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Unpacking The Cultural Relevance Of The High School Experiences Of African-American Males

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UNPACKING THE CULTURAL RELEVANCE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES

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ABSTRACT

Despite the vast research on cultural competence and student engagement, little is known about the perspectives of the Black male students who have graduated from any New Jersey public schools This qualitative, phenomenological, multi-case study examines the experiences of Black male students who have been educated predominantly by White educators. The gap in the literature highlights the need for researchers and educators to examine teacher cultural competence from the students' perspective as it impacted student engagement in the educational process. Student disengagement is a factor in school dropout and a racial/cultural gap exists between Black male students and educators not of color, so it is important for researchers to examine disengagement from the student's perspective. The results from this study highlighted the relationships between Black male students and White educators and Black male students' perception of the educational process. The findings suggest the Black male student perception of their White teachers' lack of cultural competence and the lack of curricular content that includes their culture contributes to the disconnection between Black male students and their White educators and impacts the students experience with disengagement. The potential impact of this study is that recommendations may enhance culturally relevant pedagogy and practice to increase student engagement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With the diverse student populations and a vast array of student needs, the American

public school system has the responsibility of meeting the needs of all students. These needs can

be academic, physical, social, emotional, or behavioral in nature. As a result, there is a current

movement to educate the *whole-child* as a more comprehensive approach. Kochhar-Bryant

(2010) stated, "The whole-child movement is based on the proposition that education must move

beyond preparing children to become 'well-educated' citizens who are productive participants in

the economic system" (p. 6). As this approach moves beyond the academic needs of children, it

begins to reveal the multiple layers that make up each individual child and thus reveals the need

to address all levels of child development. In examining this holistic approach to education, there

needs to be an understanding that the term *whole-child* is relative to each child. Jackson (2007)

wrote, "In this model the child is seen as a social being, connected to others and at the same time

with his or her own distinctive experiences and knowledge" (as cited in Miller, 2011, p. 6). Each

child will bring into the classroom a set of experiences, perspectives, and understandings. Some

of these students bring with them experiences of poverty, divorce, trauma, and/or mental health

issues. These students represent diverse demographics in categories such as gender, culture, race,

and age. Kochhar-Bryant (2010), argued,

> Many of the diverse faces in the classroom have grown up in circumstances that make
>
> them highly vulnerable, that can undermine their ability to learn and progress in school,
>
> or that make them unable to connect with adults and peers. (p. 2)

When these students are placed within the center of their educational experiences,

students will have their own frame of reference based on their unique experiences. As these

diverse groups of individuals enter the American public school classrooms, educators are challenged to find the most effective approaches to address the needs of all students.

Conventional methods of teaching, such as direct instruction in which the teacher lectures and leads the instruction, are being used in conjunction with more student-centered approaches to help address student needs. Struyven, Dochy, and Janssens (2010) stated, "In educational literature, approaches to teaching are commonly defined on the basis of the distinction between student-focused and teacher-focused teaching, which are respectively associated with the intention of conceptual change or information transmission" (p. 44). The student-centered approach draws heavily on the experiences and understandings of the individual student. The Teaching Excellence in Adult Literary Center (2010) stated, "Additionally, learners find the learning process more meaningful when topics are relevant to their lives, needs, and interests, and when they are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge" (para. 1). Students enter classrooms with different social and cultural experiences that construct their learning styles, academic success, and social and emotional success (Guild, 1994, para 9). Ladson-Billings (2009) argued, "Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 20). When educators can tap into the cultural fabric of their students, it places the student at the center of his or her educational experience. However, each school will have its own defined culture in which the students will need to navigate.

The American public school system has its own set of cultural traits that directs the learning process. According to Dongjiao (2015), "The culture consists of enterprise environment, values, heroes, rituals and ceremonies and cultural network, among which values are the core of

organizational culture" (p. 1-2).The culture of a school will define its values, traits, and beliefs and how the organization shapes the way it operates. The culture will dictate expectations on academic performance, behavior, and socialization within a given school. These expectations may be different for certain subgroups, such as African American and Latino students, based on larger societal beliefs. The concept of school culture is a social construct that reflects the members of the organization and the surrounding community. Deal and Peterson (2016) stated,

> The unofficial patterns seem to permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about or consider taboo, whether they seek out colleagues or isolate themselves, whether they work together, and how teachers feel about their work and their students. (p. 7)

Students navigate between their own indigenous culture and the culture of the school they attend. When schools have a diverse student population, the culture of the school and that of its students may be operating on different levels. Edmin (2016) argued, "It posits that the indigenous have their own unique ways of constructing knowledge, utilize distinct modes of communication in their interactions with one another, and hold cultural understandings that vary from the established norm" (p. 8). The Black male student's educational and societal experience has been unique in its own right, specifically when positioned within a school and surrounding community that is predominantly White. Like all students, the Black male student navigates between the social constructs of his home and that of the school he attends. Edmin (2010) highlighted the difference in the social constructs when he stated,

> Urban teaching also has its own culture, which is grounded in the historically rooted, and commonly accepted, belief that socio-economically deprived urban youth and students of color require strong 'classroom management,' hyper-structured classroom environments,

and teaching that assimilates students into an established world of school. Urban students have their own culture, which is a summation of the beliefs and practices of the students' out of school experiences as they become manifested in classrooms. (p. xii)

For many of these students their level of success can be influenced by how well they can conform to a culture not of their own while maintaining a sense of self. The need for culturally responsive teaching is paramount to their educational experience and keeping students engaged in their educational process. Fuglei (2014) stated,

Students whose lives and cultures are not treated as important are less likely to invest in the overall learning process, whereas those who are empowered and feel valued will be ready to learn, even if that connection is made through something as simple as teaching the lesson through pop culture, movies, or the music that the class will enjoy. (para. 10)

The consequences of failing to meet these specific needs can be detrimental to the academic and social success of male students of color.

One of the major crises in the American public school system is the rate of student dropouts. Within the state of New Jersey, there has been an increase in the graduation rate. However, the dropout rate for Black students is still far above students from other ethnicities. Lowe (2018) cited, "According to data released Friday by the state Department of Education, the high school graduation rate for 2017 is 90.5 percent, up 1.9 percentage points since 2014" (para. 2). This still leaves 9.5% of students dropping out within the state. The graduation numbers are lower for Black students, even though, as D'Amico (2017) noted, "Statewide, the graduation rate for Black students has increased 13 points since 2011, from 69 percent to 82 percent" (para. 19). Student disengagement has been cited as a major factor in student dropout (Childs Trend Data Bank, 2015, p. 3). Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007) argued,

Given that high school dropouts have been a concern for more than 40 years, that many more minority students and students living in poverty drop out, and that dropping out has consistently been linked to student disengagement, it is surprising that the field of early indicators is underdeveloped. (p. 225)

The ramifications for students of color who drop out can be serious. When students decide to drop out they also lose many of the resources that are available to them within the school. Schools provide a variety of services such as mental health, social-emotional networks, guidance, and breakfast programs. Without these and the other resources provided, students who are no longer connected to school become isolated and left to utilize resources within the community, which may be insufficient or unavailable to them.

Throughout any given school year, teachers and students establish a relationship. Within this environment students of color may be met with teachers and administrators who fail to make a connection with them and fail to understand many of their cultural traits and needs. Given this lack of understanding, the inability to meet the needs of many of these students, poor community/parent/police relationships, and zero tolerance policies, school districts have created what can be identified as the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). Dancy (2017) defined STPP as "…the disturbing national trend in which children are funneled out of public schools and into juvenile and criminal justice systems" (p. 476).

School districts across the country have implemented various intervention programs, such as restorative discipline practices and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), to address school discipline practices and to minimize student encounters with the juvenile justice system. According to the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports organization, PBIS has been implemented in over 7,000 schools (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, 2018,

para. 1). Nelson and Lind (2015) stated "Some of the nation's largest districts are working to punish students in ways that don't involve suspension, trying to reform discipline so that students aren't referred to police, or both" (para. 29). While these interventions have proven to be moderately effective in shrinking the STTP, they fall short in addressing student disengagement due to the lack of cultural and community competence among educators serving these students.

Statement of the Problem

As students become disengaged in their educational process, they often engage in behaviors that disrupt the process. With student disengagement being a factor in school dropout and because of the racial/cultural gap that exists between Black male students and educators not of color, it is important to examine disengagement from the student's perspective. This study examined the problem of Black male student disengagement as it relates to teachers' cultural competence.

A review of the literature on student disengagement as it relates to teachers' cultural competence, indicates a dearth of research from the student perspective. Howard (2001) stated, "Unfortunately, little of the research on culturally relevant teaching practices has examined students' perceptions and interpretations of these pedagogical practices" (p. 131). The identified problem of this study is that there is inadequate research to explore this concept from the students' perspectives. The study helps clarify two issues in the literature on Black male students' disengagement: the impact of educators' cultural competence on students' school experience, and the role of student perceptions of cultural relevance.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between student disengagement and Black male students' perceptions of New Jersey public school educators'

cultural competence. The experiences of male students of color who have graduated from a New Jersey public school were expressed in personal reflections collected by the researcher. Responses to interviews demonstrated how these students view educators' cultural competence and how they view their role in their own engagement in their educational process. The study examines the racial/cultural gap between educators and Black male students.

Research Question

Using both critical race theory (CRT) and resistance theory as a conceptual framework, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What is the Black male, high school graduates' perception of their cultural experience with predominantly White educators?

2. How do Black males perceive the cultural competence of their teachers and the cultural relevance of the curriculum and instruction?

3. How do Black males perceive their role in their educational process in light of their perceptions of its cultural relevance?

The explored educational experience of Black male students helped to provide an understanding of the impact of educator cultural competence and culturally relevant curriculum and instruction. The shared experiences of the participants of this study provided an understanding of their experiences with educators who were not of color.

Conceptual Framework: Overview

Young Black male students in the American educational system can feel as though they never fit within the box in which the system was trying to place them. Edmin (2016) argued,

> In urban schools, where the neoindigenous are taught to be docile and complicit in their own mis-education and then celebrated for being everything but who they are, they learn

quickly that they are expected to divorce themselves from their culture in order to be academically successful. (p. 13)

They are expected to behave and think in a manner that may not be indigenous to the cultural practices and traits in which they were raised. Edmin (2016) pointed this out in his book, *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood…and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education,* stating, "Our understanding of who was and wasn't a good student was rooted less in our experience with urban students and more on our perceptions of them, which were largely based on a flawed narrative" (p. 42). Some of these students can navigate this double narrative. By day they learn how to conform to what is not natural to them and by night they live by the codes of their culture (Edmin, 2016, p. 16).

This qualitative, phenomenological study used Black male high school graduates to highlight their personal educational 9th through 12th grade experiences. Specific attention was focused on the cultural competence of educators, their teaching practices, and the availability of resources within their school districts.

There are many theories that could be used as theoretical frameworks for studying culturally relevant pedagogy and student engagement. Critical race theory (CRT) and resistance theory directed the focus of this study to both the educator's role and the students' role in their educational experience and was used to ground this study of culturally relevant pedagogy and student engagement.

According to Harshman (2013) "Resistance theory promotes a politicized reading of the actions taken by students to oppose power hierarchies that reinforce systemic inequity related to class, gender, race, and sexuality through the imposition of curricula, rules, and culture in schools" (para. 1). The students' resistance to the educational system and its practices are a part

of a bigger statement on resisting societal and political measures. This theory positions the students' resistance in a perspective that is seen as negative and punishable. This theory allowed the researcher to look at how connected these students believe they were to their schooling.

Since this study focused on the specific sub-group of Black males, this conversation has been placed within the context of race and culture. The major issues of disengagement by male students of color should not be addressed without examining how they influence the discussion around culturally relevant pedagogy. As a result, resistance theory has been placed within the perspective of the CRT as it pertains to education. In its conception, CRT had its beginnings in the legal system as researchers began to look at societal inequalities due to legal practices that may have had the intent of leveling the playing field but reinforced the inequality. Gillborn (2009) stated,

> The first of these [elements] is the central role accorded to racism, which is seen as a subtle and pervasive force in society that is so deep rooted as to appear 'normal' to the majority. CRT is also characterized by a critique of liberalism, which points to the failure of notions such as 'merit', 'neutrality' and 'color-blindness', which masquerade as fair and just but, because of the uneven playing field of contemporary racist society, actually function to ensure the continuation of race inequality. (p. 126)

When placed within the context of education, CRT helps to unravel a system of inequity and the superiority of a specific group of people. Dixson and Anderson (2018) stated,

> CRT in education argues that racial inequity in education is the logical outcome of a system of achievement premised on competition, and CRT in education examines the role of education policy and educational practices in the construction of racial inequity and perpetuation of normative whiteness. (p. 122)

Critical race theory and resistance theory added the necessary depth to the study and provided a comprehensive framework that focused the research both on the system itself and the individuals within the system. The framework allowed the researcher to examine the relationship between students, the educational system, and the educators in predominantly White schools. It also offered an explanation as to how the cultural gap between students and teachers is at play with students of color.

The theoretical framework focuses the research and study on both systemic issues as well as student relationships within the system. The intent of the study was to provide a fundamental understanding of the students' perspective and to lead educators to a closer space to be able to address student disengagement within the American public school system.

