 2002; Mitra, in press). However, because no national student voice discourses or efforts have emerged in response to federal legislation in the United States, some argue that student voice is not "geared to rights and empowerment" as it had been in the past. Instead, it has "focused on the notion that student outcomes will improve and school reform will be more successful if students actively participate in shaping it" (Mitra, 2004, p. 652). Levin (2000) argues, "Thirty years ago we missed the opportunity to use new ideas about students' rights and roles as a way to build stronger and better schools. The opportunity to do so may now be with us again" (p. 169) as a discourse of rights emerges in connection with a resurgence of interest in student voice work (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 373).

Respect

"Calls for respect from students are loud and clear" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 373). To this end, "we need a fundamental shift in the dominant epistemology in our society and our schools to be based on trusting, listening to, and respecting the minds of all participants in schooling" (Oldfather et al., 1999, p. 313). As Levin (1994) argued, "If we take seriously the idea that students are people, we must respect their ideas, opinions, and desires" (p. 97). Rudduck (2002) concurred, suggesting that, "among the 'conditions of learning' in schools that students identify (i.e., conditions they need in order to learn) are respect, responsibility, challenge, and support" (p. 123). Fielding and Rudduck

maintain that if schools are to reflect the different capabilities of a new generation, they need to respond to repeated calls from students for responsibility, more opportunities to contribute to decision-making, and more opportunities for dialogue about learning and the conditions of learning.

Some researchers define respect as a basic premise underlying efforts to reposition students in processes of education and in research on schools. Goldman and Newman (1998) note, "Respect listens to divergent opinions and looks for the merits they posses" (p. 9). Rudduck and Flutter (2004) contend that "pupils who are involved in school and who feel they are respected as individuals and as an institutional and social group are likely to feel a great sense of respect and belonging, and are less likely to disengage from a school's purposes" (p. 107). MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck, and Myers (2003) assert, "Being consulted can help pupils feel that they are respected as individuals and as a body within the school" (p. 1).

Virtually all researchers of student voice have found that "respect is a reciprocal dynamic; if you give respect, you are more likely to get it" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 375). In that respect is both reciprocal and relational, it differs from the premise of rights. Respect cannot be demanded from a hierarchical power or set as a rule or principle that applies regardless of circumstances. Rather, it is a dynamic built between and among people, and therefore, it must be supported and sustained in relationship and context and it cannot be established once and for all (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Listening

In addition to rights and respect, a third essential concept, listening, is noted in student voice research. Constructivist, critical, multicultural, and antiracist pedagogies

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emphasize the importance of listening. These pedagogies argue that teachers can improve their practice by listening closely to what students have to say about their learning (Commeyras, 1995; Dahl, 1995; Duckworth, 1987; Heshusius, 1995; Johnston & Nicholls, 1995; Lincoln, 1995; Rodgers, 2006; Schultz, 2003). Listening to students and building teaching around themes that are relevant to and that emerge from students' own lives can be transformative both personally and politically (Friere, 1990; McLaren, 1989; Shor, 1987, 1992), and listening to students can counter discriminatory and exclusionary tendencies in education (Banks, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000).

As a central component of qualitative research, listening takes on a new meaning and form when researchers attend to students as informants (Cook-Sather, in press). Researchers committed to listening to student voices must "change our understanding of what it means to listen" (Thorkildsen, in press). School reform efforts must focus on creating a listening culture, and educational research must strive to redefine listening (Cook-Sather, in press; Mitra, in press; Thorkildsen, in press).

The dominant structures and culture of schooling prevent "practitioners from listening to students' own creative ideas about how systems can change to meet their needs" (Cruddas & Haddock, 2003, p. 6). Smyth (in press) worked with students in Australia and suggests that if we listen carefully to young informants, we can get a clear picture of what it is that is dysfunctional about much of what transpires in schooling, why it is so many young people decide to exit, and how schooling might be different for them. For example, Rudduck and Demetriou (2003) surveyed 15,000 students in England and when asked to describe the kind of school they would like, the fourth most popular response was "a listening school" (p. 277). A student in Mitra's (2001) study in the

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Western United States said, "If you talk and people don't listen, you don't want to talk anymore" (p. 92).

McLauglin, Carnell, and Blount (1999) contend that children "want to be listened to and value it enormously" (p. 100).   Flutter and Rudduck (2004) assert, "The most important argument for listening to the pupil voice lies in the potential for providing schools with directions for constructing a better future" (pp. 131-132).

<div align="center">The Benefits of Student Voice</div>

Several researchers have discussed the benefits to students when they are invited to share their perspectives. When students are taken seriously and attended to as knowledgeable participants in important conversations, they feel empowered (Hudson-Ross, Cleary, & Casey, 1993) and motivated to participate constructively in their education (Colsant, 1995; Oldfather et al., 1999; Sanon, Baxter, Fortune, & Opotow, 2001; Schultz & Cook-Sather, 2001). Research on motivation contains many admonitions, suggestions, and assertions for what educators and policy makers must do to motivate reluctant learners to achieve (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 2000; Lumsden, 1994). However, it rarely mentions the voices of students. When we fail to listen to student voices and dictate what we believe is best for them, we encourage their dependence rather than promote their autonomy (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005).

Student voice also facilitates students feeling respected and engaged in the classroom. "Such respect promotes participation that is more constructive; it creates relationships in which teachers and students can communicate with and learn from one another" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 367).

Oldfather and Dahl (1994) believe that "when students are given voice, they are able to gain a sense of *epistemological empowerment*: a sense of agency, and the ability to 'know' that emerges from a strong sense of the integrity of one's process of constructing meaning" (p. 132). Similarly, Ranson (2000) argues for "pedagogy of voice," which enables learners to explore self and identity, develop self-understanding and self-respect, and improve agency, capability, and potential. David Jackson (2005) also maintains that student voice is about valuing people and valuing the learning that results when we engage multiple voices in our schools. Student voice focuses on recognizing the leadership potential inherent within all learners. Finally, Mitra (2004) found that "student voice activities can create meaningful experiences for youth that help to meet fundamental developmental needs—especially for students who otherwise do not find meaning in their school experiences" (p. 651). Specifically, Mitra (2004) found a "marked consistency in the growth in agency, belonging, and competence—three assets that are essential to youth development" (p. 651).

Student voice, in its most profound and radical form, calls for a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students. Whether it is acknowledged or not, issues of voice are embedded in historically located structures and relations of power. One of the most profound and positive aspects of student voice work, and one of the clearest indicators of the beginning of a cultural shift, is its insistence on altering dominant power imbalances between adults and young people. Oldfather (1995) says, "Learning from student voices . . . requires a major shift on the part of teachers, students, and researchers in relationships and in ways of thinking and feeling about issues of knowledge, language, power, and self" (p. 87).

Such a shift requires those of us currently in positions of power to confront "the power dynamics inside and outside our classrooms that make democratic dialogue impossible" (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 107) and to strive to use our power "in an attempt (that might not be successful) to help others exercise power" (Gore, 1992, p. 59).

Children's views of the world do not necessarily reflect the view of the dominant majority (adults who have power over them). Because they do not reflect the dominant majority's view of the world, their voices have the power to criticize the dominant power structure. They may question the way things are and might even provide new theories of how the world might be ordered.

Concerns About Student Voice

The research literature also highlights the fact that even well-intentioned student-voice initiatives pose potential dangers. "One concern about student voice is the notion that there is one, single, monolithic student voice" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 367). This assumption runs the risk of overlooking essential differences among students, their perspectives, and their needs. "It is hard work not to reduce students' comments and insights to any 'single, uniform, and invariable' experience" (Silva & Rubin, 2003, p. 2, as quoted in Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 368). Others caution that it is important not to assume that students are able to represent their own interests transparently (Cruddas, 2001; Spivak, 1988).

Some forms of student voice can actually serve to disconnect or disempower young people. Some theorists warn that there is the potential for efforts that are "benign but condescending" or "cynical and manipulative" (Fielding, 2004, p. 200). Efforts to "increase student voice and participation can actually reinforce a hierarchy of power and

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privilege among students and undermine attempted reforms" (Silva, 2001, p. 98). When

listening to students, we run the risk that we may hear things we are not willing to hear.

It is difficult to learn from voices we do not want to hear (Bragg, 2001; Johnston &

Nicholls, 1995) and to learn to hear the voices we do not know how to hear. Finally,

"student voice activities run the risk of denying the potential power of silence and

resistance" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 369). Silence can be powerful as a withholding of

assent, a political act. Silence can mean that a voice is not speaking because it is not

worthwhile or safe to speak out of knowledge of one's inability in a particular situation to

transform silence into action (Lorde, 1984). It can also be an informed choice after

attempting to speak and not being heard. While the kind of silence that can result from

fear, resistance, or resignation should be of concern, silence can also be full and resonant.

Regardless of how silence is interpreted and addressed, it is an essential consideration in

discussions of voice.

<div align="center">Approaches to Student Involvement</div>

Lodge (2005) discusses four approaches to student involvement in school

improvement suggesting that an approach to student voice can be analyzed along two

dimensions: the role of the student and the purposes for which participation is being

sought. The four ideal types of student involvement are (a) quality control, (b) students

as a source of information, (c) compliance and control, and (d) dialogue.

Quality Control

In this approach, the voice of the student acts as information for quality control.

The student is regarded as passive, a source of information or as a consumer providing

<div align="center">45</div>

feedback. The voice of the student is being used as evidence in judgments about the quality of the school's educational provision.

Students as a Source of Information

In this approach, the student is still regarded as passive and as a source of information, but the purposes are for improvement. In its extreme form, this is where school improvement is done to the young people. At a more enlightened level, the students provide important information for teachers. This approach has a limited value in school improvement, as it does not engage the students. They may receive no feedback and are not involved in dialogue to develop shared understandings of the issues raised. Very often the most disaffected and unengaged are omitted from this process (Riley & Docking, 2004).

Compliance and Control

This approach acknowledges the active potential of young people. In this approach, the institutional purposes take account of ideas about the rights of young people to be involved in decisions about school, but the students' voice is used to serve institutional ends. Hart (1997) identified some forms as "manipulation or deception." Following Hart's typology, such forms may be tokenism or decorative, such as inclusion of images or quotations in brochures, where young people are being used to speak the adults' messages. Adults manipulate children's voices to carry their own message and deny or disguise their own involvement.

Dialogue

In this approach, students are viewed as active participants in their own learning. It acknowledges the value of exploring their experiences and opinions together with fellow students and teachers. Dialogue is more than conversation. It is about engagement with others through talk in order to arrive at a point one would not get to alone. Relationships are important in dialogue because they must be able to produce engagement, openness, and honesty. Dialogue encourages more complex understanding because it is a "dynamic generative kind of conversation in which there is room for all voices" (Anderson, 1999, p. 65). It is the building of a shared narrative in which the process of student participation in dialogue in schools connects their own narrative to that of others in the wider organization. Through this connection, the individual can make more sense of his or her own experience. In turn, the wider community can develop processes that address these articulated needs.

Issues That Impact the Schooling of Black Males

Critical Race Theory provides a theoretical base in which to discuss the issues that impact the schooling of Black males. These include the impact of race and racism, issues of power and relationships, the systems and structures of schooling, and the importance of involvement by others beyond the school.

Black Student Identity

Young Black males in contemporary American society face major challenges to their development and well-being. Social and economic indicators of Black male

development provide a profile of an individual whose quality of life is in serious jeopardy. The literature has referred to young Black males as an endangered species.

Success Identity

From an early age, Black males are confronted with a series of obstacles in their attempts to attain academic, career, personal, and social success. Black males are often the victims of negative attitudes and lowered expectations from teachers, counselors, and administrators. Educators may expect to encounter academic and social problems from Black males, which often lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Washington, 1982). Rosenthal and Jacobson's study of 1968 was the first full-length study to suggest that teacher expectations, even when based on erroneous information, can influence the academic performance of children. This harmful practice, known as the *pygmalion effect*, is cited as a reason that most African American children are lost in the primary grades.

Claude Steele (1992) has suggested that racial stigma is an unrecognized component of underachievement among students of color. He argued,

> Doing well in school requires a belief that school achievement can be a promising basis of self-esteem and that belief needs constant reaffirmation even for advantaged students. Tragically, I believe the lives of Black Americans are still haunted by a specter that threatens this belief and the identification that derives from it at every level of schooling. (p. 72)

The specter Steele referred to is the fact that even if students are smart, they believe that they are constantly being judged as inadequate and vulnerable. Jason Osborne (1997) tested Steele's hypothesis regarding identity formation and found that as Black males move through high school, the correlation between their academic performance and measures of their self-esteem declined consistently and dramatically, a pattern not

observed in other groups. Many Black males believe that their fate has been determined and that failure is inevitable.

Black students have a difficult time explaining why good grades symbolize Whiteness and being cool is acting Black. They appear to be confused about how to resolve the mismatch between what expectations are applauded by adults and their own need for a feeling of competence. Psychologists term this as identity diffusion—lack of identity formation as a reaction to failure (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Taylor, 1989).

Kunjufu (1988) says, "The key variable is that inferior performance and inferior ability are not the same thing. The damage is so deep that it operates at an unconscious level" (p. 31).

Racial Identity

[The] processes and influences involved in the construction of the Black male identity should be at the center of analyses of school performance because it is on the basis of their identities that Black males are presumed to be at risk, marginal, and endangered in school and throughout American society. (Anderson, 1990, pp. 23-36)

Many Black students feel that they must use a *raceless persona* (Fordham, 1988) in order to achieve academic success in a school that contradicts an identification and solidarity with Black culture. *Racelessness* is the notion that Black students must give up aspects of their identities and of their indigenous cultural system in order to achieve success as defined in dominant-group terms (Fordham, 1988).

Another aspect of Black male identity discussed in the literature is the notion of "Acting White." There is little consensus on a definition for "Acting White." Many authors have made the distinction between resenting achievement and resenting behaviors

that are associated with achievement. The literature points to the fact that Black kids do not ridicule other Black kids for making good grades. Rather, they ridicule them for the behaviors that are often associated with good grades. Neal-Barnett (2001) conducted student focus groups in an attempt to deduce what specific behaviors led to accusations of "Acting White." The list included being enrolled in honors or advanced placement classes, speaking standard English, wearing clothes from the Gap or Abercrombie and Fitch (instead of Tommy Hilfiger or FUBU) and wearing shorts in the winter! Fryer and Torelli (2006) describe a set of social interactions in which Black adolescents ridicule other Black adolescents for investing in behaviors characteristic of Whites (e.g., answering questions in class, being in advanced classes, or proper diction). The effect of "Acting White" is intensified among high achievers, and in schools with more interracial contact, but non-existent among students in predominantly Black schools or private schools.

The study of "Acting White" has been problematic due to the lack of quantitative measures of the phenomenon (Fryer & Torelli, 2006), and the ethnographic evidence is divided. Many studies report some negative relationship between "White behaviors" and social status among Blacks (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Dattnow & Cooper, 1996; Farkas, Lleras, & Maczuga, 2002; Ferguson, 2001; Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Roderick, 2003), yet two nationally representative studies dismiss "Acting White" as nothing more than an urban (or more precisely, ethnographic) legend (Fryer & Torelli, 2006).

Cook and Ludwig (1997) and Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) provided evidence that peer group norms are not significantly different between Black and White 10th-graders by examining the relationship between self-reported measures of popularity

and dichotomous measures of academic achievement. Cook and Ludwig (1997) found that high achievers were actually more popular than low-achievers, and that this positive achievement-popularity relationship is not significantly different between Blacks and Whites. If anything, the relation is stronger among Blacks, providing evidence that suggested the "Acting White" phenomenon is not empirically supported. Fryer and Torelli (2006) pointed out that the reliance on self-reported measures of popularity by Cook and Ludwig represented a shortcoming in their work.

Fryer and Torelli (2006) concluded that racial differences between popularity and achievement could potentially be a major reason for the underperformance of minorities in suburban schools. In stark contrast to the findings of Cook and Ludwig (1997), they found that there are large racial differences in the relationship between popularity and academic achievement. At roughly a 2.5 GPA, racial differences start to emerge. Among Whites, higher grades yield higher popularity. Whites continue to gain popularity as their grades increase. For Blacks, higher achievement is associated with modestly higher popularity until a grade point average of 3.5. Black popularity peaks at a grade point average of roughly 3.5 and turns downward afterward. A Black student with a 4.0 has, on average, 1.5 fewer same-race friends than a White student with a 4.0. Blacks with straight A's are as popular as Blacks with a 2.9 GPA. Black high-achieving boys have fewer friends than Black high-achieving girls. At low grade point averages, there is little difference among racial groups in the relationship between popularity and grades.

It is clear that there are large racial differences in the relationship between popularity and grades. "Acting White" is more salient in public schools and schools in which the percentage of Black students is less than 20, but non-existent among Blacks in

predominantly Black schools or those who attend private schools. In schools in which Blacks comprise greater than 80% of the student body, there is no "Acting White" effect. Schools with more interracial contact have an "Acting White" coefficient twice as large as more segregated schools (seven times as large for Black males). The fact that "Acting White" is more prevalent in schools with more interracial contact is consistent with the two-audience signaling model and provides evidence that there can be significant pressure in racially heterogeneous schools to tow the racial line (Tatum, 1997). The principal idea is that individuals face a two-audience signaling quandary: signals that beget labor market success are signals that induce peer rejection.

Fryer and Torelli (2006) assert that their findings contradict earlier models set forth as possible explanations for racial achievement gaps. Two such models, the presence of an oppositional culture identity model (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) and the self-sabotage among Black youth model (McWhorter, 2000), are discussed. They dispute the lack of empirical support for the oppositional culture hypothesis described in Fordham and Ogbu (1986). Fryer and Torelli (2006) suggested that the sabotage theory is at odds with the fact that Blacks in predominantly Black schools face no tradeoff between social status and achievement. The "Acting White" coefficient is weakly positive in these schools. The theory also does not adequately explain why "Acting White" is particularly salient in schools with more interracial contact. They argue that "Acting White" is an equilibrium phenomenon, the consequence of two-audience signaling: not self-sabotage among Blacks or the result of an oppositional culture identity that declares education useless. Fryer and Torelli (2006) state, "While the evidence in favor of the two-audience

signaling model is far from overwhelming, it is the only model that does not directly contradict the data in fundamental ways" (p. 37).

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) developed the oppositional culture hypothesis. The hypothesis states that the observed disparity between Blacks and Whites stems from the following factors: (a) White people provide them with inferior schooling and treat them differently in school; (b) White people fail to reward them adequately for their academic achievement in adult life by imposing a job ceiling, and (c) Black Americans develop coping devices that, in turn, further limit their striving for academic success.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) propose that an oppositional cultural frame of reference is applied selectively by minorities. The target areas appear to be those in which it was long believed that only Whites could perform well and in which few minorities traditionally were given the opportunity to try or were rewarded if they tried and succeeded. The areas are those in which Whites have established the criteria of performance, Whites judge competence, and Whites determine the rewards for performance based on White criteria. One such area is academics.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest the problem arose because White Americans have traditionally refused to acknowledge that Black Americans were capable of intellectual achievement, and partly because Black Americans subsequently began to doubt their own intellectual ability. As Black Americans began to define academic success as White people's prerogative, they began to discourage their peers, perhaps unconsciously, for emulating White people in striving for academic success. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argue that institutional discrimination lowers the marginal benefit of investment for certain minority groups. As a rational response, these minorities began to

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equate educational achievement with Whiteness, thereby altering their prescriptions (e.g., what it means to "be Black").

John McWhorter (2000) contrasts African American youth culture with that of immigrants (including Blacks from the Caribbean and Africa) who "haven't sabotaged themselves through victimology" (McWhorter, 2000, as quoted in Fryer, 2006, p. 54). McWhorter (2000) proposed a sabotage model to explain racial differences in the relationship between social status and achievement. He proposed that Blacks sabotage their high-achieving peers. Although Black males have developed multiple survival techniques throughout their history in the United States, the "cool pose" is perhaps unique. This pose is a ritualized form of masculinity, which uses certain behavior, scripts, physical posturing, and carefully crafted performance to convey a strong impression of pride, strength, and control. The cool pose is a coping mechanism to hide self-doubt, insecurity, and inner turmoil, and can be observed in such things as dress (e.g., beltless pants hanging below the waist), manner of talk (e.g., signifying, rapping), and behavior (e.g., high fives, special handshakes, forms of greeting).

Negative Stereotypes

Another issue that appears to affect Black student identity is that of negative stereotyping. Several researchers have provided empirical evidence that shows that as prejudice and stereotyping in educational settings decrease, students' academic performance increases (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Au, 1993; Deyhle, 1995; Fullilove & Treisman, 1990; Matthews, 1988; Steele, 1997). Other researchers cite as problematic the cultural messages about Black males and how they are negatively constructed in the media and perceived in everyday life (Belton, 1995; Blount & Cunningham, 1996;

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Harper, 1996). These images portray the Black male as violent, disrespectful, unintelligent, hyper-sexualized, and threatening. These cultural messages, without a doubt, carry over into schools and negatively influence the ways young Black male students are treated, positioned, and distributed opportunities to learn (Davis, 2003). The demeanors of Black boys are misunderstood by White middle-class teachers and are seen as defiant, aggressive, and intimidating (Majors, Tyler, Peden, & Hall, 1994; Slaughter-Defoe & Richards, 1994).

According to Geoffrey Cohen (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006), formerly an associate professor in Yale's Department of Psychology and now an associate professor at the University of Colorado, school settings can be stressful to all students. However, Black students experience an extra threat due to negative stereotypes about the intelligence of their race. Julio Garcia (Cohen et al., 2006), associate research scientist in the Psychology Department at Yale, says that people who are subjected to widely known negative stereotypes about the intelligence of their group are aware of these negative stereotypes and may worry that performing poorly could confirm the stereotype of their group. "Over the years, the image of the Black male as a subhuman, unintelligent, sexually promiscuous, idle buffoon was everywhere—in stage shows, novels, advertisements, newspapers, and magazines—and it took hold of the American psyche" (Tatum, 2005, p. 27).

"Social barriers were set up to keep Black men in a subordinate role. These barriers, along with educational, economic, political, and social disenfranchisement, made it nearly impossible for Black males *as a group* to climb above the bottom rung of the social ladder in jobs, education, income, and political power" (Tatum, 2005, p. 27).

Gender Identity

The notion of Black masculine identity and underachievement has been addressed in some of the literature and popular press (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2000), yet the main of education research has remained silent (Davis, 2003). One reason commonly mentioned for the alienation and poor academic performance of Black males is that they perceive schooling activities as feminine and irrelevant to their masculine sense of self (Noguera, 2003). Researchers have suggested that as boys experience failure in school, they begin to look to peer groups for self-esteem and a sense of belonging (Hare & Castenell, 1985; Spencer, 1995; Taylor, 1989). Peers become an increasingly negative and central force in these youths' lives, providing recognition for students. The presence of committed and successful Black male adults in educational environments is essential for enhancing Black boys' academic and social development (Jeff, 1994; Span, 2000). This positive male presence is meant to diffuse traditional masculine behaviors and counters negative gender role socialization of Black boys.

Achievement Identity

Researchers studying motivation and achievement have demonstrated the importance of a sense of efficacy, of competence, and of a clear sense of goals and the future in shaping response to stresses (Ferguson, 1994; Markus, Cross, & Wurf, 1990; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Negative school experiences and students' awareness of teachers' perceptions of their group may lead Black males to feel less competent and less efficacious in shaping their school performance through effort, leading to negative coping reactions (Steele & Aronson, 1998).

Identification With School

Identification with school is one of the many explanations for discrepancies in school achievement among Black students (Finn, 1989; Goodenow, 1993; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osborne, 1995; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; Steele, 1992; Voelkl, 1995). Represented by engagement in the academic community (Goodenow, 1993; Osborne, 1995), achievement motivation (Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1995), a sense of school belonging and academic trust (Finn, 1989; Goodenow, 1993), and heightened self-esteem (Osborne, 1995; Steele, 1992), identification with school has been found to positively influence school achievement.

Scholars debate about the degree of evidence that supports the contention that Black adolescents are less likely to see doing well in school as something they value (Cook & Ludwig, 1997; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Studies show that students who identify with the academic culture of school are more motivated to achieve and experience higher educational gains than students espousing an ideology of disidentification (Finn, 1989; Finn & Cox, 1992).

The psychosocial processes involved in the development of identification include both behavioral and emotional components (Finn, 1989). Behaviorally, students connect to school through factors such as active classroom participation, high academic attendance, and involvement in extracurricular activities, and emotionally through a feeling of acceptance, a sense of feeling valued, and a feeling that education is valued and rewarding. Active participation in the academic community, followed by an emotional sense of school belonging and achievement, encourages identification (Finn & Cox, 1992).

However, what happens when students report feelings of alienation within the school community or fail to see an education as rewarding, as is the documented experience of many Black youth (Ford & Harris, 1996; Ogbu, 1987)? Whereas some Black students exhibit signs of identification through active involvement in sports and other extracurricular activities, an emotional sense of feeling valued within the academic community is often a source of vulnerability among these youth (Steele, 1992).

Among Black students, disidentification (often defined by an emotional detachment from school) is shaped by negative teacher expectations (Finn, 1989), academic tracking (Taylor, 1991), and limited teacher support (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). According to Steele (1992), achievement depends on "forming a relationship between oneself and the domains of schooling" (p. 616). Individuals must experience and have sustained positive beliefs about their ability to achieve to experience academic success (Steele, 1992). Further contributing to the process of disidentification is *stereotype threat*, that is, the threat or "risk of confirming, as self characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group" (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797). Stereotype threat, within the context of academics, impairs school identification and can lead students to detach their sense of self-worth from academic success, rendering school achievement relatively unimportant and unobtainable. Steele (1992) found that negative beliefs about academic ability in relation to racial stereotypes can result in lower performance on academic assessments. He reported that Black students underperformed their White counterparts under ability-diagnostic conditions but performed equally well under ability-nondiagnostic conditions. That is, the threat of confirming a stereotype appears to trigger an anxiety response in the brain if the task is associated with an assessment of ability. If

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the task is not associated with an assessment of ability (e.g., it is just a puzzle versus a subtest on an intelligence test), then the threat appears to be mediated and performance is not impaired.

Cohen et al. (2006) found that it is possible to increase the performance of minority students by engaging them in an activity designed to affirm a positive identity and a sense of "self-integrity." Two randomized field experiments tested a social-psychological intervention designed to improve minority student performance and increase our understanding of how psychological threat mediates performance in chronically evaluative real-world environments. Expecting that the risk of confirming a negative stereotype aimed at one's group could undermine academic performance in minority students by elevating their level of psychological threat, Cohen et al. (2006) developed an intervention to test whether such psychological threat could be lessened by having students reaffirm their sense of personal adequacy or self-integrity. They found that a brief in-class writing assignment designed to affirm their academic ability significantly improved the grades of Black students and reduced the racial achievement gap by 40%. These results suggest that the racial achievement gap could be ameliorated by the use of timely and targeted social-psychological interventions.