Significance

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of student engagement as it relates to culturally relevant pedagogy. Through the lived experiences of Black male students, the study identified the importance of teaching practices that address the cultural, academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of these students. When these needs go unmet students can become disengaged, exhibit inappropriate behavior, and can be disciplined for their actions.

Within the larger context, this study opened up discussion as to the need for culturally relevant teaching for the diverse American student population. The U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS, 2016), "a nationally representative survey of teachers and principals, showed that 82 percent of public school teachers identified as white" (p. 6). The diverse make-up of today's student population is not reflected in those who teach them. The cultural gap between teachers and students leaves teachers in a position of identifying the

most effective means of reaching all their students while students try to identify means of connecting to their educational experience.

Definition of Terms

The following are key definitions that will be used throughout the study. This section provides clarity and context to these terms.

Cultural Competence (interchangeable with Cultural Competency). Cultural competence is having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families (National Education Association, 2017, para. 3).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (interchangeable with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy). Culturally relevant pedagogy is the theoretical framework that is centered on students' culture, experiences, and individual perspectives as a conduit on how students receive and process learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469).

Culturally Relevant Teaching (interchangeable with Culturally Responsive Teaching. Culturally relevant teaching is the practice of teaching that draws on the cultural backgrounds and knowledge of students as assets in the classroom (Byrd, 2016, para. 1).

Culture. Culture is the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group (In Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 2018, para. 1).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

This study was conducted under the assumption that all participants responded with truthful information and had a level of interest in the study. These assumptions derived from the fact the participants reflected on their personal, lived, educational experiences and were not currently students within the K-12 public schools.

By using only adult, Black males in New Jersey, the study is limited to this subpopulation, and includes only who were willing to participate in the study. The results of the study may not reflect the experiences of other subgroups and students in other parts of the world. Also, the researcher understood that there may be other factors, such as socio-economic status, family structure, and gender that impact the results of the study.

The participants for this study were selected because they have demonstrated some level of success in navigating their educational experiences. Specifically, the participants were selected because of the disparity between the demographics of educators and Black students in the American public school system.

Conclusion

As the American public school system continues to serve a more diverse student population, educators are placed in a position to try to find the most effective means to meet the needs of all students. The cultural gap that exists between male students of color and educators who are not of color impacts how engaged these students are in their educational experience. Cultural competence among educators and their students can reverse the trend of student disengagement by re-engaging them into a process where they are celebrated and not forced to conform to standards that are foreign to them (Robinson, 2012, p. ii).

The concepts of cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy were introduced as the foundation to this study. The purpose of the study was to examine the educational experiences of adult Black males who attended New Jersey public schools with a predominantly White staff. Their experiences were examined as they relate to teachers' cultural competence and student disengagement. In Chapter 2 an examination of the current literature on cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy were explored. Within the literature the themes of

culture, cultural competence, student achievement, cultural identity, and critical consciousness were explored. The review of the current literature on culturally relevant pedagogy provided a solid understanding of the phenomenon. Chapter 3 provides the methodology for the study. Chapter 4 highlights the themes and subthemes found within the data. Lastly, Chapter 5 concludes this study with interpretations of the findings, the study's implications, recommendations for further research, and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines the research that has been conducted around the topic of educator cultural competence and culturally responsive pedagogy as it relates to male students of color. The review included an analysis of the basis of culturally responsive pedagogy including educator perception of Black male students, academic rigor, school leadership capacity, and external factors. The external factors included the family structure and its perception of power, economic factors, and mental health factors. The scope of this literature review was rounded out by discussing the cultural competency of educators and Black male high school graduates from predominantly White school settings.

The literature review was developed to expand specifically on resistance theory as it relates to education, language acquisition, CRT, and teacher cultural competency. The researcher specifically sought out literature that addresses the Black male population within the context of cultural competence, culturally relevant pedagogy, and student engagement.

The literature and research on cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy identified various factors that are not included in the scope of this study such as poor academic interventions, lack of resources both within school and within the community, family structure and values, and school leadership capacity. With the diversity of today's student population, cultural competency and culturally relevant pedagogy expands to include all students. The scope of this review is limited in that it only focuses on the Black male student. Black female students and Latino students are large segments of the population that have been excluded from this review. The focus on Black male high school graduates has largely been due to general perception of those students. Dancy (2017) argued, "Black males occupy a paradox in the

American public psyche that plays out in schools, where they are both admired and despised"
(p. 477).

While family structure has been examined on a surface level, the research does not dig deeply into the effect family structure has on student disengagement, especially when it comes to males. This literature review focused mainly on the educational experiences that affect student disengagement and not on the external factors that each individual case presents or institutional factors.

Availability of Sources

Many scholarly articles were located in various databases. Most of the sources were located through the University of New England's online library system. The books within the literature review, Christopher Edmin's *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood…and the Rest of Y'all Too,* Gloria Ladson-Billings' *The Dream Keepers,* and Lisa Delpit's *The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom* were used to help round out the review to explore the academic and cultural factors that affect the male students' of color educational experiences. In examining the literature, themes were identified to connect the sources. The review focuses on the themes of culture, cultural competence, culturally relevant pedagogy, critical race theory, and resistance theory.

The Role of Culture

Throughout the literature, the discussion of equitable education for all sat front and center. With landmark court decisions, such as *Brown versus The Board of Education* of Topeka, Kansas, the concept of race and culture became the pivot point for the discussion on equal education for all. By making segregated schools unconstitutional, policy makers brought the importance of race and culture into the classroom, making it necessary for educators to address

the role of race and culture in learning. In Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2018), culture is defined as, "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group" (para. 1). The concept of culture is a social construct that dictates how individuals interact with each other and how they see the world. Axner (2016) stated,

> Culture is a strong part of people's lives. It influences their views, their values, their humor, their hopes, their loyalties, and their worries and fears. So when you are working with people and building relationships with them, it helps to have some perspective and understanding of their cultures. (para. 5)

Culture is shaped by both the shared, historical experiences and the current experiences of a group of people. Students and educators will bring their own unique set of experiences into the classroom. Ladson-Billings (2009) noted, "Burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, separate and unequal education, and relegation to unsafe, sub-standard inner-city schools, the quest for quality education remains an elusive dream for the African American community" (p. xv). Given this particular history, it is important that educators of African American students understand and demonstrate cultural competence.

Cultural Competence

Culture is the core of who we are as human beings. The human experience is shaped by our experiences, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests. With a fundamental understanding of culture and how the culture of Black males can be misunderstood by educators, the literature calls for an understanding of the culture of students through cultural competence. The development of cultural competence is a process that takes place over time. The initial stage of developing cultural competence is the educator and the student first understanding their own cultural perspectives and understanding any cultural biases that they may have. The educator

needs to understand how this perspective impacts their teaching practices and the student needs to understand how this perspective impacts their learning. Cultural competence involves having an understanding of one's own culture and having the ability to build on the cultural differences that exist within the school and community (The National Education Association, 2017, para. 3). This definition can be broken down into six key components: valuing diversity, being culturally self-aware, dynamics of difference, knowledge of student culture, institutionalizing cultural knowledge, and adapting to diversity (Colorado Department of Education, 2010, p. 7). Institutionalizing cultural knowledge and adapting to diversity fit within the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy.

For educators to develop cultural competency they need to value diversity. According to National Center for Statistics (2018),

Of the projected 50.7 million public school students entering prekindergarten through grade 12 in fall 2018, White students will account for 24.1 million. The remaining 26.6 million will be composed of 7.8 million Black students, 14.0 million Hispanic students, 2.6 million Asian students, 0.2 million Pacific Islander students, 0.5 million American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 1.6 million students of two or more races. (para. 2)

While this data shows the diversity of the American public school student body, this diversity has not been reflected within the American public school teaching force. The U.S. Department of Education (2017) reported that 80.1 % of the American public school teaching force identified as White/non-Hispanic teachers and only 6.6% of the teaching force identified as Black, non-Hispanic (p. 7).

With many of today's classrooms being filled with students who are not of the same culture as the classroom teacher, educators must first place value in diversity. According to Irish

and Scrubb (2012), "Robust instructional strategies and culturally sensitive curricula are critical, but more important is an instructor who is sensitive and responsive to the unique differences of each student" (para. 1). Both students and educators need to accept that every individual is different and expresses these differences in various ways. Diversity within the classroom extends beyond cultural traits. Students and educators need to be aware of and respect the differences that also come with such things as poverty, gender, and learning styles. Once students and educators have a genuine respect for diversity they must also have a sense of who they are and how they are positioned within the classroom and the larger community.

Cultural competence involves understanding one's own experiences and perspectives (Hanover Research, 2014, p. 6). In other words, individuals need to be culturally competent in their own culture first. This knowledge allows students and educators to recognize their own skill sets and knowledge base and their own biases towards cultures other than their own. This helps to prevent students and educators from projecting their own values onto others. This uniquely becomes a concern when educators project their cultural norms onto students of color. Edmin (2016) stated,

> For teachers to acknowledge that the ways they perceive, group, and diagnose students has a dramatic impact on student outcomes, moves them toward reconciling the cultural differences they have with students, a significant step toward changing the way educators engage with urban youth of color. (p. 10)

Ladson-Billings (2009) extended this concept stating, "These are not 'bad' teachers. These very same people decry racism; they believe in equal opportunity. However, they do not understand that their perceptions of African American students interfere with their ability to be effective teachers for them" (p. 23).

Culturally competent students and educators understand that there is a certain dynamic to differences within the classroom. Students and educators must respect the views, opinions and cultural traits of everyone in the classroom. Being culturally competent requires an understanding of how to handle those situations when they arise. Miller-Merrell (2009) stated,

> A lot of people always assume that there is a momentous possibility that cultural differences are the cause of communication problems. They should always be willing to be tolerant and pardoning, rather than intimidating and hostile, if problems develop. One should respond bit by bit and cautiously in cross-cultural exchanges, not jumping to the conclusion that you know what is being thought and said. (para. 9)

The dynamics of difference require knowing what can go wrong in cross-cultural communication and how to respond to these situations (Gay, 2002, p. 111). A major component of being able to handle these situations is knowing who makes up the classroom.

Culturally competent students and educators must exercise the ability to see people who make up their classroom from a cultural perspective. Educators who know their students can begin to handle situations and place students in the center of the students' individual learning. This ability requires developing healthy relationships with students and their families both inside and outside of school. Wilson (2016) argued, "Through these relationships, teachers learn the strengths, needs, languages and lifestyles of their students" (para 4). The use of this information will help to support the needs of all students.

Culturally competent educators understand the importance of getting to know their students outside the walls of the school. They collect information from visiting community events, organizations, churches, homes, parks, and businesses of the students they serve. This also helps to identify needs and build care and trust within the educator-student relationship.

Engle and Gonzalez (2014) declared, "We must visit the restaurants, parks, stores, churches, clinics, organizations and agencies in the neighborhood to hear firsthand the needs, fears, desires and values of community members" (p. 34). Edmin (2016) explained the effects of this connection as he reflected on his own teaching practices, stating, "I got students to engage with me and each other differently because I blurred the lines between the in-and out-of-school contexts" (p. 139).

The knowledge gained and the relationships that are built from the students within the classroom can be extended to the institution. The same celebration and use of diversity within the classroom should be extended beyond the classroom walls. Edmin (2016) stated,

> During this process, [learning from students] it became clear that there are three basic steps to fully learning about, and engaging with, students' context. It is important for the educator to take all three steps in order to move toward a better awareness of how to meet the needs of the urban student and teach with youth context as an anchor of instruction. The first involves being in the same social spaces with the neoindegenous, the second is engaging with the context, and the third is making connections between the out-of-school context and classroom teaching. (p. 140)

Without grounding the school-wide culture to reflect the diversity of the student body, students are left navigating between their own cultural understandings and that of the school. Edmin (2016) identified this skill as *code switching*. In the larger context, students of color will need to develop this ability to code switch to navigate larger social situations. He stated, "They read the codes or rules of engagement in a particular social field, identify which ones have value, adopt them, enact them, and through this process, form powerful connections to new people" (p. 175). Edmin suggested that students of color need to have the ability to fit into the culture of

the institution and switch to the culture of the multiple social spaces they will find themselves in in the outside world (Edmin, 2016, p. 177).

Cultural competence relies on forming an understanding of one's self and respecting the culture of others with whom they interact. Before culturally relevant pedagogy can be practiced in the classroom, educators and students should develop cultural competence. Cultural competence is the understanding, respect, and tolerance of culture, whereas culturally relevant pedagogy is how to reach and teach culturally diverse students.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy has its roots in the works of Au and Jordan (1981), Mohatt and Erickson (1981), and Ladson-Billings (1995). Au and Jordan's research (as cited by Ladson-Billings, 1995) on a Hawaiian school reflected the impact of incorporating aspects of students' cultural background into their reading instruction. This was largely due to the use of *talk-story,* an interactive language style that uses language patterns that were found in Native Hawaiian homes. Mohatt and Erickson (as cited by Ladson-Billings, 1995) conducted a similar study involving Native American students. The findings of both studies cited improvement in student academic performance. With the results of these two studies as a basis, Ladson-Billings (1995) set out to study the teaching methods and ideologies of culturally competent teachers. Ladson-Billings (1995) stated,

> A next step for positing effective pedagogical practice is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate. I term this pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy. (p. 469)

The three core tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy are affirming both student and teacher cultural identity, developing student critical consciousness, and high student achievement.

Culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes the role that culture plays in how students receive, analyze, and interpret information. It also recognizes the importance for students to maintain a sense of their own cultural identity to connect to their educational experience. The conversation around cultural identity seeks to address the fundamental question of Who am I? The concept of cultural identity is a complex one that is shaped by individual experiences, family dynamics, history, social circumstances, and political context (Tatum, 2017, p. 99). Gay (2001) stated, "It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (p. 106). This is especially necessary for students of color. Ladson-Billings (1995) echoed this idea in stating, "The dilemma for African-American students becomes one of negotiating the academic demands of school while demonstrating cultural competence. Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy must provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically" (p. 476). This aspect of culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to address the issues surrounding student disengagement and encourages students to develop a social conscience.

With the historical issues that surround students of color, culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to position students and educators in a space where they are critical of the social constructs that surround them. For educators, this may include challenging systemic elements that disrupt their culturally relevant teaching. Ladson-Billings (1995) provided an example of a teacher challenging the local board of education on a reading program that she felt was inconsistent with

what she was learning about literacy/learning from a critical perspective (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 474).

The educator must be aware of the social inequities their students face as well. In facing these inequities, which are relative to the individual student, culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to place students in the position of leadership. It leads students down a path of being critical of social issues and empowers them to address issues that are important to them. Educators who practice this pedagogy use the constructivist approach and play the role of facilitator. In Ladson-Billings' (1995) article, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," she provided an example of a teacher allowing students to identify issues they found in their communities. One specific issue dealt with poorly utilized space in their communities in which the teacher helped to facilitate the drafting and presentation of urban plans to the city council (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 477).

The literature on culturally relevant pedagogy points to a place in which the goal is to use cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students to teach them more effectively (Chunoo & Callahan, 2017; Ladson-Billing, 1995; Martell, 2013). The outcomes of this type of teaching are academic success and the development of culturally competent and culturally critical educators and students. The importance of developing culturally competent educators and students is that it creates space for use of culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy is important because it grounds students at the center of their educational experience, develops leadership capacity, and gives them space to be culturally critical (Chunoo & Callahan, 2017; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995). All of these elements tie into student engagement in their educational process and academic achievement.

Culturally relevant pedagogy places students' culture at the center of teaching practices. Educators place a high demand on academic achievement for all students. This is particularly important to students of color because as Delpit (2002) argued, "Those whose skin color or hair texture or facial features do not place them within the dominant phenotype are often viewed as 'lesser than'" (p. xix-xx). To combat these perspectives, culturally relevant pedagogy includes the idea that infusing cultural artifacts in the classroom is not enough. Students still need to be given the space to express their own cultural identities within the classroom. The goal of the pedagogy is to create a school experience that enables students to pursue academic excellence without losing their cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469).

Student Engagement

Robinson (2012) argued that culture influences a teacher's pedagogy as well as student engagement (p. 26). Culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to engage students in their education experience by connecting student personal experiences to their learning. Lawrence-Pine (2015) stated,

> One of the methods for re-engaging these students is by creating a home community and school connection, that, when taught by a culturally sensitive and aware pedagogue, can assist in connecting students to their education and provide them opportunities for academic achievement. Another method of creating an inclusive and engaging environment in school is to create a curriculum that reflects students' cultural heritage and background knowledge. (p. 67)

The literature breaks down student engagement into a multidimensional concept that includes behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagements that describes meaningful student

involvement throughout the learning environment (Boykin & Noguero, 2011; Devito, 2016; Robinson, 2012).

  Behavioral engagement. Behavioral engagement is based on the student's involvement with the academic, social and extracurricular opportunities of the school (DeVito, 2016, p. 8). This level of engagement is individualized to the student and the efforts they put into their education. DeVito (2016) stated, "Behavioral engagement refers to particular student behaviors related with learning, such as concentrating, exerting effort, taking initiative, being persistent in the face of failure, following rules and positively interacting with teachers and peers among others" (p. 7). Boykin and Noguero (2011) extended behavioral engagement to include on-task behavior and participating in class (para. 2). Davis (2012) summed up behavioral engagement by stating that behavioral engagement includes students' effort, persistence, participation and compliance with school structure (p. 23).

  Cognitive engagement. Students may be behaviorally engaged in their learning, but it does not mean that the student is learning. Cognitive engagement involves how the student feels about themselves and their work, their skills and the strategies they use to complete their work (Davis, 2012, p. 23). DeVito (2016) argued that cognitive engagement is about the student's investment in their education and includes being thoughtful, strategic and willing to put forth the necessary effort to master difficult skills (p. 8). Boykin and Noguero (2011) added that students who are cognitively engaged are involved in a deep processing of information (para. 2).

  Emotional engagement. The third component of student engagement involves emotional engagement. Devito (2016) defined emotional engagement as how a student identifies with their school and how they value being important (p. 8). Davis (2012) argued that this component is

deeper than just emotional engagement but is more about relational engagement (p. 24). Davis (2012), citing the works of Davis, Change, Andrzejewski, and Poirer (2010), stated,

> Specifically, Davis et al. used students' reports of perceived teacher support, perceived press for understanding (i.e., students' perception that the teacher wants them to learn and understand), and their sense of school belonging as proxies for understanding the extent to which students were relationally engaged in school. (p. 24)

The multidimensional concept of student engagement includes behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement and emotional engagement. Boykin and Noguero (2011) argued, "The greater level of a student's interest, positive affect, positive attitude, positive value held, curiosity and task absorption, the greater the effect on engagement" (para. 2). Adelman and Taylor (2015) stated,

> In general, the amount of time and energy spent on an activity seems dependent on how much the activity is valued by the person and on the person's expectation that what is valued will be attained without too great a cost. (p. 55)

The literature suggests that a lack of cultural connection has an impact on student engagement as well. Miller (2011) stated, "If that teacher has failed to connect with their students on a culturally responsive level, students may disengage from the learning" (para. 2).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study revolves around critical race theory (CRT) and resistance theory. CRT addresses the roles of race and racism within an institutional setting. The concept of cultural competence is examined through the CRT perspective and the concept of student disengagement is centered within resistance theory.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) positions institutional racism in the forefront of the issues that many African Americans face in schools and other institutions. This institutional racism contributes to the lack of cultural competence and disconnectedness that they experience. For example, CRT views the concept of "*colorblindness*" as a perspective that disconnects a person from their culture. According Ryan (2007),

> Efforts to promote a colorblind ideology in which all people were to be judged as individual human beings—without regard to race or ethnicity—were intended to eradicate racism and discrimination, promote justice, and generally improve the economic and social climate for Blacks in the US. Presumably, a colorblind ideology would thus also promote harmony between ethnic groups. According to this colorblind ideology, then, race and ethnic distinctions can and should be ignored and people should be treated in an identical manner. (p. 618)

For someone to state they do not see color denies a part of who the other person is, and their unique lived experiences. It is this denial to accept a person for who they are that disconnects them from the person and institution.

The literature addresses the concept of power and the African American students' perspective of the relationship between themselves and educational institutions. Dancy (2017) argued that those in power positions get to define the standard for *normal* behavior. The disciplinary practices are thus used to enforce conformity (Dancy, 2017). The problem here lies in the fact that what often is defined as normal is not in line with the beliefs, cultural rituals, and traits of many students of color. Each school will have its own definition of *normal* based on the culture and climate of that individual institution.

Impact of cultural misunderstanding. Within any given classroom there may or may not be a culturally diverse group of students. When students are in classrooms in which the teacher does not understand their cultural traits, it creates the *us-versus-them* perspective. Osher et al. (2012) noted that when educators have low expectations based on preconceived notions and prejudices, they fail to differentiate their instruction based on the students' academic and social-emotional needs and fail to engage when students' discipline challenges arrive in the classroom (p. 286). In contrast to these findings, Ladson-Billings (2009) argued that effective teachers of minority students have a "strong focus on student learning, developing cultural competence, and cultivating a sociopolitical awareness in their students. Student learning was varied and multifaceted in their classrooms" (p. xi). Kinloch (2017) argued that this contradiction has more to do with the disparity in unequal access to a proper education between schools that serve African Americans and those that serve non-minority students. She argued that the system itself is marked by unequal access to a rigorous curriculum, under-skilled teachers, lack of quality resources, and outdated facilities (Kinloch, 2017, p. 35). These conditions contribute to the defined achievement gap that exists between minority students and their White counterparts. In some situations, having unequal access to a rigorous curriculum, under-skilled teachers, lack of quality resources, and outdated facilities may lead to students being held back (retention), placing minority students further behind their classmates.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (1995),

While retention is intended to improve a student's chance for school success, some researchers have found that the stigma of failure associated with retention has a negative impact on students' self-esteem and subsequent academic achievement, thereby increasing their likelihood of dropping out of school. (para. 1)

This is especially true for African American and Latino male students. Cook (2015) supported this finding, "when all grade levels are combined, black students are nearly three times more likely to be held back as their White peers. They're also more likely to drop out before earning a high school diploma" (para. 9).

The review of literature supported the idea that teachers and administrators are trained to maintain and support an educational system that may be counter-productive to many of America's minority students. Allen and White-Smith (2014) believed that teacher preparation programs teach educators to take a colorblind approach to educating students. This camouflages the self-interests of some students and maintains the status quo of inequalities (Allen & White-Smith, 2014, p. 447). With the climate, culture, and leadership capacity existing to maintain the status quo Allen and White-Smith (2014) argued that the racial incongruences and deficit view of students of color converge with school policies and practices that ultimately contributed to either the push out or drop out many minority students.

Resistance Theory

The cultural disconnect has created circumstances of resistance from those students who have experienced the disconnection from their education and their educational environment. The literature appeared to link student disconnection and misbehavior to resistance to the dominant culture and system. Jaramillo (2010) stated, "Resistance theory draws on an understanding of the complexities of culture to define the relationship between school and the dominant society" (para. 1). This, when added to the complexities of the competitive structure of both society and the educational system, places marginalized students at a disadvantage that causes them to become resistant to the system and the individuals who reinforce it. Jaramillo (2010) continued, "Resistance theory stressed the structural causes and personal meanings attributed to

oppositional behavior and discussed the moral and political indignation felt by marginalized youth subcultures" (para. 3).

Every framework has its limitations. When dealing with students within an educational system there are various social constructs that exist within the system. There are peer level interactions, family level interactions, teacher/student interactions, and social interactions that exist outside of the school. The daily web of social interactions these students experience is complex, complicating understanding of teacher-student interactions when using critical race theory and resistance theory. The cultural competence theory is educator-focused and not system-focused. While a teacher can learn cultural competence, he or she is still operating in a system that may not have cultural competence and that will reinforce the expectations defined by the dominant culture. The resistance theory objectifies the educator as being a part of the system and does not consider the student's individual relationship with the teacher.

The study of race in itself has its own limitations on clearly defining the qualifying characteristics of what constitutes each race. Without a universal definition of race, the sub-categories based on race can only be loosely established. As a result, scholars appear to have difficulty pinpointing a universal definition of CRT.

Conclusion

The literature on cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy all point to the importance of having these two elements within schools and classrooms that serve Black male students. This student-centered approach is argued to have an impact on student engagement, academic achievement, and leadership. When these elements are not present, the literature suggested an increase in student disengagement and eventual student drop out. With much of the literature focusing on teacher practices and school culture, this study highlighted the lived

experience of Black males who were educated by White educators. Chapter 3 discusses the

research design and methodology used for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative, phenomenological, multiple-case study design was selected for this research. This approach allowed the researcher to describe human experiences with the phenomenon of cultural competence and student disengagement. The use of a survey and semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to capture perspectives, understandings, and feelings of people who may or may not have experienced cultural competence and student disengagement. The phenomenological approach was particularly beneficial as the goal was to impact school policy and teaching practices. Lester (1999) stated,

> Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions. Adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research, enabling it to be used as the basis for practical theory, allows it to inform, support or challenge policy and action. (p. 1)

Specifically, this approach allowed for a detailed description of the perceptions of Black male students who have had educational experiences with White educators. The phenomenological approach allowed for the exploration of perceptions of Black male students who graduated from a New Jersey public-school district. Participant interviews and surveys were used to assess how this population perceives the relationship of cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy to student engagement using the following primary research questions.

1. What is the Black male, high school graduates' perception of their cultural experience with predominantly White educators?

2. How do Black males perceive the cultural competence of their teachers and the cultural relevance of the curriculum and instruction?

3. How do Black males perceive their role in their educational process in light of their perceptions of its cultural relevance?

The motivation for this study came from a place of concern for those students who are expected to follow the rules of their culture, their communities, and their families and follow the demands of a school culture that differs from their own. When there is a conflict between the student's culture, communities, families, and the culture of the school, the student is required to navigate these spaces differently. When students resist the school culture, these students are often disengaged from their educational process leading to low academic achievement and potential drop out.