In his theoretical explanation of disidentification among Black students, Steele (1992) suggested a connection between disidentification and teacher-student relationships. Steele suggested that academic success among African American students is nurtured by teacher support. However, too often, Black students receive neither the quality nor the quantity of support needed to develop a positive identification with the academic culture of school. As a result, Black students "psychologically insulate"

(Steele, 1992) themselves from negative school experiences, thereby dis-identifying with the academic culture of school.

Studies that have employed Steele's framework to assess identification among Black students have found that the propensity toward disidentification among Black youth is heightened as students matriculate through school (Osborne, 1995). As Black students advance from junior high school to high school, they tend to detach their sense of value from traditional notions of success, one of which is schooling. This detachment makes schooling less important to students' personal identity and their willingness to identify with the traditional role of school. The lack of clear payoffs to education deprives Black males of a critical coping mechanism (Markus et al., 1990; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Although many youth are clear about the negative payoffs to dropping out, the lack of clear payoffs to persistence and well-defined pathways to success makes it difficult to invest in the future (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1997). Coming at a developmental point in which they are forming a sense of identity and goals, the transition to high school accelerates the need to make decisions about school attachment and identity. Black males may be more likely to receive negative messages from teachers in these environments about assessment of their academic competence and promise as students.

The Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships

Educating a nation of ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse children is one of the many challenges facing teachers and teacher educators. The teaching force in the United States is overwhelmingly White and female, even as the population in schools is increasingly diverse (Sleeter, 2001). In 1995, 35% of the students enrolled in public

schools were multicultural students of color (U.S. DoE, NCES, 2002) and this number is expected to grow to 46% by 2020 (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). In contrast, White teachers represent 90% of the public school teachers and 85% of the education graduates in 1999-2000 (U.S. DoE, NCES, 2002).

The demographic disparity between students and teachers suggests a need for increased attention toward multicultural teaching strategies and multicultural competency, areas that have remained relatively unexamined in the preparation of White teachers (Howard, 1999). Such demographics provide challenges and opportunities for educators striving to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

The research of Irvine (1990a) and Ladson-Billings (1994) documents the critical role that teachers play in the achievement of students of color. "Not only do teachers influence the achievement and cognitive development of African American students; they also influence their self concept and attitudes" (Irvine, 2003, p. 72). Students from culturally diverse backgrounds tend to be more dependent on teachers than do their other-race peers and tend to perform poorly in school when they do not like their teachers (Johnson & Prom-Jackson, 1986).

According to Graybill (1997), a positive relationship must exist between the student and the teacher if significant academic achievement is to occur. However, a frequent complaint of high-school students, especially for students of color, is that some teachers, particularly Caucasians, do not relate well to them. Students must find ways to communicate who they are to teachers, administrators and peers. Students must identify favorably with their teachers or they will do very poorly in school, which will lead to failure in society.

Vernon Polite (1995) argued that a major cause of academic underachievement among Black males is benign neglect from teachers and an administrative structure that does little to intervene to make sure that students are on track and getting proper guidance. Polite (1995) concluded that "it is possible to consider the education of African American males as a complex avoidance process involving parents, teachers, administrators, and the school themselves" (p. 597).

Irvine (2003) asserts that "teaching is synonymous with caring" (p. 42). Care as an essential quality of effective teachers was affirmed in a Gallup poll that developed an extensive personality profile of successful urban teachers (Van Horn, 1999). Responses in the poll revealed that of the 11 qualities presented, commitment and dedication were especially important. Irvine (2003) goes on to say that "caring comes in many forms and manifests in different ways" (p. 42). She states, "Students did not equate caring with being nice or friendly. None of them felt that they had been silenced or demonstrated resentment towards their teachers. Caring for these students meant firm, fair discipline, high standards and expectations, and an unwillingness on the part of teachers to let students 'slide by'" (p. 43).

Teacher Expectations

Children are vulnerable to teacher expectations. Research continually shows that teacher expectations of students are crucial to their performance. Low teacher expectations have been identified as a major obstacle to effective instruction for disenfranchised learners (Knapp, Shields, & Turnbull, 1995). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) suggested that teacher expectations, even when based on erroneous information, can influence the academic performance of children. The educational difficulties they

experience later in life can be correlated with a lack of motivation or encouragement from teachers while they were in elementary school. These researchers proposed that teachers' expectations act as self-fulfilling prophecies because student achievement reflects the expectations. Once teachers form expectations, they convey them to students through smiles, eye contact, and other supportive and friendly actions.

The race of the teacher may impact teacher expectations for students. Beady and Hansel (1981) noted that teacher race was strongly associated with expectations for students' future success in college, and their results revealed that Black teachers had significantly higher expectations for their Black students than did White teachers.

Research from Wilbur Brookover, of the Effective Schools Project, noted that some teachers lower their expectations based on the race, gender, or appearance of the child, or the income of the child. Teachers should not accept excuses for poor performance, nor should they develop expectations based on ethnicity or family income or any other factor unrelated to student performance (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

The educational difficulties later in life can be correlated with a lack of motivation or encouragement from teachers while they were in elementary school. If no interventions are implemented early on, this will manifest itself into learned helplessness later on in life (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) proposed that teacher expectations act as self-fulfilling prophecies because student achievement reflects the expectations.

Race of Teacher

Over the past decades, increasing attention has been given to race relations between students and their teachers in the classroom. The race of the teacher seems to

affect how teachers view Black students and what their commitment may be to the

education of Black students (Beady & Hansell, 1981; Kohl, 1991). While numerous

studies have been conducted to assess the effects of race on students and teachers and

how well they identify with one another in the classroom, the research appears to present

evidence on both sides of the issue regarding the effects of teacher race on student

success, particularly students of color.

Irvine (2003) states,

It does matter who the teacher is. Indeed, we teach who we are. Teachers bring to
their work values, opinions, ad beliefs; their prior socialization and present
experiences; and their race, gender, ethnicity, and social class. These attributes and
characteristics influence teachers' perceptions of themselves as professionals. (p. 46)

She goes on to say, "Teachers have preferences for the type of student whom they want

to teach. They do not treat all students the same or have similar expectations for their

success or achievement" (p. 46).

In addition to race and other characteristics of the teacher, Irvine (2003) also

states, "It does matter who is being taught—the student. The student's age,

developmental level, race, ethnicity, physical, and emotional states/prior experiences,

interests, family and home life, learning preferences, attitudes about school, and a myriad

of other variables influence the teaching and learning processes" (p. 47).

As noted by Irvine (2003), there are numerous characteristics of both the teacher

and the student that affect the student-teacher relationship. The race of the teacher does

appear to have influence in the process of teaching and learning. Researchers present

arguments on both sides of the issue. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), some White

teachers are excellent instructors of students of color, while some teachers of color are

ineffective with culturally diverse students (Irvine, 2003, p. 53). Meier, Stewart, and

England (1989) investigated the relationship between the presence of African American teachers and African American students' access to equal education. In investigating the question, "Does having African American educators have an impact on African American student's school success?" the researchers concluded, "The single most important factor for all forms of second generation discrimination is the proportion of African American teachers" (p. 140). The authors concluded that, "African American teachers are without a doubt the key to students academic success" (p. 6).

While researchers point to the impact of the race of the teacher in the teacher-student relationship, particularly for students of color, they do not imply that only teachers of color can teach students of color. Increasing the number of teachers of color does not, in any way, imply devaluing White teachers. "A diverse teaching force makes for a strong and effective teaching corps. Creating a highly trained, multi-ethnic teaching force cannot be solved without careful, deliberate, complex, long-term, and well financed planning" (Irvine, 2003, p. 61).

Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Instruction

Teaching strategies must be student-focused if Black students are to stay involved. The culture and history of Black students seems to be missing from their schooling experience (Ford, 1993). Black students appear to be separated from their history and literature (Allsup, 1997). Irvine has suggested that what happens between African American students and their teachers represents a lack of "cultural synchronization" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) argued for the centrality of a culturally responsive approach for helping students who have not been served well by our nation's public

schools. She suggested that the use of culturally relevant instruction as a strategy for reaching Black students and improving school success has been shown to be effective for addressing the academic needs of students of color. According to Ladson-Billings, teachers create conditions for effective learning when they recognize the importance of culture and make use of students' culture in specific activities. Culture covers many aspects, some of which are more important for teachers to know than others because they have direct implications for teaching and learning (Gay, 2000).

A culturally responsive approach involves teachers using their students' culture as an important source of the students' education. Culturally responsive teaching asserts that specific knowledge about cultural diversity is crucial to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse student populations (Lynch, 2006). Part of this knowledge about cultural diversity includes understanding the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups (King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1997). However, it is important to note that one should not assume that all students from the same cultural background learn the same way.

"A culturally responsive approach expands what students are exposed to and challenges teachers to do whatever is within their power to help students embrace high expectations for themselves and to help them to reach those expectations despite what others expect of them" (Tatum, 2005, p. 78). Although few studies have examined the relationship between culture and education among adolescents, it is clear from the available research that using an instructional approach disconnected from students' culture creates student resistance (Foster, 1997; Hale, 1994; Hollins, 1996; Hudley, 1995; Lipman, 1995; Tatum, 2000). Teachers must infuse curriculum with culturally relevant

materials. In doing so, "the students will not view their lived experiences outside of school as being marginalized inside it" (Tatum, 2005, p. 75). In spite of evidence in support of a culturally responsive approach, policy makers, school administrators, and classroom teachers have not yet called the widespread implementation of culturally responsive teaching as a way to promote the achievement of Black males (Tatum, 2005).

School Climate

The link between school climate and student achievement has been documented (Irvine, 1990b; Polite, 2000) but requires much more research specifically focused on Black boys. Black students desire and need to be loved for themselves and to be a vital part of all activity (Montgomery, 1970). If a climate of opportunity is provided, every Black student would be a participant (Montgomery, 1970). According to Goodenow and Grady (1993), increasing a sense of school belonging (i.e., perceptions of being liked, accepted, included, respected, and encouraged to participate in school and classroom activities) may reduce the school dropout rate among Black students and other students as well. What happens when students report feelings of alienation within the school community or fail to see an education as rewarding, as is the documented experience of many Black children? (Ford & Harris, 1996; Ogbu, 1987).

Studies show that students themselves yearn for deeper engagement throughout their education (Kushman, 1997). Research has demonstrated that urban schools can promote high achievement and engagement of students when they provide students with high expectations, quality teaching, and approaches that are both highly structured and personalized (Lee & Bryk, 1989; Lee & Smith, 1995; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1997). In spite of these findings, there is growing evidence that Black male disengagement with

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schooling develops in the early grades and continues to intensify as they progress through school (Carter, 2003).

Research on motivation finds that adolescents' engagement and performance in school declines markedly as they move from elementary school to junior high and high school, and urban students are most at risk. As students make the transition to high school, they must cope with dramatic increases in school size, the structure of an academic schedule, and the complexity of school environments (Felner & Adan, 1989). The move to high school also involves increases in academic demands. Adolescents also face less time with teachers and they are required to learn more in concentrated periods of time, often in more traditional classrooms with less opportunity for teacher-student interaction, hands-on activities, and group work (Eccles et al., 1993).

This is particularly marked in urban areas in which most students attend large high schools. In urban areas, students often experience marked declines in their grades, involvement, and perception of the quality of their school environments as they move into secondary schools (Reyes, Gillock, & Kobus, 1994; Roderick, 1993; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994; Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Simmons, Black, & Zhou, 1991). Evidence suggests that minority males have the greatest academic difficulty following the move from middle-level schools and high schools (Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981; Roderick & Camburn, 1999; Simmons et al., 1991). According to Davidson (1996), high schools are too often environments in which Black males are marginalized and unsupported, thus decreasing motivation and sending messages that undermine a positive sense of competence and efficacy in school settings.

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These dramatic changes in school performance as students move to high school suggest that declines in engagement in school may not simply be a process of adolescence but may be strongly shaped by the academic and social environments that students encounter in urban high schools.

Discipline

Cultural differences are often the source of disagreements between Black students and their teachers (Irvine, 1990b). "If White teachers are unaware of the cultural differences, they may view students' behavior negatively" (Irvine, 1990b, p. 61). Teachers bring their own culture and values with them into the classroom, and when faced with conflicts, they tend to judge students' behavior against their own set of values. Therefore, the teacher's perceptions and behaviors can severely impede learning in the classroom. Cultural conflicts tend to occur most when the middle-class teacher, who is frequently White and female, considers Black male behavior as disruptive or acting out.

In many school districts throughout the United States, Black males are more likely than any other group to be suspended or expelled from school (Meier et al., 1989). Norms regarding what behaviors are considered appropriate vary across cultures, and yet school personnel tend to judge students' actions through a narrow, White, mainstream lens. Many assessment procedures are deemed unreliable and subjective (Gresham, 1993; Motta, Little, & Tobin, 1993). The ambiguity of the process is exacerbated by historical racist beliefs and practices (Children's Defense Fund, 1975) reflected in a "punishment paradigm" (Maag, 2001), which includes zero-tolerance policies, corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion. These strategies target Black students at disproportionately high rates (McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Huang, 1992; Skiba, 2002).

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The combination of historical racism and extremely ambiguous definitions, policies, and practices places the most vulnerable students at increased risk of inappropriate labeling and isolation.

Ability Grouping

Ability grouping of Black boys in elementary schools also appears to have negative consequences on their achievement levels. Although much evidence on Black boys is not readily available, a few studies point in this direction. Simmons and Grady (1992) reported that Black boys in the early grades were over-enrolled in lower level instructional groups. For instance, throughout the third grade, Black boys perform equally well as their peers on district-wide assessment in reading and math. Beginning in fourth grade, however, Black boys experience a sharp decline in their test scores. The percentage of Black males in the top reading group dropped from 23% in Grades 1 and 4, to 12% in Grade 6. These declines correspond to the ability grouping of Black boys in which they have access only to homogeneous low-level groupings. When elementary Black boys have unequal access to the curriculum, achievement inequalities in the later grades are not surprising (Davis, 2003).

The Role and Presence of Racism

Americans spend a great deal of time defining themselves in terms of race. Race both defines and divides U.S. citizens, and in a curious way, unites U.S. citizens if only because U.S. citizens still think it matters (Morganthau, 1995). There are various perspectives noted in the literature in terms of defining race. Race has been defined historically as a biological concept (Van den Berghe, 1967). Woolfolk (1995) defined

race as a group who shares common biological traits that are seen as self-defining by the people of the group. Others define race as a grouping of individuals who display the same phenotypic skin color by which people in the United States identify themselves and are identified by others (Coleman et al., 1966). According to Omi and Winant (1995), race is a socio-historical concept.

Race is a powerful element in the schooling of African Americans (Pang & Sablan, 1995). In recent years, many educators have defined it from a social context (Hardert, Parker, Pfuhl, & Anderson, 1974; Myrdal, 1944; Nieto, 1992; Omi & Winant, 1993; West, 1994). Brookover (1985) noted that American education has been relatively successful if the goals of education include maintaining the differences between the races.

Racism is defined in *Merriam-Webster's American English Dictionary* (2003) as the "belief that certain races of people are by birth and nature superior to others" (*racism*). Racism is any attitude, action, or institutional structure that subordinates a person or group because of their color (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1970). In Nieto (1992), Meyer Weinburg described racism as a system of privilege and penalty based upon one's race.

Nieto (1992) described individual racism as a personal belief that people of one group are inferior to people of another because of physical traits. Institutional racism is manifested through established laws, customs, and practices that reflect and produce racial inequalities in society (Nieto, 1992). Cultural racism is the belief in the inferiority of the culture of a group of people or even the belief that they have no real culture (Nieto, 1992). Racism impacts how teachers respond to Black students in the classroom. Deeply

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held assumptions about inferior intelligence among students of color represent one of the most enduring legacies of Western racism. Despite exposure of their fallacious nature by Gould (1981) and numerous other scholars, these beliefs have been institutionalized in the policies and practices of our public schools (Steele, Perry, & Hilliard, 2004). Educators generally interpret racially diverse students' performance through White middle-class normative parameters of competence. Because Black students' performance does not always align with such parameters, it is often regarded as deficient.

Power and hegemony play a significant role in the educational experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students in U.S. schools. McLaren (1989) defines hegemony as the "maintenance of the domination not by sheer exercise of force *but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the chvrch, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family*" (p. 173; emphasis in original). Hegemony is difficult to study because it is generally invisible to the members of cultural communities. An insidious feature of hegemony is that it requires that the "oppressed unknowingly participat[e] in their own oppression" (McLaren, 1989, p. 173).

The job ceiling appears to be a significant factor affecting academic achievement. It continues to generate ambivalent attitudes toward schooling which result in a lack of serious effort to maximize achievement. The impact of the job ceiling on the Black view of schooling varies by generation. The older generations of relatively uneducated parents and grandparents did not, and in some places still do not, perceive the discrepancy between the job ceiling and schooling because their own occupations and educational aspirations and expectations were well within the range of opportunities available to

Blacks under the caste system. However, the influence of formal education itself is largely responsible for this generational difference. On the one hand, Blacks were asked to compete with Whites in acquiring academic skills, which would presumably prepare them for similar roles in adult life. However, when they succeeded in achieving qualifications similar to those of Whites, they were denied equal rewards in terms of occupation, wages, and the like. The persistence of such a frustrating experience over generations led to the evolution of the belief that education does not help Blacks to achieve the same degree of self-improvement as Whites. Blacks came to believe that in the area of jobs, promotions, wages, and social position in the community, they are judged not as individuals, based on education and ability, but as Blacks. They responded to this situation by repudiating the rhetorically and explicitly expressed educational opportunities of the schools and society. The repudiation took various forms, such as truancy, lack of serious efforts in and attitudes toward school, refusal to do class work or assignments, delinquency, and even early withdrawal from school altogether. In other words, it is not logical to expect that Blacks and Whites would exert the same energy and perform alike in school when the caste system, through the job ceiling, consistently underutilizes Black training and ability and under-rewards Blacks for their education.

Race and racism manifest in the conflict that often exists between institutions and Black males because those in the establishment lack understanding, or misunderstand, the cultural-specific behaviors exhibited by many Black males. Schools are hostile and unpredictable environments for many Black males, who come to view themselves as non-achievers and non-participants in society because of what happens there (Tatum, 2005). Institutions fail to acknowledge or adequately respond to the needs of Black males.

Instead, schools blame them for what is really the institutions' own failure. This has caused many Black youth to respond by disengaging from school or dropping out altogether. Educational systems have fallen short of addressing the academic, cultural, emotional, and social needs of Black males. Many schools that serve students from racially, ethnically, economically, and linguistically diverse neighborhoods have the least qualified teachers and administrators, inadequate physical resources, and are buffeted by violence in their communities (Ansel & McCabe, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Klingner, Harry, & Felton, 2003).

It is clear that several issues appear to have a negative impact upon the schooling and achievement of Black males. These include, but are not limited to, racial identity, the nature of the relationship between the students and their teachers, the overall climate of their school, and the involvement of others in supporting their success in school.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to seek the perspectives of adolescent Black males regarding their schooling experience and achievement in an attempt to better understand the experience and the complexities of persistent achievement gaps between students of color and their White peers. The primary question that guided this study was, How do adolescent Black males describe their schooling experience and the impact that experience has had on their achievement and success in school?

Qualitative Methods

This was a qualitative study using focus groups and pre-existing data from 1:1 semi-structured interviews in an attempt to understand the school experiences of Black males. Qualitative approaches were selected because they are particularly appropriate when investigating understudied populations, since existing theory and measures may be questionable or inadequate (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

This study was formulated in a manner consistent with phenomenology, a school of philosophical thought that underpins all of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). The phenomenological research method is unique in that it is employed to locate underlying themes or patterns for the observed event in a search for structure and meaning (Beshai,

1971). Phenomenology focuses on experience and the interpretation of that experience, with specific emphasis on the essence or structure of an experience (phenomenon).

The general format of the phenomenological method may be summarized as (a) gathering a full set of naive descriptions from persons who had the particular research experience; (b) analyzing the descriptions in order to grasp common elements that make the experience what it is; and (c) describing or giving a clear, accurate and articulate account of the phenomenon so that it can be understood by others (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Since phenomenological studies are not driven by preconceived theoretical constructs and research hypotheses, but rather by a desire to explicate a given phenomenon, the researcher can expect to be deeply immersed in data, which may seem obtuse. The researcher should be open to allowing the phenomenon to reveal itself. As such, rigorous attention to method is important, so that the revealed experiences are uncontaminated by prior learning and bias (Davey, 1999).

This research methodology was congruent with the principles of constructivism. Constructivism's particular contribution to eliciting and recreating student voices is its recognition of multiple realities, multiply constructed by individuals and groups who ground their constructions in the particulars of their own experience. Constructivism seeks no single "true" social reality. As a formal model of research, constructivism pursues insights into the webs and patterns of influence that operate on individual lives, drawing from those insights "pattern theories" of human interaction in human social systems (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

According to Patton (1990), this type of research is based on

the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon

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commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon. The assumption of essence, like the ethnographer's assumption that culture exists and is important, becomes the defining characteristic of a purely phenomenological study. (p. 70)

Prior beliefs about a phenomenon of interest are temporarily put aside, or bracketed, so they do not interfere with seeing or sensing the elements or structure of the phenomenon. When belief is suspended, consciousness itself becomes heightened and can be examined in the same way that an object of consciousness can be examined (Merriam, 1998).

"For social scientists . . . experience is a key term" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 17-18). As education is a "form of experience for students . . . narrative is the best way of representing and understanding" it as "both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 17-18). In interpretive research, education is considered a process and school a lived experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. They argue, "Experience happens narratively and therefore, educational experiences should be studied narratively" (p. 18). They further state, "If we understand the world narratively, then it makes sense to study the world narratively" (p. 18). They conclude, "Narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences" (p. 18).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) ask, "What is the experience of interest to you as a narrative inquirer?" (p. 124). Clandinin warns that "being able to say what phenomenon a narrative inquiry is about is not an easily answered question at the beginning of an inquiry" (p. 125). Narrative inquiry provides a way to explore the meaning of systems operating within social constructs such as the educational system. The inquiry process allows for meaning to emerge through the personal stories of those involved in the

process. Narrative inquiry carries a sense of a search, a "re-search," and searching again. It is a continual reformation of an inquiry rather than a problem definition or a solution (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The reflections and life stories of people of color are utilized in Critical Race Theory as a way in which to build theories about the nature of race and racism in the United States (Solórzano, 1997). The major contribution of critical theory to the search for student voice focuses on helping students examine the patterns in their lives in such a way as to discern the nearly hidden structures that shape their own and others' lives. "Within such a framework, students can be prompted to articulate for themselves the hidden curriculum and the near invisible structures of racism, classism, and sexism that act to undermine their sense of self-worth and self-esteem" (Lincoln, 1995, p. 92).

In this study, the perspectives shared by adolescent Black males allowed me to examine the perceptions of their school experience and the impact of these experiences upon their achievement and success in school. The use of the participants' words was an attempt to ensure that their voices are represented accurately and honestly. Marshall and Rossman (1989) encouraged qualitative researchers to use participants' words as primary data to understand their perceptions of their worlds.

Self as the Research Instrument

I came to this research experience with great interest, enthusiasm, and passion! I am a White female on a journey toward increased racial consciousness. The formal journey began in 2002, in a professional development session entitled *Beyond Diversity*, a 2-day seminar developed and presented by Glenn Singleton, founder and President of Pacific Educational Group in San Francisco, California. *Beyond Diversity* is an

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introduction to *Courageous Conversations About Race* (Singleton & Linton, 2006). One of the conditions of *Courageous Conversations About Race* is to "establish a racial context that is personal, local, and immediate" (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 73). Very early in the training, Glenn asked participants to consider, "To what degree does race impact my life?" Like many Whites, I judged that percentage to reflect the percentage of time I interact with persons of color. The number I chose to represent that single factor was 40%. Glenn proceeded to walk us through numerous experiences that illuminated the fact that race impacts every aspect of my life, 100% of the time. "Because people are defined by their racial identity in this society, race is constantly present and having an impact on your experience and perspective" (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 76). That is to say, "race disappears only when you no longer have your skin, and thus, the omnipresent skin that you are in defines your omnipresent racial impact" (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 76). I now understand that when I chose 40% to represent the impact of race in my life, I was actually representing my *racial consciousness* rather than *racial impact* (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 76). Hence, my journey began, and I continue to strive to increase my racial consciousness. The real work of *Courageous Conversation* lies in the will and ability of participants to participate in racial self-examination. The tendency is to examine the attitudes and behaviors of others but not to examine our own. Personally, I must examine what it means to be a White woman. Prior to *Courageous Conversations,* I had never given that question much thought. More recently, I frequently consider the role and presence of Whiteness in me, in my life and in society. I am just beginning to understand *Whiteness* and the fact that being White means I benefit from "*White*

privilege" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 78). Prior to 2002, I had never heard that term before, much less examined ways in which I benefit from it on a daily basis.

The *Courageous Conversation* Theoretical Framework includes three aspects: *Self-Examination*, Exploration of *Critical Race Theory* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), and *Professional Application*. The work focuses primarily on the exploration of race as a critical, yet often unexamined, factor in achievement gaps. Glenn Singleton works with school districts throughout the country to expose and attempt to eliminate the racial predictability in achievement gaps. Glenn first came to Connecticut as the keynote speaker for Connecticut's *Closing the Achievement Gap* Summit in March 2002. At that time, Glenn encouraged Connecticut school districts to isolate race in discussing the racial achievement gaps in their schools and districts. "Ultimately, educators need to view the experiences of students, work of colleagues, patterns in achievement data, school policies, and effective ways of engaging parents and community through the lens of race" (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 78). Not accustomed to discussing race openly and honestly, schools are much more likely to discuss factors such as poverty and social class.

The State Education Resource Center (SERC) committed to continuous professional development for its staff centered on *Courageous Conversation About Race* in order to develop the ability of the SERC Consultants to guide school districts in examining race, working to eliminate institutional racism in education, and developing equity in schooling in order to eliminate the racial achievement gap. Beginning in the fall of 2004, SERC expanded this initiative beyond the Consultants to encompass the entire SERC staff. Presently, all SERC staff participates in *Courageous Conversation* on a

regular basis, both with and without Glenn's direct facilitation. Every member of the SERC staff is assigned to a *Courageous Conversations* group that meets at least monthly.