Setting

There is no single setting for this study as participants were recruited through the social media sources of Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and the researcher's personal email contacts. Participants represented graduates of public high schools within the state of New Jersey. Descriptive demographics of the participants and the schools represented by the participants were collected to establish the cultural context of the schools they attended.

Participants

The recruitment of participants took place through social media outlets and personal contact information within the researcher's network using an invitation to participate (Appendix A) that outlined the nature of the study and explained that participants would be asked to complete a survey and potentially participate in a follow-up interview. The researcher was seeking participants who reported having experienced disengagement during any part of their 9th

grade through 12th grade experience and who perceive understanding and valuing culture as an important factor of their educational experience. Participants included Black high school graduates of a NJ public school over 21 who self-identified as having experienced a feeling of disengagement.

The researcher received responses from thirty-eight participants in the survey portion of the study. The survey responses were used to identify participants who would take part in the interview process. Eight interviewees were randomly selected to participate in the interview process. Every fifth participant who submitted their survey responses and gave their consent to participate in the interview process was asked to participate. The interviewees must have felt educational disengagement at some point in their schooling and attended a school where the faculty was predominately White. Requiring that the schools attended had a Black male student population of less than 25% helped to ensure that each participant would have an experience in which they were a part of the minority population within the school. This increased the chances of recording the experiences of Black male students who had to navigate the multiple cultural identities of their culture, community, families, and school. The participants also needed to have at least graduated from high school. The focus on high school graduates provided some insight on the role cultural competence and student engagement played in the academic success of graduating from high school.

Participant Rights

Participants were asked to provide confidential accounts of their experiences. Informed consent information (Appendix B) was provided as part of the survey and reviewed with the participants selected for interviews. Fictional names of participants, schools, and any educators mentioned within the responses were assigned by the researcher. The combination of the use of

surveys and interviews provided a level of fact checking to make sure the responses presented are authentic. The study looked for consistency between the survey responses and the information shared in the interviews. Member checking with participants added a level of confirmation for the individual stories provided. This member checking process included a review of the participant's transcript for accuracy. Participation was voluntary, and participants were given the opportunity to back out of the study at any point of the research process. Sensitivity towards any changing conditions of the participants was applied by gaining additional consent to continue to participate.

Data

The purpose of this qualitative study was to expand the understanding of the importance of cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy as it relates to student disengagement. Educational policy influencers, educators, and school administrators potentially could be interested in the findings of this study. Data was collected from participant survey responses and interviews.

Surveys

The surveys were administered using Survey Monkey. An online consent form (Appendix B) was required before the participants could participate in the survey. The consent page included information about how to complete the survey and how to participate in the optional voluntary follow-up interview. The consent page also notified the participant that this was a confidential survey and no names or institutions would be identified in the findings. The participant needed to click the continue button to proceed to the survey. The survey as used to collect data on the participant's perceptions of the diversity of the student body, the concept of culture, the concept of cultural competence, and their level of engagement in their own

educational experience. The survey questions were developed by the researcher. The researcher considered the purpose of the study and the key definitions of cultural competence, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culture to develop the survey questions.

Interviews

The last page of the survey gave participants the option to volunteer to participate in the interview process (Appendix D). This also included a description of the interview process and the participant selection criteria. Participants input their email to serve both as a means of communication and as consent to participate. The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix E) were developed by the researcher. The open-ended questions focused on the participants' educational experiences within the classroom of their 9th grade through 12th grade experience as it relates to culture, cultural competence, and student engagement. The interview process was recorded to maintain accuracy through the transcribing and coding process. Participants were afforded the opportunity to member check and review the data provided. The interviews were recorded using Garage Band by using the researcher's personal audio recording equipment at an agreed upon location by the researcher and the participant. Recorded phone interviews took place for those participants who chose not to meet in person. The interview files were transcribed using the transcription service Rev.com.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to examine the participants' language and experiences for the identification of themes and patterns. According to Delpit (2002),

> The commencement of formal education is usually one of the first settings in a person's life when their language may be judged as right or wrong; when assumptions may be

made about their intelligence, family life, future potential, or moral fiber every time a

sentence is uttered. (p. xx)

The interviews were transcribed for the purpose of coding and generating themes. After

reviewing the transcripts multiple times, the researcher sought to identify five to seven themes

within the data. The researcher made note of any similarities, differences, and contradictions.

Common themes were constructed into categories, themes, and patterns. These categories and

patterns were incorporated into the participants' responses by reviewing each participant's

transcript. Identifiers for each theme were used and indicated on a theme chart so that the theme

could easily be identified within the transcript. A table of themes was generated to identify

similar and different themes in each participant's responses. A final table was provided based on

the prevalence of data and depth of certain responses.

Potential Limitations of the Study

The phenomenological design presented a difficult challenge in proving the authenticity

of the responses provided. While the member checking process minimized the limitation of

authenticity it did not completely guarantee full authenticity. Participants were granted the

opportunity to review the transcripts and the identified themes to insure accuracy. This process

also helped to limit the influence of the researcher's bias. To further limit researcher bias,

participants had the opportunity to review the findings of the study to ensure the study captured

the participants' experiences.

Another limitation is the small sample size. The limitations of a small sample size made

generalizing the data difficult. The data collected was specific for the sample size. Other sample

populations could reveal different experiences. Also, in limiting the study to New Jersey

graduates, the findings may not be applicable to the experiences of graduates from other states

and locations. Lastly, there also were outside factors, such as family, position within the organization, and socio-economic status that may have influenced the responses provided.

Conclusion

This qualitative, phenomenological, multi-case study design sought to explore the educational experiences of eight Black adult graduates from New Jersey public schools. Participants shared their experiences with White teachers as they related to cultural competence and student engagement. The participants were gathered using social media and the researcher's personal contact list. Final participants had experienced some level of student disengagement at any time during their 9th grade to 12th grade experience and perceived understanding and valuing culture as important to their educational process. Using surveys and interviews, participants gave a confidential account of their educational experiences. The IPA process was used for data analysis. To help address the limitations of the study, participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts, themes, and findings, which are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The intended purpose of the present study was to explore the relationship between student disengagement and Black male students' perceptions of New Jersey public school educators' cultural competence. The experiences of Black male students who have graduated from a New Jersey public school were recorded to highlight the participants' personal reflections on how they viewed educators' cultural competence, and how they view their role in engagement in their educational process. This chapter presents the findings obtained from a 33-question survey and eight in-depth interviews with randomly selected participants. The researcher coded each participant's responses and analyzed all of the responses to identify patterns and themes in the data.

The following is a discussion of the findings by way of an interpretative phenomenological analysis grounded in resistance and critical race theories, offering insight into the lived experiences of Black adult males who graduated from a New Jersey public high school. The participants speak for themselves through the use of direct quotes taken from the interview transcripts. Critical data informing key findings are highlighted in the next section.

Survey Data

The researcher conducted a 33-question Likert Scale survey through Survey Monkey. The researcher utilized personal contacts and social media to solicit participants. Thirty-eight responses were recorded for the survey over a two-week period. The key highlights of participant demographics from the survey include 55% were between the ages of 35-44, 32% earned a high school education as their highest level, 92% were full time employees, and 58% of the participants had a high school experience with a less than 25% Black student population. In

response to the amount of White and Black teachers, 92% of the respondents reported having

seven or more White teachers during their high school educational experience, and 50% of the

respondents had one or fewer Black teachers in their 9th through 12th grade experience.

    Table 1 displays the findings of the participants' responses to the survey.

Table 1.

Survey Responses

Category	High Degree/ Extent	Moderate/High Degree/ Extent	Moderate Degree/ Extent	Moderate/Low Degree/ Extent	Low Degree/ Extent	Lowest Degree/ Extent
White teachers exhibited cultural competence	To a great extent 0%	Somewhat 18.42%	Very little 47.37%	Not at all 34.21%	-	-
Diversity of the teaching staff	Very Diverse 2.63%	Somewhat Diverse 26.32%	Little/No Diversity 71.05%	-	-	-
Repeated any grade level 9-12	Yes 7.89%	No 92.11%	-	-	-	-
The importance of culture and culturally identity	Very important 39.47%	Important 31.58%	Moderately important 21.05%	Slightly important 2.63%	Not important 5.26%	-
The importance of having a Black teacher	Very Important 34.21%	Important 28.95%	Moderately Important 18.42%	Slightly Important 2.63%	Not Important 15.79%	-
The degree to which you felt your Black teachers understood your culture	To a Great Extent 56.76%	Somewhat 29.73%	Very Little 8.11%	Not at all 5.41%	-	-
The degree to which you felt your White teachers understood your culture	To a Great Extent 0%	Somewhat 18.42%	Very Little 47.37%	Not at All 34.21%	-	-
The importance of understanding your classmates' cultural identity	Very Important 15.79%	Important 34.21%	Moderately Important 18.42%	Slightly Important 15.79%	Not Important 15.79%	-
How often you felt White teachers taught class with sensitivity to cultural differences	Always 0%	Very Frequently 10.53%	Occasionally 39.47%	Rarely 15.79%	Very Rarely 26.32%	Never 7.89%
The degree to which you felt the teachers had high expectations for you	To a Great Extent 23.68%	Somewhat 50%	Very Little 21.05%	None at All 5.26%	-	-

Table 1.

Survey Responses (continued)

Category	High Degree/ Extent	Moderate/High Degree/ Extent	Moderate Degree/ Extent	Moderate/Low Degree/ Extent	Low Degree/ Extent	Lowest Degree/ Extent
Expressed an experience of disengagement	Always 5.26%	Very frequently 23.68%	Occasionally 47.37%	Rarely 13.16%	Very rarely 7.89%	Never 2.63%
How often your teacher discussed racial/cultural issues in class	Never 73.68%	Sometimes 26.32%	Often 0%	-	-	-
Disengagement Behaviors	Day Dreamed 60.53%	Class Disruption 18.42%	Didn't Go To School 5.26%	Cut Class 7.89%	Completed Other Work 13.16%	Slept 23.68%
How often lessons/activities completed in class	Always 26.32%	Usually 44.74%	About Half Time 28.95%	Seldom 0%	Never 0%	-
How often lessons/activities completed outside of school	Always 21.05%	Usually 36.84%	About Half Time 31.58%	Seldom 10.53%	Never 0%	-
How often you came to class with completed assignments	Always 23.68%	Very Frequently 44.74%	Occasionally 26.32%	Rarely 0%	Very Rarely 5.26%	Never 0%
How you felt you had to work hard to complete assignments	Always 13.16%	Very Frequently 18.42%	Occasionally 50%	Rarely 7.89%	Very Rarely 10.53%	Never 0%
How often you discussed grades with your teachers	Always 5.26%	Very Frequently 18.42%	Occasionally 42.11%	Rarely 28.95%	Very Rarely 5.26%	Never 0%
Expressed an experience of your culture in the curriculum.	Always 2.63%	Very Frequently 0%	Occasionally 10.53%	Rarely 26.32%	Very Rarely 47.37%	Never 13.16%
How often the school met your non-academic needs	Always 0%	Very Frequently 7.89%	Occasionally 34.21%	Rarely 31.58%	Very Rarely 23.68%	Never 2.63%

Table 1.

Survey Responses (continued)

Category	High Degree/ Extent	Moderate/High Degree/ Extent	Moderate Degree/ Extent	Moderate/Low Degree/ Extent	Low Degree/ Extent	Lowest Degree/ Extent
Experienced school as important	Very Important 36.84%	Important 36.84%	Moderately Important 26.32%	Strongly Unimportant 0%	Not Important 0%	-
Experienced school as exciting/fun	Strongly Agree 5.26%	Agree 39.47%	Undecided 28.95%	Disagree 26.32%	Strongly Disagree 0%	-
Experienced a positive parental/teacher relationship	Strongly agree 7.89%	Agree 34.21%	Undecided 23.68%	Disagree 15.79%	Slightly Disagree 21.05%	-
I had a positive relationship with my teachers	Strongly Agree 10.53%	Agree 60.53%	Undecided 18.42%	Disagree 10.53%	Strongly Disagree 0%	-

Interview Data

The conclusion of the survey asked if the participant would like to take part in a follow up interview for the study. Twenty respondents replied that they would like to participate in the interview process. The researcher randomly selected eight participants to participate in the interviews. A list of the 20 participants was generated. The researcher selected every fifth participant until eight participants were identified. All eight of the selected individuals participated in the interview. The 35-40 minute interviews took place over the course of a week and were transcribed by Rev.com. The researcher coded each of the responses. The following themes emerged from the interview data:

1. The participants reflected that cultural understanding and cultural identity were important.

2. The participants expressed mixed feelings about the school staff meeting some of their non-academic needs.

3. The participants had experienced cultural code switching from home to school and to Black communities.

4. The participants expressed that there was a lack of Black history and perspective within the curriculum.

5. The participants possessed a hands-on learning style which, if not encouraged, would result in their struggles in math and science classes.