My participation in *Courageous Conversation* has opened my eyes! I am now more aware of and conscious of the various racial aspects of my life and of the lives of others. My journey to be anti-racist and to become an anti-racist leader has just begun. My racial awareness and consciousness grow on a daily basis. As my racial awareness and consciousness increase, they exacerbate my concern about the impact of race on the schooling experiences of children of color. I reflect on the fact that I benefited from growing up White in a society in which I was privileged to feel secure in that racial identity. I recognize that I benefited greatly from a schooling system that was designed primarily to serve White children. My increasing racial consciousness led me to consider this fact more deliberately as we discussed the achievement gaps that continue to plague Connecticut and states throughout the country. I reflected on that fact as I listened to the data that illuminate the fact that the gaps continue to be the largest for Black males in Connecticut. I reflected on the fact that while completely unaware as a child, my schooling experience differed greatly from that of students of color.

Over the past several years, prior to my exposure to *Courageous Conversation*, I have developed very meaningful friendships with persons of color. These friendships have been true blessings in my life. They have enriched the tapestry of my life. It is through these friendships that I have grown to value, honor, and embrace the diversity of others. Due to some combination of these rich friendships and my involvement with *Courageous Conversations*, I have developed an increased ability to engage in interracial conversations. There was a time in my life when race would never enter into a

conversation. Nowadays, conversations about race, both intraracial and interracial, are a regular occurrence. While my comfort level continues to wax and wane, I am more comfortable with each interaction. It is exciting to broaden my perspective beyond what I have known in my previously exclusively White, largely insular life.

As part of the *Beyond Diversity* seminar, I had to write my racial autobiography. It was an enlightening experience for me. It was the first time that I realized that my childhood was almost completely devoid of interactions with persons of color. As I now reflect upon the richness that my friendships with persons of other races and ethnicities have brought to my life, I think about the past with some regret that I did not have these opportunities earlier in my life. On the other hand, I am grateful that they have now become such a rewarding part of my journey through life. I cannot imagine my life now without the diversity that I experience and embrace.

I have learned so much in the past several years, both in my formal study of race and its impact on society and in my personal relationships with persons of color. In spite of all that I have learned, I know there is still so much to learn! I have embarked on this enlightening journey and it is clear to me that there is no turning back! I continue to discover daily the many ways in which race has an impact upon my life and that of those of different races, ethnicities, and cultures. My hope is that I can apply my increased awareness and consciousness in positive ways in my personal and professional lives in order to enrich my life and the lives of others.

I have developed a special interest in contributing to the body of knowledge with regard to creating schools that embrace diversity and better understand the factors that are

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necessary to create high-quality, equitable educational opportunities for students of color, specifically Black males.

The Sample

This study utilized "open sampling." As such, the sample size emerged as the study evolved (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, p. 93). A phenomenological study usually involves identifying and locating participants who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon being discussed. "The participants are the experiential experts on the phenomenon being studied" (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, pp. 92-93). The theory subsequently emerges from the data so there is no viable way of determining sample dimensions beforehand. Consistent with an open sampling methodology, participants were selected opportunistically, according to both convenience and willingness to participate.

Thirty-two adolescent Black male high-school students participated in this qualitative study. Students participating in the 1:1 semi-structured interviews were at least 18 years of age. These young men signed informed-consent forms in order to participate in this study. Participants under age 18 signed informed-consent forms and also had an informed-consent form signed by a parent(s)/guardian. Participants in the focus groups were between the ages of 15 and 18. The same procedures were followed to obtain informed consent as outlined above.

Recruitment of the Sample

Students were recruited to participate in the study via my professional collaboration with school personnel at two urban high schools in Connecticut and with

the founder and facilitator of the *Diversity Dream Team*. The participants represented six school districts, including the two urban districts and the four districts represented by the students of the *Diversity Dream Team*. Table 1 provides an overview of the demographics of the six districts.

Through SERC's *Courageous Conversations about Race* work, I met the assistant principal of the high school in District B. He established the *Young Men's Leadership Group (YMLG),* at the high school in order to give Black and Latino males an opportunity to participate in a club dedicated to character, service, and leadership. The *Young Men's Leadership Group* was formed after he participated in the Black Men's Forum, an organized group of Black male professionals convened by the deputy commissioner of the Connecticut State Department of Education and sponsored by the State Education Resource Center (SERC) and the Connecticut State Department of Education in 2005.

Table 1

District Profiles

District	Per capita income (USD)	District reference group	Free/ reduced lunch (%)	Non-English speaking (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	White (%)	Grad. rate (%)
A	40,537	B	1.9	1.6	0.9	1.2	94.3	99.6
B	25,989	G	34.6	3.3	21.4	18.1	54.0	93.2
C	25,671	I	65.7	23.5	33.4	46.0	16.5	73.6
D	29,919	D	6.8	6.6	4.5	4.1	84.4	98.0
E	29,893	D	9.8	9.7	2.7	6.6	86.4	93.4
F	21,121	H	38.7	16.8	25.6	20.6	49.2	91.5

The Black men who attended were challenged to do more to support young Black males in their schools and communities. Subsequently, the assistant principal recruited young men of color from his high school who had experienced behavioral and/or academic challenges. These young men may not typically have been recruited to participate in school clubs. He wanted to provide them with an opportunity that might not otherwise be afforded them and to use this opportunity to develop their leadership skills.

During the 2006-2007 school year, I was privileged to be invited to participate in a weekly group comprised of Black and Latino/Hispanic males at the high school in District C. The school psychologist, a Black female, and an English teacher, a Black male, co-facilitated the group. Because of the relationship I built throughout the course of the year with these two faculty members, they were very open when I asked to conduct focus groups with two groups of students at their school as part of my study.

Finally, for the past 2 years, I attended several meetings of the *Diversity Dream Team*. Based on that experience, I was interested in hearing the perspectives of the Black males. The students in the *Diversity Dream Team* focus group represented four public school districts (Districts A, D, E, and F) and one Catholic, parochial high school.

The Diversity Dream Team is a group of high-school students who meet monthly to engage in interracial dialogue, participate in activities facilitated by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). They also read and discussed selected books throughout the year related to race, equity, and social justice. Since 1994, the Southern Connecticut Conference of Schools, which consists of 23 high schools in urban, suburban, and rural districts, has sponsored this faculty/student diversity training program, designed to bring

face-to-face interactive learning experiences between students of different economic, cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds. These face-to-face meetings have offered students and faculty opportunities to learn the importance of understanding diversity as a means of meeting the communication challenges in 21st-century schools. A major goal of the program is the implementation and publication of each school's action plan to reduce racial isolation and enhance student diversity through improved learning experiences.

In order to achieve the purposive sample, the students represent a cross section of factors including class levels (i.e., college prep), varied grade standings (GPA), students with and without a discipline record, and those both identified and not identified as students receiving special education services.

Data Collection

In qualitative research studies, "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). Data are mediated through the researcher rather than through an inanimate inventory, instrument, or computer. Interviews may be either individual or group based, which may include a "focus group" (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, p. 96). Primary data for this study were collected through facilitated focus groups. Secondary data from 1:1 semi-structured interviews also informed the study. A separate set of questions was used for the focus groups and the 1:1 semi-structured interviews (Appendix). Both the focus group sessions and the 1:1 semi-structured interviews were videotaped. I later viewed the tapes and personally transcribed the data.

Semi-structured Interviews

The study also included secondary data obtained from interviews that I conducted during the 2006-2007 school year as an extension of my work as a *Courageous Conversations* coach at the high school in District C. I conducted the 1:1 semi-structured interviews in order to allow the students to share their perceptions about their overall schooling experience and achievement. Open-ended interview questions encouraged the students to answer in their own words and in greater depth than would have been possible through a survey. These interviews were the result of a request by the superintendent of District C, who expressed a desire to involve students to a greater degree in the *Courageous Conversations* work being done in the district by the District Equity Leadership Team. He expressed concern that the work had not yet reached the level of students. I was the *Courageous Conversations* coach in his school district for 3 years, a collaboration through my professional role at the State Education Resource Center (SERC) and in collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with small groups of five to six adolescent Black male high-school students. Consistent with the goal of qualitative research to allow participants to describe their experience from their own viewpoints and in their own words (Morrow & Smith, 2000), questions were open-ended and void of psychological jargon to avoid imposing researcher bias or existing constructs on the participants (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, & Johnson, 1997).

Five focus group sessions were conducted. Two focus groups comprised of six students each took place with students from the *Young Men's Leadership Group (YMLG)*

at the high school in District B. Two focus groups, also comprised of six students each, took place at the high school in district C. Both Districts B and C are urban districts. One focus group comprised of five students took place with students who participate in the *Diversity Dream Team*. These five students represent four high schools in Districts A, D, E, and F. The focus groups were conducted at the high schools in Districts B and C and at the Jewish Community Center, the typical location of the *Diversity Dream Team* meetings. Each focus group lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, and all sessions were videotaped.

The focus groups were facilitated by persons of color. This eliminated the potential concern that, as a White female, I may have had an impact on the students' comfort level in discussing their school experiences and achievement. A Black female served as the moderator for each group. She is a Consultant at the State Education Resource Center (SERC). She is a member of SERC's *Initiative on Diversity in Education* team and is the moderator of *Black Perspective*, a weekly television program on Connecticut's NBC affiliate (WVIT). She has many years of experience moderating and interviewing. The assistant moderator, also a Black female, is a clinical psychologist who, until recently, was the school psychologist at the high school in District C. I originally met her through SERC's *Courageous Conversations About Race* consortium. She was a member of the District Equity Leadership Team and I was the *Courageous Conversations* coach. In July 2007, she left the high school to join Pacific Educational Group (PEG) as an Associate. She currently serves as the Regional Director for PEG's work in Connecticut. She serves as a liaison between PEG and SERC to coordinate *Beyond Diversity* training and the *Courageous Conversations About Race* Consortium.

Finally, the recorder, a Black male, is a SERC Consultant who works on various SERC initiatives and assists in coordinating SERC's Black Mens' Forum. Both SERC Consultants have also participated in *Courageous Conversations about Race* (Singleton & Linton, 2006) and serve as coaches to District Equity Leadership Teams.

Procedures

In order to ensure consistency in the process, I met with the two interviewers and the recorder prior to the focus groups. I provided them with a copy of the research proposal for this study, as well as the Application to the Andrews University Institutional Review Board, in order to ensure that they were fully aware of and informed of the purposes of the study, the background of the problem, the research question, the existing literature, and the research methodology being used. In addition, I reviewed with them some critical aspects in conducting ethical research. I obtained this information from the book series, *The Focus Group Kit* by David L. Morgan and Richard A. Krueger (Krueger, 1998; Morgan, 1998). Particular emphasis was given to *Focus Group Kit 1: The Focus Group Guidebook* and *Focus Group Kit 4: Moderating Focus Groups*.

I also discussed with each interviewer the complexities of the *interviewer-respondent phenomenon*. In particular, I discussed the fact that both parties bring biases, predispositions, attitudes, and physical characteristics that influence the interaction and the data elicited. I stressed the need to be nonjudgmental, sensitive, and respectful of the respondents (Merriam, 1998).

A different set of questions was used for the 1:1 semi-structured interviews and the focus groups. The same set of 14 questions was used for each focus group. However,

the moderators asked probing and clarifying questions as needed as the interviews progressed.

At the start of each focus group session, the students signed in and completed a demographic sheet. The moderator read an introduction to the focus group, which covered the purpose of the study and outlined the procedures for the session. The students were told that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they could terminate their participation at any time.

The moderator asked each interview question in order while the co-moderator completed a field notes guide. The recorder recorded students' answers on flip charts posted throughout the room. Each session was videotaped.

Data Analysis

I viewed the videotapes from the 1:1 semi-structured interviews and the focus group sessions. While viewing the tapes, I transcribed the students' verbatim responses. Miles and Huberman (1994) have developed numerous methods for analyzing data from several cases or sites. "The methods range from simple to complex, from descriptive to explanatory, and all involve developing matrices and other visual aids for displaying data across sites" (Merriam, 1998, p. 195). Consistent with their methods, I developed several matrices to organize data as a means of developing meaning from recurring patterns and themes found in the data.

Data analysis occurred in two phases. First, once the students' responses were recorded, I reviewed the transcripts from each 1:1 interview and the focus groups to look for emerging themes and patterns. I then used a color-coding system to code each transcript in order to identify the major themes and patterns. My analysis was guided by

the following questions: (a) What are the major themes in the data, as defined by recurring phrases or topics? and (b) What are the specific quotes that confirm or disconfirm findings regarding the major themes and patterns in the data?

Once all of the transcripts were color coded to correspond to the themes that emerged, I created a matrix for each theme. The major themes were considered to be those that appeared most frequently in the student responses. In the matrix, I recorded the verbatim responses for each 1:1 semi-structured interview and the five focus groups. Finally, I combined the categories into the broad themes that became the basis to report the results of the study.

Finally, I combined the verbatim responses from both the 1:1 semi-structured interviews and the five focus groups by themes in order to develop a fictitious focus group that combined to represent the perspectives of the 32 students.

Trustworthiness

The interviews were videotaped to enhance trustworthiness. I viewed the tapes and personally transcribed the data as a way to become more personally familiar with the young men's stories and the data. Listening to and viewing the taped responses of the participants also afforded me opportunities to process how the young men were responding, in addition to what they were saying. I was able to capture the paralinguistic aspects of their responses, such as facial cues, conversational pauses, emotional expressions, and body language. This information, combined with the semantic content (i.e., words) of the conversations, assisted me in interpreting the identification of major themes and patterns in the data.

Merriam (1998) suggests six basic strategies to enhance the validity of qualitative research (p. 204). *Peer examination* involves asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). I requested that the two moderators and the recorder read the results and discussion to ensure that I had accurately captured what they heard from the students in my analysis and writing.

Eisner (1998) discusses the criteria for judging the success of qualitative studies. He states, "Qualitative research becomes believable because of its coherence, insight, and instrument utility. We are persuaded by its 'weight', by the coherence of the case and by the cogency of the interpretation" (p. 39). Eisner further states, "Coherence refers to the tightness of the argument presented. Does the story make sense? To what extent have multiple data sources been used to give credence to the interpretation that has been made?" (p. 53). The multiple data sources, in the form of several focus groups and individual interviews, increase the trustworthiness of the story told by the students.

Generalizability

Qualitative studies are full of opportunities for generalization (Eisner, 1998, p. 207). "Generalizing can be regarded not only as going beyond the information given, but also as transferring what has been learned from one situation or task to another" (Eisner, 1998, p. 198). Eisner says that transfer is necessary because situations or tasks will not be identical. That is, some features of the situations will always differ and therefore require generalization.

Because qualitative writing is often vivid and concrete, its capacity for generating images is particularly strong. We generalize images when we use them to search for and find features of the world that match or approximate the images we have acquired

(Eisner, 1998). Eisner (1998) states, "One of the most useful of human abilities is the ability to learn from the experience of others. We do not need to learn everything first-hand. We listen to story-tellers and learn about how things were, and what we have been told to make decisions about what will be" (p. 202).

In qualitative studies, it is up to the reader to determine whether the research findings fit the situation in which they work. The study offers considerations to be shared, discussed, reflected upon, debated, and acted upon as appropriate. Because teaching is an art, not a science, and as such, varies by context, generalizations in education need to be treated as ideas for consideration. This study offers considerations to the reader based upon the perspectives shared by the Black male students about their schooling experience. It provides images that may assist educators to understand how Black males experience schooling. Based upon those images and an increased understanding of their perspectives, educators may learn ways to meet the needs of Black males.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to seek the perspectives of adolescent Black males regarding their schooling experience and achievement in an attempt to better understand the complexities of persistent achievement gaps between students of color and their White peers. The study of achievement gaps, which have historically been predictable by race, is not new. For decades, researchers have examined the issue, and numerous theories have been proposed to account for these gaps. However, very few studies have been conducted in which the very students who are being studied are invited to participate, in a meaningful way, in order to inform the research and school improvement.

Academic achievement gaps persist despite decades of research. I recently attended a conference at which I heard a university professor state his belief that perhaps it is inaccurate to refer to the gaps as *achievement gaps*, but rather as *opportunity gaps* that result in the wide gaps in achievement between students of color and their White peers. He argued that gaps in opportunities to access high-quality education represent significant inequity in our schooling system and it is this inequity, both pervasive and persistent over decades, that results in the wide gaps in achievement between students of color and their White peers.

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The Power of the Students' Stories

A qualitative research design was selected because of the desire to study the issue of racial achievement gaps narratively. The richness of the study is in the students' stories about their schooling experience. The narratives told a story—their story. Stories serve a powerful psychic function for minority communities.

> Philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard discusses the concept of the *differend*, which helps to explain the value of narratives for marginalized people. The *differend* occurs when a concept such as justice acquires conflicting meaning for two groups. Narrative provides a language to bridge the gaps in imagination and conception that give rise to *differend*. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 44)

"Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence or blame themselves for their predicament. Stories give them a voice and reveal that others have similar experiences" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 43). Powerful stories may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence, thus reminding us of our common humanity.

Critical Race Theory (CRT), an emerging field of inquiry, has the potential to serve as both a framework and a tool for critique and analysis in K-12 education research. As Lynn and Parker (2006) note,

> Critical race studies in education scholars, whose work focuses on the lives of marginalized students, demonstrate how CRT can be used to give voice to students who would otherwise remain nameless and voiceless. and brought to life, but CRT helps to connect these experiences to the experiences of others sharing similar plights. It also illuminates the ways in which these students' experiences with oppression symbolize important social, cultural, and political struggles in larger society. This is important given our society's tendency to blame children of color and their families for their failure in school when schools are woefully inadequate and lacking the necessary resources to help the majority of children become successful in a larger society. (p. 277)

Children's views of the world do not necessarily reflect the view of the dominant majority (adults who have power over them). Because they do not reflect the dominant

majority's view of the world, such voices have the power to criticize the dominant power structure, to question "how things are," and what is meant by good, even to provide new theories of how the world might be ordered.

Counterstorytelling, one of the basic tenets of CRT, focuses on telling a story that shines a spotlight on racism to counter accepted notions or myths held by members of the majority culture. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define counterstorytelling as a method of telling a story that "aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (p. 44). The use of counterstories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourse of the majority, therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups. It "helps us to understand what life is like for others, and invites the reader into a new and unfamiliar world" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41).

The profound narrative insights and reflections of the students in this study have the potential to greatly enrich the landscape of school improvement and reform efforts which, until recently, have been largely absent the perspectives of the students themselves, and particularly those of Black males. In the words of Kathleen Cushman (2003), "I hope this will right the silence" (p. xiii). In addition to informing school improvement efforts, including students in meaningful ways in their own schooling has the potential to empower them, increase their belonging, and increase competency (Mitra, 2004). It is important to note that even well-intentioned student-voice initiatives pose potential dangers. Those who assert the importance of student voice as a uniform and united entity run the risk of overlooking essential differences among students, their

perspectives, and their needs. It is important that one not presume that there is a single student voice.

Thirty-two Black male high-school students participated in the study. They represented both public and private schools in both urban and suburban districts. This diversity allowed for multiple perspectives, which enhanced the richness of the study. While the diversity of experience was important, equally as important to note is that, in spite of the varied settings and experiences, some aspects of the schooling of Black males appeared to be consistent for all or most of the students represented in this study, regardless of setting.

Having said that, what follows is a compilation of the four major themes that emerged from the focus group discussions and 1:1 semi-structured interviews. The themes that emerged include Black Student Identity, The Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships, School Climate, and the Importance of Involvement by Families and Other Positive Role Models.

After some deliberation as to how best to present the student voices, I decided that the students' words should appear exactly as they were spoken. Their verbatim responses are presented in unedited form in order to ensure that the voice of the students is authentically portrayed. In most cases, grammar, syntax, and word choice were left unaltered. In order to present a more genuine dialogue, in support of the general discussion of each theme, the words of the 32 students are combined and are presented as a fictitious focus group comprised of six students with the following pseudonyms: Gerald, Trey, Olney, Marcus, Tyrese, and Jordan.

Black Student Identity

*Sometimes the way I choose to identify myself makes it
difficult for you to hear me.*
                                        ~Audrey Lorde

In this section, I present the various aspects that appear to affect the identity

development of Black males such as negative stereotypes, cultural messages such as

acting White, racial stigma, and the development of a *raceless persona,* and the role of

peers and peer pressure. The students also discuss the role they play in their own success.

Success Identity

In this section, the students described what it means to be successful in school.

They were asked how they measure a successful education.

Olney: It's different for different people, but for me, it means to work hard, pass
            my classes, and measure up to standards. It's about being well rounded
            and getting into what school is about.

Jordan: Being book smart and knowin' how to act. It's setting little goals until
            you reach the bigger goals.

Gerald: Taking initiative and pushing yourself. I think it's good grades,
            persistence and graduating.

Marcus: If it's your best, even a C is okay . . . as long as it was your best.

Trey: It's important, especially for African American students to get a 3.0. We
            need to set higher goals than other races.

Olney: It's also about doing well academically and in the community.

Tyrese: It's about getting information you can use in life.

The students' responses were consistent across the various groups. Collectively,

they spoke confidently about their plans and dreams and most acknowledged the

importance of education in achieving their aspirations. Scholars debate about the degree

of evidence that supports the contention that African American adolescents are less likely to see doing well in school as something they value (Cook & Ludwig, 1997; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

Collectively, all of the students appeared to value education. Most described success in school as working hard, getting all assignments in, working to their highest potential, setting high goals and achieving them, making the honor roll, being involved in school and community, passing all classes, and graduating. Most planned to finish high school and go on to college. Most spoke specifically about their postsecondary goals, including professional careers in fields such a law, architecture, sports, communications, and teaching. Absent was the alienation from middle-class values and aspirations often cited in the literature.

Most of the students appeared to be optimistic about their futures, which contradicts the media, as well as some academic portrayals of the apathy and hopelessness often associated with Black males, particularly those in urban settings. This sense of despair was expressed by only a small number of the students, all of whom attended one of the two urban high schools. Ogbu (1987) discussed the impact that awareness of social constraints on their future opportunities can have on students of color in terms of their interest in doing well in school. This did not appear to be the case for the students in this particular study.

However, not all of those who spoke about attending college and pursuing a professional career path were on track to do so. This is similar to findings of Corbett and Wilson (2001), who studied 50 sixth-graders in five Philadelphia middle schools with support from the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF) and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

While the grade levels of the students are dissimilar, some of the findings appear to parallel those found with this group of students across the various high schools. That is, while all or most had high aspirations, many appeared to lack specific ideas as to how to put those plans into action. Similar to the findings in Corbett and Wilson's (2001) study, some of the students acknowledged that they had not done their best to date and in some cases, were "doing just enough to get by." Some of the clearest post-high-school plans were shared by the student athletes, most of whom appeared to be the star athletes. They clearly articulated a goal to play collegiate sports "at the highest" level. The fact that they had a plan is encouraging. However, the other side of the coin is that for many Black males, sports and entertainment are held up as the career path, yet most will not achieve the professional level portrayed in the media. It is important that students have dreams, yet the adults in their homes, schools, and communities must work to ensure that the students are aware of the likelihood that they will achieve "at the highest" level as seen in the media.

When asked about the challenges that they face in their schooling, several students mentioned peers. Peer groups play a powerful role in shaping identity because the desire to be accepted by one's peer group and "fit in" with one's peers often becomes a paramount concern for most adolescents. Research has shown that in secondary school, peer groups assume a great influence over the orientation young people adopt toward achievement (Phelan et al., 1998), and they profoundly shape the way identities are constituted in school settings (Steinberg, 1996). Peer groups are also likely to impose negative sanctions on those who violate what are perceived as established norms of

behavior and who attempt to construct identities that deviate significantly from prevailing conceptions of racial and gender identity (Peshkin, 1991).

Peer groups are not the only forces that shape the social construction of identity within schools (Fordham, 1996; Ogbu, 1987; Solomon, 1992; Steinberg, 1996). The structure and culture of school plays a major role in reinforcing and maintaining racial categories and the stereotypes associated with them (Noguera, 2001).

Racial Identity

In this section, I will present the various aspects discussed in the literature that contribute to the racial identity development of Black males. I discuss the cultural messages about Black males and how they are negatively constructed in the media. For instance, many Black males feel they must use a *raceless persona* (Fordham, 1988) in order to achieve academic success in a school that contradicts an identification and solidarity with Black culture. Claude Steele (1992) suggested that *racial stigma* is an unrecognized component of underachievement among African Americans. Still others struggle to explain why good grades symbolize Whiteness and being cool is *acting Black*, while others are concerned about being accused of *acting White* when demonstrating behaviors associated with good grades.

Gerald: Like, just bein' a Black male is stressful . . . that's what makes me mad sometimes. Like, how they be treatin' us. Not just a White person; it's everybody. You never know, our own people be mad at us. I think it's hatred.

Olney: It's ignorance. My mom told me before I went to school that I have two strikes against me; being male and being African American. When people look at African American males, they automatically think one thing, 'thug'. The stereotypes they give us, like on TV and rap.

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Trey: It's hard. It's not easy. It's not supposed to be easy but it's not supposed to be this hard either. Getting' out of here not supposed to be this hard. If anything, supposed to be more help. Really not supposed to be this much negativity in school anyway. They come to school and they get treated a whole different way. In their head they're thinkin' I'm aimin' for nothin' now cuz nobody wants to listen. That's where a lot of people go wrong.

Olney: We have to do way more than a White student would have to do. When we're doing below what we should be doing, that puts us under. That's why they make the stereotypes they make. We're almost giving them room to talk.

Jordan: It's an everyday thing. As a minority, have to prove that we can do the work. We're always proving ourselves as people . . . proving that we are somebody.

Gerald: I think it's disappointing that a lot of people want you to fail in life. Always somebody doubting you no matter where you are in life. I feel like I have to work twice as hard to show that I'm not an idiot.

Tyrese: People automatically look at you as a person that's not gonna care. You're gonna get arrested by the time, or even while you're in high school. They don't even give you a chance. They don't even consider you for a person that's gonna succeed. That's probably the reason most Black kids don't succeed. Cuz they already think the community and everybody in the school . . .

Marcus: . . . is against them [finishes Tyrese's sentence].

Tyrese: Yeah, right. They think that, so why even bother tryin' to beat the odds, tryin' to graduate, tryin' to get out of school, because bein' Black, people feel that I'm not gonna make it since Black people have the highest rate of droppin' out. I push myself hard so I can to get my grades up where I can get out of school, but there's people that been tryin' to put me down because I'm Black.

Marcus: There's people tellin' 'em they can't do somethin'. They listen to other people and they believe it. They take it to heart. They don't use it as a positive. They use it as a negative. They ain't gonna be shit and they have that mentality. If you go with that mentality, then I think you're gonna be like that. If you have the desire to do what you gotta do, then you gotta believe you could do it. I think I proved myself. They might not have said it, but I know there's doubters out there. I feel like from a Black man's perspective, especially a Black man cuz they're mostly all in jail; I feel like I have done a great achievement. In middle school, I wasn't the finest plum in the garden you know.