6. The participants experienced disengagement when instruction was not engaging, and/or the content was too shallow.

<div align="center">**Discussion of Findings**</div>

The following is a discussion of the findings with excerpts from the participants' interviews as supporting examples. The researcher set out to document the lived experiences of the participants. The findings allow the reader to better understand the characteristics of the disengagement of the participants and their perceptions of teachers' cultural competence. The focus throughout presentation of the findings is to allow the participants to speak for themselves.

Finding 1: Cultural Understanding and Identity

The overarching focus of this study was to examine the cultural competence of teachers and students from the participants' perspective. When asked about the importance of culture and cultural identity, 92% reported that culture and cultural identity were moderately to very important, while 82% reported that White teachers exhibited cultural competence very little or not at all. When it comes to their Black teachers, 86% of the survey respondents reported that their Black teachers somewhat and to a great extent understood their culture. In contrast, 82% of the survey respondents reported their White teachers understood their culture very little or not at all. When it came to how often their White teachers taught class with sensitivity to cultural

differences, 89% reported occasionally to never. These respondents also reported that 71% had an experience of little to no diversity in the teaching staff. In reference to the importance of understanding their classmates' cultural identity, 50% reported that it was important to very important.

Findings of the interview portion of the study also explored the importance of culture and cultural understanding. Five out of the eight interview participants reflected that their culture and cultural understanding were important to them during their high school educational career. While cultural understanding was important to them, the participants felt as though there were two levels of understanding, them as individuals and their culture of being a Black male. The participants expressed this in the following ways:

John, who was one of six African American students in the school and the only one in his grade level, explained how he did not feel understood as an individual and felt as though there was not much in common with his classmates. In addition, he expressed the isolation he felt as a Black male student. John said:

> I felt like the school didn't understand me. We were from different sides of the tracks so to
> speak. That made it a challenge and there was no diversity with the staff as well. So, you
> know I guess all of it kind of made it a challenge. We didn't celebrate too many of the, well
> there's not too many African American holidays. I was a freshman when they had the
> Million Man March and I actually missed school because of it. And when I got back from
> school I was kind of met with a little bit of frustration about attending and also went to
> school during the OJ trial and I know that was a big topic of friction between the African
> American community and the Caucasian community. As we, me and the other African
> American students, you could kind of tell we were put on an island so to speak when it

came to circumstances like that in the news or just going on in the world. There wasn't a lot of understanding about how we felt.

Dave recounts a similar feeling of isolation with his experiences on the soccer team. Dave responded:

> For me personally, I dealt with some things minor and minuscule in retrospect. But for me, it was always weird because…I remember my freshman year, September of '93, '94. It's preseason. I played soccer. Most of the Black kids in our school, in fall, they all played football. I remember looking around like, there were only two Black kids that played soccer in school. So, I remember, I vividly remember running past the football team, and I'm looking over there; they're looking at me like, 'Damn, you're the only one.' It felt weird, but I would never let that stop me from doing what I wanted to do. But, it was definitely at times, I had to learn to accept myself for who I was and what I like to do versus what everybody else has wanted me to do.

Dave experienced teachers who did not understand being a Black male in society, and he recounted the pressure he felt having to choose what he wanted to do and being one of few Black students participating in an activity. When asked if he felt that his teachers understood him as a Black male, Dave stated, "I would say some (teachers), a few. Others probably didn't have a clue. I would say very few understood what it was like to be a Black male in society."

Keith spoke of an experience that never met his social-emotional and cultural needs. His experience was one in which he felt as though the teachers never got to know him. However, he takes responsibility for not letting them in. Keith reported:

> Culturally, I would say that at some point in time the school was not real active in trying to meet my social-emotional needs or cultural needs at the time. Yes, we had the first

Black History class, African American History class, from the school, and so I give them

credit for that. But it was still, knowing it was the early 90's and it was still at that curb

where it was new. And so did they know exactly how to open up to the whole person of

Keith? No, they had no idea. They got a piece of me that they were comfortable with, and

I got a piece of them. And I gave them a piece of me that I was comfortable with giving

them. And that's just what it was. Now were they open at that point to me, truthfully? No,

they didn't want to. Did they get deep into getting to know me beyond Keith, the athletic

star and things of that nature? No, I don't think they went that deep. But I don't put all

the pressure on them either. I don't put the responsibility on them because I don't think I

was open to let them in to know me in that way because, once again, we were taught not

to.

Some of the participants explained the experience of teachers living in their own cultural

behaviors and patterns, thus they did not have a high awareness of what it was like to be a Black

male. Jeff explained:

Mid-90's culture was different; society was different. I was a minority in my classroom,

that's for sure...as far as my graduating class, but definitely in my class. I normally was

the only Black male, or one of two maximum. I'll be honest, as far as cultural awareness

goes, it wasn't there. A lot of them [teachers] had their own cultural behaviors and

patterns that they were kind of in. They didn't have a high awareness of what my culture

was as a young Black male.

Kevin described something similar to Jeff:

There weren't a lot of Black males in my school. Mostly White women. And I think that

maybe they didn't understand our culture, maybe the way we communicate and

experience fun times together. It might look more threatening. That was just always a

thought that we had, and I experience personally. I'm going to say I feel they (teachers)

did not accept my culture. Because my culture was never brought up academically. That

wasn't just a subject that we went into. And, although I would love to have it, it just

wasn't something that came up in school.

The participants' reflections on cultural understanding by their teachers and their own cultural

identity highlights the importance of it to them. There was a general sense of isolation in being Black

males in their educational settings. They generally expressed concern with educators not having the

ability to see them as individuals. The lack of cultural understanding from educators was presented as

a secondary concern.

Finding 2: Non-Academic Needs.

In addition to the lack of cultural and individual understanding, the participants expressed

mixed feelings about the school meeting some of their non-academic needs. In the area of the

school meeting their non-academic needs, 34% of the survey respondents reported that the

school occasionally met their non-academic needs, 32% reported rarely and 24% reported very

rarely. However, the interview participants' responses ranged from being aware of available

resources to not being aware of any resources. In Jake's experience, he shared that resources

were available to given to him too late. Jake explained,

The guidance counselors, I guess from middle school up through high school were not

very accommodating. I remember the January of my senior year of high school I got a

postcard dropped off to my homeroom teacher from my guidance counselor reminding

me to sign up for the SAT, and I was like, where were you at? I already applied and got

accepted to five universities. I don't understand why you're reminding me in January of my senior year of high school to sign up for the SAT?

Bill reflected on his overall feelings about the school not meeting the non-academic needs of students. It is important to note that Bill expressed that he had difficulty when his parents separated when he was younger. Bill reported:

There should be more social-emotional resources in school. There should be shrinks in school that see the child once a month. There should be things in their book of prevention to help them cope with things. These things help. But when they don't have these things, and they'd rather spend it on bull crap instead of the resources that help children excel, they're setting them up to fail. Simple and plain. Especially if the child has a little disciplinary problem like I did. Sometimes the kid needs a damn hug, shit. For real. It's real things out there that kids need. So we need doors open. You know? They need help too.

From a social-emotional perspective Dave expressed that the circumstances of being only one of a few minorities prepared him for life. The lack of understanding and resources placed Dave in a space in which he had to learn how to navigate being one of a few minorities in school and how that played out in his present-day workplace. Dave explained:

I tell people now, we were a few specks of pepper in the salt shaker per se. Yeah. And, in society that's how it is right now. So from a social standpoint, there is definitely, not many, but there were some things that we had to deal with as being minorities, Black minorities that others did not have to…the majority did not have to deal with. And, I thank God for those things now because if I never would have had to deal with them then, I would have never had to be able to deal with them now. I say all the time and being in

that situation, you've learned to deal with those and you learn to be like a chameleon in order to navigate this thing called life and society. Were those things put in front of us purposely? No. But we had to deal with them regardless.

Not all participants expressed negative experiences with the school meeting their non-academic needs. Kevin's experience with the school meeting his non-academic needs were positive. Kevin said:

I'm going to say, yes, they did (meet his non-academic needs). Non-academically, the school really put a lot of effort into social activities. For example, dances and booster club events. We had the clubs for different interests that students might be into. So I do believe they put a really good effort into making sure we were socially aware, and involved with one another in school.

The participants' reflections on cultural understanding by their teachers and their own cultural identity highlights the importance of it to them. There was a general sense of isolation in being Black males in their educational settings. They generally expressed concern with educators not having the ability to see them as individuals. The lack of cultural understanding from educators was presented as a secondary concern.

Finding 3: Code-Switching.

The participants expressed that they have experienced the phenomenon of code-switching, in which they would change how they interacted and communicated depending on the setting. Some of the participants expressed that there were three levels of code-switching that would occur: the school environment, home environment, and the inner-city environment. The participants explained that they had to adapt to the given environment to either be understood or

as a mode of protection. Their responses were mainly linguistic codes in which the participants switched their language depending on the social setting. Dave explained:

It's funny because we grew up in South Jersey, right? So I can remember as a kid both my parents were born and raised in [the city]. And I remember as a kid and stuff, we'd come over to my grandmother's house in [the city], and they're having a block party. I would say something and everybody's like, "You talk like a White boy." When I was really young, I didn't understand that. As I became a teenager, I'm like, "Okay, I get what you're saying. I'm not talking with a street slang, and to that point where that was something…I kind of asked my parents about, "why are they saying that?" My parents broke it down to me. You're in a city environment, an urban environment, people talk different. They have an expectation. They have to deal with certain things to navigate their neighborhood. In order to get through your day, might have to talk like you're from the street or talk like yourself so that you don't have to deal with certain things or so forth.

Similarly, Keith mentioned:

When I was in [the city] we were expected to talk and act a certain way. And then when I was in [the township], we were expected to talk and act in a little bit different way. When we were to speak appropriate to the crowd that we were in and we knew who we're talking to. When we were going to a job interview, we knew not to use certain vernaculars and slangs and things like that. And I wouldn't, yeah back in the day they would say you're talking White. But I wouldn't call it that because I'd never prescribe to that. I'd never try to sound like anybody else. We would change our slang and change our tones based on environments.

John expressed his experience with navigating between school and home:

> No, it definitely felt like I was juggling between two worlds. I mean when I went to school I knew we had a strict uniform code. And I had certain rules and I had to portray a certain character when I was at school which was different when I came home. When I got off from my school bus I could kind of let my guard down. I could be myself. I didn't have to worry about maintaining some type of I guess a communication skill. I guess I just felt myself when I was home in my actual environment. Then when I was in my school environment I felt like I had to portray or put on an act to fit in or survive in that type of atmosphere for eight hours every day.

The three areas of code-switching included home, school, and urban environments. The participants expressed a need to switch their linguistics depending on the environment but still wanted to be true to themselves. There was a level of comfortability in their home environments while in other environments they might have been ridiculed as "talking White" or experienced isolation within the classroom. This ability to code-switch continues to play a role in the participants' current lives.

Finding 4: Lack of Connection with Curricular Content.

The participants generally viewed the curriculum as something the teachers needed to get through. They generally did not find connection to the material and expressed that there was a lack of the Black experience present in the material. When asked how often they experienced their culture in the curriculum, 97% of the survey respondents reported a range from occasionally to never. The interview participants recalled that their studies of Black History were rushed through at best. They also felt that the curriculum had minimal importance to their lives. Seven out of the eight participants expressed the desire for a curriculum to provide more

practical learning since they did not see the importance of the material to their everyday lives.

When talking about the curriculum being relevant to their lives, Kevin expressed the following:

I'm going to say no because most of the mathematical things I learned in school, I have

not come across these things in my adult life. Outside of the basic math of counting

money and that sort of thing. So, I would learn different things. I had honors classes. So

we would read Macbeth and other writings from things, authors. So, it was a lot of things

that we did to prove our ability to retain information. But not so much giving us

information that we'd actually need when we finished school, as far as paying taxes and

that type of thing. So, a lot of the things that we learned in school really haven't… I

really haven't experienced them in my adult life thus far.

Jeff mentioned something similar:

I wish there were some more courses on life, okay? Just how important your job is, your

career is. Knowing what you want to do for a living, knowing how to do it. Knowing how

to write a check. Knowing how to buy a house. Knowing just life skill classes, whether

it's hygiene, whether its nutrition even early on. A lot of these things I had to learn into

adulthood, college, and that type of thing, and through trial and error and being in the

workforce.

Chuck explained:

I guess it was helpful at that time, only because at that time you don't really have such a

worldly view. It would help me study for the next test. So, I guess it was relevant in that

way, but if we're comparing it to things outside of school, I don't feel like it was helping

me in any way at that point. I feel like everything we learned inside the curriculum was

for the sake of the curriculum, and not necessarily to be helpful in life.

When discussing curriculum relevance some of the participants shifted their focus specifically to Black History and how it was or was not taught in school. Some of the participants expressed the need to have to explore these topics more on their own because it was not being taught deeply enough in the classroom. Keith explained:

> ...we weren't being taught true Black history. We weren't being taught about things that connected with me personally and spiritually and things of that nature. I had to go other places to get that information and do my own research and do my own digging.

Similarly, Dave described the following:

> There was a lack of seeing ourselves in history, other than Martin Luther King and the major people. But there's so many other people that influenced American culture as well as us, that from a school environment you have never heard about. You had to seek those things out per se.

Jake described a similar experience:

> I mean, it kind of just went…you know we learned about Reconstruction. We fast forward 80 years to the Civil Rights Movement. Rosa Parks sat on a bus. Martin Luther King had a speech. LBJ signed the Voting Rights Act, and racism disappeared. And that was kind of what was ingrained in our head, and it wasn't really taught in a way that was factually accurate or was intellectually honest. So, I think that was very, I think, detrimental. And like I said, I don't know if these topics were glazed over because there were certain things (the teacher) had to, you know, requirements he had to fulfill for our exams, or if it was just that he lacked the cultural sensitivity to actually delve into these issues for the three African American kids out of his 120 students that he had.

Bill said:

It's like books were like individualized to a certain culture. We don't have to even put it

out there what culture we're talking about, but you know what it is. So, it's like being fair

to understanding and pushing what we need to learn. Truth. Start with facts, let's deal

with the facts. History was really a distortion, so that hurt.

The general lack of connection to the curriculum stemmed from a lack of connection to

the participants' general life. They expressed concerns that much of what they learned still has

no relevance to their lives today. They reflected on wanting a curriculum that would help them

later on in their lives. The participants felt, specifically, that Black History was either not

explored enough or accurately in the classroom. Some tied this directly to a lack of

understanding of Black cultural perspective by the teacher.

Finding 5: Learning Style

Most of the interview participants expressed that they found the curriculum to be

challenging, specifically in the math and science areas. Their academic success or failure

depended on the degree to which they were allowed to use their learning style. The participants

focused on their hands-on, visual, and communal learning styles. When given the space to use

them, they cited having a greater ability to retain the information. Jake said:

Yeah, well, it was pretty difficult. I was somebody who was very interested in writing,

very interested in reading and history, and knowing that I had to take math and science

courses in order to graduate, I felt that I was prepared to take these courses and

unfortunately I was in classes with kids who were interested in becoming engineers and

going into the medical field and actually had a passion. And that's kind of the only group

of kids that the teacher talked to, so it was very difficult asking questions. You know, he

was very condescending in that he responded to us in his answers, and you know, he was

not very accessible outside of class for getting clarification on things, which is why I

ultimately wound up having to drop calculus course. It was just impossible to move

forward and get a decent grade.

Keith expressed that the work was challenging. Keith explained, "Absolutely the work

was challenging. And particularly with the math and sciences, I found that work was

challenging."

An element of the experienced disengagement involved the learning style of the students.

Students were more engaged and successful when their learning styles were allowed to be used

within the classroom. Jake said:

> I'm a very analytical person; I also enjoy visuals, so having PowerPoint presentations,
>
> videos, interactive field trips, and things like that were a lot more interesting to me than
>
> having to sit down and read an outdated textbook and having to learn for myself.

Keith mentioned:

> The type of teacher that I learned from the most was definitely my teachers that were
>
> more hands-on and even ones that understood visual and got back then to multiple
>
> intelligence and used the multiple intelligence. I guess for me, I'm more of a project-
>
> based learner. Teach me just to do something. That's one thing. But when you tell me I
>
> have to do things, that's one thing. But if you allow me to do it myself, then I'm gonna
>
> always retain that because I did it. So, for me, doing something, whether I did it the right
>
> way or the wrong way, it always meant more to me, and I hold onto those experiences.

John said:

> I would say hands on, or I had to read it and honestly speaking when I was younger I did
>
> have problems with comprehension. So reading was, I had to read things repeatedly in

order to understand them. But I would say reading and hands on. Somebody really gave

me time to work with maybe three or four students in a small group really showed them

how things look and how to do projects and what to look for. That was, I would say, that

was the way I learned best.

Similarly, Jeff mentioned:

I know I'm the type of person who actually has to do it. I learn by doing it myself. But I

struggle with actually watching an individual, a teacher, do something and then saying,

"Okay, class that's it. That's how you do it. I'll be up here if you need any help."

Chuck said:

A learning style that I really had was more of a hands-on. Anytime that I could actually

see a problem, and actually use my own ways of working it out, whether it be creating

short cuts or little mnemonics and things like that.

The participants expressed their academic struggles within the math and science areas.

They expressed the need to learn from a hands-on approach. There also was a general desire for a

communal approach; they expressed that they retained more information in working with their

classmates and a system of accountability within their communal groups.

Finding 6: Disengagement.

The participants shared their experiences with disengagement; identifying non-engaging

teachers, their individual learning styles, and the curricular content as reasons for their

disengagement. While the participants felt that school was important, they disengaged often and

either misbehaved or were mentally unavailable. Some of the participants even saw those

moments of disengagement as an opportunity to complete other class work. The survey

responses reflected 76% of the respondents experienced occasional to always disengaged in their

high school experience. When these participants were disengaged, 61% daydreamed, 24% slept, 18% disrupted the class, and 13% completed other course work. The interview participants reported similar experiences.

Dave said:

> I like a very engaging teacher who was also excited about the content. I feel like sometimes you go to class and the teacher is basically just breathing. We had our books, and then they had the teacher's edition, and I felt like sometimes teachers are just reading through those, as opposed to reading through it and putting their own spin on it.

Similarly, Jeff mentioned:

> I felt disengaged quite often with lessons and subjects. Some of my disengagement was based on teacher delivery, and some of that was based on the curriculum. When we start talking about history classes and all those, I love history. I love ancient history. I love US history. I love Black history. I love Romans to Greeks. But I will say that I was disengaged with the curriculum because it didn't go deep enough into Black history. It didn't tell the truth. Let's just put it out there. Back then, the history books were slanted. They were biased. And we got taught His-story instead of the true story of what happened back then.

Chuck also described something similar:

> For me personally, I always felt disengaged during history, learning about civil rights, mainly because it kind of felt hollow, coming from the source. You could get all of the facts from the reading the books, but nobody was really able to articulate what it was like. I mean, most of the teachers for the lessons were usually White males, who didn't really understand the other side of it, or who lived it and were able to relate to it in that way.

Similarly, Kevin mentioned:

> Yes, I had times when I felt disengaged and they usually came up around those type of
>
> subjects that I just deemed to be unimportant to my life. Different things that I knew I
>
> wouldn't have to worry about once I graduated. So, I really found myself disengaged.
>
> Sometimes I would get into some mischievous things, talking to other students. But other
>
> times, I would find myself reading ahead and trying to finish homework or get ready for
>
> the next test.

Jeff described his experience with disengagement by stating,

> I found myself definitely daydreaming. So, I think the class clowning was not just
>
> because I was trying to just be so funny at all times, but I would be disengaged at certain
>
> moments and that was because like I said, my own personality, which was having ADD
>
> at times.

Summary

The data speaks to the purpose of the study as it explored the relationship between student disengagement and Black male perceptions of New Jersey public school educators' cultural competence. While participants shared their experiences with disengagement, they reported that it was due to the lack of depth in content and the teachers' engagement with that content. While the participants deemed this lack of quality important they seemed to focus on wanting a curriculum that was focused more on life skills.

The intent of the study was to investigate the relationship between student disengagement and the relevance of culture. The data presented reflected disengagement due to the relevance to the basic needs of the students more than to their culture. When these students became disengaged, they did disrupt the learning environment, completed other course work or were

mentally unavailable. The participants also experienced that their academic struggles were in the areas of math and science and were related to their preferred learning style of hands-on training.

The participants' perspective of the lack of teacher understanding of the culture was a vital experience to them. The participants expressed feelings of isolation and the necessity to code-switch between their home environment, school environment and/or the urban environments in which they frequented. Although these students felt the need to code-switch and felt isolated, they expressed this ability as a benefit to their current lived experience.

Within Chapter 5 the researcher provides a brief overview of the study and provides conclusions regarding the research questions. A discussion of the implications of the study, recommendations for key stakeholders, and recommendations for future studies are also provided.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This qualitative, phenomenological multi-case study explored the relationship between Black male students' perceptions of New Jersey public school educators' cultural competence and student disengagement. The experiences of Black male students who have graduated from a New Jersey public school informed their personal reflections and contributed to the data. The researcher documented how these students viewed educators' cultural competence and viewed their role in their own educational process. The study examined the racial/cultural gap between educators and Black male students. The three research questions considered by this study were directed by these general inquiries: What is the Black male, high school graduates' perception of their cultural experience with predominantly White educators? How do Black males perceive the cultural competence of their teachers and the cultural relevance of the curriculum and instruction? How do Black males perceive their role in their educational process in light of their perceptions of its cultural relevance?

This chapter opens with a summary of the major themes that emerged from the analysis of the data reported in chapter 4. An interpretation of the data in light of the research questions will follow the summary of the major themes. The researcher will then discuss the implications of the study for educator practice and the limitations of the study. Chapter 5 will conclude with recommendations for future study and a conclusion.

With very little of the educational research on cultural competence and disengagement coming from the students' perspective, the study sought to provide an analysis of the lived experiences of Black male students who graduated from a New Jersey public school. These students also have had the experience of being educated by a majority of White teachers. The

overall analysis of the data suggests that the cultural competence of teachers is important to these students but not as important as the individual's academic and non-academic needs. These students also expressed a lack of connection to the curricular content because they felt there was a lack of cultural and practical relevance. Disengagement was expressed in content areas in which their learning style was not implemented, and instruction was not engaging. As being one of only a few Black males in their classes, when these needs went unmet the students expressed feelings of isolation. While these students experienced a feeling of isolation at times, they also felt the need to culturally code-switch in order to navigate the different environments between school, home and the community. Six themes emerged from data analysis: Cultural Understanding and Identity, Non-Academic Needs, Code-Switching, Lack of Connection with Curricular Content, Learning Style, and Disengagement.

Interpretation of the Findings

The researcher examined the findings of the study through the conceptual framework of critical race theory and resistance theory where applicable. This section discusses the main findings from this study as they relate to the study's research questions and literature.

Research Question One

To answer the first research question, "What is the Black male, high school graduates' perception of their cultural experience with predominately White educators?" The researcher examined the perception of Black male students' cultural experience and how they view the cultural competence of predominately White educators. The following section discusses these findings relative to the literature. Furthermore, resistance theory was used to understand the experiences of Black male students during their high school experience.

Perception of Black male student cultural experience. Culture can be defined as the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious or social group (In Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 2018, para 1). In examining the cultural experience of Black male students with predominately White educators, the research positioned the study from the perspective of the Black male student. From this perspective, 92% of the survey respondents and all of the interview participants reported that cultural identity and cultural understanding were important to them. The interview participants reflected the importance of not only understanding their culture but also understanding them as individuals. The survey respondents reflected that understanding culture and cultural identity were important. They also reported that 82% of their White teachers exhibited very little to no cultural competence. Axner (2016) stated,

>Culture is a strong part of people's lives. It influences their views, their values, their humor, their hopes, their loyalties, and their worries and fears. So, when you are working with people and building relationships with them, it helps to have some perspective and understanding of their cultures. (para. 5)

When it came specifically to their White teachers, the participants felt as though the teachers did not understand them from a cultural perspective or, in some cases, did not get to know them as individuals. The interview participants perceived their White teachers' lack of understanding of their beliefs, social forms and material traits as a combined result of the teachers' lack of trying to get to know them as individuals and the students' unwillingness to open themselves up the teachers. The survey respondents reported similar findings in that 82% reported their White teachers understood their culture very little or not at all. Robinson (2012) argued that culture influences teachers' pedagogy as well as student engagement (p. 26). In re-engaging students, Lawrence-Pine (2015) stated,

One of the methods for re-engaging these students is by creating a home community and school connection, that, when taught by a culturally sensitive and aware pedagogue, can assist in connecting students to their education and provide them opportunities for academic achievement. Another method of creating an inclusive and engaging environment in school is to create a curriculum that reflects students' cultural heritage and background knowledge. (p. 67)

The impact of this cultural misunderstanding resulted in a negative relationship between the participants and their White teachers. This relationship can be viewed through the resistance theory lens.

Jaramillo (2010) stated, "Resistance theory draws on an understanding of the complexities of culture to define the relationship between school and the dominant society" (para 1). The findings of the interview portion of the study suggest that the isolation that participants experienced was, in part, an act of resistance to the dominate school culture. To maintain a sense of self within the school environment the participants did not connect with their teachers and to the school in general. With this lack of connection and the desire to be successful within their school environment the students' found themselves trying to navigate between their home, school and community, a phenomenon called code-switching. (Edmin, 2016).

Edmin (2016) explained the process of code-switching as, "They read codes or rules of engagement in a particular social field, identify which ones have value, adopt them, enact them, and through this process, form powerful connections to new people" (p. 175). Where the participants in this study fall short when it comes to code-switching is in the making of powerful connections to new people. However, their process of code-switching was a means of obtaining success or even a means of survival in certain circumstance. Where the interview participants felt

most like themselves was when they were in their home environments. There was even a lack of understanding within certain urban environments wherein these participants were labeled as "talking White." Miller-Merrell (2009) stated,

> A lot of people always assume that there is a momentous possibility that cultural differences are the cause of communication problems. They should always be willing to be tolerant and pardoning, rather than intimidating and hostile, if problems develop. One should respond bit by bit and cautiously in cross-cultural exchanges, not jumping to the conclusion that you know what is being thought and said. (para. 9)

The interview participants' cultural exchanges even existed between their home communities and the urban communities that they frequented. The Black male students' perception of cultural competence in both the school and urban environment further enhanced feelings of isolation within both environments.