Trey: Kids are givin' up. That's why they're droppin' out of school. I know there are people that haven't graduated, but I'm not gonna let myself be a bum on the street. That's just the type of people minority people are; Black people are. Even if you don't go to school or something, they still always find a way to survive.

Marcus: It's basically the non-supportive views. Anybody be sittin' up there thinkin' we're out to do something bad when we're just tryin' to survive.

Trey: Just cuz we're Black don't mean we can't be successful, achieve our goals, and make it in life. That's where the term "it doesn't matter the skin color you are. It matters about the person inside" comes from.

Tyrese: Ya'll can say we're not gonna be nothin'. Ya'll cannot educate us, but we're still gonna find a way to make it in life no matter what you do.

Negative Stereotypes

They did not limit their aspirations for me because my pants were too short. They did not lower their expectations for me because my lunch application told them I lived below the poverty line. . . . These teachers had Harvard dreams for students living in hellish conditions.

~ Alfred Tatum, 2005, p. 22

Olney: In our school there are a lot of stereotypes about Black people. Black people do this and White people do this. Students stereotype one another too.

Tyrese: Yeah. There are a lot of stereotypes in my school too. That we all dress like this certain thug way cuz our pants is a little, like . . . they got khakis and we got baggy jeans. We're different cuz we wear hats and stuff. These kids, they wear snowboarding hats. We're different cuz we wear these shirts with different stuff on it, funny stuff, and these kids wear those Lacoste shirts. Black people are different cuz of our clothing, how we talk, all kinds of stuff. We're gettin' separated in a lot of categories.

Trey: Yeah, some teachers look at some of us cuz of the way we dress, the way we talk. They think we're comin' right off the street, so they treat us different than they treat someone else. You can get labeled as a drug dealer or something like that. Teachers will assume . . . not even know, but assume that you are. If I come to school in a black t-shirt and jeans and Jordans and a White dude with Abercrombie and Fitch pressed pants, shoes, book bag comin' in behind me . . . they gonna be like, "He's gonna do his work, but this kid's not gonna do his work," when it could be the other way around.

Marcus:	We're treated differently because of our image. Like the way I dress. Some people think, "He's straight off the street." They look at me and say, "Let's let him do whatever he wants to do. He's gonna drop out anyway. He'll get sick and tired and drop out." But it's not like that. I dress like this cuz it looks good.
Trey:	I say it's all about the environment. Cops look at you in different ways. I got stopped the other day cuz I was wearin' a black hat with red on it. I was walkin' down the street and a cop asked, "What are you doin'?" To be honest with you, I'm not one of them. I'm not part of a gang, but that's what he thought. He thought I was a Blood or something. Sometimes it's how you dress, but come on, you can't judge people by how they dress. You can't judge by that because you don't know exactly what they're about.
Tyrese:	We need a better community. When you walk outside in the community and say I'm dressed like I am now, they think I'm a thug just because I'm walkin' down the street with a big jacket on or walkin' around with one of those beanie hats on or whatever. They think I'm a thug so they'll watch me in stores and all that other stereotype stuff.
Marcus:	There's also stereotyping about the projects. The way you look or where you live at. If I was a White person and lived down by the beach, they probably would not bother me. Since I don't live down by the beach and live on Crystal Avenue, they look at me and say, "He's Black, he lives on Crystal Avenue." Automatically they assume that's the projects. They think, "He comes from the projects and he's Black. He's no good." Really most of this school is based on stereotypes. Many teachers look at how you look. They don't try to get to know what you're about. They just automatically assume.
Moderator:	Do you think you can shake that?
Marcus:	You really can't shake that. Once a teacher figures out, or the administration or the guidance counselor figures out he's all about this, you really can't shake that image cuz that's what they gave you. Until they see you prove them wrong. Till they figure out you're not a drug dealer, you don't live in the projects, you do all your work and you're tryin' to get out of school. You're actually tryin' to better yourself. That's the only way you really can shake the image. Other than that, until you get out of high school, you always gonna have that image with you. A lot of teachers don't tell me, but I know a lot of teachers in this school still see me as one of those types of people. I can see it when they look at me. I can see it when they talk to me. Like, I get worse punishment than a lot of people do. I think you should treat everybody the same no matter what they look like or where they're from. If a White kid from down the

beach comes into school and a Black person from the projects comes into school, they should get the same treatment, no matter what. They both seen in the hallway after the bell, they should both be swept [referring to a disciplinary action at this student's high school]. If they both do the same thing, they should both get the same amounts of suspension. Both should get the same time in detention.

Moderator: Why do you think stereotypes exist and what do you think can be done to change what happens as a result of stereotyping?

Marcus: There's only one way . . . if the teacher stops stereotyping. I don't think you can change it by telling people to change. If somebody told me to start dressing differently, I wouldn't listen to them. I really don't care. If I dress like this, it's none of your business. I got my own style.

Trey: It's culture. If they see me drivin' a car with rims and playin' loud music, everybody thinkin' you're selling somethin'. Nobody's thinkin' you have a job. Just cuz you're Black they're thinkin, "This person can't possibly have a job like that."

It is likely that the negative stereotyping of Black males noted in these samples has a detrimental impact on their developing identity. Geoffrey Cohen (Cohen et al., 2006) says that school settings can be stressful to all students, but that Black students experience an extra 'threat' due to negative stereotypes about the intelligence of their race. Stereotypes of the Black male have become part of America's national character. Over the past 400 years, the image of the Black male as a subhuman, unintelligent, sexually promiscuous, idle buffoon has been everywhere—in stage shows, novels, advertisements, newspapers, and magazines—and it has taken hold of the American psyche. These were part of the social barriers set up to keep Black men in a subordinate role. These barriers, along with educational, economic, political, and social disenfranchisement, made it nearly impossible for Black males *as a group* to climb above the bottom rung of the social ladder in jobs, education, income, and political power (Tatum, 2005).

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There is considerable evidence that the ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds of students have bearing on how students are perceived and treated by the adults who work with them within schools (Brookover & Erickson, 1969; Morrow & Torres, 1995). Fine, Torre, Burns, and Payne (in press) have spoken with, surveyed, collaborated with, and witnessed the performances of thousands of youth from across the United States. They found that youth from urban and suburban schools, across racial and ethnic lines, and from diverse social classes and academic biographies, want, among other things, respect, for their varied identities, and not to be judged by the color of their skin, the fashion they don, the language they speak, or the zip code in which they live.

The students in my study described how these negative stereotypical images persist. The most frequent discussion about stereotypes appeared to be related to the way Black students dress. Many spoke of being targeted because of the way they dress or because of their *image* in general. One student spoke at length about his frustration regarding the treatment he receives because of his *image,* which he feels strongly is an unfair portrayal of him because people (teachers) think he lives in the projects. He spoke about being 'treated differently' because of his *image.*

Cultural Messages About Black Males

Trey: We need to talk more about how the media tells us to act one certain way . . . than how we should act in society. We get confused. The media tells you, you're Black . . . you must act like that . . . whereas when you go to school, people be like, "Why you doin' that?" It's mixed messages.

Jordan: You're almost always peer pressured into acting and dressing a certain way because you're Black.

Gerald: Bein' Black, you always have to entertain; always be the joker; be that social guy that's a funny person. I'm a good dancer, but why do they always have to ask me if I can dance? Sometimes you feel like a monkey.

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Trey: I feel like I have to work twice as hard to show that I'm not an idiot.

Jordan: It's just like the medieval castle and you're the clown. You mess up and the king send you to the chamber. You're stuck. You wait for another chance to please the king. It's like being a jokester all day.

Several researchers cite as problematic the cultural messages about Black males; how they are negatively constructed in the media and perceived in everyday life (Belton, 1995; Blount & Cunningham, 1996; Harper, 1996). These images portray the Black male as violent, disrespectful, unintelligent, hyper-sexualized, and threatening. These cultural messages, without a doubt, carry over into schools and negatively influence the ways that young Black male students are treated, positioned, and distributed opportunities to learn (Davis, 2003). Several of the young men discussed the negative impact of the media images of Black males on their identity development. This discussion cut across the various groups, regardless of the racial make-up of the school.

Raceless Persona

Racelessness is the notion that Black students must give up aspects of their identities and their indigenous cultural system in order to achieve success as defined in dominant-group terms (Fordham, 1988). Many Black students feel they must use a *raceless persona* (Fordham, 1988) in order to achieve academic success in a school that contradicts an identification and solidarity with Black culture.

Consistent with Fordham's notion of the development of a *raceless persona* or *racelessness*, Olney and Gerald appeared to struggle most with being able to be themselves, and in fact, figuring out just what that means. They appeared to be in a struggle between not wanting to give up aspects of their Black identity, yet wanting to be accepted in the majority White settings in which they are schooled. Olney stated, "I just

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want to be myself." Consistent with the literature, this appears to be more of an issue for students of color attending predominantly White schools. Similarly, the discussion about "acting White" and "acting Black" came up in the *Diversity Dream Team* group, which consisted of students who attend majority White schools, whereas it did not come up in the groups in which there is a majority of students of color attending the school.

Acting White

Gerald: Because I'm the only Black in my senior class, it's like pressure. You represent your race. Anything you do, anything you say is like you represent the whole Black community. It's been that way since 4th grade, so I'm kinda used to it, but as you get older it's different, cuz you start thinking more about who you are. I remember in middle school and now high school as well, this being a challenge. You want to have good grades, you want to be smart and talk smart but then there's this pressure to be Black. Really, what is being Black? BET (Black Entertainment TV), bein' a rapper, wearin' all that . . . which contradicts who you are. You just don't know.

Olney: Then there's the stereotype about 'Acting Black.' I don't act Black, like smokin' weed and stealin' stuff. I don't fall into that category. I say you can't really act a certain way. There's no actin' Black. There's no actin' White. It's just something America thought up. It's who you are as a person. I feel we should look at it when people say he's actin' a certain way. That's just who he is and you shouldn't change who he is.

Many studies show a negative relationship between "White behaviors" and social status among Blacks (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Dattnow & Cooper, 1996; Farkas et al., 2002; Ferguson, 2001; Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Roderick, 2003; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2004). Fryer and Torelli (2006) point out that these authors do not report that academic achievement, per se, is identified as a "White behavior." The literature actually points to the fact that Black kids do not ridicule other Black kids for making good grades. Instead, they ridicule them for the behaviors that are often associated with good grades (e.g., answering questions in class, being in advanced classes, or proper diction). Even

when academic achievement is highly correlated with "White behaviors," many authors prefer to make a distinction between resenting achievement and resenting behaviors that are associated with achievement.

Fryer and Torelli (2006) found that in schools in which Blacks comprise greater than 80% of the student body, there is no "acting White" effect, while schools that are less than 20% Black have the largest "acting White" effect for Blacks and Hispanics. Similarly, Tatum (1997) noted that "acting White" is more salient in public schools and schools in which the percentage of Black students is less than 20, but non-existent among Blacks in predominantly Black schools or those who attend private schools. Two nationally representative samples dismiss "acting White" as nothing more than an urban (or, more precisely, ethnographic) legend (Fryer & Torelli, 2006).

The focus group findings appear to be consistent with the research of Fryer and Torelli (2006) in that only Gerald and Olney, both of whom attend predominantly White schools, discussed the concept of "acting White" or acting Black." Gerald lives in an affluent suburb and is the only Black male in his graduating class. Olney attends a predominantly White, Catholic parochial school in a ring suburb just outside a major Connecticut city. They each focused on the confusion they felt in understanding what it means to "act White" or "act Black," whereas it was not addressed in the groups in which the school is 80% or greater Black. Both appeared to struggle more relative to confusion about what it means to "be Black" or "act White." Olney's comment equating "acting Black" with "smokin weed and stealin' stuff" appears to indicate that for some Black males, they too may stereotype the behavior of other Blacks whom they perceive to behave different from how they behave.

Olney: There isn't a lot expected of Black males in society. Every time you go to McDonald's or Burger King, you see a Black male. You don't really hear about many Black males with good jobs.

Marcus: You don't see a lot of Black people do rocket science or some other type of science. You don't see a lot of Black scientists. You don't see a lot of Black anything, but you do see a lot of Black athletes. In this school, you see a lot of Black athletes. That's what most think they're getting by on.

Trey: They don't see doctors and lawyers livin' in the hood. Those people live in the rich part. They see the gangsters with nice cars. Little kids gonna try to grow up to be like that. We need to see what you can become.

Tyrese: That's cuz they want the fast life; to get it easy. To them, goin' to school is just wastin' their time, especially if they're in poverty and they're struggling. They really see no point in goin' to school and tryin'.

Trey: It's hard to argue with that. It's hard to say, "Well, I'm in school and look at him. He's walkin' around with like a 'g' everyday. He's ridin' around in a Benz and I'm walkin'. I wanna do that too. But you gotta think of it as . . . in a way . . . there's two ways of a drug dealer. He's most likely gonna get caught. Then he's gonna be in jail or he's gonna be dead.

Marcus: There's no future in bein' a gang member. It's not fun. They don't see the bad stuff like friends gettin' killed and stuff.

Claude Steele (1992) has suggested that *racial stigma* is an unrecognized component of underachievement among African Americans. He suggests that to do well in school, a student must believe that school achievement can be a promising basis of self-esteem and that belief needs constant reaffirmation. Many Black students appear to be confused about how to resolve the mismatch between what expectations are applauded by adults and their own need for a feeling of competence. African American students have a difficult time explaining why good grades symbolize Whiteness and being cool is *acting Black.* Psychologists term this as identity diffusion—lack of identity formation as a reaction to failure (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Taylor, 1989).

In general, the students' comments illustrate their struggle with issues of identity in general, and specifically racial identity. Racial identity appeared to be a universal struggle for all of the students, but the challenges were different depending on their individual circumstances. Marcus, Trey, and Tyrese spoke of an image of Black males that they feel they have developed as a result of their interactions with Black males in their urban communities. One of them specifically spoke about the impact of being exposed to Black male role models who were not positive. He recalled the impact of exposure to peewee football and baseball coaches, who were widely known to be drug dealers. They also spoke more in depth and spent more time focusing on the frustration of being typecast based on negative stereotypes and images of Black males. While several students spoke about the need to be exposed to positive Black role models in order to "see what you can become," these three students seemed to focus more of their attention on the topic than others. In referring to the need to see "what you can become," some of the students spoke about not seeing Black males in professional roles, but rather in illicit activity or in lower wage jobs.

The Role of the Students in Their Own Success

Jordan: It shouldn't be up to you guys to make us strive for better. Like I said before, it's up to the parents and the student and how he wants to succeed, cuz if he don't want to, nobody can push him . . . not even teachers or parents. It's really up to the parents and the student himself. They listen more to the parents than they do to the teachers.

Gerald: You need to push yourself. Go into honors or AP, even though you could do easier. A lot of guys want to switch into easier classes. Like, they'll switch from honors to college prep or from college prep to general.

Marcus: But, once you switch to general, you're not goin' to college for that sport; at least not Division One, cuz that won't get checked through the clearinghouse.

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Jordan:	Some kids don't take the most they can get from school. They go through and slack off and get in trouble. They don't carry themselves as intelligent Black men and women. They don't try to better themselves at all. They just making a bad name for themselves. I think as we're going into predominantly White schools, we have to do way more than a White student would have to do. When you're not; when you're doin' below what you should be doin' that puts us under. That's why they make the stereotypes they make. We're almost givin' 'em room to talk. From day one in this school I kinda said, "Well, if that's what they think of us, we need to do a whole lot better than we're doin."
Tyrese:	It doesn't matter what the curriculum is. Us Black people; we really don't listen in class. Don't get me wrong. There's Black girls and boys that are successful. They be in class; they study. But it's the others. You know how kids be. They don't want to explore. They say, "Oh, that's too hard." Then they start getting' down on themselves and they get mad at the teacher like the teacher doesn't teach them nothing.
Marcus:	There's a lot of us Black male students out there that's, what would I say, ignorant. They don't care. There's some of us that do care. I can tell you right now that we do care. We are actually here takin' this survey with you [referring to the focus group]. But, there's some in the school that don't care . . . don't have no care in the world. They come here for the free food, to look at the girls, they getting' in trouble; fightin' . . . whatever. To me, that's messin' up my education. If the teacher gotta spend time talkin' to you, how am I gonna learn? There's a whole bunch of followers in this school.
Jordan:	Black people don't apply themselves as much. They take lower classes. All the White people, well, not all the White people, but people who want to achieve more take all the honors and AP classes. Black people don't want to take AP exams to see if they could take those classes.
Moderator:	So it's their choice?
Jordan:	Yeah. They just take what they're takin' instead of tryin' to do better. I'm not even sure there's much we can do. They need to find their own motivation. Everybody should want to do better.
Trey:	I agree. At the end of the day, a student could get all the help . . . they could just not want to do it. Ultimately, it's their decision in the end whether they want to do better.
Tyrese:	It's hard to stay on track with all these distractions . . . money, girls, tryin' to dress; everybody wants to think they all cool the way they dress. I need to try to box myself out from the rest of the people. I try to pay attention

in class and do all my work. I'm telling you, the most difficult thing for me is like, your friends getting too much into your class. It throws you off cuz you want to do your work, but your friends talkin' to you almost the whole class and you're talkin to them. It's the freedom. If we didn't have the freedom, we'd be doin' our work every day.

Jordan: We need a better mind frame too. We too weak. We idolize 50 Cent and his messages about getting' women, getting' money, getting' back at someone, all that other stuff . . . gangster. Kids idolize that. We lookin' in the wrong places.

Marcus: That goes back to the kids that don't have father figures.

Olney: You gotta have heart. It's all about self-determination for yourself. Don't listen to anybody else. Don't let them pull you down. If a person tries to pull you down, don't go down with them. Let them go down. There's nothin' about school that's easy, but nobody said it's gonna be easy.

The students spoke with amazing candor as they talked about their own role in their success or lack of success in their schooling experience. While they clearly discussed their concerns about the systems and structures of schooling, they also spoke about the role they play in their own success or demise. They accepted responsibility for some of the factors that may have a detrimental impact on their success in school, including distractions, such as peers. They also appeared to be reflective and honest about the fact that, in some cases, they are not living up to their potential. Some admit to "doin' just enough to get by."

The Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships

While many of the students in my school were growing into the neighborhood, finding permanent lodging in the spiraling turmoil, I was able to chart a different course. Caring teachers with high expectations . . . they helped push me against the currents of the environment in which I lived.
~ Alfred Tatum, 2005, p. 22

Lisa Delpit (1995) says,

Good teaching is not thought of in the same way in all communities. Mainstream thinking holds that teaching begins with teachers' awareness of and ability to transfer

knowledge. However, I have learned from interviews and personal experiences with teachers from communities of color, that many of their individuals believe teaching begins instead with the establishment of relationships between themselves and their students. (p. 139)

In this section, I will discuss the various aspects of the teacher-student relationship that may affect the schooling experiences of Black males. The students discuss the characteristics of "good teachers" and "bad teachers," including their desire for teachers who are caring, believe in their ability, and show them respect. They discuss their thoughts regarding whether the race of the teacher has an impact on their ability to connect with that teacher and vice versa. Finally, they discuss their desire for teachers who are able to teach culturally relevant curriculum.

The Teacher

Olney: There may be one or two teachers that act on the other side, but overall they're straight.

Jordan: They're not just there. They actually care about you passing. They stay after to help you. They care so much, they chase you down to make sure you get things done and getting you to strive.

Trey: Yeah, I think we need more teachers to make you strive to do your best to meet your goals. Some teachers just don't care. They don't care whether we succeed or not. They don't push us to our best potential and they need to be more open, so that we can speak our mind without starting an argument or something that's not necessary.

Tyrese: Some of the teachers don't help. They think they're helpin' but they're not. Some of the teachers don't give individual help. When that happens, not a lot of people gonna speak up. Not a lot of Black males gonna speak up. It took me awhile to speak up. If somebody gave me an assignment and I didn't understand it, I would just wing it and do it and whatever I got, I would just accept it. If I got a D, I would just accept it. I think the main thing is getting help and finding out who needs help. If the teacher spends no time finding out who needs help and wondering why this person's grade is bad and you just let it go on and on, their grades gonna continue to be bad and they goin' nowhere. Instead, they help this person

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who already has an A and really doesn't need help. This person has an F and they don't help them. They should be helpin' that person.

Trey: The teachers help other students more than me. If I ask a teacher I had to make them help me. Most teachers haven't helped me move forward . . . given me the extra push. There's favoritism. The whole class is supposed to be treated equal.

Marcus: They don't give you help when you need it. There's discrimination. You can tell. They go to one side of the class and they're teachin'. You feel left out and you need help but they talk in a language they understand instead of breakin' it down so you can understard.

Tyrese: You pretty much said it . . . the separation betw⟨en the teachers and the two kinds of kids basically.

Marcus: Some teachers cater to the kids sittin' in the front and want to listen and stuff like that. There's a lot of times when I really wanna do something and the teacher still doesn't want to help me. Like, I don't know how to do it and she doesn't want to waste her time with me.

Trey: I like teachers who get into what they teach so you could learn. They're willing to help you when you are struggling with certain subjects and give you extra help.

Jordan: Exactly! Have some type of enthusiasm for what they're teaching.

It's difficult to imagine a better way to express the importance of a good teacher than the description above written by Alfred Tatum in his book, *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males* (2005). Tatum describes the importance of a caring teacher with high expectations for her students and a belief in her students' potential. The students in my study shared a similar vision for the kind of teachers they want. They were collective in their vision and desire. They want to be taught by teachers who are motivated, know their subject, push students to do their best, and do not play favorites. They want teachers who offer help to all students, especially those who need it most, take the time to explain things to them in a way that helps them to understand, and those who actually teach! Students associated whether they were learning with the extent to which the

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teacher was willing to give them help. The willingness of a teacher to work with a student, any student, until they understood a concept, was important to them. Some of the students felt that some teachers pick and choose who to spend their time with based on their expectations about the individual students' potential to learn. In contrast, they desire teachers who will push them to achieve. They also want teachers they can relate to, who care, are respectful, and encourage them. They said they can tell if a teacher likes them or not, and if they feel as though the teacher does not, it negatively affects their learning. Students have a sharp eye for teachers who respond to them on the basis of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. "They can easily, and oftentimes accurately, conclude that teachers discriminate based on race and ethnicity" (Cushman & Rogers, 2008, p. 20).

Each student made an individual list of the characteristics of good versus bad teachers. Each shared his individual list and the responses were recorded on chart paper at each session. The characteristics they listed were unanimous across the groups. Here is a closer look at a compilation of what the students wrote about the teachers they want: A good teacher is . . .

1. Caring

2. Respectful

3. Open-minded

4. A good listener.

A bad teacher is . . .

1. Close-minded

2. Plays favorites

3. Disrespectful

4. Don't care.

The Power of Relationships and the Relationship of Power

Gerald: I feel like teachers need to be more close to the kids . . . like interacting with them. I want a teacher that relates more to us. Some teachers can relate and some teachers can't relate. They think they can, but they really can't. I like young teachers cuz you can joke around with them just to get to relate to people and to get to know them a little better.

Jordan: We need more teachers like Mr. Dunham [a Black male]. If you have a problem, you can go to him at any time and he'll help you out. Even though he's the Dean and a teacher, he doesn't force his power. He'll talk to the regular person. Other teachers in the school won't do that. That's why they bump heads with students. Mr. Dunham gives us respect. You can talk to him about anything.

Olney: I find those are the best teachers. It doesn't matter if they're old or young or what color they are. It's the ones that are willing to do fun stuff. They're willing to stay with the trends and new culture. This old teacher does this rap thing. It's the funniest thing. It doesn't even matter to me. And they're involved in things at school. You see them school activities. They're not just there to get a paycheck.

Olney: We need teachers that are more open to us and treat everyone equal and don't play favorites. If the teacher's gonna be a teacher, learn how to teach and learn how to listen. Some of the teachers don't listen. Some of the teachers just want to talk. Whenever they talk to you, they not talkin' to you the way you would expect someone to talk to you. They're talkin' to you like they're talkin' down to you as if they have that much power over you when nobody's really supposed to have power over anybody. They're supposed to be talkin' to you as if you're a person.

Marcus: Some teachers got attitudes. They think they're above you just because they're a teacher. To me, I give respect to anybody who gives me respect. If you're not gonna give me respect, I have trouble giving you respect. We're all human beings. We need teachers that treat you like you're a human being. Some of them think that just because they're a teacher, you're supposed to respect them. It doesn't work that way.

Tyrese: A major part of students showing disrespect is cuz they don't respect the teacher. You gotta trust somebody first. Let's be honest, I don't trust em.

Educators have labored for years to depict one of the phenomena most central to effective urban education—the quality of the relationship between inner-city students and their teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Steele (1992), in his theoretical explanation of dis-identification among Black students, suggested a connection between dis-identification and teacher-student relationships. Students want teachers to 'be real' and they want to have a relationship.

Culturally responsive teachers spend more classroom and non-classroom time developing a personal relationship with their students of color. "These relationship-building exchanges are recurrent and spontaneous daily events" (Irvine, 2003, p. 67). "In the high school classroom, respect and trust travel a two-way street between teacher and student and have everything to do with learning" (Cushman, 2003, p. 17). Virtually all researchers of student voice have found that "respect is a reciprocal dynamic, and if you give respect, you are more likely to get it" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 375). Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) highlights the teacher role in this dynamic: "Respect: To get it, you must give it" (p. 22).

In their study with middle-school students, Corbett and Wilson (2001) found that "believing a teacher cared about them did more than just make students feel good. Students in the school transformed teachers' caring enough to 'teach' them into academic self-confidence" (p. 89). One male student in their study explained, "When they push me it makes me think I can do the work; I'm glad they're trying to teach me instead of ignoring me, thinking I can't do it" (p. 89).

Doda and Knowles (2008) found similar results in their analysis of the written responses of 2,700 students who attended middle schools in diverse communities

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throughout North America. A dominant theme they reported was the desire to have positive relationships with teachers who were seen as helpful, kind, happy, encouraging, patient, respectful, and non-judgmental. They wanted teachers who truly knew them as people and as students, genuinely enjoyed them, and were committed to working with them to make success happen. Many reported that being less well known by teachers contributed to the problems they faced in school. Finally, students repeatedly urged teachers to know them as unique people and as unique students.

A Belief in Their Students

I felt a kinship with them that helped me attend to their instruction. Literacy was thrust upon me in rich and meaningful ways, not because I was a wonderful student, but because the teachers believed I deserved nothing less.

~Alfred Tatum, 2005, p. 22

Marcus: I want teachers that have a belief in the students and to want to see them achieve. I want them to actually care. Some don't care if you pass or fail. Some don't even give you a chance. They don't even consider you for a person that's gonna succeed. The reason most Black kids don't succeed is cuz they already think the community and everybody in school is against them.