Research Question Two

The second research question was, "How do Black males perceive the cultural competence of their teachers and the cultural relevance of the curriculum and instruction?" The researcher grounds this section by viewing the findings through the critical race theory as it relates to the participants' perspective on cultural competence.

Teacher cultural competence and the cultural relevance of the curriculum and instruction. Cultural competence involves having an understanding of one's own culture and having the ability to build on the cultural differences that exist within the school and community (The National Education Association, 2017, para 3). The core tenets of cultural competence include valuing diversity, being culturally self-aware, the dynamics of difference, the knowledge of student culture, institutionalizing cultural knowledge, and adapting to diversity (Colorado

Department of Education, 2010, p. 7). Both survey and interview participants of the study expressed that they felt their White teachers lacked cultural competence. The survey respondents expressed that these teachers generally had a lack of understanding of their culture. Although the interview participants thought the teachers may be culturally self-aware, the lack of knowledge of the Black male students' culture largely shaped this perspective. That no one identified these two elements was an indication of the lack of cultural competence. Difference and diversity were there even if only one person was different. The dynamics of difference and adapting to diversity may not have been identified since there was very little diversity within the classrooms, with only one or a few Black male students in each class. However, not being able to identify these two elements is an indication of the lack of cultural competence. Difference and diversity were present even if only one student was different. The survey respondents also reported little to no diversity in their classrooms. To these interview participants, diversity within the classrooms did not seem to be a priority to the teachers.

On a larger scale, the perception of the importance of diversity can also lie in the fact that the teaching staff was largely made up of White women. This cultural gap between the interview participants and the teaching staff reflected their apprehension to open themselves up to their White teachers. Kochhar-Bryant (2010), argued,

> Many of the diverse faces in the classroom have grown up in circumstances that make
> them highly vulnerable, that can undermine their ability to learn and progress in school,
> or that make them unable to connect with adults and peers. (p. 2).

The reluctance of both teacher and participant to reach a common ground largely impacted the participants' perspective on teacher cultural competence. Forty-seven percent of the respondents of the survey felt as though their White teachers had little to no cultural competence, while 34%

felt as though they had none at all. The participants perceive these teachers as not being able to understand them as Black men, while at the same time, the participants expressed that they did not give the teachers the opportunity to understand them.

The perceived lack of cultural competence in White teachers does not make them bad teachers to the students. Ladson-Billings (2009) stated, "These are not 'bad' teachers. These very same people decry racism; they believe in equal opportunity. However, they do not understand that their perceptions of African American students interfere with their ability to be effective teachers for them" (p. 23). The interview participants expressed that they thought that these teachers were good people. However, the research suggestion the curricular content and the teaching methods used influenced the participants' perspective on the relevance of the curriculum and instruction. Culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes the role that culture plays in how students receive, analyze and interpret information (Chunoo & Callahan, 2017; Ladson-Billing, 1995; Martell, 2013). It also recognizes the importance of students maintaining a sense of their own cultural identity. Placing the students' culture at the center of their learning allows the student to process and interpret information from their own frame of reference. The content can become more relevant to the students as they are able to connect their experiences to the content, thus reinforcing the cultural identity of the student. The interview findings of the study indicated that there was a lack connection to the curriculum because the content was not presented from the participants' frame of reference and did not have any personal relevance to the participants.

The findings of the study indicated that the participants felt the curriculum was not culturally relevant to their lives. The survey respondents reported that culture was represented in the curriculum occasionally to not at all. The interview participants expressed a desire for more

practical content that involved such things as finances and job training. Generally, this was an area of importance to the participants as seven out of eight interview participants expressed that a large portion of African American cultural content was presented as either not factual or shallow. When presented with this situation, the participants discovered their cultural identity through outside organizations or through self-exploration. From the critical race perspective, Dixson and Anderson (2018) stated,

> CRT in education argues that racial inequity in education is the logical outcome of a system of achievement premised on competition, and CRT in education examines the role of education policy and educational practices in the construction of racial inequity and perpetuation of normative whiteness. (p. 122)

While the interview participants reported that they felt their culture was important, they deemed it generally important but unimportant or a non-factor when it came to their educational experiences because their teachers lacked cultural competence.

Research Question Three

The third research question was, "How do Black males perceive their role in their educational process in light of their perceptions of its cultural relevance? In this section, the researcher examines the participants' perceptions of their role in the educational process through the resistance theory perspective.

Perception of participant's role in the educational process. The gap in cultural experiences that exists between the Black male students and the White teachers places the Black male students in a position to figure out how to navigate educational experiences. Ladson-Billings (1995) echoed this idea in stating, "The dilemma for African-American students becomes one of negotiating the academic demands of school while demonstrating cultural

competence" (p. 476). The findings of the study point to the Black male students as taking an active role in their education. The interview participants viewed education as something that they had to do and not something from which they needed to drop out. Given this perspective, culturally relevant pedagogy is particularly important as it grounds students at the center of their educational experience, develops leadership capacity, and gives them space to be culturally critical (Chunoo & Callahan, 2017; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995). When their educational experiences did not meet their individual and cultural needs, these students explored other options to meet those needs, such as joining cultural organizations outside of school. The findings of the interview portion of the study also indicated that the participants found the lack of cultural understanding beneficial to their present lives. Understanding of how to navigate professional spaces in which there are one or a few minorities was developed through the Black male students' educational experiences during high school.

Having engaging teachers who gave space for the students to explore the content using their individual learning styles was beneficial to the participants. All of the interview participants in this study reported that they succeeded when they used the hands-on and/or communal approaches to learning. The hands-on approach allowed the participants to be fully engaged in the activity, providing more relevance to them. A participant reflected on this by stating:

> I guess for me, I'm more of a project-based learner. Teach me just to do something. That's one thing. But when you tell me I have to do things, that's one thing. But if you allow me to do it myself, then I'm gonna always retain that because I did it. So, for me, doing something, whether I did it the right way or the wrong way, it always meant more to me, and I hold onto those experiences.

When the researcher looks at the desire for more practical content, such as finances and job training, it makes sense that hands-on experiences yielded a reported higher chance of retention. In learning about finances and job training the participants reflected that they would be involved in the practice of these things later in life. The act of *doing* was more effective than the act of *remembering* as reported by the participants.

When students are not engaged in a lesson or activity certain behaviors can manifest themselves in the classroom. The multidimensional concept of engagement includes behavioral, cognitive and emotional engagements (Boykin & Noguero, 2011; Devito, 2016; Robinson, 2012). When the participants were not engaged in the lesson they reported disengagement on the behavioral and cognitive levels. The survey participants experienced disengagement occasionally to frequently. When disengaged both interview and survey participants reported that they either completed other course work, slept/daydreamed and/or disrupted the classroom. Completing other course work and sleeping/daydreaming would be categorized as cognitive disengagement, while the class disruption would be categorized as behavioral disengagement. Despite moments of disengagement, the Black male students in this study reported the ability to complete the class lessons and activities most of the time.

Implications

This study of the perspective of Black male students who graduated from a New Jersey public high school on the cultural competence of their White teachers sheds light on a number of areas that include student disengagement, the perception of cultural competence of both the teacher and the student, and relevance of the curriculum. The study has implications for both Black male students and White teachers.

White teachers can benefit from understanding the perceptions of Black male students and use it to help improve their teaching practices. According to Irish and Scrubb (2012), "Robust instructional strategies and culturally sensitive curricula are critical, but more important is an instructor who is sensitive and responsive to the unique differences of each student" (para. 1). In understanding what these students deem important and relevant can help teachers place students at the center of their learning experience. This is a core component of culturally relevant pedagogy. Gay (2001) stated, "It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (p. 106). Professional development in the area of cultural competence can help teachers understand their own culture and biases in order to develop an understanding of how these things impact their relationships with Black male students. This knowledge could also impact how teachers instruct students about topics that are relevant to the Black male experience.

The Black male students could also benefit from an understanding of cultural competence and how their own understanding of the teacher's culture can impact the relationship between teacher and student. The ability to make themselves available can go a long way in developing a productive relationship with their teachers. In the event that this relationship cannot be strongly built students could benefit from having high expectations for their own learning and seek opportunities that will allow them to discover their cultural identity. Also, the Black male student who learns in environments in which he is one of a few can benefit from understanding the perspective that these environments may prepare him more for workplace experiences as he gets older. A participant expressed how he felt being the only Black male in certain environments. He explained:

I thank God for those things now because if I never would have had to deal with them then, I would have never had to be able to deal with them now. I say all the time and being in that situation, you've learned to deal with those and you learn to be like a chameleon in order to navigate this thing called life and society.

Curriculum coordinators and administrators could implement programs that focus on the understanding of culture. The complex nature of culture needs to be unraveled and examined to see how it impacts learning and instruction. Students enter classrooms with different social and cultural experiences that construct their learning styles, academic success, and social and emotional success (Guild, 1994, para 9). Establishing a workable definition and importance of culture will allow for a common ground to be established in terms of what curricular content needs to be explored and to what degree as it relates to their individual school. These coordinators and administrators can begin to look at how they are meeting the individual and cultural needs of all students in order to provide a well-balanced curriculum.

On a school-wide and district-wide level, administrators and school officials can benefit from understanding how the Black male student navigates their home, school and community lives. Understanding how and why these students *code-switch* between environments can be the foundation for a strategic plan that could bridge the gap between home, school and community.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the narrow focus of this study and its participants it is important to note that the researcher has identified six limitations of the study:

One limitation was the location of this study. This study was geographically limited to New Jersey suburban or rural area schools, more specifically, the southern part of the state. Other states and urban schools may provide students with a different learning experience than the ones

in this current study. The experiences of students who attended school in the southern part of New Jersey may even have different social constructs and experiences from their northern counterparts.

A second limitation was that this study focused exclusively on the Black male's perception. Other minority groups, including women, may have had different experiences and perspectives. For example, the female dominated profession of teaching may have a greater influence on female students than it does on male students.

A third limitation was the external factors such as family structure, disabilities, and socio-economic status were not considered for this study. These factors may have influenced student disengagement, the student's comprehension and retention of the curriculum and his or her overall connection to his or her school and educational process.

A fourth limitation was that the findings reflect a small population. Only 38 individuals participated in the survey portion of the study and only eight Black males participated in the interview process. A larger sample size may strengthen some of the themes found in the research and/or brought new ones to light.

A fifth limitation was that the inherited biases of the participants may have been impacted by their perceptions of larger societal issues when it comes to culture and race that may not be tied directly to the school and/or classroom. Some of the participants referenced some of the larger societal experiences, such as The Million Man March and the OJ trial, in their responses. These events may have impacted their perceptions of their teachers and classmates.

Finally, a sixth limitation was the ages of the participants. The participants of the study reflected on past practices that may have changed in today's culture and climate of the school. At best, the study is limited to the time period from which the participants reflected.

Recommendations for Future Study

In light of the limitations of the study, the following highlights the recommendations for future study of students' perceptions of the cultural competence of their high school White teachers and student disengagement:

In reference to the gap between the teaching force and minority students, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2019) stated, "Data also show that the gap isn't due to a failure to recruit minority teachers; it's largely because the number of White students has decreased in recent years, while the number of minority students has increased" (p. 6). With the increase in the number of minority students in today's public schools it is important to examine cultural competence and student disengagement from several states and communities. Each state and community might find different outcomes that can be beneficial to specific school districts. This information can be used to improve employment practices and the recruiting of a more diverse staff to help address the cultural gap that exists between the teaching staff and students. The Association of Elementary School Principals (2019) highlighted this gap further by stating, "Data show that teaching remains a primarily White, non-Hispanic workforce, and that a gap persists between the percentage of minority students and the percentage of minority teachers in the U.S." (p. 6).

The study of the Black male students' experience is important and rich. However, future studies would benefit from examining the educational experiences of other minority students such as Latino students and in some cases women. Particularly, the study of the Black female students' experience can provide a broader perspective of the Black students' educational experience when it comes to their perspective of the cultural competence of their teachers and their experiences with educational disengagement. Both studies could provide a better

understanding of the academic and non-academic needs of these students. This could enhance the practice of culturally relevant pedagogy in education by placing the cultural needs of these students in the center of student learning.

In addition, future studies would benefit from exploring the external factors that may impact the learning experience of Black male students. Some of these factors include family structure, socio-economic status and student disabilities. The participants of the current study mentioned family and an Attention Deficit Disorder diagnosis as an influence on their educational experiences. However, this was outside the scope of this study.

The educational experiences of the Black males in this study may have also been impacted by their experiences with larger societal issues concerning race and culture. How these participants experienced these issues may have impacted their perception of teachers and students not of color. This is particularly important when the concept of code-switching, as highlighted by this study, is experienced. As students navigate the spaces between school, home and community, their experiences within each of those spaces could impact their perceptions differently. Culturally relevant pedagogy centers the students' culture, experiences, and individual perspectives and serves as a conduit for students receive and process learning. Educators would benefit from understanding the concept of code-switching and how it impacts Black male student learning.