Tyrese: Yeah. They think, "Why should I bother even tryin' to beat the odds?"

Trey: I'm tryin' to get out of school and graduate. Bein' that I'm Black, people feel that I'm not gonna make it out cuz Black people have the highest dropout rate. So I push myself as hard as I can to get my grades up so I can get out of this school. But there's been people that tryin' to put me down because I'm Black. For me, when I hear that, it just makes me work harder. But, that may not be the case for all students. It defeats their confidence. They give up on themselves. For me, it's just more food for me to prove them wrong.

Marcus: Black males droppin' out of school because I think they're givin' up. People tellin' 'em they can't do something. They listen to other people and they believe it.

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Trey: I do work harder just because other people think I'm not gonna make it. When I do get an A, they get surprised. I know there's some kids out there . . . if you just challenge 'em, then they could prove a lot of people wrong. If I'm in a class and it's easy, I won't do my best. If you put a challenge in my face, I'll succeed. It's better.

Olney: We need to hear that we're gonna make it in life. We need to hear encouragement. Not these people always puttin' us down. I've had teachers doubt me. In Math class in middle school, I asked to be in a higher class. The teacher doubted me. She didn't think I could do it. I ended up proving myself to her that I should be in the higher class.

Tyrese: Teachers should understand that we all learn at different levels. They should understand that we're not all equally prepared. Not all of us were read to when we were younger.

Marcus: We're basically just tryin' to give the message that as a minority, it's difficult, so they have to work with us sometimes. Teachers should be more encouraging to Black males. I feel like I can't do nothin'. I don't like to be discouraged, so don't give up on us. Like I said before, they need to realize that words hurt.

Tyrese: That's actually another thing that's stoppin' Black males from comin' to school. If they don't get congratulated on the things they do . . . to tell the truth, I like to hear that. A lot of times I hand in a paper and I just get a grade. I don't hear nothin' like, "That's a good story or that's good work. Nothin' like that."

Trey: The teachers should know we're gonna survive no matter what, so they should pay attention to you. Still again, it's all about encouragement. Sometimes it feels like we're set up for failure. They're not doin' the best job they can do to help us succeed. They want you to fit in their education. They can't broaden their education. I think they need to broaden their education views.

The students in the focus groups appeared to have the same feelings and expressed similar thoughts as those discussed in the two studies cited above about the connection between the teachers' efforts to "teach" them and their belief in their own abilities and other factors critical to the connection between teacher and student.

Corbett and Wilson (2001) state, "Good teachers would not give up on them for any reason" (p. 92). When teachers believe in them, students begin to believe in

themselves. When teachers set the bar high, this led to increased self-confidence in doing schoolwork. The students were clear in expressing the fact that they need to be encouraged by their teachers. In some cases, they made reference to the fact that this was especially true for "minorities."

The Race of the Teacher

Gerald: We need more minority teachers in my school. I understand it's hard to get minorities to move to my town [an affluent suburb], but if they could understand there's no diversity. They could have a minority counselor. We have no outlet for racial issues. If I need to deal with a racial issue, I can't just go to my teacher. It's not like they're worse than the students or just as bad. They just don't know.

Marcus: We need to have more Black teachers in the school. I can't go to someone and tell them how I feel if it has something to do with race. I want someone I can relate to. You should be able to go to anyone and talk to them without it being a problem with their race or somethin' cuz a lot of things I talk to the teacher about, it ends up bein' a problem.

Trey: I feel like if we hire more minority teachers, and a problem comes along, you would have an outlet. They might know what you're talkin' about and be able to connect with the person. They might know how to deal with a situation better than a White teacher would or a Hispanic teacher would.

Olney: I think it might have been different, but not really. I feel like it's not really all about Black and White. As long as they're doin' their job and they're educating us kids, then it doesn't matter what race. You could be yellow . . . you could be purple. It doesn't matter.

Trey: I don't really have any preference on the race of the teacher but it might have made a difference cuz sometimes when there's the middle-aged White female teachers, we always break out into discussion about race or something. It starts with the students and then the teachers get involved. It's always about race or maybe sex. It's always about something different every day. When the White teacher speaks out, the Black kids will say, "Shut up. You don't know anything about it." If a Black teacher says somethin', they'll listen to 'em cuz they're Black. That's the only reason. Especially in History class because they break out in discussions about slavery and they don't want to hear it coming from a White teacher.

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Jordan: I asked a teacher why we don't have a Black teacher teaching Black History Month. We have to pay attention to what we have [assumed to mean White teachers]. I think we should have more Black teachers teachin' Black History Month.

The race of the teacher seems to affect how teachers view Black students and what their commitment may be to the education of Black students (Beady & Hansell, 1981; Kohl, 1991). While numerous studies have been conducted to assess the effects of race on students and teachers and how well they identify with one another in the classroom, the research appears to present evidence on both sides of the issue regarding the effects of teacher race on student success, particularly students of color.

Graybill (1997) asserted that a positive relationship must exist between the student and the teacher if significant academic achievement is to occur. However, a frequent complaint of high-school students, especially Black students, is that some teachers, particularly Caucasians, do not relate well to them. Students must identify favorably with their teachers or they will do very poorly in school, which will lead to failure in society. Yet several researchers have concluded that Black students were given less attention, ignored more, praised less, and reprimanded more than their counterparts when taught by Caucasian teachers (Brophy, 1983).

Overall, the students did not initially express that the race of the teacher was a critical component in their relationships. However, the more the students discussed the issue, the more they seemed to focus on the need for more persons of color in their schools. Several students felt like while the race of the teacher was not a critical factor in their ability to develop a relationship with a teacher, it would be beneficial for there to be a greater presence of persons of color in their schools because they may be better able to

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relate to them. Moreso, they expressed an overall desire to see more persons of color in

positive roles.

Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Instruction

Olney: I take a *Black Voices* class. It's really interesting. My teacher gets it. I said, how does this White guy teach a *Black Voices* class? He said that he just got tired of teaching about dead White guys.

Jordan: For me, it's a requirement to read *Hamlet, Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet* but like, we don't read the story of Frederick Douglass. There's stories about African American culture and stuff. Stuff they actually went through . . . stuff from the heart . . . rather than the stories that Shakespeare told that weren't even real.

Gerald: I would love to take something like that. In American Literature, it's just White American Northeast Literature. We never learn about the Harlem Renaissance or even Native American or Chinese Literature. We have this class about World Literature and it's basically British Literature. I would like to learn about Indian Literature, East Asian Literature and African Literature. We don't learn anything about Asian or African or Hispanic culture. It just makes it seem inferior . . . that we're primitive . . . and we're really not. It just seems like it feeds into that White superiority thing cuz we learn so much about the Western European White culture.

Trey: I agree. At my school, we don't read a lot of Black Literature or Black writers. Sometimes we read books about Black people, but not by Black people. It's not the same. We don't see how they look at things; how they write. People may write differently. A White person talkin' about their life and a Black person talkin' about their life; you're talkin' about two totally different books.

Marcus: We did a Tupac poem in February. Everybody did their work because they could relate to it. Easy when they say, reflect on it and write about it. It's easy cuz you say, "this happened to me and this happened to me." If you can't relate to it and they ask you to reflect how you feel about what you just read, it's hard because that never happened to you before.

Tyrese: We shouldn't just learn about Black people during Black History Month. It should be all year long. In school this year, the only thing I had to do that had anything to do with Black people was a crossword puzzle.

Trey: I get a little edgy during Black History Month because I feel like I'm not learnin' nothin'. I see kids comin' in and learnin' stuff I learned when I

was two—things my grandmother taught me. I feel like people don't pay attention to that stuff. Down South they take it seriously. They pay attention. In Virginia, I mention Louis Farakhan; they gonna know him. I come up here and mention it and they gonna be like, "Who's that?" They think it's a big joke.

Marcus: It's all the same stuff like Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. There's other African Americans who have done stuff. They should teach more and take Black History Month serious.

Tyrese: I have a tough time understanding Black History Month. Every time it comes around, we have to read books with derogatory words in it; constantly negative of Blacks. I just realized it and it hit me. Every year we read books bringin' Black people down, like Huck Finn. I hated that book! I thought Black History Month was supposed to celebrate, but it's the shortest month!

Marcus: Yeah. When it comes to Black History Month, teachers be like, "Oh, we have to teach it," but when it's in between the year, they don't want to teach it. They should teach it throughout the year, not just one month. The Board of Ed . . . they're only doin' it cuz they have to. It's part of the curriculum, but, they only want to do it for one month.

Tyrese: I think they should teach the important things. Like in geography, they teach about Christopher Columbus. That was like a thousand years ago or three hundred years ago. I'm not gonna need it in life. It's important to know but I think it's important to learn about racism and stuff like that. That was only a hundred years ago. That's recent.

Beyond wanting to be able to relate to their teachers, many of the students also expressed a desire to be able to better relate to the curriculum and to the way teachers instruct. According to Smith and Wilhelm (2002), Black males may reject literacy because of its future orientation, its separation from immediate uses and functions, and its emphasis on knowledge that is not valued in their life outside of school. "In contrast, responsive and meaningful literature instruction can nurture resiliency of Black males and can encourage them to value the written word" (Tatum, 2005, p. 19). Teaching strategies must be student-focused if Black students are to stay involved. Black students appear to be separated from their history and literature (Allsup, 1997).

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Although few studies have examined the relationship between culture and education among adolescents, it is clear from the available research that using an instructional approach disconnected from students' culture creates student resistance (Foster, 1997; Hale, 1994; Hollins, 1996; Hudley, 1995; Lipman, 1995; Tatum, 2000). How schools structure students' opportunities to learn has been shown to influence student achievement (Epstein & MacIver, 1992; Lee & Bryk, 1988).

Access to academic experiences and achievement through the curriculum, teachers, and other school activities is of particular importance for Black males, who may already be marginalized at school (Finn & Cox, 1992; Sanders & Reed, 1995). "Because students' ways of knowing and perceiving are influenced by culture, culture is a critical variable in how students learn and how teachers teach" (Irvine, 2003, p. 67). Culturally responsive teachers are not just effective educators (Irvine, 1990b). "They contextualize the teaching act and give attention to the immediate needs and cultural experiences of the students they teach" (Irvine, 2003, p. 67).

The students spoke about their desire for curriculum and instruction that better matched their interests and needs. It was interesting to note that several students expressed strong feelings, in particular about Black History Month. Various viewpoints were expressed including the fact that it seemed inappropriate that White teachers would teach about Black history. Several expressed their frustration about the fact that Black History Month is relegated to a single month, the shortest month at that, and then it feels as if some teachers teach the curriculum only because they are forced to do so. Others spoke of the need to be exposed to the history and contributions of persons of color and more books both by and about Black people.

School Climate

In this section, the students share aspects of the overall school climate, including diversity, discipline policies and practices, school clubs and activities, ability grouping and tracking practices, and the role and presence of racism. The link between school climate and student achievement has been documented (Irvine, 1990b; Polite, 2000), but requires more research specifically focused on African American boys.

Tyrese: I like the people here. I like the environment, the sporting events, and how you are praised when you succeed. They give us many opportunities. There's something new going on every day. Everybody sticks together, it's a good environment.

Trey: I like the community of the school, the people, and the school spirit. I like the atmosphere.

Marcus: That's one thing I love about this school. People will tell you straight up. There's no hiding or sugarcoating. It's real!

What happens when students report feeling alienation within the school community or fail to see an education as rewarding, as is the documented experience of many African American youth (Ford & Harris, 1996; Ogbu, 1987)? Black students desire and need to be loved for themselves and to be a vital part of all activity (Montgomery, 1970). According to Montgomery (1970), a genuine sense of community among teachers, students, and parents should be developed.

> School is a complicated social world for kids, and they want you to recognize its different aspects. Students know that a teacher's presence in informal moments is just as important as his or her classroom role. As teachers notice the dynamics among kids outside the classroom, they will also be responding to students' need to have adults see what is really going on with them in their groups. (Cushman & Rogers 2008, p. 23)

"Students are asking for the quality of human exchange in schools and classrooms to be more democratic, humane, and respectful" (Doda & Knowles, 2008, p. 29).

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The students discussed various aspects relative to the overall climate of their respective schools. They discussed topics such as diversity, discipline policies and practices, school clubs and activities, ability grouping and tracking, and the role and presence of racism. The one topic that seemed to be addressed by all of the students was discipline. The students had strong perspectives regarding the discipline policies and practices in their schools. While not discussed in all of the groups, the dynamics of the school cafeteria also generated a great deal of discussion, particularly with the students in the *Diversity Dream Team* group. Some students spoke about ability grouping and tracking. Those who addressed it felt as though the overall climate could improve and students may perform better if the classes were not as segregated by ability. They went on to discuss the fact that most of the higher ability groups were populated by White students, whereas the lower tracks were more populated by students of color. This fact appeared to have an impact on their comfort level in being placed in a higher-level class. Finally, the students spoke about the diversity or lack of diversity in their schools. It is likely that this is because there is very little diversity in his school. The *Diversity Dream Team* students spoke more about the issue of diversity in their schools, whereas it was hardly addressed in either of the groups that occurred in the urban high schools.

The students at one of the two urban high schools appeared to have a particularly positive view of their school and spoke with pride about it. Conversely, the students at the other urban high school spoke specifically about the lack of school spirit at their school. They spoke of not having pep rallies or a school mascot. It is hard to pinpoint all of the qualities that gave the one school a special feel, but it was clear that while students expressed their perspectives regarding some of the practices that concerned them, such as

discipline practices, they still had an overall positive feeling about their school. This particular school seemed to have a "spirit" not specifically spoken about by the students in the other schools.

Diversity

Gerald: If I could do one thing to make it better for Black males it would just be more diversity within the student population and definitely the teachers and definitely the curriculum. I wish my school could do more with it.

Jordan: You can see the lack of diversity in our school when you go into the cafeteria. We have our one table at our school. The back righthand corner kinda surrounded by the Whites. If you act White, you kinda merge in and then they say you're acting White or whatever. So, we'll let you sit at the White table cuz you act that way. You almost have to be switching in and out of the Black table. Blacks are more accepting. In my experience, my friends, they're more accepting.

Trey: I said the same thing. The caf's split. There's also a lot of ignorance. Kids are not getting the attention they need from other kids. I don't know why or how it's happening. There's prejudice too. If you notice, the kids who sit around each other; they all pretty much look the same. You don't really have cliques, but they're all together and they kinda look the same. I tend not to do that. I sit where I want to sit . . . go from table to table. I'm not gonna let anyone tell me where I can and cannot sit. It's kind of eerie.

Tyrese: All the White kids sit with the White kids, the Black kids with the Black kids and the Puerto Rican kids with the Puerto Rican kids. Puerto Rican kids sit with Blacks too.

Several students spoke positively about the diversity in their schools while others, particularly Olney and Gerald, who attend predominantly White schools, lamented about the lack of diversity in their school. Those students who are members of the *Diversity Dream Team* also participate in the Diversity Club at their respective schools. Most spoke positively about this experience. In the Catholic parochial school, there is also a club called *Changing Attitudes about People* (CAP) in addition to the Diversity Club.

The student who attends that school is a member of both clubs. When asked about the most important thing discussed in the focus group, he responded quickly, "Diversity. That's the main thing!"

Discipline

Marcus: If you stayed in the hallway, you'd have seen how it really is. Some of the teachers pick on certain people. Sometimes you're treated differently because of your image. Sometimes the administration goes overboard. A lot of people know I get suspended for a lot of stuff for ridiculous amounts of days. I actually had people sign a petition for me to get out of a ten-day suspension for something I really didn't do, but I got blamed for it. Now, everybody's thinkin' that everybody's against me. They should treat everybody the same no matter what they look like or where they're from. If the White person from down by the beach comes into school and the Black person from the projects comes into school they should get the same treatment no matter what. They both seen in the hallway after the bell rings, they should both get swept. If they both do the same thing, they should both get the same amount of suspension; both should get the same time in detention. It shouldn't be that he was writing on his desk and gets five days suspension and he was writing on his desk and he gets three days. Why is that? Like me, I got suspended for so long. There's no reason to get suspended for that long. Once you treat everybody the same, everything else will fall into place.

In one focus group session, several students spoke at length about the "sweep rule" at their school. The "sweep rule" is a practice at this school in which students who are in the hallway when the bell rings are "swept" up and must go to the in-school suspension room (INR).

Marcus: Instead of going to class and gettin' something done, you're swept. It's a waste of time and you're not getting' nothin' done. If they're feeling mean that day and the bell rings, everybody swept goes to INR. Sometimes they'll close the door right on you even if you're right at the door. They do treat you differently because of your image. I've been the only one swept when there's a hallway full of people.

Trey: The sweep rule is unfair; it does not work. I can understand giving a detention. I can understand calling your parents, but not this. They don't give you much work in in-school suspension so you just waste time.

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Tyrese:	They don't give you the work the teachers be doin' in class, so that's learning different lessons from a different teacher and getting double the work. Then you gotta catch back up on all the work from class.
Marcus:	They say they're tryin' to help students by getting you to see what you did wrong so you won't do it the next time, but I don't see how goin' home in the middle of the day or going to INR [in-school suspension room] when you could be learning actually helps. Kids go home and sleep all day and then they come back to school at 1:00. That doesn't really help at all.
Trey:	I know kids that go in to INR just to sit. They want to get swept so they can just sit. I know this kid who sat in INR all year and passed. That's sayin' somethin'.
Tyrese:	Yeah, it's sayin' the whole system's a joke.
Marcus:	It's better for me, but I think that's cuz athletes get treated differently than other people. We're given leeway. We can get away with some crazy stuff. Sometimes I show up late to school, but it won't get written down. I saw the quarterback and another kid. The other kid got swept. The teacher told the quarterback, "You need to hustle up." Then, if they're late, they'll just go to a certain teacher and ask them for a pass and they'll give it to 'em cuz they play sports. They don't want them to get in trouble today where they can't play. It happens all year round, not just during football season.
Trey:	I think it depends on how you do. I'm not gonna lie to you. I could walk out of this room right now and walk around and not have a word said to me.
Marcus:	That's the same thing with me. A lot of teachers see me with my hat on in the hallway and they don't tell me to take it off. We get special treatment.
Marcus:	Security always botherin' you constantly. They're always on you. A group of White people walkin' down the hallway, no questions asked. Soon as a group of Black people walk down the hallway, they start chasing you [Several students nodded and said, "uh-huh" signaling agreement].
Tyrese:	Another problem the security guards have. . . . You get in trouble at one point in time before and then start over . . . be alright. They think, "He got in trouble before—he's gonna keep doin' it so we gotta keep an eye on him."
Trey:	It seems like the Black ones treat everyone equal. They don't favor Black people or White people. But, it seems like some of the White security

guards always got it out for you. They take it way too serious. They don't have to go overboard.

The students spent a great deal of time talking about the various discipline policies and procedures at their respective schools. In one school, the discussion centered on the favoritism shown to athletes. This favoritism was regardless of their race. Students in one of the urban schools feel like the school security guards target them because they are Black. Several students thought that some of the discipline procedures were not effective, and in some cases, made no sense whatsoever. In one of the schools, the students discussed the school's "sweep rule." According to the "sweep rule," students are "swept" by the hall monitors if they are in the hallway after the bell has rung. If they are "swept," they go to the in-school suspension or they are sent home and required to return to school at 1:00 to finish their day.

Black males may be disproportionately affected by the increased emphasis on discipline that occurs in large schools. Simmons et al. (1991), for example, found that Black males showed the greatest increase in the incidence of suspensions and probations after the transition to junior high school. The trend throughout the 1990s toward get-tough approaches to violence disproportionately affected Black males (Roderick, 1993). Skiba (2002) found that the disproportionality that exists in disciplinary practices between Black males and their White peers may actually originate at the classroom level. They found that there were no differences impacting disproportionality at the office level.

This illustrates a situation in which one of the basic tenets of Critical Race Theory, interest convergence, plays out in schools. The student athletes, including students of color, are valued for their athletic prowess and the contribution they make to the school sports program. In other words, the interests of the students of color are

tended to only to the extent that they also serve the interest of the dominant, White culture.

School Clubs and Activities

Trey: We need more things that Black males can relate to, like this group [referring to the focus group]. We can express ourselves in this group. Troubled Black males should have a process where they could explain what they like and schools could create groups and clubs for that. Besides this group or Mr. Martin asking, I have never heard one staff say, "What are you interested in" or "What your hobbies are?" or "What do you like to do in your spare time?"

Marcus: We should have meetings like this where teachers sit and listen to the students. If they hear our voice, then maybe they'll understand us better; but that's not always the case. This was really good for me to be here today.

Olney: We never sat in a room with teachers and just talked back and forth. We should have people like you [referring to the focus group facilitators] come in more often and sit down and actually just talk to us. They talk about it, but it's never actually done. That would make a big difference.

Gerald: I think it's important for educators to hear this because they will never hear us say these things otherwise. It's important that they hear about how they can improve schools. I think they should hear more from the students than from other people. They'd probably be shocked at what we have to say.

Tyrese: We need a program to support a young Black male that everybody sees is gettin' in trouble. If a kid constantly gets in trouble and is involved in activities you know is not good, then why not create a program like this [referring to the focus group]. Like *Young Men's Leadership Group*. We need more programs cuz not everybody wants to join YMLG. Maybe they should create their own type of club that's gonna be positive.

Marcus: *Young Men's Leadership Group* has accomplished that for a lot of kids. We got a brotherhood goin'.

Trey: A lot of us won't join FBLA [Future Business Leaders of America] because it's a group of White people. You're just gonna go and feel uncomfortable [others all agree].

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Several students spoke about the need for more activities at their schools that would be better suited to meet the unique needs of Black males, particularly those experiencing challenges. The presence of sports appeared to be a strong motivator for many students. Several spoke specifically about the positive influence sports had on their school career. In fact, several said that without sports, they feel they may have ended up on the streets, like so many of their peers. The students in one of the urban high schools spoke very positively about their participation in the *Young Men's Leadership Group* and the positive impact it has had upon them since its inception at the school within the past few years. They also referred to the opportunity to participate in the focus groups as part of this study. Several made specific reference to the importance of opportunities in which students and teachers could just sit and talk together, such as the experience of participating in the focus group.

Moderator: What do you think could be done to improve things specifically for Black males?

Marcus: Everyone should have something that motivates them to do better . . . whatever that is. I find it real hard to go on with no drive. It could be after-school activities or something like that. We love music, so there should be a lot of music events, dance events, concerts. Black people are very social and like social events, so we should have more of them.

Tyrese: I feel like for Black males, we definitely need sports events. You should have lots of sports events. My family was number one, but my sports made me. Sports made me active and want to do something with myself. You never know, I could have been one of those kids on the streets. I like football and I use it to my advantage. You see a lot of Black males dominate in basketball and football.

Trey: The only thing that really drove me in school is the fact that I want to play college basketball at the highest level. At first when I was a freshman and sophomore, I didn't really care until my AAU coach told me that I had to have good grades if I wanted to play. So, that's when I really started to care about my grades . . . NCAA requirements and everything . . . that's when I finally got my grades up. If I wasn't in sports I don't know where

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I would be cuz I would have no motivation at all. Basketball is the only thing that motivates me. Everybody should be involved in sports cuz they teach you lessons about life, like leadership and teamwork and everything. For kids not involved in sports, they kinda out there. We're just tryin' to do well for ourselves. Everybody else is in the streets. When you play sports, you're kinda out of that.

Ability Grouping and Tracking

Jordan: You can tell there are two different social classes. If you look in class and you see all White people, it's probably an honors, AP, or college prep class. Last year in Geometry, which was a college prep class, most kids in there were White. Almost all the kids were getting good grades. I was failing and I had to be dropped down. When I went into the lower class, it was mostly minorities. The classes are not diverse. The classes need to be more diverse. In Math class, it's all White and Asian kids.

Olney: I think instead of separating people in different classes like Honors and putting all the smart White people together, they should put everybody together. You should want to put everybody equal cuz if not, people will think, "I'm not smart enough to be in that class," so you won't feel comfortable and so you'll want to drop down a level. So if they just put it equal, it would be better and everybody will feel the same way.

In Critical Race Theory, *Whiteness as property* denotes a concept whereby Whites in the U.S. have almost exclusively benefitted from the right to possess, use and enjoy, and dispose of property, with all the economic advantages inherent in this. Systems such as tracking, ability grouping, honors, and advanced placement continue to maintain the status quo. The formal ways that selection and admission into these programs are conducted guarantee that students of color have virtually no access to a high-quality curriculum or certainly one that will prepare them for college attendance (Oakes, 1995; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002). To this day, there are policies, structures, and practices in schools that restrict the access of students of color to high-quality curricula and to safe and well-equipped schools. In this way, Whites continue to enjoy benefits denied to others.

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Among African American students, dis-identification (often defined as emotional detachment from school) is shaped by negative teacher expectations (Finn, 1989), academic tracking (Taylor, 1991), and limited teacher support (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). How schools structure students' opportunities to learn has been shown to influence academic achievement (Epstein & MacIver, 1992; Lee & Bryk, 1988). The structure and culture of school play a major role in reinforcing and maintaining racial categories and the stereotypes associated with them. As schools sort children by perceived measures of ability and single out certain children for discipline, implicit and explicit messages about racial and gender identities are conveyed.

"Tracking reinforces America's value system with regard to elitism, and helps to increase a widening gap between the *haves* and *have nots*" (Kunjufu, 1989, p. 7). Tracking ensures that those in the lowest track will never catch up with those in the highest track; the gap continues to widen. Kunjufu (1989) asserts that these kinds of divisions reinforce the American economy, in which those who do not have will continue to go without. Spencer (1986) noted that a decline in scholastic achievement for Black males begins in second grade and, reinforced by academic tracking and negative stereotyping by influential adults, can become fully entrenched by fourth grade. Increased use of tracking in high schools makes it more likely that Black males will be placed in classrooms and tracks that further heighten relative comparisons between students and present even greater declines in academic opportunity and expectations (Roderick, 2003).

Goodlad (1984) found that tracking does not close the gap in academic achievement, but widens it further. To the degree that Asian and White children are

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disproportionately placed in gifted and honors classes, the idea that such children are inherently smarter may be inadvertently reinforced. Similarly, when African American and Latino children are overrepresented in remedial classes, special education programs, or on lists for suspension and expulsion, the idea that these children are not as smart or as well behaved is also reinforced (Ferguson, 2000).

This situation is further complicated by the fact that, in most cases, the most highly qualified teachers and the best resources are reserved for the highest tracks, while the students who would benefit from additional supports are relegated to lower tracks with less qualified teachers. When a student of color is placed in an Honors or Advanced Placement class, oftentimes, they are the only one or one of few students of color in the class. This placement can lead to numerous issues for the student of color including low expectations. They may also be ostracized by their peers, criticized for "acting White," or singled out in class, which further exacerbates the issue of ability grouping and tracking. While ability grouping and tracking were not discussed at length in any of the groups, those students who did mention it spoke against both ability grouping and tracking.

The Role and Presence of Racism

Olney: One thing that disappoints me about my school [a private parochial school] is the racist things and racist remarks. It's played down in our school. It needs to be talked about. It's like, Black people do this, and White people do that. You talk like this; you supposed to talk like that. They say, you're the Whitest Black kid I ever saw. They think they're [the remarks] harmless, but they aren't.

Trey: I basically think it's still the whole racism thing. It's mostly the students, not the teachers. Teachers do it sometimes, but it's the students. You try to be nice and introduce yourself. They have no interest and just walk

away. They don't care. You could ask them for help and they say they don't get it, but you know they get it.

Jordan: I remember my first day of school. Just because you're a *Project Choice* kid, they look at you different. One day, we got to school late and we were all standing outside the office. I overheard some White students say, "Why all these Black people here? We never had this many Black kids here before." From day one that kind of said to me, "Well, that's what they think of us. We need to do a whole lot better than we're doin'. We gotta ignore stuff like that. You can't let it bother you. Some kids were ready to argue and fight that day, but I think we need to let it go cuz that's just them being ignorant.

Gerald: That same kind of thing happened to me at school one day. There's a program called the ABC [*A Better Chance*] program. They take kids from New York City and bring 'em here [a predominantly White school in an affluent suburb]. If you're Black they automatically assume you are in the ABC program. The security guard asked me, "So, where are you from?" I said "here." He said, "No, not your host family, your real family." "I said the name of my town again. I was like, I live here." He automatically assumed I didn't because I'm Black.

Jordan: There's gonna be racism everywhere you go. People aren't gonna like you for your skin tone or how you act. All they're gonna do is bring you down, so I don't let it bother me anymore. I've had prejudice and stereotypes everywhere in my school since elementary school, but I just got to the point where I don't let it bother me anymore.

Marcus: At my school, a group of White people walk down the hallway and no questions are asked. As soon as Black people walk down the hallway, the guards start chasing you [all the students nodded in agreement]. Some of the White security guards seem like they always got it out for you. It seems like they follow certain people around. Another problem with the security guards is that once you get in trouble at one point in time and then you start over and you be alright. But, they think if he got in trouble before, he's gonna keep doin' it so keep an eye on him. You can't shake your past. It seems like the Black ones treat everyone equal. They don't favor Black people and they don't favor White people. But it seems like some of the White security guards always got it out for you. They take it way too serious. You don't have to go overboard.

One of the basic premises of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the notion of the

permanence of racism in society. Bell (1992) states, "Racism is a permanent component

of American life" (p. 13). According to Bell (1995), within a CRT framework, a "realist

view" requires acknowledging the dominant role that racism has played and continues to play in American society. This can be both a conscious and an unconscious act (Lawrence, 1995). This theory suggests that institutional racism is embedded in the nation's culture and evident in the hierarchy of its governmental, financial, and educational institutions. Furthermore, the notion of the *permanence of racism* implies that racist hierarchical structures govern all political, economic, and social domains. Such structures allocate the privileging of Whites and the subsequent "*othering*" of people of color in all arenas, including education.

Several students discussed the role of race and racism in their schooling, yet there appeared to be varying degrees of consciousness among them about the presence of racism in school and the impact it has had on their schooling. Some of the students appeared to be more racially conscious than others, while others appeared to struggle with whether or not to attribute the things that happen to them on a daily basis at school, and in society at large, to institutionalized racism. They shared times in which they felt like they may have experienced racism, but they hoped that was not the case. It appeared as if they wanted to believe that their experience could be attributed to something other than racism, yet it was clear the thought had crossed their mind. It was almost as if they wanted to deny the role and presence of racism, or at best, to wish it away. For instance, in addition to the stories of the student being mistaken for a student in the ABC program, or the reaction of the students to the *Project Choice* students, a third student told of the time in which he asked to be moved to a higher level class because he was bored in his current placement and felt he was capable of more rigorous work. When he made this request, he was told that there was no room in the class, only to find out later that a White

girl was transferred to that very class soon after his request was denied. He said, "I want to believe it wasn't racism, but you gotta wonder." In spite of their desire to discount the presence of racism, it was clear that all of the students have at least questioned the role that race and racism have played in their school experience.

It also appeared as though having a forum in which an open discussion of race and racism is sanctioned may have given the students the freedom to explore their feelings and perceptions. It is worth considering the fact that, at least within schools, students are rarely, if ever, provided with opportunities in which it is safe and "acceptable" to discuss race openly and honestly.

This is perhaps one of the greatest challenges for persons of color as they navigate the systems, structures, and institutions of American society. The burden to constantly have to question the impact of race casts a heavy weight on top of the everyday challenges of life. This burden must be a particularly heavy one for adolescents as they simultaneously attempt to navigate the challenges of adolescence, such as identity development and peer pressure.

The Importance of Involvement by Others

In this section, I discuss what the students shared about the important role that others play in their success. I discuss the role of family involvement and support, as well as the role that others, such as coaches and other positive role models, in particular Black male role models, can play in the support of students' success in school and in life.

Family Involvement and Support

Jordan: It's not all what the school can change. Teachers play a role, but not higher than your parents. It's at home too. It's how the parents treat them.

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For me, anyway, a lot of my success comes from the way my parents have made me strive to do better. They made me do my homework and everything. But really, in the end, it's all up to you!

Gerald: To be successful in school, you need your parents' help. They had to straighten everything out so I wouldn't get the short end of the stick.

Jordan: I would definitely say parents have to be involved. My family has helped me a lot. They're number 1. That's where it starts. They're your first role models because they teach you . . . guide you in the way you should go. My mom and my grandmother have been my number one role models. I think a lot of it has to do with home, like curfews and not going out on school nights. My mom's always over my back makin' sure I do my homework. I feel like if they're not a big part of your life to help you succeed, I don't know who can help.

Olney: Yeah, some kids, they not as strong minded as I am so their parents gotta be there for them sometimes. When they don't think their parents are there for them, they just gonna give up.

Trey: Yeah, they may lose confidence, and when they lose that confidence, they become the opposite and end up becoming a real life thug or gangster. My mom has always helped me. She made me come right home from school and stuff like that. My mom would be my role model. She keeps me focused.

Tyrese: My mom keeps me on top of my game too. She pushes me to my highest potential and makes sure I'm on point. My sister pushed me too because she's already goin' to college at Howard University. That makes me want to do the same thing and go to an even better college.

Marcus: My great-grandmother started seeing me go down the wrong path. She took me under her wing and helped me see different stuff so I can be somethin'. She helped me by just takin' me under her wing.

Trey: Then you got the kids that don't have any parents at all . . . no type of foundation or any type of family structure at all to show them right from wrong. Some others have families that don't support them. They say negative things about you. They push you down when you're bein' successful. You'd think your family would be the one pushin' you on to do better, but sometimes that's not the case. It's the opposite.

Tyrese: Also with parents. . . . Schools have PTA meetings. . . . I don't never see Black parents at these PTA meetings, but there's a whole bunch of White parents. They want to be involved. I mean, if it was introduced to Black

parents, I'm pretty sure my mother would be involved. She's just not aware of it.

Trey: Sometimes they send stuff in the mail and we don't get it or sometimes it's too late. I think it's not fair cuz certain parents do want to get involved with the school but they can't cuz the school is not lettin' them participate.

Tyrese: Mr. Martin, he's tryin' to get more parents involved. He's called and he actually has us handing letters to our parents. That's what needs to happen more. If the school wants to change, they need more people that will be on call. They need to call on these parents and let them know what's goin' on.

Jordan: The reason my parents is involved is cuz they see there's a lack of involvement, so they're tryin' to make a difference. Tryin' to encourage more parents to get involved. Those are the type of people that need to be involved.

Olney: Each person has to do their part in everything. Like the teacher has to do their part, the students and the parents too, in order to make it real good, cuz if you have two people that's down on you, that's gonna make you go down. So, everyone has a big part to play.

Support From Positive Role Models

Jordan: Black males need positive role models that are Black males. Most want to see a young Black male doin' well for himself. If they see him doin' well and he's got money, then they want to do that too.

Moderator: Do you think it is important that the role model be a Black male?

Jordan: Yes, because there isn't a lot expected from Black males in society. Every time you go to McDonald's or Burger King you see a Black male. You don't really hear about many Black males with really good jobs or anything.

Olney: Well, Mr. Marcucci . . . he's White and he's like a father figure to me. I got my real father, my step-father and my ND [name of the school] father. He changed me. He talked to me about things. He is always there for me.

Trey: I could speak for most of us in this school [one of the urban high schools], especially the boys. We really don't have no father, so we need a father figure like, it's kind of like, showin' you how to be a man. That could be the missin' link . . . I don't know.

Olney: Coaches fill that little gap that actually stops the majority of us from bein'
              men.

Marcus: My track coach teaches us stuff like how, when you become a man, people
              will depend on you. He emphasized that a team is like a family.
              Everybody has to lean on one another. If one person can't be leaned on,
              the whole thing will collapse.

Tyrese: My football coach says without school you can't go nowhere. He
              emphasizes schoolwork first. He believes grades are important and that
              will take you anywhere you need to go. He talks to the football players
              like he talks to his own sons. If I'm havin' a problem, I can go to him and
              talk to him. I'm not gonna lie to you. He'll 'man you up'. You lie, he
              make you tell the truth. You gotta respect him for it. Coach is like a father
              figure to the whole football team.

Trey: You need somebody to stay on you, like Mr. Martin [Assistant Principal].
              He stayed on me. One day, when I got in trouble, he put his finger in my
              chest and said, "Stop being stupid. You need to go to school. Don't let
              them bring you down like that" [referring to peers].

Tyrese: There's also people out in the community, like in the teen centers. There's
              a guy there; he's an African American male and he's helped all of us. He
              even made his own group called Boys to Men. We need to see people
              from the community or past alumni who are successful.

Gerald: I really liked the guy that spoke earlier today [referring to a professor from
              a local community college who is also a facilitator for the Anti-
              Defamation League and volunteers at the monthly meetings of the
              Diversity Dream Team]. I would love to have someone like him at my
              school. It's how he presents himself. Every night you see a Black man
              get shot. It's nice to see a change. If you had someone like him speaking
              on BET, people would sit back in awe just by his whole demeanor.

Olney: That guy that spoke earlier; he's a good speaker. If you sent him to a
              school, he could change somebody. He could change somebody's outlook
              . . . enlighten somebody. We don't get that anymore. We don't have any
              Malcolm X's or Martin Luther Kings. We have Jesse Jackson, but I asked
              my mom why she doesn't join the NAACP and she said it's because it's
              changed. She said, "I don't want you joining something that as soon as
              someone says one little thing, someone jumps on it and says it's racist."

Trey: We had a big meeting with Mr. Martin, a state representative, a senator,
              and the commissioner. They came here to let us know how to make it out
              there, even though you didn't have a father figure in your life. Told us
              how to strive to do better than you're doin' now.

While there seemed to be different feelings about the race of the teacher, most of the students feel that their school experience may be better if there were more positive Black male role models in their schools. Several students talked about the lack of a positive male role model in their lives. Several spoke about the lack of a father figure in their lives and felt like a positive male role model in their school may fill that role and be beneficial for them. The student athletes spoke very positively about the role their coaches play. The race of the coach did not surface as a factor. Several spoke about a White coach who has been instrumental in their success in high school and in some cases has served as a father figure. Several also spoke about the importance their parents have played, particularly their moms, in their success in school.

Contrary to the generally accepted objectives of schooling, the current thinking of many researchers and educators is that schools are not meeting the particular social and developmental needs of African American males (Brown & Davis, 2000). Consistent and positive role models in educational settings provide models for young Black males to emulate. The presence of committed and successful Black male adults in educational environments is essential for enhancing Black boys' academic and social development (Jeff, 1994; Span, 2000). This positive male presence is meant to diffuse traditional masculine behaviors and counter negative gender role socialization of Black boys.

Moderator: What do you think was the most important thing we talked about today?

Marcus: What can make African American males succeed more cuz I'm Black and I want to succeed and all my other friends do too; whether they're Black/White/Spanish. Also the fact that we have the highest dropout rate. I think that's important to talk more about.

Trey: I agree. Just cuz we're Black don't mean we can't achieve, be successful, achieve all our goals, make it in life, and be the best we can. It's really up to you. That's what I think and that's what's important. They can only

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push you so far to succeed, but like someone said earlier, if the student doesn't really care; doesn't want to succeed, you can't make 'em. It's up to him.

Gerald: I think it's important to try to help, but just don't single us out and give us extra attention. I understand if you're gonna try to help, but don't single us out. Just treat us equally.

Summary

In this study, Black high-school males discussed their school experiences and they shared the challenges they face. They spoke about negative stereotypes and their frustration in countering or counteracting these images in school. They expressed frustration about the portrayal of Black males in the media and some shared their struggles and confusion in trying to understand what it means to act Black or to be accused of acting White.

The students spoke about the importance of the relationship between teachers and their students. They spoke about their desire for their teachers to show a genuine interest in getting to know them, beyond the stereotyped image of Black males, and also for their teachers to respect them for who they are, regardless of the way they dress or where they live. Some said they would not show respect for a teacher who does not show respect for them.

The students spoke about their desire to have teachers who believe in their potential to learn. They expressed frustration in their perception that teachers doubt them and they feel as though they have to work harder to prove themselves. They want teachers who set high expectations and push them to achieve their potential. They want teachers who "really teach" and who provide all students with the help they need to

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understand the content and to succeed. Perhaps most important, the students expressed a desire to have teachers who "really care" and who can connect with them.

Most of the students felt as if the race of their teachers was not the most important factor in the teacher-student relationship. While some said they feel they may have benefitted from having more teachers of color at their schools, they felt that it was most important that teachers care, show a genuine interest in them, can connect with them and because of their belief in their ability to achieve, they set high expectations, provide the help they need to understand, and push them to achieve. They want teachers who teach all students, not just those students who seem to show promise and are getting A's. Several students admitted that they are "doing just enough to get by," but would welcome a teacher's push to encourage them and support them to do better.

The students spoke about the overall climate and culture of their schools. They spoke about the presence of prejudice and institutional racism, but, in most cases, they attempted to try to explain it away as something other than racism. The students who attend schools with less racial diversity expressed a desire for greater diversity. Those students in the more racially diverse schools spoke about their appreciation for the diverse representation in their schools.

The students spoke about the disciplinary policies and practices in their schools, expressing, in most cases, that they felt as though they were disproportionately affected by discipline practices. They spoke about the desire for more clubs and activities, particularly those that would better match the interests and needs of Black males. They want their schools to offer activities, beyond sports, that will engage Black males. They spoke about the positive impact of their participation in activities such as the *Young*

Men's Leadership Group and the *Diversity Dream Team.* The students also expressed the desire to have more opportunities to participate in groups such as the focus group sessions, in which they could just sit and talk with their teachers and the teachers would listen.

The students spoke about the role that others have played in their success, or lack of success, in school. Many students spoke about the critical role their moms have played. Some students spoke about the impact of absentee fathers. They lamented the lack of a father figure and felt that the lack of positive Black male role models has had a detrimental impact on them. In the absence of a father figure, several students spoke about the desire to have positive Black male role models take a more active role in schools. A few spoke about the role that negative Black male role models have played in the lives of some Black males. Several spoke about the need to be exposed to more Black male role models, particularly those who are in positive positions in the community or in professional occupations. A few students said, "We need to see what we can become."

The results of my study support the potential benefits to inviting students to share their perspectives about their schooling experiences. Better understanding the perspectives of Black males may assist schools in meeting their needs in order to enhance the likelihood of success in school. Student voice and greater student participation have potential benefits for both the students and the system of schooling. Student voice activities can create meaningful experiences for youth that help to meet fundamental needs, especially for students who otherwise do not find meaning in their school experiences. Specifically, "student participation has been shown to have a positive impact

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on three developmental assets that are central to youth development: a marked

consistency in the growth in agency, belonging, and competence" (Mitra, 2004, p. 651).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to seek the perspectives of adolescent Black males regarding their schooling experience and achievement in an attempt to better understand the experience and the complexities of persistent achievement gaps between students of color and their White peers. The primary question that guided this study was, "How do adolescent Black males describe their schooling experience and the impact that experience has had on their achievement and success in school?"

Research Design

This was a qualitative study using a phenomenological and narrative inquiry design. Phenomenology is a school of philosophical thought that underpins all of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Phenomenology focuses on experience and interpretation, with specific emphasis on the essence or structure of an experience (phenomenon). According to Patton (1990), this type of research is based on the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience. The general format of the phenomenological method may be summarized as (a) gathering a full set of naive descriptions from persons who had the particular research experience; (b) analyzing the descriptions in order to grasp common elements that make the experience what it is; and

(c) describing or giving a clear, accurate, and articulate account of the phenomenon so that it can be understood by others (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Narrative inquiry provides a way to explore the meaning of systems operating within social constructs such as the educational system. The inquiry process allows for meaning to emerge through the personal stories of those involved in the process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. They argue, "Experience happens narratively and therefore, educational experiences should be studied narratively" (p. 18). They further state that "if we understand the world narratively, then it makes sense to study the world narratively" (p. 18). They conclude, "Narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences" (p. 18).

The study included 32 students from six high schools. Five focus groups and six 1:1 semi-structured interviews were conducted with adolescent Black males in Grades 9-12. The data from the focus groups and 1:1 semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed to inform the study. Four groups were conducted at two urban high schools with approximately 12 students from each school participating. Each focus group consisted of approximately six students. An additional focus group was conducted with students from four high schools, both public and private, who participate in the *Diversity Dream Team*. That focus group consisted of five students. Participants were selected by school personnel. Prior to selection, I discussed with them the desire to assemble a group that would yield multiple perspectives regarding the schooling experiences of Black males. Participants were selected opportunistically, according to both convenience and willingness to participate. Participation was voluntary.

Because I am a White female, consideration was given to the impact that fact might have on the study, the participant, or both. Therefore, the focus groups were co-facilitated by two Black females, with a Black male serving as a recorder. Fourteen questions were asked of each group. Not all of the questions generated the same level of interest or level of discussion. There were differences in terms of how much time a particular group spent on a particular question, as well as which questions received more or less attention. When necessary, the facilitators probed to seek clarification or further explanation.

Theoretical Frameworks

The most important and critical overarching flaw in research on Black youth, and boys particularly, is the absence of a systems-focused theoretical framework that can analyze, represent, and explain the mechanisms of experiences and outcomes. A comprehensive theory that takes into account both normative developmental processes and specific risks faced by African Americans, the effect of experiences on coping and identity processes, and the effect of these on life outcomes is needed. In the absence of such a comprehensive theory, this study was developed on the basis of the culturalist and structuralist viewpoints about race, as well as Critical Race Theory, and Student Voice.

Structuralist and Culturalist Viewpoints

In the study of race, various scholars, notably educators, anthropologists, and sociologists, propose various viewpoints. Two viewpoints addressed in this study are the structuralist and the culturalist viewpoints. Structuralists generally focus on the political economy, the availability of jobs and economic opportunity, class structure, and social

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geography (Massey & Denton, 1993; Tabb, 1970; Wilson, 1978, 1987). From this perspective, individuals are viewed as products of their environment, and changes in individual behavior are made possible by changes in the structure of opportunity. According to this view, the most effective way to reduce objectionable behavior is to reduce the degree and extent of inequality in society (Noguera, 2001). Relating this viewpoint to education, several scholars note that the way in which schools structure students' opportunities to learn has been shown to influence student achievement (Epstein & MacIver, 1992; Lee & Bryk, 1988).

Culturalists downplay the significance of environmental factors and treat human behavior as a product of beliefs, values, norms, and socialization. Cultural explanations of behavior focus on moral codes that operate within particular families, communities, or groups (Anderson, 1990). For the culturalists, change in behavior can only be brought about through cultural change. Hence, providing more money to inner-city schools will do little to improve their academic performance because their attitudes toward school are shaped by the culture they brought from home and the neighborhood in which they live (Murray, 1984).

Both structural and cultural forces influence choices and actions, but neither has the power to act as the sole determinant of behavior because human beings have the ability to produce cultural forms that can counter these pressures (Levinson et al., 1996). The structural and cultural explanations of human behavior have traditionally been seen as irreconcilable. However, Kristin Luker (1996) demonstrated the possibility for synthesizing the two perspectives.

As I began this study, I felt that both the structuralist and the culturalist viewpoints had merit. Therefore, I felt that it was important to better understand how each of these viewpoints plays out in the lives of Black males. Without a better understanding of the forces at play in the education and schooling of Black males, we are not likely to find the solutions to eliminate racial achievement gaps and find ways to meet their needs in order to enhance the likelihood that they will be successful in school.

Since race is not synonymous with culture, I also felt that it was important to examine the impact of race on the educational experiences of Black males. Given that racism is a social reality, I felt that a better understanding of the impact of race and racism on the schooling of Black males had to be explored. For that reason, I turned to the work of critical race scholars such as Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado and chose to focus on Critical Race Theory as a foundational theoretical framework for this study.

Critical Race Theory

Various aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) provide the theoretical foundation for this study. Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado are among other scholars who have developed CRT. Critical Race Theorists are interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. According to Critical Race Theory and its "social construction" theory, "race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). "Race is a social construction, not a biological reality" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 17).

CRT began as a movement in the law, but it has rapidly spread beyond that discipline. Building on the theoretical traditions of critical legal theory, Critical Race Theory is a multidisciplinary approach to examining the intersections and interconnectedness of race, class, gender, and sexuality oppression, particularly as they relate to the lives of people of color (Delgado, 1995; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker et al., 1998).

Race has been under-theorized in education (Tate, 1997). However, today, many in the field of education consider themselves Critical Race Theorists who use the tenets of CRT to understand educational issues such as discipline, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Lynn and Adams (2002) attempted to move the discourse "towards exemplification of the many ways in which CRT currently shapes educational research and enables education scholars to analyze educational outcomes that might otherwise remain hidden from view" (p. 88). They put forth a call for CRT to move beyond analysis to action. Parker and Stovall (2004) later explored how CRT can move from theoretical explication to action that impacts the lives of disenfranchised people of color.

"Critical race scholars in education are concerned with how schools act as racial stratifiers. They are committed to conducting both qualitative and quantitative research that exposes racist beliefs, practices, and structures in schools and the broader society. They are committed to using their critiques as a basis to create more equitable and humane discourses, practices, and structures that will enable racially marginalized students and other school people to overcome and ultimately destroy existing obstacles to their freedom" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 282).

Student Voice

Student voice research and theory also provide a theoretical framework for this study. The concept of student voice represents a new frontier in the field of education, yet, in recent years, the term 'student voice' has increasingly been discussed in the school reform literature as a potential avenue for improving student outcomes and facilitating school change (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2003; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Adults (both teachers and researchers) more often than not leave students out of the dialogue about educational concerns and underestimate the potential that students have in contributing to our understandings (Erickson & Schultz, 1992). Advocates generally agree, "student voice" is "an increasingly important element in understanding teaching and schooling more generally, but how that understanding is achieved and what is done in response or with it vary considerably" (McCallum et al., 2000, p. 276).

There is no simple, fixed definition or explication of the term "voice" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363). How voice is defined depends in part on the relationship that exists in a particular context between "voice" and "agency" or "action" (Holdsworth, 2000, p. 357). "Student voice" efforts ask us to connect the sound of students speaking not only to those students experiencing meaningful acknowledged presence, but also with their having the power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices in schools.

Researchers (Fielding, 2001; Holdsworth, 2005) point to the importance of linking student voice with action, arguing that "authentic" student voice is not simply to provide data for others to make decisions, but that it should encourage young people's active participation in shared decision making and consequent actions. Meaningful involvement of students means validating and authorizing them to represent their own

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ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experiences throughout education in order to improve our schools (Fletcher, 2005).

Authorizing student perspectives (Cook-Sather, 2002) introduces into critical conversations the missing perspectives of those who experience daily the effects of existing educational policies-in-practice. Because students "have been silenced all their lives" (Giroux, 1992, p. 158), they have singular and invaluable views on education from which both adults and students themselves can benefit (Cook-Sather & Schultz, 2001a, 2001b; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Oldfather, 1995; Oldfather et al., 1999). "Students are experts on their own perceptions and experiences as learners. They are the only authentic chroniclers of their own experience" (Delpit, 1988, p. 297).

Results

The students openly shared their perspectives about their schooling experience. Their responses appeared to be candid and they appeared to be genuinely interested in telling the stories of their schooling experiences. Several broad themes emerged from the focus group and 1:1 semi-structured interview sessions. The main themes that emerged included Black Student Identity, The Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships, The Overall School Climate, and the Importance of Families and Other Positive Role Models.

The results indicate that, in some ways, the Black males interviewed share a common experience regardless of their school setting. In other ways, the students' experiences differed based on various contextual factors such as the racial makeup of the school. Therefore, the major results are presented as themes common to all Black male students, themes from students in racially diverse urban school, and themes from students in less racially diverse suburban schools.

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Results for Students Across All School Settings

Black Student Identity

1. An appreciation for the value of an education in future success

2. A desire to graduate from high school, attend college, and be successful

3. A desire for teachers to believe in their ability to succeed and to provide

encouragement for them to do so

4. Frustration regarding negative stereotypes about Black males.

Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships

1. The importance of positive interpersonal relationships between students and

teachers, characterized by caring, connectedness, and respect

2. The desire for more culturally responsive curriculum that addresses the

interests and experiences of Black males.

School Climate

1. Questions about the presence of racism in the school

2. Unfair disciplinary policies and practices

3. A desire for more clubs and activities, beyond sports, that would better meet

the needs and interests of Black males.

The Importance of Involvement by Others

1. The importance of family involvement

2. Importance of role models, such as coaches and other school personnel to set

high expectations for Black males

3. The desire for more positive Black male role models in school.

Results for Students in Racially Diverse Urban Schools

Black Student Identity

    1. Discrimination by school personnel and community members based on how they dress and negative stereotypes about Black males.

Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships

    1. Lack of the help needed to understand course material from some teachers

    2. Lack of attention given to some students in favor of others who are perceived to have greater potential.

School Climate

    1. Appreciation for the racial diversity in their schools.

Importance of Involvement by Others

    1. The strong role their mom has played in their success.

Results for Students in Less Racially Diverse Suburban Schools

Black Student Identity

    1. More discussion about what it means to "*act Black*" or "*act White*" and more apparent confusion regarding racial identity.

Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships

    1. Expressed a greater desire for greater presence of staff of color in their schools.

School Climate

    1. Desire for greater racial diversity in their school

    2. Frustration with discrimination and prejudice by other students.

Importance of Involvement by Others

    1. Importance of involvement of family

    2. Importance of positive role models such as coaches.

Discussion

Black Student Identity

The students across the groups all expressed an appreciation for the value of education and a desire to achieve and be successful in life. They all planned to graduate and shared their goals for pursuing college after high school. Several had specific professions in mind as career choices after high school. Several students also shared candidly that in order to achieve those goals, they knew they had to work harder than they were currently.

Many of the young men spoke about their desire to be known and respected for who they are as individuals, not by an image that is based on negative cultural messages and stereotypes. They expressed the desire for teachers to develop a positive relationship with them and to show a willingness to connect with them and get to know them personally. This was consistent across the focus groups regardless of school setting. However, the frustration specific to being typecast as a "thug" because of the way they dress or where they live seemed more prevalent in the two urban high schools and less prevalent in the discussion with the students of the *Diversity Dream Team*. These

findings are consistent with the findings of other researchers. Cohen et al. (2006) say that school settings can be stressful to all students, but that Black students experience an extra "threat" due to negative stereotypes about the intelligence of their race.

Weis and Fine (2005) found that youth from urban and suburban schools, across racial and ethnic lines, and from diverse social classes and academic biographies, want, among other things, respect for their varied identities, and not to be judged by the color of their skin, the fashion they don, the language they speak, or the zip code in which they live. Schultz and Cook-Sather (2001) found that, among other overarching themes, students want to be their whole selves; they do not want to be fragmented, categorized, compared to and judged against one another, treated differently or discriminated against.

The students in the less racially diverse schools appeared to struggle to a greater degree with issues of racial identity. This was evidenced by the focus on issues such as what it means to "act White" or "act Black." Students in one of the less racially diverse schools discussed the implications of "acting White" or "acting Black" and specifically addressed the racial dynamics of the school cafeteria. Conversely, these topics were not discussed by the students in the urban high schools.

Claude Steele (1992) discusses the impact of *racial stigma* on students of color. This appeared to be an issue that all of the students confront. It appeared as though the students in less racially diverse schools struggled more in reference to maintaining a Black identity while navigating a predominantly White school setting. Fordham (1988) discussed the need for many Black males to use a *raceless persona* in order to achieve academic success in a school that contradicts identification with Black culture. This appeared to be more an issue for Gerald and Olney and others in the less racially diverse

schools, whereas the students in the more racially diverse schools appeared to struggle less with confusion in reference to "how to act," but appeared to face greater challenges in relation to the negative *images* others assign to them based on how they dress or where they live.

Finally, several students spoke about their own role in their success. Some spoke with amazing candor in recognizing and acknowledging that their success is not just the responsibility of school personnel. In some cases, the students admitted to putting forth only minimal effort and acknowledged that they are doing "just enough to get by." There are structural issues in schools that appear to have impact upon the racial identity of students of color. The demands of the dominant culture of schools are oftentimes in conflict with the Black students' identity. It is conceivable that many students of color develop cultural adaptations to the structural issues present in their schooling experience. Pine and Hilliard (1990) state,

> The consequences of institutional racism and a monocultural education are pervasive and profound. Students of color experience conceptual separation from their roots; and they are compelled to examine their own experiences and history through the assumptions, paradigms, constructs, and language of other people; they lose their cultural identity; and they find it difficult to develop a sense of affiliation and connection with school. They become "universal strangers"—disaffected and alienated—and all too many eventually drop out of school. (p. 4)

Non-White children are generally expected to be bicultural, bilingual, and bicognitive; to measure their performance against a Euro-American yardstick; and to maintain the psychic energy necessary to sustain this orientation. These expectations apply to both the school system and to society at large (Anderson, 1988).

Teachers, many of whom are White, have not experienced the same struggle with racial identity development, as have the students of color whom they teach. As members

of the dominant culture, these teachers have experienced greater harmony between their inner and outer experiences. For students of color, this is not the case; hence they experience dissonance in trying to resolve the mismatch between the two experiences. For students of color, there is greater dissonance between who they are and who they are expected to be in the current culture of schools. Because White teachers have likely not experienced the dissonance themselves, they may not recognize the dissonance present for children of color between their inner experience (racial identity) and the outer experience and circumstances of schooling. A better understanding of and appreciation for this dissonance is needed in order for White teachers to be able to assist their students of color who are struggling with issues of racial identity as they relate to the dominant culture of schools.

The Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships

The students in all of the groups discussed the importance of positive interpersonal relationships, in particular, the relationship between the students and the teacher. There was considerable agreement across all of the groups regarding the characteristics of "good" vs. "bad" teachers and also about the type of teachers they want. Respect appeared the most desired of teacher behaviors. The other characteristics mentioned most frequently were caring and the ability to connect. Cushman (2003) says, "In the high school classroom, respect and trust travel a two-way street between the teacher and student and have everything to do with learning" (p. 17). Corbett and Wilson (2001) found that "believing a teacher cared about then did more than just make students feel good. Students transformed teachers' caring enough to teach them into academic self-confidence" (p. 89). Academic self-confidence appears to be an issue for many

Black males due to stereotypes and other negative cultural messages about intelligence and achievement.

Consistent across the groups was a desire for teachers who believe in their ability to succeed, who set high expectations based on that belief, and who push them to meet standards and their goals. Across the groups, the students expressed their frustration in having to "prove themselves" because of teachers' doubt in their desire or ability to achieve. The students in the urban schools were more vocal about their perception that teachers do not appear willing to provide the necessary level of support to all students. Many indicated their need for different types or greater levels of support to achieve but did not feel as though that help is provided to students in a consistent manner. They want teachers to help all students, not just those who are perceived as having the potential to achieve at high levels.

Across the groups, at least initially, the students did not appear to have a preference for the race of the teacher and most did not believe that to be the most important characteristic in developing positive relationships with teachers. However, as further discussion ensued, many said that there might have been a positive impact on their schooling experience had there been a greater presence of staff of color in their school. The students in the predominantly White schools, in particular Gerald, expressed the greatest desire to have a greater presence of staff of color to whom he could go to discuss issues related to race, identity, and other issues that he does not currently feel he can discuss with school personnel as openly as he would like.

The race of the teacher seems to affect how teachers view Black students and what their commitment may be to the education of Black students (Beady & Hansell,

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1981; Kohl, 1991). The research of Irvine (1990a) and Ladson-Billings (1994) documents the critical role that teachers play in the achievement of students of color. "Not only do teachers influence the achievement and cognitive development of African American students; they also influence their self concept and attitudes" (Irvine, 2003, p. 72). Students from culturally diverse backgrounds tend to be more dependent on teachers than do their other-race peers and tend to perform poorly in school when they do not like their teachers (Johnson & Prom-Jackson, 1986). Irvine (2003) states,

> It does matter who the teacher is. Indeed, we teach who we are. Teachers bring to their work values, opinions, and beliefs; their prior socialization and present experiences; and their race, gender, ethnicity, and social class. These attributes and characteristics influence teachers' perceptions of themselves as professionals. (p. 46)

She goes on to say, "Teachers have preferences for the type of student whom they want to teach. They do not treat all students the same or have similar expectations for their success or achievement" (p. 46).

Across the groups, the students spoke about their desire for curriculum and instruction that better matched their race, culture, interests, and experiences. Although few studies have examined the relationship between culture and education among adolescents, it is clear from the available research that using an instructional approach disconnected from students' culture creates student resistance (Foster, 1997; Hale, 1994; Hollins, 1996; Hudley, 1995; Lipman, 1995; Tatum, 2000, 2005). Alfred Tatum (2005) suggests that "teachers must become personally invested in their Black male students in a way that moves beyond the existing curriculum. Instruction must take place in responsive environments where the literacies of Black males can flourish" (p. 35).

Several students specifically discussed concerns about the way in which Black History Month is dealt with in schools. They expressed frustration that they are exposed

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to curriculum that addresses the accomplishments of persons of color only during the month of February, and then even then, they feel like most teachers teach this content only "because they have to." In addition, they feel the scope of the curriculum is limited to the same famous persons of color such as Martin Luther King or Rosa Parks, with no attention given to the numerous other famous Black Americans. They also expressed the desire to have teachers of color teach the curriculum during Black History Month. Some students questioned how a White teacher could teach the aspects of the curriculum that address the contributions of persons of color. This is perhaps the reason for the limited scope of the curriculum. You cannot teach what you do not know.

Black students appear to be separated from their history and literature (Allsup, 1997). This was most apparent in the discussion with the students in the *Diversity Dream Team* group. They specifically spoke about the Language Arts curriculum. They expressed a desire to be introduced to a more diverse array of literature. They expressed frustration for the fact that the literature they are exposed to is predominantly American Literature and most often "by dead White guys." Consistent with this view, Grant and Gillette (1987) state,

> Through the omission of information, America's schools have become monocultural environments. They dispense a curriculum centered on western civilization that encapsulates only narrowly the truth, reality, and breadth of human experience. This curriculum reinforces institutional racism by excluding from discourse and from the ethos of the school and the classroom the intellectual thought, scholarship, history, culture, contributions, and experience of minority groups. (p. 3)

School Climate

The students discussed various issues related to the overall school climate in their schools. Across the groups, there appeared to be a perception of favoritism, most

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specifically in relationship to disciplinary policies and procedures. In one of the two

urban schools, the students expressed frustration about their perception of being targeted

by the White security guards. The students in the other urban high school spoke

specifically about the favoritism shown to athletes in terms of discipline practices. They

felt as if athletes are given leeway and can get away with many things because of their

status as an athlete. There was discussion related to other aspects of favoritism shown

towards athletes, including the inequity in school funds used for athletic programs as

opposed to other school clubs and activities. This appeared to be a concern to those

students who do not participate in athletics and, across the groups, the students expressed

a desire to have more options for clubs and activities that could be provided for Black

males as alternatives to participating in athletic programs.

The students in all groups discussed situations and experiences in which they at

least questioned the role of race and racism. In several cases, particularly in the schools

with less racial diversity, the students appeared eager to try to deny the presence of

racism in the given situation. One of the basic tenets of Critical Race Theory refers to the

permanence of racism. In other words, CRT recognizes that racism is endemic to

American life (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). This type of racism

can be characterized by those mundane practices and events that are infused with some

degree of unconscious mal-intent. It can also be described as those institutional policies

and practices that are fair in form, but have a disproportionately negative impact on racial

minority groups (Lawrence, 1987). Despite the students' attempts to explain away

encounters with racism, the experiences the students describe appear to point to the

presence of prejudice and racism in the schools. In fact, students of color likely carry an

additional burden due to the psychic energy required to even question the role of race and racism in their daily experiences.

The Importance of Involvement of Others

When students were asked about those who played a role in their success in school, they spoke about family, as well as other positive role models and, in particular, coaches. Many students spoke about the role their moms played in supporting them in school. The conversation in the groups at the two urban high schools focused more specifically on the absence of a father figure in the lives of many Black males and, therefore, the desire to have other positive male role models play a role in their education. Some felt that the race of the role model was not important, but others felt as though they need to be exposed to more positive Black male role models in order to "see what we can become." Those in the two urban high schools focused more on the limited opportunities to see Black males in good jobs or professional roles and their perception that this limited their vision for what they could become. However, the students in the *Diversity Dream Team* also discussed the desire for positive Black male role models. They felt as if earlier generations had more exposure to positive Black male role models, but this generation is exposed to rappers and athletes who do affect how they perceive themselves and their future.

For the athletes, it was clear that their coaches have played a crucial role in their success in school. A few students spoke about sports as being "the" motivator for them and, in some cases, the only reason they are still in school. Some said that if not for their involvement in sports, they "would be on the streets like the other kids." It appears as though the coaches play a critical role, and it appeared as though the race of the coach

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was not a factor. Several spoke about a White coach and the role he played as both a coach and a father figure.

Summary

The current thinking of many researchers and educators is that schools are not meeting the particular social and developmental needs of African American males (Brown & Davis, 2000). The negative school experiences and outcomes for Black males are viewed, to varying degrees, as products of structural factors, results of cultural adaptations to systemic pressures and maladaptive definitions of masculinity (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Hare & Hare, 1985; Majors & Mancini Billson, 1992). Identity development is an issue for all adolescents. However, due to the negative cultural messages and stereotypes that Black males must face and attempt to overcome, it appears to be particularly challenging for Black males.

The students in this study appear to struggle with many of the issues addressed in the literature about Black males and schooling. The students spoke about their perception that they must work harder to be accepted and to "prove themselves" both to other students and to adults. They all appeared to struggle, in one way or another, with their developing racial identity, which appeared to be impacted at least to some degree by their schooling experience. They all spoke about their desire for positive relationships with their teachers, characterized by caring, connectedness, and respect. They want teachers to get to know them as individuals, separate from the negative images of Black males portrayed in the media. They want teachers to believe in them and in their ability to learn and to achieve. They want teachers to set high expectations for them and then to provide support to them in meeting those expectations. They want to be pushed. They want

teachers to offer encouragement and to provide the help needed to assist them in meeting their learning goals. They want to be taught by teachers who recognize and appreciate their interests and experiences and make connections to those interests and experiences in the curriculum and their instruction. Finally, they recognize that it cannot all be done by the educators. They recognize the importance of family support and want schools to reach out to empower and engage their families in meaningful ways. They are asking for access to positive role models who can help them to "see what they can become."

This study supports the notion that, in many cases, there appears to be a mismatch between the structures and systems of schooling and the needs of Black males that are based on their race, culture, and ethnicity. In response to structures that do not match their needs, it is likely that they develop cultural adaptations, perhaps as a means to both navigate and survive the school experience. It is likely that the achievement and overall success of Black males is affected by the nature of their encounters with the systems, structures, and practices of schools. This study supports the possibility that schools can create systems, structures, and practices that empower and engage students who have not previously been empowered. Through providing opportunities for authentic participation and voice in decision-making, schools can enhance the students' feelings of belonging and connectivity in ways that may have positive impact on their engagement and identification with schooling.

Consistent with the literature on student voice, the students appeared to feel empowered as a result of their participation in this study. They were engaged in the process, and in each of the five groups, the students expressed to the facilitators a desire for greater opportunities to engage in processes in which they could sit and talk with their

teachers and other school personnel to discuss issues that arise in their schooling. They specifically stated that opportunities such as that provided by the focus group rarely, if ever, occurred in their schools. Yet, they were clear in their belief that this type of process would have great benefit.

The results of my study support my belief that it is important that schools find ways to increase authentic student participation and engage student voice in both our school improvement efforts, and more importantly, in the everyday operations of schools. Student participation and voice are important at all levels of schooling. There is growing evidence that Black male disengagement with schooling develops in the early grades and continues to intensify as they progress through school (Carter, 2003). Therefore, it may be particularly beneficial for schools to find ways to increase participation and provide opportunities for Black boys to participate in meaningful and authentic ways in their schooling experience, beginning in the early grades. Increased opportunities may be critical as students enter middle and high school, since it is at this time that the process of disengagement and alienation from schooling intensifies.

While authentic student participation and voice are likely to be beneficial for all students, it may be particularly beneficial for students who feel disempowered by the current structures of schooling and therefore feel marginalized and disenfranchised from the experience. In *Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race, and Gender in the United States* (Weis & Fine, 1993), the authors invite the "voices of children and adolescents who have been expelled from the centers of their schools and of our culture to speak" (p. 2). It is time to listen to the perspectives of the students as we strive to improve schools in order

to increase the likelihood that all students will achieve at high levels and will attain valued life outcomes.

There appear to be both structural and cultural explanations for the achievement disparities between Black males and their White peers. The systemic and structural barriers can be addressed by schools in order to eliminate the mismatch between the current structures of schools and the needs of Black males. It is important that schools find ways to intervene for both the academic and social/emotional factors involved in the schooling of Black males. The results of this study point to the fact that relationships between teachers and their students are a critical factor in the schooling of Black males. The quality of the relationships between teachers and their students is foundational to the other aspects of the schooling process. Students must feel valued for who they are and must feel like they belong in order to engage in the schooling process. In order for this to happen, schools must address the mismatch that happens for many Black males between who they are and who they are expected to be in the current structures of schooling designed around the culture and norms of the dominant culture.

Recommendations

For Schools

1. Schools should examine current school philosophies, policies, structures, and practices through a lens of race and equity to ensure that they are designed to meet the needs of all learners.

2. Schools should actively challenge institutional racism and create culturally competent schools where equity and excellence are the goal and all members of the school's community are valued, belong, and are empowered.

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3. Schools should regularly engage in interracial dialogue through *Courageous Conversation* (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 16) in order to increase individual racial consciousness and explore the impact of race in the lives of both students and teachers and expose and address entrenched attitudes that hold students (and teachers) back.

4. Schools should empower all families, in particular, families of color, many of whom feel marginalized from the current educational system. There are numerous ways that this could be accomplished, but most aligned with the scope of this study would be to extend to parents and families more opportunities to participate in authentic ways and to have voice in the decision-making process within the school.

5. Schools should actively engage community members, particularly "successful" Black males, who can serve as positive role models and mentors to young Black males.

6. Schools should explore ways to have students more actively participate in making decisions regarding what and how they learn (Doda & Knowles, 2008). They should invite their voice to the table to be actively involved in all aspects of planning, implementing, and assessing school-improvement efforts. They should listen and be open to what they have to say!

7. Schools should examine current practice in light of students' expressed needs and concerns. They should make the changes being certain to share them with students (Doda & Knowles, 2008).

8. Schools should explore and invest in a wide range of democratic practices so that students can take control of their learning in collaboration with adults (i.e., student-

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led conferences, student self-assessment, planning curriculum and assessment, developing group norms) (Beane, 2006).

9. Schools should rethink the traditional student council and replace it with team-based student leadership that will involve more students and create a vehicle for nurturing student leadership (Doda & Knowles, 2008).

10. Schools should ensure diverse representation and include students often excluded from traditional committees, clubs, and activities.

11. Schools should explore options for school clubs and activities that will appeal to the interests and meet the needs of Black males (i.e., The *Young Men's Leadership Group*).

For Teachers

1. Give all students respect regardless of their image, appearance, where they live, or other factors based on negative stereotypes

2. Show students that you believe in both their desire and potential to achieve

3. Set high expectations for all students

4. Design and deliver culturally responsive instruction characterized by realness, rigor, relevance, and relationships (Gay, 2000)

5. Provide the necessary support and assistance to all students to aid them in reaching curriculum standards and their personal goals

6. Invite authentic student participation and voice and be willing to listen to what the students have to say, even if it is the *counterstory* to what they believe or want to hear

7. Actively engage in professional development that will empower them to understand and address the unconscious, yet overt effects of institutional racism that pervades all facets of society (Pine & Hilliard, 1990)

8. Give greater attention in pre-service education to issues of race and equity in order to increase the racial consciousness of educators who enter classrooms serving an increasingly diverse student population.

Implications and Suggestions for Further Study

The empirical and conceptual basis for thinking about student participation is quite limited. Despite the volumes of research on achievement, there have been relatively few studies that specifically address how students themselves define achievement, as well as what students do, feel, and think about in school (LeCompte & Priessle, 1992). Few studies have examined the construct of student voice as a strategy in school-reform efforts either theoretically or empirically. Though the literature on school reform is extensive, very little of it actually takes up the role of students (Levin, 2000). According to Levin, the literature is so sparse that we have only some indicators of what might be possible. Educational research that does not elicit or respond to students' ideas violates students' rights. Empowerment goes beyond feeling involved or engaged. We experience empowerment when our perspective is sought, listened to, and acted upon by those in power (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

This study supports the findings of previous studies, which support the power and potential impact of student voice in schooling. Further, there are potential benefits in inviting to the table the "voices of children and adolescents who have been expelled from the centers of their schools and of our culture to speak" (Weis & Fine, 1993, p. 2).

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Students can best inform us as they live the experience every day. It is through their eyes that we will come to see the schooling experience they desire and perhaps in which they will invest, engage in, and succeed.

Mitra (2004) found that "student voice activities can create meaningful experiences for youth that help to meet fundamental developmental needs—especially for those students who do not otherwise find meaning in their school experiences" (p. 651). In addition, students experience "a marked consistency in the growth of agency, belonging and competence; three assets that are central to youth development" (Mitra, 2004, p. 651). Mitra found that participating in student groups helped (a) instill agency in students, or belief that they could transform themselves and the institutions that affect them; (b) to acquire skills and competencies to work toward these changes, and (c) to establish meaningful relationships with adults and the peers that create greater connections to each other. Mitra's work demonstrates the potential for student voice opportunities to strengthen the developmental assets of young people.

Wiggan (2007) states that "more studies are needed to give students more voice on the subject if achievement. Rather than engaging in theory validation, student-based inquiry is intended to be inductive and grounded in student data. In this inquiry, particular emphasis is given to sharing power with students in research" (p. 325). Wiggan goes on to say that "the student-based inquiry approach attempts to generate data that, when shared with teachers and administrators, can help enrich efforts aimed at improving quality of instruction and school-climate issues" (p. 325).

Future research is needed to better understand the schooling experiences of Black males, the racial predictability in gaps in achievement, and potential benefits of student-

based inquiry, student participation, and student voice. "Critical race scholars in education critically interrogate the role of race and racism in all aspects of their work and stress the need for further research" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 270). There is potential benefit to both the students and the educational institutions that can benefit from involving students in all aspects of planning, implementing, and assessing the effectiveness of school-improvement efforts. My study and others (Mitra, 2004; Wiggan, 2007) demonstrate the value of inviting student voice into our educational system as a powerful tool to enhance their own development and that of our public schools in order to better meet the needs of all students.

CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE

This study began as a result of my desire to hear directly from students how they experience schooling as a Black male and how they view the wide gaps in achievement between them and their White counterparts. I initially selected Critical Race Theory as the most appropriate theoretical framework to ground this study. I felt as if the basic tenets of CRT would help to explain some of the experiences of Black males as they navigate their schooling. In many ways, their perceptions about their schooling experiences run *counter* to the explanations of educators and researchers who have studied the issue of achievement and Black males for decades. This time, the story was theirs to tell.

When I began this study, I was not familiar with the research on student voice. As the study emerged, I developed a greater understanding of the research regarding the power of student voice in increasing students' sense of belonging and competence and a sense of agency, in addition to the potential to have a positive impact on school-improvement efforts. As a result, this body of research and emerging theory in this field became a prominent focus of my study.

It was only as the study emerged that it became clear to me that inviting students to share their perspectives has great potential to engage students in authentic ways. I am convinced that the opportunity to participate in this study had great impact on both the

student participants and on the focus group facilitators. The students openly shared their appreciation with the focus group facilitators for inviting them to participate and for taking the time to talk to and listen to them in this forum. The facilitators shared their thoughts with me as we debriefed each focus group session. It was clear that they had been moved by the sessions. They shared with me mixed feelings about the experience. On the one hand, they were excited about the opportunity to meet with the students and to hear their perspectives. On the other hand, they shared with me how difficult it was for them to hear some of the experiences and perspectives the young men shared. As persons of color, some of what they heard was disturbing as the students shared their perspectives in very open, honest, and "real" ways. It was not as if the students' perspectives were completely new to them. After all, they all have had their own experiences as a person of color navigating both schooling and society in general. We spoke about the power of inviting the students to share their stories and the impact of hearing what they had to say.

Following the focus group sessions at one of the high schools, the Dean of Students, with whom I had collaborated throughout the study, as well as over the past 2 years in a young men's group at his school, emailed me to share his thoughts and appreciation for including his students in my study. His emails had a profound impact on my strong belief that we must do more in our schools, from the earliest grades, to invite students' voices and ideas into all aspects of their schooling. His emails were as follows:

March 10, 2008
Dear Sarah,
Thank you for your support of my students. Your research may possibly lead to a methodology where students like mine will feel empowered rather than disenfranchised. Also, it gave them the opportunity to speak and be heard at the same time! Friday's session made them feel important, as if their opinions finally counted. You made my kids feel special. So, again, thank you for all you did for my students.
Roland

March 12, 2008
Good Morning Sarah.
The kids asked me if they could participate in another discussion since they enjoyed the experience. My kids felt "it" for the first time in their lives: a sense of importance not tied to athletics, a police action, nor the "poor kid" in the ghetto mentality. This opportunity transformed them into men from boys as they finally looked outside of their own needs in order to protect and shepherd the next generation. They accepted the responsibility of trying to create a better world where they will not receive compensation for their act. Once you complete everything, I look forward to hearing from you.
Take care,
Roland

While I began the study with an intense desire to hear directly from the students about how they would describe their schooling experience and how they might discuss racial achievement gaps, it was not until well into the study that the power, importance, and potential benefits of inviting students to have a voice in their schooling became clear to me. While it was becoming increasingly clear to me as I read the literature that student voice and participation have the potential to yield numerous positive benefits for students, it was through my experiences with this study that I have become convinced of the potential benefits of student voice and authentic participation in their schooling to empower and engage students, particularly those who might not otherwise be engaged or empowered through current schooling systems, structures, and practices. In the long run, the power of student voice became a reality for everyone involved and became a focal point of the study.

I recently had the opportunity to share preliminary results of my study with the Commissioner of Education at the Connecticut State Department of Education. The Commissioner was very open to hearing my thoughts about the power of including students in authentic ways in current school-improvement efforts. High School Reform is one of the Commissioner's and the State Board of Education's top three priorities over

the next 5 years. The Commissioner has spent the past several months engaging the community in dialogue about his high-school reform plan through public forums. I asked if there had been opportunities for students to respond to his plan. He indicated that no specific effort had occurred to invite and engage students, but he was extremely willing to do so.

As a result of my brief time with the Commissioner sharing the preliminary findings from my study, he has shared with me his desire to involve students to a greater degree on his Advisory Panel. He further indicated that he would seek to ensure that those students who might not typically be invited to participate would indeed be invited to the table. In addition, he agreed to a meeting in which selected students from my study will be meeting with him to share their perspectives about their schooling and their thoughts about what should be considered as the Commissioner continues to develop his plan for high-school reform. This meeting is set to take place in May 2008 at the State Department of Education in Hartford.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

LETTER FROM STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER (SERC)

October 1, 2007

Michael Pearson
Institutional Review Board
Office of Scholarly Research
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104-0355

Dear Mr. Pearson,

The State Education Resource Center (SERC) is committed to academic study related to issues of race and schooling as they relate to racial achievement gaps. SERC has been engaged in ongoing work with Glenn Singleton, Pacific Educational Group, in *Courageous Conversations on Race* for the past four years. As a result of our collaboration with Mr. Singleton and our participation in *Courageous Conversations*, we hope to continue to expand our knowledge about race and its impact upon the schooling experiences of students of color. SERC believes that this work will assist us in supporting schools and districts throughout Connecticut to achieve their goals for equity and excellence in education for all students. SERC, in collaboration with Deputy Commissioner of Education George A. Coleman, is interested in engaging students, in particular, Black males, in the further study of race and schooling.