Lastly, future studies on this topic could benefit from examining the perspectives of current Black male students' educational experiences. This population may have different cultural and societal experiences than those of adults that were analyzed in this study. Looking at the current state of cultural awareness and teaching pedagogy may yield a different understanding of Black male students who are educated by a majority of White teachers.

Conclusion

This qualitative, phenomenological, multi-case study contributes in several ways to the field's understanding of how the Black male students who graduated from a New Jersey public high school perceived theirs and their White teachers' cultural competence, the relevance of curriculum and instruction, and student engagement. By analyzing the perspectives of the Black male students' educational experience, this study addresses a void in the research, in that a vast majority of the research in this area is not from the perspectives of the students. The study sought to provide an understanding of these elements through the lens of the critical race and resistance theories. The study's findings indicated that these Black male students experienced an education in which cultural competence and cultural identity were important but not as important as having curriculum and instruction that were relevant to their daily lives. The participants of this study provided a perspective in which they took responsibility for their relationship with their White teachers and the understanding of their own cultural identity. When content was not relevant, or teaching was not engaging to these students they responded to this disengagement in a variety of ways.

To summarize, this study was designed and intended to benefit a number of stakeholders: (a) White teachers, (b) Black male students, (c) school and district level administrators and (d) curriculum coordinators. The findings of the study offer valuable input that can improve educational practices at the classroom level as well as the district level as they relates to student and teacher cultural competence, curriculum development and instruction, and student engagement.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Dear <   >:

Hello. My name is Mr. Damiso A. Josey and I am in the process of conducting my dissertation study, The Mis-Education of African American Male Youth: Unpacking the Cultural Relevance of High Schools, which focuses on the educational experiences of New Jersey Black adult males who have graduated from a public school in New Jersey. The intended purpose of the study is to explore how the cultural competency of White educators is perceived by Black male students in New Jersey public schools as it relates to student disengagement.

Participants of this study need to be Black males that are at least 21 years of age, have graduated from a New Jersey public school, and who have had educational experiences with White educators. The participants also should have experienced moments of disengagement from the educational process during their 9th grade through 12th grade experience.

I am writing to request your participation in the cultural competence and student engagement study of adult Black males who have graduated from a New Jersey public school district. The study involves a survey with the possibility of a follow up interview. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the survey, you may be asked to participate in a more in-depth, semi-structured interview.

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. If you should have any question please contact Damiso Josey at djosey@une.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

To participate, please click on the following link:

(Survey Monkey Link will be provided)

Appendix B: Survey Instructions and Consent to Participate

Instructions and Consent to Participate

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey about cultural competence and student engagement. As a participant in this survey you are being asked to reflect on your 9th grade through 12th grade educational experiences. Select the answer that best reflects your experiences.

At the end of this survey, you will be asked if you would like to be considered as a participant in the interview process of this study. You will be asked to provide your name, phone number and email address for contact purposes only. Participants are randomly selected to participate in the interview process. If you are selected to participate in the interview process you will be contacted 7-10 days after you have submitted your contact information.

Your survey responses will be reviewed to determine your fit for the interview process of this study. By clicking submit at the end of this survey you understand that you will be giving consent to participate in an optional follow-up interview.

You may opt out of this survey at any time by not submitting your responses at the end of the survey. Your responses will not be sent to the researcher until you have clicked the submit button. This is a confidential survey. Your name and contact information will only be used for communication purposes. You will be asked to identify the high school you attended to verify that it is a New Jersey public school. No identifying information will be named in the study.

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: The Mis-education of African American Male Youth: Unpacking the Cultural

Relevance of High Schools

Principal Investigator(s): Damiso A. Josey

Introduction:

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.
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Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore how the cultural competency of educators is perceived by Black male students in New Jersey public schools as it relates to student disengagement.

Who will be in this study?

Participants will include Black male New Jersey public high school graduates 21 years of age or older, who self-identify as having experienced a feeling of disengagement. The participants will also have had an educational experience that included a majority of White teachers throughout the high school experience. Participants who have had an educational experience that was culturally diverse will be excluded from this study. Approximately 50 participants will participate in the survey portion of this study. From the pool of 50 participants, approximately eight to ten interviewees will be selected at random.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to answer questions related to your educational experiences from 9th to 12th grade through the online survey process. This will be used to identify participants who will participate in the follow up interview process. The online survey should take approximately fifteen to twenty minutes to complete. Upon completion of the survey participants will be asked if they would like to be considered to participate in the follow up semi-structured interview process. Selected participants for the follow up interview will be contacted to schedule the interview. The follow up interview will take place at the convenience of the participant and can take place in person or via telephone. The interviews will be recorded in order to be transcribed and coded for data analysis. The interview process will be approximately one hour in length. Participants will be asked to volunteer their time and will not be compensated for participating in this study.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. There may be benefits to

organizations and educational institutions that could include improved teaching practices and

student/educator relationships.

What will it cost me?

There is no cost to participate in this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

All responses will be kept anonymous. Pseudonyms will used to replace any identifiable

information including your name and your educational institution. Interviews will take place at

an agreed upon location between the researcher and participant. Participants will be given the

opportunity to review the transcripts of their interview and the study's findings. All participant

files will be deleted at the conclusion of this study. The results of the study will be shared with

the appropriate University of New England staff. Results of the study may also be shared at

educational conferences presented by the researcher and may be published at a later date.

How will my data be kept confidential?

The researcher will retain your contact information within the password protected digital file

within the researcher's cloud based storage system. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your

name, location and any institutions referred to in the study. Recordings and transcripts will be

kept in a digital password protected file on the researcher's digital cloud storage. Please note that

regulatory agencies, the University of New England advisory staff and the Institutional Review

Board may review the research records. A record of your consent to participate will be

maintained by the researcher for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent file will be stored in a secure location that only members of the research team will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project. All audio recordings will be used to collect data for the research. The information will be transcribed by an online transcription service. Participants will be afforded the opportunity to review their transcripts and the findings of this research upon request. All recorded files will be deleted at the conclusion of this study. The researcher does not intend to use the data for any future research purposes.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University of New England.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with your former high school.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
  - If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I have?

- You may choose not to participate.

Who may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study is Damiso A. Josey
  - For more information regarding this study, please contact Damiso A. Josey
  - *Email: djosey@une.edu*
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Marylin Newell
- *Email: mnewell@une.edu*

● If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

<u>Will I receive a copy of this consent form?</u>

● You will be given a copy of this consent form upon request.

Appendix C: Survey Questions

Survey Consent Procedures

The following survey questions will provide data on your experiences with cultural competence and student engagement. There will be an option to participate in a voluntary follow-up interview. If you would like to proceed with the survey, please click the continue button. By clicking the continue button you are consenting to participate in this survey.

(Continue)

Survey Questions

Please identify the following:

Age:

☐ 21-25 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 54+

Highest Educational Level Obtained

     ☐ High School

     ☐ Associate's

     ☐ Bachelor's

     ☐ Master's

     ☐ Doctorate

Employment Status

     ☐ Full Time

     ☐ Part Time

     ☐ Unemployed

     ☐ Business Owner

     ☐ Retired

Have you graduated from a New Jersey public school?

☐ Yes | ☐ No

What estimated percentage of Black students were in your high school(s)

     ☐ Below 25%

☐ 25% - 50%

☐ More than 50%

Please rate the diversity of the teaching staff in your high school(s)

☐ Very Diverse

☐ Somewhat Diverse

☐ Little/No Diversity

How many Black teachers did you have in high school?

☐ 0-1   ☐ 1-3   ☐ 4-6   ☐ 7+

How many White teachers did you have in high school?

☐ 0-1   ☐ 1-3   ☐ 4-6   ☐ 7+

Have you ever repeated any grade level 9-12?

☐ Yes | ☐ No

How important was your culture to you during your high school experience?

☐ Very important   ☐ Slightly important

☐ Important   ☐ Not important

☐ Moderately important

How important was having a Black teacher to you during your high school experience?

☐ Very important   ☐ Slightly important

☐ Important   ☐ Not important

☐ Moderately important

How important was it to understand your classmates' cultural identity to you during your high school experience?

☐ Very important   ☐ Slightly important

☐ Important   ☐ Not important

☐ Moderately important

How much do you think your Black teachers understood your culture?

☐ To a great extent   ☐ Not at all

☐ Somewhat

☐ Very Little

How much do you think your White teachers understood your culture?

☐ To a great extent   ☐ Not at all

☐ Somewhat

☐ Very Little

How often do you think your White teachers taught class with sensitivity to cultural differences?

☐ Always   ☐ Rarely

☐ Very frequently   ☐ Very rarely

☐ Occasionally   ☐ Never

How often do you think the curriculum integrated your culture into the readings, activities and assignments?

☐ Always   ☐ Rarely

☐ Very frequently   ☐ Very rarely

☐ Occasionally   ☐ Never

How often did you feel disengaged in lessons/activities?

☐ Always   ☐ Rarely

☐ Very frequently   ☐ Very rarely

☐ Occasionally   ☐ Never

If/when you were disengaged what type of behaviors did you often exhibit?

☐ Day dreamed

☐ Class disruption

☐ Didn't go to school

☐ Cut class

☐ Completed other course work

☐ Other

How often did you complete lessons/activities in class?

☐ Always   ☐ Seldom

☐ Usually   ☐ Never

☐ About half the time

How often did you complete lessons/activities outside of the school?

☐ Always   ☐ Seldom

☐ Usually   ☐ Never

☐ About half the time

My teachers had a positive relationship with my parents.

☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Disagree

☐ Agree   ☐ Strongly disagree

☐ Undecided

I had a positive relationship with my teachers.

☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Disagree

☐ Agree   ☐ Strongly disagree

☐ Undecided

How important was school to you?

☐ Very important   ☐ Strongly important

☐ Important   ☐ Not important

☐ Moderately important

School was exciting/fun for me.

☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Disagree

☐ Agree   ☐ Strongly disagree

☐ Undecided

How often do you feel you had to work hard to complete assignments?

☐ Always   ☐ Rarely

☐ Very frequently   ☐ Very rarely

☐ Occasionally   ☐ Never

How often did you come to class with completed assignments?

☐ Always   ☐ Rarely

☐ Very frequently   ☐ Very rarely

☐ Occasionally   ☐ Never

How often did you discuss grades with your teachers?

☐ Always   ☐ Rarely

☐ Very frequently   ☐ Very rarely

☐ Occasionally   ☐ Never

How much do you believe your teachers had high expectations for you?

☐ To a great extent

☐ Somewhat

☐ Very little

☐ Not at all

How often did your teachers discuss racial/cultural issues in class?

☐ Never

☐ Sometimes

☐ Often

How often do you think the school met your non-academic needs?

☐ Always	☐ Rarely
☐ Very frequently	☐ Very rarely
☐ Occasionally	☐ Never

Appendix D: Interview Consent

Instructions and Consent to Participate

This concludes the survey portion of this study. If you would like to be considered for the interview portion of this study, please click the appropriate box. Participants will be selected at random.

☐ Yes, I would like to be considered for the interview portion of this study.

If you clicked yes, please provide the following information:

Name:

Email:

Phone Number:

High School Attended:

☐ No, I would not like to be considered for the interview portion of this study.

If you clicked no, you will not have to provide your contact information and you will not be asked to participate in the interview.

If you wish to continue and submit your responses please click the submit button. By clicking Submit you agree to take part in the follow-up interview process of this study. You have the option of opting out of this survey and study by closing your web browser before you hit Submit. If you do not hit Submit, your responses will not be recorded.

(Submit)

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

- Please state your name.

- What was your perception of school?

- What was your perception of your teachers?

- Tell me about your experience with the school meeting your non-academic needs.

- How did your home environment/family help or hinder your learning?

- Explain any cultural experiences that shaped your learning.

- What type of teacher influenced you the most?

- What type of teaching influenced you the most?

- Do you think the curriculum was relevant to your life? How not or how so?

- Did you find the school work challenging? Why or why not?

- How did you determine what peer relationships you had?

- Did you feel as though your culture was accepted by your teachers in school? Why or why not?

- Did you feel as though your culture was accepted by your peers at school? Why or why not?

- Did you feel your teachers understood you as a Black male?

- Explain your experience with navigating your home/community culture and the school environment.

- Tell me a time that you felt disengaged in a lesson? What was the subject of the lesson?

- When you felt disengaged in a lesson, what do you think caused this disengagement?

- Have you ever wanted to drop out of school? Why or why not?

- Did you feel as though the discipline was fair/equal for all students? Why or why not?

- Did you feel responsible/in control of your learning? Why or why not?

- Where you aware of any outside resources to assist you with your education?

- Tell me about your experiences with any positive or negative situation(s) between you and your teacher that you can remember.

- How would you define your learning style and do you think you were encouraged to use it in class?

- Do you remember interacting with or seeing any of your teachers in your community?

- How were you introduced or made aware of your culture?

- Explain a time in which you took a stance against any school policy, practice, or societal issue.

- How connected to the school did you feel?

- Have you ever experienced anything that you would consider an academic failure? If so, explain how you handled academic failure.

- Were you an active participant in class? Why or why not?

- What do you remember about what you learned about your culture in school?