SERC has sought to invite the voice of the students into the conversations about Connecticut's racial achievement gaps. SERC believes it is critical to invite the perspectives of the students into conversations about their schooling and achievement by giving them voice in the discussions that are occurring at the local, state, and national level about the racial predictability in achievement gaps. The student perspective has been missing from much of the research about achievement gaps. SERC believes the perspectives of adolescent Black males could better inform educators as we continue to examine the philosophies, policies, structures and practices in our schools that potentially have impact upon the schooling and achievement of Black males.

Sarah Barzee, SERC's Associate Director, has participated in *Courageous Conversations about Race* for the past four years both within SERC and in collaboration with school districts throughout Connecticut. For the past three years, she has participated in SERC's *Courageous Conversations about Race* Consortium with various public school districts in CT. She has been a CC coach to the District Equity Leadership Team in New London Public Schools for the past three years and in New Haven Public Schools for the past year. It is as a result of this work that Ms. Barzee became interested in engaging *student voice* in the *Courageous Conversations* work and encouraged SERC to invite greater participation by students in various ways.

During the 2006-2007 school year, Ms. Barzee worked with a group of Black and Latino students at New London High School in New London, Connecticut. This was the result of her work as a CC coach in the district and her collaboration with the School Psychologist at the high school. She participated in the group throughout the school year to discuss various issues related to the schooling experiences of these young men. At the culmination of the year, Ms. Barzee conducted six (6) 1:1 semi-structured interviews with Black males who were in their senior year at the high school and preparing to graduate. The interviews were conducted at the high school and were videotaped. Ms. Barzee also observed in three classes at New London High School at the end of the 2006-2007 school year.

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Ms. Barzee was also instrumental in encouraging SERC Consultants to invite students to participate in various statewide conferences sponsored by SERC and the Connecticut State Department of Education during the 2006-2007 school year. As a result, high school students participated in the following SERC conferences:

> *Addressing the Achievement of Connecticut's Black and Hispanic/Latino Male Students*;
> *The Fifth Annual Summit: Closing Connecticut's Achievement Gaps and;*
> *Creating Effective School Environments to Reduce Suspension/Expulsion in Connecticut Schools*

The students participated in student panel discussions in each of the conferences. The sessions were videotaped in order to be utilized to inform SERC's study of the perspectives of adolescent Black males regarding their schooling experiences and racial achievement gaps.

SERC hereby grants permission to Sarah Barzee, Associate Director at SERC, to utilize the data collected as a result of the 1:1 interviews conducted at New London High School in May 2007 and the videotape transcripts of the student panels at SERC conferences as noted above as secondary data to inform her study, *The Schooling Experiences and Achievement of Adolescent Black Males: The Voice of the Students*. This will serve as her dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy at Andrews University.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (860) 632-1485 if I can be of further assistance in supporting Ms. Barzee's application to the Andrews University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Sincerely,

Marianne Kirner, Ph.D.,Director, SERC

Cc: George A. Coleman, Deputy Commissioner, CSDE
        Marianne Kirner, Ph.D., Director, SERC
        James A. Tucker, Ph. D., Doctoral Advisor, Andrews University

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

Andrews ⚕ University

December 3, 2007

Sarah Barzee
407 Cambridge Commons
Middletown, CT 06457

Dear Sarah,

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
IRB Protocol #: 07-071   **Application Type:** Original   **Dept:** Leadership
Review Category: Full Review   **Action Taken:** Approved   **Advisor:** James Tucker
Protocol Title: The School Experience and Achievement of Adolescent Black Males: The Voice of the
                              Students

This letter is to advise you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your
proposal for research. You have been given clearance to proceed with your research plans.

All changes made to the study design and/or consent form, after initiation of the project, require prior
approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. Feel free to contact our office if you have
any questions.

The duration of the present approval is for one year. If your research is going to take more than one year,
you must apply for an extension of your approval in order to be authorized to continue with this project.

Some proposal and research design designs may be of such a nature that participation in the project may
involve certain risks to human subjects. If your project is one of this nature and in the implementation of
your project an incidence occurs which results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury,
such an occurrence must be reported immediately in writing to the Institutional Review Board. Any project-
related physical injury must also be reported immediately to University Medical Specialties, by calling
(269) 473-2222.

We wish you success as you implement the research project as outlined in the approved protocol.

Sincerely,

Michael D Pearson
Administrative Associate
Institutional Review Board
Cc: James Tucker

APPENDIX C

REQUEST LETTER FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTICIPATION

October 8, 2007

Dear Mr. XXXXX,

As you know, SERC is committed to further study related to issues of race, schooling, and achievement gaps. In addition to the work with Glenn Singleton in *Courageous Conversations about Race* Consortium, we hope to expand our knowledge about race and its impact upon the schooling experiences of students of color in order to assist us in supporting schools and districts throughout Connecticut to achieve their goals for equity in education.
In addition, SERC, in collaboration with Deputy Commissioner of Education George A. Coleman, is interested in further study in reference to the perceptions of adolescent Black males regarding their schooling experience and racial achievement gaps.

I have become familiar with several of the XXXXX Public Schools personnel via XXXXX's participation in SERC's *Courageous Conversations about Race* Consortium. As a result of SERC's continued work in the area of *Courageous Conversations* and other efforts to explore race and its impact upon the schooling experiences and achievement of Black males, I have chosen to undertake research in this area. I have a specific interest in *student voice*, particularly as it relates to the factors that affect achievement gaps and the schooling experience of adolescent Black males. I believe that it is critical to invite the perspectives of the students themselves into conversations about their schooling and achievement by giving them voice in the discussions that ·are occurring at the local, state, and national level about the racial predictability in achievement gaps. I believe that the perspectives of the Black males could better inform educators as we continue to examine the philosophies, policies, structures and practices in our schools that have impact upon the schooling and achievement of Black males.

I am currently enrolled in the doctoral program in Leadership at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. I would like to expand the work that I have begun as a result of my work at SERC and specifically via *Courageous Conversations*. I have had the opportunity to work with students at another high school in Connecticut via on-going participation in a young men's group for Black and Latino high school students facilitated by the School Psychologist at that school. ·That experience provided me the opportunity to conduct 1:1 semi-structured interviews with six Black male students and to conduct several classroom observations.

I would like to collaborate directly with you and the young men in your Young Men's Leadership Group (YMLG) at XXXXXX High School in order to continue this research. You and I have spoken on numerous occasions about our shared interest in engaging students, particularly Black males, more actively in discussions about their schooling experience and racial achievement gaps. As we have discussed, I am hopeful that some of the young men in your group may be interested in participating in the 1:1 semi-structured interviews to provide input for this qualitative study. In addition, I am hoping to conduct a student focus group with Black males to discuss their

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perceptions of the schooling experience for Black males and their thoughts about racial achievement gaps. Finally, I would be requesting access to the student's records in order to obtain information about their GPA, academic standing, class schedule, discipline record and similar information. I would very much like to collaborate with you and your students in order to invite the voice of the students into the critical conversation about race and schooling.

Provided you support this request, I will obtain the required informed consent and permissions from each student and his parent or guardian before proceeding. I will be recruiting volunteers for the 1:1 semi-structured interviews who are at last 18 years of age or older. It is my hope that the students for the focus group may also be 18 years of age but I am aware that many of your students are in their junior or senior year and therefore, may not all be 18 years of age. I am currently making application to the Andrews University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and will have to await approval of my application in order to proceed. In order to protect the rights of the student participants, I will follow all of the guidelines as established by the Andrews University IRB and will adhere to any procedures required by your district. If you are willing to collaborate with me on this critical research endeavor, I will need a letter of support to support with my application to the Andrews University Institutional Review Board.

I greatly appreciate the time we have spent in previous collaboration to enhance equity and excellence for all students, and particularly for Black males. I appreciate your time and consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have specific questions or concerns related to this request. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Sarah J. Barzee
Associate Director, SERC

Cc: George A. Coleman, Deputy Commissioner, CSDE
        Marianne Kirner, Ph.D., Director, SERC
        James A. Tucker, Ph. D., Doctoral Advisor, Andrews University

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORMS

Leadership and Educational Administration Department

Informed Consent Form: The *Diversity Dream Team*

Title of Study:
The School Experiences and Achievement of Adolescent Black Males: The Voice of the Students

Primary Researcher: Sarah J. Barzee, Doctoral Student, Leadership Program, School of Education; Associate Director, The State Education Resource Center (SERC), Middletown, CT 06457

Purpose:
I have been told that selected Black male students from the Diversity Dream Team will be invited to voluntarily participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to invite adolescent Black males to describe their school experiences and their achievement in order to inform educators who are interested in a better understanding of racial achievement gaps. Better understanding the perspectives of the students regarding their schooling experience may assist educators in addressing the philosophies, policies, structures, and practices in schools which may have detrimental impact upon the schooling experience and achievement of Black males.

Procedures:
I have been told that selected Black male students from the Diversity Dream Team will be asked to voluntarily participate in a student focus group or groups and/or 1:1 semi-structured interviews. The focus group(s) will be facilitated by a Black male Consultant or Consultants at the State Education Resource Center (SERC). The SERC Consultants have participated in *Courageous Conversations about Race* (Singleton, 2006) or have previous experience working with adolescent Black males. The discussion will focus on questions about the students' perceptions of their personal school experiences and those of Black males in general.

The focus group(s) will take place during the 2007-2008 school year at The Jewish Community Center in XXXXX, CT, the location of the Diversity Dream Team monthly meetings.

I have been told that the researcher will be requesting access to the school records of the participants via the students' respective school district in order to better understand their academic and behavioral history and will obtain all of the necessary permissions from a parent or guardian if the participant is under the age of eighteen (18).

The information collected through the focus group(s) and 1:1 semi-structured interviews will be documented in writing in the form of a doctoral dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Leadership from Andrews University. The dissertation will be shared with the primary researcher's dissertation committee and upon approval will be published.

Risks and Discomforts:
I have been told that there is a possibility that some of the participants may experience some discomfort or stress as they discuss their personal schooling experiences as a Black male and the issue of racial achievement gaps or as they discuss their perceptions of the school experiences of Black males in general and the current racial achievement gap in both Connecticut schools and nationally. If a participant does experience stress or discomfort, Mr. Maloney and other faculty advisors of the Diversity Dream Team will be available to follow-up with the student, as needed, following a 1:1 interview or the student focus group. Students will also receive on-going support through continued conversation as a result of their participation in the Diversity Dream Team.

Voluntary Participation:
I have been told that the participation of the student members of the Diversity Dream Team in this study is strictly voluntary and the student can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and/or Anonymity:
I have been told that the identity (name) of the students will not be disclosed in any published documents written about this study without explicit permission to do so. I Have been told that personal student records shared with the researcher will be strictly confidential and accessed only by the primary researcher and those directly related to this study.

Reimbursement or Compensation:
I have been told that neither individual participants nor the Diversity Dream Team will receive compensation in the form of money or any other type as a result of participation in this study.

Participant Concerns:
I have been told that I have the right to contact the primary researcher or their advisor if I have questions or concerns about participation in this study. I may contact the primary researcher, Sarah J. Barzee at SERC, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457 at 860-632-1485 or Dr. James Tucker, Advisor, at P.O. Box 15188, Chattanooga, TN 37415 or by phone at (423) 425-5261.

Informed Consent:
I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the researcher. I have been told that I have the right to ask questions of the primary researcher before agreeing to participate in this study. Any questions I had about the study or my participation have been answered to my satisfaction. Therefore, I hereby

give voluntary consent to participate in this study. If I have additional questions or concerns, I may contact Sarah J. Barzee, SERC, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457 at 860-632-1485.

Copy of Consent Form:
I have been told that I have the right to receive a copy of the consent form for this study. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

_____   _____

Signature of *Diversity Dream Team* Coordinator   Date

_____   _____

Witness   Date

I hereby give permission to the researcher to conduct 1:1 interviews and/or student focus groups at the Jewish Community Center in Woodbridge, Connecticut.

_____   _____

Signature of Jewish Community Center Representative   Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of this study.

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

Leadership and Educational Administration Department

Informed Consent Form: XXXX High School

Title of Study:
The School Experiences and Achievement of Adolescent Black Males: The Voice of the Students

Primary Researcher: Sarah J. Barzee, Doctoral Student, Leadership Program, School of Education; Associate Director, The State Education Resource Center (SERC), Middletown, CT 06457

Purpose:
I have been told that XXXXX Public Schools will be participating in a research study. The purpose of this study is to invite adolescent Black males to describe their school experience in order to inform educators attempting to better understand racial achievement gaps. Better understanding the perspectives of the students regarding their schooling experience may assist educators in addressing the philosophies, policies, structures, and practices in schools which may have detrimental impact upon the schooling experience and achievement of Black males.

Procedures:
I have been told that Black male students from XXXXX High School will be invited to participate in a student focus group(s) and/or 1:1 semi-structured interviews. The discussion will focus on questions about the students' perceptions of their personal school experiences and those of Black males in general. The focus group(s) will take place during the 2007-2008 school year.

I have been told that all participants will be required to have a signed consent form in order to participate in the 1:1 interviews and/or the focus group(s). Participants who are 18 years of age or older will sign the informed consent form. Participants under age 18 will sign an informed consent form and must have a signed informed consent form from their parent/guardian.

I give permission for the researcher to access the school records of the student participants of the 1:1 interviews and the focus group(s) in order to better understand their academic and behavioral history in school. The same procedures as outlined above will apply in obtaining consent to access the student's school records.

I have been told that the researcher will conduct observations in classrooms and common areas at the high school. I give permission for the researcher to do so.

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The information collected through the focus group(s) and 1:1 semi-structured interviews will be documented in writing in the form of a doctoral dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Leadership from Andrews University. The dissertation will be shared with the primary researcher's dissertation committee and upon approval will be published.

Risks and Discomforts:
If a participant experiences stress or discomfort, Mr. Martin, Assistant Principal and Facilitator of the Young Men's Leadership Group will be available to follow-up with the student as needed following a 1:1 interview or the student focus group. Students will also receive on-going support through continued conversation as a result of their participation in the Young Men's Leadership Group (YMLG).

Risk of Injury:
I have been told that in the unlikely event of injury resulting from this research, Andrews University is not able to offer financial compensation.

Voluntary Participation:
I have been told that XXXXX Public Schools' participation in this study is strictly voluntary and the district can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and/or Anonymity:
I have been told that the identity (name) of the district will not be disclosed in any published documents written about this study without explicit permission to do so. I have been told that personal student records shared with the researcher will be strictly confidential and accessed only by the primary researcher and those directly related to this study.

Reimbursement or Compensation:
I have been told that XXXXX Public Schools will not receive compensation in the form of money or any other type as a result of participation in this study.

Participant Concerns:
I have been told that I have the right to contact the primary researcher or their advisor if I have questions or concerns about participation in this study. I may contact the primary researcher, Sarah J. Barzee at SERC, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457 at 860-632-1485 or Dr. James Tucker, Advisor, at P.O. Box 15188, Chattanooga, TN 37415 or by phone at (423) 425-5261.

Informed Consent:
I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the researcher. I have been told that I have the right to ask questions of the primary researcher before agreeing to participate in this study.

Any questions I had about the study or my participation have been answered to my satisfaction. Therefore, I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. If I

have additional questions or concerns, I may contact Sarah J. Barzee, SERC, 25
Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457 at 860-632-1485.

Copy of Consent Form:
I understand that I have the right to receive a copy of the consent form for this study. I
have been given a copy of the consent form.

_____   _____
Signature of Superintendent   Date

_____   _____
Witness   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Facilitator of the   Date
Young Men's Leadership Group

_____   _____
Printed Name of Other School District Personnel   Title/Position

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have
explained potential risks and benefits of this study.

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

Leadership and Educational Administration Department

Informed Consent Form: 1:1 Semi Structured Interviews: XXXXX High School

Title of Study:
The Schooling Experiences and Achievement of Adolescent Black Males: The Voice of the Students

Primary Researcher: Sarah J. Barzee, Doctoral Student, Leadership Program, School of Education; Associate Director, The State Education Resource Center (SERC), Middletown, CT 06457

Purpose:
I have been told that if I choose to participate, I will be voluntarily participating in a research study. The purpose of this study is to invite adolescent Black males to describe their school experience and their perceptions about their achievement and racial achievement gaps in order to inform educators attempting to better understand the issue in order to promote greater equity and excellence for all students. A better understanding the perspectives of the students regarding their schooling experience may assist educators in addressing the philosophies, policies, structures, and practices in schools which may have detrimental impact upon the schooling experience and achievement of Black males.

I have been told that I will be asked to participate in a 1:1 semi-structured interview. I will be asked open ended questions by the interviewer. The interview will last approximately 45-90 minutes and will take place in my high school. The 1:1 semi-structured interview will be conducted by the primary researcher. However, given that the primary researcher is a White female, there will also be a person of color present. In some cases, that person, a SERC Consultant, may conduct the interview.

Procedures:
I have been told that I must be eighteen years old to participate in these interviews and will be required to sign an informed consent form.

I give permission for the researcher to access my school records in order to better understand my academic and behavioral history in school.

I have been told that the interview will be videotaped so that analysis can be done at a later date by the primary researcher.

The information collected through the semi-structured interview will be documented in writing in the form of a doctoral dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Leadership from Andrews University. The dissertation will be shared with the primary researcher's dissertation committee and upon approval will be published.

Risks and Discomforts:
I have been told that the risk associated with participation in this study is minimal. That is, "The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests." I have been told that I may experience some discomfort or stress as I discuss my personal school experience as a Black male and the issue of racial achievement gaps or as I discuss my perceptions of the school experiences of Black males in general and the current racial achievement gap in both Connecticut schools and nationally. I understand that Mr. Martin, Assistant Principal and Facilitator of the Young Men's Leadership Group, will be available to follow-up with me as needed if I am upset following a 1:1 interview. If additional support is requested, I can speak to the School Counselor of School Psychologist if I request to do so.

Risk of Injury:
I have been told that in the unlikely event of injury resulting from this research, Andrews University is not able to offer financial compensation.

Voluntary Participation:
I have been told that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and/or Anonymity:
I have been told that my identity (name) will not be disclosed in any published documents written about this study. I further understand that personal school records shared with the researcher will be strictly confidential and accessed only by the primary researcher and those directly related to this study.

Reimbursement or Compensation:
I have been told that I will not receive compensation in the form of money or any other type as a result of participation in this study.

Participant Concerns:
I have been told that I have the right to contact the primary researcher or their advisor if I have questions or concerns about my participation in this study. I may contact the primary researcher, Sarah J. Barzee at SERC, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457 at 860-632-1485 or Dr. James Tucker, Advisor, at P.O. Box 15188, Chattanooga, TN 37415 or by phone at (423) 425-5261.

Informed Consent:
I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the researcher. I understand that I have the right to ask questions of the primary researcher before agreeing to participate in this study. Any questions I had about the study or my participation have been answered to my satisfaction. Therefore, I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study (or for my child to participate in this study). If I have additional questions or concerns, I may contact Sarah J. Barzee, SERC, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457 at 860-632-1485.

Copy of Consent Form:
I have been told that I have the right to receive a copy of the consent form for this study. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

Signatures:

_____   _____
Signature of Subject   Date
(Child must sign if seven years of age or older)

_____   _____
Witness   Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of this study.

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

Leadership and Educational Administration Department

Informed Consent Form: Focus Groups: XXXXX High School

Title of Study:
The School Experiences and Achievement of Adolescent Black Males: The Voice of the Students

Primary Researcher: Sarah J. Barzee, Doctoral Student, Leadership Program, School of Education; Associate Director, The State Education Resource Center (SERC), Middletown, CT 06457

Purpose:
I have been told that if I chose to do so, I (my child) will be voluntarily participating in a research study. The purpose of this study is to invite adolescent Black males to describe their school experiences and their achievement in order to inform educators attempting to better understand racial achievement gaps. Better understanding the perspectives of the students regarding their school experience may assist educators in addressing the philosophies, policies, structures, and practices in schools which may have detrimental impact upon the school experience and achievement of Black males.

Procedures:
I have been told that I (my child) will be invited to participate in a student focus group(s) with other Black males at my/his school. The discussion will be facilitated by a SERC Consultant who is a Black female and the Connecticut Regional Director for *Courageous Conversations About Race* (Pacific Educational Group) who is also a Black female. The recorder is a SERC Consultant who is a Black male. The SERC Consultants have participated in *Courageous Conversations about Race* (Singleton, 2006) or have previous experience working with adolescent Black males. The discussion will focus on questions about my/ my child's perceptions of my/his personal school experiences and those of Black males in general. I (my child) may also be asked to discuss my perceptions about the racial achievement gaps that exist within Connecticut schools and nationwide. The focus group(s) will take place during the 2007-2008 school year.

I have been told that I will be required to have a signed consent form in order to participate in the focus group(s). If I am 18 years of age or older I will sign the informed consent form. If I am under age 18, I will sign the informed consent form and must also have a signed consent form from my parent/guardian.

I give permission for the researcher to access my (my child's) school records in order to better understand my/their academic and behavioral history in school. The same procedures as outlined above will apply in obtaining consent to access the student's school records.

The focus group(s) will take place at XXXXX High School. I have been told that the focus groups will be videotaped for analysis at a later date by the primary researcher.

The information collected through the focus group will be documented in writing in the form of a doctoral dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Leadership from Andrews University. The dissertation will be shared with the primary researcher's dissertation committee and upon approval will be published.

Risks and Discomforts:
I have been told that the risk associated with participation in this study is minimal. That is, "The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests." I have been told that every attempt will be made by the interviewers to minimize the discomfort/stress for the participants. If I (my child) experience(s) discomfort or stress during the focus group, I can request to take a break or to cease participation completely. If I (my child) experience(s) discomfort or distress after discussing my school experience and the issue of racial achievement gaps, school personnel will be available for follow-up. If additional intervention is deemed appropriate, Mr. Dunham, XXXXX High School Dean, will contact the School Counselor or School Psychologist for additional follow-up.

Risk of Injury:
I have been told that in the unlikely event of injury resulting from this research, Andrews University is not able to offer financial compensation.

Voluntary Participation:
I have been told that my (my child's) participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I (my child) can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and/or Anonymity:
I have been told that my (my child's) identity (name) will not be disclosed in any published documents written about this study. I further understand that personal school records shared with the researcher will be strictly confidential and accessed only by the primary researcher and those directly related to this study.

Reimbursement or Compensation:
I have been told that I (my child) will not receive compensation in the form of money or any other type as a result of participation in this study.

Participant Concerns:
I have been told that I have the right to contact the primary researcher or their advisor if I have questions or concerns about my participation in this study. I may contact the primary researcher, Sarah J. Barzee at SERC, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457 at 860-632-1485 or Dr. James Tucker, Advisor, at P.O. Box 15188, Chattanooga, TN 37415 or by phone at (423) 425-5261.

Informed Consent:
I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the researcher. I understand that I (my parent/guardian) have the right to ask questions of the primary researcher before agreeing to participate in this study. Any questions I had about the study or my participation have been answered to my satisfaction. Therefore, I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study (or for my child to participate in this study). If I have additional questions or concerns, I may contact Sarah J. Barzee, SERC, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457 at 860-632-1485.

Copy of Consent Form:
I have been told that I have the right to receive a copy of the consent form for this study. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

Signature of Subject   Date
(Child must sign if seven years of age or older)

Signature of Parent(s)/Guardian (if under 18 years old)   Date

Relationship to the Participant: _____

Witness   Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of this study.

Signature of Researcher   Date

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. What does it mean to do well in school?

    a. What does it look like?

    b. If you do well how do your peers respond to you?

    c. If you do poorly, how do your peers respond to you?

    d. How do you imagine it affecting your future?

    e. Is doing well academically in school important to you?

        i. If yes, how?

        ii. If no, why?

B. What would you tell a younger brother or cousin just starting school?

    a. What will be most difficult for them?

    b. What will be easy for them?

    c. What did you lose in your school experience?

    d. What did you gain?

    e. What has been the most difficult for you?

C. How would you describe the schooling experience for a Black male?

    a. What have been the positives?

    b. What have been the negatives?

    c. What value do you see in schooling and achieving in school?

    d. What do you think is important in helping Black males succeed in school?

D. Do you feel welcome and that you belong in your school?

E. If yes, what makes you feel welcome?

    If not, what makes you feel unwelcome?

    What changes would have to happen for you to feel welcome?

    What are your thoughts about why you do not feel your school welcomes you?

E. In general, what do you believe to be the major causes of the achievement gap between Black students, especially males, and their White peers?

F. What role has your family played in your school experience?

G. What is the most important thing you think I need to know in order to make the schooling experience for black males a more successful one?

H. What else would you like me to know about your school experience?

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group Questions

Opening   1.   Tell us your name and one thing you would like us to know about yourself.

Introduction 2.   What does it mean to you to be successful in school? How do you measure a good/successful education?

Transition   3.   Take out a piece of paper. Write down three things you really like about your school. Let's make a list on this flip chart. On the other side of the paper, write down three things that disappoint you about your school. Let's add them to the list.

Key   4.   If you could change two things about your school that would make it better meet the needs of Black males, what would they be?

Key   5.   Schools differ. Some are not good, some are average, and some are great. Think about the schools that are great. What words would you use to describe the great ones? (MAKE A LIST OF WORDS ON A CHART)

Key   6.   If the Superintendent or the Commissioner of Schools came to you to ask your advice about improving this school and other schools so that they would promote success for all students, what things would you keep? What things would you change?

Transition   7.   Who needs to be involved in schooling to ensure the success of all students? What role have others had in your success or lack of success in school?

Key   8.   Do you think you faced challenges in school because you are a Black male? Please explain.

Key   9.   Is there a particular time in your schooling when things became more difficult for you?

Key   11. What do you think are the most important things for educators to hear as we work to improve the schooling experience and achievement of Black males?

Key   **12.** Write three words that would describe a good teacher.
                        (Students share aloud; list on chart); Write three words that
                        describe a bad teacher. (Students share aloud; write on chart)

Key   **13.** Of all of the things we have discussed, which one is most
                        important to you?

Ending   **14.** We at the State Education Resource Center (SERC) and
                        leaders at the CT State Department of Education are working
                        with the teachers and Principals in your district and other
                        districts across CT to address the issue of equity and
                        excellence for students of color, and in particular, for Black
                        males. What advice do you have for us that we could then
                        give to your school or other schools in CT?

                        Some things were not mentioned like...... I am assuming they
                        are not important.

(Summary)   The purpose of our discussion was to talk about your
                        perceptions about schools and what would make them better
                        for all students. Your ideas will help educators improve
                        schools for you and others. Is there anything we should have
                        talked about but didn't? Have we missed anything???

REFERENCE LIST

REFERENCE LIST

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